

## **"4. In an Age of "Progress"**

**We are all of us immigrants in the industrial world, and we have no authority to lean upon. We are an uprooted people, newly arrived and nouveau riche.**

Walter Lippmann

Chapter 3 described the growth of eugenics, a branch of scientific inquiry developed by Francis Galton, an English mathematician. He based the new science on the idea that individuals are born with a “definite endowment” of qualities like “character, disposition, energy, intellect, or physical power”—qualities that in his view “go towards the making of civic worth.” Eugenics therefore promised to “raise the present miserably low standard of the human race” by “breeding the best with the best.”

Chapter 4 considers how eugenics was related to other aspects of American life at the turn of the 20th century. Many of the readings place the movement in an historical context by focusing on some of the changes that transformed American life in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Industrial Revolution had swept away familiar ways of working and living, altered social expectations, and redefined the relationship between citizens and their government. In a book of reminiscences entitled *The Age of Confidence*, editor Henry S. Canby wrote of his own responses to those changes and those of other white middle-class Americans in the late 1800s:

We had been trained to fit into certainties, educated to suppose that Mr. [Andrew] Carnegie’s steel mills, Sunday observance, the banking system, the Republican party, the benefits of Latin, algebra, and good handwriting . . . were parts of one quite comprehensible plan. . . . Yet whispering at the back of the new liberal mind was always a question which became more insistent as the years went on. The community in which we had been brought up and the education ground into us were ordered, self-contained, comprehensible, while this new society was incoherent, without fixed aim, and without even a pretense of homogeneity. We were like pond fish who had been flooded into a river.<sup>1</sup>

Americans like Canby were ambivalent about change. Their pride in the nation’s scientific advances and technological innovations was tempered by their discomfort with social and economic transformations. A number of them looked back at the world they had known as children with a deep sense of loss. Each year

fewer Americans made their home on farms or in small towns where people knew their neighbors. More and more now lived and worked among strangers in huge metropolitan areas. By 1900 New York City was home to over 4 million people. Chicago had a population of over 1.7 million and Philadelphia 1.4 million. Some smaller cities were doubling and tripling in population in the course of a decade.

To a growing number of middle-class white Americans, the city represented all that was new and disturbing in their world. In *Our Country*, one of the most popular books of the era, author Josiah Strong, a Protestant minister, described the “seven perils” that he claimed threatened the nation. The first six were Catholicism, “Mormonism,” intemperance, socialism, wealth, and immigration. The seventh peril was the city itself—the base for the “alien army that invaded the nation,” “an army twice as vast as the estimated numbers of Goths and Vandals that swept over Southern Europe and overwhelmed Rome.”<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the late 1800s, a number of middle-class white Americans set out to save “civilization” from the “perils” Strong and others described. Known as “progressives,” these Americans tried to make their chaotic world more rational by tackling problems caused by rapid industrialization, migration, immigration, and urbanization. Unlike social Darwinists who believed in the survival of the “fittest,” progressives believed they had a duty to intervene in society, a responsibility to help the less fortunate become as “fit” as possible. These Americans placed their faith in education and legislation. They were not an organized group, although they shared similar views on the dangers of child labor, overcrowded neighborhoods, and unsanitary living conditions. Their numbers included Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Although most were middle-class white Americans, on some issues they had the support of labor union leaders, immigrants, African Americans, and even wealthy industrialists.

---

1. Quoted in *Life in Twentieth Century America* by John W. Dodds. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1965, 1972, p. 52.

2. Quoted in *The Free and the UnFree* by Peter N. Carroll and David W. Noble. Penguin Books, 1977, 1988, p. 240.

## **“Marvels of a Marvelous Age”**

---

### Reading 1

Many Americans at the turn of the 20th century viewed the changes that had taken place in their lifetimes with pride and amazement. In 1889, author Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, expressed those feelings in a letter to congratulate poet Walt Whitman on his 70th birthday:

You have lived just the seventy years which are greatest in the world’s history and richest in benefit and advancement to its peoples. These seventy years have done more to widen the interval between man and the other animals than was accomplished by any of the five centuries which preceded them.

What great births have you witnessed! The steam press, the steamship, the steelship, the railroad, the perfect cotton gin, the telegraph, the phonograph, the photogravure, the electrotpe, the gaslight, the electric light, the sewing machine and the amazing infinitely varied and innumerable products of coal tar; those latest and strangest marvels of a marvelous age. And you have seen even greater births than these; for you have seen the application of anesthesia to surgery-practice, whereby the ancient dominion of pain, which began with the first created life, came to an end on this earth forever; you have seen the slave set free, you have seen monarchy banished from France and reduced in England to a machine which makes an imposing show of diligence and attention to business, but isn’t connected with the works. Yes you have indeed seen much—but tarry for a while, for the greatest is yet to come. Wait thirty years, and then look out over the earth! You shall see marvels upon marvels added to those whose nativity you have witnessed; and conspicuous above them you shall see their formidable Result—man at almost his full stature at last!—and still growing, visibly growing while you look. Wait till you see that great figure appear; and catch the far glint of the sun upon his banner; then you may depart satisfied, as knowing you have seen him for whom the earth was made, and that he will proclaim that human wheat is more than human [seeds], and proceed to organize human values on that basis.<sup>1</sup>

Had Whitman lived until the turn of the century, he would have witnessed many more of the benefits of “a marvelous age.” Historian John Milton Cooper, Jr. writes that by 1900:

Not only had the United States grown to continental size, but its population had swelled to seventy-six million, spread from coast to coast in forty-five states, and concentrated in thirty-eight cities of more than one hundred thousand people. In 1900, no aspect of American life was more striking than this rapid, fantastic growth. The ballooning numbers of people sprang in part from a high, but now declining, annual birth rate: 32.3 live births per thousand of population (down from 55 in 1800 and 43.3 in 1850.) Greater growth resulted from lowered infant mortality and lengthened life span, which had reduced the annual death rate to 16.5 per thousand, the lowest in the world. But by far the greatest numbers of new Americans came with the waves of immigration from overseas. Nearly 425,000 Europeans arrived . . . in 1900 alone.

Americans were proud of the drawing power of their political and religious freedoms, which had long since made them a "nation of immigrants." From the beginning of the nineteenth century, European migration to the United States had steadily mounted and had become more diverse than in the colonial period, when most settlers had been English and Scottish Protestants. Starting in the 1840s, thousands of Irish immigrants, most of whom were Roman Catholics, as well as Germans of various religious persuasions, flocked across the ocean. After the Civil War, the sources of European immigration broadened still further to encompass growing numbers from Scandinavia, Italy, Greece, and Eastern Europe. . . . In 1900, the rate of immigration was still accelerating. During the first decade of the twentieth century, over eight million more immigrants would come to the United States—the largest number in any decade before or since. These newest arrivals would account for more than 10 percent of the entire American population.

Size, population, wealth—each marked how far the United States had come in such a short time from its raw, humble beginnings. Only two countries, Russia and Canada, occupied larger land areas. Among the Western nations—those with predominately European ethnic origins, languages, and cultures—only Russia had a larger population. No country anywhere enjoyed so large and dynamic an economy. American commerce, transportation, industry, and agriculture were wonders of the world. By almost any measure of economic performance, the United States excelled. Steel production in 1900 amounted to over ten million tons, more than a third higher than Germany's, the closest competitor. Railroad trackage stretched to 167,000 miles, or one-third of the world's total. Per-capita income

was estimated at \$569, far above the nearest rival, Britain. Literacy rates stood at nearly 90 percent of the populace. The country had over 2,200 newspapers and nearly one thousand colleges and universities, with a combined student body of nearly 240,000. School enrollment amounted to over sixteen million pupils—the world’s largest in both numbers and percentage of the population. Of these students, nearly one hundred thousand would graduate from secondary schools in 1900, also ahead of every other nation in numbers and percentages, and nearly double the total in 1890.<sup>2</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

Some people define the word *progress* as “growth” or “movement,” while others view it as “a step forward” or a “ladder reaching upward.” How does Mark Twain define the word? What achievements does he regard as central to progress? How do you define *progress*? How does the way one defines the term shape an understanding of the world?

Scientist Jacob Bronowski created “The Ascent of Man,” a television series and a book on the history of humankind. He explained his use of the word *ascent*: “Man ascends by discovering the fullness of his own gifts (his talents or faculties) and what he creates on the way are monuments to the stages in his understanding of nature and self.”<sup>3</sup> How is his view of *ascent* similar to Twain’s view of *progress*? To those expressed by people like Samuel Morton (Chapter 2) and Charles Davenport (Chapter 3)? How do these views of progress differ? Which view is closest to your own definition of the term?

How does the word *progress* apply to individuals? What does it mean to regard yourself and others as those “for whom earth was made”? How does that view shape the way Twain ranks humankind in relation to other animals? How are his efforts to arrange the natural world similar to those of Johann Blumenbach or Petrus Camper (Chapter 2)? How do you think someone like Charles Davenport would respond to Twain’s view of the nation’s future? On what might they agree? On what points might there be debate?

Cooper writes, “During the first decade of the twentieth century, over eight million more immigrants would come to the United States—the largest number in any decade before or since. These newest arrivals would account for more than 10 percent of the entire American population.” How do you think these newcomers may have contributed to the dis-ease Henry Canby describes in the

Introduction to Chapter 4? What other signs can you find in Cooper's account that might explain the dis-ease experienced by Americans like Canby? Their sense of loss?

Interview someone who has lived 70 years or more to find out what changes have taken place in the world in his or her lifetime. How might Twain have described those changes? Which might he regard as "marvels of a marvelous age"? If he were alive today, how might he have revised or expanded his assessment of the marvels of his own age? His assessment of the future of humankind?

- 
1. Quoted in *Letters of a Nation* edited by Andrew Carroll. Kodansha America, Inc., 1997, pp. 396-397.
  2. *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* by John Milton Cooper, Jr. W.W. Norton & Co., 1990, pp. 1-3.
  3. *The Ascent of Man* by Jacob Bronowski. Little Brown, & Co., 1973, p. 24.

## The End of the Frontier

---

### Reading 2

In 1890, the Census Bureau announced that the nation had become so settled that it was no longer possible to draw a line on a map of the United States to indicate the nation's frontier. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner saw the announcement as the end of an era. In speeches and essays, he maintained that with the closing of the frontier, something distinctive and even precious in American life had been lost. In 1926, journalist Mark Sullivan mourned that loss in *Our Times*, a history of the early 1900s. He argued that at the turn of the 20th century, "the average American in great numbers had the feeling he was being 'put upon' by something he couldn't quite see or get his fingers on; that somebody was 'riding' him; that some force or other was 'crowding' him." Sullivan explained:

Vaguely he felt that his freedom of action, his opportunity to do as he pleased, was being frustrated in ways mysterious in their origin and operation, and in their effects most uncomfortable; that his economic freedom, as well as his freedom of action, and his capacity to direct his political liberty toward results he desired, was being circumscribed in a tightening ring, the drawing-strings of which, he felt sure, were being pulled by the hands of some invisible power which he ardently desired to see and get at, but could not. This unseen enemy he tried to personify. He called it the Invisible Government, the Money Interests, the Gold Bugs, Wall Street, the Trusts. During the first [William Jennings] Bryan campaign [for President in 1896], the spokesmen of the West spoke of the businessmen of the East, collectively, as "the enemy."

That mood was the source of most of the social and political movements of the years succeeding 1900. . . .

