CHAPTER 19
Politics and Reform

A Utopian Novelist Warns of Two Americas

At the start of his best-seller Looking Backward (1888), Edward Bellamy likened the American society of his day to a huge stagecoach. Dragging the coach along sandy roads and over steep hills were the “masses of humanity.” While they strained desperately “under the pitiless lashing of hunger” to pull the coach, at the top sat the favored...
few, riding in breezy comfort but still fearful that they might fall from their seats and have to pull the coach themselves.

Bellamy’s famous coach allegory began a utopian novel in which the class divisions and pitiless competition of the nineteenth century were replaced by a classless, caring, cooperative new society. Economic anxieties and hardships were supplanted by satisfying labor and leisure. In place of the coach, all citizens in the year 2000 walked together and shopped in equal comfort and security under a huge umbrella (not unlike modern malls) over the sidewalks of the city.

The novel opens in 1887. The hero, a wealthy Bostonian, falls asleep worrying about the effect local labor struggles might have on his upcoming wedding. When he wakes up, it is the year 2000. Utopia has been achieved peacefully through the development of one gigantic trust, owned and operated by the national government. All citizens between ages 21 and 45 work in an industrial army with equalized pay and work difficulty. Retirement after 45 is devoted to hobbies, reading, culture, and the minimal leadership necessary in a society without crime, corruption, poverty, or war.

Bellamy’s book was popular with educated middle-class Americans, who were attracted by his vision of a society in which humans were both morally good and materially well-off—and in which core values of the 1880s survived intact, including individual taste and incentive, private property, and rags-to-riches presidents. He filled the novel with futuristic technological wonders, such as television and credit cards, a double-dream surprise ending, and a love story. Bellamy’s treatment of the role of women reflected his era’s struggle with changing gender. Women in 2000 were relieved of housework by labor-saving gadgets, married for love, and worked in the industrial army, albeit in “lighter occupations.” They did not participate in government, and their primary role was still to supervise domestic affairs, nurture the young, and beautify culture.

Like most middle-class Americans of his day, Bellamy disapproved of European socialism. Although some features of his utopia were socialistic, he and his admirers called his system “nationalism.” This appealed to a new generation of Americans who had put aside Civil War antagonisms to embrace the greatness of a growing, if now economically divided, nation. In the early 1890s, with Americans buying nearly 10,000 copies of Looking Backward every week, more than 160 Nationalist clubs were formed to crusade for the adoption of Bellamy’s ideas.

The inequalities of wealth described in Bellamy’s coach scene reflected a political life in which many participated but only a few benefited. The wealthiest 10 percent, who rode high on the coach, dominated national politics, while untutored bosses held sway in governing cities. Except for token expressions of support, national political leaders ignored the cries of factory workers, immigrants, farmers, African Americans, Native Americans, and other victims of the vast transformation of American industrial, urban, and agrarian life in the late nineteenth century. But as the century closed, middle-class Americans like Bellamy, as well as labor, agrarian, and ethnic leaders themselves, proposed various reforms. Their concern was never more appropriate than during the depression of the mid-1890s, a real-life social upheaval that mirrored the worst features and fears of Bellamy’s fictional coach.

In this chapter, we will examine American politics at the national and local level from the end of Reconstruction to the 1890s, a period that in the United States as well as in Europe bolstered the rich and neglected the corrosive human problems of urban industrial life. Then we will look at the growing social
and political involvement of educated middle-class reformers who, despite their distaste for mass politics, were inspired by a religious social gospel to work for social change both locally and nationally. We will conclude with an account of the pivotal importance of the 1890s, highlighted by the Populist revolt, the depression of 1893–1897, and the election of 1896. In an age of strong national identity and pride, the events of the 1890s shook many comfortable citizens out of their apathy and began the reshaping of American politics.
POLITICS IN THE GILDED AGE

Co-authoring a satirical book in 1873, Mark Twain coined the expression “Gilded Age” to describe Grant’s corrupt presidency. The phrase, with its suggestion of shallow glitter, characterized social and political life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although politics was marred by corruption, and politicians avoided fundamental issues in favor of politics of mass entertainment—pomp, parades, pennants, and penny beer—voter participation in national elections between 1876 and 1896 hovered at an all-time high of 73 to 82 percent of all registered voters.

Behind the glitter, two gradual changes occurred that would greatly affect twentieth-century politics. First was the development of a professional bureaucracy of elite specialists in congressional committees and executive offices. These experts emerged as a counterfoil to the perceived dangers of majority rule represented by high voter participation, especially by new immigrants, “millions of newcomers alien to our traditions,” according to New England poet James Russell Lowell. Second, after a period of close elections and Republican–Democratic party stalemate, new issues, concerns, and parties fostered a political realignment in the 1890s.

Politics, Parties, Patronage, and Presidents

American government in the 1870s and 1880s clearly supported the interests of riders atop Bellamy’s coach. Few nineteenth-century Americans would have agreed that the national government should tackle problems of poverty, unemployment, and trusts. They mistrusted organized power and believed that all would benefit from an economic life free of government interference. After the traumas of the Civil War era, when a strong centralized state pursued high moral causes, political leaders of the late nineteenth century favored a period of government passivity, permitting the free pursuit of industrial expansion and wealth. As Republican leader Roscoe Conkling explained, the role of government was “to clear the way of impediments and dangers, and leave every class and every individual free and safe in the exertions and pursuits of life.”

The Gilded Age, Henry Adams observed, was the most “thoroughly ordinary” period ever in American politics. “One might search the whole list of Congress, Judiciary, and Executive during the twenty-five years 1870–95 and find little but damaged reputation.” Few eras of American government were so corrupt, and Adams was especially sensitive to the low quality of democratic politics compared to the exalted morality of his grandfather John Quincy Adams and great-grandfather John Adams.

During the weak presidencies of Andrew Johnson and Ulysses Grant, Congress emerged as the dominant branch of government with power centered in the committee system. Senators James G. Blaine (R-Maine) and Roscoe Conkling (R-New York) typified the moral quality of legislative leadership. Despite lying about having been paid off by favors to railroads, Blaine was probably the most popular Republican politician of the era. Charming, intelligent, witty, and able, he served twice as secretary of state and was a serious contender for the presidency in every election from 1876 to 1892. Conkling dispensed lucrative jobs at the New York customhouse and spent most of his career rewarding the party faithful with government jobs. In more than two decades in Congress, he never drafted a bill.

Legislation was not Congress’s primary purpose. In 1879, a disgusted student of legislative politics, Woodrow Wilson, wrote: “No leaders, no principles; no principles, no parties.” A British observer, Lord Bryce, concluded that the most cohesive force in American politics was not principle but patronage: the “desire for office and for office as a means of gain.” The two parties, like two bottles of liquor, Bryce said, bore different labels, yet “each was empty.”

Yet these characterizations were not entirely accurate. There were differences, as party professionals solidified their popular base to achieve political ends. Party affiliation, as today, generally reflected not just economic but also cultural, social, and religious questions. Republican votes came from northeastern Yankee industrial interests along with New England and...
Scandinavian Lutheran farming migrants across the Upper Midwest. Democrats depended on southern whites, northern workers, and urban immigrants. Because the Republican party had proved its willingness in the past to mobilize the power of the state to reshape society, people who wanted to regulate moral as well as economic power were attracted to it. White southerners and Irish and German Catholics preferred the Democratic party because it opposed government efforts to regulate morals. Said one Chicago Democrat, “A Republican is a man who wants you to go to church every Sunday. A Democrat says if a man wants to have a glass of beer on Sunday he can have it.”

For a few years, Civil War and Reconstruction issues generated party differences. But after 1876, the two parties were evenly matched, and they avoided controversial stands on national issues. In three of the five presidential elections between 1876 and 1892, a mere 1 percent of the vote separated the two major candidates. In 1880, James Garfield won by only 7,018 votes; in 1884, Grover Cleveland squeaked past Blaine by a popular-vote margin of 48.5 to 48.2 percent. In two elections (1876 and 1888), the electoral-vote winner had fewer popular votes. Further evidence of political stalemate was that only twice, each time for only two years, did one party control the White House and both houses of Congress. Although all the presidents in the era except Cleveland were Republicans, the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives in 8 of the 10 sessions of Congress between 1875 and 1895.

Gilded Age presidents were undistinguished and, like Washington, D.C., itself, played a minor role in national life. None of them—Hayes (1877–1881), Garfield (1881), Chester A. Arthur (1881–1885), Cleveland (1885–1889 and 1893–1897), and Benjamin Harrison (1889–1893)—served two consecutive terms. None was strongly identified with any particular issue. None has been highly regarded by historians. Garfield is remembered primarily for being shot by a disappointed office seeker and by hanging on for two and a half months before he died. The only Democrat in the group, Cleveland, differed little from the Republicans. Upon his election in 1884, financier Jay Gould sent him a telegram stating that “the vast business interests of the country will be entirely safe in your hands.” When Cleveland violated the expectation that presidents should not initiate ideas by devoting his annual message in 1887 to calling for a lower tariff, Congress did nothing. Voters turned him out of office a year later.

