

# Unit Template

**Talking Points for teacher reference to support students in using and expanding on what they know on Immigration, the Growth of Cities and the Rise of Big Business** (from Enduring Vision, chapter 21, Gilder Lehrman/Digital History)

## Immigration

- For the immigrant millions in unsafe factories and unhealthy slums, life was often a desperate cycle of poverty, exhausting labor, and early death.
- Greatest source of urban growth was immigration – soared to all-time highs, especially at Ellis Island, NY’s immigration center: more than 17 million newcomers arrived from 1900 to 1917, and most of them became city dwellers.
- Origins of immigrants
  - Mostly from southern and eastern Europe
  - More than 200,000 Japanese and 40,000 Chinese between 1900 and 1920
  - And thousands of Mexicans migrated northward to work on the railroad
- Reasons for coming to America: desperate economic necessity, fleeing revolutionary upheavals (ex. in Mexico), fleeing religious persecution (eastern European Jews – especially settled in New York’s Lower East Side)

## The Growth of Cities

- American city (at this time) had its business elite, newly self-conscious middle class, and its recent immigrants
- From 1860 to 1900: growth of the number of cities
  - 100,000-499,999: 7 cities in 1860; 32 in 1900
  - 500,000 or more: 2 cities in 1860; 6 in 1900
- By 1920 when the nation’s population passed the 50 percent mark, 68 American cities had more than 100,000 inhabitants. From 1900 to 1920:
  - New York City grew by 2.2 million
  - Chicago grew by 1 million
  - Detroit grew by 425,000
- Harsh life in the cities – particularly for the immigrants:
  - Housing: crumbling slum tenements, row houses, rickety three-story structures called triple-deckers.
  - City governments did not provide such basic necessities as safe water, sewage facilities, garbage collection and fire protection, or decent schools and parks. Therefore very bad health conditions and death rates in most crowded immigrant wards twice the national average.
  - City corruption

## The Rise of Big Business

- New forms of business organization – corporation – transformed the face of capitalism.
- Late 19<sup>th</sup> century process of corporate consolidation produced such giant corporations as Carnegie Steel (Andrew Carnegie) and the Standard Oil Trust (John D. Rockefeller).
- Early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw more consolidation: around 1900, an average of more than 260 companies annually were swallowed up in mergers.
- Pros and cons of big business and the expansion of industry: many workers benefited from prevailing good times:

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- Benefit: Industrial workers average annual wages rose from \$532 in late 19<sup>th</sup> century to \$687 by 1915. In railroading and other unionized industries, wages rose still higher.
- Benefits: As industry grew + vast expansion of predominantly native-born middle class
  - White collar work force expanded rapidly (from 1900 to 1920, it mumped from 5.1 million to 10.5 million)
  - Some professions doubled or tripled (such advertising and civil engineering)
  - Number of secretaries increased by nearly 600 percent
  - Particular impact on women in this new middle class: more opportunities and more frustrations – employment outside the home and more discontent in traditional marriages/families.
- Costs: such wages could still barely support a wife and a family and left little cushion for emergencies. Therefore to make ends meet, entire immigrant families went to work – rise of child labor.