

**THIS IS A TRADITIONAL ASSIGNMENT.  
READ THE ARTICLE! PRINT AND COMPLETE THE ANALYSIS FOR BONUS POINTS**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

**"WHAT, THEN, IS THIS AMERICAN?": 1865-1900**

Purpose:

This Crossroads Essay is an optional enrichment activity providing additional insight into the era. Students who complete this activity before they take the corresponding reading quiz will earn up to 10% quiz bump for one of their unit quizzes. *Read directions carefully, and answer thoughtfully!*

Directions:

As you **read the article**, *annotate* in the space provided along the right margin. *Use INK*. Sample annotations are provided on this page.

Annotate by:

- Highlighting** the main ideas/arguments,
- identifying major themes** (MAGPIES)
- identifying historical context**
- defining terms** you may not know.  
(if it's bold... define it!)

<b>M</b>	igration and Settlement
<b>A</b>	merica in the World
<b>G</b>	eography and the Environment
<b>P</b>	olitics and Power
<b>I</b>	identity; American and National
<b>E</b>	conomy; Work, Exchange, and Technology
<b>S</b>	ociety and Culture

**I. Introduction**

Those who lived through the Civil War and Reconstruction recognized that the nation had passed through perhaps the single most significant transformative period in its history. The great questions of slavery, sectionalism, and national supremacy that had plagued the Americans for nearly eight decades had been resolved -- in part by force of arms, in part by constitutional and legal change made possible by military victory.

Most Americans concluded, with relief, that the unresolved quandaries of American national identity had been resolved. But, because history always has at least one surprise up its sleeve, most Americans were wrong, for this period posed new challenges to American values and assumptions.

**Three intertwining themes** define this period:

- (i) **industrialization** -- the rise of the industrial economy and of accompanying issues of law, governance, and public policy;
- (ii) **urbanization** -- the dramatic growth of the nation's cities as focal points for population growth and demographic change, and as centers of commerce, culture, education, news, and politics; and
- (iii) **immigration** -- the effects on American identity, politics, and culture of the great waves of immigration from eastern, central, and southern Europe and from Asia. The interaction of these themes added richness and complexity to late nineteenth-century American history.

**Identity:** *The Civil War was revolutionary because it redefined American identity and brought "all men are created equal" back to the forefront of the nation's purpose. (or so they thought)*

**Beliefs-liberty:** *Americans believed questions of beliefs-liberty had been answered with Union victory, but end of Reconstruction and new problems from industrialization proved them wrong.*

**Urbanization:** *transition from rural to urban living, aka growth of cities*

**Immigration:** *movement of peoples into the country from another country*

**Industrialization:** *development of factory, mass production, manufacturing which created need for unskilled labor and led to urbanization*

**Context:** *Industrial Boom post Civil War (north)*

---

## II. THE RISE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

---

If the great issues were swept away by the Civil War, what remained for Americans to do? Idealists answered, "The Union victory has made it possible for millions of Americans to exercise their right to the pursuit of happiness." Cynics answered, "Get rich, and get rich quickly." Even in the years before and during the Civil War, the nation's growing mastery of technology had opened up vast possibilities for material success. The war dramatically confirmed that it was possible to run large enterprises (e.g., armies, transportation systems, manufacturing enterprises) on a national scale to fulfill national demand.

These new changes had two kinds of consequences for American life:

- The explosion of technological innovation of the late nineteenth century transformed the face of the American nation. The existence of national systems of transportation (railroads and steamship lines) and communication (telegraph systems, complemented and eventually surpassed by telephone networks) created a large, unified American economic system. They also shaped a new American culture, one that assimilated technological changes with increasing speed and complacency. Americans began to take for granted that their lives could be improved by such innovations as mass-produced, ready-made clothing; virtually or comparatively instantaneous communication spanning the continent or even the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; the rise of mass-produced newspapers, magazines, and books, and the resulting creation and dissemination of a national popular culture.

