

LESSON 4

Women in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

OVERVIEW

In the late nineteenth century, American suffragettes continued the decades-long struggle for the equal right to vote. Although the movement split into disparate elements with differing strategies, the movement united again in 1890 to fight for a women's suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution. After continuing struggle, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Meanwhile, women reformers engaged in a number of lesser-known movements to ban alcohol, provide better working conditions for women and children, and improve the lot of immigrants. Women also increasingly began to work outside the home in factories, department stores, and offices. Therefore, women began to enter public life politically and economically in a fundamentally new way to break with the past in which they were primarily confined to the domestic sphere of the home.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine the causes, struggles, and successes of various forms of civic engagement by women, including efforts toward economic, social, and political equality.
- Students will understand the extensive array of reform movements in which women took the lead as part of the broader reform effort of the Progressive Era.
- Students will compare and contrast the goals of the social reformers fighting for protective legislation with the goals of reformers who wanted an Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- “We ask only for justice and equal rights—the right to vote, the right to our earnings, equality before the laws.” **Lucy Stone Women’s Rights Convention in Syracuse New York, September 8, 1852**

RECOMMENDED TIME

90 minutes

MATERIALS LIST

- **Handout A: Background Essay: Women in the Gilded Age**
- **Handout B: Women in the Gilded Age Graphic Organizer** need answer key for this.
- **Handout C: Timeline of Women’s Suffrage**
- **Handout D: Images of Women’s Suffrage**
- **Handout E: Protective Legislation for Women**
- **Handout F: Comparing and Contrasting Women’s and African-American Suffrage Movements**

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Majority rule/minority rights
- Rule of law
- Due process
- Federalism

CIVIC VIRTUES

- Contribution
- Courage
- Integrity
- Initiative
- Justice
- Perseverance
- Respect
- Resourcefulness
- Self-government
- Vigilance

STANDARDS

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

- 1) Thematic Standards
 - II. Time, Continuity, and Change
 - VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
 - VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
 - VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
 - X. Civic Ideals and Practices
- 2) Disciplinary Standards
 - 1. History
 - 3. Civics and Government
 - 4. Economics

Center for Civic Education

- 9-12 Content Standards
 - V. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

UCLA Department of History (NCHS)

- US History Content Standards
 - United States Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870 – 1900)
 - United States Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America (1890 – 1930)

KEY TERMS

- “Separate spheres”
- Temperance
- Settlement houses
- Americanization
- Protective legislation
- Suffrage
- Constitutional amendment
- Federalism
- Social Darwinism

Lesson Plan

Background/Homework » 15-20 minutes

Have students read **Handout A: Background Essay: Women in the Gilded Age** and answer the review questions.

Activity I » 20 minutes

A. Have students read **Handout A: Background Essay: Women in the Gilded Age** and complete **Handout B: Women in the Gilded Age Graphic Organizer** to compare and contrast the different reform movements in which women in the Gilded Age took the lead.

B. De-brief the activity and lead a discussion of the following questions:

How did the nature of moral reform efforts encourage women to leave the home to engage in civic life?

To what extent and in what ways were the reformers successful in changing society or the lives of women?

To what extent and in what ways did the movements strengthen civil society? How did they contribute to the growth of government power?

Activity II » 20 minutes

A. Students can work individually or in groups to complete **Handout C: Timeline of Women's Suffrage**. They should use **Handout A** and conduct other research as directed by the teacher.

B. Prior to the discussion, the teacher might appoint one or more recorders to use appropriate technology in making a timeline for display in the classroom reflecting student participation.

Activity III » 15-20 minutes

Assign students to work in groups of three to complete the assignment in **Handout D: Images of Women's Suffrage**. Students should analyze the pictures and make connections with the information presented in **Handout A**.

Activity IV » 20 minutes

A. Assign the students to work individually or in groups to read the primary sources on protective legislation and the Equal Rights Amendment. Have the students complete the brief writing assignment comparing and contrasting the primary sources in order to spotlight the main issues of the women's rights movement.

- B. The de-brief should include an analysis of the two approaches of state-level protective legislation and an amendment to the U.S. Constitution for equality and how the two contradicted each other. Have the students briefly debate which approach they prefer.

Wrap-Up » *15 minutes*

Conduct a discussion with the class on the following questions to wrap up the study of women's engagement in civic life during the Gilded Age.

- a. What were the causes of the transformation for women from the private, domestic sphere to the public sphere as workers, reformers, and voters?
- b. To what extent and in what ways did women's leadership in reform movements contribute to their success?