The principal cause of the loss by the average American of a degree of economic freedom he had been accustomed to enjoy since the first settlement of the country was the practical coming to an end of the supply of free, or substantially free, virgin land. . . . During the 1890s occurred the last important one of these openings of Indian reservations to settlement, which were the principal means by which the Federal Government gave opportunity to landless men to acquire farms at small cost. That marked the end of that gloriously prodigal period . . . during which a man with a family of sons need give little concern to their future, knowing that when the urge of manhood

came, they could go out and acquire a farm by little more than the process of “squatting” upon it. The time had come to an end when a man of independent spirit, feeling distaste for going to work as any one’s hired man in a factory or elsewhere, could go West, settle upon a quarter-section of public land, and in course of time possess himself of it without being called on to pay more than a nominal sum. The average American, who had been able to look out on a far horizon of seemingly limitless land, now saw that horizon close in around him in the shape of the economic walls of a different sort of industrial and economic organization, walls which, to be sure, could be climbed; but which called for climbing. . . .

The end of free land was the largest one of those causes which, in the years preceding 1900, gave rise to a prevailing mood of repression, of discomfort, sullenly silent or angrily vocal. . . . It took time to pass from an easy-going assumption that our land, our forests, all our natural resources were unlimited, to uncomfortable consciousness that they were not. The average American, more readily visualizing a personified cause for his discomfort, dwelt more upon causes that proceeded from persons, or organizations of persons—corporations, “trusts,” or what-not. There were such causes. But they were minor compared to the ending of the supply of free land.

. . . . In 1900, many men could remember when they could take their rifles, go out among the buffalo-herds, and get as much meat as they wanted, without . . . hindrance. To men with that memory, regulations, hunters’ licenses, were irksome. This is a small illustration of what happened in many fields. The frontiersman had hardly ever encountered law or regulation. With increase of population came limits on liberty, “verbotens,” “forbidden by law,” “no trespassing.” Later, with machinery, came another variety of regulation. In the days of the horse-drawn vehicle, “keep to the right” was about the only traffic code. With the coming of the automobile, stringent traffic rules came into being.<sup>1</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

Whom does Mark Sullivan regard as the “average American”? How does he describe the mood of that “average American” at the turn of the 20th century? To what does he attribute that mood? Why does he see it as the “source of most of the social and political movements in the years succeeding 1900”? As you continue reading, look for evidence that supports or challenges Sullivan’s views.



Each of us has a “universe of obligation”—a circle of individuals and groups toward whom we feel obligations, to whom the rules of society apply, and whose injuries call for amends. Whom does Sullivan consider “one of us”? Who lies beyond his universe of obligation?

Sullivan focuses on life at the turn of the 20th century. In looking at that same period, anthropologist Lee Baker expresses concerns about the role of the “average American” in “the violent chaos that erupted at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, race and labor riots in 1892, terrorizing lynch mobs, and reports that African Americans composed the most criminal element in society.” To what extent is there a connection between “feeling put upon” and outbreaks of violence? Historians have noted that in times of uncertainty, it is all too easy to blame someone else for all that is new and disturbing. Whom does Sullivan’s “average American” blame for his troubles? What do your answers suggest about the conditions that seem to encourage intolerance? What conditions then might foster tolerance? Find examples in current events.

Look up the words *squatting* or *squatter* in a dictionary. What do the definitions suggest about the way some Americans acquired “free land”?

How does Sullivan define the word *liberty*? What relationship does he see between individual liberties and the law? How do you define that relationship?

Many historians today disagree with the views expressed by Turner and Sullivan. In the book *Into the West*, historian Walter Nugent writes that by 1890 “Native American armed resistance had collapsed after four hundred years of European pressure. That, not the frontier, was what really ended in 1890.” What point is Nugent making about the settlement of the West and the role of Native Americans in the process? Find out more about the frontier in American history. To what extent is the picture Sullivan paints reality? To what extent is it a myth? It has been said that what people believe is true often has more power than truth itself. How does the popular view of the settlement of the West support that idea?

In 1776, soon after the American Revolution began, each of England’s 13 former colonies wrote a constitution that gave the right to vote to “free men” who owned property. By the mid-1800s, most states had revised their constitutions to allow all “free white men” to vote. What does Sullivan suggest about the links between land ownership and citizenship? Why do you think the Americans he describes felt that they had a right to the land?

---

1. *Our Times: The United States 1900-1925* by Mark Sullivan. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926, pp. 137-138, 141-143, 144-149.

## A Celebration of “Progress”

---

### Reading 3

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, expositions and fairs were a way of educating people not only about their nation and its place in the world but also about their own place in American society. In 1893, over 27 million people attended the World’s Columbian Exposition—an exposition that used architecture, artifacts, and “living exhibits” to celebrate “American progress.” Held in Chicago to mark the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s voyages to the Americas, it attracted over 13 million Americans—about one of every five people in the nation. The fair was designed to prove that “the wonderful progress of the United States, as well as the character of the people,” is the result of natural selection. Many of the exhibits illustrated “the steps of progress of civilization and its arts in successive centuries, and in all lands up to the present time.” The aim was “to teach a lesson; to show the advancement of evolution of man.” That lesson was rooted in social Darwinism—the idea that competition rewards “the strong” (Chapter 3).



A view of the “White City”, as the World’s Columbian Exposition was known.

That kind of patriotism appealed to many Americans, including Francis J. Bellamy, an editor of the popular children’s magazine *Youth’s Companion*. At his urging, Congress made October 12, 1892, a national holiday. On that day children gathered at schools and churches to celebrate Columbus’s achievements and the fair by reciting a “Pledge of Allegiance” that Bellamy wrote for the occasion: “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all.” At the exposition, hundreds of schoolgirls dressed in red, white, and blue formed a living flag as they

recited the pledge. In years to come, children across the nation—immigrant and native-born alike—would stand and recite that same pledge at the start of every school day.

To underscore the progress of the flag and the “inevitable triumph” of “white civilization” over Native Americans, the organizers invited several Sioux chiefs to the opening ceremonies. They made a brief appearance and then quietly left center stage, as a chorus sang “My Country ‘Tis of Thee.” A reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* noted, “Nothing in the day’s occurrences appealed to the sympathetic patriotism so much as this fallen majesty slowly filing out of sight as the flags of all nations swept satin kisses through the air, waving congratulations to the cultured achievement and submissive admiration to a new world.”<sup>1</sup>

That message also shaped the design of the exposition. The White City, as the fair was called, was supposed to represent the crowning achievement of American cultural and economic progress. In *The City of the Century*, historian Donald L. Miller writes:

The spacious exhibition halls were arranged in sympathy with their natural surroundings and were conveniently interconnected by picturesque walkways and two and a half miles of watercourse. At almost every major point on the grounds, footsore sightseers could climb aboard a “swift and silent” electric launch or flag down a smaller battery-run boat—like hailing a cab—and head to the next spot on their guidebook agenda. The railroad that circled the grounds was the first in America to operate heavy, high-speed trains by electricity, and it ran on elevated tracks, posing no danger to pedestrians at a time when trains, trolleys, and cable cars killed more than four hundred people a year on the streets of Chicago.

The streets and pavements of the White City were free of refuse and litter and patrolled by courteous Columbian Guards, drilled and uniformed like soldiers in the Prussian army; there was also a secret service force. . . . Every water fountain was equipped with a Pasteur filter, and the model sanitary system . . . worked flawlessly, converting sewage into solids and burning it, the ashes being used for road cover and fertilizer. There were no garish commercial signs, and with the concessionaires licensed and monitored, the fairgoers walked the grounds free from the nuisance of peddlers and confidence men, yet with the myriad pleasures of metropolitan life near at hand. The pavilions were vast department stores stocked with the newest consumer products, and in the course of a crowded day of sightseeing,

visitors could stop at courteously staffed coffee shops, teahouses, restaurants, and beer gardens located at ground level or on rooftop terraces. The White City seemed to suggest a solution to almost every problem afflicting the modern city. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Problems that did not lend themselves to technological solutions were ignored. The week the exposition opened, a depression began in the United States. By 1894, over 16,000 businesses and 500 banks had failed. Hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs. The organizers paid no attention to these Americans other than to hire guards to keep them off the fairgrounds.

Officials also tried to eliminate dissent at the fair. Although many of the nation's leading thinkers, reformers, and religious leaders spoke at the exposition, audiences were not permitted to ask questions nor were the speakers allowed to address one another directly. Many Americans found the idea of a clean, sparkling city without controversy or poverty refreshing, even inspiring. The *Chicago Tribune* described the White City as "a little ideal world, a realization of Utopia . . . [foreshadowing] some far away time when the earth should be as pure, as beautiful, and as joyous as the White City itself." To Robert Herrick and other visitors to the Exposition, it was a magical place. He wrote: "The people who could dream this vision and make it real, those people . . . would press on to greater victories than this triumph of beauty—victories greater than the world had yet witnessed."<sup>3</sup>

At the nearby Midway Plaisance—a strip of land a mile long and 600 feet wide across from the White City, visitors encountered a lesson in "race science" and social Darwinism. Here they saw "living exhibits"—representatives of the world's "races" including Africans, Asians, and American Indians. The two German and two Irish villages were located nearest to the White City. Farther away and closer to the center of the Midway were villages representing the Middle East, West Asia, and East Asia. Then, wrote literary critic Denton J. Snider, "we descend to the savage races, the African of Dahomey and the North American Indian, each of which has its place" at the far end of the Plaisance. "Undoubtedly," he noted, "the best way of looking at these races is to behold them in the ascending scale, in the progressive movement; thus we can march forward with them starting with the lowest specimens of humanity, and reaching continually upward to the highest stage" so that "we move in harmony with the thought of evolution."

The fair's organizers promoted the idea that the "savage races" were dangerous by warning that "the [Dahomey] women are as fierce if not fiercer than the men and all of them have to be watched day and night for fear they may use their spears for other purposes than a barbaric embellishment of their dances." "The stern warning," writes anthropologist Lee Baker, "reinforced many Americans'

fears that African Americans could not be trusted and were naturally predisposed to immoral and criminal behavior and thus kept away from white people through segregation.”<sup>4</sup>

Some groups were outraged at the way they were presented at the fair. Emma Sickles, the chair of the Indian Committee of the Universal Peace Union, protested portrayals of Native Americans at the exhibition in *The New York Times* on October 8, 1893. Her letter states in part:

Every effort has been put forth to make the Indian exhibit mislead the American people. It has been used to work up sentiment against the Indian by showing that he is either savage or can be educated only by government agencies. This would strengthen the power of everything that has been “working” against the Indians for years. Every means was used to keep the self-civilized Indians out of the Fair. The Indian agents and their backers knew well that if the civilized Indians got a representation in the Fair the public would wake up to the capabilities of the Indians for self-government and realize that all they needed was to be left alone.

African American leaders also protested. Frustrated and angry that “the Negroes’ ‘progress’” was ignored, two well-known African American activists, Frederick Douglass (Chapter 2) and Ida B. Wells, took matters in their own hands. They wrote and then distributed to fairgoers a pamphlet entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. As a concession to African Americans, organizers set aside a day in August as “Colored Jubilee Day.” Although many blacks refused to participate, Douglass agreed to speak. He used the occasion to outline the progress made by African Americans since the Civil War despite injustices, acts of violence, and blatant persecution. He also lambasted fair organizers who fostered the belief “that our small participation in the World’s Columbian Exposition is due either to our ignorance or to our want of public spirit.”

