

## Gilded Age Politics

Gilded: Term coined by Mark Twain. Period after Civil War, basically 1865-1900, is known as the Gilded Age. Period of intense change. Before the Civil War Americans basically saw themselves as agrarian, small farmers with a very pure and simple life style, that Jeffersonian image of the small yeoman farmer being the heart and soul of the nation. But after the Civil War America is different. There is incredible industrial growth with the economy increasingly centered around industry rather than farms. Cities grow to new sizes. Nature of factories change. They become increasingly mechanized. Everybody, even the south, emphasized urbanization and mechanization. But the changes come about so rapidly that it is not without problem. And that is why the period is termed the Gilded Age, a contestation of some people's description of the period as the Golden Age. On the surface everything looks great. We are populating our territory, spreading westward. Populations and cities growing. Industry growing. When you look more closely serious problems. Corruption in politics, poverty, labor problems, racism, filth in the cities. Capacity to threaten the American nation.

Thesis Question: Why did ordinary people form a third party to challenge Democrats and Republicans? Were they successful? Did the Populous Party fail or succeed?

Objective: To understand the change in the relationship between the American people and the federal government. To understand how a third party puts pressure on the two dominant political parties to address the needs of the American people. To understand the importance of voter participation.

Significance:

- Although the Populist Party meets a quick demise, ultimately, nearly all of their party's aims, including direct election of Senators, are achieved.
- Populist demonstrate the importance of a third party in a two party system that refuses to serve the interests of their constituents.
- Circumstances today, the depression, corruption, consolidation, unemployment, unresponsive representatives, mirror those of the 1890s.
- Federal government begins to grow and grow.

Key Terms: Pendleton Civil Service Act, 1883; Interstate Commerce Act, 1877; McKinley Tariff, 1890; Dingley Tariff, 1890; Mississippi Plan 1890, Plessey vs. Ferguson, 1896; Jim Crows Laws; Ida B. Wells-Barnett; George Plunkett; Granger Laws; White Hats.

Turmoil in the City: As you know from your reading and the debate last week is that America began to transition from a rural, agriculturally driven country to an industrialized, urban country. Immigrants, blacks, and farm boys and girls flooded the cities of the east coast and the mid-west. This caused racial tension and violence. Overcrowding sent rents

Turmoil on the Frontier:

- I. Turmoil on the frontier/Farmers
  - A. Crop—lien system
  - B. Farmers irritated with merchants (traveling salesmen) allows people in rural areas to get what they want
    1. But didn't like to buy on credit
    2. Thought, esp. in the South that being charged increasing mark up. Some say this is the beginning of American anti-Semitism.
  - C. More farmers produce the less money they get for their crops
    1. All regions of farmers felt ripped off by this.
    2. Don't seem to take into account foreign competition
    3. Farmers think it is immoral to pay them so little for their crops
    4. They should be rewarded for producing something from the earth, but they are going broke
    5. Believed their increasing hardship resulted from conspiracy of bankers, landlords, etc. rigging the American economy
    6. Striking at the farmer is a strike at the heart of liberty and democracy
  - D. American farmers responded to this hardship/conspiracy with cooperations.
    1. 1860s and 70s quite common to have Granges (associations of farmers usually buying and sharing expensive equipment)
    2. Local Granges begin to network and realized possibilities of united into 1 party
    3. Develop organization
      - a. Affects in every state in Union
      - b. Movement branched into cooperative adventures

- c. Some challenge corporate America
  - d. Buy finance own mills, etc
  - e. Even some attempt to buy some Granges to make company to make own machinery and then sell it at cost to people within in their cooperative
  - f. Farmers develop own insurance foundations. Meet actual cost of insurance
  - g. Farmers Insurance an incredible success
4. In a time of 90% voter turnout all Granges vote
    - a. They pass Granger Laws
      1. Passed at State and Local Levels
      2. Regulate banks, transportation (not effective with railroads), storage
      3. Puts damper on exorbitant service prices.
  5. Insurance Companies and Manufactories of Granges defeated because didn't have enough capital
    - a. Not much cash around in America at all after the Civil War
    - b. Period of deflation (not much money in circulation)
    - c. Money worth more then so it was harder to get, hard to earn money to pay back loans
    - d. So farmers want inflation because it devalues loans.

