

Politics in the Gilded Age 1869-1896

1. **The "Bloody Shirt" Elects Grant (1868)**
 - a. Waving the "Bloody Shirt"
 - i. the most common Republican campaign tactic from 1868 – 1880
 - ii. to remind voters of the South's dishonor of seceding and causing the Civil War
 - iii. This tactic painted all Democrats as evil destroyers of the Union
 - b. The Republicans nominated General Grant for the presidency in 1868
 - i. Republican Party supported the continuation of the Reconstruction of the South
 - ii. Grant stood on the platform of "just having peace."
 - c. The Democrats nominated Horatio Seymour.
 - d. Grant won the election of 1868

2. **The Era of Good Stealings**
 - a. Jim Fisk and Jay Gould
 - i. devised a plot to drastically raise the price of the gold market in 1869
 - ii. "Black Friday" September 24, 1869
 - iii. the two bought a large amount of gold, planning to sell it for a profit
 - iv. To lower the high price of gold, Treasury was forced to sell gold
 - b. The Credit Mobilier Scandal
 - i. erupted in 1872
 - ii. Union Pacific Railroad insiders formed the Credit Mobilier construction company
 - iii. then hired themselves at inflated prices to build the railroad line, earning high dividends
 - iv. When it was found out that government officials were paid to stay quiet about the illicit business, some officials were censured
 - c. William M. "Boss" Tweed & The Tweed Ring
 - i. To many late 19th century Americans, he personified public corruption
 - ii. In the late 1860s, William M. Tweed was the New York City's political boss
 - iii. His headquarters, located on East 14th Street, was known as Tammany Hall
 - iv. Employed bribery, graft, and fraudulent elections to milk New York of as much as \$200 million.
 - v. As Political Boss, Tweed:
 1. orchestrated elections
 2. controlled the city's mayor
 3. rewarded political supporters.
 - vi. His primary source of funds came from the bribes and kickbacks that he demanded in exchange of city contracts
 - vii. The construction of the New York County Courthouse
 1. Begun in 1861
 2. The most notorious example of urban corruption

3. Officially, the city wound up spending nearly \$13 million
 4. roughly \$178 million in today's dollars
 5. building should have cost several times less
 6. Its construction cost nearly twice as much as the purchase of Alaska in 1867
 7. The corruption was breathtaking in its breadth and boldness:
 - a. A carpenter was paid \$360,751 (roughly \$4.9 million today) for one month's labor in a building with very little woodwork
 - b. A furniture contractor received \$179,729 (\$2.5 million) for three tables and 40 chairs
 - c. A plasterer, Andrew J. Garvey, got \$133,187 (\$1.82 million) for two days' work; his business acumen earned him the sobriquet "The Prince of Plasterers."
 - d. Tweed personally profited from a financial interest in a Massachusetts quarry that provided the courthouse's marble
 - e. When a committee investigated why it took so long to build the courthouse, it spent \$7,718 (\$105,000) to print its report
 - f. The printing company was owned by Tweed
 8. The Tweed courthouse was not completed until 1880, two decades after ground was broken
 9. By then, the courthouse had become a symbol of public corruption
- viii. The Tide Turns Against the Tweed Ring
1. July 1871
 2. Two low-level city officials had a grudge against the Tweed Ring
 3. They provided The New York Times with reams of documentation that detailed the corruption at the courthouse and other city projects
 4. The Times published a string of articles
 5. Thomas Nast
 - a. Created political cartoons of Tweed
 - b. Published in *Harper's Weekly*
 6. Articles & Cartoons created a national outcry
 7. Tweed and many of his cronies were soon facing criminal charges and political oblivion
 8. Tweed was eventually put into prison where he died in 1878
- ix. Were bosses and political machines as corrupt as their critics charged?
1. Many machines professionalized urban police forces and instituted the first housing regulations
 2. Political also bosses served the welfare needs of immigrants
 3. They offered jobs, food, fuel, and clothing to the new immigrants and the destitute poor
 4. Political machines also served as a ladder of social mobility for ethnic groups blocked from other means of rising in society.

