

# The Dawn of Mass Culture

## MAIN IDEA

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

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Today, the United States has a worldwide impact on mass culture.

## Terms & Names

- Joseph Pulitzer
- William Randolph Hearst
- Ashcan school
- Mark Twain
- rural free delivery (RFD)

## One American's Story

Along the Brooklyn seashore, on a narrow sandbar just nine miles from busy Manhattan, rose the most famous urban amusement center, Coney Island. In 1886, its main developer, George Tilyou, bragged, “If Paris is France, then Coney Island . . . is the world.” Indeed, tens of thousands of visitors mobbed Coney Island after work each evening and on Sundays and holidays. When Luna Park, a spectacular amusement park on Coney Island, opened in May 1903, a reporter described the scene.

### A PERSONAL VOICE BRUCE BLEN

“[Inside the park was] an enchanted, storybook land of trellises, columns, domes, minarets, lagoons, and lofty aerial flights. And everywhere was life—a pageant of happy people; and everywhere was color—a wide harmony of orange and white and gold. . . . It was a world removed—shut away from the sordid clatter and turmoil of the streets.”

—quoted in *Amusing the Million*

Coney Island offered Americans a few hours of escape from the hard work week. A schoolteacher who walked fully dressed into the ocean explained her unusual behavior by saying, “It has been a hard year at school, and when I saw the big crowd here, everyone with the brakes off, the spirit of the place got the better of me.” The end of the 19th century saw the rise of a “mass culture” in the United States.



▲ The sprawling amusement center at Coney Island became a model for urban amusement parks.

## American Leisure

Middle-class Americans from all over the country shared experiences as new leisure activities, nationwide advertising campaigns, and the rise of a consumer culture began to level regional differences. As the 19th century drew to a close, many Americans fought off city congestion and dull industrial work by enjoying amusement parks, bicycling, new forms of theater, and spectator sports.

**AMUSEMENT PARKS** To meet the recreational needs of city dwellers, Chicago, New York City, and other cities began setting aside precious green space for outdoor enjoyment. Many cities built small playgrounds and playing fields throughout their neighborhoods for their citizens' enjoyment.

Some amusement parks were constructed on the outskirts of cities. Often built by trolley-car companies that sought more passengers, these parks boasted picnic grounds and a variety of rides. The roller coaster drew daredevil customers to Coney Island in 1884, and the first Ferris wheel drew enthusiastic crowds to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Clearly, many Americans were ready for new and innovative forms of entertainment—and a whole panorama of recreational activities soon became available.

**BICYCLING AND TENNIS** With their huge front wheels and solid rubber tires, the first American bicycles challenged their riders. Because a bump might toss the cyclist over the handlebars, bicycling began as a male-only sport. However, the 1885 manufacture of the first commercially successful "safety bicycle," with its smaller wheels and air-filled tires, made the activity more popular. And the Victor safety bicycle, with a dropped frame and no crossbar, held special appeal to women.

Abandoning their tight corsets, women bicyclists donned shirtwaists (tailored blouses) and "split" skirts in order to cycle more comfortably. This attire soon became popular for daily wear. The bicycle also freed women from the scrutiny of the ever-present chaperone. The suffragist Susan B. Anthony declared, "I think [bicycling] has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. . . . It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance." Fifty thousand men and women had taken to cycles by 1888. Two years later 312 American firms turned out 10 million bikes in one year. **A**

Americans took up the sport of tennis as enthusiastically as they had taken up cycling. The modern version of this sport originated in North Wales in 1873. A year later, the United States saw its first tennis match. The socialite Florence Harriman recalled that in the 1880s her father returned from England with one of New York's first tennis sets. At first, neighbors thought the elder Harriman had installed the nets to catch birds.

Hungry or thirsty after tennis or cycling? Turn-of-the-century enthusiasts turned to new snacks with recognizable brand names. They could munch on a Hershey chocolate bar, first sold in 1900, and wash down the chocolate with a Coca-Cola®. An Atlanta pharmacist originally formulated the drink as a cure for headaches in 1886. The ingredients included extracts from Peruvian coca leaves as well as African cola nuts.

