Module 6: A Nation Grows - 1877 to the 1900s
Topic 1 Content: Urbanization Notes

Introduction

Urbanization describes rapid growth in cities. Technological advances during the Nineteenth Century caused rapid urbanization. In addition, immigrants migrated to American cities because they provided a place where unskilled laborers could find factory jobs. Urbanization happened so quickly that immigrant workers made up more than half of the total population in eighteen major cities.

In this interactivity, click each tab to explore how the American Movement began, how ethnic communities developed, and how African Americans migrated to cities to escape hardship and oppression.

American Movement

The government sponsored the American Movement as a social campaign to help immigrants assimilate. Assimilation is a process in which the people of wide-ranging cultures begin to resemble the dominant culture. For example, educational facilities provided programs to teach immigrants skills they needed for citizenship. In addition, school-aged children took classes like English, American history, government, etiquette, and cooking. Thirty states passed laws requiring Americanization programs.

Image: Immigrant school in Boston, Massachusetts

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Ethnic Communities

Many immigrants did not wish to abandon their cultural traditions, so they lived in ethnic communities. In these communities, immigrants spoke their native language and practiced their traditional religion and customs. As a result, many ethnic neighborhoods became overcrowded.

Image: Little Italy, New York City

Major Cities

Urbanization

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Between 1890 and 1910, more than 200,000 African Americans migrated into Midwestern and Northeastern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and New York. Many people chose to migrate because they wanted to escape economic hardship, racial violence, and political oppression. Once in the cities, they experienced tensions and competition between different races and immigrants.

Image: African Americans in city life

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