Chapter 18

**[THE BIG IDEA] How did the changes wrought by industrialization shape Americans’ identities, beliefs, and culture?**

Some people think history happens at the top: that it’s about the president, Congress, wars, and economic policy. That’s partly true, but this book seeks to persuade you that *everything* has a history. Sports, for example: the great American pastimes of baseball, football, and basketball arose during industrialization. Beginning as amateur games to promote masculine strength in an era of office work, they grew into professional sports leagues that became a flourishing part of consumer culture.

Chapter 18 explores some of the ways industrialization modernized American life. The older values of duty, thrift, and hard work gradually gave way to leisure, spending, and fun—along with new political ideals. As Americans enjoyed outdoor exercise, they began to set aside national parks, where people could admire the splendor of the country’s landscapes. With gender expectations changing, women created nationwide grassroots movements for reform. And women, African Americans, and working-class men won more access to high school, college, and university education.

Amid intense economic competition, supporters of Social Darwinism tried to apply Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to human society. Describing natural “laws” of competition, they claimed humanity could only progress through a ruthless struggle for survival of the fittest. Social Darwinists considered it unscientific to engage in reform or try to alleviate poverty. Their ideas helped build support for eugenics, a so-called science of human breeding.

With both good and bad results, then, Americans showed new enthusiasm for science, but they also adapted religious faith for a modern era. Christian missionaries from the United States began to exert global influence. Catholics and Jews built thriving institutions and exercised new public clout. Faced with the challenges of modernity, Protestants divided. Some joined a new movement called “fundamentalism”; some called for political engagement through the Social Gospel; others helped create the Salvation Army.

From this chapter, I hope you’ll gain a new sense of how many of the institutions and ideas that we take for granted today first emerged in the era of industrialization.