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## Introduction

### *The State as a Work of Art: Design, Technology, and Social Reform, 1876–1917*

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**A**HUNDRED YEARS AGO, work began on a new capitol building for the State of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg. At the same time, the new City Hall of Philadelphia, begun in 1871, was finally completed. Colossal monuments to civic pride, they testify to a culture that believed in the power of art to shape the state. The statue of William Penn on the tower of City Hall, presiding over the city he founded, and the Spirit of Commonwealth still perched on the Capitol of the state she inspired, are

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perpetual reminders of the reciprocity of political and aesthetic values. Fortunately, they are not the only survivors of an optimistic era that built with posterity in mind. The preservation of the architectural masterpieces discussed in this issue have made it possible for us to revisit them more than a century later.

The concept of the state as a work of art was characteristic of the civic renaissance that took place between the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 and America's entry into World War I in 1917. Architects and engineers, painters and sculptors, designers and craftsmen were enlisted to create an urban culture suitable for a nation about to step onto the world stage. However, the conflicts inherent in American society made it inevitable that the nation's heroic posture, like its political rhetoric, would be part propaganda, part wishful thinking. While industrialization generated the vast wealth of the nineteenth century, it also created poverty, pollution, and social unrest on an unprecedented scale. Already in 1878, the *Atlantic Monthly* had observed that the working classes regarded "art and instruments of high culture, with all the possessions and surroundings of people of wealth and refinements, as causes and symbols of the laborer's poverty and degradation, and therefore as things to be hated."<sup>1</sup> Glorified as a golden age and vilified as a gilded age, it was a time when the arts were considered both a cause and a cure for social problems. Perhaps the era is best represented by the Mercer tile reproduced on this issue's cover. Handcrafted in an industrial society for the floor of the Capitol, the tile is decorated with the image of a blast furnace. Here art conveys in a single glance the essence of the complex culture that is broadly sketched in this introduction. The articles contained in this issue offer detailed analyses and reappraisals of Pennsylvania's Renaissance of design, technology, and social reform.

In her essay "Toward an Iconography of a State Capitol," Ingrid Steffensen traces the metamorphosis of Pennsylvania's capitol over three centuries from the colonial State House in Philadelphia, through the Federal-style mansion in Harrisburg, to the Renaissance revival building erected at the beginning of the twentieth century. Steffensen's iconographic analysis of Pennsylvania's "Vatican on the Susquehanna" explores

<sup>1</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, "The Great Civilization," in *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917* (New York, 1979), 21, n. 13.

the symbolism of architecture—ornamented by sculpture, murals, and cast bronze doors—in the service of the state. At the dedication of the Pennsylvania State Capitol in 1906, attended by President Theodore Roosevelt and throngs of elated citizens, Governor Samuel Pennypacker acknowledged the importance of government patronage of the arts. “The Capitol is much more than the building in which the Legislature holds its sessions, the courts sit in judgment, and the executive exercises his authority,” he declared, “it is a concrete manifestation of the importance and power of the State and an expression of its artistic development.”<sup>2</sup> The event marks a transformation of American attitudes toward the arts. Before the Civil War, Ralph Waldo Emerson had decried the public indifference to civic architecture. “Who cares, who knows, what works of art our government have ordered to be made for the capitol?” he wrote in 1841. “In this country, at this time, other interests than religion and patriotism are predominant, and the arts, the daughters of enthusiasm, do not flourish.”<sup>3</sup> Not that he thought Americans were incapable of artistic achievement; on the contrary, he maintained that the desire for “beauty, truth and goodness” was as indigenous here “as in Tuscany, or in the Isles of Greece.” Emerson believed that his compatriots’ preoccupation with practical matters was “preparing the soil of man for fairer flowers and fruits in another age.”

That age arrived with the Centennial when a new generation of Americans captivated by the Renaissance revival sought to raise the cultural status of the United States. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the term “Renaissance” entered the American vocabulary. The architectural style of City Hall, today identified as Second Empire, was described in 1876 as “a rich example of what is known by the generic term ‘Renaissance,’ modified and adapted to the varied and extensive requirements of a great American municipality.”<sup>4</sup> By the twentieth century, such generalities were no longer necessary. In 1906, the discriminating guide to the new Pennsylvania State Capitol stated that the exterior was designed in “the classical style, as adapted for the purpose of a building of this character by the architects of

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Handbook of the New Capitol of Pennsylvania* (1906; reprint, Harrisburg, 1999), i.

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Thoughts on Art,” *The Dial* 1, no. 3 (Jan. 1841), 367–78, reprinted in *American Art, 1700–1960: Sources and Documents*, ed. John W. McCoubrey (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 80.