Extension

- A. Assign your students to write a brief essay or create some form of graphic organizer comparing and contrasting the path to African-American men's suffrage and that of women.
- B. The student products should include analysis of both suffrage movements and should examine the methods, challenges, and successes of both groups.

Background Essay: Women in the Gilded Age

Directions:

Read the background essay and answer the review questions.

The vast social changes caused by industrialization, immigration, and urbanization fundamentally altered life in the United States. In turn, those changes provoked responses in which women increased their political, economic, and civic participation in American public life. Moreover, women led various reform movements to ameliorate the harsh conditions that resulted from rapid social and economic change.

The expectations of the Victorian Era of the mid-to-late nineteenth century held that men and women functioned in equally important but “separate spheres.” Men entered public life in business and politics, which had many temptations for corruption and vice. Women cultivated virtuous homes for their husbands as homemakers and educators of their children. However, in the late nineteenth century, increasing numbers of women began to enter the workforce especially as marriage rates and fertility rates began a long-term decline. In addition, women took advantage of increasing educational opportunities in colleges.

By 1900, more than five million women (and approximately eight million a decade later) worked outside the home due to both the problems and opportunities caused by an industrializing economy. Many young, single women – especially of the working-class – worked in dangerous factories earning low wages and working between ten and twelve hours every day of the week before they married and left the workforce. The rampant low wages and frequent

unemployment experienced by immigrant men meant that many of their wives also had to work in factories or as domestic servants in homes. Alternatively, they took on piecemeal work on garments and other products inside the home. However, African-American women usually were restricted to working as servants or in agriculture. Single, middle-class women increasingly worked as secretaries, store clerks, teachers, and nurses. A very small percentage of married, middle-class women worked outside the home. Even fewer women worked in the professions of law and medicine.

A socially acceptable means of women entering public life was to engage in social reform. Most of these reformers were white, middle-class, educated Protestants who wanted to promote an improved moral climate in society and politics. For example, in 1879 Frances Willard assumed the presidency of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU’s primary mission was closing saloons and ending the consumption of alcohol because of the ill-effects of drunkenness on families, including wasted wages and domestic violence. The WCTU supported women’s suffrage as a means of achieving the prohibition of alcohol and other reforms.

In 1889, Jane Addams founded the Hull-House in Chicago to provide immigrants with desperately-needed services in poor, ethnic neighborhoods of the city. Other women took the lead in establishing similar successful settlement houses in dozens of other cities. These

community centers helped immigrants adapt to American society by teaching them English and civics, with the goal of “Americanizing” them.

Florence Kelley formed the National Consumers’ League in 1898 to pressure stores to pay female clerks better. The League also worked for protective legislation regulating the hours and conditions for women and children. Women were shut out of male-dominated unions such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), partially because AFL leadership accepted the traditional belief that employed women were taking the jobs of men who were the main source of income for families. Lilian Wald and other women created the Women’s Trade Union League to help women organize their own labor unions to bargain for better working conditions and increased wages.

In 1909, women who worked in the garment industry formed a movement called the “uprising of the twenty thousand” and went on strike to protest poor wages, grueling hours, and dangerous working conditions. Met with violence and arrest, the striking women, led by Rose Schneiderman, formed their own union, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) to support the strike. By early 1910, the ILGWU won the strike with higher wages and a limit of 52 hours of work per week. However, the next year tragedy struck when 146 workers, most of them young immigrant women, were killed in a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, a garment manufacturer in New York City. Within half an hour, just before quitting time on March 25, 1911, a fire that started on the eighth floor had engulfed the building’s top three floors. The fire exits and stairwells were inadequate, the doors were kept locked, and the safety procedures were virtually nonexistent. Dozens of employees jumped out of windows to their deaths as the flames advanced, and many others were killed by

the blaze. The Triangle Waist Company tragedy was one of the most shocking of the events that focused national attention on unsafe working conditions. New York and other states passed laws to improve public safety for workers.

The various reforming civic groups and unions established by powerful women during the Gilded Age reflected the organizational strength of women fighting for social and economic reform. While they struggled for those reforms, they developed a keen sense of the political inequality faced by women excluded from the ballot box. Women re-invigorated the women’s suffrage movement through the same organizational strategies they had implemented in the reform movements of the late nineteenth century.

