

# The Victorians Make the Modern

## 1880–1917

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### CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following annotated chapter outline will help you review the major topics covered in this chapter.

#### I. Commerce and Culture

##### A. Consumer Spaces

1. During industrialization, members of the middle and working classes distinguished each other not just through work but also through consumerism and leisure.
2. Entrepreneurs like Thomas Edison developed products such as the incandescent light bulb and phonograph for the consumer.
3. Consumer culture appeared democratic because even working-class Americans could purchase cheap mass-produced goods and watch moving pictures.
4. In reality, consumerism evidenced class inequalities, race privilege, and traditional gender roles.
5. Consumer-oriented businesses enticed middle class women and families to change their old shopping and leisure habits.
6. P. T. Barnum advertised his traveling circus as respectable and educational family entertainment.
7. Department stores lured middle-class women by offering tearooms, day care, wrapping and carrying services, as well as credit plans.
8. Although shopping in department stores remained the privilege of middle-class women, working-class women could work as clerks and cashiers in these establishments and use employee discounts to purchase the latest fashions.
9. Technology widened the gap between the classes. Washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and telephones eased life and changed social relations for the middle class but also offered new employment opportunities for the working class.
10. Railroad companies appealed to middle-class consumers and travelers with stations that offered modern amenities and railcars, such as the Pullman cars, that provided comfort in elegant surroundings.
11. It was a struggle for wealthy African Americans to find seats in first-class railcars because white ladies and gentlemen opposed racial equality.
12. The United States Supreme Court decided in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that segregation, such as separate cars on trains

for African Americans, was constitutional as long as accommodations were equal. In reality, segregated facilities were inferior.

13. This court decision upheld Jim Crow legislation that segregated all public and commercial spaces in the South and evidenced that racial and class injustices shaped business and consumer culture.
- B. Masculinity and the Rise of Sports
1. “Muscular Christianity”
    - a. Gender expectations also changed for men. Traditionally, a successful man was his own boss and economically independent. By 1900, more and more men worked in salaried positions or for wages. An increasing number also did “brain work” in offices and no longer used their muscles. Athletics became the preferred way for men to prevent weakness and decay and to maintain their toughness and strength.
    - b. One of the first promoters of physical fitness was the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Introduced in Boston in 1851, the YMCA combined vigorous activities with an evangelizing appeal.
    - c. Business leaders hoped that sports taught discipline and established employer-sponsored teams to instill a competitive spirit, teamwork, and company pride.
    - d. YMCA leaders also offered working-class men opportunity for leisure activities and developed the new indoor games of basketball and volleyball to offer its membership winter activities.
    - e. Elite men and women enjoyed tennis, golf, swimming, and social gatherings at country clubs. Elite men also pursued more aggressive physical sports including boxing, weightlifting, and martial arts.
  2. America’s Game
    - a. Before the Civil War, there were no distinctly American games except for Native American lacrosse. European Americans preferred to play cricket.
    - b. The rules for a new team sport, baseball, were developed during the 1840s and 1850s, and the game’s popularity spread in military camps during the Civil War. In the postwar years, it became the most popular sport in America.
    - c. Although developed by independent craftsmen and adopted by middle-class and elite men to prove strength and fitness, employers also encouraged working-class men to play baseball because it promoted discipline and teamwork.
    - d. Big-time professional baseball arose with the launching of the National League in 1876; during the first World Series in 1903, the Boston Americans defeated the Pittsburgh Pirates. Profit-minded entrepreneurs shaped the sport to please a new type of consumer, the fan.
  3. Rise of the Negro Leagues
    - a. Although a few African Americans had initially been able to play for major league teams, by the early 1900s, baseball had become a segregated sport.
    - b. Shut out of white leagues, black players and fans turned instead to all-black professional teams, which organized into separate Negro Leagues to celebrate athletic talent and race pride.
  4. American Football
    - a. The most controversial sport was football, which began at elite Ivy League schools during the 1880s.
    - b. Like baseball and the YMCA, football soon attracted business sponsorship.
    - c. The first professional teams emerged around the turn of the century in

western Pennsylvania's steel towns. Executives of Carnegie Steel organized teams in Homestead and Braddock, and the first league appeared during the anthracite coal strike in 1902.