<sup>4</sup> James Dabney McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition* (Philadelphia, 1876), 82.

the Renaissance."<sup>5</sup> By that time, exposure to Renaissance art through histories, exhibitions, and travel had produced a more knowledgeable public. The notion of an "American Renaissance" was first proposed in 1880 in reference to a new generation of European-trained artists and thereafter the expression was commonplace.<sup>6</sup> In 1904, the architect Joy Wheeler Dow published *American Renaissance: A Review of Domestic Architecture*.<sup>7</sup> Removed from its historical context, the term became synonymous with a blossoming of creativity, as in *The Craftsman* which declared in 1909, "Now in America we are at the beginning of a period not only of extraordinary activity in all the creative arts, but also of a Renaissance in industrial art conditions."<sup>8</sup> Critics observed "a Renaissance in brickwork"<sup>9</sup> and an "American Renaissance of stained glass."<sup>10</sup> The Philadelphia blacksmith Samuel Yellin was described as "a Renaissance artisan born out of his time."<sup>11</sup> In its myriad uses, "Renaissance" reflected the national self-image at the beginning of the new century.<sup>12</sup>

The Renaissance revival began in 1848 when a small group of English painters disenchanted with modern industrial society formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an alliance based on their nostalgia for Italian painting of the fifteenth century. The founding members, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt, joined by Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, soon attracted an ever-widening circle of followers. Sanctioned by John Ruskin, the medieval-revivalist and critic, as an Italian form of the Gothic, Pre-Raphaelitism spread from a cult into a religion.

The "American Exhibition of British Art" brought the Pre-Raphaelites to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1858. Organized by William Rossetti, the show featured 232 paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites in

<sup>5</sup> Charles H. Caffin, *Handbook of the New Capitol of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1906), 12.

<sup>6</sup> "The American Renaissance," *Californian* 1 (June 1880), 571-72, as quoted by Richard N. Murray, *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917*, 154, n. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, "The Great Civilization," 45.

<sup>8</sup> *The Craftsman* 16, no. 5 (August 1909), 526.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

<sup>10</sup> Clement Weiser DeChant, *The Story of Religion in Stained Glass* (Philadelphia, 1942) as quoted by Gilbert Weeder, "Oak Lane United Church of Christ," *Stained Glass Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Royal Cortissoz, as quoted in Jack Andrews, *Samuel Yellin, Metalworker* (Philadelphia, 1982), 11.

<sup>12</sup> See *The American Renaissance: 1876-1917*; Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1993), chap. 6, "Midsummer of the American Renaissance."

addition to works by Ruskin.<sup>13</sup> In 1892, the Academy organized a second exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite painting from the collections of Samuel Bancroft, Jr., and Ruskin's American disciple, Charles Eliot Norton, the first professor of fine arts at Harvard University.<sup>14</sup> While their effect on the Academy's painters was negligible, the Pre-Raphaelites exerted a great influence on local designers through the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>15</sup> America's foremost illustrator, Howard Pyle, designed books in the Renaissance style of the Kelmscott Press, founded by William Morris in 1893.<sup>16</sup> His student, Violet Oakley, employed the Pre-Raphaelite style in her illustrations, books, and stained glass designs.

The superior quality of the furnishings manufactured by the Pre-Raphaelite firms of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company (1861) and Morris and Company (1874), inspired a crafts revival in the region. William Willet in 1898 and Nicola D'Ascenzo in 1900 founded stained glass studios in Philadelphia employing the painting techniques of Edward Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown.<sup>17</sup> In 1900, Henry Mercer organized the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown to revive the Pennsylvania German method of making ceramics. In 1908, the blacksmith Samuel Yellin established his decorative ironwork firm in Philadelphia. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Arts and Crafts villages founded at Rose Valley near Media, Pennsylvania, and at Arden, Delaware, produced a distinctive line of handmade furniture, ceramics, and ironwork.

Fascination with art and artists was characteristic of the first wave of scholarship on the Renaissance. Mrs. Jonathon Foster's translation of Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1850),

<sup>13</sup> *Catalogue of the American Exhibition of British Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Philadelphia, 1858); Susan P. Casteras, "The 1857-58 Exhibition of English Art in America and Critical Responses to Pre-Raphaelitism," in *The New Path: Ruskin and American Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerds (New York, 1985), 109-33.

<sup>14</sup> Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., *In This Academy: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1805-1976*, (Philadelphia, 1976), 40.

<sup>15</sup> See the bibliography in *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America*, ed. Robert Judson Clark (Princeton, 1992); for the ideology of the American Crafts revival, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Henry C. Pitz, *Howard Pyle: Writer, Illustrator, Founder of the Brandywine School* (New York, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> The Willet Studio is still operating in Chestnut Hill. Records of D'Ascenzo's Studio (1900-50) are in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. For a general reference, see John Gilbert Lloyd, *Stained Glass in America* (Jenkintown, Pa., 1963); and H. Weber Wilson, *Great Glass in American Architecture* (New York, 1986).

first brought the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artists to life. The Swiss scholar Jakob Burckhardt's *Cicerone* (1850), translated in 1873, provided American tourists with a guide to the art treasures of Italy. Rossetti's English translation, *The Early Italian Poets and Dante's La Vita Nuova* (1861), contributed to the growing audience for Dante in the United States. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Elliot Norton founded the Dante Society of America in Cambridge in 1880.<sup>18</sup> Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) initiated the formation of a canon of Italian masters by analyzing the aesthetic qualities of the styles of Leonardo da Vinci and other painters. Botticelli, the subject of dissertations by the German art historians Aby Warburg (1892) and Hermann Ulmann (1893), cast his spell over much of the art of the late nineteenth-century century.<sup>19</sup> John Addington Symonds portrayed the dramatic personalities of the High Renaissance with his translation of *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* (1888) and his *Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1893). Bernhard Berenson, the author of *Venetian Painters* (1894) and *Florentine Painters* (1896), introduced the notion that art had "life-enhancing" properties, and developed methods of connoisseurship to authenticate Italian Renaissance paintings for American collectors.

