
23

Politics in the Gilded Age, 1869–1896

PART I: Reviewing the Chapter

A. Checklist of Learning Objectives

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. describe the political corruption of the Grant administration and the various efforts to clean up politics in the Gilded Age.
2. describe the economic slump of the 1870s and the growing conflict between “hard-money” and “soft-money” advocates.
3. explain the intense political activity of the Gilded age, despite the low quality of political leadership and the agreement of the two parties on most issues.
4. indicate how the disputed Hayes-Tilden election of 1876 led to the Compromise of 1877 and the end of Reconstruction.
5. describe how the end of Reconstruction led to the loss of black rights and the imposition of the Jim Crow system of segregation in the South.
6. explain the growth of class and ethnic conflict during the 1870s and after.
7. describe the sharp personal and partisan clashes between Grover Cleveland and his Republican opponents.
8. show how the rise of the Populists and the depression of the 1890s stirred growing social protests and class conflict.

B. Glossary

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms.

1. **coalition** A temporary alliance of political factions or parties for some specific purpose. “The Republicans, now freed from the Union party coalition of war days, enthusiastically nominated Grant. . . .” (p. 503)
2. **corner** To gain exclusive control of a commodity in order to fix its price. “The crafty pair concocted a plot in 1869 to corner the gold market.” (p. 503)
3. **censure** An official statement of condemnation passed by a legislative body against one of its members or some other official of government. While severe, a censure itself stops short of penalties or **expulsion**, which is removal from office. “A newspaper exposé and congressional investigation led to formal censure of two congressmen. . . .” (p. 504)
4. **amnesty** A general pardon for offenses or crimes against a government. “The Republican Congress in 1872 passed a general amnesty act. . . .” (p. 506)
5. **civil service** Referring to regular employment by government according to a standardized system of job descriptions, merit qualifications, pay, and promotion, as distinct from **political appointees** who receive positions based on affiliation and party loyalty. “Congress also moved to reduce high Civil War tariffs and to fumigate the Grant administration with mild civil service reform.” (p. 506)

6. **unsecured loans** Money loaned without identification of collateral (existing assets) to be forfeited in case the borrower defaults on the loan. "The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company had made unsecured loans to several companies that went under." (p. 506)
7. **contraction** In finance, reducing the available supply of money, thus tending to raise interest rates and lower prices. "Coupled with the reduction of greenbacks, this policy was called 'contraction.'" (p. 507)
8. **deflation (ary)** An increase in the value of money in relation to available goods, causing prices to fall. **Inflation**, a decrease in the value of money in relation to goods, causes prices to rise. "It had a noticeable deflationary effect—the amount of money per capita in circulation actually decreased . . ." (p. 507)
9. **fraternal organization** A society of men drawn together for social purposes and sometimes to pursue other common goals. ". . . the Grand Army of the Republic [was] a politically potent fraternal organization of several hundred thousand Union veterans of the Civil War." (p. 507)
10. **consensus** Common or unanimous opinion. "How can this apparent paradox of political consensus and partisan fervor be explained?" (p. 507)
11. **kickback** The return of a portion of the money received in a sale or contract, often secretly or illegally, in exchange for favors. "The lifeblood of both parties was patronage—disbursing jobs by the bucketful in return for votes, kickbacks, and party service." (p. 507)
12. **lien** A legal claim by a lender or another party on a borrower's property as a guarantee against repayment, and prohibiting any sale of the property. ". . . storekeepers extended credit to small farmers for food and supplies and in return took a lien on their harvest." (p. 510)
13. **assassination** Politically motivated murder of a public figure. ". . . he asked all those who had benefited politically by the assassination to contribute to his defense fund." (p. 514)
14. **laissez-faire** The doctrine of noninterference, especially by the government, in matters of economics or business (literally, "leave alone"). "[The new president was] a staunch apostle of the hands-off creed of laissez-faire. . . ." (p. 518)
15. **pork barrel** In American politics, government appropriations for political purposes, especially projects designed to please a legislator's local constituency. "One [way to reduce the surplus] was to squander it on pensions and 'pork-barrel' bills. . . ." (p. 519)

PART II: Checking Your Progress

A. True-False

Where the statement is true, mark **T**. Where it is false, mark **F**, and correct it in the space immediately below.

