# 3

INDUSTRY TRIUMPHANT/ CIVIC FAILURE

1865–1930

IN 1876 THE UNITED STATES CELEBRATED its centennial year with a great world's fair in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. Ten million people came from across the country and around the world to see the fair and America's second largest city. Philadelphians had taken the lead in organizing the fair and its success was a source of enormous pride. Visitors saw a city that was among the world's great manufacturing centers. Its economy shaped the city's structure and attracted a staggering population, far exceeding anything that had come before. From 1860 to 1930 Philadelphia's population jumped from 566,000 to 1.9 million and filled out much of its open space. Center City expanded into a modern and diversified downtown with skyscrapers and landmark civic buildings. Although the economic prosperity raised people's material standard of living, compared with other large cities, Philadelphia failed to live up to its potential. In this era prosperity eclipsed the public welfare. With responsible leadership, conditions could have been far better.

Private City/Public City

In the decades after the war, Philadelphia nurtured an extraordinarily productive and profitable economy. By the early twentieth century, the manufacturing sector produced almost $750 million of goods, employing 250,000 wage and 41,000 salaried workers. The city was home to such nationally famous consumer brands as Stetson hats, Fels-Naptha soap, Whitman's chocolates, Burpee seeds, and the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies' Home*

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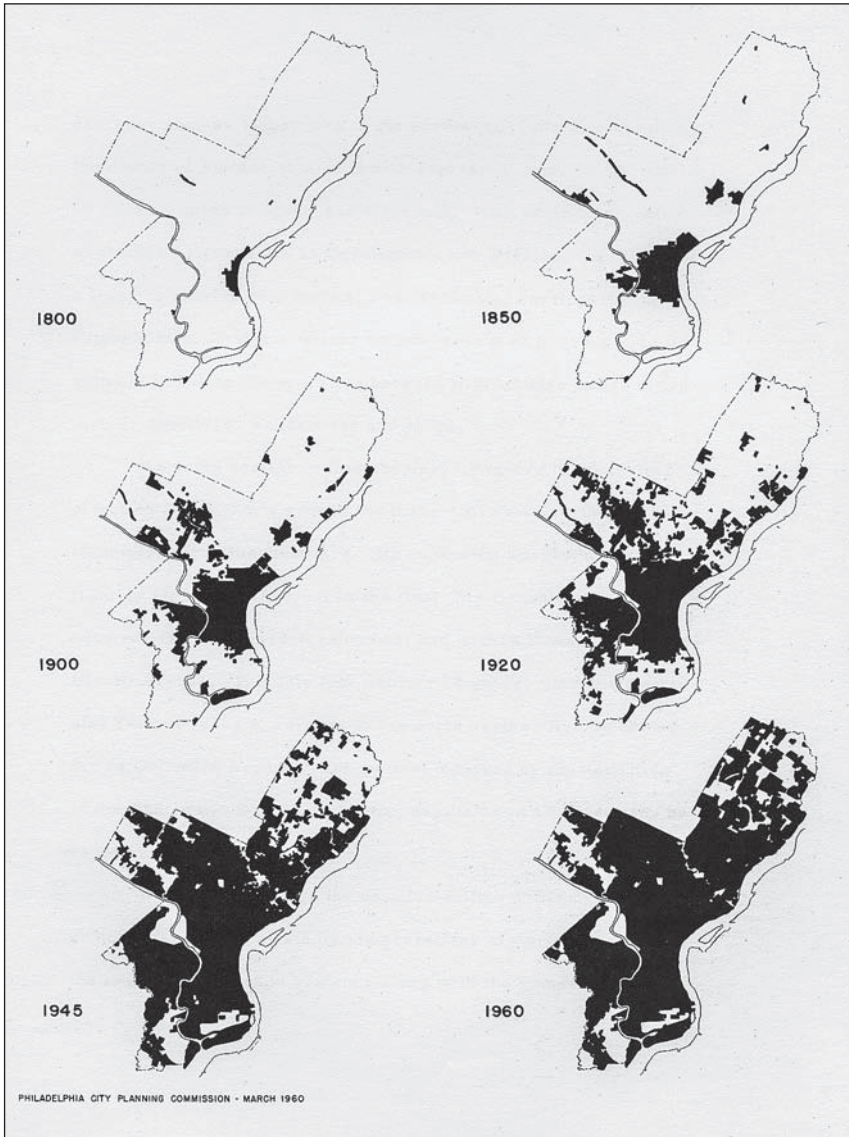
This sequence of maps, using the modern boundaries, shows the growth of the city from 1800 to 1960. Until 1900 the population remained compact. After 1900 the electric trolley and subway/elevated rapid transit enabled the population to spread farther out. But even in 1945 the city's fringe boasted considerable open space, especially in the Northeast. (City Planning Commission, *Comprehensive Plan: The Physical Development Plan for the City of Philadelphia* [Philadelphia, 1960]. Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.)

Many women worked in manufacturing, mostly in textile and garment shops. In this photograph taken around 1910, women trim hats at the mammoth Stetson factory at Fourth and Montgomery Streets in Kensington. Notice the large, well-lit room, an improvement over the dark and crowded conditions of many sweatshops and mills. John B. Stetson, a leader in what was known as "welfare capitalism," offered his workers amenities and benefits. (Library Company of Philadelphia.)

Journal. Three attributes accounted for the strength of the manufacturing base: its diversity, its flexibility, and its decentralized structure. The diversity meant firms and workers possessed an astonishing array of technical skills that often could be transferred from one product to another; it also meant that the economy could absorb cyclical slowdowns in one sector. The flexibility permitted the manufacture of specialized or customized products, produced in small batches, which made it easy to shift production to meet new styles. The decentralized structure meant thousands of small businesses, with an ability and willingness to adapt products and processes, anchored the manufacturing sector. Those attributes led to a manufacturing style that was profitable for firms and provided a large number of skilled jobs for workers.[1]

The strength of this system can be demonstrated in two great industrial complexes: textiles and garments, and metalworking and heavy machinery. Textile production remained Philadelphia's largest industry by far. Early in the new century, textiles employed sixty-five thousand people in the region, accounting for 10 percent of the nation's textile workforce and almost a quarter of the city's wage earners. But firms remained small, with an industry average of eighty-three workers specializing in one phase of production, such as spin-

ning, weaving, knitting, dyeing, or finishing. Independent pattern designers worked closely with proprietors to introduce new styles. Thus, the entire industry was highly interdependent and firms relied heavily on the pool of experienced skilled workers, male and female, to meet the demand. Kensington held the largest concentration of textile factories and workers; with more than a hundred thousand people living cheek by jowl in narrow row houses, it was essentially a dense mill town in the midst of a large city.