### Presidential Elections, 1872–1892

A British observer of American politics, James Bryce, said in 1888 that: “the American usually votes with his party, right or wrong, and the fact that there is little distinction of view between the parties makes it easier to stick to your old friends.” To what extent does this chart show that American voters stuck to their party? How close were the elections? What was the usual percent difference? In which two elections did the popular-vote winner, as in 2000, lose the election? Are parties today more like or unlike those from the late nineteenth century?

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
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<td>1872</td>
<td>ULYSSES S. GRANT</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>3,596,745 (56%)</td>
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<td>Horace Greeley</td>
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<td>2,843,446 (44%)</td>
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<td>James B. Weaver</td>
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<td>4,848,334 (48.2%)</td>
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<td>BENJAMIN HARRISON</td>
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<td>Benjamin Harrison</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>5,190,802 (43%)</td>
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<td>James B. Weaver</td>
<td>Populist</td>
<td>1,027,329 (9%)</td>
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*Greeley died before the Electoral College met.

Note: Winners’ names are in capital letters.
National Issues

Four issues were important at the national level in the Gilded Age: the tariff, currency, civil service, and government regulation of railroads. In confronting these issues, legislators tried to serve both their own self-interest and the national interest of an efficient, productive, growing economy.

The tariff was one issue in which party, as well as regional attitudes toward the use of government power, made some difference. Republicans wanted government to support business interests and stood for a high tariff to protect businesspeople, wage earners, and farmers from foreign competition. Democrats demanded a low tariff because “the government is best which governs least.” But politicians accommodated local interests when it came to tariffs. Democratic senator Daniel Vorhees of Indiana explained, “I am a protectionist for every interest which I am sent here by my constituents to protect.”

Tariff revisions were bewilderingly complex as legislators catered to many special interests that one senator described as “not far from disgusting.” Most tariffs included a jumble of higher and lower rates that defied understanding. The federal government depended on tariffs and excise taxes (primarily on tobacco and liquor) for most of its revenue, so there was little chance that the tariff would be abolished or substantially lowered. Surpluses produced by the tariff during the Gilded Age helped the parties finance patronage jobs and government programs.

The currency question was even more complicated. During the Civil War, the federal government had circulated paper money (greenbacks) that could not be exchanged for gold or silver (specie). In the late 1860s and 1870s, politicians debated whether the United States should return to a metallic standard, which would allow paper money to be exchanged for specie. “Hard-money” advocates supported either withdrawing all paper money from circulation or making it convertible to specie. They opposed increasing the volume of money, fearing inflation. “Soft money” Greenbackers argued that there was not enough currency in circulation for an expanding economy and urged increasing the supply of paper money in order to raise farm prices and cut interest rates.

Hard-money interests had more clout. In 1873, Congress demonetized silver. In 1875, it passed the

Political Advertisements of the 1880s Although the tariff protectionist Harrison defeated Cleveland in 1888 (the results were reversed in 1892), all Gilded Age presidents were essentially “preservers” rather than innovators. None had approached the greatness of Washington, Lincoln, and the other presidents hovering over Harrison and Morton in this illustration. In a second image from 1888, titled The Presidential B.B. Club, politics and business are merged in a tobacco advertisement, which shows Cleveland the fielder tagging out Harrison the batter—true enough for the election of 1892 but not for 1888, which Harrison won. Why baseball? What other images do you see in these two campaign visuals? (Left: Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-7177]; right: from the collection of David J. and Janice L. Frent)
Specie Resumption Act, gradually retiring greenbacks from circulation and putting the nation firmly on the gold standard. But as large supplies of silver were mined in the West, pressure resumed for increasing the money supply by coining silver. Soft-money advocates pushed for the unlimited coinage of silver in addition to gold. In an 1878 compromise, the Treasury was required to buy between $2 million and $4 million of silver each month and to coin it as silver dollars. Despite this increase in the money supply, the period was not inflationary. Prices fell, disappointing supporters of soft money. They pushed for more silver, continuing the controversy into the 1890s.

The issue of civil service reform was, as Henry Adams observed, a "subject almost as dangerous in political conversation in Washington as slavery itself in the old days before the war." The worst feature of the spoils system was that parties financed themselves by assessing holders of patronage jobs often as much as 1 percent of their annual salaries. Reformers, mostly middle-class, native-born, white Protestants, demanded competitive examinations to create an honest and professional civil service—but also one that would bar immigrants and their urban political machine bosses from the spoils of office.

Most Americans expected their presidents to reward the faithful with government jobs. Garfield’s assassination by a crazed office seeker created a public backlash. When he died, even a loyal Republican said of his successor, “My God! Chet Arthur in the White House!” But Arthur surprised doubters by being a capable and dignified president, responsive to growing demands for civil service reform. Congress passed the Pendleton Act of 1883, mandating merit examinations for about one-tenth of federal offices. Gradually, more bureaucrats fell under its coverage, but parties became no more honest. As campaign contributions from government employees dried up, parties turned to huge corporate contributions, which in 1888 helped elect Benjamin Harrison.

The Lure of Local Politics

The fact that the major parties did not disagree substantially on issues such as money and civil service does not mean that nineteenth-century Americans found politics dull. Far more eligible voters turned out in the late nineteenth century than at any time since. The 78.5 percent average turnout to vote for president in the 1880s contrasts sharply with the near 50 percent of eligible Americans who voted in recent elections.

American men were drawn to the polls in part by the hoopla of party parades, buttons, and banners, but also by local issues. Voters expressed strong interest in emotional social values issues of race, religion, nationality, and alcohol, which often overrode economic self-interest. Iowa farmers favored curbing the power of the railroads to set high grain-shipping rates, but they also turned out to vote for temperance and compulsory education laws. Irish Catholics in New York wanted support for parochial schools, while third-generation, middle-class American Protestants from Illinois and Connecticut voted for laws compelling attendance at public schools.

The new urban immigrants played a large role in stimulating political participation. As traditional native-born elites left local government for more lucrative and higher-status business careers, urban bosses stepped in. Their control rested on their ability to deliver the immigrant vote, which they secured by operating informal welfare systems. Bosses such as “Big Tim” Sullivan of New York and Michael “Hinky Dink” Kenna of Chicago handed out jobs and money for rent, fuel, and bail. Sullivan gave birthday shoes to poor children in his district and turkeys to poor families at Thanksgiving. New York City’s Tammany Hall boss, George Washington Plunkitt, attended Jewish weddings, Irish Catholic confirmations, and Italian funerals; prevented evictions; posted bail; and otherwise provided favors to the members of his district, all in exchange for votes. As he explained, “I think that there’s got to be in every ward somebody that any bloke can come to—no matter what he’s done—and get help.”

Party leaders also won votes by making politics exciting. The parades, rallies, buttons, songs, and oratory of late-nineteenth-century campaigns generated excitement as a substitute for substantive issues. In the election of 1884, for example, emotions ran high over the moral lapses of the opposing candidates—Blaine’s corruption and Cleveland’s illegitimate child. Democrats chanted in election eve rallies: “Blaine! Blaine! James G. Blaine! / Continental liar from the state of Maine!” while Republicans responded: “Ma! Ma! Where’s my pa? / Gone to the White House, Ha! Ha! Ha!” Cleveland won in part because an unwise Republican clergyman called the Democrats the party of “rum, Romanism, and rebellion,” ensuring Cleveland an outpouring of Catholic support in crucial New York.
Party leaders used local and ethnic issues for their benefit. In New Mexico, for example, the Santa Fe ring, a small group of Anglo-Protestant Republican bankers, lawyers, and politicians, had long exploited local anti-Mexican feelings to grab lands. The ring controlled judges, legislators, and the business interests of the state, including many Spanish-speaking voters. When desperate Mexican-American tenant farmers turned to violence in the 1880s, the ring used the situation to dispossess Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and poor white squatters from enormous tracts of land.

Prohibition also provoked spirited local contests. Many Americans considered drinking a serious social problem. Annual consumption of brewery beer had risen from 2.7 gallons per capita in 1850 to 17.9 gallons in 1880. In one city, saloons outnumbered churches 31 to 1. Such statistics shocked those who believed that drinking would destroy character; corrupt politics; and cause poverty, crime, and unrestrained sexuality. Because they were often the targets of violent, drunken men, women especially supported temperance. Rather than try to persuade individuals to give up drink, as the pre–Civil War temperance movement had done, many now sought to ban drinking by making it illegal.

The battle in San Jose, California, illustrates the strong passions such efforts aroused. In the 1870s, temperance reformers put on the ballot a local option referendum to ban the sale of liquor in San Jose. Women erected a temperance tent where they held daily meetings. Despite denunciations from clergymen and heckling from some local drinkers, the women refused to retreat to their homes. On election eve, a large crowd appeared at the temperance tent, but a larger one turned up at a pro-liquor rally. In the morning, women roamed the streets, urging men to adopt the referendum. Children marched to the polls and saloons, singing, “Father, dear father,
come home with me now.” By afternoon, the mood grew ugly; the women were harassed and threatened by drunken men, and the proposal lost by a vote of 1,430 to 918.

