



Life in the Big City

Welcome!

These mini-lectures are an overview of your assigned readings—they should provide better understanding of what you are reading!

Just listen (if audio is provided, it plays automatically), then read the slide, and use the next arrowhead. If you are viewing this in PDF, use the down arrow at the top of the pdf.

Contents:

The Big City Population boom

One Industry Towns

Transportation a Key

Building Up!

Tenements

Boss Rule

Anti-Immigrant Attitudes & Violence

Corruption, Crime, Health & Early Reform

Fighting Environmental Battles

Cultural life

Conclusions.

A brief post test.





The “big city” in America. From New York City’s “Bandit’s Roost” (l) to San Francisco’s China Town (r), large American cities were changing who we were and how we lived.



“Bandit's Roost, 59 ½ Mulberry Street,” 1887. Museum of the City of New York, The Jacob A. Riis Collection
Online image. 1889. 1 December 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008>> Scene in Chinatown, c.
1900. San Francisco Museum. Online image. May 2010. <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist9/cook.html>>





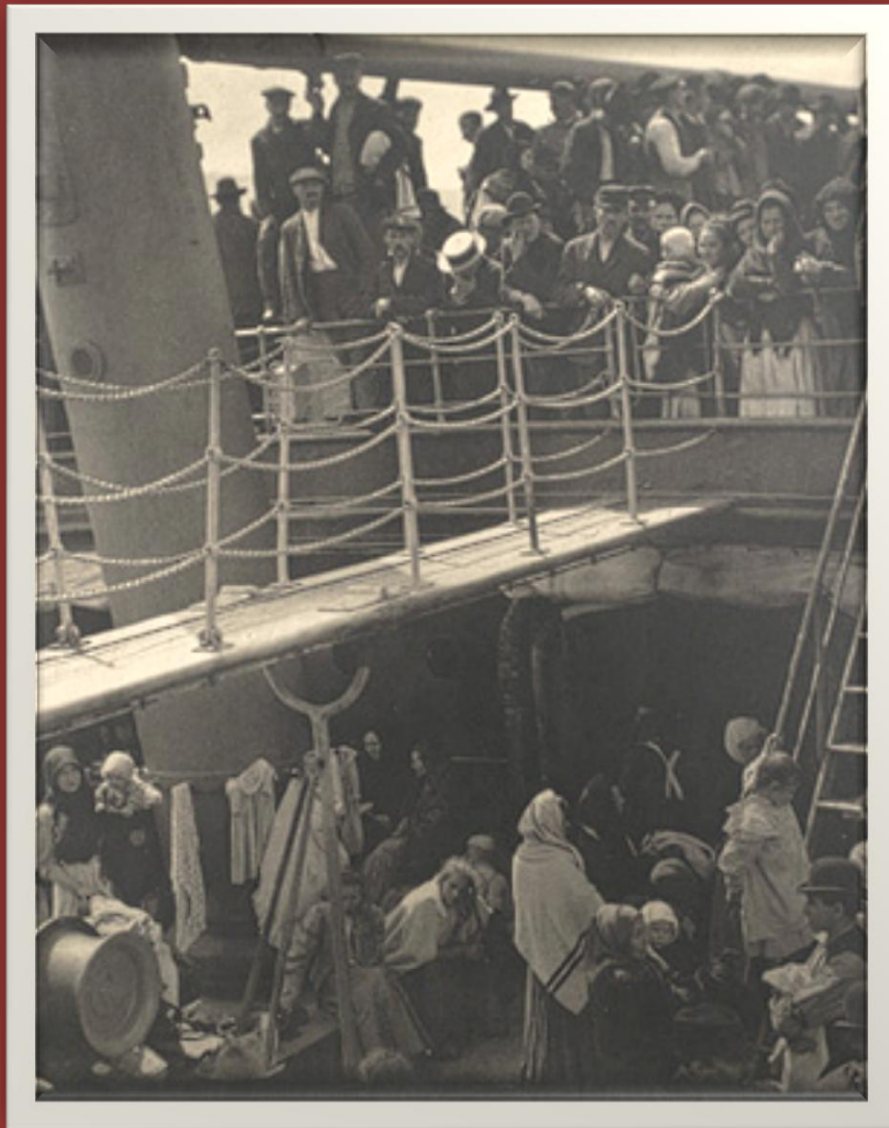
Late nineteenth century (1870-1900) city population boomed thanks to new industrial jobs, adequate food supply, transportation, native birth rates, and especially foreign immigrants. Like today, the arrival of so-many immigrants led to racism and fears. Many immigrants were very “different” coming from either China or Southeastern Europe, their languages, customs, & religions seemed threatening to native-born. Immigrants came under harsh conditions often crowded on the decks of ocean going vessels, paying for “Steerage”. Most European immigrants came to the U. S. via Ellis Island—top. Chinese and Asians came via Angle Island—bottom. In 1860 only nine U.S. cities housed 100,000 people; by 1900 thirty-eight cities held 100,000 or more people! And NYC was the second largest city in the world!