The large garment industry, clustered in Center City and adjacent Southwark, complemented textiles. German Jewish owners dominated the business, with most of the work done by more recently arrived Russian Jews and Italians. Here too, a decentralized structure made firms interdependent as people carried goods back and forth between shops and homes, keeping Southwark one of the most overcrowded sections of the city. Competition was fierce and wages low.[2]

Philadelphia was also the center of an interdependent network of machine tool builders, specialty foundries, and machine shops. In 1900, Philadelphia's workforce included thirty-one thousand machinists and metal trades workers. Baldwin Locomotives and William Cramp and Sons, shipbuilders, anchored the industry. For more than half a century, the Baldwin Locomotive Works, the world's largest steam locomotive manufacturer, annually accounted for between 30 and 45 percent of total U.S. output. To roll out a customized locomotive in as few as eight weeks required a large force of skilled designers, draftsmen, tool and die makers, iron molders, blacksmiths, and machinists. By 1900, the Baldwin Locomotive Works sprawled across eight square blocks north and west from Broad and Callowhill, and in 1906, its peak year, more than seventeen thousand workers produced an average of 8.5 engines a day. In addition, the company subcontracted half of its parts, sustaining metalworking shops throughout the district. This interconnected network of firms and men with complementary skills enabled large and small businesses to work together to solve technological problems and contributed to the fourfold increase in the productivity of Baldwin workers.[3]

Philadelphia was also a preeminent center of shipbuilding and machine tools. The city's early lead and strong dominance in the manufacture of stationary steam engines, and the depth of skills among its workers, enabled the city's leading yards to make the transition from wood to steam. Cramp's shipyards in Kensington, which built many of the navy's new iron and steel ships, including the battleship *Maine,* ranked as the nation's largest shipbuilder. Among the most complex of all capital goods, each ship was a custom product. In the mid-1890s the company directly employed about five thousand workers, but several times that number worked for suppliers and contractors that

Hundreds of small, specialty metal shops made parts and components for the city's manufacturers. Typical was the Eagle Builders Iron Works on St. John (now American) Street in Kensington, shown in this photograph taken around 1899. The machinery was powered by a basement steam engine linked to the power shaft that ran along the ceiling of the shop. Leather belts connected the individual machines lined up along the wall to the power shafts. (Library Company of Philadelphia [unidentified photographer].)

were involved in producing a single ship. For example, William Sellers and Company, the nation's preeminent machine tool builders, supplied much of the heavy equipment for firms such as Baldwin and Cramp at its Bush Hill works and at Midvale Steel in Nicetown. At both plants William and his cousin, Coleman, promoted research on tool steels and ways to improve productivity. At Midvale some of this work was turned over to Frederick Winslow Taylor, whose time and motion studies pioneered the field of industrial engineering.[4]

A. Shoenhut and Company exemplified the thousands of specialty firms that dominated niche markets. Albert Shoenhut, son and grandson of toy makers, emigrated from Germany in 1866 and soon began manufacturing toy pianos in a converted storefront, eventually producing thirteen different models, one with thirty-seven keys. In 1883 seventeen men and boys worked in his

small factory. By 1900, with 125 workers, he had built his own factory in Frankford and expanded into novelty toys. Shoenhut's sixty different "Rolly Dollys" had rounded, weighted bottoms that rolled upright when pushed over. In the 1920s, with more than four hundred workers, Shoenhut and Company produced the enormously popular Humpty Dumpty Circus—wooden and papier-mâché circus animals and performers with moveable joints.[5]

In an era before planning and zoning, factories were widely dispersed throughout the city. Nevertheless, specialized patterns of land use emerged. The sorting out of functions that began early in the nineteenth century was fully delineated by the end of the century, leaving a well-defined central business district; areas of deteriorated housing nearby, occupied mostly by recent immigrants and African Americans; industrial districts of factories, mills, and workshops mixed with the working-class population, mostly to the north of Center City; and, farther out, middle-class residential sections made accessible by mass transit.

The key factors shaping the city were the terrain itself, the railroads, mass transit, and Fairmount Park. The lack of natural barriers to expansion, notably in comparison with Boston and New York, enabled Philadelphia to spread easily to the north, south, and west. Four new bridges built across the Schuylkill River right after the Civil War accelerated development to the west, and a grid of streetcar routes converged on an emerging business district. In the 1890s, the streetcar lines consolidated into one company and switched to the more efficient electric trolley, making possible a uniform five-cent fare with free transfers and faster service that led to a surge in ridership. After the Civil War, banks and financial firms concentrated on Chestnut and Walnut between Fourth and Sixth Streets. Law firms clustered opposite Independence Hall, which housed city offices and the courthouse. Stock brokers, importers, and insurance firms dominated two large buildings across the street that further anchored the business district: the ten-story Drexel Building (1888), the city's largest office building at the time, and The Bourse (1895). Nearby could also be found a cluster of the major cultural institutions: the Library Company, American Philosophical Society, Mercantile Library, Franklin Institute, and the Athenaeum.[6]

In the 1880s and 1890s, however, the entire business district drifted farther west toward Broad Street, pulled by several landmark buildings. In 1871 the city committed to build its new City Hall on the ten-acre square that William Penn had set aside for "Buildings of Publick Concerns" at Broad and Market. When Alexander Milne Calder's statue of William Penn was hoisted to the top of City Hall in 1894, it became the tallest building in the world, announcing to all that Philadelphia was one of the world's great and powerful

City Hall, in the foreground of this photograph taken circa 1920, was finally completed in 1904, with considerable cost overruns. The statue of William Penn, by Alexander Milne Calder, at 548 feet, remained the tallest feature of the skyline until 1986. Across from City Hall was the Broad Street Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The train shed, so massive that it became known as the "Chinese Wall," ran west along Filbert Street (now John F. Kennedy Boulevard). (Copyright © Terra Flight Aerial Services. *Free Library of Philadelphia*, Print and Picture Collection.)

cities. In 1881 the Pennsylvania Railroad, the nation's largest corporation, opened its Broad Street station and corporate headquarters directly across the street. An immense stone viaduct carried the trains west to the Schuylkill with low openings for the cross streets, creating such a formidable barrier to development north of Market Street that it became known as the "Chinese Wall." In 1893 the Reading Railroad opened its new terminal on East Market at Twelfth Street. A farmers' market that previously stood on the site found new space under the train shed at Twelfth and Arch, and, ironically, outlasted the terminal.[7]