- ___ 1. Ulysses Grant's status as a military hero enabled him to become a successful president who stood above partisan politics.
- ___ 2. The scandals of the Grant administration included bribes and corrupt dealings reaching to the cabinet and the vice president of the United States.
- ___ 3. The Liberal Republican movement's political skilled enabled it to clean up the corruption of the Grant administration.
- ___ 4. The severe economic downturn of the 1870s caused business failures, labor conflict, and battles over currency.
- ___ 5. The close, fiercely contested elections of the Gilded Age reflected the deep divisions between Republicans and Democrats over national issues.

- ___ 6. The battles between the "Stalwart" and "Half-Breed" Republican factions were mainly over who would get patronage and spoils.
- ___ 7. The disputed Hayes-Tilden election was settled by a political deal in which Democrats got the presidency and Republicans got economic and political concessions.
- ___ 8. The Compromise of 1877 purchased political peace between North and South by sacrificing southern blacks and removing federal troops in the South.
- ___ 9. The sharecropping and tenant farming systems forced many Southern blacks into permanent economic debt and dependency.
- ___ 10. Western hostility to Chinese immigrants arose in part because the Chinese provided a source of cheap labor that competed with white workers.
- ___ 11. By reducing politicians' use of patronage, the new civil-service system inadvertently made them more dependent on big campaign contributors.
- ___ 12. The Cleveland-Blaine campaign of 1884 was conducted primarily as a debate about the issues of taxes and the tariff.
- ___ 13. The Republican party in the post-Civil War era relied heavily on the political support of veterans' groups, to which it gave substantial pension benefits in return.
- ___ 14. The Populist party's attempt to form a coalition of farmers and workers failed partly because of the racial division between poor whites and blacks in the South.
- ___ 15. Cleveland effectively addressed the depression of the 1890s by compromising with pro-silver money advocates.

B. Multiple Choice

Select the best answer and write the proper letter in the space provided.

- ___ 1. Financiers Jim Fisk and Jay Gould tried to involve the Grant administration in a corrupt scheme to
 - a. skim funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
 - b. sell "watered" railroad stock at high prices.
 - c. corner the gold market.
 - d. bribe congressmen in exchange for federal land grants.
- ___ 2. Boss Tweed's widespread corruption was finally brought to a halt by
 - a. federal prosecutors who uncovered the theft.
 - b. outraged citizens who rebelled against the waste of public money.
 - c. the journalistic exposés of *The New York Times* and cartoonist Thomas Nast.
 - d. Tweed's political opponents in New York City.

3. The Credit Mobilier scandal involved
- the abuse of federal credit intended for urban development.
 - railroad corporation fraud and the subsequent bribery of congressmen.
 - Secretary of War Belknap's fraudulent sale of contracts to supply Indian reservations.
 - the attempt of insiders to gain control of New York's gold and stock markets.
4. Grant's greatest failing in the scandals that plagued his administration was
- his refusal to turn over evidence to congressional investigators.
 - his toleration of corruption and his loyalty to crooked friends.
 - his acceptance of behind-the-scenes payments for performing his duties as president.
 - his use of large amounts of "dirty" money in his political campaigns.
5. The depression of the 1870s led to increasing demands for
- inflation of the money supply by issuing more paper or silver currency.
 - federal programs to create jobs for the unemployed.
 - restoration of sound money by backing all paper currency with gold.
 - stronger regulation of the banking system.
6. The political system of the "Gilded Age" was generally characterized by
- "split-ticket" voting, low voter turnout, and single-issue special-interest groups.
 - strong party loyalties, low voter turnout, and deep ideological differences.
 - "third-party" movements, high voter turnout and strong disagreement on foreign-policy issues.
 - strong party loyalties, high voter turnout, and few disagreements on national issues.
7. The primary goal for which all factions in both political parties contended during the Gilded Age was
- racial justice.
 - a sound financial and banking system.
 - patronage.
 - a more assertive American foreign policy.
8. The key tradeoff featured in the Compromise of 1877,
- Republicans got the presidency in exchange for the final removal of federal troops from the South.
 - Democrats got the presidency in exchange for federal guarantees of black civil rights.
 - Republicans got the presidency in exchange for Democratic control of the cabinet.
 - Democrats got the presidency in exchange for increased immigration quotas from Ireland.
9. Which of the following was *not* among the changes that affected African-Americans in the South after federal troops were withdrawn in the Compromise of 1877?
- the forced relocation of black farmers to the Kansas and Oklahoma "dust bowl."
 - the imposition of literacy requirements and poll taxes to prevent black voting.
 - the development of the tenant farming and share-cropping systems.
 - the introduction of legal systems of racial segregation.

