THE U.S. CULTURE

American culture is rich, complex, and unique. It emerged from the short and rapid European conquest of an enormous landmass sparsely settled by diverse indigenous peoples. Although European cultural patterns predominated, especially in language, the arts, and political institutions, peoples from Africa, Asia, and North America also contributed to American culture. All of these groups influenced popular tastes in music, dress, entertainment, and cuisine. As a result, American culture possesses an unusual mixture of patterns and forms forged from among its diverse peoples. The many melodies of American culture have not always been harmonious, but its complexity has created a society that struggles to achieve tolerance and produces a uniquely casual personal style that identifies Americans everywhere. The country is strongly committed to democracy, in which views of the majority prevail, and strives for equality in law and institutions.

Characteristics such as democracy and equality flourished in the American environment long before taking firm root in European societies, where the ideals originated. As early as the 1780s, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crиvecoeur, a French writer living in Pennsylvania who wrote under the pseudonym J. Hector St. John, was impressed by the democratic nature of early American society. It was not until the 19th century that these tendencies in America were most fully expressed. When French political writer Alexis de Tocqueville, an acute social observer, traveled through the United States in the 1830s, he provided an unusually penetrating portrait of the nature of democracy in America and its cultural consequences. He commented that in all areas of culture—family life, law, arts, philosophy, and dress—Americans were inclined to emphasize the ordinary and easily accessible, rather than the unique and complex. His insight is as relevant today as it was when de Tocqueville visited the United States. As a result, American culture is more often defined by its popular and democratically inclusive features, such as blockbuster movies, television comedies, sports stars, and fast food, than by its more cultivated aspects as performed in theaters, published in books, or viewed in museums and galleries. Even the fine arts in modern America often partake of the energy and forms of popular culture, and modern arts are often a product of the fusion of fine and popular arts.

While America is probably most well known for its popular arts, Americans partake in an enormous range of cultural activities. Besides being avid readers of a great variety of books and magazines catering to differing tastes and interests, Americans also attend museums, operas, and ballets in large numbers. They listen to country and classical music, jazz and folk music, as well as classic rock-and-roll and new wave. Americans attend and participate in basketball, football, baseball, and soccer games. They enjoy food from a wide range of foreign cuisines, such as Chinese, Thai, Greek, French, Indian, Mexican, Italian, Ethiopian, and Cuban. They have also developed their own regional foods, such as California cuisine and Southwestern, Creole, and Southern cooking. Still evolving and drawing upon its ever more diverse population, American culture has come to symbolize what is most up-to-date and modern. American culture has also become increasingly international and is imported by countries around the world.

FORCES THAT SHAPED AMERICAN CULTURE

**Imported Traditions**

Today American culture often sets the pace in modern style. For much of its early history, however, the United States was considered culturally provincial and its arts second-rate, especially in painting and literature, where European artists defined quality and form. American artists often took their cues from European literary salons and art schools, and cultured Americans traveled to Europe to become educated. In the late 18th century, some American artists produced high-quality art, such as the paintings of John Singleton Copley and Gilbert Charles Stuart and the silver work of Paul Revere. However, wealthy Americans who collected art in the 19th century still bought works by European masters and acquired European decorative arts—porcelain, silver, and antique furniture—. They then ventured further afield seeking more exotic decor, especially items from China and Japan. By acquiring foreign works, wealthy Americans were able to obtain the status inherent in a long historical tradition, which the United States lacked. Americans such as Isabella Stewart Gardner and Henry Clay Frick amassed extensive personal collections, which overwhelmingly emphasized non-American arts.

In literature, some 19th-century American writers believed that only the refined manners and perceptions associated with the European upper classes could produce truly great literary themes. These writers, notably Henry James and Edith Wharton, often set their novels in the crosswinds of European and American cultural contact. Britain especially served as the touchstone for culture and quality because of its role in America's history and the links of language and political institutions. Throughout the 19th century, Americans read and imitated British poetry and novels, such as those written by Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens.

**The Emergence of an American Voice**

American culture first developed a unique American voice during the 19th century. This voice included a cultural identity that was strongly connected to nature and to a divine mission. The new American voice had liberating effects on how the culture was perceived, by Americans and by others. Writers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau proposed that the American character was deeply individualistic and connected to natural and spiritual sources rather than to the conventions of social life. Many of the 19th century’s most notable figures of American literature—Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Mark Twain—also influenced this tradition. The poetry of Walt Whitman, perhaps above all, spoke in a distinctly American voice about people’s relation to one another, and described American freedom, diversity, and equality with fervor.

Landscape painting in the United States during the 19th century vividly captured the unique American cultural identity with its emphasis on the natural environment. This was evident in the huge canvases set in the West by Albert Bierstadt and the more intimate paintings of Thomas Cole. These paintings, which were part of the Hudson River School, were often enveloped in a radiant light suggesting a special connection to spiritual sources. But very little of this American culture moved beyond the United States to influence art trends elsewhere. American popular culture, including craft traditions such as quilting or local folk music forged by Appalachian farmers or former African slaves, remained largely local.

This sense of the special importance of nature for American identity led Americans in the late 19th century to become increasingly concerned that urban life and industrial products were overwhelming the natural environment. Their concern led for calls to preserve areas that had not been developed. Naturalists such as John Muir were pivotal in establishing the first national parks and preserving scenic areas of the American West. By the early 20th century, many Americans supported the drive to preserve wilderness and the desire to make the great outdoors available to everyone.

**Immigration and Diversity**

By the early 20th century, as the United States became an international power, its cultural self-identity became more complex. The United States was becoming more diverse as immigrants streamed into the country, settling especially in America’s growing urban areas. At this time, America's social diversity began to find significant expression in the arts and culture. American writers of German, Irish, Jewish, and Scandinavian ancestry began to find an audience, although some of the cultural elite resisted the works, considering them crude and unrefined.

Many of these writers focused on 20th-century city life and themes, such as poverty, efforts to assimilate into the United States, and family life in the new country. These ethnically diverse writers included Theodore Dreiser, of German ancestry; Henry Roth, a Jewish writer; and Eugene O'Neill and James Farrell, of Irish background. European influence now meant something very different than it once had: Artists changed the core of American experience by incorporating their various immigrant origins into its cultural vision. During the 1920s and 1930s, a host of African American poets and novelists added their voices to this new American vision. Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Countee Cullen, among others, gathered in New York City’s Harlem district. They began to write about their unique experiences, creating a movement called the Harlem Renaissance.

Visual artists of the early 20th century also began incorporating the many new sights and colors of the multiethnic America visible in these new city settings. Painters associated with a group known as The Eight (also called the Ashcan school), such as Robert Henri and John Sloan, portrayed the picturesque sights of the city. Later painters and photographers focused on the city’s squalid and seamier aspects. Although nature remained a significant dimension of American cultural self-expression, as the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe demonstrated, it was no longer at the heart of American culture. By the 1920s and 1930s few artists or writers considered nature the singular basis of American cultural identity.

In popular music too, the songs of many nations became American songs. Tin Pan Alley (Union Square in New York City, the center of music publishing at the turn of the 20th century) was full of immigrant talents who helped define American music, especially in the form of the Broadway musical. Some songwriters, such as Irving Berlin and George M. Cohan, used their music to help define American patriotic songs and holiday traditions. During the 1920s musical forms such as the blues and jazz began to dominate the rhythms of American popular music. These forms had their roots in Africa as adapted in the American South and then in cities such as New Orleans, Louisiana; Kansas City, Missouri; Detroit, Michigan; and Chicago, Illinois. Black artists and musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Count Basie became the instruments of a classic American sound. White composers such as George Gershwin and performers such as Bix Beiderbecke also incorporated jazz rhythms into their music, while instrumentalists such as Benny Goodman adopted jazz’s improvisational style to forge a racially blended American form called swing music.

**Development of Mass Media**

In the late 19th century, Americans who enjoyed the arts usually lived in big cities or had the money to attend live performances. People who were poor or distant from cultural centers settled for second-rate productions mounted by local theater troupes or touring groups. New technologies, such as the motion-picture camera and the phonograph, revolutionized the arts by making them available to the masses. The movies, the phonograph, and, somewhat later, the radio made entertainment available daily and allowed Americans to experience elaborately produced dramas and all types of music.

While mass media made entertainment available to more people, it also began to homogenize tastes, styles, and points of view among different groups in the United States. Class and ethnic distinctions in American culture began to fade as mass media transmitted movies and music to people throughout the United States. Some people criticized the growing uniformity of mass culture for lowering the general standard of taste, since mass media sought to please the largest number of people by appealing to simpler rather than more complex tastes. However, culture became more democratic as modern technology and mass media allowed it to reach more people.

During the 20th century, mass entertainment extended the reach of American culture, reversing the direction of influence as Europe and the world became consumers of American popular culture. America became the dominant cultural source for entertainment and popular fashion, from the jeans and T-shirts young people wear to the music groups and rock stars they listen to and the movies they see. People all over the world view American television programs, often years after the program’s popularity has declined in the United States. American television has become such an international fixture that American news broadcasts help define what people in other countries know about current events and politics. American entertainment is probably one of the strongest means by which American culture influences the world, although some countries, such as France, resist this influence because they see it as a threat to their unique national culture.

**The Impact of Consumerism**

Popular culture is linked to the growth of consumerism, the repeated acquisition of an increasing variety of goods and services. The American lifestyle is often associated with clothing, houses, electronic gadgets, and other products, as well as with leisure time. As advertising stimulates the desire for updated or improved products, people increasingly equate their well-being with owning certain things and acquiring the latest model. Television and other mass media broadcast a portrayal of a privileged American lifestyle that many Americans hope to imitate.

Americans often seek self-fulfillment and status through gaining material items. Indeed, products consumed and owned, rather than professional accomplishments or personal ideals, are often the standard of success in American society. The media exemplify this success with the most glamorous models of consumption: Hollywood actors, sports figures, or music celebrities. This dependence on products and on constant consumption defines modern consumer society everywhere. Americans have set the pace for this consumer ideal, especially young people, who have helped fuel this consumer culture in the United States and the world. Like the mass media with which it is so closely linked, consumption has been extensively criticized. Portrayed as a dizzy cycle of induced desire, consumerism seems to erode older values of personal taste and economy. Despite this, the mass production of goods has also allowed more people to live more comfortably and made it possible for anyone to attain a sense of style, blurring the most obvious forms of class distinction.

WAYS OF LIFE

**Living Patterns**

A fundamental element in the life of the American people was the enormous expanse of land available. During the colonial period, the access to open land helped scatter settlements. One effect was to make it difficult to enforce traditional European social conventions, such as primogeniture, in which the eldest son inherited the parents’ estate. Because the United States had so much land, sons became less dependent on inheriting the family estate. Religious institutions were also affected, as the widely spread settlements created space for newer religious sects and revivalist practices.

In the 19th century, Americans used their land to grow crops, which helped create the dynamic agricultural economy that defined American society. Many Americans were lured westward to obtain more land. Immigrants sought land to settle, cattle ranchers wanted land for their herds, Southerners looked to expand their slave economy into Western lands, and railroad companies acquired huge tracts of land as they bound a loose society into a coherent economic union. Although Native Americans had inhabited most of the continent, Europeans and American settlers often viewed it as empty, virgin land that they were destined to occupy. Even before the late 19th century, when the last bloody battles between U.S. troops and Native Americans completed the white conquest of the West, the idea of possessing land was deeply etched into American cultural patterns and national consciousness.