## CONNECTIONS

---

What is a fair? What is its purpose? How was the Columbian Exposition like other fairs you have attended? In what sense was it unique? What message did the exposition convey? What emotions did it prompt? Who was the intended audience? What do you think they learned from the fair?

How did the fair encourage patriotism? Build pride in the nation? Whom did the organizers see as part of that nation? Who seemed to lie beyond its universe of obligation? How did the organizers of the Columbian Exposition answer the question of Chapter 1: What do you do with a difference?

What does it mean to associate “whiteness” with being an American at a time of mass immigration?

Historian Donald I. Miller writes, “The White City seemed to suggest a solution to almost every problem afflicting the modern city.” Identify some of those problems and the way each was solved in the White City. At whose expense were many of these problems solved?

Why do you think many Americans found the idea of city without controversy refreshing? What does this reading suggest about how those who disagreed with the majority could get heard in the late 1800s? How have new technologies affected our ability to voice our opinions? To have those opinions heard and respected?

To what extent was the “White City” a utopia? How is it like the “Masterpiece Society” described on pages 31 and 32? What differences seem most striking? Is either a democracy? A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia. To what extent was the Midway a dystopia? What lessons did it teach?

How did the fair’s organizers define *civilization*? *Barbarism*? *Savagery*? What do those words mean to you? Record your definitions in your journal so that you can revise, expand, and deepen them as you continue to read.

Emma Sickles protested the way Indians were portrayed at the fair. Why was she outraged at the omission of “self-civilized” Indians? How does she seem to define the term *self-civilized*? What do you think it means to be “self-civilized”? If the so-called “inferior races” are able to “civilize” themselves, what questions do their efforts raise about social Darwinism? About the validity of the notion of “inferior” and “superior” races?

How did the organizers use “modern science,” including Charles Darwin’s theories (page 63), to reinforce old myths about “race”? How did they use “science” to not only rank the “races” but also justify those rankings?

Anthropologist Lee Baker believes that “the ethnological exhibits provided easy answers for Americans who were seeking ways to explain the violent chaos that erupted at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, race and labor riots in 1892, terrorizing lynch mobs, and reports that African Americans composed the most

criminal element in society.” Research one event on Baker’s list. What “easy answers” did the fair provide? Who might be attracted to those “easy answers”?

The Columbian Exposition was one of several “world’s fairs” in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Research another fair, like the one in St. Louis in 1904 to mark the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase. What did fairgoers learn about human differences—about *us* and *them*?

---

1. *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1892.

2. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster from *City of the Century: The Epic of the Making of America* by Donald L. Miller. Copyright © 1996 by Donald L. Miller.

3. *Memoirs of an American Citizen* by Robert Herrick. Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 147. Originally published in 1905.

4. *From Savage to Negro* by Lee D. Baker. University of California Press, 1998, p. 58.

## **“Progress,” Civilization, and “Color-Line Murder”**

---

### Reading 4

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the notion that the “white race” is “superior” to all others shaped the way many Americans viewed the world. Fairs like the World’s Columbian Exposition simply confirmed what people already believed about *us* and *them*. Fears of miscegenation—the mixing of the “races”—were widespread and acts of violence against African Americans and other minorities were on the rise. Newspapers, magazines, and other publications too often viewed lynchings as “justice” served in the name of chivalry and the “protection of white women.” It was a view supported by the nation’s leading anthropologists and other scholars. Daniel G. Brinton, president of the International Congress of Anthropology and the American Association for the Advancement of Science in the 1890s, was among those who called for laws and educational reforms based on the “scientific fact” that African Americans were inferior to white Americans. In his most popular work, *Races and Peoples*, he argued:

It cannot be too often repeated, too emphatically urged, that it is to the women alone of the highest race that we must look to preserve the purity of the type, and with it the claims of the race to be the highest. They have no holier duty, no more sacred mission, than that of transmitting in its integrity the heritage of ethnic endowment gained by the race throughout thousands of generations of struggle. . . . That philanthropy is false, that religion is rotten, which would sanction a white woman enduring the embrace of a colored man.<sup>1</sup>

Were lynchings an effort to protect “white women”? Journalist and social activist Ida B. Wells conducted an investigation to find out. In 1909, she reported her findings in a speech to members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

The lynching record for a quarter of a century merits the thoughtful study of the American people. It presents three salient facts: First, lynching is a color-line murder. Second, crimes against women are the excuse, not the cause. Third, it is a national crime and requires a national remedy.

Proof that lynching follows the color line is to be found in the statistics which have been kept for the past twenty-five years. During the few years preceding this period and while frontier law existed, the executions showed a majority of white victims. Later, however, as law



courts and authorized judiciary extended into the far West, lynch law rapidly abated, and its white victims became few and far between. . . .

During the last ten years, from 1899 to 1908 inclusive, the number lynched was 959. Of this number, 102 were white, while the colored victims numbered 857. No other nation, civilized or savage, burns its criminals; only under the Stars and Stripes is the human holocaust possible. Twenty-eight human beings burned at the stake, one of them a woman and two of them children, is the awful indictment against American civilization—the gruesome tribute which the nation pays to the color line.

Why is mob murder permitted by a Christian nation? What is the cause of this awful slaughter? This question is answered almost daily: always that same shameless falsehood that “Negroes are lynched to protect womanhood.” Standing before a Chautauqua assemblage, John Temple Graves, at once champion of lynching and apologist for lynchers, said, “The mob stands today as the most potential bulwark between the women of the South and such a carnival of crime as would infuriate the world and precipitate the annihilation of the Negro race.” This is the never-varying answer of lynchers and their apologists. All know that it is untrue. The cowardly lyncher revels in the murder, then seeks to shield himself from public execration by claiming devotion to woman. But truth is mighty and the lynching record discloses the hypocrisy of the lyncher as well as his crime.

The Springfield, Illinois, mob rioted for two days, the militia of the entire state was called out, two men were lynched, hundreds of people driven from their homes, all because a white woman said a Negro assaulted her. A mad mob went to the jail, tried to lynch the victim of her charge, and, not able to find him, proceeded to pillage and burn the town and to lynch two innocent men. Later after the police had found that the woman’s charge was false, she published a retraction, the indictment was dismissed, and the intended victim discharged. But the lynched victims were dead, hundreds were homeless, and Illinois was disgraced.

As a final and complete refutation of the charge that lynching is occasioned by crimes against women, a partial record of lynchings is cited; 285 persons were lynched for causes as follows: unknown cause, 92; no cause, 10; race prejudice, 49; miscegenation, 7; informing, 12; making threats, 11; keeping saloon, 3; practicing fraud, 5; practicing voodooism, 2; bad reputation, 8; unpopularity, 3; mistaken identity, 5; using improper language, 3; violation of

contract, 1; writing insulting letter, 2; eloping, 2; poisoning horse, 1; poisoning well, 2; by white capes, 9; vigilantes, 14; Indians, 1; moonshining, 1; refusing evidence, 2; political causes, 5; disputing, 1; disobeying quarantine regulations, 2; slapping a child, 1; turning state's evidence, 3; protecting a Negro, 1; to prevent giving evidence, 1; knowledge of larceny, 1; writing letter to white woman, 1; asking white woman to marry, 1; jilting girl, 1; having small-pox, 1; concealing criminal, 2; threatening political exposure, 1; self-defense, 6; cruelty, 1; insulting language to woman, 5; quarreling with white man, 2; colonizing Negroes, 1; throwing stones, 1; quarreling, 1; gambling, 1.

Is there a remedy, or will the nation confess that it cannot protect its protectors at home as well as abroad? Various remedies have been suggested to abolish the lynching infamy; but year after year, the butchery of men, women, and children continues in spite of plea and protest. Education is suggested as a preventative, but it is as grave a crime to murder an ignorant man, as it is a scholar. True, few educated men have been lynched, but the hue and cry once started stops at no bounds, as was clearly shown by the lynchings in Atlanta, and in Springfield, Illinois.

Agitation, though helpful, will not alone stop the crime. Year after year statistics are published, meetings are held, resolutions are adopted. And yet lynchings go on. . . . The only certain remedy is an appeal to law. Lawbreakers must be made to know that human life is sacred and that every citizen of this country is first a citizen of the United States and secondly a citizen of the state in which he belongs. This nation must assert itself and protect its federal citizenship at home as well as abroad. The strong men of the government must reach across state lines whenever unbridled lawlessness defies state laws, and must give to the individual under the Stars and Stripes the same measure of protection it gives to him when he travels in foreign lands. Federal protection of American citizenship is the remedy for lynching. . . .

In a multitude of counsel there is wisdom. Upon the grave question presented by the slaughter of innocent men, women, and children there should be an honest, courageous conference of patriotic, law-abiding citizens anxious to punish crime promptly, impartially, and by due process of law, also to make life, liberty, and property secure against mob rule.

Time was when lynching appeared to be sectional, but now it is national—a blight upon our nation, mocking our laws and disgracing

our Christianity. "With malice toward none but with charity for all," let us undertake the work of making the "law of the land" effective and supreme upon every foot of American soil—a shield to the innocent; and to the guilty, punishment swift and sure.<sup>2</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

How does Ida B. Wells define *lynching*? In her view, what is the relationship between lynching and the way a community defines its universe of obligation?

In the 1920s, composer Arnold Schoenberg witnessed antisemitism, a form of racism, in Germany. He asked, "But where is antisemitism to lead to if not to acts of violence?" How would you answer his question? How are racism and violence linked to the way a nation defines its universe of obligation? What does Wells suggest about the role of "the mob" in the way the two are linked?

How does Wells define such words as *civilization*, *barbarism*, *citizenship*, and *liberty*? How do her definitions differ from those of the organizers of the Columbian Exposition? What relationship does she see between individual liberties and the law? Compare and contrast her views with those expressed by Mark Sullivan in Reading 2. How do you account for differences?

How does Wells use statistics to educate the public and sway public opinion? What do the numbers reveal that words could not convey? What other techniques does she use to make her case? Which is most effective?

Like individuals, communities and even nations have identities. Use the information in this reading to create an identity chart for the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Include the words or phrases the nation uses to describe itself as well as the ones that others attach to it. How did the nation seem to define its universe of obligation? Who was outside that universe? As you continue reading this chapter, add to the nation's identity chart.

For more information on the life and work of Ida B. Wells, see *Choosing to Participate: A Critical Examination of Citizenship in American History*. Also available from the Facing History Resource Center is a documentary entitled *A Passion for Justice: The Life of Ida B. Wells*.

---

1. *Races and Peoples* by Daniel Brinton. Hodges, 1890, p. 287.

2. Reprinted in *In Our Own Words* edited by Robert Torricelli and Andrew Carroll. Pocket Books, 1999, pp. 22-25.

## Doors to Opportunity

---

### Reading 5

Progressives believed in the power of education to “civilize,” “uplift,” and “Americanize.” In every state in the nation, they lobbied for laws that required children to attend school until at least the age of 14. Partly as a result of their efforts, school enrollment in the United States increased by more than 600 percent, from about 200,000 students in 1880 to over 1.5 million by 1920.

Yet even as progressive reformers worked to expand educational opportunities, many were uncertain that all children could benefit from schooling. Increasingly some argued that education should be made available only to those with a large “endowment” of certain qualities like “character, disposition, energy, intellect, or physical power”—qualities that “go towards the making of civic worth.” They insisted that placing groups (based on “race,” class, or gender) in the right educational “track” or even in a special school to train them for their “rightful place” in society was the most efficient use of taxpayers’ money.