Ellis Island, c. 1900 & Angel Island, c. 1910. Online images. May 2010. <<http://memory.loc.gov>>

You can view images of Ellis Island immigrants from the Keystone-Mast Collection in the California Museum of Photography, By going to this web portal: <http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/collections/permanent/projects/stereo/immigration/ellisland.html#>



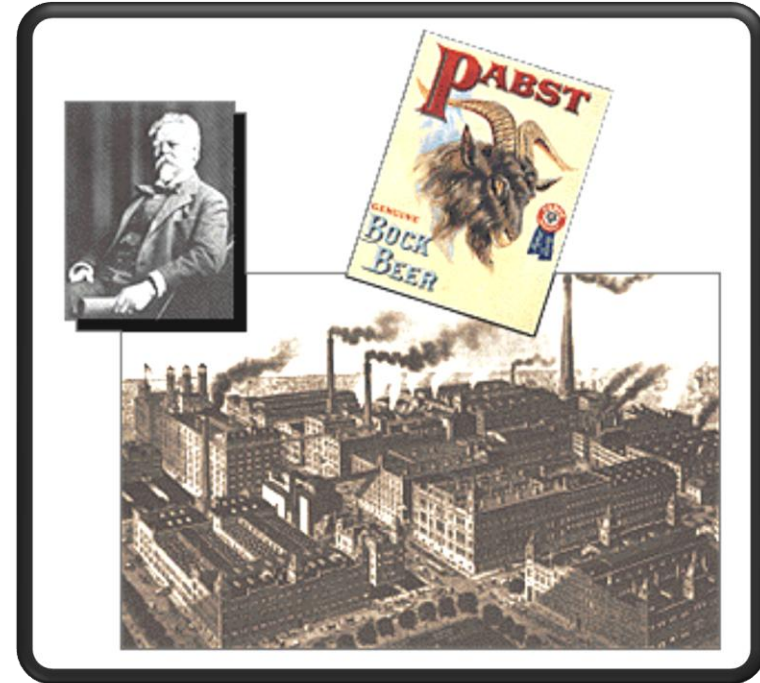


American photographer Alfred Stieglitz took this photograph in 1907 of immigrants arriving in America. Their meager funds paid only for what was called “steerage”—the right to stand or sit on the open decks. They brought their own food, bundled in warm clothes and used common toilets. Titled simply “The Steerage” the photo became famous for technique and subject matter. Stieglitz, Alfred. *The Steerage*, 1907. May 2010. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. <<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/33.43.419>>





One Industry towns. American cities were dirty, crowded, & lacked essential services. Most cities developed a mixed economy, but often specialized in one dominant trade : New York was a port city; Chicago was a rail head and “hog butcher to the world”; Omaha was a beef town; & Milwaukee was the home of beer! Omaha residents, and the citizens of most 19th century cities, were highly mobile. In 1888, only 12% of Omaha families lived at the same address as they did in 1880!! The Pabst brewery was founded in Milwaukee by a German family of beer makers, the Bests, in the 1840s. A son-in-law, Captain Frederick Pabst turned the company into a national powerhouse. Tours of the Pabst Mansion in Milwaukee are available.



HOG Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse. and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.





Transportation was a key! Until the 1870s, cities were walking cities—people had to have services and jobs within a walk, or easy horse ride for the wealthy—approximately 2 miles. Transportation was one key to urban livability. From the 1830s—to the 1900s horses, horse cars (and their waste products) were common. In the 1850s--steam rail streetcars were used. By the 1880s San Francisco used cable cars. In the 1890s--“trolleys” —or electric streetcars were introduced in Richmond in 1887 & solved some of the problem. Most lines lost money, but land along the routes sold faster than tracks could be built--molding the shape of cities and suburban lifestyle.