5. In *The Shame of the Cities*, Lincoln Steffens argued that it was greedy businessmen who kept the political machines functioning
6. It was their hunger for government contracts, franchises, charters, and special privileges, he believed, that corrupted urban politics
7. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, urban reformers would seek to redeem the city through:
 - a. beautification campaigns
 - b. city planning
 - c. rationalization of city government
 - d. increases in city services

3. Election of 1872

- a. Liberal Republican Party
 - i. Formed in 1872
 - ii. In response to disgust of the:
 1. political corruption in Washington
 2. military Reconstruction of the South
- b. Horace Greeley
 - i. The Liberal Republican Party presidential candidate for the election of 1872
 - ii. The Democratic Party also chose Greeley as their candidate.
 - iii. The Republican Party continued to put its support behind President Grant
 - iv. Grant won the election of 1872.
- c. Republican Congress of 1872
 - i. Passed General Amnesty Act in 1872
 1. The Liberal Republicans forced this act's passage
 2. removed political disabilities from most of the former Confederate leaders
 - ii. Congress also reduced high Civil War tariffs
 - iii. gave mild civil-service reform to the Grant administration

4. Pallid Politics in the Gilded Age

- a. Throughout most of the Gilded Age the political parties in government had balanced out.
- b. Few significant economic issues separated the Democrats and the Republicans.
- c. *Democrats*
 - i. Were immigrant Lutherans and Roman Catholics
 - ii. Believed in toleration of differences in an imperfect world
 - iii. Opposed the government imposing a single moral standard on the entire society
 - iv. Were found in the South and in the northern industrial cities.
- d. *Republicans*
 - i. Tended to stress strict codes of personal morality

- ii. Believed that the government should play a role in regulating the economic
- iii. Believed that the government should play a role in the moral affairs of society
- iv. Were found in the Midwest and Northeast
- v. Many Republican votes came from the Grand Army of the Republic
 - 1. a politically active fraternal organization of many Union veterans of the Civil War
- e. Republican Party was split into three factions:
 - i. *“Stalwarts”*
 - 1. Conservative faction
 - 2. led by Roscoe Conkling (R-NY)
 - 3. Were *“stalwart”* in opposition to Hayes’ efforts to reconcile with the South
 - 4. Opposed all form of Civil Service Reform
 - 5. supported the system of swapping civil-servant jobs for votes
 - a. Giving someone a job if they vote for a specific party/cause
 - b. A new *“Spoils System”* or Patronage
 - 6. Backed Protective Tariff
 - 7. Sought 3rd term for US Grant
 - 8. Typical Stalwarts were
 - a. Radical Republicans
 - b. Union War Veterans
 - c. Republican Political Bosses
 - ii. *“Half-Breeds”*
 - 1. Term of disparagement ginned-up by Stalwarts
 - 2. Opposed to the Stalwarts
 - 3. led by James G. Blaine (R-ME)
 - a. failed to earn GOP nomination in 1876 & 1880
 - 4. James Garfield also affiliated with the Half-Breeds
 - 5. Moderate faction of GOP
 - 6. Backed lenient treatment of the South
 - 7. Supported moderate Civil Service Reform
 - 8. The main disagreement between the two groups was over who would give the jobs to the people who voted in their favor
 - iii. *“Liberals”*
 - 1. The Reform element of the GOP
 - 2. Supported:
 - a. Active civil service reform
 - b. Tariff for revenue generation only

5. Election of 1876 - The Hayes – Tilden Standoff

- a. The Two-Term Resolution
 - i. Congress passed a resolution that reminded the country, and Grant, of the two-term tradition for presidency
 - ii. Grant was speculating about running for a 3rd term