Emotional conflicts boiled in the 1880s at the state level over education and other issues. As Catholics in Boston and New York sought political support for parochial schools, Protestant Republicans in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin sponsored laws mandating that children attend “some public or private day school” where instruction was in English, an early (but not the last) movement for English-only education. These laws aimed to undermine parochial schools, which taught in the language of the immigrants. In Iowa, where a state prohibition law also passed, the Republican slogan was “A schoolhouse on every hill, and no saloon in the valley.” Local Republicans bragged that “Iowa will go Democratic when hell goes Methodist,” and indeed they won. But in Wisconsin, a law for compulsory school attendance was so strongly anti-Catholic that it backfired. Many voters, disillusioned with pious Republican moralism, shifted to the Democratic party.
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MIDDLE-CLASS REFORM

Most middle-class Americans avoided reformist politics. But urban corruption, poverty, and labor violence frightened many out of their aversion to politics.

Frances Willard and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is an example. As president of the WCTU from 1879 until 1898, Willard headed the largest women's organization in the country. Most WCTU members were churchgoing, white, Protestant women who believed drunkenness caused poverty and family violence. But after 1886, the WCTU reversed its position, attributing drunkenness to poverty, unemployment, and bad labor conditions. Willard joined the Knights of Labor in 1887 and by the 1890s had influenced the WCTU to extend its programs to alleviate the problems of workers, particularly women and children.

The Gospel of Wealth and Social Darwinism

Willard called herself a Christian socialist because she believed in applying the ethical principles of Jesus to economic life. For Willard and many other educated, middle-class reformers, Christianity called for a cooperative social order that would reduce inequalities of wealth. But for most Gilded Age Americans, Christianity supported the competitive individualistic ethic. Leading ministers preached sermons and wrote treatises justifying class divisions and the moral superiority of the wealthy. Episcopal Bishop William Lawrence wrote that it was “God’s will that some men should attain great wealth.” Philadelphia Baptist preacher Russell Conwell’s famous sermon “Acres of Diamonds,” delivered 6,000 times to an estimated 13 million listeners, praised riches as a sure sign of “godliness” and stressed the power of money to “do good.”

Industrialist Andrew Carnegie expressed the ethic most clearly. In an article titled “The Gospel of Wealth” (1889), Carnegie celebrated competition for producing better goods at lower prices. The concentration of wealth in a few hands, he concluded, was “not only beneficial but essential to the future of the race.” The fittest would bring order and efficiency out of the chaos of rapid industrialization. Carnegie's defense of the new economic order in his book *Triumphant Democracy* (1886) found as many supporters as Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, partly because Carnegie insisted that the rich must spend some of their wealth to benefit their “poorer brethren.” Carnegie built hundreds of libraries, many still operating in large and small towns throughout the United States, and in later years turned his philanthropic attentions to world peace.

Carnegie’s ideas reflected an ideology known as social Darwinism, based on the work of the English naturalist Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Darwin had concluded that plant and animal species evolved through natural selection. In the struggle for existence, some species managed to adapt to their environment and survived; others failed to adapt and perished. Herbert Spencer, an English social philosopher, applied this “survival of the fittest” notion to human society. Progress, Spencer said, resulted from relentless competition in which the weak were eliminated and the strong climbed to the top, as in Bellamy’s coach. Spencer warned against any interference in the economic world by tampering with the natural laws of selection: “The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such as are unfit, to clear the world of them, and make room for better.”

When Spencer visited the United States in 1882, leading men of business, science, religion, and politics thronged to honor him with a lavish banquet in New York City. Here was the man whose theories justified their amassed fortunes as men of “superior ability, foresight, and adaptability,” and they praised him as the founder not only of a new sociology but also of a new religion. Spencer’s American followers, Carnegie and Yale political economist William Graham Sumner, insisted
that poverty resulted from the struggle for existence. Attempts to end it were pointless, if not immoral. To take power or money away from millionaires, Sumner scoffed, was “like killing off our generals in war.” It was “absurd,” he wrote, to pass laws permitting society’s “worst members” to survive, or to “sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world.”

The scientific vocabulary of social Darwinism injected scientific rationality into what often seemed a baffling economic order. Sumner and Spencer argued that underlying laws of political economy, like those of the natural world, dictated economic affairs. Social Darwinists also believed in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, which they maintained had reached the highest stage of evolution. Their theories were used to justify race supremacy and imperialism (see Chapter 20) as well as the monopolistic efforts of American businessmen. “The growth of a large business,” John D. Rockefeller, Jr., told a YMCA class in Cleveland, like the growth of “the American beauty rose,” happens “only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it.” This was, he said, “merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.”

Reform Darwinism and Pragmatism

Others questioned social Darwinism. Brooks Adams, Henry’s brother, wrote that social philosophers such as Spencer and Sumner were “hired by the comfortable classes to prove that everything was all right.” Fading aristocrats such as the Adams family, increasingly displaced by a new industrial elite, may have felt a touch of envy for the new rich. But intellectual reformers directly challenged the gloomy social Darwinian notion that nothing could be done to alleviate poverty and injustice. With roots in antebellum abolitionism, women’s rights, and other crusades for social justice, men such as Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, and Franklin Sanborn and women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony transferred their reform fervor to postbellum issues. Sanborn, for example, an inspector of charities in Massachusetts, founded the American Social Science Association in 1865 to “treat wisely the great social problems of the day.” An early advocate of doing social scientific research on society’s problems, Sanborn was known as the “leading social worker of his day.”

Reformer Henry George, an amateur social scientist, observed that wherever the highest degree of “material progress” had been realized, “we find the deepest poverty.” George’s book Progress and Poverty (1879) dramatically showed the contradictions of American life. With Bellamy’s Looking Backward, it was the most influential book of the age, selling 2 million copies by 1905. George admitted that economic growth had produced wonders, but he...
pointed out the social costs and the loss of Christian values. His remedy was to break up land-holding monopolists who profited from the increasing value of their land, which they rented to those who actually did the work. He proposed a “single tax” on the unearned increases in land value received by landlords.

George’s solution may seem simplistic, but his religious tone and optimistic faith in the capacity of humans to effect change appealed to many middle-class intellectuals. Some went further. Sociologist Lester Frank Ward and economist Richard T. Ely both found examples of cooperation in nature and demonstrated that competition and laissez-faire had proved both wasteful and inhumane. Reform Darwinists urged an economic order marked by cooperation and regulation.

Two pragmatists, John Dewey and William James, established a philosophical foundation for reform. James, a professor at Harvard, argued that while environment was important, so was human will. People could influence the course of human events. “What is the ‘cash value’ of a thought, idea, or belief?” James asked. What was its result? “The ultimate test for us of what a truth means,” he suggested, was in the “consequences” of a particular idea and what kind of moral “conduct it dictates.”

James and young social scientists including Ward and Ely gathered statistics documenting social wrongs and rejected the social determinism of Spencer and Sumner. They argued that the application of intelligence and human agency could change the “survival of the fittest” into the “fitting of as many as possible to survive.” Their position encouraged educators, economists, and reformers of every stripe, giving them an intellectual justification to struggle against misery and inequalities of wealth.

Settlements and Social Gospel

Jane Addams saw the gap between progress and poverty in the streets of Chicago in the winter of 1893. “The stream of laboring people goes past you,” she wrote, and “your heart sinks with a sudden sense of futility.” Born in rural Illinois, Addams founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889 “to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city.” Also in 1889, Wellesley literature professor Vida Scudder, feeling “the agitating and painful vibrations” of urban poverty, joined six other Smith College graduates to form an organization of college women to work in settlement houses.

Middle-class activists such as Addams and Scudder worried in particular about the degradation of life and labor in America’s cities, factories, and farms. They were influenced by middle-class English socialists; by European social prophets such as Karl Marx, Leo Tolstoy, and Victor Hugo; by Americans such as Emerson, Whitman, George, and Belamy; and by the ethical teachings of Jesus. Their message was highly idealistic, ethical, and Christian. They preferred a society marked by cooperation rather than competition in which, as they liked to say, people were guided by the “golden rule rather

Lessons and Services of the Settlement House

What is being taught to immigrant women in this typical settlement house poster? The public health clinic is in Vida Scudder’s Denison House in Boston. Settlement house work, Scudder wrote, fulfilled “a biting curiosity about the way the Other Half lived, and a strange hunger for fellowship with them.” Do you see evidence of cross-cultural, cross-class bonding? (Left: U.S. Government Education Bureau of the National Geographic Image Collection; right: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)
than the rule of gold.” Like Frances Willard, they meant to apply the ethics of Jesus to industrial and urban life in order to bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth. Some preferred to put their goals in more secular terms, speaking of radically transforming American society. Most, however, worked within existing institutions. As middle-class intellectuals and professionals, they tended to stress an educational approach to problems. But they were also practical, seeking tangible improvements by crusading for tenement-house and factory-conditions legislation, mediating labor disputes, and living among the poor people they helped.

The settlement house movement typified 1890s middle-class reformers’ blend of idealism and practicality. The primary purpose of settlement houses was to help immigrant families, especially women, adapt Old World rural styles of childbearing, child care, and housekeeping to American urban life. They launched day nurseries, kindergartens, and boarding rooms for immigrant working women; they offered classes in sewing, cooking, nutrition, health care, and English; and they tried to keep young people out of saloons by organizing sports clubs and coffeehouses.