- ___ 10. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upholding "separate but equal" public facilities in effect legalized
- southern blacks' loss of voting rights.
 - the system of unequal segregation between the races.
 - the program of separate black and white economic development endorsed by Booker T. Washington.
 - the rights to "equal protection of the law" guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.
- ___ 11. The great railroad strike of 1877 revealed
- the growing strength of American labor unions.
 - the refusal of the U.S. federal government to intervene in private labor disputes.
 - the ability of American workers to cooperate across ethnic and racial lines.
 - the growing threat of class warfare in response to the economic depression of the mid-1870s.
- ___ 12. The final result of the widespread anti-Chinese agitation in the West was
- a program to encourage Chinese students to enroll in American colleges and universities.
 - a Congressional law to prohibit any further Chinese immigration.
 - the stripping of citizenship even from native-born Chinese-Americans.
 - legal segregation of all Chinese into "Chinatown" districts in San Francisco and elsewhere.
- ___ 13. President James Garfield was assassinated by
- a fanatically anti-Republican Confederate veteran.
 - a mentally unstable disappointed office seeker.
 - an anticapitalist immigrant anarchist.
 - a corrupt gangster under federal criminal indictment.
- ___ 14. In its first years, the Populist Party advocated, among other things
- free silver, a graduated income tax, and government ownership of the railroads, telegraph, and telephone.
 - higher tariffs and federally sponsored unemployment insurance and pensions.
 - tighter restriction on black economic, social, and political rights.
 - a Homestead Act to permit farmers and unemployed workers to obtain free federal land in the West.
- ___ 15. Grover Cleveland stirred a furious storm of protest when, in response to the extreme financial crisis of the 1890s, he
- lowered tariffs to permit an influx of cheaper foreign goods into the country.
 - signed a bill introducing a federal income tax that cut into workers' wages.
 - pushed the Federal Reserve Board into sharply raising interest rates.
 - borrowed \$65 million dollars from J.P. Morgan and other bankers in order to save the monetary gold standard.

C. Identification

Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

- _____ 1. The symbol of the Republican political tactic of attacking Democrats with reminders of the Civil War
- _____ 2. Corrupt construction company whose bribes and payoffs to congressmen and others created a major Grant administration scandal
- _____ 3. Short-lived third party of 1872 that attempted to curb Grant administration corruption
- _____ 4. Precious metal that "soft-money" advocates demanded be coined again to compensate for the "Crime of '73"
- _____ 5. "Soft-money" third party that polled over a million votes and elected fourteen congressmen in 1878 by advocating inflation
- _____ 6. Mark Twain's sarcastic name for the post-Civil War era, which emphasized its atmosphere of greed and corruption
- _____ 7. Civil War Union veterans' organization that became a potent political bulwark of the Republican party in the late nineteenth century
- _____ 8. Republican party faction led by Senator Roscoe Conkling that opposed all attempts at civil-service reform
- _____ 9. Republican party faction led by Senator James G. Blaine that paid lip service to government reform while still battling for patronage and spoils
- _____ 10. The complex political agreement between Republicans and Democrats that resolved the bitterly disputed election of 1876
- _____ 11. Asian immigrant group that experienced discrimination on the West Coast
- _____ 12. System of choosing federal employees on the basis of merit rather than patronage introduced by the Pendleton Act of 1883
- _____ 13. Sky-high Republican tariff of 1890 that caused widespread anger among farmers in the Midwest and the South.
- _____ 14. Insurgent political party that gained widespread support among farmers in the 1890s
- _____ 15. Notorious clause in southern voting laws that exempted from literacy tests and poll taxes anyone whose ancestors had voted in 1860, thereby excluding blacks