The experiences of two young immigrants reveals how “race” shaped the kind of education available to many Americans in the late 1800s. Mary Antin, a young Jewish immigrant from Poland, came to Boston with her mother and siblings in 1894. They reunited with Antin’s father who had arrived earlier to find a job and establish a home. She writes in her autobiography:

Education was free. That subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. It was the one thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us, surer, safer, than bread or shelter.

On our second day [in America] I was thrilled with the realization of what this freedom of education meant. A little girl from across the alley came and offered to conduct us to school. My father was out, but we five [children] between us had a few words of English by this time. We knew the word school. We understood. This child, who had never seen us till yesterday, who could not pronounce our names, who was not much better dressed than we, was able to offer us the freedom of the schools of Boston! No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions; no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. The smallest child could show us the way.

This incident impressed me more than anything I had heard in

advance of the freedom of education in America. It was a concrete proof—almost the thing itself. One had to experience it to understand it.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years before the Antins came to the United States, another immigrant family tried to enroll their daughter at a public school in San Francisco only to be turned away. Principal Jennie Hurley explained that the Board of Education did not allow children of Chinese descent to attend the city's public schools. In 1884, the Tapes sued the principal in a case known as *Tape v. Hurley* for denying Mamie, their 8-year-old daughter, an education. Hurley and other school officials defended the child's exclusion by pointing to a clause in the California constitution describing the Chinese as "dangerous to the well-being of the state." Therefore, they argued, the city was not obligated to educate the Chinese.

Despite the school board's argument, the courts ruled in the Tapes' favor, citing a state law requiring that "all children" be admitted to school; only "children of filthy or vicious habits," or "children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases" could be excluded. Mamie Tape had the "same right to enter a public school" as any other child. Officials responded to the ruling by establishing a special public school just for Mamie Tape and any other Chinese child who wished to attend. Outraged, Mary Tape, young Mamie's mother, wrote a letter in newly learned English to the Board of Education in April of 1885:

DEAR SIRS: I see that you are going to make all sorts of excuses to keep my child out of the Public Schools. Dear sirs, Will you please to tell me! Is it a disgrace to be Born a Chinese? Didn't God make us all!!!! What right have you to bar my children out of the school because she is a Chinese Decend. There is no other worldly reason that you could keep her out, except that. I suppose, you all goes to church on Sundays! Do you call that a Christian act to compel my little children to go so far to a school that is made on purpose for them. My children don't dress like the other Chinese. They look just as phunny amongst them as the Chinese dress in Chinese look amongst you Caucasians. Besides, if I had any wish to send them to a Chinese school I could have sent them two years ago without going to all this trouble. You have expended a lot of Public money foolishly, all because of one poor little Child. Her playmates is all Caucasians ever since she could toddle around. If she is good enough to play with Them! Then is she not good enough to be in the same room and study with them? You had better come and see for yourselves. See if

the Tapes is not the same as other Caucasians except in features. It seems not matter a Chinese may live and dress so long as you know they Chinese. Then they are hated as one. There is not any right or justice for them.

You have seen my husband and child. You told him it wasn't Mamie Tape you object to. If it were not Mamie Tape you object to, then why didn't you let her attend the school nearest her home! Instead of first making one pretense of some kind to keep her out? It seems to me Mr. Moulder has a grudge against this Eight-year-old Mamie Tape. I know they is no other child I mean Chinese child! Care to go to your public Chinese school. May you Mr. Moulder, never be persecuted like the way you have persecuted little Mamie Tape. Mamie Tape will never attend any of the Chinese schools of your making! Never!!! I will let the world see sir What justice there is When it is govern by the Race prejudice men! Just because she is of the Chinese descend, not because she don't dress like you because she does. Just because she is descended of Chinese parents I guess she is more of a American than a good many of you that is going to prevent her being Educated.<sup>2</sup>

School officials ignored Mary Tape's appeal. So did the California courts. At the turn of the 20th century, both state and federal courts supported the idea of "separate but equal" schools for children of "inferior races." Mamie Tape had to attend a segregated school or not be educated at all.

In 1906, San Francisco school officials decided to send students of Japanese and Korean descent to Mamie Tape's school. Over 1,200 Japanese parents in the city responded to the announcement with a lawsuit attacking segregation. The Japanese consul in California wrote a formal letter of protest to government officials in Washington, D.C. President Theodore Roosevelt, eager to maintain good relations with Japan, sent a member of his cabinet to San Francisco to encourage the school board to withdraw its order. Although the Japanese were pleased with Roosevelt's stand, San Francisco school officials were unimpressed. In the end, however, they agreed to a political compromise. The city would allow Japanese children to attend all-white schools if the federal government sharply limited the number of Japanese laborers who could enter the United States each year. In the years that followed, those limits were tightened further so that fewer and fewer Japanese immigrants could settle in the nation.

## CONNECTIONS

---

What do Mary Antin's recollections add to our understanding of what it means to be within a nation's universe of obligation? What does Mary Tape's outrage suggest about what it means to lie beyond that universe of obligation?

In the late 1800s, many white Americans claimed that the Chinese could not be assimilated—that is, acquire American values and traditions. They were “too different.” How does Mary Tape shatter those stereotypes? The right to petition government officials is central to democracy. It is guaranteed in the first amendment to the Constitution. How does Tape show her understanding of that principle? What other democratic principles are reflected in her writing?

How do you explain the failure of public officials to respond to Tape's letter? If they had responded, how might they have answered the questions she raises? How would you answer them?

China in the late 1800s and early 1900s was a weak nation torn by war. During those years, Japan was becoming a modern industrialized nation with a strong military. How did this reality shape the way the Chinese and the Japanese were treated in the United States? To what extent did their treatment reflect myths about race and racial differences?

---

1. *The Promised Land* by Mary Antin. Houghton Mifflin, 1910, pp. 185-186.

2. Quoted in *Letters of a Nation* edited by Andrew Carroll. Kodansha America, Inc., 1997, pp. 185-186.

## **Taking Up the “White Man’s Burden”**

---

### Reading 6

Questions about “race” and membership shaped not only American life but also the nation’s foreign policy. In 1898, just after the Spanish American War, Americans discussed the future of the territories it acquired as a result of its victory in that war.

The United States declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898, after the U.S. battleship *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor in Cuba. Although investigators never determined the cause of the explosion, American newspapers were quick to call the disaster “wholesale murder” and blame Spain, which was trying to put down a rebellion in Cuba, then a Spanish colony. Many Americans supported the war because they believed it would result in independence for Cuba. Others regarded the war as an opportunity to gain territory abroad. As early as February 1898, Theodore Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the Navy, sent secret orders to Commodore George Dewey, head of the American fleet in the Pacific. Roosevelt ordered Dewey to take the Philippines, which then belonged to Spain, as soon as war began. Dewey obeyed.

By August, the war was over and the United States controlled not only Cuba but also the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The United States had to decide what to do with these islands. The debate focused on the Philippines. There was general agreement that Cuba, which had been fighting for years to overthrow Spanish rule, ought to be independent, although the American government placed limits on the new nation’s freedom. There was also little doubt about the future of Guam and Puerto Rico, even though Puerto Ricans had been virtually independent of Spain for a number of years. Both now were under American rule. Many Americans were also eager to keep the Philippines. Others noted that the Filipinos had been fighting for their independence long before the war began. It did not seem right to give Cuba its freedom and make the Philippines a colony.

Each side in the debate used American principles to support its point of view. Each also relied on racist thinking. Those who favored intervention argued that the nation had a responsibility to not only rule “inferior races” but also “educate,” “uplift,” and “civilize” them. Among these Americans was Senator Albert J. Beveridge who argued:

Think of the thousands of Americans who will pour into Hawaii and Puerto Rico when the republic’s laws cover those islands with



justice and safety! Think of the tens of thousands of Americans who will invade mine and field and forest in the Philippines when a liberal government, protected and controlled by this republic, if not the government of the republic itself, shall establish order and equity there! Think of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who will build a soap-and-water, common-school civilization of energy and industry in Cuba, when a government of law replaces the double reign of anarchy and tyranny! . . .

What does all this mean for every one of us? It means opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-imperialists like Mark Twain strongly disagreed. He based his argument on the Declaration of Independence: “The hearts of men are about alike, all over the world, no matter what their skin-complexions may be.”<sup>2</sup> Senator Ben Tillman of South Carolina, also an anti-imperialist, based his opposition to expansion on “race science.” He argued that white southerners “understand and realize what is to have two races side by side that can not mix or mingle without deterioration and injury to both and the ultimate destruction of the civilization of the higher.” A British writer named Rudyard Kipling participated in the debate by addressing Americans in a poem that was widely quoted at the time:

Take up the White Man’s burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives’ need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

Kipling ended his poem with the following verse:

Take up the White Man’s burden—  
Have done with childish days—  
The lightly proffered laurel,  
The easy, ungrudged praise.  
Comes now, to search your manhood  
Through all the thankless years,  
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,  
The judgment of your peers!<sup>3</sup>

The ideas expressed in the poem troubled many African Americans, particularly those who had fought in the Spanish American War to show their loyalty, courage, and idealism at a time when others portrayed them as inferior, cowardly, and immoral. Now some were uncomfortable with the consequences of their sacrifices. In response to Kipling's poem, H. T. Johnson, a black clergyman and editor of the *Christian Recorder*, wrote:

Pile on the Black Man's Burden.  
'Tis nearest at your door;  
Why need long bleeding Cuba,  
or dark Hawaii's shore?  
Hail ye your fearless armies,  
Which menace feeble folks  
Who fight with clubs and arrows  
And brook your rifle's smoke.<sup>4</sup>

In 1899, the Senate approved by a single vote a treaty that placed the Philippines under American rule. Filipinos responded with a revolt that took 84,000 American soldiers over four years to end. In 1904, the United States marked its victory over the Filipinos at a world's fair held in St. Louis, Missouri, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase—the nation's first major expansion beyond the Mississippi River. Officials saw the fair as an opportunity to educate Americans about the nation's objectives in the Philippines by creating a special exhibition that contrasted "educated" Filipinos with "backward tribes" in need of "civilization." The aim was to show that American imperialism was not just an effort to gain land and wealth but also to educate, "uplift," civilize, and Christianize a "primitive people."