A second purpose of the settlement house movement was to give college-educated women meaningful work at a time when they faced professional barriers and to allow them to preserve the strong feelings of sacrifice and sisterhood they had experienced at college. As Scudder explained, settlement house workers were like “early Christians” in their renunciation of worldly goods and dedication to a life of service. A third goal was to gather data exposing social misery in order to spur legislative action—developing city building codes for tenements, abolishing child labor, and improving factory safety. Hull House, Adams said, was intended in part “to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago.” Settlement houses and organizations such as the Christian Social Union, with their dual emphasis on the scientific gathering of facts and Christian commitment, helped nourish the new discipline of sociology, first taught in divinity schools.

Meanwhile, Dwight Moody preached a more traditional Christianity in American cities, leading hundreds of urban revivals in the 1870s. Discovering his mission while in England for the YMCA, Moody mastered the art of the folksy sermon filled with Bible and family stories, the easy path from sin to salvation by filling out a decision card, and the importance of music in making converts. The revivals appealed to lower-class, rural folk who were both drawn to the city by their hopes and pushed there by economic ruin. Supported by business-people who felt that religion would make workers and immigrants more docile, Moody’s revivalist “passion for souls” provided a safe community in the midst of urban confusion. Revivalism helped to nearly double evangelical Protestant church membership in the last two decades of the century. Although some urban workers drifted into secular faiths such as socialism, most embraced the “old-time” religion.

Unlike Moody, many Protestant ministers preferred the Social Gospel movement of the 1890s, which tied salvation to social betterment. Like the settlement house workers, these religious leaders sought to make Christianity relevant to urban problems. In books such as Working Men and Their Employers and Applied Christianity, Congregational minister Washington Gladden advocated collective bargaining and corporate profit sharing. Walter Rauschenbusch, a young Baptist minister in the notorious Hell’s Kitchen area of New York City, raised an even louder voice. Often called on to conduct funeral services for children killed by the airless, diseased tenements and sweatshops, Rauschenbusch scathingly attacked capitalism and church ignorance of socioeconomic issues. His progressive ideas for social justice and a welfare state were later published in two landmark books: Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907) and Christianizing the Social Order (1912).

Perhaps the most influential book promoting social Christianity was the best-selling novel In His Steps, published in 1896 by Charles Sheldon. The novel portrayed the dramatic changes made possible by a few community leaders who resolved to base all their actions on a single question: “What would Jesus do?” For a minister, this meant seeking to “bridge the chasm between the church and labor.” For the idle rich, it meant settlement house work and reforming prostitutes. For landlords and factory owners, it meant improving the living and working conditions of tenants and laborers. Although filled with naive sentimentality characteristic of much of the Social Gospel, In His Steps prepared thousands of influential, middle-class Americans for progressive civic leadership.

Reforming the City

No late-nineteenth-century institution needed reforming more than urban government, called by the president of Cornell “the worst in Christendom—the most expensive, the most inefficient, and the most corrupt.” A Philadelphia committee pointed to years of “inefficiency, waste, badly paved and filthy
streets, unwholesome and offensive water, and slovenly and costly management.” New York and Chicago, where cholera and typhoid epidemics resulted from raw sewage poured into Lake Michigan, were even worse, rivaling the appalling sewage, water, and health conditions in European cities such as London, Frankfurt, and Rome.

Creating a “city beautiful” through environmental remedies was one approach to cleaning up dirty cities. Urban planners put in water mains and sewers and landscape architects built city parks and planted trees along broadened boulevards lined by elegant homes and public buildings—libraries, museums, theaters, and music halls. Boston filled in more than 500 acres of tidal flats in the Back Bay and elsewhere around the core of the city and created an elegant upper-class neighborhood along tree-lined Commonwealth Avenue. But the transformation of urban space rarely reached the squalid sections of the city inhabited by recent immigrants and rural transplants packed into crowded tenement houses along filthy streets filled with milling people, garbage, and animals.

Rapid urban growth swamped city leaders with new demands for service. Flush toilets, thirsty horses pulling street railways, and industrial users of water, for example, all exhausted the capacity of municipal waterworks built for an earlier age. As city governments struggled, they raised taxes and incurred vast debts, which bred graft and gave rise to the boss. In addition to dispensing jobs and favors in return for votes, urban bosses awarded street railway, gas line, and other utility franchises and construction contracts to local businesses in return for kickbacks and other favors. Bosses tipped off friendly real estate agents about the location of projected city improvements and received favors from the owners of saloons, brothels, and gambling clubs in return for help with police protection, bail, and influence with judges. These institutions were vital to the urban economy and played an important role in easing the immigrants’ way into American life. For many young women, prostitution meant economic survival. For men, the saloon was the center of social life and a source of cheap meals and job leads.

Bossism deeply offended middle-class urban reformers, unkindly dubbed “goo-goos” for their advocacy of good government. They opposed not only graft and vice but also the perversion of democracy by the exploitation of ignorant immigrants. The immigrants, said one, “follow blindly leaders of their own race, are not moved by discussion, and exercise no judgment of their own”—and so were “not fit for the suffrage.”

Urban reformers’ programs were similar in most cities. They not only advocated the “Americanization” of immigrants in public schools (and opposed parochial schooling) but also formed clubs

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**The City Beautiful: Enlarging Boston**

As part of the “city beautiful” movement, Boston filled in coastal, swampy lowlands with gravel, thus adding the fashionable Back Bay along Commonwealth Avenue. What is the effect of beautifying cities on different classes and ethnicities? Who benefits?
and voters’ leagues to discuss the failings of municipal government. They delighted in exposing electoral irregularities and large-scale graft. These discoveries led to strident calls for replacing the mayor, often an Irish Catholic, with an Anglo-Saxon Protestant reformer.

Politics colored every reform issue. Anglo-Saxon men favored prohibition partly to remove ethnic saloon-owner influence from politics and supported woman suffrage partly to gain a middle-class political advantage against male immigrant voters. Most urban reformers could barely hide their distaste for the “city proletariat mob,” as one put it. They proposed to replace bosses with expert city managers, who would bring honest professionalism to city government. They hoped to make government cheaper and thereby lower taxes, which ironically ended up cutting services to the poor. Another unexpected consequence was to disfranchise working-class and ethnic groups, whose political participation depended on the boss system.

Not all urban reformers were elitist. Samuel Jones, for example, opposed bossism and passionately advocated political participation by urban immigrants. He himself had begun as a poor Welsh immigrant in the Pennsylvania oil fields but worked his way up in the rags-to-riches tradition to ownership of several oil fields and a factory in Toledo, Ohio. Once successful, however, Jones espoused a different ethic from Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth.” Influenced by a combination of firsthand contact with the “piteous appeals” of unemployed workers and by his reading of social reformers and the New Testament, in 1894 Jones resolved that he would “apply the Golden Rule as a rule of conduct” in his factory. He instituted an eight-hour workday, a $2 minimum daily wage (50 to 75 cents higher than the local average for 10 hours), a cooperative insurance program, and an annual 5 percent Christmas dividend. Plastering the Golden Rule over his factory walls, Jones hired former criminals and social outcasts. He anticipated twentieth-century industrial reforms by creating a company cafeteria offering a hot lunch for 15 cents, a Golden Rule Park for workers and their families, employee music groups, and a Golden Rule Hall, where he invited social visionaries to speak.

In 1897, Jones was elected to the first of an unprecedented four terms as mayor of Toledo. A maverick Republican who antagonized prominent citizens, Jones was adored by ordinary people. He advocated municipal ownership of utilities; public-works jobs and housing for the unemployed; more civic parks and playgrounds with free pools, skating rinks, and sleigh rides; and free vocational education and kindergartens. A pacifist, he took away policemen’s sidearms and heavy clubs. In police court, Jones regularly dismissed most cases of petty theft and drunkenness on grounds that the accused were victims of social injustice, and he often released prostitutes after fining every man in the room 10 cents—and himself a dollar—for condoning prostitution. Crime in notoriously sinful Toledo fell during his term. When “Golden Rule” Jones died in 1904, nearly 55,000 people, “tears streaming down their faces,” filed past his coffin.

The Struggle for Woman Suffrage

Women served, in Jane Addams’s phrase, as “urban housekeepers” in the settlement house and good-government movements, precursors of welfare programs in the twentieth century. They also reflected the tension many women felt between their public
and private lives, that is, between their obligations to self, family, and society. This tension was seldom expressed openly. A few women writers, however, began to vent the frustrations of middle-class domestic life. In her novel *The Awakening* (1899), Kate Chopin told the story of a young woman who, in discovering her own sexuality and life’s possibilities beyond being a “mother-woman,” defied conventional expectations of a woman’s role. Her sexual affair and eventual suicide prompted a St. Louis newspaper to label the novel “poison.”

Some middle-class women—Addams and Scudder, for example—avoided marriage, preferring the nurturing relationships found in the female settlement house community. “Married life looks to me... terribly impoverished for women,” a Smith College graduate observed, adding, “most of my deeper friendships have been with women.” A few women boldly advocated free love or, less openly, formed lesbian relationships. Although most preferred traditional marriages and chose not to work outside the home, the generation of women that came of age in the 1890s married less—and later—than any other in American history.

Many women reconciled the conflicting pressures between their private and public lives and deflected male criticism by seeing their work as material. Addams called Hull House the “great mother breast of our common humanity.” Frances Willard told Susan B. Anthony in 1898 that “government is only housekeeping on the broadest scale,” a job men had botched, requiring women’s saving participation. A leading labor organizer was Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, and the fiery feminist anarchist Emma Goldman titled her monthly journal *Mother Earth*. By using nurturant language to describe their work, women furthered the very arguments used against them. Many remained economically dependent on men, and all women still lacked the essential rights of citizenship. How could they be municipal housekeepers if they could not yet even vote?