In itself, the appreciation of Italian painting among an elite of artists and collectors does not sufficiently account for the pervasive influence of the Renaissance on American culture. A predominantly Protestant society, antipathetic to Catholic iconography and offended by pagan mythology, would not be deeply moved by exposure to Renaissance art. Certainly Ruskin, the supreme arbiter of taste in the English-speaking world, had written *The Stones of Venice* in 1851 with the expressed purpose of destroying admiration for "the pestilent art of the Renaissance."<sup>20</sup> Yet in the second half of the century, Americans defied Ruskin's injunction to "cast out" the Renaissance tradition of architecture because it was "utterly devoid of all life, virtue, honorableness, or power of doing good."<sup>21</sup> Why then did

<sup>18</sup> American interest in Dante began before the Civil War but did not develop momentum until the 600th anniversary of the poet in 1865. See A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Dante in America* (Binghamton, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> For Americans' interest in Botticelli, see Lillian B. Miller, "Celebrating Botticelli: The Taste for the Italian Renaissance in the United States, 1870-1920" in *The Italian Presence in American Art, 1890-1920*, ed. Irma B. Jaffe (New York and Rome, 1992), 1-22.

<sup>20</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53; reprint, 3 vols., New York, 1900), 1:39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:193.

Americans identify with Renaissance? Perhaps the answer lies in the meaning of the word.

The historical prestige of Renaissance Italy was predicated on the belief that a high culture was reborn from the ruins of the Roman Empire. To Americans of the 1850s, who lived in a nation born yesterday, so to speak, the notion was irrelevant. Only a decade later, however, the nation split into two hostile governments and the ensuing War between the States nearly destroyed the Union. In the wake of the Civil War, the idea of resurrecting the nation was no longer academic but a matter of the greatest urgency. "Dead men cannot raise themselves," wrote the abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens, "Dead States cannot restore their existence *as it was*."<sup>22</sup> Reconstruction, in Lincoln's words, "the re-inauguration of the national authority,"<sup>23</sup> created the political climate in which a renaissance could take root.

During the 1870s, Americans discovered a model of renewal in the cultural histories of the Renaissance. After the ordeal of the war, they could take heart from Hegel's description of the Renaissance as "the first blush of dawn . . . which breaks upon the world after the long, eventful and terrible night of the Middle Ages—a day which is distinguished by science, art and inventive impulse." Developed by a number of European historians, Hegel's identification of "the Revival of Learning, the flourishing of the Fine Arts, and the discovery of America" as the major achievements of the Renaissance countered Ruskin's negative image of a corrupt and dissipated age.<sup>24</sup> In John Addington Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–86), Americans found a definition they could rally around:

What the word *Renaissance* really means is a new birth to liberty—the spirit of mankind recovering consciousness and the power of self-determination, recognizing the beauty of the outer world and the body through art, liberating the

<sup>22</sup> Speech by Thaddeus Stevens, Dec. 18, 1865, reprinted in *Great Issues in American History*, ed. Richard and Beatrice Hofstadter (New York, 1982), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Speech by Abraham Lincoln, April 11, 1865, reprinted in Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* was first translated into English by J. Sibree in 1857. Quotations from G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York, 1991), 410–11. The most important nineteenth-century cultural histories of the Renaissance were published by Jules Michelet, *La Renaissance* (1855); Georg Voigt, *Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums*, (1859); Jakob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860); and John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–88).

reason in science, restoring culture to the intelligence, and establishing political freedom.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, this spirit of liberty was like an Olympian torch passed from civilization to civilization: "Such is the torch-race of the nations," wrote Symonds, "Greece stretches forth her hand to Italy; Italy consigns the sacred fire to Northern Europe; the people of the North pass on the flame to America. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated into English in 1878, provided a detailed analysis of the means by which the Italians had revitalized their culture.<sup>27</sup> A professor of architecture and art history at Zurich Polytechnic, Burckhardt developed his thesis that the Renaissance represented a "new fact in history . . . the state as the outcome of reflection and calculation, the state as a work of art."<sup>28</sup> The paradigm was Florence, the birthplace of the modern state. "That wondrous Florentine spirit, at once keenly critical and artistically creative was incessantly transforming the social and political condition of the state, and as incessantly describing and judging the change." By rediscovering his illustrious Roman ancestors, the proud Italian "soon felt himself in truth citizen of the most advanced nation in the world."<sup>29</sup>

At the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, Americans encountered artifacts of the nation's history on display and discovered that they had a cultural heritage worth preserving. A colonial revival followed in which architects documented and imitated the styles of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century buildings, craftsmen reproduced early American furniture, and painters and sculptors represented historical events and personages. Locally, Thomas Eakins depicted colonial dames at spinning wheels and Philadelphia sculptor *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1877). The neurologist S. Weir Mitchell wrote historical fiction about the Revolutionary War. His most popular novel, *Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker* (1896), was illustrated by Howard Pyle. From 1899 to

<sup>25</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. 1, "The Age of The Despots" (New York, 1888), 28. In his text, Symonds acknowledges Burckhardt's seminal influence on his thinking.

<sup>26</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. 2, "The Revival of Learning," 546.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, first English translation by S. G. C. Middlemore, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (London, 1878). All quotations are from the Penguin edition (New York, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

1913, Philadelphia architects under the direction of Frank Miles Day restored Congress Hall at Independence Square. By restoring national pride, the Colonial Revival was the decisive step in the revitalization of the national culture.

