# Urban Society in 19th Century

### Immigration

As in the 40s and 50s, labor needs were met by new tidal waves of immigration. In the latter part of the 19th century, however, immigration changed. Historians often refer to it as **Second Wave Immigration**or the **New Immigration.**The old immigrants came from Ireland and Germany—the new came from southern and Eastern Europe.

This made the new immigrants even morealien to most Americans than the "old" immigrants. For one thing, they didn't speak any English, like the Irish had. For another, they belonged to the Scary Religions that Americans were so sure were conspiring against their Protestant nation and liberties: Catholicism and Judaism. And, finally, they were darkerthan the "old immigrants." In American minds, dark skin equaled "inferiority."

**Nativism** reared its ugly head again, and again immigrants were shuttled off to some of the most disgusting neighborhoods and put to work in some of the hardest, lowest-paying jobs.

At the same time, however, some had learned how to use immigration to their own advantage. Many watched the swarms of desperate, hungry, ragged people shuffling through the docks and saw only dirt, danger, and competition. Others, though, saw votes.Guys like **Boss Tweed**actually had his workers stand on the docks to greet immigrants with a loaf of bread and hot soup. As the immigrants happily chowed down, their benefactors would cheerfully tell them "vote Tammany." And give them a nice little pamphlet. Many couldn't read, but you couldn't mistake Boss Tweed's mug. [What a handsome guy.](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_mlPoGU4VqSk/SkzPI8SptcI/AAAAAAAAGGg/vbP5rNbmM50/s400/boss%2Btobacco.jpg)

Thanks to people like Tweed in various cities (who were called **political bosses**), immigrants received some boons: homes, jobs, applications for citizenship, community projects like parks—even positions on the police force. Yet his **political machine,**called **Tammany Hall,**was also notable for corruption, outright theft, and even employing gangsters. Boss Tweed, for example, hired a several of New York's most hardcore crime lords to be "shoulder-hitters" at his elections—aka thugs who physically bullied voters into casting ballots for Tweed.

### Labor Movements

Immigrants and the working class had other, more savory champions too. Workers started organizing **labor unions**to push for certain rights like fair wages, working hours, and factory conditions. Before the Civil War they had been fairly small, but as industry increased so did the labor force—and more workers represented moremusclefor unions.

The first national union was the **Knights of Labor.**This union deserves a round of applause in history books because of how progressive it was. The whole idea was to organize allworkers, because the more you had behind you, the more of a punch you packed. They included skilled and unskilled workers, men and women, even white and black.

The Knights were the first to demand things that became staples for other unions: an eight-hour workday, fair pay, laws requiring workplaces to be safe and clean, laws preventing children from working, a federal income tax (so the rich would be taxed more than the poor) and government ownership of things like railroads and telegraphs (so people wouldn't be bled dry by the tycoons who owned the monopolies).

The problem with the Knights—and other unions— was that they started to become violent. Who was to blame them? The classic way that strikes were usually put down was the entrance of the U.S. Army, or guys-with-guns armed by the employers. One example is the **Great Railroad Strike of 1877,**where workers across the wholenationwent on strike and totally paralyzed the railroads—that is, until the Army marched in and started shooting. Other employers used hired guns like the **Pinkertons**to put down strikers**.**

The death knell for the Knights came when things exploded—literally—during one of their own strikes in Haymarket Square in Chicago. Someone threw a bomb at the police, and Americans freaked out. They blamed the Knights for the **Haymarket Riot**and the union quickly dissolved.

Others felt that the reason the Knights had failed was because they were too open: they let in the riff-raff. **Samuel Gompers**was one of these: he wanted only skilled workers to unionize, and so formed the **American Federation of Labor**(AFL). The good news is that the AFL received a lot of what it asked for (like more pay for fewer hours) but the bad news is that it barred immigrants, women, and blacks from membership.

### Social Reformers

Other social reformers didn't look to labor—they looked at neighborhoods. Many of these social reformers were women like **Jane Adams.**Adams had been extremely well educated, but left college only to find that she was expected to put aside her wonderful new intellect and skills to become a baby-toting, stay-at-home wife.

"That can't stand." Jane decided. She gathered a number of other middle-class, college-educated women and started the **settlement house**movement, creating **Hull House**in Chicago. The point of this institution was to provide a kind of sanctuary for immigrants. At the same time as pushing for better sanitation and housing in the rancid immigrant slums, Adams offered them a mansion as a kind of community center. At Hull House, immigrants could relax in spacious libraries, take English classes, drop their kids off at kindergarten, and learn all about American history, culture, and current events.

The real point was to better immigrants' conditions—but one of the methods was "Americanization." By teaching them American language and traditions, the idea was to make their integration into society that much smoother. It's not that Adams and her ladies had some deep dark plan to eradicate immigrant culture—they knew that America was a racist place, and the only way to improve one's lot was to look, act, and talk "American."

One important result of the hard work of these interesting women was a new feeling of power. Along with Adams, for example, came **Francis Willard**and her **Women's Christian Temperance Union,**which sought to end social ills by prohibiting alcohol. One exciting woman, **Carrie Nation,**became infamous in the movement for running into bars and smashing bottles with a hatchet. Other women crusaded for an end to evils like prostitution. During this time, they began to feel that progress would move much faster if they had political rights.

In 1890, two activists, **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**and the ever-formidable **Susan B. Anthony**(who fought until she was in her 80s.) formed the **National American Woman Suffrage Association.**This combined two rival groups that had initially split when the **15th Amendment had passed,**with one being forit (hoping that the vote for black men would eventually lead to the vote for all women) and another being against it (feeling betrayed by the black men they had been working to enfranchise).

It was a slow road for these ladies, and they had to deal with a lot of taunting from both men andwomen. Many Americans thought that women needed to stay at home—if they were running around the streets campaigning all the time, who would take care of the kiddies? Cartoons like [this one](http://womenshistory.about.com/library/graphics/suffrage_cartoon1.jpg) showed—often in hilarious ways—the fears people had about women's suffrage.

Yet the ladies didn't give up—they knew they couldn't win with an amendment to the Constitution (Susan B. Anthony had tried, but Capitol Hill was still way too much of an Old Boys' Club), so they campaigned state by state. And, amazingly, it started to work—especially in the west, where hardy frontierswoman had shown their spunk and drive by creating homes in the wilderness, and pushed to be recognized for their spirit.