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

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| ___ 1. Ulysses S. Grant | A. Heavyweight New York political boss whose widespread fraud landed him in jail in 1871 |
| ___ 2. Jim Fisk | B. Bold and unprincipled financier whose plot to corner the U.S. gold market nearly succeeded in 1869 |
| ___ 3. Boss Tweed | C. Winner of the contested 1876 election who presided over the end of Reconstruction and a sharp economic downturn |
| ___ 4. Horace Greeley | D. Great military leader whose presidency foundered in corruption and political ineptitude |

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| ___ 5. Jay Cooke | E. Term for the racial segregation laws imposed in the 1890s |
| ___ 6. Denis Kearney | F. Eloquent young Congressman from Nebraska who became the most prominent advocate of "free silver" in the early 1890s. |
| ___ 7. Tom Watson | G. President whose assassination after only a few months in office spurred the passage of a civil-service law |
| ___ 8. Roscoe Conkling | H. Irish-born leader of the anti-Chinese movement in California |
| ___ 9. James G. Blaine | I. Radical Populist leader whose early success turned sour, and who then became a vicious racist |
| ___ 10. Rutherford B. Hayes | J. Wealthy New York financier whose bank collapse in 1873 set off an economic depression |
| ___ 11. James Garfield | K. Imperious New York senator and leader of the "Stalwart" faction of Republicans |
| ___ 12. Jim Crow | L. First Democratic president since the Civil War; defender of <i>laissez-faire</i> economics and low tariffs |
| ___ 13. Grover Cleveland | M. Enormously wealthy banker whose secret bailout of the federal government in 1895 aroused fierce public anger |
| ___ 14. William Jennings Bryan | N. Colorful, eccentric newspaper editor who carried the Liberal Republican and Democratic banners against Grant in 1872 |
| ___ 15. J. P. Morgan | O. Charming but corrupt "Half-Breed" Republican senator and presidential nominee in 1884 |

E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.

- ___ A bitterly disputed presidential election is resolved by a complex political deal that ends Reconstruction in the South.
- ___ Two unscrupulous financiers use corrupt means to manipulate New York gold markets and the U.S. Treasury.
- ___ A major economic depression causes widespread social unrest and the rise of the Populist Party as a vehicle of protest.
- ___ Grant administration scandals split the Republican party, but Grant overcomes the inept opposition to win reelection.
- ___ Monetary deflation and the high McKinley Tariff lead to growing agitation for "free silver" by Congressman William Jennings Bryan and others.

F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

- | Cause | Effect |
|--|--|
| ___ 1. Favor-seeking business-people and corrupt politicians | A. Created fierce partisan competition and high voter turnouts, even though the parties agreed on most national issues |
| ___ 2. <i>The New York Times</i> and cartoonist Thomas Nast | B. Caused anti-Chinese violence and restrictions against Chinese immigration |

