

Gilded Age Politics and Economics



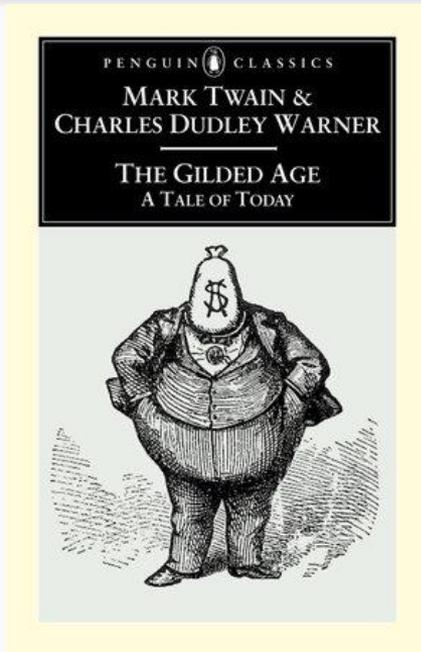
Standard & Objective:

U.S. 4 Analyze the causes and consequences of Gilded Age politics and economics as well as the significance of the rise of political machines, major scandals, civil service reform, and the economic difference between farmers, wage earners, and industrial capitalists, including the following:

- Spoils system and President James A. Garfield's assassination
- Boss Tweed
- Thomas Nast
- Pendleton Act
- Credit Mobilier
- Interstate Commerce Act

Scholars will analyze the causes and consequences of Gilded Age politics and economics as well as the significance of the rise of political machines, major scandals, civil service reform, and the economic difference between farmers, wage earners, and industrial capitalists.

The Gilded Age



- The era of U.S. history from 1870-1900 is often referred to as [The Gilded Age](#), taking the name from the Mark Twain novel of the same name.
- This was done to emphasize the fact that the era looked shiny and golden, but was filled with less pleasing things, such as graft, corruption, poverty, and crime.

Causes of the Gilded Age

- Lots of natural resources
- Lots of cheap labor (slaves, immigrants)
- New technology
- Creation of corporations
- Growing markets
- Business-friendly
- government
- Steam-engine revolution

Urbanization

- After the Civil War, Americans began moving to urban areas at a large rate, with cities increasing in population tremendously
- In order to accommodate these changes, investors and city planners began engaging in different strategies and the image of the city began to shift
 - Moving people upward with skyscrapers
 - Moving people outward by increasing city sizes & reshaping physical landscapes

Results of Urbanization:

- Mass Transit
- Separation by Class
 - As cities grew, the upper, middle, and working classes lived in distinctive areas of the city from one another.
- Urban Problems
 - Few cities had sanitation systems and regular trash pickup
 - Soot and ash from wood fires, horse manure from horse-drawn transportation, and smoke from chimneys added to the grime of city living
 - Sewage contaminated water systems
 - Poorly designed/overrun city design features
 - high crime rates
 - illness like cholera and typhoid
- Political Machines

Social Classes

- The wealthy lived in fashionable districts in the heart of the city, spending their leisure time engaged in expensive & fashionable activities, with usually at least one live-in servant
- The middle class tended to live far away from the city center in “streetcar suburbs”
- The working class mainly lived in tenement buildings, with some working class groups (such as white, native born males) doing better than others. Often, all family members, including women & children, were expected to work, with women working as servants & children not being educated.

Political Machines

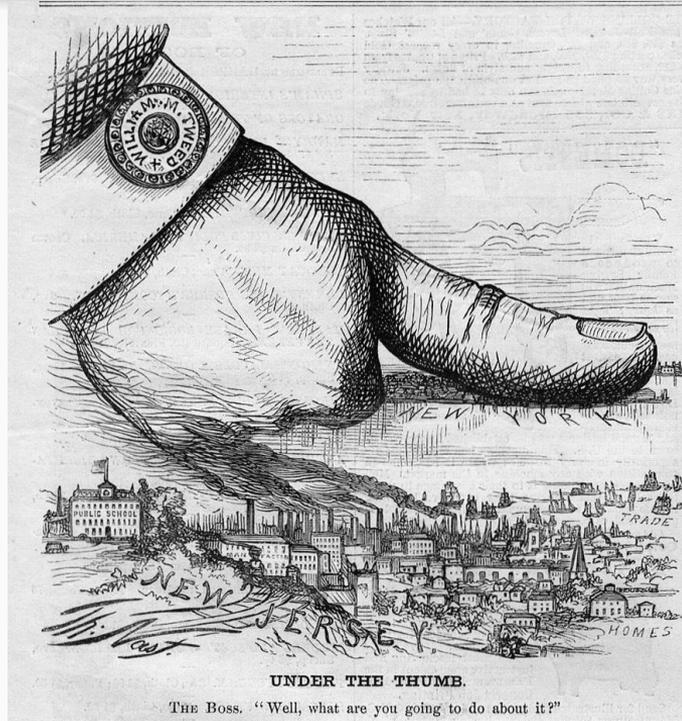
- While cities grew at a rapid rate, their governments often did not, which resulted in **political machines** (an informal organization linked to a political party that often controlled local government)
- The party bosses that headed such groups, controlled the essential services of a particular city (jobs, housing, food, heat, and police protection) and gave them to city residents in exchange for votes and Political support.
- The party bosses also typically controlled the finances of a city, which allowed the bosses themselves to benefit through graft and fraud

Tweed and Tammany Hall

- One such boss was William Tweed of NYC, who controlled the Tammany Hall Democratic political machine.
- Before his 1874 conviction landed him in prison, Tweed engaged in a tremendous amount of corruption, earning the disapproval of cartoonist [Thomas Nast](#), who began a campaign to take Tweed, and other political bosses, out of power.



Political Cartoon



Civil Service Reforms

- The assassination of President James Garfield was a sign to many that the U.S. civil service system needed to be reformed.
- **The spoils system**, where victorious politicians appointed their supporters to government jobs, caused many Americans to lose faith in the government.

Pendleton Act of 1833

- Congress passed the [Pendleton Act of 1883](#), requiring that some jobs be filled by competitive written exams, rather than by patronage.
- This marked the beginning of professional civil service—a system where most government workers are given jobs based on qualifications rather than on political affiliation.

Interstate Commerce Act

- The Election of 1884 led to the passage of the [Interstate Commerce Act](#)
- Was the first federal law regulating interstate commerce

Credit Mobilier Scandal

- Was a construction company set up by several Union Pacific stockholders
- **Credit Mobilier** would charge Union Pacific inflated prices to build and Union Pacific would pay causing Credit Mobilier stock to go up
- To get Congress to keep issuing land grants, Oakes Ames sold discounted stock in Credit Mobilier to other Congressmen to keep giving Union Pacific more land grants
- Scandal was uncovered during Election of 1872
- Implicated many politicians, but had a negligible impact on U.S. politics