Throughout the 19th century, agricultural settlements existed on large, separate plots of land, often occupying hundreds of acres. The Homestead Act of 1862 promised up to 65 hectares (160 acres) of free land to anyone with enough fortitude and vision to live on or cultivate the land. As a result, many settlements in the West contained vast areas of sparsely settled land, where neighbors lived great distances from one another. The desire for residential privacy has remained a significant feature of American culture.

This heritage continues to define patterns of life in the United States. More than any other Western society, Americans are committed to living in private dwellings set apart from neighbors. Despite the rapid urbanization that began in the late 19th century, Americans insisted that each nuclear family (parents and their children) be privately housed and that as many families as possible own their own homes. This strong cultural standard sometimes seemed unusual to new immigrants who were used to the more crowded living conditions of Europe, but they quickly adopted this aspect of American culture.

As cities became more densely populated, Americans moved to the suburbs. Streetcars, first used during the 1830s, opened suburban rings around city centers, where congestion was greatest. Banks offered long-term loans that allowed individuals to invest in a home. Above all, the automobile in the 1920s was instrumental in furthering the move to the suburbs.

After World War II (1939-1945), developers carved out rural tracts to build millions of single-family homes, and more Americans than ever before moved to large suburban areas that were zoned to prevent commercial and industrial activities. The federal government directly fueled this process by providing loans to war veterans as part of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill of Rights, which provided a wide range of benefits to U.S. military personnel. In many of the new housing developments, builders constructed homes according to a single model, a process first established in Levittown, New York. These identical, partially prefabricated units were rapidly assembled, making suburban life and private land ownership available to millions of returning soldiers in search of housing for their families.

American families still choose to live in either suburbs or the sprawling suburban cities that have grown up in newer regions of the country. Vast areas of the West, such as the Los Angeles metropolitan region in California, the area around Phoenix, Arizona, and the Puget Sound area of Washington state, became rapidly populated with new housing because of the American desire to own a home on a private plot of land. In much of this suburban sprawl, the central city has become largely indistinct. These suburban areas almost invariably reflect Americans’ dependence on automobiles and on government-supported highway systems.

As a result of Americans choosing to live in the suburbs, a distinctly American phenomenon developed in the form of the shopping mall. The shopping mall has increasingly replaced the old-fashioned urban downtown, where local shops, restaurants, and cultural attractions were located. Modern malls emphasize consumption as an exclusive activity. The shopping mall, filled with department stores, specialty shops, fast-food franchises, and movie multiplexes, has come to dominate retailing, making suburban areas across America more and more alike. In malls, Americans purchase food, clothing, and entertainment in an isolated environment surrounded by parking lots.

The American preference for living in the suburbs has also affected other living experiences. Because suburbs emphasize family life, suburban areas also place a greater emphasis on school and other family-oriented political issues than more demographically diverse cities. At their most intense levels, desire for privacy and fear of crime have led to the development of gated suburban communities that keep out those who are not wanted.

Despite the growth of suburbs, American cities have maintained their status as cultural centers for theaters, museums, concert halls, art galleries, and more upscale restaurants, shops, and bookstores. In the past several decades, city populations grew as young and trendy professionals with few or no children sought out the cultural possibilities and the diversity not available in the suburbs. Housing can be expensive and difficult to find in older cities such as New York; Boston, Massachusetts; and San Francisco, California. To cope, many city dwellers restored older apartment buildings and houses. This process, called gentrification, combines the American desire for the latest technology with a newer appreciation for the classic and vintage.

Many poorer Americans cannot afford homes in the suburbs or apartments in the gentrified areas of cities. They often rely upon federal housing subsidies to pay for apartments in less-desirable areas of the city or in public housing projects. Poorer people often live crowded together in large apartment complexes in congested inner-city areas. Federal public housing began when President Franklin Roosevelt sought to relieve the worst conditions associated with poverty in the 1930s. It accelerated during the 1950s and 1960s, as the government subsidized the renewal of urban areas by replacing slums with either new or refurbished housing. In the late 20th century, many people criticized public housing because it was often the site for crime, drug deals, gangs, and other social ills. Nevertheless, given the expensive nature of rental housing in cities, public housing is often the only option available to those who cannot afford to buy their own home. Private efforts, such as Habitat for Humanity, have been organized to help the urban poor move from crowded, high-rise apartments. These organizations help construct low-cost homes in places such as the South Bronx in New York City, and they emphasize the pride and autonomy of home ownership.

In recent years, the importance of home ownership has increased as higher real estate prices have made the house a valuable investment. The newest home construction has made standard the comforts of large kitchens, luxurious bathrooms, and small gardens. In line with the rising cost of land, these houses often stand on smaller lots than those constructed in the period following World War II, when one-story ranch houses and large lawns were the predominant style. At the same time, many suburban areas have added other kinds of housing in response to the needs of single people and people without children. As a result, apartments and townhouses—available as rentals and as condominiums—have become familiar parts of suburban life. For more information on urbanization and suburbanization.

**Food and Cuisine**

The United States has rich and productive land that has provided Americans with plentiful resources for a healthy diet. Despite this, Americans did not begin to pay close attention to the variety and quality of the food they ate until the 20th century, when they became concerned about eating too much and becoming overweight. American food also grew more similar around the country as American malls and fast-food outlets tended to standardize eating patterns throughout the nation, especially among young people. Nevertheless, American food has become more complex as it draws from the diverse cuisines that immigrants have brought with them.

Historically, the rest of the world has envied the good, wholesome food available in the United States. In the 18th and 19th centuries, fertile soil and widespread land ownership made grains, meats, and vegetables widely available, and famine that was common elsewhere was unknown in the United States. Some immigrants, such as the Irish, moved to the United States to escape famine, while others saw the bounty of food as one of the advantages of immigration. By the late 19th century, America’s food surplus was beginning to feed the world. After World War I (1914-1918) and World War II, the United States distributed food in Europe to help countries severely damaged by the wars. Throughout the 20th century, American food exports have helped compensate for inadequate harvests in other parts of the world. Although hunger does exist in the United States, it results more from food being poorly distributed rather than from food being unavailable.

Traditional American cuisine has included conventional European foodstuffs such as wheat, dairy products, pork, beef, and poultry. It has also incorporated products that were either known only in the New World or that were grown there first and then introduced to Europe. Such foods include potatoes, corn, codfish, molasses, pumpkin and other squashes, sweet potatoes, and peanuts. American cuisine also varies by region. Southern cooking was often different from cooking in New England and its upper Midwest offshoots. Doughnuts, for example, were a New England staple, while Southerners preferred corn bread. The availability of foods also affected regional diets, such as the different kinds of fish eaten in New England and the Gulf Coast. For instance, Boston clam chowder and Louisiana gumbo are widely different versions of fish soup. Other variations often depended on the contributions of indigenous peoples. In the Southwest, for example, Mexican and Native Americans made hot peppers a staple and helped define the spicy hot barbecues and chili dishes of the area. In Louisiana, Cajun influence similarly created spicy dishes as a local variation of Southern cuisine, and African slaves throughout the South introduced foods such as okra and yams

By the late 19th century, immigrants from Europe and Asia were introducing even more variations into the American diet. American cuisine began to reflect these foreign cuisines, not only in their original forms but in Americanized versions as well. Immigrants from Japan and Italy introduced a range of fresh vegetables that added important nutrients as well as variety to the protein-heavy American diet. Germans and Italians contributed new skills and refinements to the production of alcoholic beverages, especially beer and wine, which supplemented the more customary hard cider and indigenous corn-mash whiskeys. Some imports became distinctly American products, such as hot dogs, which are descended from German *wurst,* or sausage. Spaghetti and pizza from Italy, especially, grew increasingly more American and developed many regional spin-offs. Americans even adapted chow mein from China into a simple American dish. Not until the late 20th century did Americans rediscover these cuisines, and many others, paying far more attention to their original forms and cooking styles.

Until the early 20th century, the federal government did not regulate food for consumers, and food was sometimes dangerous and impure. During the Progressive period in the early 20th century, the federal government intervened to protect consumers against the worst kinds of food adulterations and diseases by passing legislation such as the Pure Food and Drug Acts. As a result, American food became safer. By the early 20th century, Americans began to consume convenient, packaged foods such as breads and cookies, preserved fruits, and pickles. By the mid-20th century, packaged products had expanded greatly to include canned soups, noodles, processed breakfast cereals, preserved meats, frozen vegetables, instant puddings, and gelatins. These prepackaged foods became staples used in recipes contained in popular cookbooks, while peanut butter sandwiches and packaged cupcakes became standard lunchbox fare. As a result, the American diet became noteworthy for its blandness rather than its flavors, and for its wholesomeness rather than its subtlety.

Americans were proud of their technology in food production and processing. They used fertilizers, hybridization (genetically combining two varieties), and other technologies to increase crop yields and consumer selection, making foods cheaper if not always better tasting. Additionally, by the 1950s, the refrigerator had replaced the old-fashioned icebox and the cold cellar as a place to store food. Refrigeration, because it allowed food to last longer, made the American kitchen a convenient place to maintain readily available food stocks. However, plentiful wholesome food, when combined with the sedentary 20th-century lifestyle and work habits, brought its own unpleasant consequences—overeating and excess weight. During the 1970s, 25 percent of Americans were overweight; by the 1990s that had increased to 35 percent.

America’s foods began to affect the rest of the world—not only raw staples such as wheat and corn, but a new American cuisine that spread throughout the world. American emphasis on convenience and rapid consumption is best represented in fast foods such as hamburgers, french fries, and soft drinks, which almost all Americans have eaten. By the 1960s and 1970s fast foods became one of America's strongest exports as franchises for McDonald’s and Burger King spread through Europe and other parts of the world, including the former Soviet Union and Communist China. Traditional meals cooked at home and consumed at a leisurely pace—common in the rest of the world, and once common in the United States—gave way to quick lunches and dinners eaten on the run as other countries mimicked American cultural patterns.

By the late 20th century, Americans had become more conscious of their diets, eating more poultry, fish, and fresh fruits and vegetables and fewer eggs and less beef. They also began appreciating fresh ingredients and livelier flavors, and cooks began to rediscover many world cuisines in forms closer to their original. In California, chefs combined the fresh fruits and vegetables available year-round with ingredients and spices sometimes borrowed from immigrant kitchens to create an innovative cooking style that was lighter than traditional French, but more interesting and varied than typical American cuisine. Along with the state’s wines, California cuisine eventually took its place among the acknowledged forms of fine dining.

As Americans became more concerned about their diets, they also became more ecologically conscious. This consciousness often included an antitechnology aspect that led some Americans to switch to a partially or wholly vegetarian diet, or to emphasize products produced organically (without chemical fertilizers and pesticides). Many considered these foods more wholesome and socially responsible because their production was less taxing to the environment. In the latter 20th century, Americans also worried about the effects of newly introduced genetically altered foods and irradiation processes for killing bacteria. They feared that these new processes made their food less natural and therefore harmful.

These concerns and the emphasis on variety were by no means universal, since food habits in the late 20th century often reflected society’s ethnic and class differences. Not all Americans appreciated California cuisine or vegetarian food, and many recent immigrants, like their immigrant predecessors, often continued eating the foods they knew best.