- b. The Election of 1876:
 - i. GOP chose Rutherford B. Hayes
 - ii. Democrats chose Samuel J. Tilden
 - iii. Tilden won the popular vote, but was 1 vote shy from winning in the Electoral College
 - iv. The determining electoral votes would come from three states:
 - 1. Louisiana
 - 2. South Carolina
 - 3. Florida
 - v. Each of these 3 sent two sets of ballots to Congress
 - 1. one with the Democrats victorious
 - 2. the other with the Republicans victorious
 - 3. thus, there was no winner in these states
 - vi. It was necessary to find the true political party winner of the states
 - vii. It was unknown who would judge the winner of the states because
 - 1. the president of the Senate was a Republican
 - 2. the Speaker of the House was a Democrat

6. The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction

- a. The Electoral Count Act (Compromise of 1877)
 - i. Passed by Congress in 1877
 - ii. Set up an electoral commission consisting of 15 men selected from the:
 - 1. Senate
 - 2. House of Representatives
 - 3. Supreme Court
 - iii. This commission was made to determine which party would win the election
 - iv. The committee finally determined:
 - 1. the Republicans had been victorious in the disputed ballots from the three states
 - 2. giving the Republicans the presidency
 - 3. without opening the ballots from the three disputed states
- b. The Democrats
 - i. were outraged at the outcome
 - ii. but agreed that Republican Hayes could take office if he withdrew the federal troops from Louisiana and South Carolina
- c. First time in history the Electoral College and Popular Vote differed
- d. With the Hayes-Tilden deal, the Republican Party abandoned its commitment to racial equality
- e. The Civil Rights Act of 1875
 - i. Supposedly guaranteed equal accommodations in public places and prohibited racial discrimination in jury selection
 - ii. The Supreme Court
 - 1. ended up ruling most of the Act unconstitutional
 - 2. declaring that the 14th Amendment only prohibited *government* violations of civil rights, not the denial of civil rights by individuals

7. The Birth of Jim Crow in the Post-Reconstruction South

- a. Reconstruction had ended in the South
- b. Democrats
 - i. resumed their political power in the South
 - ii. began to exercise their discrimination upon blacks
- c. Blacks were forced into sharecropping and tenant farming
- d. Through the "crop-lien" system, small farmers who rented out land from the plantation owners were kept in perpetual debt and forced to continue to work for the owners
- e. State-level legal codes of segregation known as Jim Crow laws were enacted
- f. The Southern states also enacted literacy requirements, voter-registration laws, and poll taxes to ensure the denial of voting for the South's black population
- g. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)
 - i. The case originated in Louisiana
 - ii. In 1890 LA passed the Separate Car Law, providing that separate cars be provided for whites and blacks
 - iii. In 1892, passenger Homer Plessy refused to sit in a Jim Crow car
 - iv. He was brought before Judge John H. Ferguson of the Criminal Court for New Orleans
 - v. In the original trial, Plessy is found guilty, and this decision was upheld by the Louisiana Supreme Court
 - vi. The law was later challenged in the US Supreme Court on grounds that it conflicted with the 13th and 14th Amendments
 - vii. The Supreme Court ruled 7-1 in favor of the South's segregation
 - viii. Declaring that separate but equal facilities for blacks were legal under the 14th Amendment.

8. The Election of 1880 - Garfield vs. Scott

- a. President Hayes was despised by his own Republican Party
- b. James A. Garfield was chosen as the presidential candidate for the election of 1880
- c. His vice-president was Chester A. Arthur, a former Stalwart
- d. The Democrats chose Civil War hero, Winfield Scott
- e. Garfield won the election of 1880
- f. Garfield's Assassination
 - i. assassinated by Charles J. Guiteau at a Washington railroad station
 - ii. Guiteau, claiming to be a Stalwart, shot the president
 - iii. claimed that the Conklingites would now get all the good jobs now that Chester Arthur was President.
- g. The death of Garfield shocked politicians into reforming the spoils system.
- h. The reform was supported by President Arthur, shocking his critics
- i. The Pendleton Act of 1883
 - i. made campaign contributions from federal employees illegal
 - ii. it established the Civil Service Commission to make appointments to federal jobs on the basis of competitive examination
 - iii. It was basically made to stop political corruption

- iv. The civil-service reform forced politicians to gain support and funds from big-business leaders.

