At Levine Museum of the New South, we look at how Charlotte and the surrounding area has changed since the end of the American Civil War in 1865. These changes range from the types of jobs people have held to the constitutional rights we hold dear today. When we think about the New South, we like to define it as:

- A Time — The New South is the period of time from 1865, following the Civil War, to the present.
- A Place — The New South includes areas of the Southeast U.S. that began to grow and flourish after 1865.
- An Idea — The New South represents new ways of thinking about economic, political and cultural life in the South.

In Unit 2, we discovered how the textile industry reshaped the Carolina piedmont and the many changes people experienced as they moved from farm to factory. Now, we pick up our journey around 1900, when the textile industry fueled Charlotte’s growth as a city and brought radical changes to people’s lives.

Glossary:

- **Booster** - a person who advocates for city growth and new businesses.
- **Evangelist** - a person who tries to convert others to Christianity, especially through public preaching.
- **Suffrage** - the right to vote. Women who fought for the right to vote were called suffragettes.
- **Streetcar (trolley)** - a small train for moving people between neighborhoods and the center city for work and recreation.
- **Great Depression (1929-1939)** - with the crash of the economy, the world entered a period of widespread poverty as people lost jobs, homes, and bank accounts.
- **World War II (1939-1945)** - the second global war fought between the Allied and Axis powers.

During the early 1900s, Charlotte grew as a city and went on to surpass Charleston as the biggest city in the Carolinas. Towns all across the Piedmont were growing around the mills that were built near the railways. New inventions, skyscrapers, and social changes created a bustling downtown. The city’s growth attracted many families in search of new jobs and better wages. In 1920, women gained suffrage with the 19th Amendment. Thriving African American districts, such as Charlotte’s Brooklyn neighborhood, existed in many Southern cities, though segregation still limited opportunities for blacks in the South.
Section 1: Technology

Mills developed their own power sources next to rivers. Soon electricity was generated to power these mills. The electric company Southern Power united the mills’ power services and brought electricity to Piedmont cities, including Charlotte. You may know this company today as Duke Energy.

The Catawba Hydro Station, pictured on the left, was the company’s first generating station. People went to Southern Power stores to buy new appliances or pay the electric bill for their homes.

Other technologies and inventions developed during this time that forever changed people’s lives, including radios, telephones, moving pictures, skyscrapers, and automobiles.

Model T and Model A Fords (pictured on the right) were produced in a Charlotte factory off the Southern Railroad between the 1920s-1930s.

Think About It!

What do you think it would have been like to experience electricity for the first time?

Answer It!

As a young person growing up in the 1900s-1940s, which new technology would have been the most important to you? Why?
Section 2: Business is Booming

During this era, many new businesses were born in Charlotte and nearby towns. People traveled downtown to do their shopping. A lot of people had more money to spend and were making fewer things at home, so they had to buy them instead. For the first time, they could find so many different items under one roof in department stores like Belk. You may have shopped in one yourself!

Even when people did not travel downtown, they were influenced by the city. Charlotte’s WBT radio station was one of the largest stations on the East Coast. WBT brought advertising and programs to the Piedmont’s mill villages.
Movie theaters were being built across the United States. For about 10 cents, people could see a newsreel, cartoons, coming attractions, and a feature film!

Charlotte’s Carolina Theater opened in 1927. The Carolina Theater still stands today. During Jim Crow segregation, the Carolina Theater only admitted white customers. African Americans in Charlotte could visit the Savoy Theater in Charlotte’s Brooklyn neighborhood.

Think About It!

Besides farming and factory work, what new job opportunities were now available for people living in Charlotte?

Answer It!

As a child in this time period, which businesses would have been most important to you? Why?

The Lance snack cracker we know and love today was created by the Lance family in 1915 when Mary Lance and her two daughters spread peanut butter between two crackers.
Section 3: Inequality

While downtown was a place for gathering, not everyone was welcome. African Americans were forming their own city within the city. Because most white businesses refused service to African Americans, they needed to provide these services for themselves. Black restaurants, libraries, schools, churches, real estate offices, and barbershops could be found in Charlotte’s Brooklyn neighborhood (pictured on the left).

During the early 20th century, women continued to fight for equal rights to men and won the right to vote, called suffrage. However, African American women were still unable to vote along with black men.

Women also began working in professions that were traditionally for men. Annie Alexander (pictured on the left) became the South’s first female doctor. She made $2 her first year!
Successful African American businessman Thad Tate’s barbershop was one of the few places where whites and African Americans mingled in uptown Charlotte.

**Think About It!**

What were some of the ways people challenged unequal treatment in New South cities?

**Answer It!**

How do you feel about the unequal treatment of different groups during this time? Why do you feel this way?