

Period 6: 1865-1898

AP United States History

Westward Expansion after the Civil War

Period 6 runs from **1865** to **1898** - the **Gilded Age**. Industry, migration, and the West transform the country, and every transformation produces a political argument about who benefits.

Improvements in **mechanization** raised agricultural production substantially, while railroads carried crops to national and world markets. But the same forces squeezed farmers: **consolidation in agricultural markets** left them facing high freight rates, expensive credit, and falling crop prices.

Westward settlement also meant the final dispossession of American Indians. Federal policy moved from treaties to **reservations** and then to **assimilation** through the **Dawes Act**, which divided communal land into individual plots and transferred the surplus to settlers.

The Rise of Industrial Capitalism

Industrial growth involved technology, management, a growing workforce, wider markets and pro-growth government policies. Businesses used new **corporate structures**, including trusts and holding companies, for **consolidation**: bringing firms under concentrated control.

Try it – distinguish mechanisms. Teacher-written cases: A business adopts new machinery and management methods to produce more goods. Several firms are brought under a large trust or holding company. Better transport and communication connect producers with more distant markets. Explain which changes production, which changes ownership, and which changes market access. Which most directly shows consolidation?

Worked mechanisms. New technology and management could raise output; more goods alone do not prove that fewer owners control an industry. Trusts and holding companies concentrated control over businesses and wealth. Transport and communication connected producers with wider markets. Businesses also sought markets and natural resources outside the United States. These mechanisms could interact; they are not interchangeable labels for growth.

Try it – assess two claims. Teaching evidence paraphrased from CED Topics 6.6–6.7: many goods became cheaper, workers’ real wages increased, and many Americans could afford more goods and services. At the same time the gap between rich and poor grew, and consolidation concentrated wealth. Claim A says that if workers could buy more, inequality must have fallen. Claim B says that if inequality grew, no worker’s living standard could improve. Assess both, distinguishing purchasing power from the distribution of wealth.

Worked judgment. Lower prices could let wages buy more goods and services. Living standards could improve without workers becoming as wealthy as business owners. Wealth could become more concentrated while many workers' purchasing power improved, so neither claim follows. Improved affordability also did not end disputes over wages and working conditions.

Some defended **laissez-faire** , arguing that competition promoted long-term growth and opposing government intervention during economic downturns. This was a policy argument; it does not mean government was absent from industrial development. Pro-growth government policies also helped industrial growth. Many living standards improved alongside **rising inequality** ; downturns and labour conflicts prompted debates over policy.

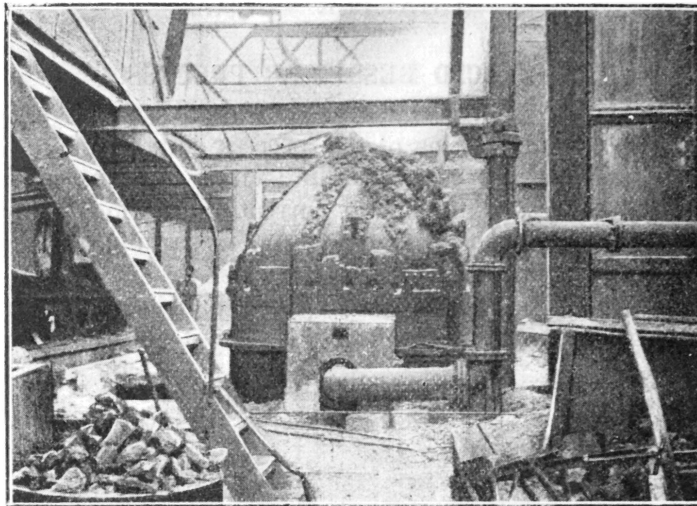
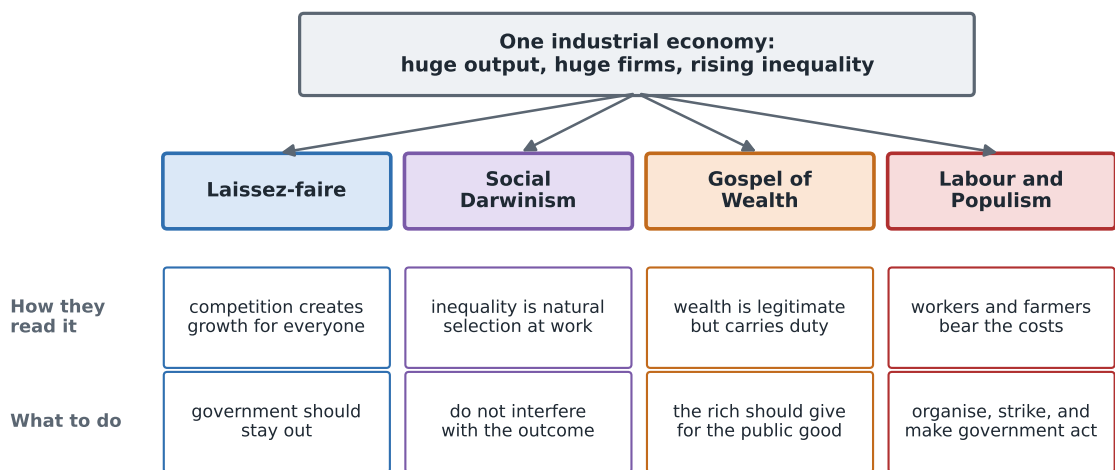


Fig. 30.—Bessemer Converter while Blowing.

