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CITIES, PEOPLES, CULTURES, 1890–1920

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- The Rise of the City • Immigration • Building Ethnic Communities
- African American Labor and Community • Working-Class and Commercial Culture • The New Sexuality and the Rise of Feminism • Reimagining American Nationality

AMERICA'S CITIES GREW RAPIDLY in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both to accommodate expanded production and trade and to house masses of workers who labored on the wharves, streets, and factories. Growth called forth technological advance: running water, electric lighting and trolley lines, steel suspension bridges, skyscrapers, and elevators. Immigration soared to remedy severe labor shortfalls in manufacturing and construction; foreign languages and cultures, as a result, became a more prominent feature of American urban life.

New economic elites sought to impart to their cities an architectural elegance and cultural *gravitas* that, in their minds, rivaled those of the greatest cities in history—London, Paris, Rome, Athens, Berlin. Their plans transformed cities but also brought the rich into conflict with the poor, whose presence could not be ignored. A vigorous commercial culture had taken root in working-class and ethnic districts of the city, appearing in dance halls, **nickelodeons**, and amusement parks. Exuberance rather than refinement, adventure rather than education defined these working-class leisure pursuits. Young, working-class women pioneered a sexual revolution, and immigrants energized cities with the diversity of their communities and cultures. The interactions among the different ethnic communities, as well as between rich and poor, made American cities sites of innovation, transformation, and conflict. In them, a new America was taking shape.