

# 4 Society and Mass Culture

## TERMS & NAMES

mass culture  
Joseph Pulitzer  
William Randolph Hearst  
department store  
mail-order catalog  
leisure  
vaudeville  
ragtime

## MAIN IDEA

Industrialization and new technologies created a mass culture in the United States.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Modern American mass culture had its beginnings during this period.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Mary Ellen Chase dreaded her first day of teaching at a new school. Many of the boys were larger than she and were known to be troublemakers. But she would do her best to control the class.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I stormed up and down. . . . This pathetic pretense of courage, aided by the mad flourishing of my razor strop, brought forth . . . the expression of respectful fear on the faces of the young giants.

Mary Ellen Chase, quoted in *The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible!*

Discipline was a key goal of education in the 1800s. Education also helped create a common culture for the millions of Americans who went to school. In this section, you will learn how education helped create an American **mass culture**—a common culture experienced by large numbers of people.



Students work on their lessons in this New York City classroom in 1906.

## Education and Publishing Grow

Immigration caused enormous growth in American schools. To teach citizenship and English to immigrants, new city and state laws required children to attend school. Between 1880 and 1920, the number of children attending school more than doubled. To serve the growing number of students, the number of public high schools increased from 2,526 in 1890 to 14,326 in 1920.

The growth of education increased American literacy. Reading became more popular. Americans read large numbers of novels. Dime novels were especially popular. They sold for ten cents each and told exciting tales of romance and adventure, often set in the West or on the high seas.

Americans also read more newspapers. Tough competition pushed newspaper publishers to try all sorts of gimmicks to outsell their rivals. For example, **Joseph Pulitzer**, owner of the *New York World*, and

### Background

By 1898, each of these newspapers sold more than a million copies a day.

**William Randolph Hearst**, owner of the *New York Morning Journal*, were fierce competitors. They filled the pages of their papers with spectacular stories. They also added special features, such as comics and sports.

## Modern Advertising and New Products

Newspapers had a wide influence on American life, including the rise of modern advertising. Advertisers used images of celebrities in newspapers and magazines to tempt people to buy products. They advertised everything from cereal to jewelry to soap. Some ads played on people's fears. For example, advertisers might scare a young woman concerned about her appearance into buying a particular brand of face cream. Advertising was effective in turning brand names into household words.

Advertisements also helped people learn about new products. At the turn of the century, new inventions, such as the electric washing machine, promised to help people do their household chores more easily. Because women did most of these chores as well as most of the shopping, manufacturers marketed these new devices to women.

One of the places people could buy these—and many other—goods was in department stores. **Department stores** sold everything from clothing to furniture to hardware. The Chicago businessman Marshall Field discovered as a sales clerk that he could increase his sales by paying close attention to each woman customer. Field opened his own department store in downtown Chicago with the motto, “Give the lady what she wants.”

People who did not live near a department store could order goods through the mail. Companies like Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck sent catalogs to customers. These **mail-order catalogs** included pictures and descriptions of merchandise. People could place their orders by mail, and the company would deliver the product. Richard Sears claimed that he sold 10,000 items a minute.

In 1896, the post office made it easier for people to receive goods through the mail by establishing a new delivery system. Rural free delivery brought packages directly to homes in rural areas. Now people in these areas could get the same goods as people in the cities.

## Urban Parks and World's Fairs

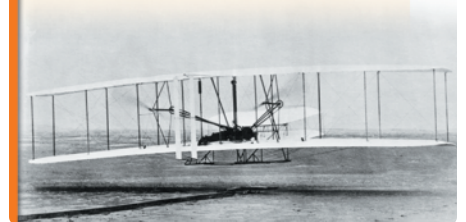
Advertising and shopping were not the only daily activities changing at this time. **Leisure**, or free time, activities also changed. In cities, new parks provided people with entertainment. The increasing number of people working in factories and offices liked going to parks to get some sunshine and fresh air. Parks helped bring grass and trees back into city landscapes.

### STRANGE but True

#### BICYCLES TO AIRPLANES

At the turn of the century, two bicycle mechanics invented a machine that would help advertisers and businessmen reach new customers. In 1892, Orville and Wilbur Wright opened a bicycle shop in Ohio. They used the profits to fund experiments in aeronautics, the construction of aircraft.

In 1903, the Wright brothers took a gasoline-powered airplane that they had designed to a sandy hill outside Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. On December 17 of that year, Orville made the first successful flight of a powered aircraft in history. By 1918, the U.S. Postal Service began airmail service that made it faster and easier for people to get goods.



### ReadingHistory

#### A. Summarizing

What developments changed American methods of selling at the turn of the century?

## Leisure Activities

### ▼ Coney Island

Visitors to New York's Coney Island cool off in the Steeple-chase Pool.



### ▼ World's Fair

Visitors to the 1893 world's fair in Chicago saw exotic sights, such as elephants.



### ▼ Football

Excited fans watch the 1881 Harvard–Yale football game at the Polo Grounds in New York.