At the end of the 20th century, American eating habits and food production were increasingly taking place outside the home. Many people relied on restaurants and on new types of fully prepared meals to help busy families in which both adults worked full-time. Another sign of the public’s changing food habits was the microwave oven, probably the most widely used new kitchen appliance, since it can quickly cook foods and reheat prepared foods and leftovers. Since Americans are generally cooking less of their own food, they are more aware than at any time since the early 20th century of the quality and health standards applied to food. Recent attention to cases in which children have died from contaminated and poorly prepared food has once again directed the public’s attention to the government's role in monitoring food safety.

In some ways, American food developments are contradictory. Americans are more aware of food quality despite, and maybe because of, their increasing dependence on convenience. They eat a more varied diet, drawing on the cuisines of immigrant groups (Thai, Vietnamese, Greek, Indian, Cuban, Mexican, and Ethiopian), but they also regularly eat fast foods found in every shopping mall and along every highway. They are more suspicious of technology, although they rely heavily on it for their daily meals. In many ways, these contradictions reflect the many influences on American life in the late 20th century—immigration, double-income households, genetic technologies, domestic and foreign travel—and food has become an even deeper expression of the complex culture of which it is part.

**Dress**

In many regions of the world, people wear traditional costumes at festivals or holidays, and sometimes more regularly. Americans, however, do not have distinctive folk attire with a long tradition. Except for the varied and characteristic clothing of Native American peoples, dress in the United States has rarely been specific to a certain region or based on the careful preservation of decorative patterns and crafts. American dress is derived from the fabrics and fashions of the Europeans who began colonizing the country in the 17th century. Early settlers incorporated some of the forms worn by indigenous peoples, such as moccasins and garments made from animal skins (Benjamin Franklin is famous for flaunting a raccoon cap when he traveled to Europe), but in general, fashion in the United States adapted and modified European styles. Despite the number and variety of immigrants in the United States, American clothing has tended to be homogeneous, and attire from an immigrant’s homeland was often rapidly exchanged for American apparel.

American dress is distinctive because of its casualness. American style in the 20th century is recognizably more informal than in Europe, and for its fashion sources it is more dependent on what people on the streets are wearing. European fashions take their cues from the top of the fashion hierarchy, dictated by the world-famous *haute couture* (high fashion) houses of Paris, France, and recently those of Milan, Italy, and London, England. Paris designers, both today and in the past, have also dressed wealthy and fashionable Americans, who copied French styles. Although European designs remain a significant influence on American tastes, American fashions more often come from popular sources, such as the school and the street, as well as television and movies. In the last quarter of the 20th century, American designers often found inspiration in the imaginative attire worn by young people in cities and ballparks, and that worn by workers in factories and fields.

Blue jeans are probably the single most representative article of American clothing. They were originally invented by tailor Jacob Davis, who together with dry-goods salesman Levi Strauss patented the idea in 1873 as durable clothing for miners. Blue jeans (also known as dungarees) spread among workers of all kinds in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially among cowboys, farmers, loggers, and railroad workers. During the 1950s, actors Marlon Brando and James Dean made blue jeans fashionable by wearing them in movies, and jeans became part of the image of teenage rebelliousness. This fashion statement exploded in the 1960s and 1970s as Levi's became a fundamental part of the youth culture focused on civil rights and antiwar protests. By the late 1970s, almost everyone in the United States wore blue jeans, and youths around the world sought them. As designers began to create more sophisticated styles of blue jeans and to adjust their fit, jeans began to express the American emphasis on informality and the importance of subtlety of detail. By highlighting the right label and achieving the right look, blue jeans, despite their worker origins, ironically embodied the status consciousness of American fashion and the eagerness to approximate the latest fad.

American informality in dress is such a strong part of American culture that many workplaces have adopted the idea of “casual Friday,” a day when workers are encouraged to dress down from their usual professional attire. For many high-tech industries located along the West Coast, as well as among faculty at colleges and universities, this emphasis on casual attire is a daily occurrence, not just reserved for Fridays.

The fashion industry in the United States, along with its companion cosmetics industry, grew enormously in the second half of the 20th century and became a major source of competition for French fashion. Especially notable during the late 20th century was the incorporation of sports logos and styles, from athletic shoes to tennis shirts and baseball caps, into standard American wardrobes. American informality is enshrined in the wardrobes created by world-famous U.S. designers such as Calvin Klein, Liz Claiborne, and Ralph Lauren. Lauren especially adopted the American look, based in part on the tradition of the old West (cowboy hats, boots, and jeans) and in part on the clean-cut sportiness of suburban style (blazers, loafers, and khakis).

**Sports and Recreation**

Large numbers of Americans watch and participate in sports activities, which are a deeply ingrained part of American life. Americans use sports to express interest in health and fitness and to occupy their leisure time. Sports also allow Americans to connect and identify with mass culture. Americans pour billions of dollars into sports and their related enterprises, affecting the economy, family habits, school life, and clothing styles. Americans of all classes, races, sexes, and ages participate in sports activities—from toddlers in infant swimming groups and teenagers participating in school athletics to middle-aged adults bowling or golfing and older persons practicing t’ai chi.

Public subsidies and private sponsorships support the immense network of outdoor and indoor sports, recreation, and athletic competitions. Except for those sponsored by public schools, most sports activities are privately funded, and even American Olympic athletes receive no direct national sponsorship. Little League baseball teams, for example, are usually sponsored by local businesses. Many commercial football, basketball, baseball, and hockey teams reflect large private investments. Although sports teams are privately owned, they play in stadiums that are usually financed by taxpayer-provided subsidies such as bond measures. State taxes provide some money for state university sporting events. Taxpayer dollars also support state parks, the National Park Service, and the Forest Service, which provide places for Americans to enjoy camping, fishing, hiking, and rafting. Public money also funds the Coast Guard, whose crews protect those enjoying boating around the nation's shores.

Sports in North America go back to the Native Americans, who played forms of lacrosse and field hockey. During colonial times, early Dutch settlers bowled on New York City's Bowling Green, still a small park in southern Manhattan. However, organized sports competitions and local participatory sports on a substantial scale go back only to the late 19th century. Schools and colleges began to encourage athletics as part of a balanced program emphasizing physical as well as mental vigor, and churches began to loosen strictures against leisure and physical pleasures. As work became more mechanized, more clerical, and less physical during the late 19th century, Americans became concerned with diet and exercise. With sedentary urban activities replacing rural life, Americans used sports and outdoor relaxation to balance lives that had become hurried and confined. Biking, tennis, and golf became popular for those who could afford them, while sandlot baseball and an early version of basketball became popular city activities. At the same time, organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) began to sponsor sports as part of their efforts to counteract unruly behavior among young people.

Baseball teams developed in Eastern cities during the 1850s and spread to the rest of the nation during the Civil War in the 1860s. Baseball quickly became the national pastime and began to produce sports heroes such as Cy Young, Ty Cobb, and Babe Ruth in the first half of the 20th century. With its city-based loyalties and all-American aura, baseball appealed to many immigrants, who as players and fans used the game as a way to fit into American culture.

Starting in the latter part of the 19th century, football was played on college campuses, and intercollegiate games quickly followed. By the early 20th century, football had become a feature of college life across the nation. In the 1920s football pep rallies were commonly held on college campuses, and football players were among the most admired campus leaders. That enthusiasm has now spilled way beyond college to Americans throughout the country. Spectators also watch the professional football teams of the National Football League (NFL) with enthusiasm.

Basketball is another sport that is very popular as both a spectator and participant sport. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) hosts championships for men’s and women’s collegiate teams. Held annually in March, the men’s NCAA national championship is one of the most popular sporting events in the United States. The top men’s professional basketball league in the United States is the National Basketball Association; the top women’s is Women’s National Basketball Association. In addition, many people play basketball in amateur leagues and organizations. It is also common to see people playing basketball in parks and local gymnasiums around the country.

Another major sport played in the United States is ice hockey. Ice hockey began as an amateur sport played primarily in the Northeast. The first U.S. professional ice hockey team was founded in Boston in 1924. Ice hockey’s popularity has spread throughout the country since the 1960s. The NCAA holds a national collegiate ice hockey championship in April of each year. The country’s top professional league is the National Hockey League (NHL). NHL teams play a regular schedule that culminates in the championship series. The winner is awarded the Stanley Cup, the league’s top prize.

Television transformed sports in the second half of the 20th century. As more Americans watched sports on television, the sports industry grew into an enormous business, and sports events became widely viewed among Americans as cultural experiences. Many Americans shared televised moments of exaltation and triumph throughout the year: baseball during the spring and summer and its World Series in the early fall, football throughout the fall crowned by the Super Bowl in January, and the National Basketball Association (NBA) championships in the spring. The Olympic Games, watched by millions of people worldwide, similarly rivet Americans to their televisions as they watch outstanding athletes compete on behalf of their nations. Commercial sports are part of practically every home in America and have allowed sports heroes to gain prominence in the national imagination and to become fixtures of the consumer culture. As well-known faces and bodies, sports celebrities such as basketball player Michael Jordan and baseball player Mark McGwire are hired to endorse products.

Although televised games remove the viewing public from direct contact with events, they have neither diminished the fervor of team identification nor dampened the enthusiasm for athletic participation. Americans watch more sports on television than ever, and they personally participate in more varied sporting activities and athletic clubs. Millions of young girls and boys across the country play soccer, baseball, tennis, and field hockey.

At the end of the 20th century, Americans were taking part in individual sports of all kinds—jogging, bicycling, swimming, skiing, rock climbing, playing tennis, as well as more unusual sports such as bungee jumping, hang gliding, and wind surfing. As Americans enjoy more leisure time, and as Hollywood and advertising emphasize trim, well-developed bodies, sports have become a significant component of many people's lives. Many Americans now invest significant amounts of money in sports equipment, clothing, and gym memberships. As a result, more people are dressing in sporty styles of clothing. Sports logos and athletic fashions have become common aspects of people’s wardrobes, as people need to look as though they participate in sports to be in style. Sports have even influenced the cars Americans drive, as sport utility vehicles accommodate the rugged terrain, elaborate equipment, and sporty lifestyles of their owners.

Probably the most significant long-term development in 20th-century sports has been the increased participation of minorities and women. Throughout the early 20th century, African Americans made outstanding contributions to sports, despite being excluded from organized white teams. The exclusion of black players from white baseball led to the creation of a separate Negro National League in 1920. On the world stage, track-and-field star Jessie Owens became a national hero when he won four gold medals and set world and Olympic records at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. The racial segregation that prevented African Americans from playing baseball in the National League until 1947 has been replaced by the enormous successes of African Americans in all fields of sport.

Before the 20th century women could not play in most organized sports. Soon, however, they began to enter the sports arena. Helen Wills Moody, a tennis champion during the 1920s, and Babe Didrikson Zaharias, one of the 20th century’s greatest women athletes, were examples of physical grace and agility. In 1972 Title IX of the Education Amendments Act outlawed discrimination based on gender in education, including school sports. Schools then spent additional funding on women's athletics, which provided an enormous boost to women’s sports of all kinds, especially basketball, which became very popular. Women's college basketball, part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), is a popular focus of interest. By the end of the 20th century, this enthusiasm led to the creation of a major professional women’s basketball league. Women have become a large part of athletics, making their mark in a wide range of sports.