In the same decades, a host of new technologies—structural steel, safety elevators, electric lighting, telephones, and typewriters—made it feasible to build tall office buildings for rapidly growing corporations and business firms. South Broad Street provided attractive sites for new office towers because the

wide street meant ample light and air for high buildings as well as proximity to local government, the courts, and intercity rail service. Financial institutions, eager to impress the public with their wealth and strength, led the way. The eight-story Girard Trust Bank at Broad and Chestnut, built in 1890, although modest by later standards, was among the first commercial high buildings. By 1900 the seventeen-story Real Estate Trust Building and the twenty-two-story Land Title Building towered over the same intersection. During the next three decades, steel-frame office towers, mostly in the fifteen- to twenty-story range, rose in the immediate vicinity. In 1924 the Packard Building, at Fifteenth and Chestnut, set a new height of 324 feet. Philadelphia in the 1920s had a distinct skyline with the statue of William Penn at the pinnacle.

The post–Civil War decades also saw the emergence of the department store, featuring open displays, a single price for everyone, credit, free home delivery, a generous return policy, and the convenience of a wide range of merchandise under a single roof. By the early twentieth century, the city's five largest, lining East Market Street—Lit Brothers, Strawbridge and Clothier, Gimbel Brothers, N. Snellenburg, and John Wanamaker—became great civic landmarks. Wanamaker, who began his career at thirteen as a store clerk, emerged as one of the nation's premier retailers by offering customers a full guarantee and cash refunds and attracting attention with men carrying sandwich boards on the sidewalks and billboard-covered wagons roaming the streets. In 1875 he purchased the vacated Pennsylvania Railroad freight depot at Thirteenth Street, added a false façade with towers and Gothic windows, and called it Wanamaker's Grand Depot. In 1912, Wanamaker rebuilt the store in a neo-Renaissance style. It occupied a full square block and featured a dramatic atrium, the Grand Court, with an enormous pipe organ, giving it a cathedral-like quality. Organ concerts and elaborate holiday pageants soon became a local tradition. A cast-iron eagle, purchased from the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and installed on the ground floor, became the store's symbol and a Philadelphia icon.[8]

The enlarged downtown also developed distinct entertainment zones. Vaudeville theaters, with live acts suitable for the entire family, clustered on Chestnut, Walnut, and Arch Streets. In the 1920s four new large stage theaters—the Schubert, the Erlanger, the Forrest, and the New Locust—made the city a popular site for tryouts of Broadway plays, and several ornate "first run" movie palaces opened in the same area. East of Broad along Race and Vine Streets one could find other diversions: a busy "red light" district offering burlesque halls and prostitution, gambling, and other illicit vices. Several theaters catered exclusively to African Americans, who were excluded from or relegated to the balconies of mainstream venues.[9]

The city's major mass-retailing department stores lined East Market Street between Seventh and Thirteenth Streets. This view looks west from Seventh Street. The cast-iron façade of Lit Brothers is on the right; across Eighth Street was Strawbridge and Clothier (later rebuilt as a larger store). Gimbel Brothers is on the left side of Market Street. This 1911 photograph also shows the evolving transportation modes: the Lit Brothers canopy announces the entrance to the new subway; horse-drawn wagons and streetcars fill the street; automobiles are parked in front of Strawbridge's and Gimbels in the middle distance. (William Rau and the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

By 1900, Center City had assumed the appearance and form it would retain for much of the century. People from across the region flocked there for the shows, movies, and parades, the stores and restaurants, and sometimes the vices as well. Going downtown was special; people dressed up for the occasion and pedestrians thronged the streets. Parents took their children to the department stores for holiday clothing, to visit Santa Claus, and to view the decorated windows. For those in a hurry there were Horn and Hardart Automats, with the dishes displayed behind little glass windows; the customer dropped in a few nickels, twisted a handle, and the window popped opened. Eliminating waitress service, the Automats were the original fast-food restaurants.[10]

The size and location of Fairmount Park also shaped the city. In the late 1860s, to protect the water supply and enhance "the health and enjoyment of the people," the state enlarged the park on both sides of the Schuylkill and

extended it to include the Wissahickon Creek valley to the city's border; at twenty-seven hundred acres, it was the country's largest urban park. The state also established the Fairmount Park Commission. After 1900 the commission and an affiliated private group of elite citizens, the City Parks Association (CPA), founded in 1888, mobilized civic groups to promote acquisition of new parklands and once again encourage philanthropists to acquire and donate parcels. As a result, in short order the commission acquired Bartram's Garden in West Philadelphia, the nation's oldest arboretum, and parks in Germantown, Overbrook, Olney, Juniata Park, the far end of South Philadelphia, and Mt. Airy. In 1916 the commission assumed management of Penn's original squares and Independence Square. In addition, the commission acquired the valleys of Cobbs, Pennypacker, and Tacony Creeks as sites for recreation, protecting them from industrial development and preserving their natural beauty.

Equally important, the commission and the CPA spearheaded the building of the Fairmount (later Benjamin Franklin) Parkway and Northeast (later Roosevelt) Boulevard. Coinciding with the nationwide City Beautiful movement to create impressive civic spaces, the CPA actively promoted a grand boulevard to link the park with City Hall. The Parkway, opened in 1918, provided an impressive motor entrance to the city center from the Northwest and the suburbs. At its western end, atop the old reservoir, stood the Philadelphia Museum of Art, three massive Greek temples in distinctive yellow sandstone completed in 1928. A cluster of civic buildings arose around Logan Square (reduced to a traffic circle): the Free Library (1927), the new Franklin Institute (1934), and the Board of Education (1943, now the Family Court House), which joined the earlier Academy of Natural Sciences (1874). Planners of the Parkway were inspired by the Champs-Élysées in Paris, but it failed as a pedestrian boulevard; merely to cross it on foot was daunting. Rather than street-level shops and cafes, apartment buildings eventually lined the roadway from Logan Circle to the Art Museum. Not until late in the twentieth century did the Parkway begin to fulfill its promise as a principal venue for civic celebrations and parades, and in good weather, a pleasant jogging route.[11]

The Fairmount Park Commission and the CPA also lobbied for Roosevelt Boulevard to link Tacony and Pennypack with Hunting and Fairmount Parks. The Boulevard, built in sections from 1903 to 1918, opened the previously remote Far Northeast to settlement and thus played a critical role in the city's twentieth-century development. Meanwhile, in 1909, Mayor John Reyburn appointed a committee of businessmen to prepare a comprehensive city