These technological changes also affected the lives of millions of ordinary Americans, by transforming the conditions of work and the range of available occupations. More and more Americans, faced with a choice between the always-uncertain life of farm farming and the prospect of more certain industrial employment, chose certainty and flocked to cities and towns to find work. Yet the conditions of industrial labor were often appalling, and at times life-threatening. Moreover, as the new industrial workers came to discover, they were unable to bargain over salary and working conditions on an equal footing with prospective employers. They discovered that their lot was to become cogs in a huge and ever-growing industrial machine, and more and more workers came to question just how wise their choice of work had been.

- American technological and industrial growth had other social and political consequences. With the development of the railroad, the steamship, the telegraph, and the telephone came the linking of the nation's raw materials, manufacturing centers, and markets. The recognition soon followed that a few well-positioned, shrewd, industrious men could build lucrative financial empires for themselves in the process of fulfilling this great national prospect. Similar realizations spurred the rise of such great manufacturing enterprises as **United States Steel** and **Standard Oil**.

These enterprises are often seen as the lengthened shadow of one man -- **Andrew Carnegie**, in the case of **U.S. Steel**, or **John D. Rockefeller**, in the case of **Standard Oil**. But, equally important, this period was the golden era of the large-scale business corporation. Although businessmen had experimented with corporations in earlier epochs, it was between 1865 and 1900 that the **business corporation** became the model for how a large private organization should be run. This was also the period in which the financial component of business -- providing the money to finance the development of new technologies, or the creation of new enterprises or the expansion of an existing corporation -- assumed overwhelming importance. The same models of large-scale organization that made it possible to create a manufacturing corporation or a railroad corporation to serve a national market also made it possible to create large-scale financial institutions that grew to wield immense economic power in a national or even international scale. The late nineteenth century was thus the "**Age of Capital**."

The revolutions in corporate and financial organization also posed key challenges to law and government. Corporations are capable of wielding great power over their suppliers, their employees, and their customers. Investors, especially when represented by a large financial organization such as the **House of Morgan**, are at least as powerful as corporations. Indeed, unchecked power -- whether of large business corporations or of the wielders of capital -- seemed (to aghast reformers) to threaten the authority of government itself and the stability of American democratic society.

American workers realized that the individual worker was no match for the emerging economic world of large-scale corporate employers. They began, therefore, to consider how to organize themselves to meet the challenge posed by the employers' increasing economic power. To be sure, **organized labor** was nothing new in American history. The first lawsuits over employee organizations took place before 1810, and the 1842 Massachusetts case of ***Commonwealth v. Hunt*** protected workers' right to organize labor unions against the old common-law doctrine that forbade conspiracies in restraint of trade. But, throughout the nineteenth century, workers' organizations found themselves besieged by hostile forces -- both employers and government (sometimes local, often state, and on occasion federal). The Age of Capital was an age of bare-knuckled, no-holds-barred battles between management and labor -- the era of such great and terrible struggles as the "**year of crisis**" (1877), the **Haymarket Riot** of 1883, and the **Homestead Steel Strike** of 1892.

It might seem natural -- and many labor leaders believed it was natural -- that **organized labor** would become a valuable nongovernmental response (a countervailing force, in John Kenneth Galbraith's phrase) to the problem of corporate power. And, labor leaders hoped, the rise of an independent labor movement might induce government either to restrain the power of capitalist organizations (whether corporations or financial institutions) or to mediate between capital and labor. To some extent, their hopes were realized, as state and local governments experimented with legislation to protect the rights of workers (for example, state minimum-wage, maximum-hour, and working-conditions statutes) and the interests of consumers (for example, laws regulating railroad rates or the quality of manufactured products).

But federal and state courts were of two minds about the legitimacy and desirability of such measures -- and the legitimacy and desirability of an organized labor movement numbering those types of legislation among its goals. Many courts recognized such laws and programs as valid exercises of the state's police power -- the power of state governments to protect the health, safety, welfare, and morals of their citizens. But courts often suspected these statutes as violations of the **freedom of contract** protected by Article I, section 9 of the **United States Constitution** and of the **due process** rights of persons (including business corporations) under the **Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments** to the Constitution.