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| <p>___ 3. Upright Republicans' disgust with Grant administration scandals</p> <p>___ 4. The economic crash of the mid-1870s</p> <p>___ 5. Local cultural, moral, and religious differences</p> <p>___ 6. The Compromise of 1877 that settled the disputed Hayes-Tilden election</p> <p>___ 7. White workers' resentment of Chinese labor competition</p> <p>___ 8. Public shock at Garfield's assassination by Guiteau</p> <p>___ 9. The 1890s depression and the drain of gold from the federal treasury</p> <p>___ 10. The inability of Populist leaders to overcome divisions between white and black farmers</p> | <p>C. Led to the formation of the Liberal Republican party in 1872</p> <p>D. Induced Grover Cleveland to negotiate a secret loan from J. P. Morgan's banking syndicate</p> <p>E. Forced Boss Tweed out of power and into jail</p> <p>F. Helped ensure passage of the Pendleton Act</p> <p>G. Caused numerous scandals during President Grant's administration</p> <p>H. Led to failure of the third party revolt in the South and a growing racial backlash</p> <p>I. Caused unemployment, railroad strikes, and a demand for "cheap money"</p> <p>J. Led to the withdrawal of troops from the South and the virtual end of federal efforts to protect black rights there</p> |
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G. Developing Historical Skills

Historical Fact and Historical Explanation

Historians uncover a great deal of information about the past, but often that information takes on significance only when it is analyzed and interpreted. In this chapter, many facts about the presidents and elections of the Gilded Age are presented: for example, the very close elections in 1876, 1884, 1888, and 1892; the large voter turnouts; and the lack of significant issues in most elections.

These facts take on larger meaning, however, when we examine the *reasons* for them. Reread the section "Pallid Politics in the Gilded Age" (pp. 507–508) and answer each of the following questions in a sentence or two.

1. What *fundamental* difference between the two parties made partisan politics so fiercely contested in the Gilded Age?

2. Why did this underlying difference *not* lead to differences over issues at the national level?

3. Why were so many of the elections extremely close, no matter who the candidates were?

4. Why was winning each election so very important to both parties, even though there was little disagreement on issues?

H. Map Mastery

Map Discrimination

Using the maps and charts in Chapter 23, answer the following questions.

1. *Hayes-Tilden Disputed Election of 1876*: In the controversial Hayes-Tilden election of 1876, how many *undisputed* electoral votes did Republican Hayes win in the former Confederate states?
2. *Hayes-Tilden Disputed Election of 1876*: Democrat Tilden carried four states in the North—states that did not have slavery before 1865. Which were they?
3. *Growth of Classified Civil Service*: The *percentage* of offices classified under civil service was approximately how many times greater under President McKinley than under President Arthur: two, three, four, five, or ten?
4. *Presidential Election of 1884*: Which of the following states gained the most electoral votes between 1876 and 1884: New York, Indiana, Missouri, or Texas?
5. *Presidential Election of 1884*: How many states that were carried by Republican Hayes in 1876 were carried by Democrat Cleveland in 1884?

Map Challenge

Using the election map on p. 508 and the account of the Compromise of 1877 in the text (pp. 508–509), discuss the election of 1876 in relation to both Reconstruction and the political balance of the Gilded Age. Include some analysis of the reasons why this was the last time for nearly a century that the states in the Deep South voted Republican.

PART III: Applying What You Have Learned

1. What made politics in the Gilded Age extremely popular—with over 80 percent voter participation—yet so often corrupt and unconcerned with issues?
2. What caused the end of the Reconstruction? What did the North and South each gain from the Compromise of 1877?
3. What were the results of the Compromise of 1877 for race relations? How were the political, economic, and social conditions of southern African-Americans interrelated?
4. What caused the rise of the “money issue” in American politics? What were the backers of “greenback” and silver money trying to achieve?
5. What were the causes and political results of the rise of agrarian protest in the 1880s and 1890s? Why were the Populists’ attempts to form a coalition of white and black farmers and industrial workers ultimately unsuccessful?
6. In what ways did the political conflicts of the Gilded Age still reflect the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction? (See Chapter 22.) To what extent did the political leaders of the time address issues of race and sectional conflict, and to what extent did they merely shove them under the rug?