*"Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will"*

THE CARPENTERS' UNION,  
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

**MAIN IDEA**

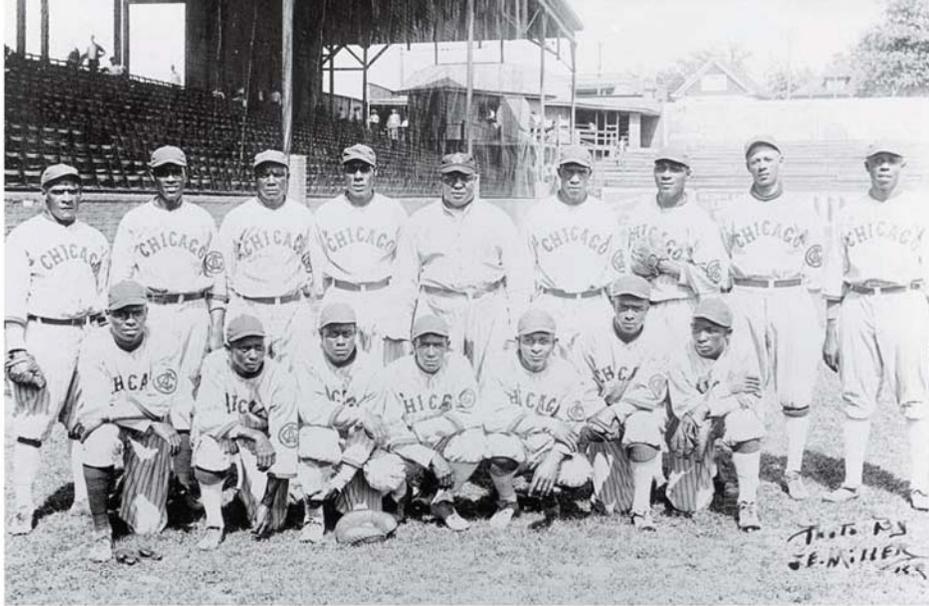
**Making Inferences**

**A** How did the mass production of bicycles change women's lives?

Bicycling and other new sports became fads in the late 1800s.



The Negro  
Leagues were  
first formed in  
1920.



**SPECTATOR SPORTS** Americans not only participated in new sports, but became avid fans of spectator sports, especially boxing and baseball. Though these two sports had begun as popular informal activities, by the turn of the 20th century they had become profitable businesses. Fans who couldn't attend an important boxing match jammed barbershops and hotel lobbies to listen to telegraphed transmissions of the contest's highlights.

**BASEBALL** New rules transformed baseball into a professional sport. In 1845, Alexander J. Cartwright, an amateur player, organized a club in New York City and set down regulations that used aspects of an English sport called rounders. Five years later, 50 baseball clubs had sprung up in the United States, and New York alone boasted 12 clubs in the mid-1860s.

In 1869, a professional team named the Cincinnati Red Stockings toured the country. Other clubs soon took to the road, which led to the formation of the National League in 1876 and the American League in 1900. In the first World Series, held in 1903, the Boston Pilgrims beat the Pittsburgh Pirates. African-American baseball players, who were excluded from both leagues because of racial discrimination, formed their own clubs and two leagues—the Negro National League and the Negro American League.

The novelist Mark Twain called baseball “the very symbol . . . and visible expression of the drive and push and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.” By the 1890s, baseball had a published game schedule, official rules, and a standard-sized diamond. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Drawing  
Conclusions**

**B** Why do you think sports were so popular among Americans at the turn of the century?

## The Spread of Mass Culture

As increasing numbers of Americans attended school and learned to read, the cultural vistas of ordinary Americans expanded. Art galleries, libraries, books, and museums brought new cultural opportunities to more people. Other advances fostered mass entertainment. New media technology led to the release of hundreds of motion pictures. Mass-production printing techniques gave birth to thousands of books, magazines, and newspapers.

