

Period 6: 1865-1898

AP United States History

Westward Expansion after the Civil War

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

Improvements in **mechanization** 机械化 raised agricultural production substantially, while railroads carried crops to national and world markets. But the same forces squeezed farmers: **consolidation in agricultural markets** 农产品市场集中化 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** 保留地 and then to **assimilation** 同化 through the **Dawes Act** 道斯法, which divided communal land into individual plots and transferred the surplus to settlers.

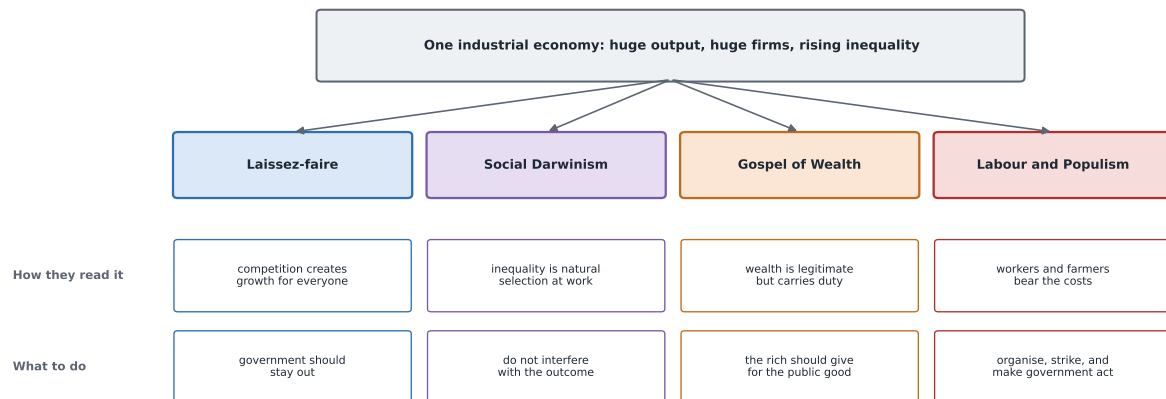
The Rise of Industrial Capitalism

Large-scale industrial production, accompanied by massive technological change, produced enormous output and enormous firms.

- New **corporate structures** 公司组织形式 - trusts and holding companies - allowed **consolidation** 合并 and, in some industries, near-monopoly.
- New **transportation and communication** networks, above all the railroad, created a genuinely national market.
- Business leaders defended their position with **laissez-faire** 自由放任 arguments: competition promoted growth, and government should stay out.

The same period produced **rising inequality** 不平等加剧 and recurring financial panics, which is why the economy itself became the central political question.

Labour in the Gilded Age



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

A **variety of perspectives** 各种不同的立场 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** 劳工骑士团 and the **American Federation of Labor** 美国劳工联合会 differed over who to admit and what to demand - the AFL concentrating on skilled workers and practical gains in wages and hours. **Strikes** 罢工 were frequent, often large, and frequently broken by state or federal force, which itself became an argument about the role of government.

Migration and the Cities

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

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

In cities where access to power was unequally distributed, **political machines** 政治机器 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** 管理人员 and for male and female **clerical workers** 文职人员 expanded a new **middle class** 中产阶级, with new patterns of consumption and leisure.

Cultural and intellectual movements both **buttressed and challenged** 既支持又挑战 the social order:

- **Social Darwinism** 社会达尔文主义 used evolutionary language to justify inequality as natural.
- The **Gospel of Wealth** 财富福音 argued that the wealthy had a **moral obligation** 道德义务 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** 自愿团体 - 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** 政治分肥 more than policy, producing close elections and limited legislation.

Economic instability drove agrarian activists to build the **People's (Populist) Party** 人民党, 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** 公民身份, **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

The period's reasoning skill is **continuity and change**. Industrialisation changed where people lived and what they did, while inequality, sectional political loyalties, and racial exclusion persisted.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). The 2025 exam set the long essay *"Evaluate the extent to which economic changes influenced United States society between 1865" and the end of the century.* A strong thesis names the changes and the groups they affected differently: *"Economic change reshaped American society to a great extent after 1865, creating an urban industrial working class and a salaried middle class, but its benefits were distributed so unevenly that farmers and industrial workers organised politically against it."* Notice the shape: naming **who** was affected differently is what allows an essay to argue about extent rather than just describe growth.

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. Saying both is what earns the complexity.
- **Populism** matters less for winning than for putting government intervention on the agenda.
- On continuity-and-change prompts, name a specific continuity. Racial exclusion and unequal wealth are the safest here.