**Article B**

**The Rise of Urban America**

The years of industrial expansion after the Civil War brought significant changes to American society. The country became increasingly urban, and cities grew not only in terms of population but also in size, with skyscrapers pushing cities upward and new transportation systems extending them outward. Part of the urban population growth was fueled by an unprecedented mass immigration to the United States that continued unabated into the first two decades of the twentieth century. The promise that America held for these new immigrants contrasted sharply with the rise of legalized segregation of African‐Americans in the South after Reconstruction. Meanwhile, ongoing industrialization and urbanization left their mark on how people spent their daily lives and used their leisure time.

In 1870, there were only two American cities with a population of more than 500,000; by 1900, there were six, and three of these — New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia — boasted over one million inhabitants. Roughly 40 percent of Americans lived in cities and the number was climbing. Although much of the urbanization occurred in the industrial regions of the Northeast and Midwest, it was a national phenomenon that often corresponded to the presence of railroads. For example, Atlanta experienced a rapid economic recovery in the last quarter of the century, and Los Angeles became a boomtown in the 1880s due to the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads. Because the birth rate in the United States declined in the late nineteenth century, urban growth reflected an internal migration of Americans from farms and small towns to the larger cities and the overseas migration that brought millions of people to U.S. shores.

**The new immigration**. Before the Civil War, immigration to the United States largely originated in Northern and Western European countries, such as Great Britain (particularly Ireland), Germany, and Scandinavia, with smaller numbers of immigrants from China and Mexico settling in California and the Far West. In the 1880s, however, the origin of immigrants shifted to Southern and Eastern Europe. A combination of deteriorating economic conditions, war, and religious/ethnic persecution compelled Jews (from Austria‐Hungary and the Russian Empire), Greeks, Italians, Poles, Russians, Serbs, and Turks to come to the “Golden Land” of America. Although historians distinguish between the “old” (pre‐1880) and “new” (post‐1880) immigration in terms of the immigrants' countries of origin, it is a somewhat arbitrary distinction; immigrants from the Balkans and Russia were in the United States early in the century, and Irish and Germans continued to arrive after 1880. Another popular misconception is that all immigrants found permanent homes in the United States. In fact, perhaps as many as three out of every ten new arrivals (most of them single young men) returned to their homeland after they earned enough money to buy land or set up their own business.

Immigrants moved into the poorer sections of the major cities — New York's Lower East Side, for example — and often into neighborhoods abandoned by upwardly mobile immigrant groups. Seeking familiar surroundings, they tended to live and work with people from their native country. Although their children attended public schools and quickly learned English, immigrant parents continued to use their native tongue, transplanting a bit of the Old World into the new. Whether nicknamed Little Italy, Little Bohemia, or Chinatown, immigrant neighborhoods were rich with Old World languages, from the words printed in the newspapers and on the signs in store windows to the voices heard on the streets. These neighborhoods, which helped ease the transition from greenhorn (as newcomers were often called) to citizen, were terribly overcrowded, with upward of 4,000 people housed on a single block. Such overcrowding contributed to poverty, crime, and disease.

Native‐born Americans were troubled by the influx of foreigners, who seemed very different from earlier immigrants, because earlier immigrants spoke English (for example, the Irish) or followed the Protestant religion (such as Germans or Scandinavians). Moreover, new immigrants were often portrayed as dangerous radicals ready to undermine the American political system or as threats to the jobs of American workers because of their willingness to settle for lower wages. Given these attitudes toward foreigners, it is not surprising that calls for restrictions on immigration began to sound. In 1882, Congress denied convicts, paupers, and the mentally ill the right to enter the United States and three years later prohibited contract laborers (immigrants whose passage was paid in return for working for a certain period of time). Neither law had much affect on what was essentially an open immigration policy. The **Chinese Exclusion Act** (1882), on the other hand, suspended immigration from China for ten years; it was extended for another decade in 1892 and then was made permanent in 1902. The law was not repealed until 1943.