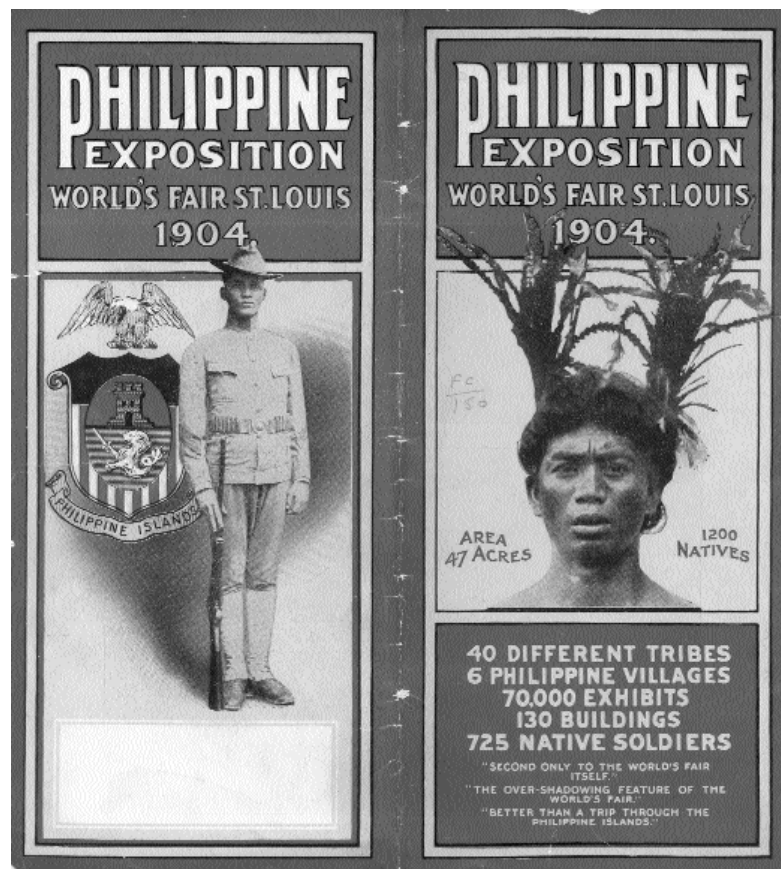
To show the positive effects of American civilization on native peoples, officials imported several hundred members of the Philippine Scouts and the Constabulary. At the fair, the two groups performed drills and other military maneuvers to show that "savages" could be "transformed" through education. Also included at the fair were the Igorots, "an uncivilized tribe" that revealed how much work still needed to be done. Attracted by stories of "naked savages" who dined on "dog meat," thousands of visitors flocked to see the Igorots and even have their pictures taken with them. They were such an attraction that they were showcased at other fairs in the years that followed, despite the protests of many Filipinos. A Filipino newspaper explained:

As Americans may have no better sources of information, they believe that the majority of the Filipinos are like the [Igorots]. There are many of our students and countrymen who have been asked the

following questions from badly informed Americans: "Since when have you used coats?" "Do your shoes hurt your feet?" and whether there are many Filipinos who wear clothes, etc., etc. And as the United States government maintains that its mission is one of education, the belief grows that we Filipinos are savages whom the nephews of Uncle Sam are here to civilize.

When the exposition was held at St. Louis, we energetically opposed the exhibition of non-Christian tribes; the effect on the opinion in the United States verified our fears. Again we opposed the sending of them to [the fair in] Portland. We were equally unsuccessful in this.

It does little good to send honorary commissioners, delegates, students, etc., to America; the general opinion continues that they are exceptional samples and that the masses are still "savages." Congressional delegations and travelers . . . may come; but what are



The cover of a booklet promoting the Philippine Exposition at the St. Louis World's Fair. Notice the contrast between the Philippine scout and the Igorot.

these drops in the midst of that ocean of American impression formed by the sight of these non-Christian tribes? Besides this, those who come here and return to America are not all sincerely actuated by wishes for the highest good of the Filipinos. How then can the truth be established which political interests are interested to conceal?<sup>5</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

---

How do the individuals quoted in this reading seem to define such terms as *civilization*, *liberty*, *democracy*, and *barbarism*? Compare and contrast their views with those expressed in earlier readings.

How do the individuals quoted in the reading seem to define the nation's universe of obligation? Who is part of that universe? Who lies beyond it? What other ideas influence opinions on whether the United States should acquire colonies?

How important were exhibitions like the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904 in shaping public opinion about the issues of the day? What is the difference between reading about Filipinos and how they live and seeing an "authentic re-creation" of their way of life? What does the protest in the Filipino newspaper suggest about the challenges of altering public opinion?

Emma Sickles objected to the fact that "self-civilized Indians" were excluded from the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Reading 3). How might her comments apply to the portrayal of Filipinos at the St. Louis fair? A number of websites contain photographs, magazine articles, and other artifacts from the St. Louis fair. Use them to compare and contrast the treatment of American Indians and other groups at the fair with that of the Filipinos. What similarities do you notice? How do you account for differences?

In an address to African Americans in 1900, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Lloyd Garrison, and George S. Boutwell—three white veterans of the abolitionist movement and the Civil War—expressed their concerns about the consequences of American involvement in the Philippines:

Every day in the Philippines is already training our young American soldiers to the habit of thinking that the white man, as such, is the rightful ruler of all other men. This is seen, for instance, in the fact that these very soldiers, in writing home letters from the seat of

war, describe the inhabitants of the Philippines, more and more constantly, as “n—s”; thus giving a new lease of life to a word which was previously dying out among us.

. . . In other words, freedom is to become . . . a matter of complexion. If this doctrine is to prevail, what hope is there for the colored race in the United States? The answer is easy; there is in that case no hope at all.<sup>6</sup>

Why do the three believe that both black and white Americans ought to dread “the habit of thinking that the white man . . . is the rightful ruler of all other men”? A growing belief that freedom is “a matter of complexion”? What is the danger to each group? To democracy?

- 
1. Quoted in *The American Spirit* edited by Thomas A. Bailey. D.C. Heath, 1963, pp. 609-610.
  2. Quoted in *Barbarian Virtues* by Matthew Frye Jacobson. Hill and Wang, 2000, p. 230.
  3. From “The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling. *McClurg’s Magazine* 12, February 1899.
  4. Quoted in *Barbarian Virtues* by Matthew Frye Jacobson. Hill and Wang, 2000, p. 257.
  5. “How the Filipinos Feel about the Exhibition of the Igorots in the United States.” *The Public*, vol. 8, March 3, 1906.
  6. Higginson, Thomas Wentworth, William Lloyd Garrison, and George S. Boutwell. “Address to the Colored People of the United States.” *Voice of Missions* 8 (Nov. 1, 1900). <http://www.boondocksnet.com/aitexts/adcol926.html> In Jim Zwick, ed., *Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898-1935*. <http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai198-35.html>

## Disparities

---

### Reading 7

Race was not the only issue that divided Americans at the turn of the 20th century. Americans were also divided by social class. In 1890, just one percent of American families owned 51 percent of the nation's real estate and personal property. The poorest 44 percent owned a little over 1 percent.<sup>1</sup> That disparity troubled many people. As early as 1879, sociologist Henry George wrote that despite the nation's "prodigious increase in wealth-producing power . . . it becomes no easier for the masses of our people to make a living. On the contrary, it is becoming harder. The gulf between the employed and the employer is becoming wider; social contrasts are becoming sharper; as liveried carriages appear, so do barefooted children."<sup>2</sup>

The pictures that accompany this reading offer a visual perspective on the disparities between the lives of the rich and the poor. That gap is also evident in the childhood memories of Americans who grew up in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Novelist Edith Wharton came from a socially prominent New York City family. In the 1930s, she recalled the foods of her childhood:

My father had inherited from his family a serious tradition of good cooking. . . . My mother, if left to herself, would probably not have been much interested in the pleasures of the table. My father's Dutch blood accounted for his gastronomic enthusiasm; his mother, who was a Schermerhorn, was reputed to have been the best cook in New York. But to know about good cooking was a part of every young wife's equipment, and my mother's favorite cookery books (Francatelli's and Mrs. Leslie's) are thickly interleaved with sheets of yellowing note paper, on which, in a script of ethereal elegance, she records the making of "Mrs. Joshua Jones's scalloped



A detail of the painting "Daughters of Edward Darley Boit" by John Singer Sargent.

oysters with cream," "Aunt Fanny Gallatin's fried chicken," "William Edgar's punch," and the special recipes of our two famous Negro cooks, Mary Johnson and Susan Minnerman. . . . Mary Johnson, a gaunt towering woman of a rich bronzy black, with huge gold hoops in her ears, and crisp African crinkles under vividly patterned kerchiefs; Susan Minnerman, a small smiling mulatto, more quietly attired, but as great a cook as her predecessor.

Ah, what artists they were! How simple yet sure were their methods—the mere perfection of broiling, roasting and basting—what an unexampled wealth of material, vegetable and animal, their genius had to draw upon! Who will ever again taste anything in the whole range of gastronomy to equal their corned beef, their boiled turkeys with stewed celery and oyster sauce, their fried chickens, broiled red-heads, corn fritters, stewed tomatoes, rice griddle cakes, strawberry short-cake and vanilla ices? I am now enumerating only our daily fare, that from which even my tender years did not exclude me; but when my parents "gave a dinner," and terrapin and canvas-back ducks, or (in their season) broiled Spanish mackerel, soft-shelled crabs with a mayonnaise of celery, and peach-fed Virginia hams cooked in champagne (I am no doubt confusing all the seasons in this allegoric evocation of their riches), lima-beans in a cream, corn soufflés, and salads of oyster-crabs, poured in varied succulence from Mary Johnson's lifted cornucopia—ah, then, the gourmet of that long-lost day, when cream was cream and butter butter and coffee coffee, and meat fresh every day, and game hung just for the proper number of hours, might lean back in his chair and murmur "Fate cannot harm me" over his cup of Moka [a coffee made from costly and aromatic beans] and his glass of authentic Chartreuse [a liqueur].

I have lingered over these details because they formed a part—a most important and honorable part—of that ancient curriculum of house-keeping which, at least in Anglo-Saxon countries, was so soon to be swept aside by the "monstrous regiment" of the emancipated: young women taught by their elders to despise the kitchen and the linen room, and to substitute the acquiring of University degrees for the more complex art of civilized living. The movement began when I was young, and now that I am old, and have watched it and noted its results, I mourn more than ever the extinction of the household arts.<sup>3</sup>

Although Wharton's family was not fabulously wealthy, few Americans could afford to set as elaborate a dinner table as her parents did. According to the 1900 census, two-thirds of all male workers over the age of 16 earned less than \$12.50 a week. And about one of every four of those workers could expect to be

laid off at a moment's notice. Although a dollar in 1900 bought far more than it does today, surviving on less than two dollars a day was a struggle. Like Wharton, journalist Zalmen Yoffeh made his home in New York City. His parents were immigrants from Eastern Europe who struggled to make a living. Yoffeh recalls how his mother practiced the "household arts."

With . . . one dollar a day [our mother] fed and clothed an ever-growing family. She took in boarders. Sometimes this helped; at other times it added to the burden of living. Boarders were often out of work and penniless; how could one turn a hungry man out? She made all our clothes. She walked blocks to reach a place where meat was a penny cheaper, where bread was a half-cent less. She collected boxes and old wood to burn in the stove instead of costly coal. Her hands became hardened and the lines so begrimed that for years she never had perfectly clean hands. One by one she lost her teeth—there was no money for dentists—and her cheeks caved in. Yet we children always had clean and whole clothing. There was always bread and butter in the house, and, wonder of wonders, there was usually a penny apiece for us to buy candy with. On a dollar and a quarter we would have lived in luxury.<sup>4</sup>



Detail from "Street children, New York City, c. 1908" by Lewis Hine.

Sammy Aaronson, a prizefighter, came from an even poorer immigrant family. He later recalled:

Eating was always a struggle. We ate when we had food in the house and our diet would give a social service worker the horrors. Meat soup was a big thing and we sometimes could have it once a week. Outside of that, the only hot food we ever had was potatoes. I never tasted anything like steak or roast beef or lamb chops until I was sixteen years old. We lived on pumpernickel [bread], herring,



bologna ends, and potatoes. The whole family could eat for fifteen or twenty cents a day, sometimes less. Mom would send me over to the delicatessen on Hester Street where we could get pumpernickel the size of a steering wheel for a dime. We paid a penny a herring and two took care of the whole family. Another penny bought three pounds of potatoes. We always had the meat soup on Friday nights. It was made up of leftovers and ends and bones which the butcher sold for six cents a pound instead of throwing away. Three pounds was plenty for a meal for us.<sup>5</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

Every picture tells a story. Look carefully at each of the pictures included in this reading. What story does each tell? Who is telling the story? What does each picture add to your understanding of the gap between rich and poor? Of why people like Henry George feared the possible consequences of that disparity?

