

③ Segregation and Discrimination

MAIN IDEA African Americans lead the fight against voting restrictions and Jim Crow laws.

By 1900, southern states restricted African Americans' right to vote, weakening their political power. One law required voters to be able to read. Another put a tax on voting. A third disallowed voters if they, their fathers, or their grandfathers could not vote before January 1, 1867—the first day that African Americans could vote. All these laws were passed specifically to take away blacks' right to vote. The Supreme Court allowed these laws to remain standing.

The southern states also passed Jim Crow laws that segregated whites and blacks into separate facilities. When Homer Plessy was denied a seat on a railroad car, he sued, but the Supreme Court ruled separate facilities legal.

Racial etiquette—customs—restricted the rights of African Americans even when laws did not. Booker T. Washington argued that blacks should not insist on full equality—which whites, he felt, would resist—but work for economic security. Ida Wells crusaded nationwide to end lynching—hanging people without trial. African Americans in the North faced discrimination as well.

Mexican Americans, especially in the Southwest, faced similar discrimination. The railroads hired them to build new lines but paid little. Landowners forced workers to work to repay debts, a system called debt peonage that the Supreme Court ruled against in 1911.

The Chinese population in the West grew until 1880, and white workers felt threatened by competition from Chinese workers. Congress responded to their pressure in 1882 by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. It prohibited further immigration from China.

④ The Dawn of Mass Culture

MAIN IDEA As Americans had more time for leisure activities, a modern mass culture emerged.

Shorter work weeks meant more leisure time, and Americans found new ways to use that time.

Many city dwellers enjoyed trips to amusement parks. Cycling and tennis became popular sports as well. Those who did not wish to exercise watched professionals play sports. Boxing and baseball became two popular spectator sports.

The rise in literacy contributed to an expansion of cultural vistas for ordinary Americans. Other advances fostered mass entertainment, including new media technology, such as motion pictures, and improved mass-production printing techniques.

Art galleries, libraries, books, and museums brought new cultural opportunities to more people. By 1900, at least one art gallery graced every large American city. Americans were also entertained by the new newspapers. To increase sales, publishers often presented the news in sensational style.

While serious novelists addressed concerns of contemporary society, many readers enjoyed the more popular dime-store novels.

Another change was in the sale of goods. Cities developed shopping areas that concentrated many retail establishments in certain areas. Huge department stores arose that offered consumers a wide range of goods to purchase. National chains developed as some retailers created stores in many sites, offering goods at lower prices. To persuade consumers to buy these goods, retailers and manufacturers spent large amounts of money on advertising.

To reach rural consumers, some companies sold their goods through catalogs. They were helped by the U.S. Post Office, which began delivering packages to rural people in 1896.

Review

1. What technological changes at the turn of the twentieth century affected American life?
2. How did education change in the late 1800s?
3. What discrimination was faced by minority groups in the late 1800s?
4. What evidence of modern mass culture can you find near the turn of the twentieth century?