In 1848, a group of reformers had met at Seneca Falls, New York, and issued a Declaration of Sentiments modeled after the Declaration of Independence. The Seneca Falls document, signed by 100 delegates including thirty-two men, listed the ways women had been deprived of equal rights, including “the inalienable right to the elective franchise.” The women’s suffrage movement split, however, in 1869 when the National Woman Suffrage Association led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony sought to win women’s suffrage through an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The rival American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, pursued a strategy of achieving women’s suffrage at the state level. Thus, the principled debate was between those who wanted to amend the Constitution and those who desired most closely to follow the principle of federalism.

In 1890, the movement united and formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The suffragettes argued for the right to vote on the grounds that women

were the intellectual equal to men and capable of exercising an independent vote. Second, women argued that they were more virtuous and would help improve the moral character of politics through reform. Third, they made Social Darwinist arguments, asserting that if “inferior” black and immigrant men could vote, so should white, middle-class women. The NAWSA achieved notable successes in the more individualistic western states of Washington, California, Kansas, Oregon, and Arizona as they joined Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho in approving women’s suffrage in state and local elections.

Despite the successes, in 1913, radical suffragette Alice Paul broke with the NAWSA to form the Congressional Union (which later became the National Women’s Party). Paul disagreed with the state-by-state strategy and wanted a constitutional amendment. On March 3, 1913, the day before president-elect Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, five thousand women bravely marched down Pennsylvania Avenue while being jeered and pelted with objects by a hostile crowd. The demonstration was aimed at pressuring incoming President Woodrow Wilson to support women’s suffrage. After suffering the indignity of insults for marching for equality, hundreds were arrested and imprisoned. Alice

Paul and others went on a hunger strike and were force-fed in prison.

In 1916, both Republicans and Democrats had a plan supporting women’s suffrage due to the efforts of thousands of women who showed up at the respective party conventions. Women’s patriotic contribution to the war effort at home, in factories, and near the front lines during World War I furthered the cause of suffrage. Still, President Wilson was lukewarm. Although a president’s signature is not necessary for a constitutional amendment, Wilson’s support would add the prestige of the office to the cause and help secure passage. Beginning in January 1917, suffragettes marched before the White House for six months to lobby the president. All of these efforts bore fruit when the House and Senate passed the amendment by the required two-thirds vote, and thirty-six states ratified it by August, 1920.

The women reformers of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era spearheaded a number of movements that profoundly reshaped women’s participation in American society and civic life. As a result, they would pave the way for other women to engage in politics, social reform, and the struggle for women’s equality during the course of the twentieth century.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What social and economic changes were occurring in the lives of women during the Gilded Age?
2. What were the different experiences of women in the workforce?
3. Compare and contrast the goals of the different social movements women joined.
4. How did the goals and strategies of the women’s suffrage movement change over time?
5. Why were women successful in achieving a constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage?

DOCUMENT B

Women in the Gilded Age Graphic Organizer

Directions:

Using **Handout A**, fill out the following graphic organizer related to women and Gilded Age and Progressive Era reform.

Organization	Date/Founder	Reforms Supported
Women’s Christian Temperance Union		
Hull House		
National Consumers’ League		
Women’s Trade Union League		
International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union		
National Woman Suffrage Association		
American Woman Suffrage Association		

Timeline of Women’s Suffrage

Directions:

Work with a partner to create a timeline of women’s suffrage in America from Seneca Falls (1848) to the Nineteenth Amendment (1919) using **Handout A** and additional research as directed by the teacher. Your timeline should include 15 events, showing year/event/significance for each one.

Year	Event	Significance
1848	Seneca Falls	

Images of Women's Suffrage

Directions:

Use the following images related to women's suffrage to answer the questions.



“The Awakening” (1915) Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98502844/>

REVIEW QUESTION

What does “The Awakening” represent about the history and geography of women’s suffrage in the Gilded Age?



"The First Picket Line" (1917) Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97500299/>

REVIEW QUESTION

What role did women's suffrage demonstrations play in changing President Woodrow Wilson's actions regarding the Nineteenth Amendment?

Protective Legislation for Women

Directions:

Read the following two primary sources. Compare and contrast the goals of the movements for protective legislation for women and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Background: During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, numerous state laws were passed to protect women workers by regulating hours they could work. These types of laws were broadly known as “protective legislation.” After women’s suffrage was won with the Nineteenth Amendment, Alice Paul and the National Women’s Party worked for an Equal Rights Amendment that seemed to endanger protective legislation for women since all must be treated equally.