\*\*Significance of Granges: successful political movement comes from this

- E. Farmers' Alliances
  1. Networks of organization, one in the South and one in the planes
  2. More political than granges
  3. Raise consciousness of fellow farmers
  4. Write senators
  5. "trailing speech givers" give speeches in tent meeting
    - a. Give persuasive speeches about saving democracy
    - b. Issues at hand call farmers to political action

- c. We have the power of the people, but big business and banks have the power of big \$
- d. Money wants of farmers are not individual, but cooperative

6. Southern Alliance

- a. By 1889 had 3 million members
- b. 1/3 of whom were black
- c. Brief shining moment of common link between blacks and whites
- d. So those with power and \$ move quickly to get blacks no vote
- e. Rich don't want poor whites and blacks unifying.
- f. Many mass movement required and tended to simplify programs

7. Farmers' Alliance Called for a Sub-treasury plan

- a. Federal government warehouses established in every count and instead of selling crops as soon as they are harvested for a cheap price in a glutted market put in federal reserve until a price asked for when farmers wanted to sell
- b. Government gives federal treasury notes for 80% of projected price
- c. Frees farmers from the banks and grain wheels

8. Success of Farmers Alliance Politically in 1890

- a. 4 governors elected by Farmers Alliance
- b. 8 State legislatures by Farmers Alliance
- c. 3 senators
- d. And several members of House of Representatives

9. d

F. Kansas Alliance

- 1. 1890 holds a Convention of the People
- 2. Launched most powerful 3<sup>rd</sup> party ever
- 3. Doesn't become one of the two great parties

4. Populous Party, Omaha, Nebraska
  - a. Wrote Omaha Platform
  - b. Radical Document
  - c. Populous believe people who work with their hands are producers
  - d. Others are parasites
  - e. Farmers are the real Americans,
  - f. those to whom we are opposed or those oppose us are wrong
  - g. We are people's party
  - h. Others parties, Democrats and Republicans, represent big business
  
5. Omaha Platform
  - a. Government confiscate all railroads and telegraphs
  - b. Government confiscate all lands by railroads for speculation, federal government gave railroads then land, so they can take it back. Millions of acres owned by railroads whose investors are foreigners
  - c. Want graduated income tax in an area of \$ power
  - d. Want federal government or provide shorter work hours
  - e. Want federal banks to keep people from losing money to upstart banks, but no interest but money will be safe
  - f. Want direct election of American senators not chosen by state legislatures, requires constitutional amendment
  - g. They want free unlimited production of silver money, basically government sponsorship of inflation)

Significance: \*\* Omaha Platform and Populist Party calling for expansion of power of federal government in a time when people wanted no federal intervention

6. Populist Party achieves some electoral success
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> Populist Presidential Candidate in 1892 gets 1 million popular votes and 32 electoral votes
  - b. 1896 Populist think they will win the presidential election, but they decide to hold their political convention after Republicans and Democrats in order to

show they are a part of the people. Think they will win because they are running on free silver.

1. Republicans are for the gold standard and nominate William McKinley (McKinley elected but shot so Teddy Roosevelt becomes president. McKinley launched US into game of empire)
2. Democrats does what mainstream party does sees ideas of 3<sup>rd</sup> party as good ideas.
  - aa. William Jennings Bryan makes a speech at the Democratic Convention in favor of inflation and against the gold standard.
  - bb. Steals the wind out of the Populist's sail
3. Republicans win and Gold standard remains til 1930s

Significance: Some Populist elements go on to be successful under middle class, Progressive Movement, graduated income tax, direct election of senators

c. f

7. d

G. d

II. d