After the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, women’s civil and political rights advanced very slowly. Although several western states gave women the right to vote in municipal and school board elections, before 1890 only the territory of Wyoming (1869) granted full political equality. Colorado, Utah, and Idaho enfranchised women in the 1890s, but no other states granted suffrage until 1910. This slow pace resulted in part from an antisuffrage movement led by an odd combination of ministers, saloon interests, and men threatened in various ways by women’s voting rights. “Equal suffrage,” said a Texas senator, “is a repudiation of manhood.”

In the 1890s, leading suffragists reexamined their situation. The two wings of the women’s rights movement, split since 1869, combined in 1890 as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both in their 70s, continued to head the association. But in 1895, Stanton’s *Woman’s Bible*, a devastating attack on the religious argument against woman suffrage, embarrassed many younger women. At the NAWSA convention in 1896, despite the pleas of Anthony not to “sit in judgment” on her good friend, a resolution renouncing any NAWSA connection with Stanton’s book passed by a vote of 53 to 41. That vote signaled the passage of leadership to younger, more moderate women who, unlike Stanton and Anthony, concentrated on the single issue of the vote.

Changing leadership meant a shift in the arguments for suffrage. Since 1848, suffragists had argued primarily from the principle of “our republican idea, individual citizenship,” as Stanton put it in 1892. But younger leaders shifted to three expedient
arguments. The first was that women needed the vote to pass self-protection laws to guard against rapists and unsafe industrial work. The second argument, Addams’s notion of urban housekeeping, pointed out that political enfranchisement would further women’s role in cleaning up immoral cities and corrupt politics.

The third expedient argument reflected urban middle-class reformers’ prejudice against non-Protestant immigrants. Machine bosses saw to it that immigrant men got to vote, sometimes several times in a day. Suffragists argued that educated, native-born American women should get the vote to counteract the undesirable influence of illiterate male immigrants. In a speech in Iowa in 1894, Carrie Chapman Catt, who would succeed Anthony as president of NAWSA in 1900, argued that the “Government is menaced with great danger . . . in the votes possessed by the males in the slums of the cities,” a danger that could be averted only by cutting off that vote and giving it to women. In the new century, under the leadership of women such as Catt, woman suffrage would finally be secured.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Speaks Out for a “Woman’s Bible”

In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton published her highly controversial Woman’s Bible in order to protest male theologians’ centuries-long revisions and interpretations of the Bible that attempted to justify putting women into an inferior “sphere.”

We have the usual array of objectors to meet and answer. One correspondent conjures us to suspend the work, as it is “ridiculous” for “women to attempt the revision of the Scriptures.” I wonder if any man wrote to the late revising committee of Divines to stop their work on the ground that it was ridiculous for men to revise the Bible. Why is it more ridiculous for women to protest against her present status in the Old and New Testament, in the ordinances and discipline of the church, than in the statutes and constitution of the state? Why is it more ridiculous for women to protest against her present status in the Old and New Testament, in the ordinances and discipline of the church, than in the statutes and constitution of the state? Why is it more ridiculous for women to protest against her present status in the Old and New Testament, in the ordinances and discipline of the church, than in the statutes and constitution of the state? Why is it more ridiculous for women to protest against her present status in the Old and New Testament, in the ordinances and discipline of the church, than in the statutes and constitution of the state?

Why not compel Bishops and Revising Committees to modify their creeds and dogmas? Forty years ago it seemed as ridiculous to timid, time-serv ing and retrograde folk for women to demand an expurgated edition of the laws, as it now does to demand an expurgated edition of the Liturgies and the Scriptures.

Come, come, my conservative friend, wipe the dew off your spectacles, and see that the world is moving. Whatever your views may be as to the importance of the proposed work, your political and social degradation are but an outgrowth of your status in the Bible.

. . . How can woman’s position be changed from that of a subordinate to an equal, without opposition, without the broadest discussion of all the questions involved in her present degradation? For so far-reaching and momentous a reform as her complete independence, an entire revolution in all existing institutions is inevitable.

Let us remember that all reforms are interdependent, and that whatever is done to establish one principle on a solid basis, strengthens all. Reformers who are always compromising, have not yet grasped the idea that truth is the only safe ground to stand upon. The object of an individual life is not to carry one fragmentary measure in human progress, but to utter the highest truth clearly seen in all directions, and thus to round out and perfect a well balanced character. . . . We have many women abundantly endowed with capabilities to understand and revise what men have thus far written.

From this short passage from Stanton’s introduction, what do you think of her arguments?

Is it more difficult to change churches or politics?
Americans mistakenly think of the last decade of the nineteenth century as the “gay nineties,” symbolized by mustached baseball players, sporty Gibson girls.
The 1890s was, indeed, a decade of baseball and bicycles, urban electrification, and the enormous wealth of the few. But it was also a decade of dark tenements, grinding work, desperate unemployment, and debilitating poverty. The early 1890s included protesting farmers; Wounded Knee and the “second great removal” of Native Americans; segregation, disfranchisement, and lynchings for blacks; and the “new immigration,” a changing workplace, and devastating labor defeats at Coeur d’Alene, Homestead, and Pullman.

The 1890s, far from gay, were years of contrasts and crises. The obvious contrast, as Bellamy had anticipated, was between the rich and the poor. Supreme Court justice John Harlan saw a “deep feeling of unrest” everywhere among people worrying that the nation was in “real danger from . . . the slavery that would result from aggregations of capital in the hands of a few.” Populist “Sockless” Jerry Simpson simply saw a struggle between “the robbers and the robbed.” And between them, he said, “there is no middle ground.”

The gap was indeed huge between Kansas orator Mary E. Lease, who in 1890 said, “What you farmers need to do is to raise less corn, and more Hell,” and the wealthy Indianapolis woman who told her husband, “I’m going to Europe and spend my money before these crazy people take it.” The pivotal nature of the 1890s hinged on this feeling of polarizing unrest and upheaval as the nation underwent the traumas of change from a rural to an urban society. The new immigration from Europe and the internal migrations of African Americans and farmers added to the “great danger” against which Carrie Catt warned. The depression of 1893 widened the gap between rich and poor, accelerating demands for reform. The federal bureaucracy slowly began to adapt to the needs of governing a complex specialized society, and Congress purposefully moved to confront national problems.

**Republican Legislation in the Early 1890s**

Harrison’s election in 1888 was accompanied by Republican control of both houses of Congress. As the English and Germans were enacting national health, housing, and social insurance laws, American legislators in 1890 inched forward on five areas: Civil War veterans’ pensions, trusts, tariffs, the money question, and rights for blacks. On the first issue, a bill providing generous support of $160 million a year for Union veterans and their dependents sailed through Congress.

The Sherman Anti-Trust Act passed with only one nay vote. It declared illegal “every contract, combination . . . or conspiracy in restraint of trade or commerce.” Although the Sherman Act was vague and not really intended to break up big corporations, it was an initial attempt to restrain large business combinations. But in *United States v. E. C. Knight* (1895), the Supreme Court ruled that the American Sugar Refining Company, which controlled more than 90 percent of the nation’s sugar-refining capacity, was not in violation of the Sherman Act.

A tariff bill introduced in 1890 by Ohio Republican William McKinley stirred more controversy. McKinley’s bill raised tariffs higher than ever. As European nations moved away from a commitment to free trade and experienced heightened feelings of nationalism, they put in place protective measures that affected American interests. Despite heated opposition from agrarian interests, whose products...
were generally not protected, McKinley’s bill passed the House and, after nearly 500 amendments, also the Senate.

Silver was trickier. Recognizing the appeal of free silver to agrarian debtors and organized farmers, Republican leaders feared their party might be hurt by the issue. Senator John Sherman (R-Ohio), the brother of Union general William Sherman, proposed a compromise that momentarily satisfied almost everyone. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act ordered the Treasury to buy 4.5 million ounces of silver monthly and to issue Treasury notes for it. Silverites were pleased by the proposed increase in the money supply. Opponents felt they had averted the worst—free coinage of silver. The gold standard still stood.