Muller v. Oregon (1908)

“The legislation and opinions referred to [in the Brandeis Brief] may not be, technically speaking, authorities, and in them is little or no discussion of the constitutional question presented to us for determination, yet they are significant of a widespread belief that woman’s physical structure, and the functions she performs in consequence thereof, justify special legislation restricting or qualifying the conditions under which she should be permitted to toil....

That woman’s physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious. This is especially true when the burdens of motherhood are upon her. Even when they are not, by abundant testimony of the medical fraternity continuance for a long time on her feet at work, repeating this from day to day, tends to injurious effects upon the body, and, as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical wellbeing of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race....

Differentiated by these matters from the other sex, she is properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection may be sustained, even when like legislation is not necessary for men and could not be sustained. It is impossible to close one’s eyes to the fact that she still looks to her brother and depends on him. Even though all restrictions on political, personal and contractual rights were taken away, and she stood, so far as statutes are concerned, upon an absolutely equal plane with him, it would still be true that she is so constituted that she will rest upon and look to him for protection; that her physical structure and a proper discharge of her maternal functions—having in view not merely her health, but the well-being of the race—justify legislation to protect her from the greed as well as the passion of man. The limitations which this statute places upon her contractual powers, upon her right to agree with her employer as to the time she shall labor, are not imposed solely for her benefit, but also largely for the benefit of all. Many words cannot make this plainer. The two sexes differ in structure of body, in

the functions to be performed by each, in the amount of physical strength, in the capacity for long-continued labor, particularly when done standing, the influence of vigorous health upon the future well-being of the race, the self-reliance which enables one to assert full rights, and in the capacity to maintain the struggle for subsistence. This difference justifies a difference in legislation and upholds that which is designed

to compensate for some of the burdens which rest upon her.”

Alice Paul, “Lucretia Mott Amendment,” December, 1923

“Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.”

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Write a 5-7 sentence response to the following question. Should women be protected by “protective legislation” or by an Equal Rights Amendment, or by some other method, or by no legal action at all?

Extension Activity: Comparing and Contrasting Women's and African-American Suffrage Movements

Directions:

Using this lesson and Lesson 2.5 African Americans in the Gilded Age, write a brief essay or construct a graphic organizer using your preferred format comparing and contrasting the movement to gain African-American male suffrage and the movement for women's suffrage. Be sure to include analysis of their methods, challenges, and major successes of both groups.



Handout A: Background Essay: Women in the Gilded Age Review Questions Answer Key

1. Social and economic changes occurring in the lives of Gilded Age women include:
 - Increasing numbers of women began entering the workforce: in factories, as domestic servants, on piecemeal work on garments. African-American women were restricted to working as servants or in agriculture.
 - Single, middle-class women were able to get positions as secretaries, store clerks, teachers, and nurses.
 - Women also began engaging in social reform such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), settlement houses, and National Consumers’ League.
 - As more women began to enter the work force, women would also seek to form their own unions such as the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU).
 - As women began organizing for various economic and social reforms, they met at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and issue a Declaration of Sentiments, aimed at securing equal rights for women, namely, the right to vote.
2. Different experiences of women in the workforce include the following:
 - Lower-class women who chose to work outside of the home were mostly confined to low-skill jobs in factories.
 - Few women were accepted into professions of law and medicine.
 - Women were not admitted into common labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor. Therefore, women would form their own unions within the workplace.
 - Eventually, some states implemented “protective legislation” for women. This legislation encompassed a number of laws aimed at things such as restricting the working hours of women to account for “physical inequality” between women and men.
3. There were a number of women’s social movements during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era aimed at influencing a variety of areas in society. One of the first of these was the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) whose goal was to close saloons and end alcohol consumption. Jane Addams’s Hull House and its staff sought to improve the assimilation process for immigrants. The National Consumers’ League pressured stores to offer better pay for female clerks and other protective legislation for women in the workplace. Additionally, due to the inability to join the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Lilian Wald and other women would form the Women’s Trade Union League to fight for the demands of working women. Another example of a woman led union was the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU). Much like the Women’s Trade Union League, the ILGWU aimed to improve the lives of working women in the garment industry.

4. At Seneca Falls in 1848, a group of women and men met and issued the Declaration of Sentiments, making women's suffrage one of the main demands. However, the women's suffrage movement would split in 1869 as the National Woman Suffrage Association desired a constitutional amendment to grant women's suffrage while the American Woman Suffrage Association desired to achieve women's suffrage at the state level. These movements would unite once again in 1890 and, together, would follow the state-by-state strategy. Despite successes, another split would occur in 1913 leading to the founding of the Congressional Union (later called the National Women's party) that would once again seek a constitutional amendment.
5. Women employed a variety of strategies in the struggle for the constitutional amendment for suffrage including winning suffrage in several states, speaking and writing in favor of equality, demonstrating and picketing, going to jail and engaging in hunger strikes, and pressuring members of Congress and the President.