The word *disparity* comes from a Latin word that means separate or distinct. List some of the disparities described in this reading. What questions do they raise? Why might these questions trouble many Americans?

Florence Harriman, whose family made its fortune in railroads, described “high society” as “pink frosting on a cake—a cake in a world that hungered for bread. . . . But that is only a mood. On the whole I have loved balls, garden parties, and hunting, as a pony loves his paddock. I cannot be solemn about the snobbery and the wastefulness. . . . The truth is that snobbery is not so wicked,—it is usually very, very dull, and as for wastefulness, if one believes in private property at all, I think that the . . . Balls that added to the gaiety of nations and set money in circulation were far more pious enterprises than unostentatious hoarding.”<sup>6</sup> What does Harriman suggest that it means to be among the few to enjoy “cake with pink frosting” in a world that “hungered for bread”? Why do you think she dismisses her concerns as a “mood”? How does she seem to defend the balls and parties that define her world? How is the relationship she describes between rich and poor similar to the one implied in Edith Wharton’s account?

According to Wharton, what is “civilized living”? Why does she seem to associate it with “Anglo-Saxon countries”? What value does she place on “civilized living”? What is the “monstrous regiment” that threatens it? Does that threat come from the poor or from others in her social class?

In the late 1800s, about 20 percent of all children between the ages of 10 and 14 held jobs. By the age of 14, half of the nation's children worked in factories, mines, and other businesses. How do accounts like those of Yoffeh and Aaronson help us understand why few poor children were able to attend school at that time? In 1900, the U.S. Navy turned away many young volunteers from poor families because they were physically unfit. How do accounts like those of Yoffeh and Aaronson help us understand why some men raised in poverty lacked the strength necessary for military service?

- 
1. Cited in *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* by Steven J. Diner. Hill & Wang, 1998, p. 4.
  2. *Poverty and Progress* by Henry George. Quoted in *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* by John Milton Cooper, Jr. W.W. Norton & Co., 1990, p. 10.
  3. From Chapter 3 of *A Backward Glance* by Edith Wharton. Reprinted in *The Faber Book of America* edited by Christopher Ricks and William L. Vance. Faber and Faber, 1992, pp. 315-316.
  4. "The Passing of the East Side" in *Menorah Journal*, December, 1929. Reprinted in *How We Live* edited by Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo. Richard Marek Publishers, 1979, p. 43.
  5. *High as My Heart* by Sammy Aaronson and Albert S. Hirshberg. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1957. Reprinted in *How We Live* edited by Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo. Richard Marek Publishers, 1979, p. 44.
  6. Quoted in *The Rise of Industrial America* by Page Smith. McGraw Hill, 1984, pp. 859-860.

## **“Progress” and Poverty**

---

### Reading 8

Many progressive reformers were deeply troubled by the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Fearful that huge disparities not only in wealth but also in opportunity might lead to revolution, they proposed a variety of laws and other reforms. Much of their effort focused on the nation’s largest cities, where the gap between rich and poor was the most visible.

Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant who worked as a police reporter in New York City, expressed the views of many of these progressives when he wrote, “Government by the people must ever rest upon the people’s ability to govern themselves, upon their intelligence and public spirit. The slum stands for ignorance, want, unfitness, for mob-rule in the day of wrath. This at one end. At the other, hard-heartedness, indifference, self-seeking, greed. It is human nature. We are brothers whether we own it or not, and when the brotherhood is denied in Mulberry Street [one of New York’s poorest neighborhoods] we shall look vainly for the virtue of good citizenship on Fifth Avenue [one of the city’s richest neighborhoods].”<sup>1</sup>

In 1890, Riis published a detailed study of the tenements of New York City to explain why the slums on “Mulberry Street” ought to matter to those who lived on “Fifth Avenue.”

Long ago it was said that “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.” That was true then. It did not know because it did not care. The half that was on top cared little for the struggles, and less for the fate of those who were underneath, so long as it was able to hold there and keep its own seat. There came a time when the discomfort and crowding below were so great, and the consequent upheavals so violent, that it was no longer an easy thing to do, and then the upper half fell to inquiring what was the matter. Information on the subject has been accumulating rapidly since, and the world has had its hands full answering for its old ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

Riis went to describe early efforts to identify the “nursery of crime.” After noting “younger criminals seem to come almost exclusively from the worst tenement districts,” he concluded that the “boundary line of the Other Half lies through the tenements.”

The boundary line lies there because, while the forces for good

on one side vastly outweigh the bad—if it were not well otherwise—in the tenements all the influences make for evil; because they are the hotbed of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike; the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts; that throw off a scum of forty thousand human wrecks to the island asylums and workhouses year by year; beggars to prey upon our charities; that maintain a standing army of ten thousand tramps with that implies; because, above all, they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion. This is their worst crime, inseparable from the system. That we have to own it as the child of our own wrong does not excuse it, even though it gives its claim upon our utmost patience and tenderest charity.

What are you going to do about it? is the question of today.<sup>3</sup>

Riis's book contains detailed descriptions of New York City's worst tenements, photographs of the individuals who lived there, and statistics drawn from such sources as the U.S. Census, police reports, and the city's health department. He was not the only progressive reformer to rely on reports, studies, and tables to advocate for change. In 1910, Jane Addams described her efforts to improve sanitation in the area around Hull House, the settlement that she founded with Ellen Gates Starr in Chicago after visiting the world's first settlement house in London. Like its British counterpart, Hull House was a place where newcomers to the city—both immigrants and the native-born—could find advice, childcare, English classes, lectures, clubs, and political groups. It was also a place where newcomers learned to participate positively in the life of their community.

During our first three years on Halsted Street, we had established a small incinerator at Hull House and we had many times reported the untoward conditions of the ward to the city hall. We had also arranged many talks for the immigrants, pointing out that although a woman may sweep her own doorway in her native village and allow the refuse to innocently decay in open air and sunshine, in a crowded city quarter, if the garbage is not properly collected and destroyed, a tenement-house mother may see her children sicken and die, and that the immigrants must therefore not only keep their own houses clean, but must also help the authorities to keep the city clean.

Possibly our efforts slightly modified the worst conditions, but they still remained intolerable, and the fourth summer . . . we began a systematic investigation of the city system of garbage collection, both as to its efficiency in other wards and its possible connection with the death rate in the various wards of the city.

. . . . The members [of the Hull House Women's Club] came together . . . in quite a new way that summer when we discussed with them the high death rate so persistent in our ward. After several meetings devoted to the subject, despite the fact that the death rate rose highest in the congested foreign colonies and not in the streets in which most of the Irish American club women lived, twelve of their number undertook in connection with the residents, to carefully investigate the condition of the alleys. During August and September the substantiated reports of violations of the law sent in from Hull House to the health department were one thousand and thirty-seven. For the club woman who had finished a long day's work of washing or ironing followed by the cooking of a hot supper, it would have been much easier to sit on her doorstep during a summer evening than to go up and down ill-kept alleys and get into trouble with her neighbors over the condition of their garbage boxes. It required both civic enterprise and moral conviction to be willing to do this three evenings a week during the hottest and most uncomfortable months of the year. Nevertheless, a certain number of women persisted, as did the residents, and three city inspectors in succession were transferred from the war because of unsatisfactory services. Still the death rate remained high and the condition seemed little improved throughout the next winter. In sheer desperation, the following spring when the city contracts were awarded for the removal of garbage, with the backing of two well-known businessmen, I put in a bid for the garbage removal of the nineteenth ward. My paper was thrown out on a technicality but the incident induced the mayor to appoint me the garbage inspector of the ward.

The salary was a thousand dollars a year, and the loss of that political "plum" made a great stir among the politicians. The position was no sinecure whether regarded from the point of view of getting up at six in the morning to see that the men were early at work; or of following the loaded wagons, uneasily dropping their contents at intervals, to their dreary destination at the dump; or of insisting that the contractor must increase the number of his wagons from nine to thirteen and from thirteen to seventeen, although he assured me that he lost money on every one and that the former inspector had let him off with seven; or of taking careless landlords into court because they would not provide the proper garbage receptacles; or of arresting the tenant who tried to make the garbage wagons carry away the contents of his stable.

With the two or three residents who nobly stood by, we set up

six of those doleful incinerators which are supposed to burn garbage with the fuel collected in the alley itself. The one factory in town which could utilize old tin cans was a window weight factory, and we deluged that with ten times as many tin cans as it could use—much less would pay for. We made desperate attempts to have the dead animals removed by the contractor who was paid most liberally by the city for that purpose but who, we slowly discovered, always made the police ambulances do the work, delivering the carcasses upon freight cars for shipment to a soap factory in Indiana where they were sold for a good price although the contractor himself was the largest stockholder in the concern.<sup>4</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

What is the message of Jacob Riis's writing? How does he use adjectives and descriptive nouns to underscore that message? What is the effect of such words and phrases as "hotbed of the epidemics," "nurseries of pauperism and crime," and "deadly moral contagion"?

What is the message of Jane Addams's account? How does she use adjectives and descriptive nouns to underscore that message? What is the effect of such words and phrases as "systematic investigation," "substantiated reports of violations of the law," and "civic enterprise and moral conviction"? How do the stories she tells underscore her message? Who is her intended audience?

"Woman's place is in the Home," wrote suffragist Rheta Childe Dorr in 1910, "but Home is not contained within the four walls of an individual home. Home is the community."<sup>5</sup> How do her remarks help us understand why Jane Addams and her staff devoted so much time and effort to garbage collection? What do these efforts suggest about how they defined their universe of obligation?

Although Riis offers no specific solution to the problem he describes, he hints at remedies. What are those remedies? How do they differ from the ones Jane Addams seems to advocate? Find out how sociologists, journalists, and others view similar problems today. To what extent have attitudes toward the poor changed? To what extent are they unchanged? Which remedies might be attractive to a "social Darwinist" like William Graham Sumner (Chapter 3)? A eugenicist like Charles Davenport (Chapter 3)? Which remedies do you favor?

In the late 1800s, a group of progressives in Philadelphia hired W. E. B. Du Bois,

then a young African American scholar, to study the Seventh Ward in Philadelphia. To these progressives, poverty was a virus that needed to be contained before it contaminated “the closely allied product just outside the almshouse door.” They wanted DuBois to diagnose the exact nature of the “virus” among the city’s African Americans. They told him: “We want to know precisely how this class of people live; what occupations they follow; from what occupations are they excluded; how many of their children go to school; and to ascertain every fact which will throw light on this social problem.”<sup>6</sup> Du Bois took the job because he believed that “the world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know.”<sup>7</sup> He was the convinced “the facts” would reveal the truth. How is his view of the power of “the facts” similar to the views of Riis and Addams? To your own views? Find out more about Du Bois’s study of African Americans in Philadelphia. To what extent did “the facts” he uncovered change the way people thought about race in the city?