Distrust of organized labor existed outside the court system -- indeed, within the larger structure of American society. Many Americans, from whatever social, ethnic, or religious origins, came to believe that the broad general equality of conditions that **Tocqueville** had examined and (guardedly) celebrated fifty years before had broken down, and that a class system was beginning to emerge, splitting Americans into three unequal camps: **the wealthy** few, the broad **middle class** (including professionals such as doctors and lawyers, and the independent small businessmen and tradesmen), and the **working or laboring classes**.

In the eyes of most Americans (who disdained to see themselves as workers), this newly-emergent stratification of American society seemed foreign, even threatening, to American values. It was easier for the wielder of capital such as **Carnegie** to portray himself (or to hire it done) as an exemplar of American **upward mobility** and success than it was for the organizers of labor to portray the labor movement as consistent with American values. If labor organizations recognized this stratification, they ran the risk of appearing to harbor "un-American" ideas about the inevitability of a rigid **class system**. If labor organizations argued for the need for **worker solidarity**, they ran the even greater risk of appearing to embrace "un-American" ideas about **class struggle**.

---

### III. BECOMING A NATION OF CITIES

---

From the first settlements through the end of the Civil War, the United States was largely a rural, agricultural nation -- though Americans did notice that, in the decades preceding and during the Civil War, the nation's cities grew in pace with the grow growth of industry. After Appomattox, urbanization joined with industrialization to dominate the evolution of American society. The following quotation paints in arresting detail the explosive growth of American cities in this period:

By 1890 nine of every ten people in Rhode Island clustered in towns, and Massachusetts had a larger proportion of people in towns of 10,000 than any nation in Europe. One district of New York's Eleventh Ward, with a density of 986 per acre, was probably the most crowded spot on earth; even the notorious Koombarwara district of Bombay had but 760 persons per acre. In the twenty years from 1880 to 1900 the population of New York City increased from a little less than two to almost three and a half millions; Chicago grew from half a million to a million and a half, to become the second city in the nation; such cities as Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Columbus, Toledo, Omaha, and Atlanta more than doubled. In 1880 there were 19 cities with a population of 100,000 or more; by 1910, there were 50.

This extraordinary growth was the result of several factors:

- First, the nation's cities grew because they became **centers of industrialization** -- a process that combined extensive urban construction and development with the consequent growing demand for factory workers, which in turn spurred the growth of home, apartment, and tenement construction.

- Second, the growth of **technology and technological innovation** made the rapid territorial expansion of American cities at first technologically feasible, and then socially and economically necessary. Such technological developments as the quick spread of electricity throughout the nation brought other, unexpected changes in their wake. The capacity to transmit electric power, or to construct relatively cheap, quick, and efficient transportation systems, reshaped the demographic portrait of the nation; it was possible for urban areas to expand dramatically into their formerly rural surroundings -- whether as a consequence of the building of railroads or streetcar lines, or of the stringing of electric transmission lines.
- Third, in a related though independent development, the nation's rural areas in this period entered an era of decline as sources of individual opportunity. Because of the growing cultural emphasis on **cities** as the place to make one's fortune, the nation witnessed a large and growing population shift from rural to urban areas.
- Fourth, the massive **European immigration** that was one of the key facts of this period (see III below) first inundated great cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

But the growth of cities ran head-on into a long-standing American prejudice against urbanization as somehow European, corrupting, and dangerous to democracy. Just as labor's response to industrialization seemed threatening to prized American values of individualism, free enterprise, and social mobility, so, too, did urbanization seem to endanger the individual's ability to own his own home, the cherished **doctrine of self-reliance**, and the prospect of democratic government. But this **anti-urban sentiment** was only partly the latest outbreak of a venerable **American intellectual tradition**. It also was a direct response to the specific facts of American urban life, spread throughout the nation by the growing network of American newspapers and magazines. Americans throughout the nation read of the overcrowding of slums, the ghastly sanitary conditions that beset most urban areas, and the growing corruption of urban political life.

