Causes and effects of urbanization and immigration in the late 19th century

Why did people move from the farm to the city? How did the women’s suffrage movement develop? What were the circumstances of African American migration to the North and Midwest? How did cities and urban areas grow as a result of immigration? What restrictions were imposed on immigration? How did Immigrants respond to the urban political machines?

Movement from the farm to the city--Cities first developed as centers of trade, then transportation hubs and after the advent of electricity, as centers of production.

- Movement to the city grew during World War I as more jobs became available. Farmers and immigrants filled cities making them crowded.
- Farm technology allowed regions to produce more, which sold for less, causing many farmers to default on loans and lose their land.
- Crowded city conditions led to problems with housing, sanitation, transportation, water, crime and fire. Corruption prevented city bosses from using the political power from their immigrant constituencies to address these issues.

The women’s suffrage movement gained speed in the late 19th century.

- Women campaigned on the idea of cleaning up society and government, setting political bosses and the liquor industry against them. Some were considered radical for organizing picket lines and hunger strikes. Middle class women were increasingly frustrated by their inability to have political influence in solving problems of city life and the workplace.
- Women formed the National American Women’s Suffrage Association to lobby for the right to vote in the Eastern states. (Remember, suffrage means the right to vote.) A split over tactics disrupted this movement as some women lobbied at the state level and others lobbied at the national level. African-American women formed the National Association of Colored Women to secure the civil rights of African-Americans, including women’s suffrage.
- Western states were the first to allow women to vote because of appreciation for the role that women played as pioneers in the new states and territory. Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote.
- Women received the right to vote nationally in 1920 with passage of the 19th amendment to the Constitution, in part due to their activism their contribution to the war effort. (World War I)

Reasons African-Americans migration to the North and Midwest intensified (remember, most freedmen stayed in the South immediately after the Civil War).

- Poor cotton yields due to soil exhaustion and boll weevil infestation.
- Discrimination as a result of Jim Crow laws consisting of intimidation and lynching in the South.
- Falling prices for farm goods led them to join other farmers to move to the cities for job opportunities.

Growth of cities due to immigration was largely due to the inability of poor immigrants to move beyond the port cities where they landed.

- Immigrants looked for people with the same culture and language resulting in the formation of ethnic neighborhoods that had similar Churches, schools, businesses and newspapers. Greeks, Poles and Italians and many other nationalities grouped together.
- Many established immigrants helped the newcomers by finding them jobs and housing. This had a powerful impact on city politics as people voted for those who found them jobs and assisted them in hard times. Neighborhood and political bosses received votes from those newcomers who were grateful
for help. This allowed the urban political machine to become powerful enough to solve important urban problems. (There were some abuses that occurred under city bosses such as New York’s Boss Tweed.

**Restrictions on immigration** were a result of ethnic prejudices and market forces.

- Nativism is a bias against foreign-born people. In America, it began before the Civil War towards Germans and Irish people and continued later with bias against Chinese workers who had built the railroads, resulting in Chinese immigration being restricted once the railroads were complete. Late 19th century nativism can be seen as another expression of Social Darwinism.

- Unskilled workers from Europe were often resented by “native” American workers because they could be paid cheaper and therefore exerted a downward pressure on wages. Sometimes immigrants were employed as “scabs” (strikebreakers) by management. In the late 19th century resentment focused on immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Further restrictions on immigration were eventually passed in the 1920s.
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