### C. The Great Outdoors

1. By the 1880s and 1890s, elite and middle-class Americans began to view Victorian culture as stuffy and claustrophobic, and they revolted by heading outdoors.
2. A craze for bicycling swept the nation, and women took up athletic activities such as archery and golf.
3. The outdoors took on a new meaning: instead of danger and hard work, it reflected leisure and renewal. Those with leisure time accomplished this by using the railroad networks to go to national parks. People of modest means went camping and rented cottages.
4. As Americans went searching for renewal in nature, the nation's conservation movement arose. Organizations such as the Appalachian Mountain Club (1876) and the Sierra Club (1892) dedicated themselves to preserving and enjoying America's great mountains.
5. National and state governments set aside more public lands for preservation and recreation. The United States substantially expanded its park system, requiring more comprehensive oversight, which President Woodrow Wilson established by signing an act creating the National Park Service in 1916.
6. Conservationists also worked to protect wildlife. Preservation efforts resulted in the passage of the Lacey Act in 1900, the creation of the National Audubon Society in 1901, and President Theodore Roosevelt's establishment of the first National Wildlife Refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, in 1903.
7. In 1908, Roosevelt used the powers of the Antiquities Act (1906), which gave U.S. presidents the ability to set aside "objects

of historic and scientific interest" without congressional approval, to preserve the Grand Canyon.

8. Although the great outdoors provided new leisure opportunities for women as well as working-class tourists, elite visitors also maintained segregation practices.
9. New state game laws, which redefined hunting and fishing as recreational not subsistence activities to protect animals from extinction, triggered controversy over the uses of wildlife.

## II. Women, Men, and the Solitude of Self

### A. Changes in Family Life

1. The average family—especially in the middle class—continued to get smaller in the post-Civil War decades. A long decline in the birth rate, which began in the late eighteenth century, continued in this era. In 1800, white women who survived to menopause had borne an average of 7.0 children; by 1900, the average was 3.6.
2. Several factors limited childbearing. Americans married at older ages, and many mothers tried—as they had for decades—to space pregnancies more widely by nursing young children for several years, which suppressed fertility. By the late nineteenth century, couples also used a range of other contraceptive methods, such as condoms and diaphragms.
3. In 1873, Anthony Comstock, the crusading secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, secured a federal law that banned "obscene materials" from the U.S. mail. The law prohibited circulation of almost any information about sex and birth control.

### B. Education

1. For young people who hoped to secure respectable and lucrative jobs, the watchword was *education*. A high school education was particularly valuable for

boys from affluent families who hoped to enter professional or managerial work. Daughters attended in even larger numbers than their brothers.

