**Life at the Turn of the 20th Century  
Urbanization, New Technologies, Education, Discrimination, Mass Culture, Consumerism**

**Science and Urban Life**

* By the turn of the 20th century, four out of ten Americans lived in cities. In response to urbanization, technological advances began to meet communication, transportation, and space demands.

**Skyscrapers**

* Skyscrapers emerged after elevators & steel skeletons to bear weight were invented. Examples include Daniel Burnham’s Flatiron Building in NYC and Louis Sullivan’s Wainwright Building in St. Louis. The skyscraper, America’s greatest contribution to architecture, solved the issue of how best to use limited and expensive space.

**Electric Transit**

* Changes in transportation allowed cities to spread outward. By the turn of the century, intricate networks of electric streetcars – also called trolley cars – ran from outlying neighborhoods to downtown offices & stores.

**El’s and Subways**

* A few large cities moved their streetcars far above street level, creating elevated or El trains. Other cities built subways by moving their rail lines underground

**Bridges and Parks**

* Steel-cable suspension bridges, like the Brooklyn Bridge, also brought cities’ sections closer. Some urban planners sought to include landscaped areas and parks. Frederick Law Olmsted was instrumental in drawing up plans for Central park, NYC.

**City Planning: Chicago**

* Daniel Burnham oversaw the transformation of Chicago’s lakefront from swampy wasteland to elegant parks strung along Lake Michigan. Today Chicago’s lakefront is one of the most beautiful shorelines in North America.

**New Technologies**

* New developments in communication brought the nation closer. Advances in printing, aviation, and photography helped speed the transfer of information.

**A Revolution In Printing**

* By 1890, the literacy rate in the U.S. was nearly 90%. American mills began to produce huge quantities of cheap paper from wood pulp. Electrical web-presses printed on both sides of paper at the same time. Faster production and lower costs made newspapers and magazines more affordable. Most papers sold for 1 cent.

**Airplanes**

* In the early 20th century, brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright, experimented with engines and aircrafts. They built a biplane and on December 17, 1903, they flew it for 12 seconds over 120 feet. Two years later, they were making 30 minute flights and by 1920, the U.S. was using airmail flights regularly.

**Explosion of Photography**

* Before 1880, photography was a professional activity. Subjects could not move and the film had to be developed immediately. Then George Eastman invented lighter weight equipment and more versatile film. In 1888, he introduced his Kodak camera. It cost $25 camera and came with a 100-picture roll of film.

**Expanding Public Education**

* Between 1865 and 1895, states passed laws requiring 12 to 16 weeks of annual education for students ages 8-14, but the curriculum was poor and the teachers were usually not qualified. However, the number of kindergartens expanded from 200 in 1880 to 3,000 in 1900

**High School Enrollment**

* High schools expanded their curriculum to include science, civics and social studies. By 1900, 500,000 teenagers were enrolled in high schools.

**Racial Discrimination**

* African Americans were usually excluded from secondary education. In 1890, less than 1% attended high school. By 1910, that figured had reached only 3%.

**Education for Immigrants**

* Unlike African Americans, immigrants were encouraged to go to school. Most immigrants sent their children to public schools. In addition, thousands of adult immigrants attended night schools to learn English.

**Expanding Higher Education**

* In 1900, less than 3% of America’s youth attended college. Between 1880 and 1920 college enrollments more than quadrupled. Professional schools were established for law and medicine

**African American Universities**

* After the Civil War, thousands of African Americans pursued higher education, though excluded from white schools.
  + Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee University to provide technical training.
  + W.E.B. Dubois founded the Niagara Movement to provide liberal arts education to blacks.

**Segregation**

* By the turn of century, Southern states had adopted a broad system of legal discrimination. Blacks had to deal with voting restrictions, Jim Crow laws, Supreme Court set-backs, and physical violence.

**Voting Restrictions**

* All Southern states imposed new voting restrictions and denied legal equality to African Americans. Some states limited the vote to those who could read or pay a poll tax.

**Jim Crow Laws**

* Southern states passed segregation laws to separate white and black people in public and private facilities. These laws came to be known as “Jim Crow Laws.” Racial segregation was practiced in schools, hospitals, parks, and transportation systems throughout the South.

**Plessy v. Ferguson**

* In 1896, a legal case reached the U.S. Supreme Court to test the constitutionality of segregation. In Plessy v. Ferguson the Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of races was legal and did not violate the 14th Amendment.

**Informal Rules and Customs**

* Blacks faced legal discrimination as well as informal rules and customs meant to humiliate them.
  + Whites were never to shake the hand of an African American.
  + Blacks had to yield the sidewalk to whites.
  + Blacks had to remove their hats in the presence of whites.

**Violence**

* African Americans who did not follow the rules could face severe punishment or death. Between 1882-1892, more than 1,400 black men and women were shot, burned, or lynched. Lynching peaked in the 1880s and 90s but continued well into the 20th century.

**Discrimination in the North**

* While most African Americans lived in the segregated South, many blacks migrated to the North in hopes of better jobs & equality. However, the North had its own brand of racism. B blacks got low paying jobs and lived in segregated neighborhoods.

**Discrimination in the West**

* Discrimination in the West was most often directed against Mexican or Asian immigrants. Mexicans were forced into debt peonage – a system of forced labor. Asians were increasingly excluded from mainstream society.

**Dawn of a Mass Culture**

* Many middle class Americans fought off city congestion and dull industrial work by enjoying beaches, amusement parks, bicycling, tennis and spectator sports. American leisure was developing into a multi-million dollar industry.

**Amusement Parks**

* To meet the recreational needs of city dwellers, many cities began setting aside land for parks. Amusement parks were constructed on the outskirts of cities. These parks had picnic grounds and a variety of rides

**Bicycling and Tennis**

* After the introduction of the “safety bike” in 1885, Americans increasingly enjoyed biking. By 1890, 312 companies made over 10,000,000 bikes. Tennis also was very popular in the late 19th century

**Spectator Sports**

* Americans also became avid fans of spectator sports. Baseball and boxing became profitable businesses. Mark Twain called baseball, “the very symbol of the booming 19th century.”

**Newspapers**

* Mass-production printing techniques led to the publication of millions of books, magazines, and newspapers. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were   
  two leading publishers whose competition led to more and more sensational newspaper reporting.

**Promoting Fine Arts**

* By 1900, free circulating public libraries numbered in the thousands and most major cities had art galleries. In the early 20th century, the Ashcan School of American Art painted urban life.

**Popular Fiction**

* “Dime” novels were popular and inexpensive. Most of these focused on adventure tales and heroes of the west. Some readers preferred a more realistic portrayal from authors Mark Twain, Jack London, and Willa Cather.

**Growing Consumerism**

* The turn of the century witnessed the beginnings of the shopping center, department and chain stores, and the birth of modern advertising.

**The Department Store**

* Marshall Field of Chicago brought the first department store to America. Field’s motto was “Give the lady what she wants.” Field also pioneered the “bargain basement” concept.

**Chain Stores**

* In the 1870s, F.W. Woolworth found that if he offered an item at a low price, “the consumer would purchase it on the spur of the moment.” By 1911, the Woolworth chain had 596 stores and sold $1,000,000 per week.

**Advertising**

* Expenditures for advertising were under $10 million a year in 1865, but increased to $95 million by 1900.
* Ads appeared in newspapers, magazines and on billboards

**Catalogs and RFD**

* Montgomery Ward and Sears were two pioneers in catalog sales. By 1910, ten million Americans shopped by mail. In 1896 the Post Office introduced a rural free delivery (RFD) system that brought packages directly to every home.