Major Legislative Activity of the Gilded Age

In the table, notice the kinds of issues dealt with at the national level as opposed to state and local arenas. What does this suggest about the interests of the American people and how federalism worked in the late nineteenth century? Do you think the apparent division of governmental responsibilities made sense? How is it the same or different today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>National</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>National Civil Service Commission created</td>
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<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Coinage Act demonetizes silver</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>“Salary Grab” Act (increased salaries of Congress and top federal officials) partly repealed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Bland-Allison Act permits partial coining of silver</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Federal Immigration Law restricts certain categories of immigrants and requires head tax of all immigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Interstate Commerce Act sets up Interstate Commerce Commission</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td>Dependent Pension Act grants pensions to Union army veterans</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Sherman Anti-Trust Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Immigration law gives federal government control of overseas immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Sherman Silver Purchase Act repealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Wilson-Gorman Tariff lowers duties slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Currency Act puts United States on gold standard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| State and Local                                                                 |
| 1850s–1880s | State and local laws intended to restrict or prohibit consumption of alcoholic beverages |
| 1871        | Illinois Railroad Act sets up railroad commission to fix rates and prohibit discrimination |
| 1874        | Railroad regulatory laws in Wisconsin and Iowa                           |
| 1881        | Kansas adopts statewide prohibition                                       |
| 1882        | Iowa passes state prohibition amendment                                  |
| 1880s       | Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Montana, Michigan, Ohio, and Missouri all pass local laws prohibiting consumption of alcohol |
| 1889        | Santa Fe ring dominates New Mexico politics and land grabbing            |
| 1889–1890   | New Jersey repeals a county-option prohibition law of 1888               |
| 1890–1910   | Laws in Wisconsin and Illinois mandate compulsory attendance of children at schools in which instruction is in English |
| 1891        | Kansas, Maine, Michigan, and Tennessee pass antitrust laws               |
| 1899–1902   | Eleven former Confederate states amend state constitutions and pass statutes restricting the voting rights of blacks |

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Republicans were also prepared to confront violations of the voting rights of southern blacks in 1890. As usual, political considerations trumped moral ones. Since 1877, the South had become a Democratic stronghold, where party victories could be traced to fraud and intimidation of black Republican voters. “To be a Republican . . . in the South,” one Georgian noted, “is to be a foolish martyr.” Republican legislation, then, was intended to honor old commitments to freed male voters and improve party fortunes in the South. An elections bill proposed by Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge sought to ensure African American voter registration and fair elections. But a storm of Democratic disapproval arose, branding Lodge’s measure the “Force Bill.” Former president Cleveland called it a “dark blow at the freedom of the ballot,” and the Mobile Daily Register claimed that it “would deluge the South in blood.” Senate Democrats delayed action with a filibuster.

Meanwhile, in order to secure passage of the McKinley Tariff, Republican leaders bargained away the elections bill, ending major-party efforts to protect African American voting rights in the South until the 1960s. In a second setback for black southerners, the Senate, fearful of giving the federal government a role in education, defeated a bill to provide federal aid to black schools in the South that received a disproportionately small share of local and state funds. “The plain truth is,” said the New York Herald, “the North has got tired of the negro,” foreshadowing a similar retreat from civil rights legislation 100 years later.

The legislative efforts of the summer of 1890, impressive by nineteenth-century standards, fell far short of solving the nation’s problems. Trusts grew more rapidly after the Sherman Act than before. Union veterans were pleased with their pensions, but southerners were incensed that Confederate veterans were left out. Others, seeing the pension measure as extravagant, labeled the fifty-first Congress the “billion-dollar Congress.” Despite efforts to please farmers, many still viewed tariff protection as a benefit primarily for eastern manufacturers. Farm prices continued to slide, and gold and silver advocates were only momentarily silenced. African American rights were put off to another time. Polarizing inequalities of wealth remained. Voters abandoned the GOP in droves in the 1890 congressional elections, dropping the number of Republicans in the House from 168 to 88.

Two years later, Cleveland won a presidential rematch with Harrison. “The lessons of paternalism ought to be unlearned,” he said in his inaugural address, “and the better lesson taught that while the people should . . . support their government, its functions do not include the support of the people.”

**Formation of the People’s Party, 1892**

Farmers knew all too well that government did not support them. In February 1892, the People’s, or Populist, party was established with Leonidas Polk, president of the National Farmers Alliance, as its presidential candidate. “The time has arrived,” he thundered, “for the great West, the great South, and the great Northwest, to link their hands and hearts together and march to the ballot box and take possession of the government . . . and run it in the interest of the people.” But by July, at the party convention in Omaha, Polk had died. Reflecting its Midwestern and southern alliance roots, the party nominated James B. Weaver, a Union army veteran from Iowa, as its standard bearer, and James G. Field, a former Confederate soldier, for vice president.

The platform preamble, written by Ignatius Donnelly, a Minnesota farmer–politician, blazed with the urgent spirit of the agrarian protest movement, proclaiming that in the midst of political and corporate corruption “the people are demoralized. . . . The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes . . . we breed two great classes—paupers and millionaires.” To heal that divide, Donnelly advocated ending “the controlling influences dominating the old political parties.”

The Omaha demands expanded the Ocala platform of 1890 (see Chapter 17). They included more direct democracy (popular election of senators, direct primaries, the initiative and referendum, and the secret ballot) and several pro-labor planks (the eight-hour workday, immigration restriction, and condemnation of the use of Pinkerton agents as an “army of mercenaries. . . . a menace to our liberties”). The Populists also endorsed a graduated income tax, free and unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1 (meaning that the U.S. Mint would have to buy silver for coinage at one-sixteenth the current, official price of the equivalent amount of gold), and government ownership of railroads and telephone and telegraph companies. “The time has come,” the platform said, “when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads.”

Although Populists attempted to widen political debate by promoting a new vision of government activism to resolve farmers’ problems, the obstacles the new party faced were monumental: weaning the South from the Democrats, encouraging southern
whites to work with blacks, and persuading voters of both parties to abandon familiar political ties. But the new party pressed ahead. Weaver campaigned actively in the South, where he faced egg- and rock-throwing Democrats, who fanned racial fears in opposing his efforts to include blacks in the People’s party. The urban workers are denied the right to organize for self-protection, imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

...We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore, in the coming campaign, every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonetization of silver and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

...Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation, and filled with the spirit of the grand general and chief who established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of “the plain people,” with which class it originated...

We believe that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded...as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.

■ In this excerpt, what is Donnelly’s assessment of the American socioeconomic and political situation?
■ What values does he espouse?
■ Could a similar assessment be made in America today?
the Populists were not yet finished, most discontented farmers in 1892 voted for Cleveland and the Democrats, not for the Populists.

**The Depression of 1893**

Though winning the election, Cleveland soon faced a difficult test. No sooner had he taken office than began one of the worst depressions ever to grip the American economy, lasting from 1893 to 1897. Its severity was heightened by the growth of a national economy and global economic interdependence. The depression started in Europe and spread to the United States as overseas buyers cut back on their purchases of American products. Shrinking markets abroad soon crippled American manufacturing.

Foreign investors, worried about the stability of American currency after passage of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, dumped some $300 million of their securities in the United States. As gold left the country to pay for these securities, the nation’s money supply declined. At the same time, falling prices hurt farmers, many of whom discovered that it cost more to raise their crops and livestock than they could make in the market. Workers fared no better: wages fell faster than the price of food and rent.

The collapse in 1893 was also caused by overextensions in railroad construction and crops. Farmers, troubled by falling prices, planted more, hoping the market would pick up. As the realization of overextension spread, confidence faltered, then gave way to financial panic. When Wall Street
crashed early in 1893, investors frantically sold their shares, companies plunged into bankruptcy, and disaster spread. People rushed to exchange paper notes for gold, further reducing gold reserves and confidence in the economy. Banks called in loans, which by the end of the year led to 16,000 business bankruptcies and 500 bank failures. The capital crunch and diminished buying power of rural and small-town Americans (still half the population) forced massive factory closings. Within a year, an estimated 3 million Americans—20 percent of the workforce—lost jobs. People fearfully watched tramps wandering from city to city looking for work. “There are thousands of homeless and starving men in the streets,” one young man reported from Chicago, indicating that he had seen “more misery in this last week than I ever saw in my life before.”

As in Bellamy’s coach image, the misery of the many was not shared by the few, which only increased discontent. While unemployed men foraged in garbage dumps for food, the wealthy gave lavish parties—at one, dining while seated on horses—sometimes costing as much as $100,000. While poor families shivered in poorly heated tenements, the very rich built million-dollar summer resorts at Newport, Rhode Island, or grand mansions on New York’s Fifth Avenue and Chicago’s Gold Coast. While Lithuanian immigrants walked or rode packed streetcars to work, wealthy men luxuriated on huge pleasure yachts. J. P. Morgan owned three, one with a crew of 85 sailors. Nowhere were these inequalities more apparent than in Chicago during the World’s Columbian Exposition, which opened on May 1, 1893, five days before a plummeting stock market began the depression. The Chicago World’s Fair showcased, as President Cleveland said in an opening-day speech, the “stupendous results of American enterprise.” When he pressed an ivory telegraph key, he started electric current that unfurled flags, spouted water through gigantic fountains, lit 10,000 electric lights, and powered huge steam engines. For six months, some 27 million visitors strolled around the White City, admiring its wide lagoons, its neoclassical white plaster buildings, and its exhibit halls filled with inventions. Built at a cost of $31 million, the fair celebrated the marvelous mechanical accomplishments of American enterprise and of the “city beautiful” movement to make cities more livable.

But as fairgoers celebrated by sipping pink champagne, Americans in immigrant wards less than a mile away drank contaminated water, crowded into packed tenements, and looked in vain for jobs. The area around Hull House was especially disreputable, with saloons, gambling halls, brothels, and pawnshops dotting the neighborhood. “If Christ came to Chicago,” British journalist W. T. Stead wrote in a book of that title in 1894, this would be “one of the last precincts into which we should care to take Him.” Stead’s book showed readers the “ugly sight” of corruption, poverty, and wasted lives in a city with 200 millionaires and 200,000 unemployed men.

