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A Visual Journey Beyond the Censuses

“There is history in all men’s lives” (William Shakespeare)

“History never looks like history when you’re living through it” (John Gardiner)

1790 – 1820

- In 1790 about 4 million people lived in all 13 states, most of them on farms (90%)
- In 1790 few Americans lived beyond the Appalachian Mountains. 95% lived east of them.
- After 1790, several enterprising northerners opened stage lines for travelers
- Philadelphia had a yellow fever epidemic in 1793. More than 5,000 people died—about 10% of the population
- The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 added more than 800,000 square miles of land to the U.S.
- In the War of 1812, New England militias frequently refused to serve outside their state boundaries
- A treaty with Britain in 1818 settled the United States-Canadian border westward to the Rocky Mountains
- It was more likely to find extended families living together under one roof or nearby in the rural South and on the frontier
- Large families were the norm, with an average of 8 children
- About 1 in 6 babies died in the first year. Because of high infant mortality rates, some children were not named until they were at least a few months old
- Tuberculosis (or consumption) was the leading cause of death by disease among adults
- Construction began on the Cumberland Road, also known as the National Road, between Cumberland, Maryland, and Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). This would be a primary route for pioneers seeking opportunities in the West
- In the 19th century, land was considered to be the prime source of wealth

The Louisiana Purchase encompassed portions of 15 current U.S. states and 2 Canadian Provinces. The land purchased contained all of present-day [Arkansas](#), [Missouri](#), [Iowa](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Kansas](#), [Nebraska](#), parts of [Minnesota](#) that were south of the [Mississippi River](#), most of [North Dakota](#), nearly all of [South Dakota](#), northeastern [New Mexico](#), northern [Texas](#), the portions of [Montana](#), [Wyoming](#), and [Colorado](#) east of the [Continental Divide](#), and [Louisiana](#) west of the Mississippi River, including the city of [New Orleans](#). (The Oklahoma Panhandle, and southwestern portions of Kansas and Louisiana were still claimed by Spain at the time of the Purchase.) In addition, the Purchase contained small portions of land that would eventually become part of the Canadian provinces of [Alberta](#) and [Saskatchewan](#). The land included in the purchase comprises around 23% of the territory of the United States today.

19th Century Frontier

- The environment of the Great Plains was far from hospitable
 - The grassland was difficult to cultivate, there were few trees for wood for houses, fences, lumber to burn for cooking and heating
 - There were sometimes extremes in temperature, the wind could be fierce with nothing to block it, winter blizzards (wind & snow = 80 MPH; temperature = -30°F) could be fatal to people or stock and sometimes came on very quickly
 - Prairie fires; grasshoppers (in 1866, they darkened the sky in a column 150 by 100 miles wide in Kansas and in 1874, they ravaged crops from the Dakotas to Texas)
 - The winter of 1885-1886 was especially hard

- On the homesteader's frontier, everyone worked—work was not gender specific. Both men and women milked cows and helped in the fields, however, women were generally in charge of the house and children and garden
- On the open Plains, depression was common among women and men, sometimes leading to insanity. This was due to the immensity of the Plains, the sense of insignificance, brutally hard work, poverty, and loneliness
- In the territories of Dakota, Nebraska, Utah, and Washington, women's death rates in 1859-60 were 22% higher than those of men. It was attributed to unsanitary conditions and/or complications during childbirth
- The infant mortality rate was as high as 25-30%
- The first home for most farmers was either a tar-paper shack or a dugout. Most were small, sometimes no more than 10 ft by 12 ft (which is what the govt required for a claim)
- Thru the Townsite Act of 1844, settlers and/or speculators could stake out 320 acres and take possession for \$1.25 an acre. Usually, sites were divided into lots of 125 ft by 25 ft, with profits from sales ranging from \$50 to \$1,000 per lot
- In 1862, The Homestead Act and the Transcontinental Railroad Act are passed by Congress
- May 10, 1969, the Golden Spike joins the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads at Promontory Point, Utah
- Apr 22, 1889, the Oklahoma land rush begins

The Homestead Act of 1862

The Act, which became law on Jan. 1, 1863, allowed anyone over age 21 to file for a quarter-section of free land (160 acres) after paying a filing fee of \$12. The land was yours at the end of five years as a permanent claim if you paid \$6 and had built a house on the land, dug a well, broken (plowed) 10 acres, fenced a specified amount, and actually lived there. Additionally, one could claim a quarter-section of land by "timber culture" (commonly called a "tree claim"). This required that you plant and successfully cultivate 10 acres of timber.