How do Riis and Addams use facts—particularly statistics—to define a problem? To suggest remedies? What are the advantages of using numbers and other data to document a problem? Does agreement on the nature of the problem necessarily mean agreement on a solution? How do you account for the differences in the remedies Riis and Addams suggest? Compare and contrast their use of statistics to that of Charles Davenport and Henry Goddard (Chapter 3). What similarities do you notice? How do you account for differences?

How does Addams define the word *citizen*? What does she see as the duties of a citizen? What rights does she seem to think every citizen enjoys? Addams founded Hull House at a time when women had the right to vote only in Wyoming. In fact, most married women in 1889 did not even have the right to the property they brought to their marriage or the money they earned on the job. In most states, both belonged to their husbands. Yet even as women struggled to expand their citizenship rights, some like Jane Addams took an active role in the political issues of their day. In doing so, how do they expand our understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democracy? Of the ways an individual can make a positive difference in the world?

---

1. *The Battle of the Slum* by Jacob A. Riis, 1902.

2. *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob A. Riis, 1890. Republished by Hill and Wang, 1957, p. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

4. *Twenty Years at Hull House* by Jane Addams. First published in 1910 and reissued by Signet and New American Library.

5. *What Eight Million Women Want* by Rheta Childe Dorr. Boston, 1910, p. 327.

6. Quoted in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* by David Levering Lewis. Henry Holt, 1993, p. 188.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

## Rumors and Fears

---

### Reading 9

Jane Addams and other progressives focused on issues like regular garbage collection, clean streets, and waste removal for an important reason—fear of epidemics of cholera, typhus, and other diseases associated with crowding, poor sanitation, and filth. Almost every city had experienced such outbreaks in the 19th century. As a result, many Americans regarded cities as dangerous places to live. Because epidemics often began in a city's poorest neighborhoods, many held the residents of those neighborhoods—especially immigrants—responsible.

Quoting New York health workers, reporter Jacob R. Riis labeled the Lower East Side, then a predominately Jewish neighborhood, as “the typhus ward” in *How the Other Half Lives*. He described it as a place where diseases “sprout naturally among the hordes that bring the germs with them from across the sea and whose instinct is to hide their sickness lest the authorities carry them off to be slaughtered.”<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1862, Arthur B. Stout, a physician, expressed a similar view of Chinese immigrants in a report entitled “Chinese Immigration and the Physiological Causes of the Decay of a Nation.”<sup>2</sup> After reading it, the California Board of Health asked him to investigate the harm to San Francisco that results from “the combined intermixture of races and the introduction of habits and customs of a sensual and depraved people in our midst . . . with hereditary vices and engrafted peculiarities.”<sup>3</sup> Stout's report confirmed their fears.

Similar fears led Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. It was the first law to single out the residents of a single nation as “unsuitable” for residence in the United States. In the years that followed, Chinese already in the United States were repeatedly blamed for various epidemics, often with dubious evidence to support the claim or none at all. Increasingly, health officials in San Francisco and elsewhere came to see them as a “laboratory of infection” in the heart of the city “distilling its deadly poison by day and by night and sending it forth to contaminate the atmosphere of the streets and houses of a populous, wealthy, and intelligent community.”<sup>4</sup> Then on February 1, 1900, the following story appeared in newspapers across the country:

The steamship *Australia* . . . from Honolulu, arrived [in San Francisco] today and reports that up to the time of her departure forty-one deaths from the plague had occurred and there was a total of fifty-two cases.



In an effort to stamp out the plague, it was decided to burn one of the blocks in Chinatown [in Honolulu]. The fire was started and it gained such headway that the fire department could not control it. The flames spread rapidly from one block to another and soon the whole Chinese quarter was in flames. Hardly a house was left standing; 4,500 people were rendered homeless and they are now living in tents.<sup>5</sup>

In San Francisco, the largest port on the West Coast, the story created an uproar. As confused and often contradictory rumors of plague spread through the city, officials confirmed three cases of bubonic plague in Honolulu. The plague was as terrifying in 1900 as it was during the Middle Ages. Almost always fatal, it had no known cure and victims suffered agonizing deaths. Today scientists believe that fleas from infected rats carried the plague bacillus onto virtually every ocean-going ship at the turn of the 20th century. In 1900, people knew only that the disease was associated with filth and famine.

Public health officials in Hawaii tried to reassure Americans by announcing that they had all the chemicals needed for “proper destruction of the microbes.” To underscore that message, the San Francisco *Examiner* published a detailed account of the sterilization of a steamship with “formaldehyde gas” before it was allowed to leave Honolulu.<sup>6</sup> The story quieted fears for a time.

Then on March 6, the body of Chick Gin, a storekeeper, was found in the basement of a hotel in San Francisco’s Chinatown. At the time, city health officials required an examination into the death of any Chinese who was not under the care of a “Caucasian” physician. So officials collected tissue samples from the corpse. Before they could begin to analyze them, panicky health officers ordered the police to evacuate all “Caucasians” from Chinatown and then cordon off the community. On March 7, 25,000 Chinese residents awoke to find themselves separated from “white” neighbors by ropes that looped around a 14-block area.

Five days later, officials revealed that Gin had died of bubonic plague. At first no new cases were reported and people began to relax. Then suddenly, there were three more suspicious deaths. In the weeks that followed, quarantines were imposed on Chinatown and then lifted. There were rumors of missing corpses, stolen tissue samples, and hidden information. In June, after health officers documented ten cases in the Chinese quarter, the city sent 75 inspectors and 50 policemen to search every building in Chinatown and root out every ailing resident. City workers even built fumigating stations at the edge of Chinatown so that “white” San Franciscans who worked in the area could be disinfected before they returned home each evening.

The Chinese were then “absolutely shut away from the rest of the world.” Streetcars did not enter Chinatown nor was the mail delivered as sixty policemen stood guard. Fear fed on fear. As early as March, *Organized Labor*, a union publication, warned, “The almond-eyed Mongolian is waiting for his opportunity, waiting to assassinate you and your children with one of his many maladies.”<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese had fears too. There was talk of shipping them to an isolated island in San Francisco Bay and then burning their homes and businesses. One local newspaper demanded, “Clear the foul spot from San Francisco and the debris to the flames.” Fearful that city officials were also planning to poison their water supply, Chinese leaders placed guards around the water tanks. When a white sanitation worker who was new to the city wandered near one of those tanks, he was almost killed.

Again and again, the Chinese demanded that the quarantine be lifted. When their protests went unheard, they turned to the courts for help. The first case focused on an attempt to forcibly inoculate the Chinese with an experimental drug believed to prevent the plague. Lawyers for Wong Wai, a Chinese merchant, argued that forced inoculation violated his right to pursue a lawful business and denied him “equal protection of the laws.” Judge William Morrow agreed. He ruled that the measures the city adopted were “not based upon any established distinction in the conditions that are supposed to attend the plague or the persons exposed to the contagion.” Instead, he argued, officials took measures that were “boldly directed against the Asiatic or Mongolian race as a class without regard to the previous condition, habits, exposure or disease, or resident of the individual on the unproven assumption that this race is more liable to the plague than any other.”<sup>8</sup>

The second suit filed by the Chinese focused on the legality of the quarantines. This time a grocer in Chinatown, Jew Ho, filed the complaint on behalf of other residents. Ho challenged the quarantine as arbitrary and discriminatory. His lawyers argued that while white San Franciscans were allowed to enter and leave Chinatown as they pleased, Chinese residents were effectively under house arrest. They also noted that despite its claims that the quarantine was necessary, the Board of Health had made no provision to feed or care for isolated members of the Chinese community. The court agreed with Ho but did permit the city to quarantine specific buildings that officials believed were contaminated. The plague did not end with a court order. It continued to claim lives at the rate of about one victim every two weeks. On August 11, the first “Caucasian” in the city died of the disease. By 1904, officials had documented 121 cases and 112 deaths. The vast majority of the victims were Chinese.

## CONNECTIONS

---

Many stories have a moral or lesson. What is the moral of the story of the plague? How does it deepen our understanding of what it means to be outside a community's universe of obligation?

What is the power of fear? How does it thrive on rumors, myth, and misinformation? Why does fear often lead to violence?

Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, partly out of fear of epidemics. In the years that followed, violence against people of Chinese ancestry increased dramatically. What is the connection between racism and violence?

What aspects of the work of Charles Davenport and other eugenicists might appeal to San Franciscans and other Americans who were frightened by the plague? By fears of contamination?

Howard Markel is a physician who has written a book about the experiences of Eastern European Jewish immigrants during typhus and cholera epidemics in New York City in 1892. In the concluding chapter, he notes, "The microbe as an agent of illness and death is the ultimate social leveler. It binds us and, when transmitted through a filter of fear, has the potential to divide."<sup>9</sup> In what sense is a microbe a "social lever"? How do Markel's comments about microbes apply to the experiences of Chinese Americans in San Francisco in the early 1900s? To victims of the AIDS epidemic in recent years?

- 
1. *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob A. Riis, 1890. Republished by Hill and Wang, 1957, p. 1.
  2. *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* by Alan M. Kraut. HarperCollins Publishers, 1994, p. 80.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
  5. *Washington Post*, February 1, 1900.
  6. This account is based in part on pages 164-166 in *America 1900* by Judy Crichton. Henry Holt and Company, 1998.
  7. Quoted in *America in 1900* by Noel Jacob Kent. M.E. Sharpe, 2000, p.107.
  8. *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* by Alan M. Kraut. HarperCollins Publishers, 1994, pp. 91-92.
  9. *Quarantine!* by Howard Markel. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 192.

## **“The Kind of World We Lived In”**

---

### Reading 10

Progressive reformers were primarily middle-class white Americans who were uncomfortable with many of the changes that were taking place in American life at the turn of the 20th century. They viewed immigrants, African Americans, working families, and the poor, as groups in need of help and advice rather than as independent individuals with voices and ideas of their own. African Americans like Ida B. Wells challenged those views. So did many immigrants. They did not see themselves as problems but as ordinary people who wanted many of the things that other Americans wanted—a safe place to live, a good job, and opportunities for themselves and their children. To achieve these goals they confronted and sometimes overcame extraordinary obstacles. Pauline Newman’s story challenges the stereotypes that shaped the way many Americans viewed the nation’s newest arrivals.

Newman and her family came to New York City from Lithuania, a country in Eastern Europe, in 1901. Although she was only about eight years old at the time, within weeks of her arrival she was working in a factory that made shirt-waists—linen dresses popular with many women at the turn of the 20th century. In 1975, she told a group of young people:

I’d like to tell you about the kind of world we lived in 75 years ago because all of you probably weren’t even born then. . . . That world 75 years ago was a world of incredible exploitation of men, women, and children. I went to work for the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in 1901. The corner of a shop would resemble a kindergarten because we were young, eight, nine, ten years old. It was a world of greed; the human being didn’t mean anything. The hours were from 7:30 in the morning to 6:30 at night when it wasn’t busy. When the season was on we worked until 9 o’clock. No overtime pay, not even supper money. There was a bakery in the garment center that produced little apple pies the size of this ashtray [holding up an ashtray for group to see] and that was what we got for our overtime instead of money.

My wages as a youngster were \$1.50 for a seven-day week. I know it sounds exaggerated but it isn’t; it’s true. . . . I worked on the 9th floor with a lot of youngsters like myself. When the operators were through with sewing shirtwaists, there was a little thread left, and we youngsters would get a little scissors and trim the threads off.