Sports have become one of the most visible expressions of the vast extension of democracy in 20th-century America. They have become more inclusive, with many Americans both personally participating and enjoying sports as spectators. Once readily available only to the well-to-do, sports and recreation attract many people, aided by the mass media, the schools and colleges, the federal and state highway and park systems, and increased leisure time.

**Celebrations and Holidays**

Americans celebrate an enormous variety of festivals and holidays because they come from around the globe and practice many religions. They also celebrate holidays specific to the United States that commemorate historical events or encourage a common national memory. Holidays in America are often family or community events. Many Americans travel long distances for family gatherings or take vacations during holidays. In fact, by the end of the 20th century, many national holidays in the United States had become three-day weekends, which many people used as mini vacations. Except for the Fourth of July and Veterans Day, most commemorative federal holidays, including Memorial Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, and Presidents’ Day, are celebrated on Mondays so that Americans can enjoy a long weekend. Because many Americans tend to create vacations out of these holiday weekends rather than celebrate a particular event, some people believe the original significance of many of these occasions has been eroded.

Because the United States is a secular society founded on the separation of church and state, many of the most meaningful religiously based festivals and rituals, such as Easter, Rosh Hashanah, and Ramadan, are not enshrined as national events, with one major exception. Christmas, and the holiday season surrounding it, is an enormous commercial enterprise, a fixture of the American social calendar, and deeply embedded in the popular imagination. Not until the 19th century did Christmas in the United States begin to take on aspects of the modern holiday celebration, such as exchanging gifts, cooking and eating traditional foods, and putting up often-elaborate Christmas decorations. The holiday has grown in popularity and significance ever since. Santa Claus; brightly decorated Christmas trees; and plenty of wreathes, holly, and ribbons help define the season for most children. Indeed, because some religious faiths do not celebrate Christmas, the Christmas season has expanded in recent years to become the “holiday season,” embracing Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, and Kwanzaa, a celebration of African heritage. Thus, the Christmas season has become the closest thing to a true national festival in the United States.

The expansion of Christmas has even begun to encroach on the most indigenous of American festivals, Thanksgiving. Celebrated on the last Thursday in November, Thanksgiving has largely shed its original religious meaning (as a feast of giving thanks to God) to become a celebration of the bounty of food and the warmth of family life in America. American children usually commemorate the holiday’s origins at school, where they re-create the original event: Pilgrims sharing a harvest feast with Native Americans. Both the historical and the religious origins of the event have largely given way to a secular celebration centered on the traditional Thanksgiving meal: turkey—an indigenous American bird—accompanied by foods common in early New England settlements, such as pumpkins, squashes, and cranberries. Since many Americans enjoy a four-day holiday at Thanksgiving, the occasion encourages family reunions and travel. Some Americans also contribute time and food to the needy and the homeless during the Thanksgiving holiday.

Another holiday that has lost its older, religious meaning in the United States is Halloween, the eve of All Saints’ Day. Halloween has become a celebration of witches, ghosts, goblins, and candy that is especially attractive to children. On this day and night, October 31, many homes are decorated and lit by jack-o'-lanterns, pumpkins that have been hollowed out and carved. Children dress up and go trick-or-treating, during which they receive treats from neighbors. An array of orange-colored candies has evolved from this event, and most trick-or-treat bags usually brim with chocolate bars and other confections.

The Fourth of July, or Independence Day, is the premier American national celebration because it commemorates the day the United States proclaimed its freedom from Britain with the Declaration of Independence. Very early in its development, the holiday was an occasion for fanfare, parades, and speeches celebrating American freedom and the uniqueness of American life. Since at least the 19th century, Americans have commemorated their independence with fireworks and patriotic music. Because the holiday marks the founding of the republic in 1776, flying the flag of the United States (sometimes with the original 13 stars) is common, as are festive barbecues, picnics, fireworks, and summer outings.

Most other national holidays have become less significant over time and receded in importance as ways in which Americans define themselves and their history. For example, Columbus Day was formerly celebrated on October 12, the day explorer Christopher Columbus first landed in the West Indies, but it is now celebrated on the second Monday of October to allow for a three-day weekend. The holiday originally served as a traditional reminder of the "discovery" of America in 1492, but as Americans became more sensitive to their multicultural population, celebrating the conquest of Native Americans became more controversial.

Holidays honoring wars have also lost much of their original significance. Memorial Day, first called Decoration Day and celebrated on May 30, was established to honor those who died during the American Civil War (1861-1865), then subsequently those who died in all American wars. Similarly, Veterans Day was first named Armistice Day and marked the end of World War I (1914-1918). During the 1950s the name of the holiday was changed in the United States, and its significance expanded to honor armed forces personnel who served in any American war.

The memory of America's first president, George Washington, was once celebrated on his birthday, February 22nd. The date was changed to the third Monday in February to create a three-day weekend, as well as to incorporate the birthday of another president, Abraham Lincoln, who was born on February 12th. The holiday is now popularly called Presidents’ Day and is less likely to be remembered as honoring the first and 16th American presidents than as a school and work holiday. Americans also memorialize Martin Luther King, Jr., the great African American civil rights leader who was assassinated in 1968. King’s birthday is celebrated as a national holiday in mid-January. The celebration of King's birthday has become a sign of greater inclusiveness in 20th-century American society.

EDUCATION

**Role of Education**

The United States has one of the most extensive and diverse educational systems in the world. Educational institutions exist at all learning levels, from nursery schools for the very young to higher education for older youths and adults of all ages. Education in the United States is notable for the many goals it aspires to accomplish—promoting democracy, assimilation, nationalism, equality of opportunity, and personal development. Because Americans have historically insisted that their schools work toward these sometimes conflicting goals, education has often been the focus of social conflict.

While schools are expected to achieve many social objectives, education in America is neither centrally administered nor supported directly by the federal government, unlike education in other industrialized countries. In the United States, each state is responsible for providing schooling, which is funded through local taxes and governed by local school boards. In addition to these government-funded public schools, the United States has many schools that are privately financed and maintained. More than 10 percent of all elementary and secondary students in the United States attend private schools. Religious groups, especially the Roman Catholic Church, run many of these. Many of America's most renowned universities and colleges are also privately endowed and run. As a result, although American education is expected to provide equality of opportunity, it is not easily directed toward these goals. This complex enterprise, once one of the proudest achievements of American democracy because of its diversity and inclusiveness, became the subject of intense debate and criticism during the second half of the 20th century. People debated the goals of schools as well as whether schools were educating students well enough.

**History of Education in America**

Until the 1830s, most American children attended school irregularly, and most schools were either run privately or by charities. This irregular system was replaced in the Northeast and Midwest by publicly financed elementary schools, known as common schools. Common schools provided rudimentary instruction in literacy and trained students in citizenship. This democratic ideal expanded after the Civil War to all parts of the nation. By the 1880s and 1890s, schools began to expand attendance requirements so that more children and older children attended school regularly. These more rigorous requirements were intended to ensure that all students, including those whose families had immigrated from elsewhere, were integrated into society. In addition, the schools tried to equip children with the more complex skills required in an industrialized urban society.

Education became increasingly important during the 20th century, as America’s sophisticated industrial society demanded a more literate and skilled workforce. In addition, school degrees provided a sought-after means to obtain better-paying and higher-status jobs. Schools were the one American institution that could provide the literate skills and work habits necessary for Americans of all backgrounds to compete in industries. As a result, education expanded rapidly. In the first decades of the 20th century, mandatory education laws required children to complete grade school. By the end of the 20th century, many states required children to attend school until they were at least 16. In 1960, 45 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college; by 1996 that enrollment rate had risen to 65 percent. By the late 20th century, an advanced education was necessary for success in the globally competitive and technologically advanced modern economy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, workers with a bachelor’s degree in 1997 earned an average of $40,000 annually, while those with a high school degree earned about $23,000. Those who did not complete high school earned about $16,000.

In the United States, higher education is widely available and obtainable through thousands of private, religious, and state-run institutions, which offer advanced professional, scientific, and other training programs that enable students to become proficient in diverse subjects. Colleges vary in cost and level of prestige. Many of the oldest and most famous colleges on the East Coast are expensive and set extremely high admissions standards. Large state universities are less difficult to enter, and their fees are substantially lower. Other types of institutions include state universities that provide engineering, teaching, and agriculture degrees; private universities and small privately endowed colleges; religious colleges and universities; and community and junior colleges that offer part-time and two-year degree programs. This complex and diverse range of schools has made American higher education the envy of other countries and one of the nation’s greatest assets in creating and maintaining a technologically advanced society.

When more people began to attend college, there were a number of repercussions. Going to college delayed maturity and independence for many Americans, extending many of the stresses of adolescence into a person’s 20s and postponing the rites of adulthood, such as marriage and childbearing. As society paid more attention to education, it also devoted a greater proportion of its resources to it. Local communities were required to spend more money on schools and teachers, while colleges and universities were driven to expand their facilities and course offerings to accommodate an ever-growing student body. Parents were also expected to support their children longer and to forgo their children's contribution to the household.

**Funding**

Education is an enormous investment that requires contributions from many sources. American higher education is especially expensive, with its heavy investment in laboratory space and research equipment. It receives funding from private individuals, foundations, and corporations. Many private universities have large endowments, or funds, that sustain the institutions beyond what students pay in tuition and fees. Many, such as Harvard University in Massachusetts and Stanford University in California, raise large sums of money through fund drives. Even many state-funded universities seek funds from private sources to augment their budgets. Most major state universities, such as those in Michigan and California, now rely on a mixture of state and private resources.

Before World War II, the federal government generally played a minor role in financing education, with the exception of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. These acts granted the states public lands that could be sold for the purpose of establishing and maintaining institutions of higher education. Many so-called land-grant state universities were founded during the 19th century as a result of this funding. Today, land-grant colleges include some of the nation’s premier state universities. The government also provided some funding for basic research at universities.

The American experience in World War II (especially the success of the Manhattan Project, which created the atomic bomb) made clear that scientific and technical advances, as well as human resources, were essential to national security. As a result, the federal government became increasingly involved in education at all levels and substantially expanded funding for universities. The federal government began to provide substantial amounts of money for university research programs through agencies such as the National Science Foundation, and later through the National Institutes of Health and the departments of Energy and Defense. At the same time, the government began to focus on providing equal educational opportunities for all Americans. Beginning with the GI Bill, which financed educational programs for veterans, and later in the form of fellowships and direct student loans in the 1960s, more and more Americans were able to attend colleges and universities.

During the 1960s the federal government also began to play more of a role in education at lower levels. The Great Society programs of President Lyndon Johnson developed many new educational initiatives to assist poor children and to compensate for disadvantage. Federal money was funneled through educational institutions to establish programs such as Head Start, which provides early childhood education to disadvantaged children. Some Americans, however, resisted the federal government’s increased presence in education, which they believed contradicted the long tradition of state-sponsored public schooling.

By the 1980s many public schools were receiving federal subsidies for textbooks, transportation, breakfast and lunch programs, and services for students with disabilities. This funding enriched schools across the country, especially inner-city schools, and affected the lives of millions of schoolchildren. Although federal funding increased, as did federal supervision, to guarantee an equitable distribution of funds, the government did not exercise direct control over the academic programs schools offered or over decisions about academic issues. During the 1990s, the administration of President Bill Clinton urged the federal government to move further in exercising leadership by establishing academic standards for public schools across the country and to evaluate schools through testing.