9. The Election of 1884 - The Blaine-Cleveland Mudslingers

- a. GOP chose James G. Blaine as their presidential candidate
 - i. One of the most powerful republicans of the 1870s & 80s
 - ii. Member of the House from 1862 – 1876
 - iii. Speaker from 1868 - 18876
- b. The Democrats chose Grover Cleveland
 - i. a very honest and admirable man
 - ii. born in Caldwell, NJ
 - iii. Governor of NY in 1882
- c. The “Mugwumps”
 - i. Independent Republicans
 - ii. refused to support Blaine in the presidential campaign of 1884
 - iii. bolted the party and voted for Cleveland
 - iv. The word, from the Algonquian “mugwomp”
 - v. It was later applied in US political slang to any independent voter
- d. The Campaign
 - i. Contrasted Cleveland's spotless public career with the uncertain record of Blaine
 - ii. Cleveland received much Mugwump support
- e. Cleveland won the election of 1884

10. The First Presidency of Grover Cleveland - "Old Grover" Takes Over

- a. Could Cleveland and the Democratic Party, "the party of disunion," be trusted to govern the Union?
- b. Cleveland replaced thousands of federal employees with Democrats
- c. Vetoed a bill in 1887 to provide seeds for drought-ravaged Texas farmers
 - i. stating that the government should not support the people
 - ii. this summed up Cleveland's political philosophy
- d. The Grand Army of the Republic
 - i. lobbied hundreds of unreasonable military pension bills through Congress
 - ii. Cleveland vetoed many of the bills
- e. Cleveland Battles for a Lower Tariff
 - i. The growing surplus of money in the Treasury coming from the high tariff
 - ii. which was made to raise revenues for the military during the Civil War
 - iii. caused President Cleveland to propose lowering of the tariff in order to bring lower prices to consumers
 - iv. The lower tariff, introduced to Congress in 1887 and supported by Cleveland, tremendously hurt the nation's factories and the overall economy
 - v. Cleveland lost support because of the tariff

11. The Election of 1888 – Cleveland v. Harrison

- a. The GOP chose Benjamin Harrison as their presidential candidate

- b. Democrats chose Cleveland
- c. During the election, the first major issue between the two parties had arisen: tariffs
- d. Cleveland won the popular vote
- e. Harrison won the electoral college
- f. Second time in history the Electoral College & Popular Vote differed
- g. The Election of 2000 will be only other time this occurs

12. The Billion-Dollar Congress

- a. Democrats were prepared to stop all House business
- b. Thomas B. Reed (R-ME)
 - i. Speaker of the House
 - ii. took control and intimidated the House to his imperious will
- c. The Billion-Dollar Congress, named for its lavish spending:
 - i. gave pensions to Civil War veterans
 - ii. increased government purchases on silver
 - iii. passed the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890
 - 1. raised tariffs yet again and brought more troubles to farmers
 - 2. Farmers were forced to buy expensive products from American manufacturer
 - 3. while selling their own products into the highly competitive world markets.
 - 4. The Tariff Act caused the Republican Party to lose public support
- d. In the congressional elections of 1890, the Republicans lost their majority in Congress