As more Americans began to travel abroad, their exposure to the magnificence of the European capitals forced them to confront the cultural poverty of their own cities. Like *The American* of Henry James's 1877 novel, they realized that the "very rich and beautiful world" they saw "had not all been made by sharp railroad men and stock-brokers."<sup>30</sup> Back at home, affluent Americans could identify with the fifteenth-century Italians who "felt the want of culture and had the leisure and the means to obtain it."<sup>31</sup> And if they lacked the noble lineage of the European aristocracy, so had the men and women who made the Renaissance. "In all departments open to a man of talent," wrote Symonds, "birth was less important than natural gifts."<sup>32</sup> Burckhardt went even farther, insisting that Renaissance Italy was virtually a classless society that "ignored all distinctions of caste."<sup>33</sup> Rather than social position, the mutually enhancing relationship of creative genius and enlightened patronage had produced all the great works of art and architecture in Renaissance Italy.

The "perfect equality" of men and women that Burckhardt attributed to Renaissance society encouraged the nineteenth-century feminist movement. Equal education, he explained, eliminated the "question of 'woman's rights' or female emancipation" since "the same intellectual and emotional development which perfected the man was demanded for the perfection of the woman." The Renaissance model of gender relations contributed to the growing acceptance of women artists and patrons in American culture. To her contemporaries, the artist Violet Oakley exemplified the great women of the Renaissance who "had the mind and courage of men."<sup>34</sup> In the essay, "Violet Oakley, American Renaissance Woman," I discuss her multifaceted career as a muralist, stained glass designer, illustrator, and propagandist for world peace.

"Revival of Learning" was the term historians of the Renaissance used to describe the effect of ancient ideas on the modern intellect. To re-educate

<sup>30</sup> Henry James, *The American*, ed. James W. Tuttleton (New York, 1978), 75.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>32</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 2:3.

<sup>33</sup> Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 230-31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-51.

themselves, the humanists amassed vast collections of manuscripts, books, commentaries, and translations that required facilities to house them. In Florence, Cosimo de' Medici opened the first public library since antiquity and funded private and specialized collections throughout Italy. The consuming passions for "books and buildings" produced the golden age of the library. The Laurentian in Florence, the Marcian in Venice, the Ambrosian in Milan, and the Vatican Libraries in Rome were as famous for their architecture as their collections. Prized for their beauty as well as their rarity, books and manuscripts were regarded as works of art in their own right.

After the Centennial, libraries became a measure of the intellectual status of American cities. In his guide to Philadelphia, James Dabney McCabe claimed that there were 3,700 public and private libraries in the city with a total of 2,985,770 volumes. He took great pride in the new Ridgway Library, designed by Addison Hutton (1871-77) with a mausoleum for its benefactor, Dr. Benjamin Rush:

The building is in all respects one of the most massive and superb edifices of its kind in the world. It is an ornament of which any city might be proud, and is the noblest monument its founder could have desired to perpetuate his name and fame to after ages. It is solid enough to withstand the decaying hand of time, and will always form one of the noblest of Philadelphia's public institutions.

Philadelphians could be justly proud of their library tradition, which was the oldest in the nation. The Library Company, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731, was operating in 1876 with a collection estimated at 100,000 volumes. Nearly as large was the 95,000 volume Mercantile Library, established by merchants and bankers, that subscribed to "all the principal newspapers and magazines of this country and Europe."<sup>35</sup> Both institutions were given new quarters designed by Frank Furness, Philadelphia's most innovative architect.<sup>36</sup> Designing in an idiosyncratic style that defied simple classification, Furness resembled the early Renaissance architects described by Symonds who "bowed to no tradition, but followed the dictates of their own inventive impulse, selecting the types that suited them, and dealing freely with the forms they found around them."<sup>37</sup> Furness, however, was concerned with function as well as form. In "The

<sup>35</sup> McCabe, *Centennial Exhibition*, 111-14.

<sup>36</sup> For Furness, see George E. Thomas et al., *Frank Furness: The Complete Works* (New York, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 2:5-6.

Happy Employment of Means to Ends': Frank Furness's Library of the University of Pennsylvania and the Industrial Culture of Philadelphia," George E. Thomas describes how the architect reinvented the academic library to meet the needs of the emerging research university of the 1880s.

The industrialist Andrew Carnegie was the Cosimo de' Medici of the American Renaissance, using his wealth to fund more than twenty-five hundred public libraries throughout the world. The first Carnegie library in Philadelphia was the Walnut West Branch. A classical temple ornamented with an entablature of sculpted books, the library was designed by Clarence C. Zantlinger and Charles L. Borie in 1904.<sup>38</sup> Carnegie typified the "men self-made by commerce" who formed the ruling class of the Renaissance republics.<sup>39</sup> Rising from bobbin boy in an Allegheny County cotton mill to the top of the steel industry, he bought fame with philanthropy.