2. By 1900, 71 percent of Americans between the ages of five and eighteen attended school. That figure rose even further in the early twentieth century, as public officials adopted and enforced laws requiring school attendance.
  3. Most high schools were co-educational, and almost every high school featured athletics.
  4. Some high school graduates sought further degrees, as the higher education system expanded rapidly. The percentage of Americans who attended college rose during the 1880s from around 2 percent to 8 percent by 1920. Attendance at business and technical schools rose as well.
  5. The economy shaped curriculum at most state universities stressing technical training. The curriculum at private colleges also changed. Under dynamic president Charles Eliot, between 1869 and 1909, Harvard College pioneered the use of liberal arts.
  6. In the South, one of the most famous educational projects was Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, founded in 1881. Washington, born in slavery, not only taught but also exemplified the goal of self-help.
  7. Washington became the most prominent black leader of his generation. His 1895 Atlanta Compromise address intended to show racial progress in the South and seemed to support segregation.
  8. Washington's style of leadership, based on avoiding confrontation with whites and cultivating patronage and private influence, was well suited to the difficult era after Reconstruction. He represented the hope that education and hard work would erase white prejudice, but the tide of disfranchisement and segregation convinced younger African Americans that Washington had accommodated whites too much.
  9. In the Northeast and South, women most often attended single-sex institutions or teacher-training colleges where the student body was overwhelmingly female.
  10. For female students from affluent families, private colleges offered an education equivalent to men's. Vassar College started the trend when it opened in 1861; Smith, Wellesley, and others soon followed.
  11. Co-education was more prevalent in the Midwest and West, where state universities opened their doors to female students after the Civil War. Women were also admitted to most of the southern African American colleges founded during Reconstruction.
  12. The Association for the Advancement of Women, founded in 1873 by women's college graduates, defended women's higher education and argued that women's paid employment was a positive good. As women began to earn degrees and work for wages, it became more difficult to argue that women were "dependents" who did not need to vote.
- C. From Domesticity to Women's Rights
1. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union
    - a. During industrialization, middle-class women sought to expand their place beyond the household, building reform movements and taking political action. Starting in the 1880s, women's clubs sprang up and studied social problems such as pollution, unsafe working conditions, and urban poverty. By 1890, they created a nationwide General Federation of Women's Clubs.
    - b. Women frequently made maternalist arguments; they justified their work based on their role as mothers.

- c. One of the first places women sought to reform was the saloon. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1874, spread rapidly after 1879, when the charismatic Frances Willard became its leader.
  - d. It became the leading organization advocating prohibition of liquor. The WCTU, more than any other group of the late nineteenth century, launched women into public reform.
  - e. Although the prohibition movement drew many supporters, it also attracted many critics, and attitudes toward prohibition diverged along ethnic, religious, and class lines.
  - f. Frances Willard declared herself a Christian Socialist and urged her followers to tackle other problems, such as poverty, hunger, lack of libraries, prison conditions, and workers' plight.
  - g. The WCTU advocated women's voting rights and supported the Prohibition Party which accepted women as speakers, convention delegates, and local candidates.
  - h. The WCTU served as a springboard for many women to not only raise money but to become more politically involved, join the People's Party or groups such as the National Congress of Mothers, and run for office.
2. Women, Race, and Patriotism
- a. Like temperance work, patriotic activism became women's special province in the post-Civil War decades. The Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1890, devoted themselves to celebrating the memory of Revolutionary War heroes, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, founded in 1894, extolled the South's "Lost Cause."
  - b. African American women did not sit idle and in 1896 created the National Association of Colored Women, a network of local women's clubs that focused their attention on community support.
  - c. Using the language of domesticity and respectability to justify their work, black club women arranged for the care of orphans, founded homes for the elderly, worked for temperance, and undertook public health campaigns.
  - d. One of the most radical voices was Ida B. Wells, who launched a one-woman campaign against lynching. Her investigations revealed that labor disputes, economic competition, and consensual relationships between white women and black men, not interracial rape, were the reasons why white mobs lynched black men.
  - e. The largest black women's group arose within the National Baptist Church (NBC), which by 1906 represented 2.4 million African American churchgoers.
  - f. Founded in 1900, the Women's Convention of the NBC promoted and funded night schools, health clinics, kindergartens, day care centers, and prison outreach programs.
3. Women's Rights
- a. Although it divided into two rival organizations during Reconstruction, the movement for women's suffrage reunited in 1890 in the National American Woman Suffrage Organization (NAWSA).
  - b. Soon afterward, suffragists won victories in the West, winning full ballots for women in Colorado in 1893 and Idaho as well as Utah in 1896. By 1913, most women living west of the Mississippi River had the ballot and in other localities could participate in municipal elections, school elections, or liquor referenda.