The Northeast section of the city remained relatively inaccessible and undeveloped into the twentieth century. In this aerial view from 1927, Roosevelt Boulevard cuts across diagonally. Oxford Circle is at the lower left, and Castor Avenue runs straight north. (Copyright © Terra Flight Aerial Services. *Free Library of Philadelphia*, Print and Picture Collection.)

plan that led to the formation of an advisory planning committee in 1912. Although those initiatives went nowhere in the short run, tellingly, the proposals focused almost entirely on traffic and Center City, which remained the predominant emphasis of planning for almost the entire twentieth century.[12]

Life and Work in the Age of Industry

Philadelphia built its prosperity on the sweat and labor of a quarter million workers. For most, conditions remained hard and dangerous, with long hours for inadequate pay. In the early twentieth century, although average annual incomes rose modestly, the standard workweek was still fifty-five to fifty-eight hours. Inside factories, new technologies brought a modicum of improvement in working conditions. Electric lighting greatly improved illumination, but lint in the textile mills, smoke in the foundries, chemicals in dye houses and

tanneries, exposed machinery, and soot everywhere took their toll on human health and life. An 1880 study concluded that a family of five needed at least $640 a year for a minimally decent standard of living, but skilled workers' average annual income in the 1880s was only about $578, while the unskilled managed on about $374. In addition, four severe business depressions between 1873 and 1921 brought widespread suffering. In the depression of 1893, Baldwin cut its workforce from five thousand to twenty-four hundred within four months, and the average weekly wage fell from $13.06 to $7.12. In the spring of 1914, one-quarter of the textile workers were unemployed. In years of hard times, the desperate had to turn to private charities since the city had eliminated all direct public assistance.

To make ends meet, wives and children frequently had to supplement family income. Among major industrial cities, Philadelphia families had the highest percentage of multiple wage earners. Women accounted for more than a quarter of the workforce, clustering in textiles, apparel, and domestic service. White women with employed husbands rarely worked outside the home, but single women living on their own or widows with children struggled to survive. Employers paid women much less than men regardless of the industry. However, beginning in the 1890s more white-collar opportunities, as teachers, nurses, secretaries, and retail clerks, opened for native-born women, including the daughters of immigrants. Most boys went to work at fourteen or fifteen and girls a year later. Children between the ages of twelve and seventeen constituted 15 percent of the workforce. About half labored in sweatshops and most others worked in textiles, where fully 25 percent of the workforce was under fifteen. Only in the 1910s did child labor begin to decline.[13]

The workers' standard of living was spartan. Diets relied heavily on meat and starches, with fruits and vegetables only in season and supplemented with canned tomatoes and peaches. Their small row houses rarely had central heat. Before World War I illumination was only by gas light, and only a minority had an icebox. Nevertheless, families had high rates of homeownership, which represented a considerable sacrifice for the entire family. Besides demonstrating a level of social status, homeownership could allow the family to take in boarders and provide security in old age. In 1910 a quarter of all families counted themselves homeowners; by 1930 half were homeowners, but with high mortgages.

Despite employers' hostility to unions and a pro-management local government, workers maintained a union tradition and occasionally went on strike against wage cuts and poor conditions. In 1869 a group of Philadelphia

craftsmen founded the Knights of Labor. The Knights espoused a single union across gender, ethnic, craft, and even racial boundaries. The conservative national leadership opposed strikes, but just the idea of a union of all workers frightened employers, who worked to quash the movement. At the peak of its influence in the mid-1880s the Knights of Labor had upwards of three hundred locals in Philadelphia, mostly in garments and textiles, and 750,000 members nationally, but later in the decade it rapidly lost influence and membership.

Even where craftsmen maintained unions, formal bargaining was the exception. For example, in the textile mills, at the beginning of each season a delegation of workers would meet with the owner to discuss piece rates, and after agreement was reached the proprietor would initial the wage scale and post it in the mill. It was not considered a formal union contract, but it brought some stability to labor-management relations and preserved workers' sense of dignity. But workers, both men and women, also fought for their right to a decent livelihood. For example, in 1879–1880 and again in 1885 the women carpet weavers in Kensington engaged in prolonged strikes, demonstrating that women workers could be just as militant as men.[14]

Philadelphia had a reputation as strongly anti-union city. Employers effectively exploited workers' ethnic and racial differences to keep unions weak and maintained close ties to local politicians to ensure that the police and judges were on their side. Nevertheless, from the 1890s on the number and duration of strikes increased as inflation eroded wages. Tensions reached a climax in 1910 in two strikes. In the first, seven thousand young women, mostly Jewish immigrants who sewed shirtwaists (tailored women's blouses), demanded higher wages, improved working conditions, an end to sexual harassment by bosses, and union recognition. While the police protected strikebreakers, other unions provided support, as did many college and society women. The strikers, many of them in their teens, showed extraordinary discipline and picketed through a bitterly cold winter. The strike dragged on until February when the manufacturers agreed to the women's demands, including union recognition. This settlement came in the midst of an even larger strike by streetcar workers after the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT) fired all its employees who joined a new union and imported strikebreakers to maintain operations. Mayor John Reyburn deployed the police to protect PRT property as mobs of enraged workers in Kensington attacked the streetcars, breaking windows and disrupting service. On February 23, when a scuffle broke out along Broad Street, police fired into a crowd of Baldwin workers on their lunch break, causing a riot.[15]

During the streetcar strike of 1910, when thousands of workers walked out in support, the state sent in mounted police, ostensibly to maintain order, though the officers were clearly biased against the strikers. Here the state police, with clubs raised, chase a demonstrator up a front stoop. (*Free Library of Philadelphia*, Print and Picture Collection.)