Several of Pennsylvania's self-made millionaires endowed the nation with collections of European masterpieces acquired from insolvent aristocrats more than willing to exchange family heirlooms for American cash. John Graver Johnson, the son of a Philadelphia blacksmith, became wealthy as legal counsel for the tobacco, oil, and railroad corporations. With Berenson's advice, he purchased hundreds of Italian paintings that now form the Johnson Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Henry Clay Frick, a farm boy from Westmoreland County, started out producing coke for Carnegie's steel mills. After his company merged with the Carnegie Steel Corporation, Frick, chairman of Carnegie Steel, became one of the most powerful men in the industry. An unlikely connoisseur, his rapacious appetite for Old Masters produced the world-class holdings of the Frick Collection in New York City. In Henry James's satirical novel *The Outcry*, based on the British protest against Frick's attempt to remove a Holbein portrait from England in 1909, James compared the American plunderers of European art to conquering hordes "armed now with huge cheque-books instead of with spears and battle-axes."<sup>40</sup>

Andrew Mellon, born into a family of bankers in Pittsburgh, precisely fit

<sup>38</sup> George E. Thomas and David B. Brownlee, *Building America's First University: An Historical and Architectural Guide to the University of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia, 2000), 310-11.

<sup>39</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 2:3.

<sup>40</sup> Henry James, *The Outcry* (1911; reprint, New York, 2002), 99. In the introduction, Jean Strouse records that Britons raised \$350,000 to buy the painting, *Duchess of Milan*, and donate it to the National Gallery in London.

the Medici model. Renowned for his financial prowess, he served as secretary of the treasury under Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover and was appointed ambassador to Great Britain in 1932. By donating his own funds and art collection to the government, Mellon established the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1937. The national collection was also enriched by Joseph E. Widener, the son of a Philadelphia bricklayer, who made his fortune in the street-car industry. He donated the collection of fine and decorative art that adorned Lynnewood Hall, his Elkins Park estate, to the National Gallery in 1942. Whether these men were the merchant princes of a golden age or the robber barons of a gilded age is, to some extent, a matter of perspective.

To Mark Twain, Pennsylvania epitomized everything that was wrong with America in the Gilded Age. Rich in natural beauty and resources, the commonwealth was plundered by greedy speculators and despoiled by ruthless industrialists who polluted the environment and exploited their workers. To demonstrate how Pennsylvania had declined, Twain and co-author Charles Dudley Warner appended a verse to their novel *The Gilded Age* from Thomas Makin's 1729 *Descriptio Pennsylvaniae* of:

Fair Philadelphia next is rising seen,  
Between two rivers plac'ed, two miles between,  
The Delaware and Sculkil, new to fame  
Both ancient streams, yet of modern name,  
The city, form'd upon a beauteous plan,  
Has many houses built, tho' late began;  
Rectangular the streets, direct and fair;  
And rectilinear all the ranges are.<sup>41</sup>

Industrialization, the villain of *The Gilded Age*, had turned Penn's "greene countrie towne" into a blight on the landscape. After traveling by rail through "the fat lands of Lancaster, with its broad farms of corn and wheat, its mean houses of stone, its vast barns and granaries" and "the smiling fields of Chester with their English green", the visitor caught sight of the industrial inferno:

Long trains of coal cars, laden and unladen, stood upon the sidings; . . . the smoke of other locomotives was seen on parallel lines; factories multiplied;

<sup>41</sup> Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (1873; reprint, New York, 1994), 110, chap. 14 epigraph, trans. on p. 442.

streets appeared; . . . The broad streets glowed in the the sun, and the white-shuttered houses stared at the hot thoroughfares like closed baker's-ovens set along the highway.<sup>42</sup>

Worse still, for Mark Twain, were the chauvinistic residents who compelled visitors to admire their overrated architectural masterpieces, "Independence Hall, Girard College, and Fairmount Water Works and Park, four objects which Americans cannot die peacefully, even in Naples, without having seen." The provincialism of Philadelphians—"Was there any building in Greece to compare with Girard College?"—was only exceeded by their grandiosity—"And then there was Broad Street! Wasn't it the broadest and the longest in the world?"<sup>43</sup> The author's disdain for the urban environment was not limited to Philadelphia. Washington, D.C., was "a wide stretch of cheap little brick houses, with here and there a noble architectural pile lifting itself out of the midst of government buildings." The Washington Monument looked like "a factory chimney with the top broken off,"<sup>44</sup> and the Capitol, a "snowy palace" that "looks out upon a sorrowful little desert of cheap boarding houses."<sup>45</sup> American civic architecture was the taxpayers' sacrifice to the insatiable gods of government and commerce. In *The Gilded Age*, Philadelphia was just another whistle-stop on the train to "Corruptionville" where unscrupulous railroad tycoons and coal barons bought and sold politicians.<sup>46</sup>

Three years after *The Gilded Age* appeared in print, the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 demonstrated that Philadelphia was no laughing matter. Organized to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the event temporarily restored the city's pride as the former capital of the United States. On the eve of the centennial, the inauguration of the new building of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, transformed from Greek to Gothic by Frank Furness and George Hewitt, heralded the rebirth of American culture. Furness's father, the Reverend William H. Furness, proclaimed the "the Rejuvenescence of our venerable Academy" as the symbol of "the new day that now dawns

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 435. According to Marvin Felheim (introd., x), the Pennsylvania material was contributed by Charles Dudley Warner who had studied law in Philadelphia.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 177

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 198. "Corruptionville . . . they named it after Congress itself."

upon the Beautiful Arts, that help so powerfully to gladden and refine and elevate the life of man."<sup>47</sup>

The ten million visitors who came to the nation's first "International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine" in 1876 could see Philadelphia's superlative architecture for themselves. Fairmount Park, where the exhibition was located, was the largest municipal park in the world. The Main Exhibition Hall, erected in iron and glass by the engineers Joseph M. Wilson and Henry Petit, was the biggest building in the world. John McArthur's City Hall, the tallest masonry structure, was under construction in the center of Philadelphia. The Centennial was the model city of the future: artistically designed, socially progressive, and technologically advanced. Domenic Vitiello's essay, "Engineering the Metropolis: William Sellers, Joseph M. Wilson, and Industrial Philadelphia," describes the ways in which the leading engineers of the Centennial and the host city designed civic infrastructure for the modern urban environment. Through mechanical standardization and the development of new materials and methods of construction, Sellers and the Wilson Brothers revolutionized industrial production. Although the engineers have been overshadowed by the architects, Vitiello demonstrates the importance of their pioneering role.

