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Immigration in the Early 20th Century

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City Life in the Early 1900s

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Imagine the year is 1920 and you are talking with a sixty year-old man who moved to New York City around 1880. Listen as he reflects back on the changes he has seen over the past forty years:

"Back in 1880, it was wise to watch where you walked. Horse-drawn trolleys provided the main form of transportation and pollution it seemed. Horses can produce 20 to 30 pounds of manure a day. Multiply that times a couple thousand, and you've got quite a mess. By the 1890s, electric streetcars had replaced horse drawn vehicles, running above or below ground to avoid the crowded streets. After Henry Ford introduced his Model T car in 1908, a pedestrian soon had to dodge not only the streetcars, but also a new urban menace--the automobile. Strangely enough, paved streets came about late in the century at the urging of bicyclists, not the automobile drivers.



Washington Square
New York City 1909

"The family would spend my one day off from work in Central Park. Frederick Olmsted designed it in the 1850s as a refuge for city folk with its open fields and small lakes. Other cities did the same. Any excuse to get away from those tenement buildings. Four to six stories high, with four apartments on each floor, they held two or three families in each apartment, all with no elevator or indoor plumbing. We used cesspools and outhouses for sewage.