Once peace was restored, the unions, leading newspapers, and many clergy called for arbitration, but the PRT, backed by Reyburn, determined to smash the union. The entire Pennsylvania mounted police force rode into town, patrolling Kensington and Frankford, breaking up demonstrations and liberally busting heads. Labor leaders called for a citywide general strike in support and within days more than a hundred thousand people had walked off their jobs in the largest display of worker solidarity since 1835. The partial general strike and widespread antipathy toward the company forced a compromise settlement, with workers winning most of their demands but not union recognition. Twenty-nine deaths were attributed to the strike, about half resulting from accidents caused by inexperienced car drivers.[16]

To insure workers' loyalty and lure them away from unions, large firms, such as John B. Stetson Company, Henry Disston and Sons, and John Wanamaker, pioneered welfare programs and better working conditions. They provided and sponsored social clubs, bands, night schools, sports teams, health programs, vacations, and even profit sharing. Disston gave workers low-interest loans to buy houses. Known collectively as welfare capitalism, those pro-

grams were popular with employees, but they rarely extended down to the thousands of smaller mills and shops where the majority of people worked.[17]

Meanwhile, immigrants kept coming. In 1910, 60 percent of Philadelphians were either immigrants or their U.S.-born children. Despite the large numbers, however, Philadelphia had a smaller overall share of immigrants than did comparable large cities for several reasons. The anti-Catholic riots of the 1840s had discouraged Irish settlement. Later, immigrants did not want to compete with the city's African American population for unskilled jobs, and, after the turn of the century, midwestern cities, with their assembly-line production, offered more opportunities for unskilled workers. But percentages can also be deceptive: in 1910 Philadelphia had more people of Irish ancestry than Boston, more Germans than St. Louis or Detroit, and more Italians and Jews than any other city except New York.[18]

Until the 1890s most immigrants came from Ireland, Britain, and Germany. Southwark, Moyamensing, and Gray's Ferry, all near the Delaware or Schuylkill waterfronts, had strong Irish communities, Germans were heavily represented in Northern Liberties and Kensington, and the textile mills of Kensington, Manayunk, Germantown, and Frankford were magnets for English immigrants. Beginning in the 1880s the sources of immigration shifted as thousands of Jewish, Italian, and Slavic people poured in, often via the Washington Avenue Immigration Station maintained by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Jews and Italians found small, established communities that provided some grudging assistance; but, within both communities, the newcomers, with their European folkways, embarrassed the earlier arrivals. Whereas the German Jews had gone to great lengths to acculturate and followed the liberal Reform movement, the Polish and Russian newcomers persisted in traditional Orthodox practices. The Irish-dominated Catholic Church considered Italian religious practices to border on the pagan.[19]

The labor preferences of different groups also influenced their location. East European Jews arrived with extensive experience in trades and commerce. They avoided factories, but many quickly gravitated to the garment industry, which became the largest employer of Jewish immigrants. They clustered predominantly in Southwark and South Philadelphia, where they found an ample supply of old cheap housing and proximity to the garment industry. A small colony of northern Italian immigrants at Eighth and Christian Streets became the nucleus for the large migration from southern Italy and Sicily. Many of the earlier settlers were craftsmen, while later arrivals went to work in construction or food handling. Because they preferred to work outdoors and with fellow countrymen, Italians avoided heavy factory labor and came to dominate public construction and street work. They also

Among the worst forms of slum housing were damp below-grade cellar apartments, such as the one shown here. This 1902 photograph was taken by the Philadelphia Housing Association, which lobbied for improved housing conditions. (Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA.)

worked in large numbers in the garment trades, with many women doing sewing in their homes.

The shops along Ninth Street between Catherine and Federal became the nucleus of the Italian Market, famous for year-round fresh produce and imported Italian specialties. Slavic immigrants were drawn to heavy industries, such as iron and steel mills, chemical plants, and slaughterhouses, where the pay was relatively good but the conditions hard. They established communities in Bridesburg, Richmond, Nicetown, and Manayunk. A tiny but visible Chinese community emerged around Ninth and Race Streets. Most Chinese worked in laundries and restaurants around the city but gravitated to Chinatown for companionship. Immigration restrictions kept the community small until the 1940s.[20]

No group dominated any neighborhood, but while immigrants might rub shoulders with other people in the streets, in their social, cultural, and spiritual lives they kept to themselves. Clustering eased acculturation for immigrants

who spoke little or no English, sought familiar foods, and relied on word-of-mouth to find work. Religion provided a primary outlet for spiritual solace and ethnic solidarity. Every community built elaborate houses of worship that announced their presence and laid claim to their turf. Each group also established lodges, social clubs, mutual insurance funds, and building and loan associations. These institutions often drew on immigrants from a particular province or even a single village. At one time the Italian community supported more than four hundred such organizations. The larger groups had their own foreign-language newspapers.[21]

In the 1920s federal quotas brought European immigration to a virtual halt. The 1930 census revealed that six hundred thousand Philadelphians, almost one-third of the population, were either foreign born or second generation. The Irish still made up the largest segment, at about a quarter of the total; East European Jews and Italians each accounted for about 20 percent; Germans and the British (English, Scottish, and Welsh) another 15 percent each. The immigrants and their children struggled to achieve a solid financial footing. Discrimination, especially against Italian, Jewish, Chinese, and Slavic groups, limited job and school opportunities. With considerable sacrifice, some saved to buy a house, while others put their faith in education for the next generation.

Not all newcomers, however, came from abroad; the city also attracted increasing numbers of African Americans, mostly from the upper South. By 1900 the community had grown to sixty-two thousand, even before migration surged in response to World War I labor shortages, and migration continued at a high level through the 1920s. African Americans continued to struggle for dignity and recognition of their legal rights. During the Civil War, their exclusion from the city's new streetcar system led to humiliating incidents, prompting a civil rights movement led by Octavius Catto, a gifted teacher at the Quaker-run Institute for Colored Youth. After passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1870, federal troops had to be called out to prevent violence when blacks tried to vote for the first time since 1838. In the 1871 elections, with no troops present, white mobs, supported by the police, tried again to block blacks from voting. Catto was killed on election day, but not in the rioting; rather, he was targeted and assassinated for his leadership role. His death was a grievous loss to the community.[22]

Most African Americans could find work in only stereotypical service jobs that paid the lowest of all wages and eroded a person's dignity. In 1880, 60 percent of black men and 90 percent of black women were employed as domestics or service workers, compared with about 30 percent of immigrants

and less than 10 percent of native-born whites. When African American men managed to secure a toehold in manufacturing, it was usually in the dirtiest and least desirable jobs. Nonetheless, such jobs provided better pay than service work. On the eve of World War I, black male workers made fertilizer, printing ink, bricks and cement, and iron and steel forgings. They paved streets, maintained railroad tracks, and worked in construction and along the waterfront. Black barbers, caterers, coachmen, hotel workers, and construction laborers had their own unions, but the skilled trades unions refused to accept black members. The rare exception was the longshoremen of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, which maintained a strong integrated union from 1913 to 1922. Black women, far more likely to work than white women, still toiled almost exclusively in low-wage domestic and service jobs.[23]