**MASS CIRCULATION NEWSPAPERS** Looking for ways to captivate readers' attention, American newspapers began using sensational headlines. For example, to introduce its story about the horrors of the Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood of 1889, in which more than 2,000 people died, one newspaper used the headline “THE VALLEY OF DEATH.”

**Joseph Pulitzer**, a Hungarian immigrant who had bought the *New York World* in 1883, pioneered popular innovations, such as a large Sunday edition,

### MAIN IDEA

#### Drawing Conclusions

**C** How did the *World* and the *Journal* attract readers?

comics, sports coverage, and women's news. Pulitzer's paper emphasized "sin, sex, and sensation" in an attempt to surpass his main competitor, the wealthy **William Randolph Hearst**, who had purchased the *New York Morning Journal* in 1895. Hearst, who already owned the *San Francisco Examiner*, sought to outdo Pulitzer by filling the *Journal* with exaggerated tales of personal scandals, cruelty, hypnotism, and even an imaginary conquest of Mars. **C**

The escalation of their circulation war drove both papers to even more sensational news coverage. By 1898, the circulation of each paper had reached more than one million copies a day.

**PROMOTING FINE ARTS** By 1900, at least one art gallery graced every large city. Some American artists, including Philadelphian Thomas Eakins, began to embrace realism, an artistic school that attempted to portray life as it is really lived. Eakins had studied anatomy with medical students and used painstaking geometric perspective in his work. By the 1880s, Eakins was also using photography to make realistic studies of people and animals.

In the early 20th century, the **Ashcan school** of American art, led by Eakins's student Robert Henri, painted urban life and working people with gritty realism and no frills. Both Eakins and the Ashcan school, however, soon were challenged by the European development known as abstract art, a direction that most people found difficult to understand.

In many cities, inhabitants could walk from a new art gallery to a new public library, sometimes called "the poor man's university." By 1900, free circulating libraries in America numbered in the thousands.

### History Through

#### Art

#### THE CHAMPION SINGLE SCULLS (MAX SCHMITT IN A SINGLE SCULL) (1871)

This painting by Thomas Eakins is an example of the realist movement—an artistic school that aimed at portraying people and environments as they really are.

**What realistic details do you see portrayed in this painting?**





▲ Highly popular dime novels often featured adventure stories.

**POPULAR FICTION** As literacy rates rose, scholars debated the role of literature in society. Some felt that literature should uplift America’s literary tastes, which tended toward crime tales and Western adventures.

Most people preferred to read light fiction. Such books sold for a mere ten cents, hence their name, “dime novels.” Dime novels typically told glorified adventure tales of the West and featured heroes like Edward Wheeler’s *Deadwood Dick*. Wheeler published his first *Deadwood Dick* novel in 1877 and in less than a decade produced over 30 more. **D**

Some readers wanted a more realistic portrayal of American life. Successful writers of the era included Sarah Orne Jewett, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Willa Cather. Most portrayed characters less polished than the upper-class men and women of Henry James’s and

Edith Wharton’s novels. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, the novelist and humorist better known as **Mark Twain**, inspired a host of other young authors when he declared his independence of “literature and all that bosh.” Yet, some of his books have become classics of American literature. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example, remains famed for its rendering of life along the Mississippi River.

Although art galleries and libraries attempted to raise cultural standards, many Americans had scant interest in high culture—and others did not have access to it. African Americans, for example, were excluded from visiting many museums and other white-controlled cultural institutions.

## New Ways to Sell Goods

Along with enjoying new leisure activities, Americans also changed the way they shopped. Americans at the turn of the 20th century witnessed the beginnings of the shopping center, the development of department and chain stores, and the birth of modern advertising.

**URBAN SHOPPING** Growing city populations made promising targets for enterprising merchants. The nation’s earliest form of a shopping center opened in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1890. The glass-topped arcade contained four levels of jewelry, leather goods, and stationery shops. The arcade also provided band music on Sundays so that Cleveland residents could spend their Sunday afternoons strolling through the elegant environment and gazing at the window displays.