**Concerns in Elementary Education**

The United States has historically contended with the challenges that come with being a nation of immigrants. Schools are often responsible for modifying educational offerings to accommodate immigrants. Early schools reflected many differences among students and their families but were also a mechanism by which to overcome these differences and to forge a sense of American commonality. Common schools, or publicly financed elementary schools, were first introduced in the mid-19th century in the hopes of creating a common bond among a diverse citizenship. By the early 20th century, massive immigration from Europe caused schools to restructure and expand their programs to more effectively incorporate immigrant children into society. High schools began to include technical, business, and vocational curricula to accommodate the various goals of its more diverse population. The United States continues to be concerned about how to incorporate immigrant groups.

The language in which students are taught is one of the most significant issues for schools. Many Americans have become concerned about how best to educate students who are new to the English language and to American culture. As children of all ages and from dozens of language backgrounds seek an education, most schools have adopted some variety of bilingual instruction. Students are taught in their native language until their knowledge of English improves, which is often accomplished through an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Some people have criticized these bilingual programs for not encouraging students to learn English more quickly, or at all. Some Americans fear that English will no longer provide a uniform basis for American identity; others worry that immigrant children will have a hard time finding employment if they do not become fluent in English. In response to these criticisms, voters in California, the state that has seen the largest influx of recent immigrants, passed a law in 1998 requiring that all children attending public schools be taught in English and prohibiting more than one year of bilingual instruction.

Many Americans, including parents and business leaders, are also alarmed by what they see as inadequate levels of student achievement in subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science. On many standardized tests, American students lag behind their counterparts in Europe and Asia. In response, some Americans have urged the adoption of national standards by which individual schools can be evaluated. Some have supported more rigorous teacher competency standards. Another response that became popular in the 1990s is the creation of charter schools. These schools are directly authorized by the state and receive public funding, but they operate largely outside the control of local school districts. Parents and teachers enforce self-defined standards for these charter schools.

Schools are also working to incorporate computers into classrooms. The need for computer literacy in the 21st century has put an additional strain on school budgets and local resources. Schools have struggled to catch up by providing computer equipment and instruction and by making Internet connections available. Some companies, including Apple Computer, Inc., have provided computer equipment to help schools meet their students’ computer-education needs.

**Concerns in Higher Education**

Throughout the 20th century, Americans have attended schools to obtain the economic and social rewards that come with highly technical or skilled work and advanced degrees. However, as the United States became more diverse, people debated how to include different groups, such as women and minorities, into higher education. Blacks have historically been excluded from many white institutions, or were made to feel unwelcome. Since the 19th century, a number of black colleges have existed to compensate for this broad social bias, including federally chartered and funded Howard University. In the early 20th century, when Jews and other Eastern Europeans began to apply to universities, some of the most prestigious colleges imposed quotas limiting their numbers.

Americans tried various means to eliminate the most egregious forms of discrimination. In the early part of the century, "objective" admissions tests were introduced to counteract the bias in admissions. Some educators now view admissions tests such as the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), originally created to simplify admissions testing for prestigious private schools, as disadvantageous to women and minorities. Critics of the SAT believed the test did not adequately account for differences in social and economic background. Whenever something as subjective as ability or merit is evaluated, and when the rewards are potentially great, people hotly debate the best means to fairly evaluate these criteria.

Until the middle of the 20th century, most educational issues in the United States were handled locally. After World War II, however, the federal government began to assume a new obligation to assure equality in educational opportunity, and this issue began to affect college admissions standards. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the government increased its role in questions relating to how all Americans could best secure equal access to education.

Schools had problems providing equal opportunities for all because quality, costs, and admissions criteria varied greatly. To deal with these problems, the federal government introduced the policy of affirmative action in education in the early 1970s. Affirmative action required that colleges and universities take race, ethnicity, and gender into account in admissions to provide extra consideration to those who have historically faced discrimination. It was intended to assure that Americans of all backgrounds have an opportunity to train for professions in fields such as medicine, law, education, and business administration.

Affirmative action became a general social commitment during the last quarter of the 20th century. In education, it meant that universities and colleges gave extra advantages and opportunities to blacks, Native Americans, women, and other groups that were generally underrepresented at the highest levels of business and in other professions. Affirmative action also included financial assistance to members of minorities who could not otherwise afford to attend colleges and universities. Affirmative action has allowed many minority members to achieve new prominence and success.

At the end of the 20th century, the policy of affirmative action was criticized as unfair to those who were denied admission in order to admit those in designated group categories. Some considered affirmative action policies a form of reverse discrimination, some believed that special policies were no longer necessary, and others believed that only some groups should qualify (such as African Americans because of the nation’s long history of slavery and segregation). The issue became a matter of serious discussion and is one of the most highly charged topics in education today. In the 1990s three states—Texas, California, and Washington—eliminated affirmative action in their state university admissions policies.

Several other issues have become troubling to higher education. Because tuition costs have risen to very high levels, many smaller private colleges and universities are struggling to attract students. Many students and their parents choose state universities where costs are much lower. The decline in federal research funds has also caused financial difficulties to many universities. Many well-educated students, including those with doctoral degrees, have found it difficult to find and keep permanent academic jobs, as schools seek to lower costs by hiring part-time and temporary faculty. As a result, despite its great strengths and its history of great variety, the expense of American higher education may mean serious changes in the future.

Education is fundamental to American culture in more ways than providing literacy and job skills. Educational institutions are the setting where scholars interpret and pass on the meaning of the American experience. They analyze what America is as a society by interpreting the nation’s past and defining objectives for the future. That information eventually forms the basis for what children learn from teachers, textbooks, and curricula. Thus, the work of educational institutions is far more important than even job training, although this is usually foremost in people’s minds.

ARTS AND LETTERS

The arts, more than other features of culture, provide avenues for the expression of imagination and personal vision. They offer a range of emotional and intellectual pleasures to consumers of art and are an important way in which a culture represents itself. There has long been a Western tradition distinguishing those arts that appeal to the multitude, such as popular music, from those—such as classical orchestral music—normally available to the elite of learning and taste. Popular art forms are usually seen as more representative American products. In the United States in the recent past, there has been a blending of popular and elite art forms, as all the arts experienced a period of remarkable cross-fertilization. Because popular art forms are so widely distributed, arts of all kinds have prospered.

The arts in the United States express the many faces and the enormous creative range of the American people. Especially since World War II, American innovations and the immense energy displayed in literature, dance, and music have made American cultural works world famous. Arts in the United States have become internationally prominent in ways that are unparalleled in history. American art forms during the second half of the 20th century often defined the styles and qualities that the rest of the world emulated. At the end of the 20th century, American art was considered equal in quality and vitality to art produced in the rest of the world.

Throughout the 20th century, American arts have grown to incorporate new visions and voices. Much of this new artistic energy came in the wake of America’s emergence as a superpower after World War II. But it was also due to the growth of New York City as an important center for publishing and the arts, and the immigration of artists and intellectuals fleeing fascism in Europe before and during the war. An outpouring of talent also followed the civil rights and protest movements of the 1960s, as cultural discrimination against blacks, women, and other groups diminished.

American arts flourish in many places and receive support from private foundations, large corporations, local governments, federal agencies, museums, galleries, and individuals. What is considered worthy of support often depends on definitions of quality and of what constitutes art. This is a tricky subject when the popular arts are increasingly incorporated into the domain of the fine arts and new forms such as performance art and conceptual art appear. As a result, defining what is art affects what students are taught about past traditions (for example, Native American tent paintings, oral traditions, and slave narratives) and what is produced in the future. While some practitioners, such as studio artists, are more vulnerable to these definitions because they depend on financial support to exercise their talents, others, such as poets and photographers, are less immediately constrained.

Artists operate in a world where those who theorize and critique their work have taken on an increasingly important role. Audiences are influenced by a variety of intermediaries—critics, the schools, foundations that offer grants, the National Endowment for the Arts, gallery owners, publishers, and theater producers. In some areas, such as the performing arts, popular audiences may ultimately define success. In other arts, such as painting and sculpture, success is far more dependent on critics and a few, often wealthy, art collectors. Writers depend on publishers and on the public for their success.

Unlike their predecessors, who relied on formal criteria and appealed to aesthetic judgments, critics at the end of the 20th century leaned more toward popular tastes, taking into account groups previously ignored and valuing the merger of popular and elite forms. These critics often relied less on aesthetic judgments than on social measures and were eager to place artistic productions in the context of the time and social conditions in which they were created. Whereas earlier critics attempted to create an American tradition of high art, later critics used art as a means to give power and approval to nonelite groups who were previously not considered worthy of including in the nation’s artistic heritage.

Not so long ago, culture and the arts were assumed to be an unalterable inheritance—the accumulated wisdom and highest forms of achievement that were established in the past. In the 20th century generally, and certainly since World War II, artists have been boldly destroying older traditions in sculpture, painting, dance, music, and literature. The arts have changed rapidly, with one movement replacing another in quick succession.

**Visual Arts**

The visual arts have traditionally included forms of expression that appeal to the eyes through painted surfaces, and to the sense of space through carved or molded materials. In the 19th century, photographs were added to the paintings, drawings, and sculpture that make up the visual arts. The visual arts were further augmented in the 20th century by the addition of other materials, such as found objects. These changes were accompanied by a profound alteration in tastes, as earlier emphasis on realistic representation of people, objects, and landscapes made way for a greater range of imaginative forms.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American art was considered inferior to European art. Despite noted American painters such as Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, Mary Cassatt, and John Marin, American visual arts barely had an international presence.

American art began to flourish during the Great Depression of the 1930s as New Deal government programs provided support to artists along with other sectors of the population. Artists connected with each other and developed a sense of common purpose through programs of the Public Works Administration, such as the Federal Art Project, as well as programs sponsored by the Treasury Department. Most of the art of the period, including painting, photography, and mural work, focused on the plight of the American people during the depression, and most artists painted real people in difficult circumstances. Artists such as Thomas Hart Benton and Ben Shahn expressed the suffering of ordinary people through their representations of struggling farmers and workers. While artists such as Benton and Grant Wood focused on rural life, many painters of the 1930s and 1940s depicted the multicultural life of the American city. Jacob Lawrence, for example, re-created the history and lives of African Americans. Other artists, such as Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper, tried to use human figures to describe emotional states such as loneliness and despair.

**Abstract Expressionism**

Shortly after World War II, American art began to garner worldwide attention and admiration. This change was due to the innovative fervor of abstract expressionism in the 1950s and to subsequent modern art movements and artists. The abstract expressionists of the mid-20th century broke from the realist and figurative tradition set in the 1930s. They emphasized their connection to international artistic visions rather than the particularities of people and place, and most abstract expressionists did not paint human figures (although artist Willem de Kooning did portrayals of women). Color, shape, and movement dominated the canvases of abstract expressionists. Some artists broke with the Western art tradition by adopting innovative painting styles—during the 1950s Jackson Pollock "painted" by dripping paint on canvases without the use of brushes, while the paintings of Mark Rothko often consisted of large patches of color that seem to vibrate.

Abstract expressionists felt alienated from their surrounding culture and used art to challenge society’s conventions. The work of each artist was quite individual and distinctive, but all the artists identified with the radicalism of artistic creativity. The artists were eager to challenge conventions and limits on expression in order to redefine the nature of art. Their radicalism came from liberating themselves from the confining artistic traditions of the past.