Despite their poverty, segregation, and oppression, African Americans supported a rich communal life with their own institutions to nurture self-expression and leadership. State law kept the public schools segregated from 1854 to 1881, but even after the law changed they remained largely segregated by custom. In predominantly African American neighborhoods, black children attended separate schools with black teachers, often in decrepit buildings with gas lights and outdoor privies. In this context, the churches continued to provide the vital functions of fellowship and consolation. As the largest black-owned venues, they doubled as concert and meeting halls. There were also numerous black lodges and all-black building and loan associations. The weekly *Philadelphia Tribune,* begun in 1881, provided news and an autonomous voice. White philanthropic support made possible schools, hospitals, and asylums for the aged, orphaned, and infirm. The refusal of white hospitals to allow black physicians to practice in their facilities led to the establishment of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital in 1895 at Sixteenth and Lombard.[24]

At the turn of the century, African Americans clustered in a highly segregated district between Spruce and Fitzwater, west of Seventh Street. The neighborhood was convenient to the mansions of Rittenhouse Square, where many found employment as domestics. With decent housing always scarce, and even harder to find during World War I, those who could afford to sought out better homes in nearby all-white areas. But when a black family attempted to move into the Gray's Ferry neighborhood in June 1918, a four-day riot ensued, with whites attacking blacks, who received little police protection. Some black families succeeded in securing a foothold in white neighborhoods, but when they did, whites generally fled, so that the level of segregation actually increased. In virtually all instances, blacks moved into older houses because no one in the 1920s would sell them new houses. By 1930 African Americans were more

In an era before movies and radio, people made their own entertainment. Music groups were popular among individuals of all backgrounds. Pictured here is the African American Treble Clef Old String Orchestra, circa 1905. (Sullivan Studio and the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

heavily segregated than they had been a decade earlier; most lived in slum housing and suffered high incidents of disease and premature death.[25]

While fewer in number than the industrial workers, the nonmanual middle-class workforce expanded rapidly after the Civil War. The best paid included professionals, successful businessmen, and corporate executives, mostly middle-aged, native-born white men. Below them in income were the growing numbers of middle managers and supervisors, shop owners, salesmen and agents, educators, artists, and musicians. Almost all were men, but beginning in the 1890s, more white-collar opportunities opened for women, primarily as office secretaries or retail clerks, but also in lower-paid professions such as teaching and nursing. What all middle-class workers had in common was clean work, a steady job with little fear of seasonal layoffs, and after the turn of the century, even a vacation. In 1900 about one-third of families could be considered middle class, probably more by aspiration; by 1929 this proportion had risen to almost 40 percent.[26]

The streetcars and commuter rail lines enabled middle-class families to create residential neighborhoods away from the noise and dirt of the factories

and the immigrants. In West Philadelphia, for example, a middle-class residential neighborhood emerged after 1858 when horsecar service extended across the river. The electric trolley and commuter rail lines opened still more land, first to middle-class families and later to successful immigrants and skilled workers. In West Philadelphia, trolley service in the 1890s along Lancaster Pike and Haverford and Lansdown Avenues attracted new middle-class housing, and, after 1908, the Market Street Elevated brought the district within fifteen minutes of Center City. The neighborhoods of Mill Creek, Haddington, and Hestonville rapidly filled with two-story brick row houses with front porches. In the 1910s and 1920s, successful Jewish and Italian immigrants and African Americans moved into the area. Much of North Philadelphia, Tioga, and Germantown, which one historian called "a bastion of the bourgeoisie," also filled with substantial houses, many semi-detached or single family.[27]

Strawberry Mansion, typical of many pre–World War I streetcar neighborhoods, provided a more modest residential alternative for the lower-middle-class and successful artisans. The row houses, built almost entirely in the 1890s, fronted on the sidewalk, but some had bay windows and porches. Although the area offered little employment, it enjoyed excellent trolley service to Kensington and Center City, making it desirable for families with multiple wage-earners. In 1900, most residents claimed an Irish, German, or English background; about two-thirds of the family heads worked as skilled craftsmen and another quarter as clerical workers. By the 1920s, Russian Jews displaced the earlier residents, but the class profile changed little.[28]

As always, the rich and upper middle classes had the most residential choices. After the Civil War, while established elites gravitated to the fashionable Rittenhouse Square, the new money industrialists erected handsome mansions along North Broad Street. Toward the end of the century, the well-off could commute to town by rail from several carefully planned city neighborhoods, notably Overbrook Farms and Chestnut Hill, or they could leave Philadelphia entirely for the suburban Main Line, a real estate venture of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Chestnut Hill lies ten miles from City Hall, in the far northwestern corner, beyond Germantown; railroad service reached the area in 1854. After Fairmount Park annexed the Wissahickon Creek valley in 1868, providing a buffer to preserve its bucolic character, the area attracted wealthy businessmen, who built large stone houses. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Chestnut Hill Improvement Association raised money to plant trees, pave and maintain sidewalks and streets, and even build a water reservoir. Thus, in the decades before any zoning laws, affluent residents were able to shape and control their environment.[29]

Politics and Culture in the Machine Era

In 1903, Lincoln Steffens, a leading national journalist, labeled Philadelphia the worst governed city in the United States, calling it "corrupt and contented." Kickbacks from city contractors, insider deals on real estate, and outright bribery financed the activities of a Republican political organization that was powerful at the local, state, and national levels. The Progressive-era reform mayor Rudolph Blankenburg called it a "pernicious machine, which, well-greased, runs smoothly and unchecked on the highway of vice, graft and civic demoralization." City workers were expected to contribute 3 to 12 percent of their salary to the party, while a corrupt election process provided myriad opportunities to insure the selection of loyal men. More than once ballot boxes ended up in the river. The party, like similar organizations in other cities, attracted immigrant voters by providing ad hoc welfare, dispensing patronage jobs, ensuring that the police largely ignored regulations on liquor sales, and buying votes for a dollar each. From 1887 to 1933, with only two exceptions (1905 and 1911), the Republicans won virtually all city and county offices, leaving Democrats so weak by the 1920s that Republicans were secretly paying the rent on their party's office to maintain the semblance of opposition.[30]

