

all but Baltimore and New Orleans recorded a majority of their population as immigrants or first-generation. These ratios began to decline in the 1920s as Congress severely limited the number of applicants who were let in, establishing immigration quotas in legislation passed in 1921, 1924, and 1929.<sup>31</sup> Though immigration began to taper off after this, the legacy of decades of immigration remained and made a major impact on art and popular culture. Of the artists discussed at length in this resource guide, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Tina Modotti, Man Ray, and Alfred Stieglitz were all either immigrants or the children of immigrants.

## Infrastructure and City Planning

During the 1920s, urban America was still shaped by the policies of the **Progressive Era**. This movement, which lasted from around the 1890s to the 1920s, privileged regulation and the intervention of local, state, and federal government into citizens' lives, including reforms to manage issues like political corruption, pollution, poverty, health and safety, and other concerns that challenged residents in urban areas. The period also saw the growth of specialized education and professionalization in fields like medicine and the law. Ernest W. Burgess and Robert E. Park, sociology researchers at the University of Chicago, established the academic discipline of urban studies in the 1920s, formalizing the study of urban systems and communities for the first time.<sup>32</sup>

One of the outcomes of this Progressive push was

**zoning**. Zoning laws were used to manage sprawl, create more orderly and navigable cities, and segregate industrial areas from residential areas to avoid pollution. However, laws could also control the shape, height, type, and capacity of a building, which led architects to devise clever strategies to satisfy the laws. The most famous zoning ordinance was New York City's so-called "setback" law, part of a larger zoning bill of 1916. As buildings were beginning to grow taller, city officials worried that streets lined with skyscrapers would turn avenues into dark, gloomy canyons. To increase the amount of light that would reach the streets, the law stipulated buildings had to be "set back" a certain distance from the lot line and, additionally, the building's façade had to recede a further distance back for each incremental increase in height.

This led to a trend for "pyramidal" towers and inspired imaginative artistic responses, like those produced by the architectural draftsman [Hugh Ferriss](#). Even outside of New York, in places where the stepped-back profile was not required by law, this style of skyscraper became a fashionable marker of modernity and of the **Art Deco** movement. Zoning was not always popular since it dictated what landowners could build on their holdings. Some city leaders also used zoning to support forms of racial and class segregation. In 1926, the Supreme Court upheld zoning as constitutional. At the end of the 1920s, 60 percent of urban Americans lived in a city or neighborhood with zoning laws.<sup>33</sup>

## SELECTED WORK: William Van Alen, Chrysler Building, New York, New York, 1928–30

William Van Alen was a native New Yorker, born in 1883. He studied at the Pratt Institute, a technical college targeted mostly toward working-class men and founded by the philanthropist Charles Pratt in 1887. In 1908, Van Alen won a scholarship to study in Paris at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts (School of the Fine Arts), which taught painting, sculpture, and architecture; at that time its architectural academy was considered the best in the world. The curriculum stressed rigorous fundamentals based on classical (Greek and Roman) and Renaissance architectural models. Many prominent Americans graduated from the academy and worked in what became known as the "Beaux-Arts" architectural style; their buildings are found all around the country and include the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (1902), [Sather Tower](#) at the University of California Berkeley (1914), and Chicago's [Union Station](#) (1925). These stately buildings with their historical references often resemble classical temples and were increasingly at odds with modernist currents in architecture.

Starting in 1911, Van Alen worked as a professional architect in New York before securing the commission in 1927 for what would become known as the Chrysler Building. Images from the [design process](#) show his