Labour in the Gilded Age



One economy, four responses: each group diagnosed a different problem and proposed a different remedy

A **variety of perspectives** on the economy and labour developed. Workers faced long hours, dangerous conditions, and wages that fell during downturns. They organised. Unions such as the **Knights of Labor** and the **American Federation of Labor** differed over who to admit and what to demand - the AFL concentrating on skilled workers and practical gains in wages and hours. **Strikes** were frequent, often large, and frequently broken by state or federal force, which itself became an argument about the role of government.

	KNIGHTS OF LABOR	AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR
WHO IT ORGANISED	almost everyone who worked, skilled or not	skilled workers only, by craft
WHAT IT WANTED	a reformed society — an alternative to wage labour itself	better wages, hours and conditions inside the system
WHAT FOLLOWED	collapsed after being blamed for the violence at Haymarket	survived, and became the model for American unions

The narrower aim is the one that **survived**. “Workers organised” is not an answer on its own — the exam wants which kind of organising, and why it lasted

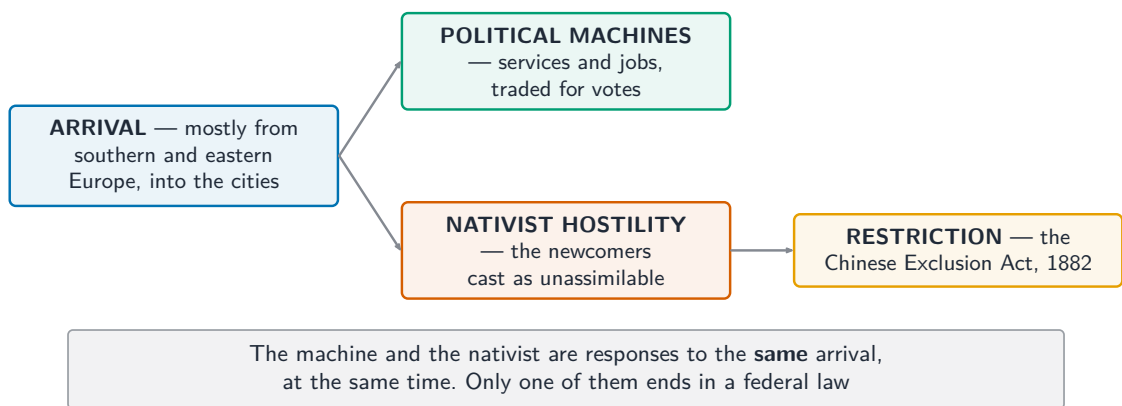
Migration and the Cities

International and internal migration increased urban populations and fostered the growth of **cities** .

New arrivals came increasingly from **southern and eastern Europe** , alongside Chinese migration to the West - which met the **Chinese Exclusion Act** , the first significant federal restriction on immigration by nationality.

In cities where access to power was unequally distributed, **political machines** provided jobs, housing help, and services in exchange for votes - corrupt by later standards, and for many migrants the only functioning source of support.

Migration also produced organised hostility. **Nativist** movements argued that new arrivals threatened wages, culture, or self-government.

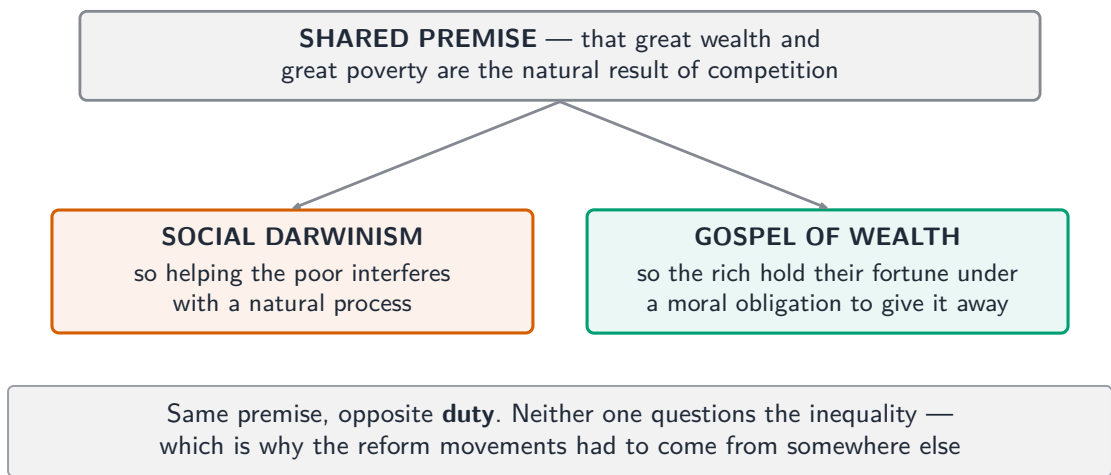


The New Middle Class and Reform

Corporations' need for **managers** and for male and female **clerical workers** expanded a new **middle class** , with new patterns of consumption and leisure.