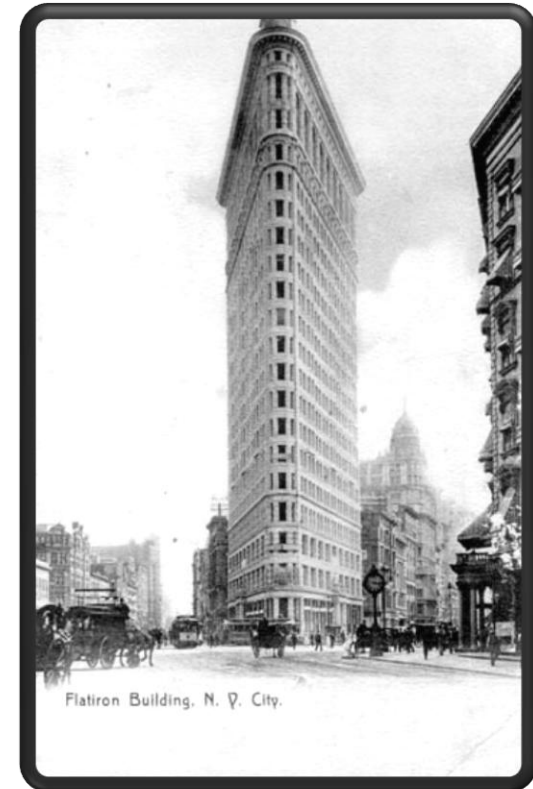


Bottom, Chicago electric Trolley, 1906. Top, horse and trolley scene in Philadelphia 1897. Online images. May 2010.
<<http://memory.loc.gov>>



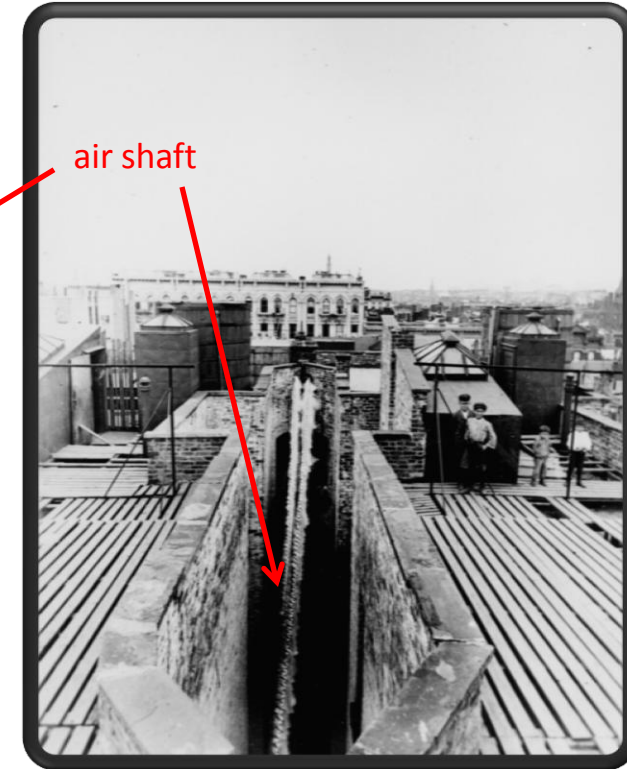
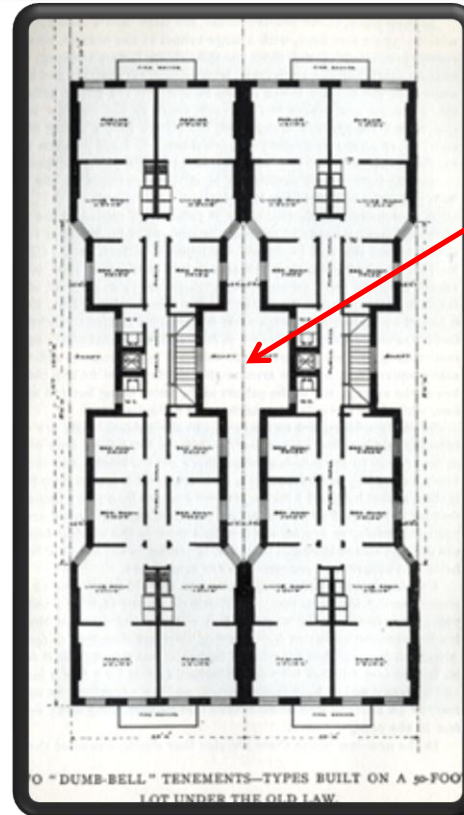