The consequence of an entrenched machine with no check on its abuses was a poorly run city and a neglected infrastructure, sometimes with tragic cost. The management of basic utilities laid bare the cost of corruption. After the Civil War the city extended gas service, but the Republican boss James McManes used the city-owned gas works as a source of patronage to build the party organization, leaving the city with inferior service and high prices. Finally, in 1897, while retaining ownership, the city leased the gas works to a private firm in exchange for a flat rental fee. Meanwhile, the city dragged its feet on installing water and sewer mains, delayed constructing additional reservoirs, ignored warnings of deteriorating water quality, and rejected proposals for water-filtration plants. The bosses provided monopoly franchises to the streetcar and later rapid-transit syndicate led by the well-connected partners Peter Widener and William Elkins that meant inferior and overpriced service.[31]

Philadelphia's corruption was not unique, nor was it always the most egregious, but by World War I other large cities did better in all those areas. The city could have ensured that its water was drinkable and that all houses had an indoor water tap and a toilet connected to the sewers. It could have improved surface drainage to eliminate stagnant water and keep basements dry,

and it could have cleaned its streets regularly and provided more playgrounds in the immigrant neighborhoods. For example, in 1913, when the state finally passed a housing act to outlaw the worst slum conditions, city council, beholden to real estate interests, refused to fund the necessary inspectors. The Republican machine neglected the public schools, which were so overcrowded in the early twentieth century that one-third of the pupils attended only a half day, while, despite compulsory attendance laws, another thousand children waited for room to enroll. A 1921 state report labeled the school buildings "deplorable," with "unwholesome" bathrooms.[32]

Although undoubtedly corrupt, the city was not content. At least some of the social and business elites organized ostensibly nonpartisan groups, such as the Reform Club and the Committee of Seventy, to elect honest and efficient officials. But the reformers had little broad-based appeal; they were wealthy men who spoke mostly with one another and made little attempt to reach out to immigrants and workers. They usually expressed more interest in cutting taxes than in spending more effectively to address pressing public needs. Men dependent on municipal jobs had little interest in cost-cutting schemes. The reformers were offended by the blatant corruption and concerned about the poor living conditions, but they did not like politics. They could not bring themselves to engage in the nitty-gritty work of building coalitions and creating an effective counterorganization. Furthermore, they were solidly Republican, firmly committed to the conventional high-tariff orthodoxy, which made it difficult to build alliances with the Democrats.[33]

Before the 1930s, the reformers' only victory came in 1911 when a factional struggle within the political machine enabled the Quaker merchant and longtime reformer Blankenburg to narrowly capture the mayor's office. Although the machine kept firm control of the city council, the Blankenburg administration demonstrated what an honest and capable government could achieve. Under the leadership of Morris L. Cooke, an engineer, the city undertook overdue and badly needed improvements: it eliminated railroad crossings at street level; introduced some efficiency in the fire, police, and sanitation departments; started construction of the Frankford Elevated (Frankford El) and North Broad Street subway; erected new piers; and increased school spending by 60 percent. Cooke fired hundreds of political functionaries who did no work and hired trained engineers and other professionals. Unfortunately, Blankenburg was self-righteous and politically naive. He refused to use patronage to reward his supporters or build a durable independent organization to compete with the machine. When he vetoed a bill to reduce gas rates,

breaking a campaign promise, he lost considerable support. In 1915, the machine regained the mayor's office with a weak and pliable candidate whose tenure involved more scandal.[34]

In the new century, the construction contractors George, Edwin, and William Vare of South Philadelphia and "Sunny Jim" McNichol from North Philadelphia controlled powerful factions within the Republican machine. Together they garnered most of the lucrative city contracts and did extensive work for the local utilities, the telephone company, and the Pennsylvania Railroad, with the excess costs funding the machine's activities and lining their pockets. They built the Market Street subway, Roosevelt Boulevard, the Parkway, and the Torresdale filtration plant, with a cost overrun of about one-third. In 1926, William Vare won a U.S. Senate race with a huge margin in the city. But rumors of widespread fraud led to a Senate investigation that uncovered twenty-five thousand phony voter registrations (including large numbers of the deceased, ineligible recent immigrants, and children), along with multiple voting, stuffed ballot boxes, and false counts. The Senate refused to seat Vare, who died soon after.

Despite the sordid politics, Philadelphians managed to build civic institutions that enriched the community, uplifted its spirit, and created enduring legacies for future generations in the fine arts and culture. In some instances, however, complacency and conservatism limited the achievements. Cultural conservatism and social snobbery cost the Philadelphia Museum of Art several fine private collections, including the industrialist Albert Barnes's magnificent Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection, for which he built his own private gallery in the suburbs. Similarly, the Philadelphia Orchestra, founded in 1900, enjoyed national prestige and represented the city's greatest achievement in the arts. But there, too, the conservative tastes of the local elites often clashed with the brilliant Leopold Stokowski, director from 1912 to 1936, who introduced most of the twentieth century's finest composers to the city and the country but was eased out after 1936. Finally, despite the founding of the Free Library in the 1890s as a result of the receipt of several large gifts, including one by the streetcar baron Peter Widener for a million dollars, not until 1927 did Philadelphians construct a public library building worthy of the city's size and wealth.[35]

For the majority of the people, however, the fine arts held little interest. In the late nineteenth century, people mostly made their own entertainment. The middle class formed singing societies, mandolin groups, and hiking and bicycling clubs; they played chess and parlor games and read aloud. Those who could afford it might ride an open streetcar to cool off or take an excursion

train to Atlantic City, while hundreds of thousands flocked to Fairmount Park for picnics, promenades, and carriage and sleigh rides, and for skating, sledding, boating, and team sports. Rowing along the Schuylkill River became exceedingly popular with elegant boathouses lining the east bank. But the park was not accessible to everyone. For the burgeoning immigrant communities in South Philadelphia, Kensington, or Richmond, a park visit meant a streetcar ride, a prohibitive expense for struggling families except on special occasions. There was little open space in the most densely populated neighborhoods except for the streets.[36]

Particularly after 1900, better pay and shorter hours provided more working-class residents the means and opportunity to patronize commercial entertainments. Vaudeville and minstrel shows enjoyed wide popularity, with performers wearing blackface, reinforcing every vicious stereotype of African Americans. Professional baseball also gained a following in 1882, with the formation of the American Association Athletics and the National League Phillies the following year. Under the leadership of Connie Mack, between 1901 and 1931 the Athletics won nine league championships and five World Series. In 1909, the Athletics moved into the thirty-five-thousand-seat Shibe Park (later, Connie Mack Stadium) at Twenty-First Street and Lehigh Avenue. The Phillies, playing at the inferior Baker Bowl at Broad and Lehigh, struggled as the second-tier team and won a single pennant, in 1915, but lost the World Series. By the 1920s people of all classes followed the teams, but for many in the working class, ticket prices and daytime games precluded their attending. For the children of the immigrants, however, to play and follow baseball was to embrace American culture.[37]