- Finally, Americans' **anti-urban sentiment** was fed by prejudice against one of the principal reasons for urbanization -- the immigrants, mainly from Southern and Eastern Europe.

---

#### IV. A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

---

Both Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy found it necessary to remind the American people that the United States is **a nation of immigrants**. Every person on the North and South American continents came from someplace else -- either as an immigrant herself or as a descendant of immigrants. It is a telling and unfortunate commentary that we require regular reminders of these facts. The late nineteenth century was one of the great ages of immigration in American history. This era of immigration differed from previous immigration booms in two key respects: scale and sources.

In many ways, the change in sources of immigration was more important than the change in scale. By far the largest sources of immigrants in the period were the nations of **central, eastern, and southern Europe**. These immigrants were refugees from economic privation and political and religious persecution in the ailing empires of Austria-Hungary and Russia and the new, fragile nations of Italy and Germany. This also was the first great period of Asian immigration to America, mostly from China but with a trickle of immigrants from Japan and Korea as well. However, anti-Asian feeling in the western United States, exacerbated by such cynical politicians as D Daniel Kearny of California, limited both the extent of **Asian immigration** and the degree to which the Asian immigrants could take full advantage of the opportunities available to their white neighbors.

The growth of immigration in this period was spurred, as were so many other social phenomena, by technology. The development of **ocean-going steamships** and the rise of a great **trans-oceanic trade** spanning the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans made it possible for tens of thousands of men, women, and children to seek a new life in America and, despite the lure of the large eastern cities, to spread out across the continent to do so. Moreover, the rise of **American industries** and the growth of the **railroad system** created thousands of jobs -- both in factories and in the construction trades -- that offered powerful inducements to prospective immigrants seeking a new life.

Finally, because of the growth of urbanization and industrialization and the accompanying growth of American technology, the resources for understanding the immigration of the late nineteenth century are more varied and richer than for any other period of American history. For one thing, we have a wealth of first-person accounts of immigration and memoirs of immigrants; for another, we have the federal government's extensive statistical documentation of the waves of immigrants; for a third, we have a remarkably rich public and private photographic documentation of the arrivals and lives of American immigrants. All these resources make it possible for us, their descendants, to get at least some sense of what it must have been like to come to America.

Although immigration was one of the prime forces that shaped the American people, Americans always have been ambivalent about the virtues and advantages of immigration. Those who already have roots here have often resented those who sought to join them. In part, this was simply an expression of the fear that newcomers might not only outstrip those who were already here in achievement but even exclude them from the fruits of economic and social success. In part, **anti-immigrant feeling** is (and has been) closely linked to religious, ethnic, or racial prejudice. In few periods of American history (save, perhaps, the present) were these prejudices as evident as in the late nineteenth century. One way in which these prejudices found expression was the belief that the "**new immigrants**," coming as they did from **despotic monarchies**, were incapable of understanding **democracy**, living by it, or taking part in it. It was in partial response to these fears that the nation's **public schools** assumed the burden of training potential citizens as well as educating pupils. For millions of immigrant children, the public schools were the first real contact they had with America; the impulse to become "real Americans" became a driving force in immigrant families, and the process of what social scientists began to call "**Americanization**" worked in most families through school-age children upward.

The floods of immigrants that poured into the nation's largest cities (usually the seaports, such as **New York**, and rail centers, such as **Chicago**) swamped the cities' resources of housing and employment. In response to growing alarm at urban immigrants' living and working conditions, **social reformers** began to organize **public and private relief programs** and to pursue attempts to establish legal standards for housing and working conditions. These scattered reform efforts were among the seeds of a much larger, more comprehensive series of reform movements that soon came to dominate American life.