1890: The Bureau of Census declares there is no longer any "free land"; the frontier is thus closed

The Civil War Years

- Between 1 and 1.5 million men may have served in the Rebel Army (this was 30%-40% of all soldiers who served); federal forces numbered precisely 2.2 million men; the average age was 26, height was 5 ft 8 inches, weight was 145 lbs
- ¾ of each opposing force was infantry; 15% was cavalry; 7% was artillery; the remaining were engineers, medical personnel, teamsters, and other ancillary personnel; about 10% were officers; 3% of the federals and 1% of the Confederates served in the navies
- 29% of the federal soldiers were married when they enlisted; 36% of the Rebels were
- 5% of all federal soldiers were killed or mortally wounded in combat; almost 12% of the Confederates suffered a similar fate. The North lost 3 men for every 2 in the South
- Almost 100,000 Americans lost their lives or were wounded in May 1864 at the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse (or Battle of the Wilderness)
- Both sides had Conscription Acts
- Conscientious objectors who belonged to recognized nonviolent sects (eg. Quakers) did not have to serve if they provided a substitute or paid the government \$500
- A man could have an exemption from the draft based on a war-related occupation
 - Iron workers, machinists, miners, RR workers
 - Ferrymen, pilots, steamboat workers
 - Govt officials, clerks, telegraphers
 - Ministers, professors, teachers of handicapped or with more than 20 pupils
 - Physicians, leather workers, blacksmiths, millers, munitions workers, shipyard workers, salt makers, charcoal burners, some stockmen, some printers, and one editor for each newspaper

- A man could buy his way out of the draft by finding a substitute and paying him, sometimes as much as \$400 in gold
- Literacy was quite high in Civil War America. In the South at least 70% of the white male population could read, and in the North it may have run as high as 90%
- In the 1860s, accidents and common childhood diseases claimed nearly half of all children before the age of five
- People stood for photographs at landmark times in their life, such as just after marriage or betrothal, following the birth of a child, or before leaving for war. They also had photos made of a recently diseased child for remembrance.
- During the 1830s, a phenomenon known as the rural cemetery movement emerged
 - This was to prevent contamination of the town water supply and families who sold their property would not worry about leaving members buried on property now belonging to someone else
 - The farm water supply could also be protected
 - Rural cemeteries continued to expand into the 1850s
 - By the time of the Civil War, virtually every sizable city in both the North and South had its own rural cemetery
 - The primary focus of the rural cemetery was the family plot

The meanings of some symbols on old monuments:

- Ivy symbolized memory
- The poppy symbolized sleep
- An anchor meant hope
- The oak depicted immortality
- The acorn was a symbol of life

Cartes de Visite

Cartes de visite were popular from the 1850s until around 1900. They were photos measuring about 3.5"x2.25" mounted on trade cards measuring about 4" x 2.5".

The photographer's name and address usually appeared on the back of the card.

These were very popular during the Civil War and afterward

1870 – 1900

- Most children were born in their family homes. 1300 out of 100,000 live births resulted in the mother dying in the late 19th century. (In contrast, between 1987 and 1997, only 7.7 women died per 100,000 live births)
- Birthrates for native-born, white women plummeted from 7.04 children in 1800 to 3.56 children in 1900
- There were fewer than 2 divorces per 1,000 marriages in 1870 and people married later than their parents did, waiting until their mid- to late twenties. Fully 11% of women born between 1860 and 1880 never married, the highest figure throughout American history
- Tuberculosis was the largest single killer of adults; for children, it was gastrointestinal diseases among infants under one year, accounting for 25% of infant deaths even as late as 1900. The reason was often contaminated milk. This disease was often called "summer sickness."
- The Great Potato Famine in Ireland was 1845 to 1850. It reduced the population from 8 million to less than 3 million by 1895. Women accounted for 52.9% of Irish immigrants as compared with 41% of Germans, and 21% of southern Italian. The majority were young and single
- More American land was transformed into farmland between 1870-1900 than in the previous 250 years of American history
- During the 19th century, as many as 70% of American citizens may have been boarders at one time or another and as many as 20% of city households may have taken in boarders
- The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 burned an area four and ¾ miles long and around a mile wide and nearly 100,000 people were left homeless
- In 1880, there were several natural disasters, including a hurricane in Brownsville, Texas

- In October, a tornado outbreak that killed 152 people in southwestern and central Missouri
- The Blizzard of 1880 beginning in October which was made famous by Laura Ingalls Wilder in one of her books
- Other disasters included a 7.6 earthquake in South Carolina in 1886
 - The Children's Blizzard of 1888 in which 250-500 people died, many of them children on their way home from school
 - The Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood of 1889 in which forty-foot high floodwaters with 14 miles of accumulated debris from a dam that broke swept through town, killing 2,209 people

Naming Patterns for Children

1st Son named after the Father's Father
 2nd Son named after the Mother's Father
 3rd Son named after Father
 4th Son named after Father's oldest Brother

1st Daughter named after Mother's Mother
 2nd Daughter named after Father's Mother
 3rd Daughter named after Mother
 4th Daughter named after Mother's oldest Sister