Enthusiasm for Philadelphia's architecture was not simply an expression of local pride. William Dean Howells, a cosmopolitan who had served as American consul in Venice, also observed "a great deal of beauty in the architecture" at the Centennial.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the undisputed masterpieces at the Centennial were the machines. "The superior elegance, aptness, and ingenuity of our machinery is observable at a glance," wrote Howells. "Yes, it is still in these things of iron and steel that the national genius most freely speaks."<sup>49</sup> The cultural value of American technology can be measured by the emergence of industrial aesthetics in the middle of the nineteenth century. Seventy-five years before the architects of the Bauhaus declared the machine to be the source of modern design, American machinery was judged according to the same classical criteria as sculpture. Howells characterized the 1400 horsepower Corliss engine as "an athlete of

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., "A History of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1805-1976," in *This Academy* (Philadelphia, 1976), 33.

<sup>48</sup> William Dean Howells, "A Sennight of the Centennial," *Atlantic Monthly* 38, no. 225 (July 1876), 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

steel and iron" as if it had been a statue by Phidias.<sup>50</sup> Philadelphia machines in particular, as George Thomas documents, were praised for the beauty of their proportions, the harmony of their parts, and their color. Eventually, the mechanical standardization William Sellers introduced to increase efficiency would become a new aesthetic. The marriage of art and industry at the Centennial produced the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art. Housed in Memorial Hall from 1877, the new institution evolved into the Philadelphia Museum of Art and moved in 1928 to its present location on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

The feminists who organized the Women's Pavilion at the Centennial also felt compelled to exhibit a masterpiece of technology. The Baxter steam engine, operated by a female engineer, demonstrated modern woman's embrace of industry. Under the direction of Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, the great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, the Women's Pavilion exhibited the products of female hand and machine labor and published a weekly newspaper, *New Century for Woman*.<sup>51</sup> Although Howells could not fathom why women chose "to separate their work from that of the rest of the human race,"<sup>52</sup> the controversial installation was officially sanctioned at the opening ceremonies. "We pray thy benediction especially on the women of America," entreated Bishop Simpson, "who for the first time in the history of our race take so conspicuous a place in our national celebration."<sup>53</sup> This was not the first time that local women had broken new ground, however. In 1848, Sarah Worthington Peter, a wealthy widow, had founded the first art school for women in the United States, the Philadelphia School of Design.<sup>54</sup> Two years later, Philadelphia Quakers founded the first medical school for women, the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania. Twain noted that the tiny college "sustained itself not without difficulty in this city, which is so conservative and is yet the origin

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> For a recent discussion of the Women's Pavilion, see Sylvia Yount, "A 'New Century' for Women: Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition and Domestic Reform," *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape: The Sartain Family Legacy*, ed. Katherine Martinez and Page Talbott (Philadelphia, 2000), 149-60.

<sup>52</sup> Howells, "Sennight of the Centennial," 101.

<sup>53</sup> McCabe, *Centennial Exhibition*, 281.

<sup>54</sup> The Philadelphia School of Design for Women survives as Moore College of Art and Design. For a history of the institution, see Page Talbott, "The Sartain Family and the Founding of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women," in Martinez and Talbott, *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape*, 161-74.

of so many radical movements."<sup>55</sup>

The paradox can be explained by the beliefs of the city's founder. "If we desire to amend the world," Penn stated, "let us first amend ourselves." From the time of their arrival in Pennsylvania, the Quakers distinguished themselves from other Protestant denominations by their combination of a strict code of personal morality with political pluralism. As E. Digby Baltzell noted, "Penn's colony on the Delaware was a sectarian and multi-cultural society from the very beginning."<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, Philadelphia proved to be fertile ground for abolitionism, feminism, temperance, and labor—the great reform movements of the nineteenth century. In 1833, the National Temperance Conference was held in Philadelphia. That same year, male abolitionists in Philadelphia founded the American Anti-Slavery Association. When they would not admit women, Quaker leader Lucretia Mott promptly formed the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia.

Quakers were not the only Philadelphians who raised their voices against slavery. The impassioned sermons of the Unitarian minister, Reverend William H. Furness, fanned the flames of abolitionism. The engraver John Sartain came to the First Congregational Unitarian Church to hear Furness preach, and the lifelong friendship that developed between the two men was a union of art, faith, and social reform that shaped the culture of Philadelphia.<sup>57</sup> In 1844, they became the managers of the local branch of the American Art Union. Furness wrote essays espousing a transcendentalist aesthetic in *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (1848–52) and his *American Gallery of Art*.<sup>58</sup> Sartain believed that social harmony could be achieved by design. Long before Ruskin and Morris were advising artists to create their own ideal societies, Sartain had become a member of a utopian community based on the ideas of the French socialist, Charles Fourier. In 1850 he bought stock in the North American Phalanx in Monmouth County, New Jersey, but soon found that his work as an engraver was incompatible with the organization of the rural commune.