Central Park in New York City is the nation's best-known urban park. Opened in 1876, Central Park looked like the country. Trees and shrubs dotted its gently rolling landscape. Winding walkways let city dwellers imagine they were strolling in the woods. People could also ride bicycles and play sports in the park.

In addition to urban parks, amusement parks provided a place people could go for fun. The most famous amusement park was Coney Island in New York City. Completed in 1904, Coney Island had shops, food vendors, and exciting rides like roller coasters. One immigrant woman said Coney Island “is just like what I see when I dream of heaven!”

World's fairs provided another wildly popular form of entertainment for Americans. Between 1876 and 1916, several U.S. cities, including Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco, hosted world's fairs. The fairs were designed to show off American technology. The 1876 fair in Philadelphia displayed Alexander Graham Bell's newly invented telephone. Millions of people attended these fairs. Nearly 10 million attended the Philadelphia fair alone. Visitors were drawn to foods, shows, and amusements. The historian Thomas Schlereth described the giant wheel built by George Ferris at the 1893 Chicago fair.

### ReadingHistory

**B. Comparing and Contrasting**  
What did urban parks and world's fairs have in common?

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Chicago's answer to Paris's 1889 Eiffel Tower, Ferris's 264-foot bicycle wheel in the sky dominated the landscape. With thirty-six cars, each larger than a Pullman coach and capable of holding 60 people, the wheel, when fully loaded, rotated 2,160 people in the air.

**Thomas Schlereth, *Victorian America***

## Spectator Sports

During this time, spectator sports also became popular entertainment. Baseball, football, boxing, and many other sports drew thousands of people to fields and gyms around the country.

Baseball was the most popular sport. Summer games drew crowds of enthusiastic fans. By the 1890s, baseball had standardized rules and a published schedule of games. Racial discrimination kept African-American baseball players out of baseball's American and National Leagues. In order to compete, African Americans formed their own teams in

the Negro American League and the Negro National League. (See Geography in History, pages 320–321.)

## Going to the Show

In addition to sports, other forms of live entertainment attracted large audiences. **Vaudeville**, for example, featured a mixture of song, dance, and comedy. A show would have a series of acts leading up to an exciting end, which advertisers billed as the “wow finish.”

New types of music also began to be heard. **Ragtime**, a blend of African-American songs and European musical forms, was an important new musical form. African-American composer Scott Joplin heard ragtime while he traveled through black communities from New Orleans to Chicago. Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag,” published in 1899, became a hit in the first decade of the 20th century.

Early in the 20th century, movies began to compete with live entertainment. The first movies were silent and were added as the final feature of a vaudeville show. Soon storefront theaters appeared that showed only movies. After 1905, these movie theaters were called nickelodeons because they charged just a nickel for admission.

Movies, music, sports, and advertising contributed to shaping modern American mass culture. People across the nation experienced many of these things. In the next chapter, you will learn about different nationwide changes—the reform movements of the Progressive era.

### ReadingHistory

#### C. Making

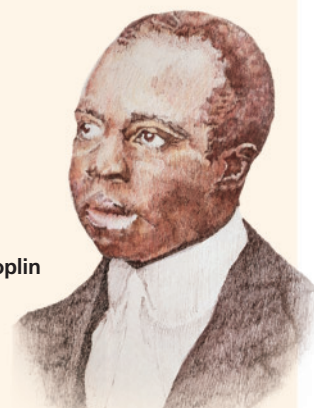
**Inferences** How do you think movies contributed to mass culture?

## America's HERITAGE

### RAGTIME

Tired of slow waltz music, young people eagerly embraced ragtime at the turn of the century. The name probably came from a description of the rhythm of black dance music as “ragged time.” Ragtime’s exciting beat inspired the names of such songs as “Irresistible Fox Trot Rag,” “That Fascinating Rag,” and “That Nifty Rag.”

Ragtime had an enormous influence on American music. Throughout the 20th century, American musical styles such as jazz, blues, rock-and-roll, rap, and rhythm-and-blues built on the style of ragtime.



Scott Joplin

## Section 4 Assessment

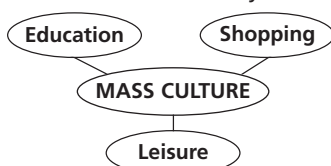
### 1. Terms & Names

#### Explain the significance of:

- mass culture
- Joseph Pulitzer
- William Randolph Hearst
- department store
- mail-order catalog
- leisure
- vaudeville
- ragtime

### 2. Taking Notes

Use a diagram like the one below to note the changes that created a mass culture at the turn of the century.



### 3. Main Ideas

- What did dime novels and newspapers have in common?
- How did new technologies change the way people bought goods?
- What did visitors see at world’s fairs?

### 4. Critical Thinking

**Making Inferences** Why did mass culture emerge during this period?

#### THINK ABOUT

- the impact of newspapers
- advertising and catalogs
- the development of leisure time

### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

#### ART

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

Research a world’s fair from the turn of the century. Then make a **poster** or write a **newspaper advertisement** that will attract people to the fair.