The most notable activity took place in New York City, which became one of the world’s most important art centers during the second half of the 20th century. The radical fervor and inventiveness of the abstract expressionists, their frequent association with each other in New York City’s Greenwich Village, and the support of a group of gallery owners and dealers turned them into an artistic movement. Also known as the New York School, the participants included Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, and Arshile Gorky, in addition to Rothko and Pollock.

The members of the New York School came from diverse backgrounds such as the American Midwest and Northwest, Armenia, and Russia, bringing an international flavor to the group and its artistic visions. They hoped to appeal to art audiences everywhere, regardless of culture, and they felt connected to the radical innovations introduced earlier in the 20th century by European artists such as Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp. Some of the artists—Hans Hofmann, Gorky, Rothko, and de Kooning—were not born in the United States, but all the artists saw themselves as part of an international creative movement and an aesthetic rebellion.

As artists felt released from the boundaries and conventions of the past and free to emphasize expressiveness and innovation, the abstract expressionists gave way to other innovative styles in American art. Beginning in the 1930s Joseph Cornell created hundreds of boxed assemblages, usually from found objects, with each based on a single theme to create a mood of contemplation and sometimes of reverence. Cornell's boxes exemplify the modern fascination with individual vision, art that breaks down boundaries between forms such as painting and sculpture, and the use of everyday objects toward a new end. Other artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, combined disparate objects to create large, collage-like sculptures known as combines in the 1950s. Jasper Johns, a painter, sculptor, and printmaker, recreated countless familiar objects, most memorably the American flag.

The most prominent American artistic style to follow abstract expressionism was the pop art movement that began in the 1950s. Pop art attempted to connect traditional art and popular culture by using images from mass culture. To shake viewers out of their preconceived notions about art, sculptor Claes Oldenburg used everyday objects such as pillows and beds to create witty, soft sculptures. Roy Lichtenstein took this a step further by elevating the techniques of commercial art, notably cartooning, into fine art worthy of galleries and museums. Lichtenstein's large, blown-up cartoons fill the surface of his canvases with grainy black dots and question the existence of a distinct realm of high art. These artists tried to make their audiences see ordinary objects in a refreshing new way, thereby breaking down the conventions that formerly defined what was worthy of artistic representation.

Probably the best-known pop artist, and a leader in the movement, was Andy Warhol, whose images of a Campbell’s soup can and of the actress Marilyn Monroe explicitly eroded the boundaries between the art world and mass culture. Warhol also cultivated his status as a celebrity. He worked in film as a director and producer to break down the boundaries between traditional and popular art. Unlike the abstract expressionists, whose conceptual works were often difficult to understand, Andy Warhol's pictures, and his own face, were instantly recognizable.

Conceptual art, as it came to be known in the 1960s, like its predecessors, sought to break free of traditional artistic associations. In conceptual art, as practiced by Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth, concept takes precedent over actual object, by stimulating thought rather than following an art tradition based on conventional standards of beauty and artisanship.

Modern artists changed the meaning of traditional visual arts and brought a new imaginative dimension to ordinary experience. Art was no longer viewed as separate and distinct, housed in museums as part of a historical inheritance, but as a continuous creative process. This emphasis on constant change, as well as on the ordinary and mundane, reflected a distinctly American democratizing perspective. Viewing art in this way removed the emphasis from technique and polished performance, and many modern artworks and experiences became more about expressing ideas than about perfecting finished products.

**Photography**

Photography is probably the most democratic modern art form because it can be, and is, practiced by most Americans. Since 1888, when George Eastman developed the Kodak camera that allowed anyone to take pictures, photography has struggled to be recognized as a fine art form. In the early part of the 20th century, photographer, editor, and artistic impresario Alfred Stieglitz established 291, a gallery in New York City, with fellow photographer Edward Steichen, to showcase the works of photographers and painters. They also published a magazine called *Camera Work* to increase awareness about photographic art. In the United States, photographic art had to compete with the widely available commercial photography in news and fashion magazines. By the 1950s the tradition of photojournalism, which presented news stories primarily with photographs, had produced many outstanding works. In 1955 Steichen, who was director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, called attention to this work in an exhibition called *The Family of Man*.

Throughout the 20th century, most professional photographers earned their living as portraitists or photojournalists, not as artists. One of the most important exceptions was Ansel Adams, who took majestic photographs of the Western American landscape. Adams used his art to stimulate social awareness and to support the conservation cause of the Sierra Club. He helped found the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in 1940, and six years later helped establish the photography department at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco (now the San Francisco Art Institute). He also held annual photography workshops at Yosemite National Park from 1955 to 1981 and wrote a series of influential books on photographic technique.

Adams's elegant landscape photography was only one small stream in a growing current of interest in photography as an art form. Early in the 20th century, teacher-turned-photographer Lewis Hine established a documentary tradition in photography by capturing actual people, places, and events. Hine photographed urban conditions and workers, including child laborers. Along with their artistic value, the photographs often implicitly called for social reform. In the 1930s and 1940s, photographers joined with other depression-era artists supported by the federal government to create a photographic record of rural America. Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Arthur Rothstein, among others, produced memorable and widely reproduced portraits of rural poverty and American distress during the Great Depression and during the dust storms of the period.

In 1959, after touring the United States for two years, Swiss-born photographer Robert Frank published *The Americans*, one of the landmarks of documentary photography. His photographs of everyday life in America introduced viewers to a depressing, and often depressed, America that existed in the midst of prosperity and world power.

Photographers continued to search for new photographic viewpoints. This search was perhaps most disturbingly embodied in the work of Diane Arbus. Her photos of mental patients and her surreal depictions of Americans altered the viewer’s relationship to the photograph. Arbus emphasized artistic alienation and forced viewers to stare at images that often made them uncomfortable, thus changing the meaning of the ordinary reality that photographs are meant to capture.

American photography continues to flourish. The many variants of art photography and socially conscious documentary photography are widely available in galleries, books, and magazines.

A host of other visual arts thrive, although they are far less connected to traditional fine arts than photography. Decorative arts include, but are not limited to, art glass, furniture, jewelry, pottery, metalwork, and quilts. Often exhibited in craft galleries and studios, these decorative arts rely on ideals of beauty in shape and color as well as an appreciation of well-executed crafts. Some of these forms are also developed commercially. The decorative arts provide a wide range of opportunity for creative expression and have become a means for Americans to actively participate in art and to purchase art for their homes that is more affordable than works produced by many contemporary fine artists.

**Literature**

American literature since World War II is much more diverse in its voices than ever before. It has also expanded its view of the past as people rediscovered important sources from non-European traditions, such as Native American folktales and slave narratives. Rediscovering these traditions expanded the range of American literary history.

American Jewish writing from the 1940s to the 1960s was the first serious outpouring of an American literature that contained many voices. Some Jewish writers had begun to be heard as literary critics and novelists before World War II, part of a general broadening of American literature during the first half of the 20th century. After the war, talented Jewish writers appeared in such numbers and became so influential that they stood out as a special phenomenon. They represented at once a subgroup within literature and the new voice of American literature.

Several Jewish American novelists, including Herman Wouk and Norman Mailer, wrote important books about the war without any special ethnic resonance. But writers such as novelists Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth, and storytellers Grace Paley and Cynthia Ozick wrote most memorably from within the Jewish tradition. Using their Jewish identity and history as background, these authors asked how moral behavior was possible in modern America and how the individual could survive in the contemporary world. Saul Bellow most conspicuously posed these questions, framing them even before the war was over in his earliest novel, *Dangling Man* (1944). He continued to ask them in various ways through a series of novels paralleling the life cycle, including *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Herzog* (1964), and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970). One novel in the series earned a Pulitzer Prize (*Humboldt's Gift*, 1975). Bellow was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1976. Like Bellow, Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud struggled with identity and selfhood as well as with morality and fate. However, Roth often resisted being categorized as a Jewish writer. Playwright Arthur Miller rarely invoked his Jewish heritage, but his plays contained similar existential themes.

Isaac Bashevis Singer was also part of this postwar group of American Jewish writers. His novels conjure up his lost roots and life in prewar Poland and the ghostly, religiously inspired fantasies of Jewish existence in Eastern Europe before World War II. Written in Yiddish and much less overtly American, Singer’s writings were always about his own specific past and that of his people. Singer's re-creation of an earlier world as well as his stories of adjusting to the United States won him a Nobel Prize in literature in 1978.

Since at least the time of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, American writers of African descent, such as Richard Wright, sought to express the separate experiences of their people while demanding to be recognized as fully American. The difficulty of that pursuit was most completely and brilliantly realized in the haunting novel *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison. African American writers since then have contended with the same challenge of giving voice to their experiences as a marginalized and often despised part of America.

Several African American novelists in recent decades have struggled to represent the wounded manner in which African Americans have participated in American life. In the 1950s and 1960s, James Baldwin discovered how much he was part of the United States after a period of self-imposed exile in Paris, and he wrote about his dark and hurt world in vigorous and accusatory prose. The subject has also been at the heart of an extraordinary rediscovery of the African American past in the plays of Lorraine Hansberry and the fiction of Alice Walker, Charles Johnson, and Toni Morrison. Probably more than any American writer before her, Morrison has grappled with the legacy that slavery inflicted upon African Americans and with what it means to live with a separate consciousness within American culture. In 1993 Morrison became the first African American writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize in literature.

Writers from other groups, including Mexican Americans, Native Americans, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Filipino Americans, also grappled with their separate experiences within American culture. Among them, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich have dealt with issues of poverty, life on reservations, and mixed ancestry among Native Americans. Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros have dealt with the experiences of Mexican Americans, and Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston have explored Chinese American family life.

Even before World War II, writers from the American South reflected on what it meant to have a separate identity within American culture. The legacy of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction left the South with a sense of a lost civilization, embodied in popular literature such as *Gone With the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell, and with questions about how a Southern experience could frame a literary legacy. Southern literature in the 20th century draws deeply on distinct speech rhythms, undercurrents of sin, and painful reflections on evil as part of a distinctly Southern tradition. William Faulkner most fully expressed these issues in a series of brilliant and difficult novels set in a fictional Mississippi county. These novels, most of them published in the 1930s, include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom* (1936).For his contribution, Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1949. More recent Southern writers, such as Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, James Dickey, and playwright Tennessee Williams, have continued this tradition of Southern literature.

In addition to expressing the minority consciousness of Southern regionalism, Faulkner's novels also reflected the artistic modernism of 20th-century literature, in which reality gave way to frequent interruptions of fantasy and the writing is characterized by streams of consciousness rather than by precise sequences in time. Other American writers, such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and E. L. Doctorow also experimented with different novel forms and tried to make their writing styles reflect the peculiarities of consciousness in the chaos of the modern world. Doctorow, for example, in his novel *Ragtime* juxtaposed real historical events and people with those he made up. Pynchon questioned the very existence of reality in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973).

Aside from Faulkner, perhaps the greatest modernist novelist writing in the United States was йmigrй Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov first wrote in his native Russian, and then in French, before settling in the United States and writing in English. Nabokov saw no limits to the possibilities of artistic imagination, and he believed the artist's ability to manipulate language could be expressed through any subject. In a series of novels written in the United States, Nabokov demonstrated that he could develop any situation, even the most alien and forbidden, to that end. This was demonstrated in *Lolita* (1955), a novel about sexual obsession that caused a sensation and was first banned as obscene.