Other Philadelphians fought for reform within the existing capitalist system. In 1869, Uriah S. Stephens, a Philadelphia tailor, organized the

<sup>55</sup> Twain and Warner, *The Gilded Age*, 120.

<sup>56</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (New York, 1980), 390.

<sup>57</sup> For the relationship between Sartain and Furness, see Katharine Martinez, "A Portrait of the Sartain Family and Their Home," in Martinez and Talbot, *Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 23, n. 27.

Noble Order of the Knights of Labor for all wage-earners without regard to race, sex, creed, or ethnicity. Membership increased rapidly and in 1878 the knights held a labor convention in Reading, Pennsylvania, to demand an eight-hour day, prohibition of child labor, government ownership of railroads, and other economic reforms. According to Sean Cashman, "it was due to pressure from the Knights and their affiliates that Congress established a Bureau of Labor in 1884."<sup>59</sup> Seeking labor reform through the political process, the Social Democratic Party convened in Philadelphia during the Centennial to organize the more radical Socialist Labor Party.

A decade after the Civil War, the city which had played such an important role in the first quarter-century of the nation's history was the ideal place to re-establish unity and present an international audience with the image of a free citizenry working together to create harmony. "The man of science, the politician, the poet and the artisan are meeting together in the City of Brotherly Love," the *Manufacturer and Builder* reported. "All nations are represented, and the greatest good must arise, both morally and commercially, from the exchange of opinion, the opportunities for information, and the friendly relations brought about by the exhibition."<sup>60</sup> The efficient railway that brought the visitors to the Centennial grounds even vindicated the railroad executives vilified in *The Gilded Age*. "That wonderful Pennsylvania Railroad," wrote William Dean Howells, "bearing the prosperity of the most prosperous Commonwealth to and fro."<sup>61</sup>

The prosperity Howells observed was for the most part an illusion created by the elaborate stagecraft of the Centennial. Profits were real enough, but they enriched the few at the expense of the many. After the Panic of 1873, an economic depression left 20 percent of the workforce unemployed. While fortunes were appropriated to build the fair, the coal miners and railroad workers whose labor was in constant demand saw their incomes dwindle annually. In 1875, attempts to break the strike of disgruntled anthracite miners in northeastern Pennsylvania erupted in violence. While the Centennial celebration was underway, nineteen members of a union of Irish miners known as the Molly Maguires were convicted of murder and sentenced to death.<sup>62</sup> The following summer, the Pennsylvania Railroad's decision to cut wages again triggered an insurrec-

<sup>59</sup> Cashman, *Gilded Age*, 119.

<sup>60</sup> *Manufacturer and Builder* 8, no. 9 (Sept. 1876), New York, 200.

<sup>61</sup> Howells, "Sennight of the Centennial," 92.

<sup>62</sup> Cashman, *Gilded Age*, 108-10.

tion.<sup>63</sup> Rioting workers destroyed railroad property along the lines in Pittsburgh, Altoona, Easton, Harrisburg, Reading, Johnstown, Bethlehem, and Philadelphia. In July, federal troops dispatched to quell the rioters in Pittsburgh killed twenty-five people and an enraged mob burned the depot to the ground.<sup>64</sup> The Great Railroad Strike paralyzed transportation across the country.

The uprisings that surrounded the Centennial Exhibition demonstrated that American labor could not be appeased by a policy of bread and circuses. Subsequent world's fairs were also followed by riots in a cycle that mirrored the rise and fall of civilizations in microcosm. "The White City" built in Chicago for the World's Columbian Exposition held visitors spellbound with its dreamlike beauty illuminated by ten thousand incandescent lights. By the end of the summer, it had vanished like a mirage and the reality of the Panic of 1893 set in: hundreds of banks closed, thousands of businesses failed, and millions were unemployed. Reductions in the wages of railroad workers provoked the Pullman Railroad strike in which the murder and mayhem of 1877 recurred. A decisive blow in the class war was delivered in Buffalo, New York, in 1901 when an unemployed worker recently converted to anarchism assassinated President William McKinley in the "Rainbow City" of the Pan-American Exposition.

Drawing on both European and American ideas, a rising tide of socialists, communists, and anarchists demanded the redistribution of the wealth produced by industrial capitalism. In 1879, the journalist Henry George, a native Philadelphian, proposed a solution in *Progress and Poverty*. Motivated by Christianity rather than socialism, George believed that poverty could be eliminated without sacrificing either private property or free enterprise by simply enacting a single tax on land. Although he attracted a wide and devoted constituency, the government did not adopt his economic policies. Ten years later, the Haymarket bombing in Chicago renewed fears of anarchism. To defend the capitalist system, Carnegie published his "Gospel of Wealth" in 1899. He recommended an inheritance tax, like the one already established in Pennsylvania, as a means of redistributing wealth.<sup>65</sup> "Under its sway we shall have an ideal state," he wrote "in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense,

<sup>63</sup> For the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon* (New York, 1987), 15-24; and Cashman, *Gilded Age*, 110-12.