Retail shopping districts formed where public transportation could easily bring shoppers from outlying areas. To anchor these retail shopping districts, ambitious merchants started something quite new, the modern department store.

**THE DEPARTMENT STORE** Marshall Field of Chicago first brought the department store concept to America. While working as a store clerk, Field found that paying close attention to women customers could increase sales considerably. In 1865, Field opened his own store, featuring several floors of specialized departments. Field’s motto was “Give the lady what she wants.” Field also pioneered the bargain basement, selling bargain goods that were “less expensive but reliable.”

**THE CHAIN STORE** Department stores prided themselves on offering a variety of personal services. New chain stores—retail stores offering the same merchandise under the same ownership—sold goods for less by buying in quantity and limiting personal service. In the 1870s, F. W. Woolworth found that if he offered an item at a very low price, “the consumer would purchase it on the spur of the

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**D** What factors contributed to the popularity of dime novels?

#### Vocabulary

**consumer:** a person who purchases goods or services for direct use or ownership

moment” because “it was only a nickel.” By 1911, the Woolworth chain boasted 596 stores and sold more than a million dollars in goods a week.

**ADVERTISING** An explosion in advertising also heralded modern consumerism. Expenditures for advertising were under \$10 million a year in 1865 but increased tenfold, to \$95 million, by 1900. Patent medicines grabbed the largest number of advertising lines, followed by soaps and baking powders. In addition to newspapers and magazines, advertisers used ingenious methods to push products. Passengers riding the train between New York and Philadelphia in the 1870s might see signs for Dr. Drake’s Plantation Bitters on barns, houses, billboards, and even rocks.

**CATALOGS AND RFD** Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck brought retail merchandise to small towns. Ward’s catalog, launched in 1872, grew from a single sheet the first year to a booklet with ordering instructions in ten languages. Richard Sears started his company in 1886. Early Sears catalogs stated that the company received “hundreds of orders every day from young and old who never [before] sent away for goods.” By 1910, about 10 million Americans shopped by mail. The United States Post Office boosted mail-order businesses. In 1896 the Post Office introduced a **rural free delivery (RFD)** system that brought packages directly to every home.

The turn of the 20th century saw prosperity that caused big changes in Americans’ daily lives. At the same time, the nation’s growing industrial sector faced problems that called for reform.

**NOW & THEN**

**CATALOG SHOPPING**

Catalogs were a novelty when Sears and Montgomery Ward arrived on the scene. However, by the mid-1990s, more than 13 billion catalogs filled the mailboxes of Americans.

Today, the world of mail-order business is changing. After over 100 years of operation, Montgomery Ward filed for bankruptcy on December 28, 2000.

Online shopping is challenging mail-order commerce today. Online retail sales grew from \$500 million in 1998 to over \$80 billion in 2005. Still, mail-order sales are about twice this amount. What do online shoppers order? Computer equipment and software make up 20 percent of online spending.

**SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT**

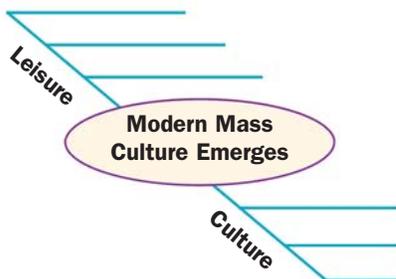
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Joseph Pulitzer
- William Randolph Hearst
- Ashcan school
- Mark Twain
- rural free delivery (RFD)

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Re-create the spider diagram below. Add examples to each category.



Why is mass culture often described as a democratic phenomenon?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. SUMMARIZING**

How did American methods of selling goods change at the turn of the 20th century?

**Think About:**

- how city people did their shopping
- how rural residents bought goods
- how merchants advertised their products

**4. ANALYZING VISUAL SOURCES**

This cartoon shows the masters of the “new journalism.” According to the cartoonist, where were Pulitzer and Hearst leading American journalism?