Where would the people of cities work & live? The urban answer was up. By the 1870s, several New York City buildings were 8-10 stories, but they were supported by massive brick and stone blocks on the outside of the buildings. Using the new innovative and stronger Bessemer steel beams, George Fuller designed a system of steel cages to bear heavy loads—stacked them on top of each other, and built the world’s first tall building with interior support—this allowed for even taller structures. His Tacoma Building was completed in 1889. His company built one of New York’s first tall building—the “Flatiron Building” in 1902.





N. Y. City began to build “Tenement Houses” in 1879 after a design won an award for urban architecture. The dumbbell shape was intended to provide a shaft of fresh air in the crowded city—instead these spaces became trash heaps. Built on lots 25X100 with 6-8 apartments per floor and usually six floors—they only had one shared toilet per floor. Over 25% had no fire escape. A reporter, Jacob Riis, detailed the misery of the tenements.



Dumbbells Tenements (l), Columbia University. Online image. 1889. 1 December 2009. <http://ci.columbia.edu/0240s/0243_2/0243_2_s1_2_text.html>. Dumbbell Airshaft (r), Chicago 1889. Online image. May 2010. <<http://www.archives.gov>>



Baby's Playground



Cigar maker



Italian Mother and Her Baby



Dens of Death



Five Cents a Spot



Museum of the City of New York, The Jacob A. Riis Collection. Online images. 1888-1889. May 2010.

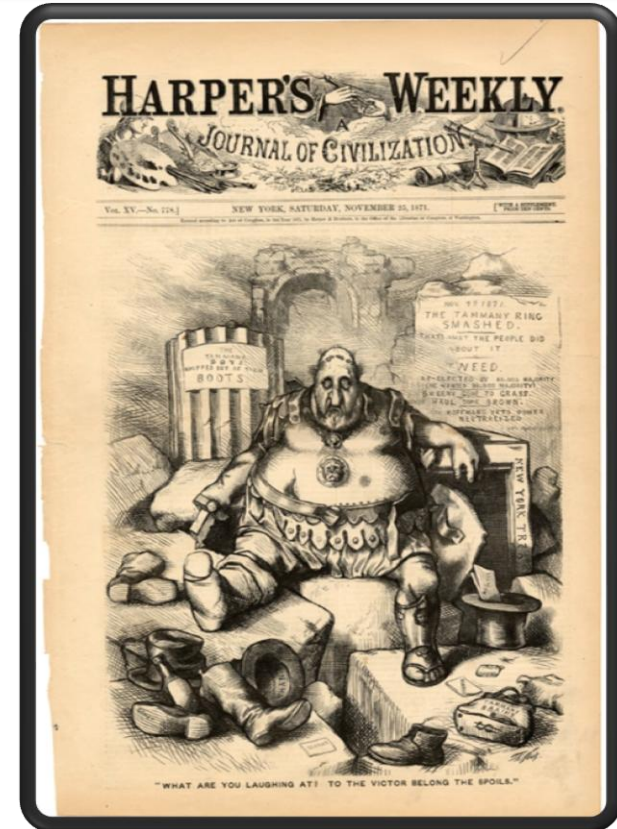
<http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/02/27/nyregion/20080227_RIIS_SLIDESHOW_index.html?ref=jacob_riis>

Take a virtual tour of New York Tenements here: http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/index_virtual.html





Boss Rule. Elected officials & city managers ran cities via contracts with outside vendors. It became common for builders to pay a “fee” to politicians to get the job. The Tammany Hall Ring, or Tweed Ring, worked remarkably well thanks to two sets of accounts. Tweed would steer builders to the right bank for a loan & the bank paid a commission to Tweed for the referral. The contractors would kickback funds to Tweed through over-billing. And Tweed would use the funds to re-elect his political buddies. The full measure of theft from New York City taxpayers will never be known, but estimates range from \$20 to \$300 million. Other city “bosses” ran Cincinnati, Chicago, and Kansas City. The boss system was not all bad. In an age where cities outpaced services, the bosses provided housing, parks, libraries, & social services such as job referral. Central Park in NYC and Grant Park in Chicago became models of urban green areas. A crusading cartoonist, Thomas Nast, along with others, brought defeat to Tweed as reform took control.