<sup>64</sup> Cashman, *Gilded Age*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, no. 391 (June 1889), as reprinted in

the property of the many, because administered for the public good."<sup>66</sup> Although Carnegie, whose annual income was estimated at \$7,500,000<sup>67</sup> wrote about labor sympathetically, he paid his workers subsistence wages. The strike at his Homestead Steel Mill near Pittsburgh in 1892 escalated into a fierce battle between the union and the armed Pinkerton detectives hired by his manager, Henry Clay Frick. The violence did not cease until Governor William Stone placed the mill under martial law. An anarchist seeking to avenge the workers killed during the strike stabbed Frick, but he survived.<sup>68</sup>

During the chronic economic turmoil at the end of the century, Sir Thomas More's 1516 treatise *Utopia* seemed to many nineteenth-century thinkers as important to human history as Columbus's arrival in America. "Whether the Utopia of a modern world, in which all men shall enjoy the same social, political, and intellectual advantages be realized or not," Symonds noted in 1875, "we cannot doubt that the whole movement of humanity onward has tended in this direction."<sup>69</sup> Visions of the ideal state proliferated in novels. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* of 1888 imagined Boston as a perfected society in the year 2000. William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, published in 1891, was a nostalgic return to pre-industrial England. These seminal works were followed by Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1898), H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), and W. H. Hudson's *The Crystal Age* (1906). Charlotte Perkins Gilman published *Herland*, describing an all-female utopia, in 1915.

In his autobiographical sketch, *How I Became a Socialist*, written in 1894, William Morris defined a true commonwealth as a society in which people lived in "equality of condition . . . and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all." At the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of Pennsylvania artists organized arts and crafts communities on the model of Morris's vision of a pre-industrial village of artisans. The architect William L. Price founded Rose Valley on the ruins of an industrial site near Media, Pennsylvania, in 1901.<sup>70</sup> Rose Valley's journal, the *Arts-*

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Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, 79–84.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>67</sup> John Tipple, "Big Businessmen," in *The Gilded Age*, ed. H. Wayne Morgan, (Syracuse, N.Y., 1970), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon* (New York, 1987), 110–14.

<sup>69</sup> Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:28–29.

<sup>70</sup> For a history of Rose Valley, see *A Poor Sort of Heaven, A Good Sort of Earth*, exhibition catalogue,

man, published by Horace Traubel in Philadelphia from 1903 to 1907, disseminated the utopian philosophy of life and work throughout the region.<sup>71</sup> In 1902, Violet Oakley and the illustrators Jessie Willcox Smith and Elizabeth Shippen Green formed a communal household at the Red Rose Inn at Villanova, and later at Cogslea in West Mount Airy, that lasted for fourteen years.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the sculptor Frank Stephens established an arts and crafts community in Arden, Delaware, based on the single tax model of Henry George. In his essay, "Utopia by Taxation: Frank Stephens and the Single Tax Community of Arden, Delaware," Mark Taylor traces the genesis of Arden in the sufferings and struggles of its founder. Despite the profound social and economic changes of the last hundred years, Arden has survived as a haven for radical idealists into the twenty-first century.

The desire to build a society that was as good as it was beautiful was the unattainable ideal of the American Renaissance, unattainable in part because those who shared the goal disagreed profoundly about how to reach it. Yet as Charles Mulford Robinson pointed out in 1899, one strand of this pursuit of happiness led to the City Beautiful,

There is sociological value in the larger happiness of great masses of people, whose only fields are park meadows, whose only walks are city streets, whose statues stand in public places, whose paintings hang where all may see, whose books and curios, whose drives and music, are first the city's where they live. The happier people of the rising City Beautiful will grow in love for it, in pride in it. They will be better citizens, because better instructed, more artistic, and filled with civic pride. The little Florence of the twelfth century, whose few inhabitants were raising the tower of Giotto and the famous Duomo, has written her name above cities a score of times as large.<sup>73</sup>

In the final analysis, the solution to the industrial crises was not to abandon the cities but to rebuild them. For this monumental task, the example

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Brandywine River Museum (Chadds Ford, Pa., 1983); and George E. Thomas, *William L. Price: Arts and Crafts to Modern Design* (New York, 2000).

<sup>71</sup> William Innes Homer, "The Rose Valley Press and The Artsman," in *A Poor Sort of Heaven, A Good Sort of Earth*, 67-71.

<sup>72</sup> See Patricia Likos, "The Ladies of the Red Rose," *Feminist Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1976), 11-31; and Alice A. Carter, *The Red Rose Girls* (New York, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Charles Mulford Robinson, "Improvement in City Life," *Atlantic Monthly* 83, no. 500 (June 1899), 785.

of the heroic little city of Florence, whose patron was the biblical giant-slayer David, loomed large. When the Florentines were determined to raise their cultural standards, they mastered the art, the technology and the will to raise a dome over their cathedral. With that symbolic act, uniting them in spirit with their Roman ancestors, the Renaissance began.

Lifting the dome over the State Capitol at the beginning of a new century lifted the hopes of Pennsylvanians in a similar way. "Elsewhere in the world are noble domes," the critic Charles Caffin observed. "But this one makes its own peculiar appeal to every citizen, not only of the Commonwealth, but of this great Republic, that like the Commonwealth, was a Holy Experiment and has been a precedent for the Nations."<sup>74</sup> As the birthplace of the nation and the original seat of government, it was fitting that Pennsylvania's dome should evoke the Capitol in Washington, D.C. As in Florence, the rebirth of the state was achieved by a ritual reconnection with the founders.

<sup>74</sup> Caffin, *Handbook of the New Capitol* (1906), 32.