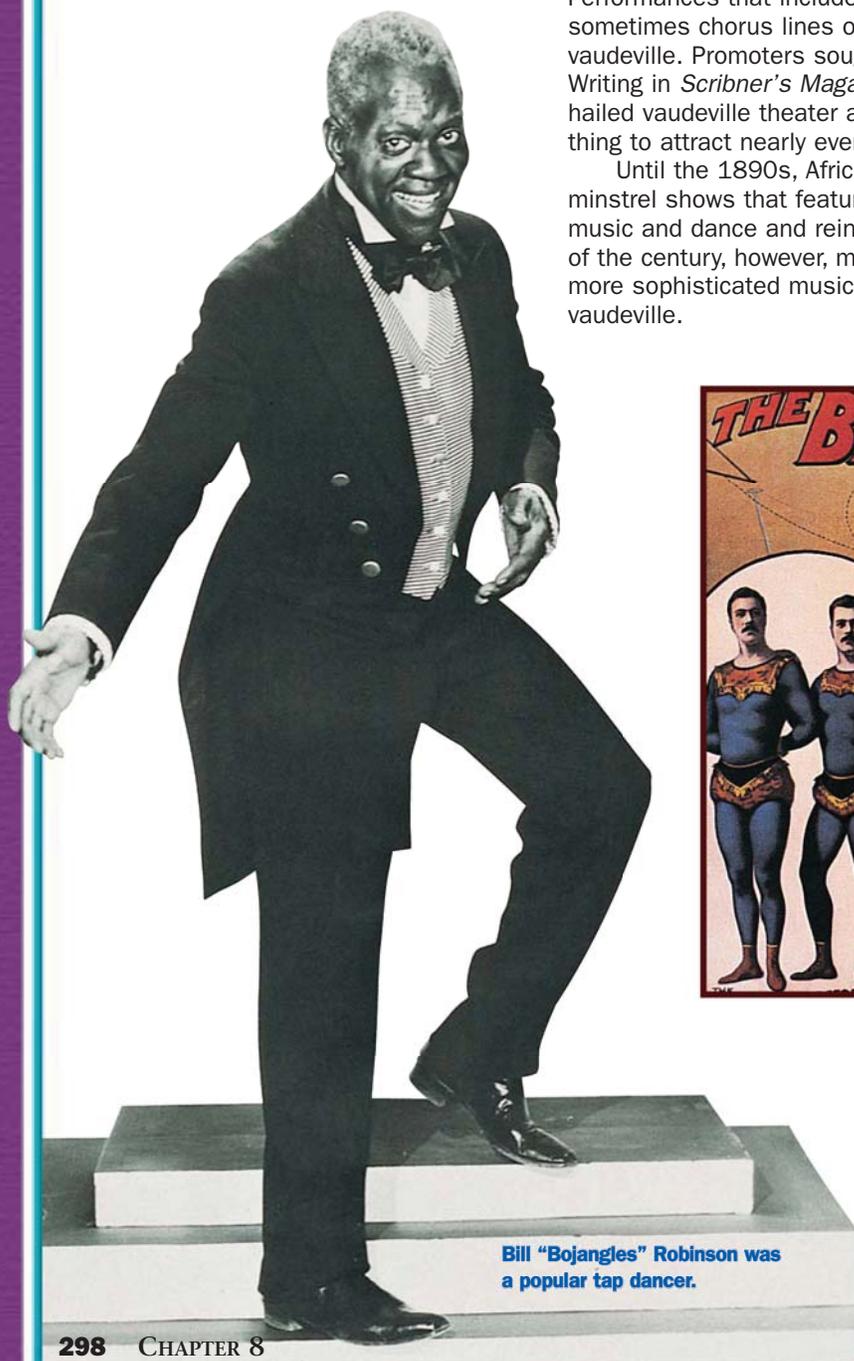
# Going to the Show

As Americans moved from rural areas to cities, they looked for new ways to spend their weekend and evening leisure time. Live theatrical performances brought pleasure to cities and small towns alike. Stars, popular performers who could attract large audiences, compensated for the less-talented supporting actors. Audiences could choose from a wide range of music, drama, circus, and the latest in entertainment—moving pictures.