A Typical Week for Women in the Late 19th Century

- Monday: washing day (boil clothes, add soap, rub across wash board, hang outside)
- Tuesday: ironing (3-6 flat irons on the stove to heat, swap out irons as they cooled, iron wiped with beeswax between uses so it wouldn't stick to fabrics)
- Thursday & Saturday: baking (bread took 24 hours to make; by 1900, 75% of families still baked their own bread)
- Everyday: cooking (in general, the most time-consuming housework was cooking; 3 large meals were eaten daily; prepared on open hearth or cast iron stove; most foods either grown on property or brought from marketplace unprepared)
- Everyday: cleaning (daily tasks included sweeping the kitchen, washing the dishes, making beds and tending the lamps
 - Washing meant hauling water by hand from outdoor pump and boiling it
 - Making beds meant fluffing, adjusting and flipping feather beds
 - Tending kerosene lamps meant wiping top chimneys, replacing or trimming wicks and filling lamp with oil

The Largest Religious Denominations in 1895

Catholic: 8,014,911	Congregationalist: 600,000
Methodist: 5,452,654	Reformed: 343,981
Baptist: 4,068,539	United Brethren: 262,950
Presbyterian: 1,458,999	Latter-Day Saints: 234,000
Lutheran: 1,390,775	Evangelical: 145,904
Disciples of Christ: 923,663	Jewish: 139,500
Episcopalian: 626,290	Friends: 114,771

Source: Gaustad, Edwin S., ed. *A Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1865*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983

1900 – 1940

- In the late 19th century, nearly one in ten brides went to the altar pregnant. Divorce skyrocketed, increasing from 1 per 18 marriages in the 1880s to 1 per 6 in the 1920s, but remarriage likewise became common
- The median age for 1st marriage in 1920: 24.6 for males, 21.2 for females

- During the 1930s, the divorce rate declined due to costs but frequently couples broke apart informally. Men deserted their families when they lost the ability to support them, thinking that an abandoned family would be more likely to receive assistance
- The generation born in the 1930s turned out to be the smallest in American history, smaller than the 1920s or the 1940s (the birthrate grew only 7% during the 1930s as compared to 16% in the 1920s and 15% in the 1940s)
- The median age was 25; 2/3 of the population was 35 or younger; only 7.4% were 60 or older and only 4.6% passed age 65
- Almost 45% of the white population had either come to the U.S. themselves or were children of immigrants
- As many as 1/6 of families doubled up and shared living quarters
- The average family income was \$2,600 per year
- In 1920, barely one household in three owned a car. It was 1 in 13 at the outset of WWI. By 1929, 4 families out of 5 owned a car.
- In 1914, a Model T cost \$490. In 1908, only about 6% of the nation's roads had gravel or hard surfaces. In 1921, a two-lane road (US Hwy 30) was completed from New York City to San Francisco. By 1929, nearly 700,000 miles of U.S. roads (over 1/5 of all roads) were hard surfaced
- The 1921 National Origins Act limited immigration in any year to 3% of the number of foreign-born members of a nationality group listed in the 1910 census. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 further reduced quotas to 2% of a nationality's 1890 census representation. These immigration restriction laws ended a 300-year pattern of virtually unrestrained entry into the United States from Europe
- The bulk of recent immigrants can be found in big cities in 1920: Boston, Philadelphia, New York; also, Fall River, Mass., Providence, RI, Newark, Patterson & Camden, NJ; also, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago (where countrymen resided and there was promise of employment)
- Life expectancy:
 - 1920: 56.3 for males; 58.5 for females
 - 1940: 62.8 for males; 67.3 for females
- WWI – 1917 to Nov 1918
- 1918 – Influenza epidemic
- Early 1920s: the boll weevil destroyed cotton fields across the South. Many families switched to dairy farming
- The Great Flood of 1927 flooded 2.3 million acres in Mississippi and affected over 170,000 people. It was 100 miles wide at some points
- 1932-1938: drought gripped 2/3 of the United States (mostly in the Great Plains), most intensely Kansas, eastern Colorado, and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas
 - It was called the Dust Bowl and these areas were hardest hit during the Depression
 - In 1934, a single dust storm produced a dust cloud that for a day and a half severely reduced visibility from the Rockies to the Great Lakes and from the Canadian border to Oklahoma
 - In 1935, the worst dust storms hit the plains with several deaths by suffocation reported
- 1930s: The Great Depression (an estimated 3.5 million people left their farms during the 1930s, many of them taking along only what could be packed into the Model T, farm truck, or pushcart.
 - They headed west to California or Oregon where agricultural jobs were rumored still to be available)

Societal Issues

- 1920: Prohibition Act (18th Amendment) – By the end of the 1920s, prohibition violators accounted for over 1/3 of the 12,000 inmates of federal prisons
- 1920: 19th Amendment – Women's Right to Vote
- The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established in 1933 put young men to work planting trees, building national park facilities, fighting fires, and doing other worthwhile tasks to improve public land
 - CCC workers were required to be between 17 and 25 and from families already on relief
 - They lived in camps run by the U.S. Army and, in addition to room, board, and medical care, were paid \$30 per month, 75% of which was sent home to their families

- Within 3 months, nearly a quarter million young men had enlisted
- Eligibility requirements were later eased and enrollment peaked at 500,000 in 1935
- During the program's 9-year existence, some 2.5 million men served in the CCC

Look Beyond to Understand!

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