Cultural and intellectual movements both **buttressed and challenged** the social order:

- **Social Darwinism** used evolutionary language to justify inequality as natural.
- The **Gospel of Wealth** argued that the wealthy had a **moral obligation** to use their fortunes for the public good.
- Agrarians, utopians, socialists, and artists criticised industrial society from the other direction.
- Many women sought greater equality, often through **voluntary organizations** - temperance, settlement houses, and suffrage work.



Politics and the Populist Challenge

The major parties appealed to lingering divisions from the Civil War and competed over **patronage** more than policy, producing close elections and limited legislation.

Economic instability drove agrarian activists to build the **People's (Populist) Party**, demanding government action: regulation of railroads, currency reform, and a graduated income tax. Populism failed as a party but placed on the agenda the idea that government should intervene in the economy - the argument Period 7 takes up.

Debates over **citizenship**, **race**, and the role of government ran through all of this, as the rights promised during Reconstruction continued to be narrowed.

Continuity and Change in Period 6

Continuity and change is one useful reasoning skill for this period. Industrialisation changed where people lived and what they did, while inequality, sectional political loyalties, and racial exclusion persisted.

Exam transfer – 2024 AP US History, Set 2, short-answer Q4(a–b), paraphrased. A asks for one economic development from 1865 to 1900. B asks for one similarity or difference in how two groups responded to economic change in those dates. Try A using corporate consolidation, and B comparing supporters of laissez-faire with Populist advocates of railroad regulation. Give relevant characteristics and explain the relationship rather than only naming a term or two groups.

Teacher-written model for A. Corporate trusts emerged as a business structure that brought multiple firms under concentrated control, helping owners consolidate businesses.

Teacher-written model for B. Some business supporters of laissez-faire opposed government intervention, trusting competition to promote growth. Populists called for

government regulation of railroads to address farmers' grievances. They differed over whether government should regulate economic activity.

Why these fit. The official scheme accepts corporate trusts for A and contrasting laissez-faire with demands for regulation for B. The models describe a development and explain a difference within the dates. These are our models, not official samples or guarantees of credit. Only parts (a–b) are addressed here; part (c) asks about 1900–1940.

Exam tips

- Explain farmers' anger with mechanisms: **freight rates, credit, and falling crop prices** - not "farmers struggled".
- Keep the four Gilded Age responses distinct: **laissez-faire, Social Darwinism, the Gospel of Wealth, and organised labour and Populism**.
- For immigration, name the shift to **southern and eastern Europe** and the **Chinese Exclusion Act** as the first nationality-based federal restriction.
- **Political machines** are examinable as both corruption and social provision. Relate both to the question; this alone does not guarantee a complexity point.
- **Populism** matters less for winning than for putting government intervention on the agenda.
- On continuity-and-change prompts, name a specific continuity. Explain how it persisted within the dates in the question.

Vocabulary card meanings

Gilded Age: The late nineteenth century of industrial wealth and stark inequality. mechanization: Replacing hand work with machines on farms and in factories. consolidation in agricultural markets: Fewer, larger firms controlling the buying and selling of farm products. reservations: Lands onto which the government confined Indigenous nations. Dawes Act: The 1887 law that broke up tribal land into individual allotments. corporate structures: Legal forms such as trusts that organised large businesses. consolidation: Combining firms so that fewer companies controlled an industry. rising inequality: A widening gap between the wealthy and everyone else. variety of perspectives: Workers, farmers, and owners explaining industrial change in different ways. Knights of Labor: A broad late-nineteenth-century union open to many kinds of workers. American Federation of Labor: A union federation organised mainly by skilled craft. Strikes: Organised refusals to work, used to press employers. cities: Large urban centres that grew with factories and newcomers. southern and eastern Europe: The regions that supplied many immigrants around 1900. Chinese Exclusion Act: The 1882 law that barred most Chinese labourers from immigrating. political machines: Party organisations that traded services for votes in cities. managers: Salaried staff who directed work inside large firms. clerical workers: Office employees who kept records and correspondence. buttressed and challenged: Both supported an existing order and put it under pressure. Gospel of Wealth: The argument that the rich should use their

fortunes for the public good. moral obligation: A duty claimed on ethical grounds, not only by law. patronage: Giving government jobs to political supporters. People's (Populist) Party: A late-nineteenth-century party of farmers and workers demanding economic reform. citizenship: Legal membership in the nation, with the rights that membership carries.