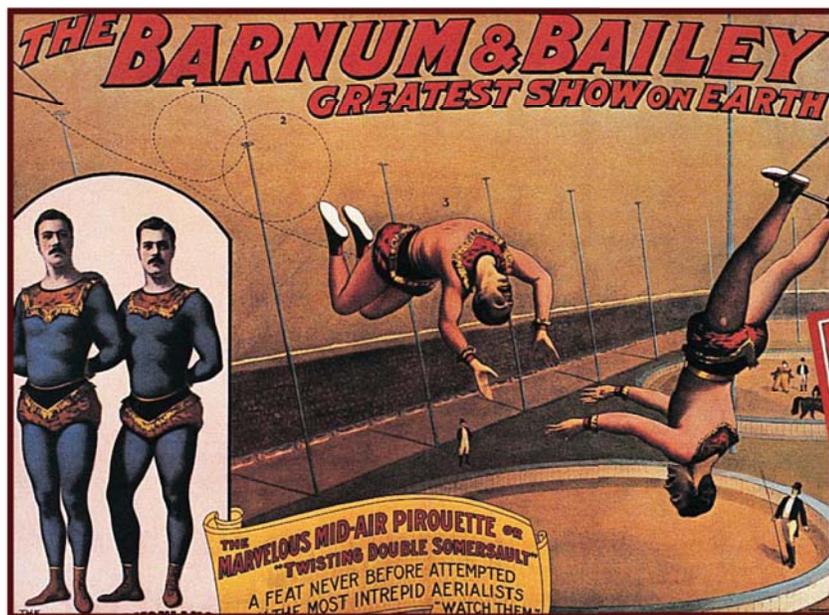
## ◀ VAUDEVILLE THEATER

Performances that included song, dance, juggling, slapstick comedy, and sometimes chorus lines of female performers were characteristic of vaudeville. Promoters sought large audiences with varied backgrounds. Writing in *Scribner's Magazine* in October 1899, actor Edwin Milton Royle hailed vaudeville theater as “an American invention” that offered something to attract nearly everyone.

Until the 1890s, African-American performers filled roles mainly in minstrel shows that featured exaggerated imitations of African-American music and dance and reinforced racist stereotypes of blacks. By the turn of the century, however, minstrel shows had largely been replaced by more sophisticated musicals, and many black performers entertained in vaudeville.

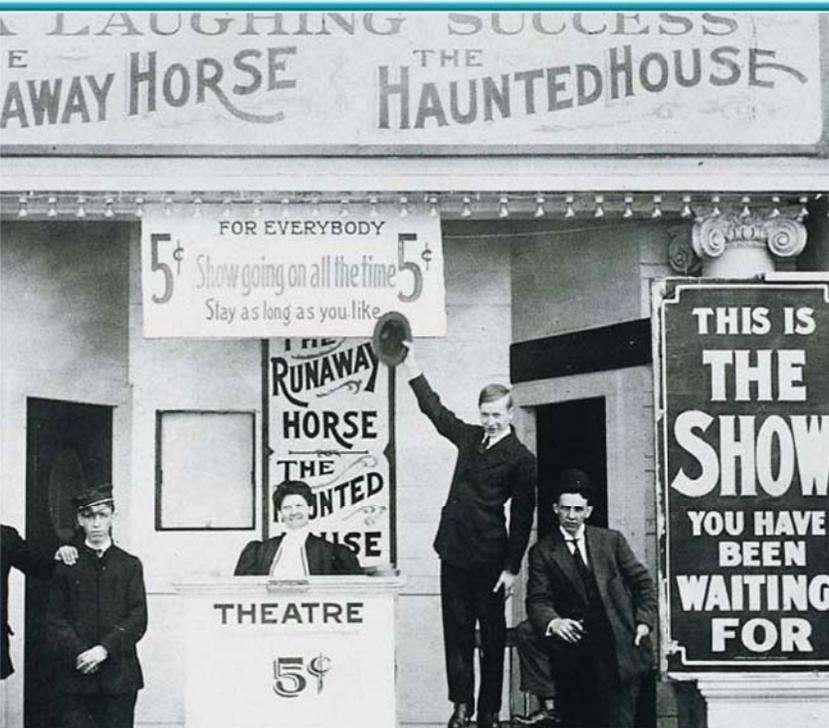


Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was a popular tap dancer.