Nast, Thomas. *Harper's Weekly*, *What are you looking at—to the victor belong the spoils*. November 25, 1871. Online image of woodcut. May 2010.
<http://cartoons.osu.edu/nast/what_are_you.htm>



New York City Mayor A. Oakey Hall, and Treasurer "Slippery Dick" Connelly coordinated with William Tweed, the head of the New York City Democratic Party (headquartered in "Tammany Hall") to control two aspects of city life in New York City from the 1850s to the 1870s. First, they controlled who won city work contracts and either padded bills to the city; or demanded kickbacks. Secondly, they used this money for themselves, and for political favors. It was called the "Tammany Ring" or "Tweed Ring" because the money, once stolen from taxpayers, kept coming back to help re-elect the same corrupt men.

1. Board of Supervisors approves city's contractors—influenced by Tweed and others

2. Board approves Bonds (loans) for needed building projects with Bank commission to Tweed

3. No-bid contract is 35% cost & profit; plus 65% kickback to Tweed

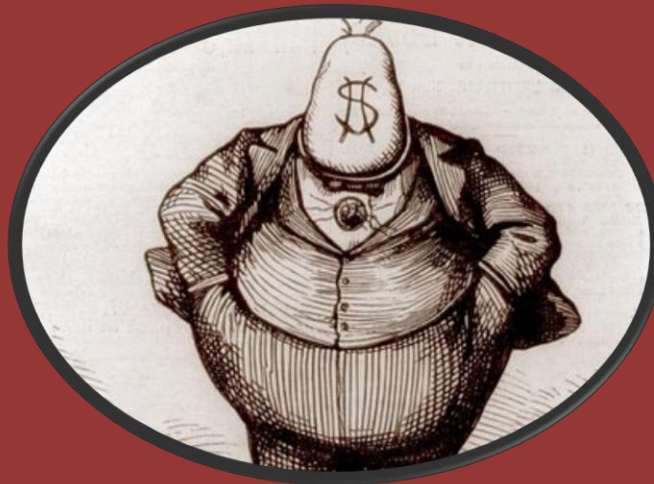
4. Tweed keeps bank commission and 40% of contractor commission

5. Sixty percent of contractor commission goes to Democratic Party Aldermen and political ward bosses (in other cities the Republican Party was just as greedy).

6. Ward bosses help immigrants find jobs, pay rent & spread political favors

7. Contracts result in needed services such as bridges & parks; as well as cultural centers

8. At election time, Tweed, Board members and Aldermen remind the public of the great building boom. Ward bosses remind the immigrant throngs of favors done—the result is re-election





Anti-Immigrant Attitudes. By 1870 more immigrants came to America from Southeastern Europe, Ireland, and Asia than from familiar lands such as England and Germany. Native fears grew—these immigrants were “more” Catholic or Jewish than earlier immigrants. They dressed and ate differently. Some, like the Chinese and Irish, were desperately poor. Americans expected the Irish to speak “English” but when the Irish tongues landed in eastern cities many Americans were shocked at the language barriers. Irish were feared because of their Catholicism, but they were soon acclimated into city life—often effectively working in large groups. As a result American cities became a patchwork of new and old citizenship ties. Many immigrants grouped together in Italian, Polish, and Russian sections of cities. Immigrants would readily work for lower wages to feed their families, only to risk more conflict with native workers. Violence, discrimination, and legal isolation followed in many cases; but acceptance and prosperity also helped many immigrants. In 1882 The United States outlawed Chinese immigration., passing the Chinese Exclusion Act.





Corruption, Crime, Health & Early Reform. Cities faced myriad problems. Police openly demanded bribes allowing saloons, gambling, and prostitution to flourish. Crime skyrocketed, with homicides tripling. By 1890 public police commissions set standards of hiring and training. Police departments hired women police & used new technologies such as the telephone to combat crime. Disease, accidents, and crime filled urban hospitals where nurses were expected to work from 7am to 8pm. Reform will be discussed later, but American reforms started in these same cities. The Tenement House Act 1901 was the first law to forbid unhealthy construction. As we will see later, an army of volunteers in churches, YMCA's, & settlement houses would begin to work on the problems of cities.