Despite the magnitude of despair during the depression, national politicians and leaders were reluctant to respond. Mass demonstrations forced some city authorities to provide soup kitchens and places for homeless to sleep. When an army of unemployed led by Jacob Coxey marched on Washington in the spring of 1894 to press for public work relief, its leaders were arrested for walking on the Capitol grass. Cleveland’s reputation for callousness worsened later that summer when he sent federal troops to Chicago to crush the Pullman strike.

The president focused on tariff reform and repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, which he blamed for the depression. Although repeal was ultimately necessary to re-establish business confidence, in the short run Cleveland only worsened the financial crisis, highlighted the silver panacea, and hurt conservative Democrats. With workers, farmers, and wealthy silver miners alienated, voters abandoned the Democrats in the midterm elections of 1894, giving both Populists and Republicans high hopes for 1896.

The Crucial Election of 1896

The 1896 presidential campaign, waged during a depression and featuring a climactic battle over the currency, was one of the most critical in American history. Although Cleveland was in disgrace for ignoring depression woes, few leaders in either major party thought the federal government was responsible for alleviating the suffering of the people. But unemployed Polish meatpackers in Chicago; railway firemen in Terre Haute, Indiana; unskilled Slavic workers in Pennsylvania blast furnaces; Italian immigrant women in New Haven tenements; and desperate white and black tenant farmers in Georgia all wondered where relief might be found. Would either major party respond to the pressing human needs of the depression? Would the People’s party set a new national agenda for politics? Would the established order prevail? These questions were raised and largely resolved in the election of 1896.

As the election approached, Populist leaders emphasized the silver issue and debated whether to fuse
with one of the major parties by agreeing on a joint ticket, which meant abandoning much of the Populist platform. Influenced by silver mine owners, many Populists became convinced that they must make a single-issue commitment to the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1.

In the throes of the depression in the mid-1890s, silver took on enormous importance as the symbol of the many grievances of downtrodden Americans. Popular literature captured the rural, moral dimensions of the silver movement. Some argue that L. Frank Baum’s *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) was a free-silver moral allegory of rural values (Kansas, Auntie Em, the uneducated but wise scarecrow, and the good-hearted tin woodsman) and Populist attitudes and policies (the wicked witch of the East, and the magical silver shoes in harmony with the yellow brick road, in “Oz”—ounces).

The Republicans nominated William McKinley. As a congressman and twice governor of Ohio, McKinley was happily identified with the high protective tariff that bore his name. Citing the familiar argument that prosperity depended on the gold standard and protection, Republicans blamed the depression on Cleveland’s attempt to lower the tariff.

The excitement of the Democratic convention in July contrasted with the staid, smoothly organized Republican gathering. With Cleveland already repudiated by his party, state after state elected delegates pledged to silver. Gold Democrats, however, had enough power to wage a close battle for the platform plank on money. Leading the silver forces was an ardent young silverite, William Jennings Bryan, a 36-year-old former congressman from Nebraska. Few saw him as presidential material, but Bryan arranged to give the closing argument for a silver plank himself. His dramatic speech swept the convention for silver and ensured his own nomination. “I come to speak to you,” Bryan cried out, “in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity.” Concluding one of the most famous political speeches in American history, Bryan attacked the “goldbugs”:

> Having behind us the producing masses of this nation . . . and toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Bryan stretched out his arms as if on a cross, and the convention exploded with applause.

Populist strategy lay in shambles when the Democrats named a silver candidate. Some party leaders favored fusion with the Democratic ticket (whose vice-presidential candidate was a goldbug), but antifusionists were outraged. Unwisely, the Populists also nominated Bryan, with Georgia Populist Tom Watson for vice president. Running on competing silver slates damaged Bryan’s chances.

During the campaign, McKinley stayed at his home in Canton, Ohio, where some 750,000 admirers came to visit him, brought by low excursion rates
Historians recover the past in printed sources such as books, diaries, magazines, and government documents as well as in visual records such as paintings, photographs, and the artifacts of material culture. Throughout American history, presidential political campaigns have produced, in addition to the streams of speeches, words, and sound bites, mountains of material objects: buttons, badges, banners, bumper stickers, yard signs, posters, cartoons, and other campaign paraphernalia to persuade voters to support one candidate or another.

The election of 1896 was no exception and, in fact, produced a plethora of political campaign artifacts on behalf of William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan. The fervor of that pivotal political contest led to the production of thousands of lapel pins, buttons, ribbons, bandanas, shirts, teacups, paper and soap dolls, posters, and other articles intended to influence American voters to cast their ballot for Bryan or McKinley. Although some of it seems silly, symbolic imagery was important. The examination of just two kinds of material paraphernalia—buttons and posters—reveals a great deal about the issues, values, symbolism, and style of the election of 1896.

**Reflecting on the Past** Examine the buttons pictured here (as well as the “goldbug” and other stick-pins). What issues are voters reminded of, and how complex is the message? How many different ways is the message, reinforced by recurring symbols, repeated on these buttons? Now compare the buttons and pins with the two posters. Do not worry that you cannot read most of the words; focus instead on the visual imagery and such words as you can make out. How do the posters reinforce key symbols, slogans, and substantive issues associated with each candidate? What visual images do the posters add? What audience do you think these campaign artifacts had in mind? What summary statements would you make about the 1896 campaign on the basis of these material items? Do these artifacts suggest that voters were more or less involved with political issues and party identification than they are today? What artifacts would best reflect an early twenty-first-century presidential campaign, and what would future historians learn from them?
Campaign poster showing William McKinley and his running mate, Garret Hobart. (Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-3162])

Campaign poster showing William Jennings Bryan, his wife and children, and the text of the "Cross of Gold" speech. (The Granger Collection, New York)
offered by the railroads. The Republicans made an unprecedented effort to reach voters through a highly sophisticated media campaign, heavily financed by such major corporations as Standard Oil and the railroads. Party leaders hired thousands of speakers to support McKinley and distributed more than 200 million pamphlets in 14 languages to a voting population of 15 million, all advertising McKinley as the “advance agent of prosperity.”

McKinley appealed not only to the business classes but also to unemployed workers, to whom he promised a “full dinner pail.” He also spoke about the money issue, declaring that “our currency today is . . . as good as gold.” Free silver, he warned, would cause inflation and more economic disaster. Recovery depended not on money, but on tariff reform to stimulate industry and provide jobs—“not open mints for the unlimited coinage of the silver of the world,” he said, “but open mills for the full and unrestricted labor of American workingmen.”

Bryan took his case directly to the people. Three million Americans in 27 states heard him speak as he traveled more than 18,000 miles, giving as many as 30 speeches a day. Bryan’s message was simple: prosperity required free coinage of silver. Government policies should attend to the needs of the producing classes rather than the vested interests. But the rhetoric favored rural toilers. “The great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies,” he said in the “Cross of Gold” speech, “destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country.” Urban workers were not inspired by this rhetoric, nor were immigrants influenced by Bryan’s prairie moralizing.

To influential easterners, the brash young Nebraskan represented a threat. Theodore Roosevelt wrote, “This silver craze surpasses belief. Bryan’s election would be a great calamity.” A Brooklyn minister declared that the Democratic platform was “made in Hell.” One newspaper editor said of Bryan that he was just like Nebraska’s Platte River: “six inches deep and six miles wide at the mouth.” Others branded him a “madman” and an “anarchist.”

With such intense interest in the election, voters turned out in record numbers. In the key states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, 95 percent of those eligible to vote...
went to the polls. McKinley won with 271 electoral votes to Bryan's 176, the largest popular majority since Grant trounced Greeley in 1872. Millionaire Mark Hanna jubilantly wired McKinley: “God's in his heaven, all's right with the world.”

Although Bryan won more than 6 million votes (47 percent of the total), more than any previous Democratic winner, he failed to carry the Midwest or the urban middle classes and industrial masses, who had little confidence that the Democrats could stimulate economic growth or cope with industrialism. McKinley's promise of a “full dinner pail” was more convincing than the untested formula for free silver. Northern laborers feared that inflation would leave them even poorer—that prices and rents would rise faster than their wages. Catholic immigrants distrusted Populist Protestantism. In the Great Lakes states, prosperous farmers felt less discontent than farmers elsewhere. But the realities of an increasingly global network of production, prices, and markets also played a part in Bryan's defeat. Poor wheat harvests in India, Australia, and Argentina drove up world grain prices, and many of the complaints of American farmers evaporated with a better price for their crops.

The New Shape of American Politics

The landslide Republican victory broke the stalemate in post–Civil War American politics. Republicans dropped their identification with the politics of piety and strengthened their image as the party of prosperity and national greatness, which gave them a party dominance that lasted until the 1930s. The Democrats, under Bryan's leadership until 1912, put on the mantle of Populist agrarian morals but were largely reduced to a sectional party, reflecting southern views on money, race, and national power. The 1896 election demonstrated that the Northeast and the Great Lakes states had acquired so many immigrants that they now controlled the nation's political destiny. The demoralized Populists disappeared, yet within the next 20 years, many Populist issues (direct election of senators, direct primaries, graduated income tax, woman suffrage, and others) were adopted by the two major parties.