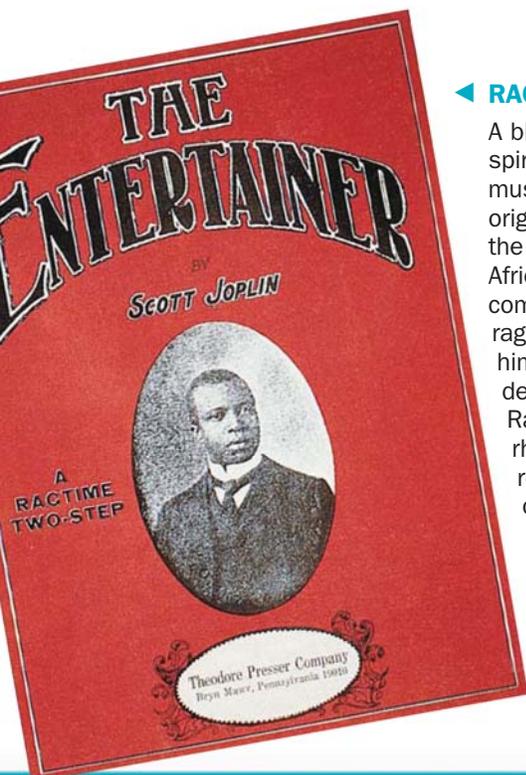
## ▲ THE CIRCUS

The biggest spectacle of all was often the annual visit of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which its founders, P. T. Barnum and Anthony Bailey, touted as “The Greatest Show on Earth.” Established in 1871, the circus arrived by railroad and staged a parade through town to advertise the show.



### ▲ THE SILVER SCREEN

The first films, one-reel, ten minute sequences, consisted mostly of vaudeville skits or faked newsreels. In 1903, the first modern film—an eight minute silent feature called *The Great Train Robbery*—debuted in five-cent theaters called nickelodeons. By showing a film as often as 16 times a day, entrepreneurs could generate greater profits than by a costly stage production. By 1907, an estimated 3,000 nickelodeons dotted the country.



### ◀ RAGTIME MUSIC

A blend of African-American spirituals and European musical forms, ragtime originated in the 1880s in the saloons of the South. African-American pianist and composer Scott Joplin's ragtime compositions made him famous in the first decade of the 1900s. Ragtime led later to jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock 'n' roll. These forms of popular American culture spread worldwide, creating new dances and fashions that emulated the image of "loud, loose, American rebel."

## DATA

### FILE

#### A LOOK AT THE FACTS

A shorter workweek allowed many Americans more time for leisure activities, and they certainly took advantage of it.



- In 1890, an average of 60,000 fans attended professional baseball games daily.
- In 1893, a crowd of 50,000 attended the Princeton-Yale football game.
- *A Trip to Chinatown*, one of the popular new musical comedies, ran for an amazing 650 performances in the 1890s.
- In 1900, 3 million phonograph records of Broadway-produced musical comedies were sold.
- The love of the popular musicals contributed to the sale of \$42 million worth of musical instruments in 1900.
- By 1900, almost 500 men's social clubs existed. Nine hundred college fraternity and sorority chapters had over 150,000 members.

#### Changes in the U.S. Workweek

Year	Hours per week
1860	66
1890	60
1920	51

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States

#### THINKING CRITICALLY

##### CONNECT TO HISTORY

- 1. Interpreting Data** Study the statistics in the Data File. What summary statements about the culture and attitudes of this time period can you make? Is this a time in history when you would like to have lived? Why or why not?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R27.

##### CONNECT TO TODAY

- 2. Chronological Order** Trace the development and impact on the rest of the world of one area—music, theater, or film—of popular American culture. Use a time line from the turn of the 20th to the 21st century with "United States developments" on one side and "world impacts" on the other.



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