This sketch proudly showed the manners of a newly graduated police officer in New York City. *Civil Service Examination for New York City Police.* Wood engraving illustrated in *Harper's Weekly*. January 16, 1886.. 1 December, 2009. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c08120> >

Click here to read the memoirs of a young hospital nurse from 1893. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/60>





Environmental Battles. The cities stank! They were noisy, dirty, full of smoke, & often unhealthy. From horse poop to cattle carcasses to furnace emissions, the waste & by products of living in 19th century cities were overpowering. Chicago's Union Stock yards (1865-1971) killed & butchered 9 million beeves a year by 1900. The bones and leftovers all went into a fork of the Chicago River, called "Bubbly Creek"—named after escaping gases that seeped to the surface from rotting animal waste. Today the creek still exists between an industrial park & a newer housing neighborhood, shut off by chain link fence. Urban leaders knew they had a problem, and many searched for solutions. In 1898 Steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie told a Pittsburg Chamber of Commerce meeting that it was critical for someone to solve the "Smoke Nuisance" problem in Pittsburg—referring to the smoke pouring out of his own mills. After twelve years of legal battles, the Pennsylvania legislature allowed cities to issue pollution restrictions. Carnegie's self-serving hope for a technical solution became instead government regulation. A critical "first" for federal legislation was the 1899 passage of the Rivers and Harbors Act outlawing the dumping of waste in navigable waterways. Mostly aimed at keeping the waterways free for boats, the act was a early victory for common sense control of city waste.

Bird's Eye View of the Union Stock Yards. 1897. Online image. May 2010. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a46035>>



5075—Bird's-eye View of Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.





The cities might stink, but boy were they fun!

Vaudeville shows played to growing urban audiences. There were marching bands, bicycle races, women's and men's lawn tennis, football, & boxing (the Corbett v. Fitzsimmons, March 17, 1897 match was a favorite).

Magazine publication grew along with the urban readership. Public and private education, including higher education, kept pace with city growth.

Relaxing in the park was a favorite pastime for middle and upper class women and children.