And when the inspectors came around, do you know what happened? The supervisors made all the children climb into one of those crates that they ship material in, and they covered us over with finished shirtwaists until the inspectors had left, because of course we were too young to be working in the factory legally.

The Triangle Waist Company was a family affair, all relatives of the owner running the place, watching to see that you did your work, watching when you went into the toilet. And if you were two or three minutes longer than foremen or foreladies thought you should be, it was deducted from your pay. If you came five minutes late in the morning because the freight elevator didn't come down to take you up in time, you were sent home for a half a day without pay.

. . . The early sweatshops were usually so dark that gas jets [for light] burned day and night. There was no insulation in the winter, only a pot-bellied stove in the middle of the factory. . . . Of course in summer you suffocated with practically no ventilation. There was no drinking water, maybe a tap in the hall, warm, dirty. What were you going to do? Drink this water or none at all.

The conditions were no better and no worse than the tenements where we lived. You got out of the workshop, dark and cold in winter, hot in summer, dirty unswept floors, no ventilation, and you would go home. What kind of home did you go to? Some of the rooms didn't have any windows. I lived in a two-room tenement with my mother and two sisters and the bedroom had no windows, the facilities were down in the yard, but that's the way it was in the factories too.

We wore cheap clothes, lived in cheap tenements, ate cheap food. There was nothing to look forward to, nothing to expect the next day to be better. Someone asked me once: "How did you survive?" And I told him, "What alternative did we have? You stayed and you survived, that's all."<sup>1</sup>

Newman, however, did more than stay and survive. In an interview with author Joan Morrison, she described her efforts to get an education:

At first I tried to get somebody who could teach me English in the evening, but that didn't work out because I don't think he was a very good teacher, and, anyhow, the overtime interfered with private lessons. But I mingled with people. I joined the Socialist Literary Society. Young as I was and not very able to express myself, I decided that it wouldn't hurt if I listened. There was a Dr. Newman, no

relation of mine, who was teaching at City College. He would come down to the Literary Society twice a week and teach us literature, English literature. He was very helpful. He gave me a list of books to read, and as I said, if there is a will you can learn. We read Dickens, George Eliot, the poets. I remember when we first heard Thomas Hood's "Song of the Shirt." I figured that it was written for us. You know, because it told of the long hours of "Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!" I remember one of the girls said, "He didn't know us, did he?" And I said, "No, he didn't." But it had an impact on us. . . .

I regretted that I couldn't go even to evening school, let alone going to day school, but it didn't prevent me from trying to learn and it doesn't have to prevent anybody who wants to. I was then and still am an avid reader. Even if I didn't go to school I think I can hold my own with anyone, as far as literature is concerned.

Conditions were dreadful in those days. We didn't have anything. If the season was over, we were told, "You're laid off. Shift for yourself." How did you live? After all, you didn't earn enough to save any money. Well, the butcher trusted you. He knew you'd pay him when you started work again. Your landlord, he couldn't do anything but wait, you know. Sometimes relatives helped out. There was no welfare, no pension, no unemployment insurance. There was nothing. . . .

But despite that, we had good times. In the summer we'd go to Central Park and stay out and watch the moon rise; go to the Palisades and spend the day. We went to meetings, too, of course. We had friends and we enjoyed what we were doing. We had picnics. And, remember, in that time you could go and hear [tenor Enrico] Causo for twenty-five cents. . . . Of course we went upstairs [to the balcony], but we heard the greatest soloists, all for a quarter, and we enjoyed it immensely. We loved it. We'd go Saturday night and stand in line no matter what the weather. In the winter we'd bring blankets along. Just imagine, the greatest artists in the world, from here and abroad, available to you for twenty-five cents.<sup>2</sup>

By the time she was 15, Newman was not only reading poetry and attending concerts but also organizing a labor union at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. By 1909, she was working full-time as a union organizer. That year, as a result of her efforts and those of other organizers, thousands of garment workers in New York City went on strike for higher wages, a shorter work week, and safer working conditions. Newman recalled the mood of the workers the day the strike began:

Thousands upon thousands left the factories from every side, all of them walking down toward Union Square. It was November, the cold winter was just around the corner. . . .

I can see the young people, mostly women, walking down and not caring what might happen. The spirit, I think, the spirit of a conqueror led them on. They didn't know what was in store for them, didn't really think of the hunger, cold, loneliness, and what could happen to them. They just didn't care on that particular day; that was their day.<sup>3</sup>

In the days that followed, the women quickly learned that a strike required more than "spirit." After visiting their union hall, a reporter for the *New York Sun* wrote: "There, for the first time in my comfortably sheltered, Upper West Side life, I saw real hunger on the faces of my fellow Americans in the richest city in the world."<sup>4</sup> The young strikers also faced arrest.

Picketing—carrying signs and banners outside a place of employment to express grievances and keep strikebreakers out—was illegal. Newman recalled, "The judge, when one of our girls came before him, said to her: 'You're not striking against your employer, you know, young lady. You're striking against God,'" and sentenced her to two weeks on Blackwell's Island, which is now Welfare Island. And a lot of them got a taste of the club."<sup>5</sup>

Despite hunger and the threat of jail, the union enrolled a thousand new members each day. Some estimate that as many as 20,000 men, women, and children participated in the strike. As money began to run out, leaders sent organizers like Pauline Newman to other cities to seek help from women's clubs and other unions. They also won the support of prominent New York women and settlement house leaders like Lillian Wald and Mary Simkovitch, who used their connections to protect the strikers, raise money, and press factory owners to settle with workers.

The strike lasted three months. It officially ended on February 15, 1910. Historians Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo have described the strike as "an uprising of people who discovered on the picket lines their sense of dignity and self. New emotions swept the East Side, new perceptions of what immigrants could do, even girls until yesterday mute. '*Unzere vunderbare farbrente meydlekh*' (our wonderful, fervent girls) an old-timer called them."<sup>6</sup>

Newman was less positive. She told an interviewer, "We didn't gain very much at the end of the strike. I think the hours were reduced to fifty-six a week or something like that. We got a ten percent increase in wages. I think that the

best thing that the strike did was to lay a foundation to build a union.<sup>7</sup> Newman's enthusiasm was tempered by the realization that many employers, including the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company where she had once worked, refused to negotiate with the union. They simply fired the strikers and hired replacements.

One year later, on March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. The fire claimed the lives of 146 workers—143 of them were women and children who worked on the ninth floor. One former striker noted, "If the union had won, we would have been safe. Two of our demands were for adequate fire escapes and for open doors from the factories to the street. But the bosses defeated us and we didn't get the open doors or the better fire escapes. So our friends are dead."<sup>8</sup>

After the fire, Newman and other union organizers persuaded lawmakers and reformers to pass what Frances Perkins hailed as "the greatest battery of bills to prevent disaster and hardships." She believed that these new laws were the legacy of the victims in the Triangle Fire. Perkins was the chief investigator for a state commission that investigated factory conditions after the fire. In her view those laws "in some way" "paid the debt society owed to those children, those young people who lost their lives in the Triangle Fire. It's their contribution to the people of New York that we have this really magnificent series of legislative acts to protect and improve the administration of the law regarding the protection of work people in the City of— in the State of New York."<sup>9</sup>

---

## CONNECTIONS

---

Pauline Newman never uses the words *progress* or *civilized*. How are those ideas reflected in her account? In reflecting on the world of 1900, Pauline Newman compares that world with life in the United States in 1975. How do those changes compare to the ones that took place in Walt Whitman's lifetime (Reading 1)?

Dictionaries define a *union* as a group of people who form an organization to work for a common cause or interest. What, then, is a *labor union*? What is its common cause or interest? What is a strike? Why has it become an important tool for labor unions?

After the strike, Pauline Newman recalls that she and her co-workers tried to educate themselves by reciting English poetry to improve their understanding of



the language.<sup>10</sup> One of their favorites was Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy"—particularly the last two stanzas. The poem was written to commemorate a mass meeting of British reformers who were attacked by soldiers on August 16, 1819. Several were killed and hundreds were injured.

And these words shall then become  
Like Oppression's thundered doom  
Ringing through each heart and brain,  
Heard again-again-again!

Rise like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number!  
Shake your chains to earth, like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you—  
Ye are many, they are few.

What is the lesson of the poem? Why might it have special appeal to young immigrant workers?

Look carefully at the Bill of Rights—the first ten amendments to the Constitution. How did workers use those rights to fight injustices? How is their use of those amendments similar to the way Chinese immigrants used those same rights? How do you account for differences?

How does Newman's account of her early years in the factory challenge stereotypes about immigrants held by Charles Davenport (Chapter 3) and other eugenicists? How does her account challenge stereotypes about women and their role in society? Why might her activities have seemed threatening to some progressive reformers?

What do Howe and Libo mean when they write that the strikers "discovered on the picket lines their sense of dignity and self"? Would eugenicists like Charles Davenport agree? How do you think he might have described the young strikers?

The fire was a turning point in the lives of many people, including Frances Perkins, then a young social worker who saw the tragedy with her own eyes. In her role as chief investigator for the state commission, she set out to educate lawmakers. She writes in her memoirs:

We used to make it our business to take Al Smith [then a state lawmaker] . . . to see the women, thousands of them, coming off the ten-hour night-shift on the rope walks in Auburn [New York]. We

made sure that Robert Wagner [also a lawmaker] personally crawled through the tiny hole in the wall that gave egress to a steep iron ladder covered with ice and ending twelve feet from the ground, which was euphemistically labeled "Fire Escape" in many factories. We saw to it that the austere legislative members of the Commission got up at dawn and drove with us for an unannounced visit to a Cattaraugus County cannery and that they saw with their own eyes the little children, not adolescents, but five-, six-, and seven-year-olds, snipping beans and shelling peas. We made sure that they saw the machinery that would scalp a girl or cut off a man's arm. Hours so long that both men and women were depleted and exhausted became realities to them through seeing for themselves the dirty little factories.<sup>11</sup>

How is the kind of education Perkins provided lawmakers different from the kind Jacob Riis provides in *How the Other Half Lives*? Why do you think she placed such importance on lawmakers meeting workers and seeing their conditions rather than reading about them in a book or a report? What did she want lawmakers to learn? What did she hope they would remember?

- 
1. From a taped talk by Pauline Newman to union women from Trade Union Women's Studies, a program of the New York State School of Industrial Labor Relations, Cornell University, March, 1975. Quoted in *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* by Barbara Mayer Wertheimer. Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 294-295.
  2. Interview in *American Mosaic* by Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky. New American Library, 1980, pp. 11-12.
  3. From a taped talk by Pauline Newman, March, 1975. Quoted in *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* by Barbara Mayer Wertheimer. Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 301.
  4. Quoted in *How We Lived* by Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo. Richard Marek Publishers, 1979, p. 182.
  5. Interview in *American Mosaic* by Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky. New American Library, 1980, p. 13.
  6. *How We Lived* by Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo. Richard Marek Publishers, 1979, p. 182.
  7. Interview in *American Mosaic* by Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky. New American Library, 1980, pp. 12-13.
  8. Quoted in *The Triangle Fire* by Leon Stein. J.B. Lippincott, 1962, p. 168.
  9. *Lectures of Frances Perkins*, Collection /3047, 30 September 1964, Cornell University, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Ithaca, NY.
  10. Quoted in *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* by Barbara Mayer Wertheimer. Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 308.
  11. *The Roosevelt I Knew* by Frances Perkins. Viking Press, 1946, pp. 17, 22.