













market the medical threat of Chinese disease, physicians raked in social capital— earning the attention and trust of communities nationwide— and advanced attitudes and policies that disenfranchised Chinese immigrants.

### **The Rise of the Doctor**

When Dr. O'Donnell mounted his national exhibition tour, the fields of medicine and public health were surfacing from the throes of a structural and social transformation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American population had nearly quintupled. Urban governments were grappling with how best to manage the health of the public in light of the increased number of people, new information about how diseases spread, and the hardships posed by industrialization. Sickness was common in urban centers, where overcrowding mingled with shared basement bathrooms, poor sewage systems, and a general lack of adequate sanitary infrastructure.<sup>19</sup> To complicate matters, word of insufficient conditions and their causes spread quickly: rapidly evolving methods of communication and transportation, including the telegraph, the railroad, and the automobile, delivered news to the public faster than ever before.<sup>20</sup>

No longer would people subscribe to the idea that disease resulted from exposure to miasma, noxious vapors that emanated from filth. In the 1870s, germ theory became the prevailing explanation for how illnesses spread among the public. The new theory, while a remarkable innovation for science, also illuminated to everyday Americans the deficient state of public health in their cities and the omnipresence of contagion. According to the germ theory,

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<sup>19</sup> Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 72; Suellen M. Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 69.













