Handout B: Women in the Gilded Age Graphic Organizer

Organization	Date/Founder	Reforms Supported
Women's Christian Temperance Union	Frances Willard (1879)	Promoting an improved moral climate in society and politics; closing saloons and ending the consumption of alcohol because of the ill effects of drunkenness on families; women's suffrage as a means of achieving prohibition.
Hull House	Jane Addams (1889)	Providing immigrants with vital services in poor, ethnic neighborhoods; helped immigrants to adapt to American society by teaching English and civics.
National Consumers' League	Florence Kelley (1898)	Pressured stores to pay female clerks better; protective legislation regulating the hours and conditions for women and children.

Organization	Date/Founder	Reforms Supported
Women's Trade Union League	Lilian Wald (1903)	Helped women organize their own labor unions to bargain for better working conditions and increased wages.
International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union	Rose Schneiderman (1909)	Desired to protest against poor wages, grueling hours, and dangerous conditions in the garment industry.
National Woman Suffrage Association	Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1869)	Achieving voting rights for women through an amendment to the United States Constitution.
American Woman Suffrage Association	Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell (1869)	Achieving women's suffrage on a state-by-state basis through state amendments rather than one to the United States Constitution.

Handout C: Timeline of Women's Suffrage

Students may list a variety of different significant events and landmarks for their timeline. Some prominent examples are listed below, but accept well-reasoned and applicable responses:

- **1848:** First women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York
- **1850:** First National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts
- **1869:** Formation of National Woman Suffrage Association (May)
- **1869:** Formation of American Woman Suffrage Association (November)
- **1869:** Wyoming passes first women's suffrage law
- **1878:** Susan B. Anthony writes a federal woman suffrage amendment and it is introduced to Congress
- **1890:** National Woman Suffrage Association and American Women Suffrage Association merge in order to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association

- **1893:** Colorado adopts an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1896:** Idaho adopts an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1903:** Formation of the National Women’s Trade Union League to help advocate for higher wages and better working conditions for working women
- **1910:** Washington state adopts an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1911:** California adopts an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1912:** Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1913:** Alaska and Illinois adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1913:** Formation of the Congressional Union which sought an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would grant women the right to vote at the federal level; this group would later change its name to the National Women’s Party
- **1914:** Montana and Nevada adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1917:** New York adopts an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1918:** Michigan, South Dakota, and Oklahoma adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote
- **1919:** Federal woman suffrage amendment is passed by the House and Senate and sent to the states for ratification
- **1920:** The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution is signed into law by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby.

Handout D: Images of Women’s Suffrage

1. The Awakening represents how during the Gilded Age, the push for women’s suffrage truly began in the West, with almost all of the states passing women’s suffrage amendments prior to the Nineteenth amendment being states in the West. The Awakening symbolizes how this movement which began in the west is moving eastward in its goal of providing women across the nation with the right to vote.
2. While President Wilson’s signature would not be necessary for securing the constitutional amendment, many desired his support to add legitimacy to the cause of women’s suffrage. The persistence of those in support of women’s suffrage would help to persuade Wilson to support women’s suffrage.

Introductory Essay

The decades after the American Civil War witnessed a vast array of social, economic, technological, cultural, and political changes in the American landscape. These changes transformed the United States from a largely local to a national society. This new society was characterized by a more integrated nation with large institutions and a broad, national outlook.

The economy experienced significant growth during the late nineteenth century that built on the beginnings of the industrial revolution that had begun before the Civil War. The rise of the factory system depended on technological change and new power sources that made the mass production of goods possible. The expansion of the railroad created a national distribution network for the goods. The modern business corporation grew as a response to managing the national production and distribution of goods. The practices of big business came under media and regulatory scrutiny as equal opportunity seemed to shrink. The great wealth of several industrialists was also scrutinized by those who feared their influence and were concerned about growing inequality.

American workers were the backbone of this new industrial economy as they worked with machines to secure the raw materials from the earth and used them to create a finished product. Millions of workers saw great changes in the nature of their work in the factory system. They earned higher wages and enjoyed greater standards of living but sometimes at a great cost due to dangerous, unhealthy conditions. Workers organized into labor unions to meet the growing power of big business. The labor unions

gave workers a sense of solidarity and a greater bargaining position with employers. Waves of strikes and industrial violence convulsed the country, and led to an uncertain future for organized labor.