**Skyscrapers and mass transit**. As more and more people crowded into the large cities, the value of urban land increased. The solution to rising costs of real estate and the need to maximize the use of available space was to build up. The availability of cheap cast iron and, later, structural steel, improved fireproofing, and the electric elevator allowed for the construction of taller and taller buildings. The first **skyscraper** was the ten‐story Home Insurance Building in Chicago, completed in 1884. Chicago became the home of the skyscraper because of the disastrous fire of 1871 that destroyed most of the central business district. The building codes that went into effect after the fire required that all new construction use noncombustible materials. Office buildings of 20 or more stories were common in large cities throughout the country by the end of the nineteenth century.

The advances in architecture and design that skyscrapers represented did not extend to residential housing; the high‐rise apartment house was a twentieth‐century phenomenon. One attempt at improving housing for the poor actually had the opposite effect. The **dumbbell tenement**, which was introduced in New York in 1879, had four apartments and two toilets on each floor and was indented in the middle, producing its characteristic “dumbbell” shape. When two tenements were built next to each other, the indentations created an airshaft that provided limited ventilation and light to the interior apartments. Developers seized on the design, because it allowed them to make full use of the small 25‐x‐100‐foot city building lots. A block lined with dumbbell tenements housed more than 4,000 people, significantly adding to overcrowding in poor neighborhoods; future construction was banned in New York in 1901.

Improved urban transportation helped shape the modern city. Early developments included elevated steam‐driven trains (1870) and the introduction of the cable car in San Francisco (1873). The use of electricity in the 1880s led to innovations such as trolleys in many cities, the first underground trains (Boston, 1897), and New York's famed subway system (1904). Mass transit helped to change living patterns. As trolley or subway lines extended beyond what used to be the city limits, the first suburbs were created, resulting in residential segregation by income. While immigrants and the poor remained in the central city, the middle class could live further away from their jobs and commute to work. Bridges also contributed to the outward expansion of cities. Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883 and the longest suspension bridge in the world at the time, linked the then city of Brooklyn with Manhattan.

**Urban politics and reform**. In the late nineteenth century, municipal government often failed to meet the needs of its constituents — citizen and immigrant alike. In many cities across the country, power rested not in the hands of elected officials but with the **boss** who handpicked the candidates for office and controlled the vote through the **political machine**, or organization, that he ran. Some of the bosses were New York's William Marcy Tweed and George Washington Plunkitt, Kansas City's “Big Jim” Pendergast, and Cincinnati's George Cox. Although reformers bitterly attacked the corruption and inefficiency that went along with boss politics, the system did provide valuable services. In return for immigrants' votes and help organizing campaigns, bosses could arrange jobs on the growing city payrolls for them or their children. Bosses also provided the poor with money and food and helped them work out problems with the police or other city agencies. In sum, political machines ran a large‐scale welfare system at a time when even the concept of a social safety net was unheard of.

The strong late‐nineteenth‐century impulse to help the poor and recent immigrant arrivals often had a distinctly Christian overtone. Groups like the Young Men's Christian Association, whose North American branch was founded in 1851, grew rapidly after the Civil War, and an American branch of the Salvation Army was established in 1880. Charitable assistance was encouraged by the **Social Gospel**, a philosophy embraced by a number of Protestant ministers, which noted that personal salvation came through the betterment of society and that churches could help bring this about by fighting poverty, slum conditions, and drunkenness. Churches built gymnasiums, opened libraries, set up lectures, and took on social programs in the hope of attracting the working poor.

The **settlement house movement** was a nonsectarian approach to the same problems addressed by the churches. Established in the poorest neighborhoods, settlement houses served as community centers whose primary function was to help immigrant families adjust to life in the United States. They offered a variety of services, including nurseries and kindergartens, classes on sewing, cooking, and English, and a range of sports and recreation programs. The first settlement house was the Neighborhood Guild in New York (1886), but the most famous were the Hull House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams in 1889, and the Henry Street Settlement on Manhattan's Lower East Side, founded by Lillian Wald in 1893. College‐educated middle‐class women, who in effect created the field of social work, generally ran the settlement houses. As professionals, they were interested in gathering information on a wide range of urban problems. The data they collected helped bring about changes in building codes, improved health care and factory safety, and highlighted the need for new child labor laws.