- c. Ironically, the prominence of the movement also encouraged women and men to oppose it. Antisuffragists argued that women voters would just double their husbands' votes, subject men to "petticoat rule," and undermine women's special roles as disinterested reformers.
- d. By the 1910s, some women took a stand for feminism—women's full political, economic, and social equality.
- e. A famous site of sexual rebellion was New York's Greenwich Village, where radical intellectuals, including many gays and lesbians, created a vibrant community.
- f. Along with many other political activities, women in Greenwich Village founded the Heterodoxy Club (1912), which was open to any woman who pledged not to be "orthodox in her opinions."
- g. As women entered the public sphere, feminists argued that they should not just fulfill Victorian expectations of self-sacrifice for others; they should work on their own behalf.

### III. Science and Faith

#### A. Darwinism and Its Critics

1. Amid rapid change, the United States continued to be a deeply religious nation. However, the late nineteenth century brought increasing public attention to another kind of belief: faith in science.
2. Researchers in many fields became converts to the doctrine of "fact worship": the belief that one could rely only on hard facts and observable phenomena. Fiction writers and artists used close observation and attention to real-life experience to create works of realism. Others struggled to reconcile science with religion.
3. Evolution—the idea that species are not fixed, but ever-changing—was not a simple idea that scientists all agreed upon in the late nineteenth century. The term was widely associated with British naturalist Charles Darwin and his immensely influential book, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which proposed the theory of natural selection.
4. In nature, Darwin argued, all creatures struggle to survive. Individual members of a species are born with random genetic mutations that better fit them for their particular environment.
5. Social Darwinism, as Spencer's idea became known, found its American champion in William Graham Sumner, a sociology professor at Yale. Competition, said Sumner, was a law of nature, like gravity, and the success of millionaires demonstrated to him that they were "naturally selected."
6. Sumner's views created controversy, as intellectuals argued that Social Darwinism was an excuse for the worst excesses of industrialization.
7. The most dubious applications of evolutionary ideas were codified into new reproductive laws based on eugenics, an emerging "science" of human breeding. Eugenicists proposed sterilizing those deemed "unfit," especially residents of state asylums for the insane or mentally disabled.
8. In the early twentieth century, almost half of U.S. states enacted eugenics laws. By the time eugenics subsided in the 1930s, about 20,000 people had been sterilized, with California and Virginia taking the lead. Eugenicists also supported segregation and racial discrimination and advocated immigration restrictions.

#### B. Realism in the Arts

1. Inspired by the quest for facts, American authors rebelled against romanticism and Victorian sentimentality and took up literary realism.
2. By the 1890s, a younger generation of writers took up the call by editor and

- novelist William Dean Howells “to picture the daily life in the most exact terms possible.” Theodore Dreiser dismissed unrealistic novels that always had “a happy ending.”
3. Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) described the seduction, abandonment, and death of a slum girl. Hamlin Garland conveyed the hardships of rural life in *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), a collection of stories based on his family’s struggle in Iowa and South Dakota.
  4. Some authors believed realism did not go far enough to overturn Victorian morality. Jack London, who spent his teenage years as a factory worker, sailor, and tramp, dramatized what he saw as the harsh reality of an uncaring universe in stories such as “The Law of Life” (1901).
  5. London and Crane helped create literary naturalism. They suggested that human beings were not so much rational agents and shapers of their own destinies, but blind victims of forces beyond their control—including their own subconscious impulses and desires.
  6. America’s most famous fiction writer, Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens), came to take an equally bleak view. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), he condemned slavery and racism, and in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), he bitterly critiqued America’s idea of progress.
  7. By the time Twain died in 1910, realist and naturalist writers had laid the groundwork for literary modernism. Modernists rejected traditional canons of literary taste, tended to be religious skeptics or atheists, questioned the whole idea of progress and order, and focused their attention on the subconscious and “primitive” mind.
  8. In the visual arts, technological changes influenced aesthetics. By 1900, some photographers argued that the rise of photography made painting obsolete.
  9. Painters invented their own form of realism. In 1913, New York Realists participated in one of the most controversial events in American art history, the Armory Show.
  10. Housed in an enormous National Guard building in New York, the show introduced America to modern art, including experiments with such styles as cubism, characterized by abstract, geometric forms.
  11. A striking feature of both realism and modernism, as they developed, was that many of their leading writers and artists were men. They denounced nineteenth-century culture as hopelessly feminized. In making their work strong and modern, these men also contributed to the broader movement to masculinize America.
- C. Religion: Diversity and Innovation
1. By 1900, new scientific, literary, and artistic ideas posed a significant challenge to religious faith. Although some Americans argued that science would sweep away religion altogether, American religious practice remained vibrant. Protestants developed creative new responses to the era of industrialization, while millions of newcomers built their own institutions for worship and religious education.
  2. Immigrant Faiths
    - a. By 1920, almost two million children attended Catholic elementary schools instead of public schools, and Catholic dioceses across the country operated fifteen hundred high schools.
    - b. Like Protestants, some Catholics and Jews succumbed to secular pressures and fell away from religious practice.
    - c. Those immigrant Catholics who remained faithful to the Church were anxious to preserve what they had known in Europe, and they generally