Despite its obvious achievements, modernism in the United States had its most profound effect on other forms of literature, especially in poetry and in a new kind of personal journalism that gradually erased the sharp distinctions between news reporting, personal reminiscence, and fiction writing.

**20th-Century Poetry**

Modern themes and styles of poetry have been part of the American repertoire since the early part of the 20th century, especially in the work of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Their works were difficult, emotionally restrained, full of non-American allusions, and often inaccessible. After World War II, new poetic voices developed that were more exuberant and much more American in inspiration and language. The poets who wrote after the war often drew upon the work of William Carlos Williams and returned to the legacy of Walt Whitman, which was democratic in identification and free-form in style. These poets provided postwar poetry with a uniquely American voice.

The Beatnik, or Beat, poets of the 1950s notoriously followed in Whitman’s tradition. They adopted a radical ethic that included drugs, sex, art, and the freedom of the road. Jack Kerouac captured this vision in *On the Road* (1957), a quintessential book about Kerouac’s adventures wandering across the United States. The most significant poet in the group was Allen Ginsberg, whose sexually explicit poem *Howl* (1956) became the subject of a court battle after it was initially banned as obscene. The Beat poets spanned the country, but adopted San Francisco as their special outpost. The city continued to serve as an important arena for poetry and unconventional ideas, especially at the City Lights Bookstore co-owned by writer and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Other modernist poets included Gwendolyn Brooks, who retreated from the conventional forms of her early poetry to write about anger and protest among African Americans, and Adrienne Rich, who wrote poetry focused on women's rights, needs, and desires.

Because it is open to expressive forms and innovative speech, modern poetry is able to convey the deep personal anguish experienced by several of the most prominent poets of the postwar period, among them Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Theodore Roethke, Anne Sexton, and John Berryman. Sometimes called confessional poets, they used poetry to express nightmarish images of self-destruction. As in painting, removing limits and conventions on form permitted an almost infinite capacity for conveying mood, feeling, pain, and inspiration. This personal poetry also brought American poetry closer to the European modernist tradition of emotional anguish and madness. Robert Frost, probably the most famous and beloved of modern American poets, wrote evocative and deeply felt poetry that conveyed some of these same qualities within a conventional pattern of meter and rhyme.

Another tradition of modern poetry moved toward playful engagement with language and the creative process. This tradition was most completely embodied in the brilliant poetry of Wallace Stevens, whose work dealt with the role of creative imagination. This tradition was later developed in the seemingly simple and prosaic poetry of John Ashbery, who created unconventional works that were sometimes records of their own creation. Thus, poetry after World War II, like the visual arts, expanded the possibilities of emotional expression and reflected an emphasis on the creative process. The idea of exploration and pleasure through unexpected associations and new ways of viewing reality connected poetry to the modernism of the visual arts.

**Journalism**

Modernist sensibilities were also evident in the emergence of a new form of journalism. Journalism traditionally tried to be factual and objective in presentation. By the mid-1970s, however, some of America's most creative writers were using contemporary events to create a new form of personal reporting. This new approach stretched the boundaries of journalism and brought it closer to fiction because the writers were deeply engaged and sometimes personally involved in events. Writers such as Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Joan Didion created a literary journalism that infused real events with their own passion. In *Armies of the Night* (1968), the record of his involvement in the peace movement, Mailer helped to define this new kind of writing. Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), the retelling of the senseless killing of a Kansas family, and Mailer’s story of a murderer's fate in *The Executioner's Song* (1979) brought this hyperrealism to chilling consummation. No less vivid were Didion's series of essays on California culture in the late 1960s and her reporting of the sensational trial of football star O. J. Simpson in 1995.

**Performing Arts**

As in other cultural spheres, the performing arts in the United States in the 20th century increasingly blended traditional and popular art forms. The classical performing arts—music, opera, dance, and theater—were not a widespread feature of American culture in the first half of the 20th century. These arts were generally imported from or strongly influenced by Europe and were mainly appreciated by the wealthy and well educated. Traditional art usually referred to classical forms in ballet and opera, orchestral or chamber music, and serious drama. The distinctions between traditional music and popular music were firmly drawn in most areas.

During the 20th century, the American performing arts began to incorporate wider groups of people. The African American community produced great musicians who became widely known around the country. Jazz and blues singers such as Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Billie Holiday spread their sounds to black and white audiences. In the 1930s and 1940s, the swing music of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller adapted jazz to make a unique American music that was popular around the country. The American performing arts also blended Latin American influences beginning in the 20th century. Between 1900 and 1940, Latin American dances, such as the tango from Argentina and the rumba from Cuba, were introduced into the United States. In the 1940s a fusion of Latin and jazz elements was stimulated first by the Afro-Cuban mambo and later on by the Brazilian bossa nova.

Throughout the 20th century, dynamic classical institutions in the United States attracted international talent. Noted Russian-born choreographer George Balanchine established the short-lived American Ballet Company in the 1930s; later he founded the company that in the 1940s would become the New York City Ballet. The American Ballet Theatre, also established during the 1940s, brought in non-American dancers as well. By the 1970s this company had attracted Soviet defector Mikhail Baryshnikov, an internationally acclaimed dancer who served as the company’s artistic director during the 1980s.

In classical music, influential Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, who composed symphonies using innovative musical styles, moved to the United States in 1939. German-born pianist, composer, and conductor Andrй Previn, who started out as a jazz pianist in the 1940s, went on to conduct a number of distinguished American symphony orchestras. Another Soviet, cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, became conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., in 1977.

Some of the most innovative artists in the first half of the 20th century successfully incorporated new forms into classical traditions. Composers George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, and dancer Isadora Duncan were notable examples. Gershwin combined jazz and spiritual music with classical in popular works such as *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935). Copland developed a unique style that was influenced by jazz and American folk music. Early in the century, Duncan redefined dance along more expressive and free-form lines.

Some artists in music and dance, such as composer John Cage and dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, were even more experimental. During the 1930s Cage worked with electronically produced sounds and sounds made with everyday objects such as pots and pans. He even invented a new kind of piano. During the late 1930s, avant-garde choreographer Cunningham began to collaborate with Cage on a number of projects.

Perhaps the greatest, and certainly the most popular, American innovation was the Broadway musical, which also became a movie staple. Beginning in the 1920s, the Broadway musical combined music, dance, and dramatic performance in ways that surpassed the older vaudeville shows and musical revues but without being as complex as European grand opera. By the 1960s, this American musical tradition was well established and had produced extraordinary works by important musicians and lyricists such as George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Jerome Kern, and Oscar Hammerstein II. These productions required an immense effort to coordinate music, drama, and dance. Because of this, the musical became the incubator of an American modern dance tradition that produced some of America's greatest choreographers, among them Jerome Robbins, Gene Kelly, and Bob Fosse.

In the 1940s and 1950s the American musical tradition was so dynamic that it attracted outstanding classically trained musicians such as Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein composed the music for *West Side Story*, an updated version of *Romeo and Juliet* set in New York that became an instant classic in 1957. The following year, Bernstein became the first American-born conductor to lead a major American orchestra, the New York Philharmonic. He was an international sensation who traveled the world as an ambassador of the American style of conducting. He brought the art of classical music to the public, especially through his "Young People's Concerts," television shows that were seen around the world. Bernstein used the many facets of the musical tradition as a force for change in the music world and as a way of bringing attention to American innovation.

In many ways, Bernstein embodied a transformation of American music that began in the 1960s. The changes that took place during the 1960s and 1970s resulted from a significant increase in funding for the arts and their increased availability to larger audiences. New York City, the American center for art performances, experienced an artistic explosion in the 1960s and 1970s. Experimental off-Broadway theaters opened, new ballet companies were established that often emphasized modern forms or blended modern with classical (Martha Graham was an especially important influence), and an experimental music scene developed that included composers such as Philip Glass and performance groups such as the Guarneri String Quartet. Dramatic innovation also continued to expand with the works of playwrights such as Edward Albee, Tony Kushner, and David Mamet.

As the variety of performances expanded, so did the serious crossover between traditional and popular music forms. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, an expanded repertoire of traditional arts was being conveyed to new audiences. Popular music and jazz could be heard in formal settings such as Carnegie Hall, which had once been restricted to classical music, while the Brooklyn Academy of Music became a venue for experimental music, exotic and ethnic dance presentations, and traditional productions of grand opera. Innovative producer Joseph Papp had been staging Shakespeare in Central Park since the 1950s. Boston conductor Arthur Fiedler was playing a mixed repertoire of classical and popular favorites to large audiences, often outdoors, with the Boston Pops Orchestra. By the mid-1970s the United States had several world-class symphony orchestras, including those in Chicago; New York; Cleveland, Ohio; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Even grand opera was affected. Once a specialized taste that often required extensive knowledge, opera in the United States increased in popularity as the roster of respected institutions grew to include companies in Seattle, Washington; Houston, Texas; and Santa Fe, New Mexico. American composers such as John Adams and Philip Glass began composing modern operas in a new minimalist style during the 1970s and 1980s.

The crossover in tastes also influenced the Broadway musical, probably America's most durable music form. Starting in the 1960s, rock music became an ingredient in musical productions such as *Hair* (1967). By the 1990s, it had become an even stronger presence in musicals such as *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* (1996), which used African American music and dance traditions, and *Rent* (1996) a modern, rock version of the classic opera *La Bohиme*. This updating of the musical opened the theater to new ethnic audiences who had not previously attended Broadway shows, as well as to young audiences who had been raised on rock music.

Performances of all kinds have become more available across the country. This is due to both the sheer increase in the number of performance groups as well as to advances in transportation. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the number of major American symphonies doubled, the number of resident theaters increased fourfold, and the number of dance companies increased tenfold. At the same time, planes made it easier for artists to travel. Artists and companies regularly tour, and they expand the audiences for individual artists such as performance artist Laurie Anderson and opera singer Jessye Norman, for musical groups such as the Juilliard Quartet, and for dance troupes such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Full-scale theater productions and musicals first presented on Broadway now reach cities across the country. The United States, once a provincial outpost with a limited European tradition in performance, has become a flourishing center for the performing arts.

**Libraries and Museums**

Libraries, museums, and other collections of historical artifacts have been a primary means of organizing and preserving America’s legacy. In the 20th century, these institutions became an important vehicle for educating the public about the past and for providing knowledge about the society of which all Americans are a part.

**Libraries**

Private book collections go back to the early European settlement of the New World, beginning with the founding of the Harvard University library in 1638. Colleges and universities acquire books because they are a necessary component of higher education. University libraries have many of the most significant and extensive book collections. In addition to Harvard’s library, the libraries at Yale University, Columbia University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in Urbana, and the University of California in Berkeley and Los Angeles are among the most prominent, both in scope and in number of holdings. Many of these libraries also contain important collections of journals, newspapers, pamphlets, and government documents, as well as private papers, letters, pictures, and photographs. These libraries are essential for preserving America’s history and for maintaining the records of individuals, families, institutions, and other groups.

Books in early America were scarce and expensive. Although some Americans owned books, Benjamin Franklin made a much wider range of books and other printed materials available to many more people when he created the first generally recognized public library in 1731. Although Franklin’s Library Company of Philadelphia loaned books only to paying subscribers, the library became the first one in the nation to make books available to people who did not own them. During the colonial period Franklin’s idea was adopted by cities such as Boston, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and Charleston, South Carolina.

