the product might bring. As the United States became more of a mixed community, with millions of people pouring in who might not look or talk or act like native-born Americans, owning certain products, such as grandfather clocks and grand pianos, came to mean "being American." Before immigrants even arrived, they recognized and yearned to own the brand-name items they had seen in American mail-order catalogs. Later, they might even sacrifice family necessities in order to keep up monthly payments on luxury items.

Not everyone benefited equally from the era's consumer culture. The poorest, who could not afford the carfare to get to department stores, much less the goods on display there, continued to buy from street peddlers and local shop owners. Often they went from one to another to get the best price. Nor did all immigrants rely on consumer goods to win social acceptance. Access to such goods eventually made the middle class more homogeneous, but it never fully erased the complexity of cultural and ethnic differences embedded in the American population.

### SEE ALSO

Bicycle; Consumer movement; Immigration; Industry; Journalism; National Consumers' League

### FURTHER READING


### Consumer movement

**IN PREINDUSTRIAL TIMES,** individuals usually made the goods they consumed or knew who had grown or made the products they bought. Thus they could hold that person accountable for a product's reliability. In the industrial era of the late 1800s, however, consumers were buying mass-produced goods made far from their homes and marketed across long distances. They usually had no recourse when products were defective or made them sick.

Beginning in the 1890s, middle-class women concerned about this issue began a consumer protest movement. They targeted both defective or harmful goods as well as the often unfair, unhealthy, and abusive conditions under which goods were made and sold. Late-19th-century consumers found models for their activism among earlier protests, such as boycotts of English tea in the American Revolutionary era and of products made by slave labor before the Civil War. The Progressive Era consumer movement began in 1888 when Leonora O'Reilly, a New York garment worker and labor organizer, invited prominent women to a meeting of the New York Working Women's Society and appealed to them for help. The women set up a committee to urge shoppers to give their business only to those employers who treated their workers fairly. In 1891, the women created a Consumers' League under the leadership of
Josephine Shaw Lowell. Other leagues formed in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. In 1899, these state and local groups united into the National Consumers’ League (NCL). The chief goals of the NCL were to outlaw child labor and pass a minimum wage and other protective labor laws.

The NCL was not the only consumer group active in this era. A Housewives League and professionals associated with the emerging field of home economics agitated for product testing and consumer education. Other groups questioned the rates charged by insurance companies and the levels at which government set taxes and tariffs. Working-class women mounted protests against exorbitant meat prices and high rents, sometimes engaging in vociferous urban demonstrations. Members of women’s clubs and groups such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Jewish Women were active in campaigns to ensure pure food, meat, and drugs, and they pursued such reforms as workers’ compensation laws, unemployment insurance, and the introduction of a social security system. Even suffrage organizations used consumer pressure tactics against manufacturers and department stores in order to get the business community to support the woman’s vote.

Women were the chief leaders of the consumer movement, but many men supported its goals and worked hard in its campaigns. Business leaders generally resisted making the changes that consumer groups requested, but some cooperated in order to stabilize their industries and increase confidence in their products. Today consumer movements pay their greatest attention to product testing and safety issues. They have also mounted worldwide campaigns to curb abusive conditions in sweatshops involved in the global economy.

SEE ALSO
Child labor; Consumer culture; National Consumers’ League; Pure Food and Drugs Act (1906); Taxes and tariffs

FURTHER READING

Coxey’s Army

COXEY’S ARMY was a movement of unemployed workers organized in 1894 in response to a severe nationwide economic depression. Their leader was Jacob Coxey, an Ohio businessman sympathetic to working people. Earlier in his life Coxey had run for political office under the banner of the Greenback Labor Party, founded in 1876 to promote the increased supply of cheap paper money, a step that would have helped poor people pay off their debts more easily. In 1892 Coxey proposed that the federal government issue “legal tender” bonds to raise funds for public projects such as road building, thereby providing work for the unemployed.

Members of Coxey’s Army navigate their barge through a canal on their way to Washington, D.C., to demand government-funded public works projects.