Another result of the election of 1896 was a change in the pattern of political participation. Because the Republicans were so dominant outside the South, and Democrats were so powerful in the South, few states had vigorous two-party political battles and therefore had less reason to mobilize large numbers of voters. With results so often a foregone conclusion, voters had little motivation to cast a ballot. Many black voters in the South, moreover, were disfranchised, and middle-class good-government reformers were not as effective as party bosses in turning out urban voters. The tremendous rate of political participation that had characterized the nineteenth century since the Jackson era gradually declined. In the twentieth century, political involvement among poorer Americans declined considerably, a phenomenon unique among western democracies.

McKinley had promised that Republican rule meant prosperity, and as soon as he took office, the

### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Congress demonetizes silver</td>
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<td>1875</td>
<td>Specie Resumption Act</td>
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<td>1877</td>
<td>Rutherford B. Hayes becomes president</td>
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<td>1878</td>
<td>Bland–Allison Act</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Henry George, <em>Progress and Poverty</em></td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>James A. Garfield elected president</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Garfield assassinated, Chester A. Arthur succeeds to presidency</td>
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<td>1883</td>
<td>Pendleton Civil Service Act</td>
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<td>1884</td>
<td>Grover Cleveland elected president, W. D. Howells, <em>The Rise of Silas Lapham</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>College Settlement House Association founded</td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>Edward Bellamy, <em>Looking Backward</em>, Benjamin Harrison elected president</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td>Jane Addams establishes Hull House, Andrew Carnegie promulgates “The Gospel of Wealth”</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Sherman Anti-Trust Act, Sherman Silver Purchase Act, McKinley Tariff, Elections bill defeated</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho grant woman suffrage</td>
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<td>1892</td>
<td>Cleveland elected president for the second time, Populist party wins more than 1 million votes, Homestead steel strike</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago</td>
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<td>1893–1897</td>
<td>Financial panic and depression</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>Pullman strike, Coxey’s march on Washington</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>United States v. E. C. Knight</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Charles Sheldon, <em>In His Steps</em>, Populist party fuses with Democrats, William McKinley elected president</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>“Golden Rule” Jones elected mayor of Toledo, Ohio, Economic recovery begins</td>
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economy recovered. Discoveries of gold in the Yukon and the Alaskan Klondike increased the money supply, ending the silver mania until the next great depression in the early 1930s. Industrial production returned to full capacity. Touring the Midwest in 1898, McKinley spoke to cheering crowds about the hopeful shift from “industrial depression to industrial activity.”

McKinley’s election marked not only the return of economic health but also the emergence of the executive as the dominant focus of the American political system. Just as McKinley’s campaign (like Benjamin Harrison’s in 1888) set the pattern for the extravagant corporate contributions in presidential campaigns that have marked modern times, his conduct as president foreshadowed the twentieth-century presidency. McKinley rejected traditional views of the president as the passive executor of laws, instead playing an active role in dealing with Congress and the press. His frequent trips away from Washington showed an increasing regard for gathering public opinion in the interests of advancing federal and national power. As we shall see in Chapter 20, McKinley began the transformation of the presidency into a potent force in world affairs as well.

Conclusion

Looking Forward

This chapter began with Edward Bellamy’s imaginary look backward from the year 2000 at the grim economic realities and unresponsive politics of American life in the late nineteenth century. McKinley’s triumph in 1896 indicated that in a decade marked by depression, Populist revolt, and cries for action to close the inequalities of wealth—represented by Bellamy’s coach—the established order remained intact. Calls for change did not necessarily lead to change. But in the areas of personal action and the philosophical bases for social change, intellectual middle-class reformers such as Edward Bellamy, Henry George, Frances Willard, Jane Adams, and “Golden Rule” Jones were showing the way to progressive reforms in the new century. More Americans were able to look forward to the kind of cooperative, caring, and cleaner world envisioned in Bellamy’s utopian novel.

As 1900 approached, people took a predictably intense interest in what the new century would be like. Henry Adams, still the pessimist, saw an ominous future, predicting the explosive and ultimately destructive energy of unrestrained industrial development, symbolized by the “dynamo” and other engines of American and European power. Such forces, he warned, would overwhelm the gentler, moral forces represented by art, woman, and religious symbols. But others were more optimistic, preferring to place their confidence in America’s self-image as an exemplary nation, demonstrating to the world the moral superiority of its economic system, democratic institutions, and middle-class Protestant values. Surely the new century, most thought, would see not only the continued perfection of these values and institutions but also the spread of the American model around the globe. Such confidence resulted in foreign expansion by the American people even before the old century had ended. We turn to that next.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How would you characterize the politics of the Gilded Age? How does it compare to present-day politics?
2. What political issues concerned the American people in the late nineteenth century, and do you think they were the appropriate ones?
3. What role did middle-class reformers, especially women, play in dealing with social and political problems in the Gilded Age? How did religion influence reform?
4. Why was the election of 1896 such a crucial and pivotal one in the development of American political parties? How were the policies and areas of support of the two major parties similar to and different from those of the present?
5. Was the American democratic system responsive to the needs of the American people in the Gilded Age? Was it even “democratic”? How well did politics reflect national ideals and values?
Mark Twain and Charles D. Warner’s *The Gilded Age* (1873) spares no one in its satirical critique of the social, political, and economic life of late-nineteenth-century America. Henry Adams’s *Democracy: An American Novel* (1880) uses an ironic title to capture the elitist nature of politics and life in Washington in the Gilded Age. Two novels by William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889) and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), portray the social life of the new rich in the 1880s. Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) is the utopian novel that began this chapter and that stimulated much late-nineteenth-century reform, rivaled only by Charles Sheldon’s social gospel novel *In His Steps* (1896). Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), set in New Orleans in the 1890s, tells the story of a woman’s discovery of self. Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), influenced by social Darwinian determinism and set in Chicago and New York, shows the life of a young farm girl who rises to fame and fortune in the city. Frank Norris’s immense novel *The Octopus* (1901), set in the San Joaquin Valley of California, shows struggles not only between ranchers and railroads but also between rich and poor, city and country, commercial wheat farmers and sheep herders, and native-born and immigrant Americans. Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers* (1925) reveals the struggles between an Old World Jewish father and his Americanized daughter. *Hester Street* (1975) is a wonderfully teachable video about Jewish immigrants in New York City and, like *Bread Givers*, the process of Americanization. Ed. L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (1975) is an innovative novel that plays fast and loose with the history and historical figures of turn-of-the-century America; it was also made into a Broadway play. Upper-class life in the late nineteenth century is portrayed in the Hollywood film *The Bostonians* (1998), based on a novel by Henry James. Gore Vidal’s *1876: A Novel* (1976) takes a playful, imaginative look at America in its centennial year.

**Recommended Reading**

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit [www.ablongman.com/nash](http://www.ablongman.com/nash)

**Fiction and Film**

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**Discovering U.S. History Online**

- **Gilded Age Presidents**
  - [www.potus.com/rbhayes.html](http://www.potus.com/rbhayes.html)
  - [www.potus.com/jagarfield.html](http://www.potus.com/jagarfield.html)
  - [www.potus.com/caarthur.html](http://www.potus.com/caarthur.html)
  - [www.potus.com/gcleveland.html](http://www.potus.com/gcleveland.html)
  - [www.potus.com/bharrison.html](http://www.potus.com/bharrison.html)
  These sites contain basic factual data about Gilded Age presidents Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, and Harrison, including speeches and online biographies.

- **Late Nineteenth-Century Articles**
  - [www.boondocksnet.com](http://www.boondocksnet.com)
  This site includes several exhibitions with links to contemporary articles, art, and cartoons about the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including “World’s Fairs and Expositions: Defining America and the World, 1876–1916” and “Mark Twain on War and Imperialism.”

- **The Gilded Age**
  - [www.wm.edu/~srnels/gilded.html](http://www.wm.edu/~srnels/gilded.html)
  This site offers links to Gilded Age documents and sources, especially literature.

- **The Rich in the Gilded Age**
  - [www.newportmansions.org](http://www.newportmansions.org)
  This site presents a virtual tour of Newport mansions along with background information.

- **The Life of William Jennings Bryan**
  - [www.mission.lib.tx.us/exhibits/bryan/bryan.htm](http://www.mission.lib.tx.us/exhibits/bryan/bryan.htm)
  This site offers an online presentation of Hidalgo County Historical Museum’s exhibit on William Jennings Bryan as well as digitized sources on his life and campaign for president.

- **The Election of 1896**
  - [www.iath.virginia.edu/seminar/unit8/home.htm](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/seminar/unit8/home.htm)
  This fine University of Virginia site contains biographical information, images, great cartoons, and related links about the pivotal election of 1896.

- **1896: The Presidential Campaign: Cartoons and Commentary**
  - [www.iberia.vassar.edu/1896/](http://www.iberia.vassar.edu/1896/)
  The site contains several sections: “Cartoons,” “Parties and Platforms,” “Leaders,” “Campaign Themes,” and “Special Features,” as well as background on the depression of 1893.

- **World’s Columbian Exhibition**
  - [www.boondocksnet.com/expos/columbian.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/expos/columbian.html)
  Part of a larger site, “World’s Fairs and Expositions: Defining America and the World, 1876–1916,” superbly edited by Jim Zwick, this site is full of links to contemporary articles, art, and cartoons about the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, with attention to architecture, art and literature, race relations, religion, social issues, and technology. A virtual visit to the fair.

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