13. The Election of 1892 – Harrison v. Cleveland v. Populists

- a. The Populists or People's Party
 - i. formed from frustrated farmers in the agricultural belts of the West and South
 - ii. The Populists' Platform:
 - 1. demanded inflation through free and unlimited coinage of silver
 - 2. called for a graduated income tax
 - 3. government ownership of the railroads, telegraph, and telephone
 - 4. the direct election of U.S. senators
 - 5. a one-term limit on the presidency
 - 6. the adoption of the initiative and referendum to allow citizens to shape legislation more directly
 - 7. a shorter workday
 - 8. immigration restriction
- b. The Populists nominated General James B. Weaver
- c. GOP nominated Harrison
- d. Democrats nominate Cleveland again
- e. In 1892, a series of violent worker strikes swept through the nation
- f. The Populist Party fell far short of winning the election

- g. The Populists lost because
 - i. They had a scattered base of power
 - ii. Their ideas had been co-opted by the Democrats
 - iii. They reached out to the black community
 - 1. They believed that a black man had every right to vote
 - 2. The Populist Party counted on many blacks votes from the South
 - 3. Unfortunately, many Southern blacks were denied the right to vote due to literacy tests
 - 4. The Southern whites voted against the party due the party's equal rights views toward blacks

14. **President Cleveland Redux**

- a. Immediate Problem: The Panic of 1893
 - i. was the worst economic downturn for the United States during the 19th Century
 - ii. caused by:
 - 1. overbuilding and over-speculation
 - 2. labor disorders
 - 3. the ongoing agricultural depression
- b. The Gold & Silver Issue
 - i. The Treasury was required to issue legal tender notes for the silver bullion that it had purchased
 - ii. Owners of the paper currency would then present it for gold, and by law the notes had to be reissued
 - iii. This process depleted the gold reserve in the Treasury to less than \$100 million
 - iv. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 was created by the administration of Benjamin Harrison in order to increase the amount of silver in circulation
 - 1. The drastic rise in silver caused the American people to believe that the less expensive silver was going to replace gold as the main form of currency
 - 2. The American people therefore began to withdraw their assets in gold, depleting the Treasury's gold supply
 - 3. Cleveland was forced to repeal the Silver Act Purchase in 1893
- c. Cleveland turned to J.P. Morgan to borrow \$65 million in gold in order to increase the Treasury's reserve
- d. The Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894
 - i. lowered tariffs
 - ii. contained a 2% tax on incomes over \$4,000
 - iii. The Supreme Court ruled income taxes unconstitutional in 1895
 - iv. caused the Democrats to lose positions in Congress
 - v. gave the Republicans an advantage

15. The Forgettable Presidents

- a. Grant
- b. Hayes
- c. Garfield
- d. Arthur
- e. B. Harrison
- f. Cleveland

16. The Election of 1896 - Golden McKinley v. Silver Bryan

- a. The GOP candidate was William McKinley
 - i. Marcus Alonzo Hanna led the Republican presidential campaign
 - ii. Hanna felt that the prime function of government was to aid business
 - iii. The Republican platform supported the gold standard
- b. The Democratic candidate was William Jennings Bryan
 - i. The platform demanded inflation through the unlimited coinage of silver
 - 1. at the ratio of 16 ounces of silver to 1 ounce of gold
 - 2. meaning that the silver in a dollar would be worth about 50 cents
- c. The Election of Class Conflict
 - i. Plowholders versus Bondholders
 - ii. Many of McKinley votes came from the East
 - iii. Many of Bryan's votes came from the debt-stricken South and the trans-Mississippi West
 - iv. The wage earners in the East voted for their jobs and had no reason to favor inflation, which was the heart of Bryan's campaign
 - v. William McKinley won the election of 1896

17. The Fourth Party System

- a. McKinley's election ushered in a new character to the American political system
- b. Diminishing voter participation in elections
- c. the weakening of party organizations
- d. the fading of issues like the money question and civil-service reform
- e. came to replaced by the concern for industrial regulation and the welfare of labor
- f. Scholars have dubbed this new political era the period of the "Fourth Party System"

The Election of 1900 and an assassin's bullet will spell the end of the Gilded Age and spark the beginning of Progressivism