American farmers were caught between two competing trends in the new industrial economy. The future seemed bright as new western lands were brought under cultivation and new technology allowed farmers to achieve much greater production. However, banks and railroads offered mixed blessings as they often hurt the farmers' economic position. Farmers organized into groups to protect their interests and participate in the growing prosperity of the rapidly industrializing American economy. At the same time, difficult times led many to give up on farming and find work in factories.

American cities became larger throughout the period as the factory system drew millions of workers from the American countryside and tens of millions of immigrants from other countries. The large cities created immense markets that demanded mass-produced goods and agricultural products from American farms. The cities were large, impersonal places for the newcomers and were centers of diversity thanks to the mingling of many different cultures. The urban areas lacked basic services and were often run by corrupt bosses, but the period witnessed the growth of more effective urban government that offered basic services to improve life for millions of people.

The tens of millions of immigrants that came to the United States primarily settled in urban areas and worked in the factories. They came for the opportunities afforded by large, industrial

economies and provided essential low-skill labor. The “new immigrants” were mostly from southeastern Europe, Asia, and Mexico. They had to adapt to a strange new world, and in turn brought with them new ethnicities, languages, religious practices, foods, and cultures. This tension over assimilation led to debates about American values and the Americanization of immigrants. Some native-born Americans wanted to restrict the number of immigrants coming into the country, while others defended the newcomers.

The changes in the economy and society created opportunities and challenges for millions of other Americans. The status and equal rights of women experienced a general, long-term growth. Many women enjoyed new opportunities to become educated and work in society, though these opportunities were still limited when compared with men. The history of women during the late nineteenth century was not monolithic as white, middle-class women often had a very different experience than women who were poor, or from a minority or immigrant background. Because many women entered the workforce, a debate occurred over the kinds and amount of work that women performed, which led to legal protections. The women’s suffrage movement won the biggest success for equal rights in the period with the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, granting women the right to vote.

African Americans did not participate in the growing opportunities and prosperity that other groups in American society did. The long and bloody Civil War had ended with the freeing of African Americans from slavery. This was followed by further gains of constitutional and legal protections, however, many of these rights would soon evaporate. During the late

nineteenth century, African Americans found inequality and racism in the segregation of the South, but they were also victimized by inequality and racism in northern cities in the early twentieth century as they moved there in increasing numbers. Black leaders debated the right path to full equality, civic participation, and economic opportunity in American life.

The changes that affected the American economy and society led to a growth in the federal government. The important issues of the nineteenth century were increasingly contested on the national rather than local levels. Businesses, organized labor, farmers, and interest groups turned to the national government to resolve their disputes. The executive branch saw an expansion of its role and influence as it increased its regulatory power over the many aspects of American life. A widespread reform movement called “progressivism” introduced many reforms that were intended to address the changes in society resulting from the modern industrial economy and society. This increased government’s responsiveness but also dramatically increased the size and powers of the federal government. The national government therefore began to supplant the local and state governments in the minds of many Americans and in the American constitutional system.

The late nineteenth century also ushered in great changes in how the United States interacted with the rest of the world. For the first century of its existence, the United States traded with other countries, acquired territory for continental expansion, and fought in a few major wars. However, the United States was generally neutral in world affairs and focused on its domestic situation. That changed as America entered the world stage as a major global

power. This expansion in world affairs led to an internal debate over international powers and responsibilities. Americans also struggled over the character of its foreign affairs. Debates raged over the growth of American military power and whether Americans had a duty to spread democracy around the world.

The changes in the late nineteenth century were bewildering to most Americans who experienced them. Many debates took place to make sense of the changes and to consider how to respond to them. Americans rarely found easy answers and often conflicted with one another on the different solutions. The vast changes that occurred laid the foundation of modern America. The questions and challenges that they faced are still relevant and are debated by Americans

today in the twenty-first century. Americans continue to discuss the power and regulation of banks and large corporations. Workers grapple with the globalization of the economy, stagnant wages, and changing technology. Farmers still struggle to make an income amid distant markets determining commodity prices while keeping up with changing consumer tastes about organic and locally-sourced food. Headlines are filled with news of African Americans suffering racism and police brutality. Issues related to the equality of women continue to be debated even as women run for president. Smartphones, social media, the internet, and other technologies change our lives, the culture, and the world economy every day. After more than a century since the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the fundamental challenges of the era still face us today.