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 boosted the economy with thousands of jobs and new residents. Local firms supplied Britain and France with enormous quantities of arms and other war materiel. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the large Ford plant at Broad and Lehigh stamped out infantry helmets, while Stetson made hats and caps for the army. Seven miles south of Center City, at Hog Island, the federal government's Emergency Fleet Corporation hastily erected an enormous facility at which seventeen thousand workers constructed more than three hundred ships. Large numbers of men and materiel were shipped out of the port to Europe. Wartime production created a great shortage of workers, exacerbated because the war cut off European immigration and the draft drew off thousands of local young men to fight. Domestic migration to the city resulted in a population jump of 6 percent between 1915 and 1919 and an acute housing shortage. The federal government built six hundred well-planned houses around Tenth Street and Oregon Avenue in South Philadelphia for Navy Yard workers, and

Philadelphia's row houses spread for miles in every direction and anchored its strong neighborhoods. Before the Civil War, narrow houses—mostly two stories—opened directly onto the sidewalk. In the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, wider houses with modest setbacks—such as the houses in this 1924 photograph of Lycoming Street near O Street, in the Juniata section—featured front porches and bay windows. (Library Company of Philadelphia.)

the Emergency Fleet Corporation built another two hundred houses around Elmwood Avenue in the southwestern section of the city before the war ended.[38]

During World War I the federal government offered labor unions unprecedented support in order to maintain war production, resulting in a surge in union membership. After the war, unions attempted to solidify those gains, but the government pulled back its support and most of the strikes failed. Organized labor, in Philadelphia and elsewhere, faced a fundamental structural problem. Large employers had deep pockets and enjoyed the support of newspapers, the courts, and government officials at all levels in any serious showdown with the unions. In contrast, skilled workers had organized themselves along craft lines, so that in any given firm literally dozens of different trades unions made cooperation difficult. Further, the conservative unions, dominated by white men, made little effort to reach out to women, recent immigrants, African Americans, or the unskilled generally, all of whom they disdained as inferior. Under such conditions, it was unlikely unions could make much headway. Strikes, like the one at Cramp's shipyards in 1921, had virtually no chance of succeeding.[39]

Despite the erosion of the unions, the 1920s was a decade of prosperity for many. Thousands of families purchased automobiles, radios, and appli-

ances (usually on credit) and bought the new row houses and twins spreading around the city's edges, made more accessible by Roosevelt Boulevard, the Frankford El (1922), and the North Broad Street subway (1928). New factories opened in electronics, radios, and automobile parts, particularly in West and Southwest Philadelphia and north of Lehigh Avenue. Yet, Philadelphia was in trouble. The formula of diversity and innovation that had served the local economy well for so long was no longer working. Its largest industries were obsolete, and the new products of assembly-line manufacturing concentrated elsewhere. Cramp's shipyards built several luxury liners after the war but closed in 1927. In 1906, Baldwin began to shift operations south of the city to Eddystone, and in 1928, closed the Broad Street works. Although full-fashion hosiery bolstered the textile industry, total employment peaked in 1925 as the industry shifted production to outlying towns and the South, where employers paid workers less and more easily fought off unions. In April 1929, even before the Great Depression, unemployment in Philadelphia stood at 10 percent, and half of those people were idle more than six months. The sluggish economy, combined with a cut-off in foreign immigration and out-migration to the nearby suburban towns, led to a population increase in the decade of only 7 percent, the lowest rate of growth to date.[40]

During the 1920s African Americans continued to pour into the city. Although blacks now found employment with the railroads and in manufacturing, their jobs paid little. The family income of unskilled black male workers varied little from that of unskilled whites, but only because more black wives and children contributed to family income. The historic black ghetto just south of Center City spread east into blocks Jews and Italians were abandoning and expanded in sections of North and West Philadelphia. A 1924 survey of recent migrants indicated that, despite widespread racism in the city, the greater freedom of movement and treatment in public compared with conditions in the South was a great source of satisfaction. But the poor, both black and white, still often lived in houses lacking indoor toilets, running water, and central heat. Little was done in the decade to address those conditions.[41]

The twenties also brought Prohibition. Local politicians had little stomach for it, refusing to enlarge the police department or support a crackdown on violations. Mayor Freeland Kendrick appointed marine general Smedley Butler to clean up the city, but his raids on speakeasies and private homes met with widespread opposition. Butler tried, unsuccessfully, to break up the cozy relationship among the police, ward politicians, and the local courts that protected the illicit drinking. After two years the mayor fired Butler. A 1928 national magazine article reported that the city tolerated 1,185 open bars and

13,000 speakeasies, each paying a weekly bribe to the police and lenient judges. Prohibition, in Philadelphia as elsewhere, provided fertile ground for organized crime, which took strong hold in parts of South Philadelphia and long outlasted the repeal of Prohibition.[42]

In the decade the city went on a building binge, financed almost entirely by bonds, because the business and commercial leaders stopped fighting the political machine and united around a range of projects to reduce the density of population, improve public health, and encourage homeownership: extension of water, sewer, and gas lines, new schools, and new rapid-transit lines. The elites spearheaded completion of such projects as the Free Library, the Museum of Art, and a municipal stadium. Hoping to repeat the success of the centennial celebration, businessmen and politicians also joined forces to host the Sesquicentennial International Exposition in 1926. Built on swamp land in far South Philadelphia (now the site of the sports arenas), it was a costly financial failure. In the long run, the city's investment in draining the swamp land and extending sewer and water lines stimulated development of the area, but in the short run, the city spent almost ten million dollars it could ill afford. The elites hoped those projects would bolster the city's image and make it attractive to new firms and thus offset declining industries. They turned a willful blind eye to the cost overruns and kickbacks that went with machine control.[43]

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FROM THE CIVIL WAR to the Great Depression Philadelphia grew enormously and provided employment and housing to hundreds of thousands. The wealth generated provided private philanthropists with the resources to create a better community by investing in efforts to preserve open land and build important cultural institutions. After 1900 the city made impressive investments in infrastructure to open new neighborhoods and reduce density, but those gains came with the sacrifices of workers and immigrants who struggled to survive on inadequate incomes. While some businessmen tried to take on the political machine, too many tolerated the massive corruption and inept government. Other major cities had powerful and corrupt political machines but still managed to do better in meeting community needs.