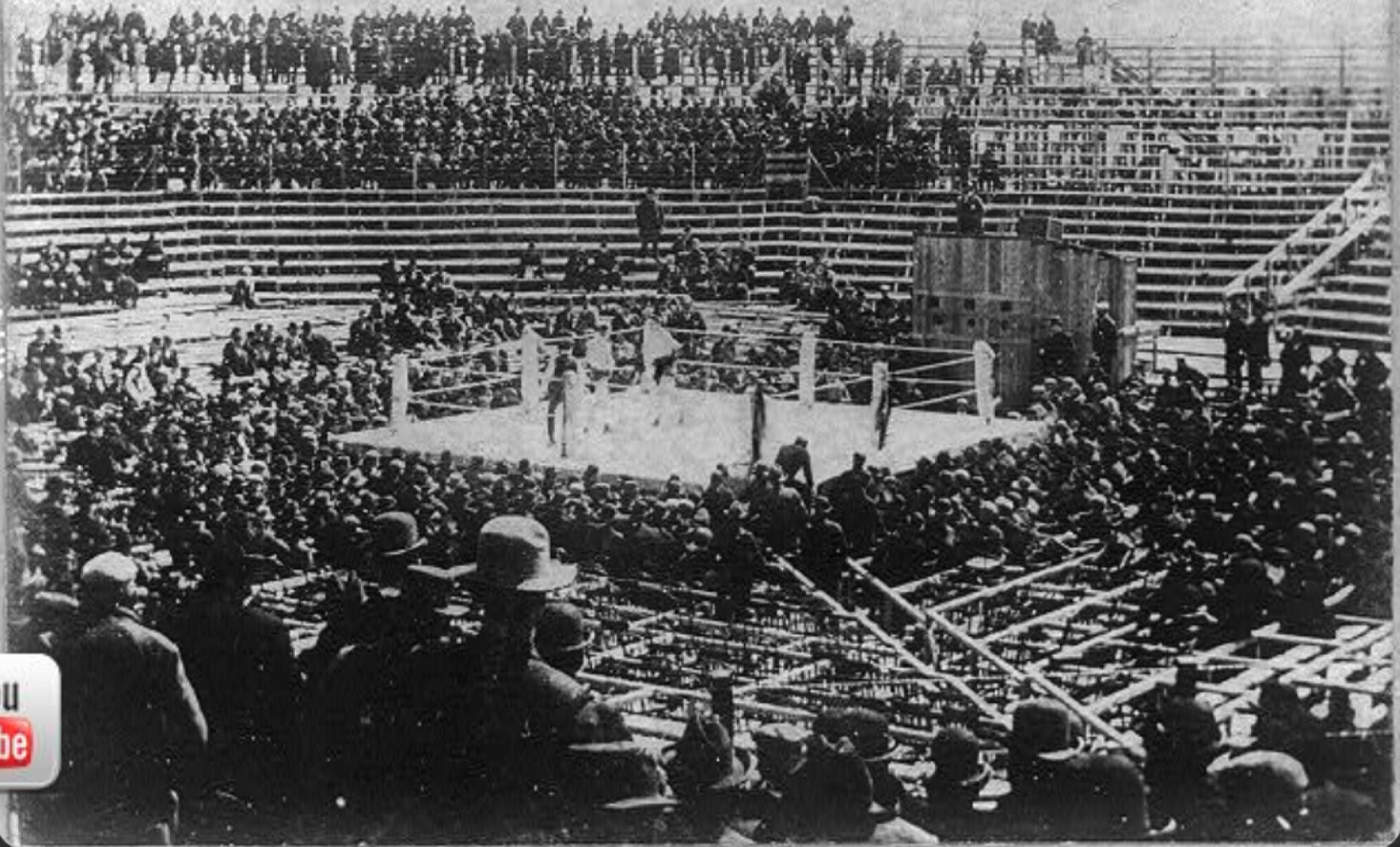


The Sandow Troc Vaudevilles, Online image of Poster. 1894. May 2010. LC-USZC4-12307.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/var.0219/>



Fitzsimmons, was 4 years older & 16 pounds lighter than champ Jim Corbett. Known as the fight of the century, Fitz won at the last minute. The total purse was an astronomical \$2,700,000—mainly due to paid rights from telegraph companies; and from Edison films which filmed the fight.



You
Tube





Mothers In a New York City Park, Digital ID: (b&w film copy neg.) cph 3b03355
<<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b03355>>





Conclusions! American urban life in the 19th century was a prologue to the future—a future of growth, jobs, diversity, & culture; as well as challenges for government, transportation, & safety.

The number of large U.S. cities tripled due to available resources, technology and immigration. Much of the immigration of this period was from China, or Southeastern Europe. Many cities started growing with one unique industry like the stock yards & the breweries. Technologies allowing mass transportation & skyscraper construction made life bearable. Some “innovations” like the tenements flopped as over-crowding created unsafe conditions. Cities were governed by often corrupt bosses; yet parks, sewers, & services continued. Some Americans feared & resented the immigrants resulting in violence and discrimination. Problems in police enforcement and health care were gradually addressed. And some laws like the Rivers and Harbors Act did begin to address the nasty environment. Despite issues cities enjoyed parks, vaudeville, sports & increased educational opportunities.





A Brief Post Test! Read the question, then click on the best answer to see feedback.

The number of large cities in America more than tripled from 1860-1900. True. False.

Urban economies were diverse but often dominated by one industry. True. False.

The horse caused terrible urban waste, but proved the key to city growth. True. False.

Taller city structures were built using support from exterior stonework. True. False.

The tenement house design (1879) was an award winning design that failed. True. False.

William Tweed represents the corruption of boss rule. True. False.

Nineteenth century urban bosses were all corrupt & accomplished nothing. True. False.

Chinese immigration was formally restricted by the federal government. True. False.

Irish-Catholic immigrants were never feared in U.S. cities. True. False.

Police reform (1880s) came through the use of citizen commissions and training. True. False.

Vaudeville shows were mostly a rural attraction in the late 1800s. True. False.

Toxins thrown into Bubbly Creek in the late 1800s contaminate the creek today. True. False.

The Rivers & Harbors Act (1899) was a major federal protection of waterways. True. False.





Good! That is Correct!

**[Click to return to the Post
Test!](#)**



Yikes! Try that again!

**[Click to return to the Post
Test!](#)**