

CHAPTER 23

Politics in the Gilded Age, 1869–1896

1. Part Four Intro. (pp. 500–501) This introduction gives you a preview of the authors’ answers to certain key questions about the “pallid politics” and corruption but at the same time massive changes taking place in American life in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Look at this section and list three major questions you think the authors will be addressing in the next five chapters.

(1)

(2)

(3)

2. Grant and Corruption (pp. 502–506)

a. The authors’ opinions are obviously not high regarding any of the late nineteenth-century political leaders, especially Gen. Grant - calling him “inept” and a political “greenhorn.” How important was the black vote in electing Grant and how did this political factor affect the Reconstruction policy of the Republican party? (Note that blacks, to the extent they were allowed to vote, continued to support the “party of Lincoln” until Roosevelt in the 1930s.)

b. Jay _____ and Jim _____ are cited as examples of post-Civil War corporate corruption. Boss _____ in New York City is cited as an example of political corruption. A combination of the two was the “Crédit Mobilier” scandal. What did the Crédit Mobilier scandal involve?

3. 1873 Depression and “Hard Money” (pp. 506–507)

a. The first paragraph of this section summarizes nicely the boom and bust cycles that seem to afflict American capitalism every generation or so. In your own words, what caused the economic panic of 1873?

b. We are used to *inflation* today (i.e., prices being higher this year than last). But in the late 1800s, the government actually contracted the money supply per capita, causing *deflation* (i.e., a loaf of bread would cost *less* this year than last). Why would debtors in the countryside who owed people money want more silver to be coined and more dollars to be printed? Why would eastern financial interests who lent money (creditors) oppose these inflationary actions?

(1) Debtors for inflation:

(2) Creditors against inflation:

4. Death of Reconstruction and Birth of “Jim Crow” (pp. 507–511)

a. Politics in the “Gilded Age” was passionate if not particularly inspiring. Party distinctions had many similarities to the present day. List a few words to describe the Republican and Democratic parties of the period.

(1) Republican:

(2) Democratic:

b. The backroom Compromise of 1877 involved ____ (number) disputed electoral votes in the 1876 election between Republican Rutherford B. _____ and Democrat Samuel J. _____. The deal gave the presidency to _____ in return, among other things, for the Democratic desire to withdraw the last federal troops from the South. This ended Republican commitment to racial equality in the South and completed the reversion of southern state governments to the white “redeemers.” What effect did the following have on the institution of legalized social segregation (“Jim Crow” laws) and black economic subservience in the South?

(1) Compromise of 1877:

(2) Civil rights cases (1883):

(3) *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896):

5. The Chinese (pp. 511–514) The Chinese —mostly as single men from southern China —came to the West Coast primarily during the Gold Rush and to work on the railroads, after which they ventured into other areas. This created resentment, especially during the hard economic times of the 1870s. Demagogues such as San Francisco’s Denis _____ agitated and Congress finally passed the Chinese _____ Act in 18____, creating ethnic-based immigration restrictions that remained until 19____.

6. Politics of the 1880s (pp. 514–521) Republican James _____ of the key swing state of _____ was elected in 1880 and assassinated by a disgruntled office-seeker less than a year later. Vice President Chester _____ then took over and pushed through the _____ Act of 1883, which started to control the abuses of the “spoils system” by classifying government jobs, testing applicants, and setting up a _____ Service Commission. Democrat Grover _____ then beat Blaine in 1884 thanks to the desertion to the Democrats of some reform-minded, sound-money Republicans called “_____.” Cleveland liked small government which, when combined with the revenues generated from high tariffs, was producing a large government budget surplus. Cleveland tried to lower tariffs, which raised the ire of the Republicans and got Benjamin _____ (grandson of ol’ Tippecanoe) elected over Cleveland in 1888 in one of the first campaigns heavily financed by big industrialists.

7. Populists and Politics of the 1890s (pp. 521–526)

a. The newly formed _____ Party, or “Populists,” made a remarkable showing in the 1892 elections, backing ex-general James B. _____. Their platform called for unlimited coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, and government ownership of certain large industries such as railroads. *** Pick *one* of these planks and explain why it would be favored by farmers and/or debtors.

b. Labor never fully joined the Populist crusade and southern whites used old racist arguments to make sure that the white Populists would not join forces on a class basis with the Colored National Farmers Alliance. Jim Crow laws and black disenfranchisement were tightened throughout the South. Though the Populists made a strong showing, the Democrat Grover _____ returned to the White House in 1893 in time for the worst economic depression the country had yet seen. (*Note: Today, the government would probably take steps to relieve suffering through welfare and unemployment insurance and by pumping more money into the economy, but then the philosophy was to “let nature take its course.”*) To save money, Cleveland angered rural interests by suspending the 1890 _____ Purchase Act and borrowing \$65 million from Wall Street banker J. P. _____.

VARYING VIEWPOINTS

The Populists

From what you’ve read so far (there’s more on the Populists in Chapter 26), do you tend to favor Richard Hofstadter’s critical view of the Populists as rural hicks resisting inevitable progress? Or do you like the positive view of Lawrence Goodwin (influenced by the popular uprisings of the 1960s) that the Populists represented a pure, progressive grassroots movement (a “shining, popular democratic moment”)? Why do you favor one of these viewpoints?

CHAPTER 23 TERM SHEET

Politics in the Gilded Age

Pages 502–506

Ulysses S. Grant

“Waving the bloody shirt”

“Jubilee Jim” Fisk

Jay Gould

“Boss” Tweed

Thomas Nast

Crédit Mobilier

Whiskey Ring

Liberal Republicans

Horace Greeley

General Amnesty Act (1872)

Pages 506–507

Panic of 1873

“Greenbacks”

Resumption Act of 1875

“Crime of ‘73”

Greenback Labor Party (1878)

Pages 507–511

“Gilded Age”

Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)

“Stalwarts”/Sen. Roscoe Conkling

“Half-Breeds”/Sen. James B. Blaine

Rep. Rutherford B. Hayes (1876)

Dem. Samuel J. Tilden (1876)

“Compromise of 1877”

Civil Rights Act of 1875

Civil Rights Cases (1883)

“Jim Crow” laws

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Pages 511–514

Denis Kearney

Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark (1898)

Pages 514–521

James A. Garfield (1880)

Charles Guiteau

Chester A. Arthur (1881)

Pendleton Act of 1883

Civil Service Commission

“Mugwumps” (1884)

Dem. Grover Cleveland (1884)

Rep. Benjamin Harrison (1888)

Rep. Thomas B. Reed

“Billion-Dollar” Congress (1889)

McKinley Tariff Act of 1890

Farmers’ Alliance

Pages 521–526

People’s Party (“Populists”)

Gen. James B. Weaver

Homestead Steel Strike (1892)

Colored Farmers’ National Alliance

Tom Watson

Depression of 1893

J. P. Morgan

Wilson-Gorman Tariff (1894)