These libraries set the precedent for the free public libraries that began to spread through the United States in the 1830s. Public libraries were seen as a way to encourage literacy among the citizens of the young republic as well as a means to provide education in conjunction with the public schools that were being set up at the same time. In 1848 Boston founded the first major public library in the nation. By the late 19th century, libraries were considered so essential to the nation's well-being that industrialist Andrew Carnegie donated part of his enormous fortune to the construction of library buildings. Because Carnegie believed that libraries were a public obligation, he expected the books to be contributed through public expenditure. Since the 19th century, locally funded public libraries have become part of the American landscape, often occupying some of the most imposing public buildings in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Philadelphia. The belief that the knowledge and enjoyment that books provide should be accessible to all Americans also resulted in bookmobiles that serve in inner cities and in rural counties.

In addition to the numerous public libraries and university collections, the United States boasts two major libraries with worldwide stature: the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the New York Public Library. In 1800 Congress passed legislation founding the Library of Congress, which was initially established to serve the needs of the members of Congress. Since then, this extraordinary collection has become one of the world's great libraries and a depository for every work copyrighted in the United States. Housed in three monumental buildings named after Presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, the library is open to the public and maintains major collections of papers, photographs, films, maps, and music in addition to more than 17 million books.

The New York Public Library was founded in 1895. The spectacular and enormous building that today houses the library in the heart of the city opened in 1911 with more than a million volumes. The library is guarded by a famous set of lion statues, features a world-famous reading room, and contains more than 40 million catalogued items. Although partly funded through public dollars, the library also actively seeks funds from private sources for its operations.

Institutions such as these libraries are fundamental to the work of scholars, who rely on the great breadth of library collections. Scholars also rely on many specialized library collections throughout the country. These collections vary greatly in the nature of their holdings and their affiliations. The Schmulowitz Collection of Wit and Humor at the San Francisco Public Library contains more than 20,000 volumes in 35 languages. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, part of the New York Public Library, specializes in the history of Africans around the world. The Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, located at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in Massachusetts, houses the papers of prominent American women such as Susan B. Anthony and Amelia Earhart. The Bancroft Collection of Western Americana and Latin Americana is connected with the University of California at Berkeley. The Huntington Library in San Marino, California, was established by American railroad executive Henry Huntington and contains a collection of rare and ancient books and manuscripts. The Newberry Library in Chicago, one of the most prestigious research libraries in the nation, contains numerous collections of rare books, maps, and manuscripts.

Scholars of American history and culture also use the vast repository of the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., and its local branches. As the repository and publisher of federal documents, the National Archives contain an extraordinary array of printed material, ranging from presidential papers and historical maps to original government documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. It houses hundreds of millions of books, journals, photos, and other government papers that document the life of the American people and its government. The library system is deeply entrenched in the cultural life of the American people, who have from their earliest days insisted on the importance of literacy and education, not just for the elite but for all Americans.

**Museums**

The variety of print resources available in libraries is enormously augmented by the collections housed in museums. Although people often think of museums as places to view art, in fact museums house a great variety of collections, from rocks to baseball memorabilia. In the 20th century, the number of museums exploded. And by the late 20th century, as institutions became increasingly aware of their important role as interpreters of culture, they attempted to bring their collections to the general public. Major universities have historically also gathered various kinds of collections in museums, sometimes as a result of gifts. The Yale University Art Gallery, for example, contains an important collection of American arts, including paintings, silver, and furniture, while the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley specializes in archaeological objects and Native American artifacts.

The earliest museums in the United States grew out of private collections, and throughout the 19th century they reflected the tastes and interests of a small group. Often these groups included individuals who cultivated a taste for the arts and for natural history, so that art museums and natural history museums often grew up side by side. American artist Charles Willson Peale established the first museum of this kind in Philadelphia in the late 18th century.

The largest and most varied collection in the United States is contained in the separate branches of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The Smithsonian, founded in 1846 as a research institution, developed its first museums in the 1880s. It now encompasses 16 museums devoted to various aspects of American history, as well as to artifacts of everyday life and technology, aeronautics and space, gems and geology, and natural history.

The serious public display of art began when the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, founded in 1870, moved to its present location in Central Park in 1880. At its installation, the keynote speaker announced that the museum’s goal was education, connecting the museum to other institutions with a public mission. The civic leaders, industrialists, and artists who supported the Metropolitan Museum, and their counterparts who established the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, were also collectors of fine art. Their collections featured mainly works by European masters, but also Asian and American art. They often bequeathed their collections to these museums, thus shaping the museum’s policies and holdings. Their taste in art helped define and develop the great collections of art in major metropolitan centers such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. In several museums, such as the Metropolitan and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., collectors created institutions whose holdings challenged the cultural treasures of the great museums of Europe.

**Funding**

Museums continued to be largely elite institutions through the first half of the 20th century, supported by wealthy patrons eager to preserve collections and to assert their own definitions of culture and taste. Audiences for most art museums remained an educated minority of the population through the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century. By the second decade of the 20th century, the tastes of this elite became more varied. In many cases, women within the families of the original art patrons (such as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, and Peggy Guggenheim) encouraged the more avant-garde artists of the modern period. Women founded new institutions to showcase modern art, such as the Museum of Modern Art (established by three women in 1929) and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Although these museums still catered to small, educated, cosmopolitan groups, they expanded the definition of refined taste to include more nontraditional art. They also encouraged others to become patrons for new artists, such as the abstract expressionists in the mid-20th century, and helped establish the United States as a significant place for art and innovation after World War II.

Although individual patronage remained the most significant source of funding for the arts throughout the 20th century, private foundations began to support various arts institutions by the middle of the century. Among these, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller Foundation were especially important in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Ford Foundation in the 1960s. The federal government also became an active sponsor of the arts during the 20th century. Its involvement had important consequences for expanding museums and for creating a larger audience.

The federal government first began supporting the arts during the Great Depression of the 1930s through New Deal agencies, which provided monetary assistance to artists, musicians, photographers, actors, and directors. The Work Projects Administration also helped museums to survive the depression by providing jobs to restorers, cataloguers, clerical workers, carpenters, and guards. At the same time, innovative arrangements between wealthy individuals and the government created a new kind of joint patronage for museums. In the most notable of these, American financier, industrialist, and statesman Andrew W. Mellon donated his extensive art collection and a gallery to the federal government in 1937 to serve as the nucleus for the National Gallery of Art. The federal government provides funds for the maintenance and operation of the National Gallery, while private donations from foundations and corporations pay for additions to the collection as well as for educational and research programs.

Government assistance during the Great Depression set a precedent for the federal government to start funding the arts during the 1960s, when Congress appropriated money for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as part of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities. The NEA provides grants to individuals and nonprofit organizations for the cultivation of the arts, although grants to institutions require private matching funds. The need for matching funds increased private and state support of all kinds, including large donations from newer arts patrons such as the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Large corporations such as the DuPont Company, International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), and the Exxon Corporation also donated to the arts.

**Expansion**

The increased importance placed on art throughout the 20th century helped fuel a major expansion in museums. By the late 1960s and 1970s, art museums were becoming aware of their potential for popular education and pleasure. Audiences for museums increased as museums received more funding and became more willing to appeal to the public with blockbuster shows that traveled across the country. One such show, *The Treasures of Tutankhamun*, which featured ancient Egyptian artifacts, toured the country from 1976 to 1979. Art museums increasingly sought attractions that would appeal to a wider audience, while at the same time expanding the definition of art. This effort resulted in museums exhibiting even motorcycles as art, as did the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1998.

Museums also began to expand the kinds of art and cultural traditions they exhibited. By the 1990s, more and more museums displayed natural and cultural artifacts and historical objects from non-European societies. These included objects ranging from jade carvings, baskets, and ceramics to calligraphy, masks, and furniture. Egyptian artifacts had been conspicuous in the holdings of New York's Metropolitan Museum and the Brooklyn Museum since the early 20th century. The opening in 1989 of two Smithsonian museums in Washington, D.C., the National Museum of African Art and the National Museum of the American Indian, indicated an awareness of a much broader definition of the American cultural heritage. The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., maintain collections of Asian art and cultural objects. The 1987 opening of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, a new Smithsonian museum dedicated to Asian and Near Eastern arts, confirmed the importance of this tradition.

Collectors and museums did not neglect the long-venerated Western tradition, as was clear from the personal collection of ancient Roman and Greek art owned by American oil executive and financier J. Paul Getty. Opened to the public in 1953, the museum named after him was located in Malibu, California, but grew so large that in 1997 the J. Paul Getty Museum expanded into a new Getty Center, a complex of six buildings in Los Angeles. By the end of the 20th century, Western art was but one among an array of brilliant cultural legacies that together celebrate the human experience and the creativity of the American past.

**Memorials and Monuments**

The need to memorialize the past has a long tradition and is often associated with wars, heroes, and battles. In the United States, monuments exist throughout the country, from the Revolutionary site of Bunker Hill to the many Civil War battlefields. The nation’s capital features a large number of monuments to generals, war heroes, and leaders. Probably the greatest of all these is Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, where there are thousands of graves of veterans of American wars, including the Tomb of the Unknowns and the gravesite of President John F. Kennedy. In addition to these traditional monuments to history, millions of people are drawn to the polished black wall that is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The memorial is a stark reminder of the losses suffered in a war in which more than 58,000 Americans died and of a time of turmoil in the nation.

No less important than monuments to war heroes are memorials to other victims of war. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which opened in 1993 in Washington, D.C., is dedicated to documenting the extermination of millions of Jews and others by the Nazis during World War II. It contains photographs, films, oral histories, and artifacts as well as a research institute, and has become an enormous tourist attraction. It is one example of a new public consciousness about museums as important sources of information and places in which to come to terms with important and painful historical events. Less elaborate Holocaust memorials have been established in cities across the country, including New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

Monuments to national heroes are an important part of American culture. These range from the memorials to Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to the larger-than-life faces of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt carved into Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Some national memorials also include monuments to ordinary citizens, such as the laborers, farmers, women, and African Americans who are part of the new Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Americans also commemorate popular culture with museums and monuments such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. These collections of popular culture are as much a part of American heritage as are fine arts museums and statues of national heroes. As a result of this wide variety of institutions and monuments, more people know about the breadth of America’s past and its many cultural influences. This new awareness has even influenced the presentation of artifacts in natural history museums. Where these once emphasized the differences among human beings and their customs by presenting them as discrete and unrelated cultures, today’s museums and monuments emphasize the flow of culture among people.

The expansion in types of museums and the increased attention to audience is due in part to new groups participating in the arts and in discussions about culture. In the early 20th century, many museums were supported by wealthy elites. Today’s museums seek to attract a wider range of people including students from inner cities, families from the suburbs, and Americans of all backgrounds. The diverse American population is eager to have its many pasts and talents enshrined. The funding now available through foundations and federal and state governments provides assistance. This development has not been without resistance. In the 1980s and 1990s people challenged the role of the federal government in sponsoring certain controversial art and culture forms, posing threats to the existence of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Nevertheless, even these controversies have made clearer how much art and cultural institutions express who we are as a people. Americans possess many different views and pasts, and they constantly change what they create, how they communicate, and what they appreciate about their past.