

# The Gilded Age

*The Development of the Industrial  
United States (1870–1900)*



Immigration and urbanization

Social change

The Western frontier

**Politics**

## Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

**Icons:** For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



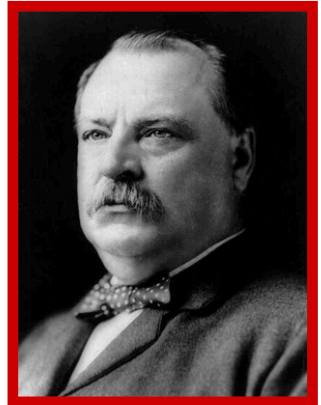
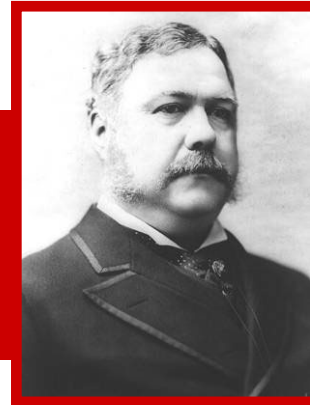
By the end of this section, you will learn about political issues during the Gilded Age and be able to answer these key questions:

- What were the main political issues of the Gilded Age?
- Why was currency such a big issue?
- How did populism and socialism challenge the existing structure?



People were shocked by the scandals and corruption of Reconstruction era politics. The Gilded Age saw many efforts at reform. **Patronage**, the rewarding of loyal supporters, began to be replaced with **civil service** jobs for federal government positions based on merit.

However, with big cities being run by political machines and powerful bosses, corruption and bribery were still rife.



Politicians also faced economic problems. Big business also had a strong influence, wanting a lack of regulation yet also high tariffs for protection. Problems culminated in the **Panic of 1873** and the **Panic of 1893**. Both were severe depressions.



During the Gilded Age, currency was the subject of an important debate about whether the dollar should be valued against gold or silver. There were also two economic depressions during this era. Watch this animation to find out more about currency and economics.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Which novel allegedly mirrors the currency debate?



U.S. politics has mostly had two major parties. During the Gilded Age, both the Republicans and the Democrats suffered splits over reform and tariffs respectively.

In 1891, an alliance of farmers from the South and Great Plains, and urban labor unions formed the **Populist** (or **People's**) **Party**. They opposed elites and stood for:

- use of silver and paper money
- a graduated income tax
- direct election of senators
- public ownership of railroads
- land and resources to be held by the people, not business.



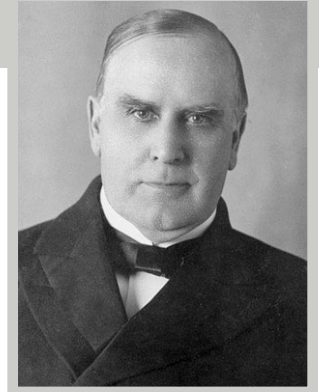
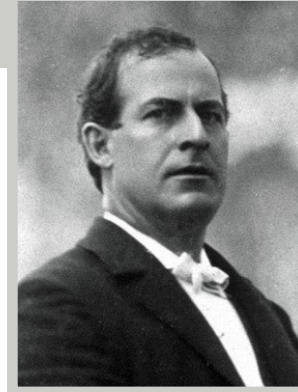


# Elections of 1892 and 1896



In 1892 the Populist James B. Weaver ran for President, polling respectably. In 1896 the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan, who favored bimetallism. Bryan was also supported by the Populists.

Some Populists wanted to merge with the Democrats, but others feared they would be absorbed and then ignored.



Republican William McKinley won the election as “gold bug” Democrats voted for him in the interest of the country rather than their party. Populism never recovered from this defeat.

Where do we see Populist policies in the U.S. today?



Although it was only supported by a minority of people, **socialism** was an important part of American political life during the Gilded Age.

Press the buttons to find out about what socialism was and its impact on the national stage.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**







During the Gilded Age, the U.S. began to shift away from a rugged way of life to the start of a more modern one.



While people's lives generally improved, conflicts raged over equal rights, politics, rural and urban life, immigration, currency and consumption.

This is where the name the Gilded Age comes from – shiny on top, crude metal beneath.



In what ways had life for most people changed by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?





Test your knowledge of the Gilded Age  
with this quiz.

Choose the correct answer to each  
question to see how much you can  
remember about the Gilded Age.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Test your understanding of the Gilded Age  
by recapping key terms and important  
people using this glossary.

Press on the tabs and then each term to  
see a definition.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**