- supported the Church's traditional wing. But they also wanted religious life to express their ethnic identities. The Catholic hierarchy agreed to appoint immigrant priests as auxiliary bishops within existing dioceses.
- d. In the late nineteenth century, many native-born, prosperous American Jews embraced Reform Judaism, abandoning such religious practices as keeping a kosher kitchen and conducting services in Hebrew.
  - e. But this was not the way of Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe. Generally much poorer and also eager to preserve their own traditions, they founded Orthodox synagogues, often in vacant stores, and practiced Judaism as they had at home.
- ### 3. Protestant Innovations
- a. Facilitated by global steamship and telegraph lines, Protestant foreign missions in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East grew rapidly after the Civil War. Missionaries were supported at home by millions of armies of volunteers, including many women.
  - b. Missionaries won converts by offering medical care and promoting women's education. Some missionaries came to love and respect the people among whom they served. But others became deeply frustrated.
  - c. Militant Protestants created a powerful political association, the American Protective Association (APA). This virulently nativist and anti-Catholic group advocated that all public school teachers be Protestants, no Catholics hold public office, and immigration be restricted.
  - d. Although Protestants still accounted for 60 percent of Americans affiliated with a religious body, the formation of groups such as the APA evidenced a fear that Catholics and Jews may limit that dominance.
  - e. While some Protestants enlisted in foreign missions, others responded by evangelizing among the unchurched and indifferent. They provided reading rooms, day nurseries, vocational classes, and other services.
  - f. This movement to renew religious faith through dedication to public welfare and social justice became known as the Social Gospel.
  - g. Its goals were epitomized by Charles Sheldon's novel *In His Steps* (1896), which told the story of a congregation whose members resolved to live by Christ's precepts for one year.
  - h. An example of the Social Gospel at work, the Salvation Army, which arrived from Great Britain in 1879, spread a message of repentance among the urban poor, offering assistance programs that ranged from soup kitchens to shelters for former prostitutes.
  - i. Disturbed by what they saw as rising secularism and abandonment of belief, some conservative ministers and their allies held an annual series of Bible Conferences at Niagara Falls. The resulting "Niagara Creed" reaffirmed the literal truth of the Bible and the certainty of damnation for those not born again in Christ. These Protestants called themselves fundamentalists, based on their belief in the essential truth of the Bible and its central place in Christian faith.
  - j. Fundamentalists such as Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday made effective use of revival meetings, offering salvation to anyone and expressing political thoughts based on their Protestant beliefs. Sunday's public support for progressive reforms and condemnation of Socialists

anticipated the nativism and antiradicalism of the post-World War I era.

- k. Sunday also embodied the masculinized American culture through his commanding presence on stage, his fiery sermons, and his history as a baseball player. His revivals also represented modern marketing techniques, providing mass entertainment and the opportunity to meet a sports hero. Americans had adapted to modernity by adjusting the older beliefs and values, enabling them to endure in new forms.