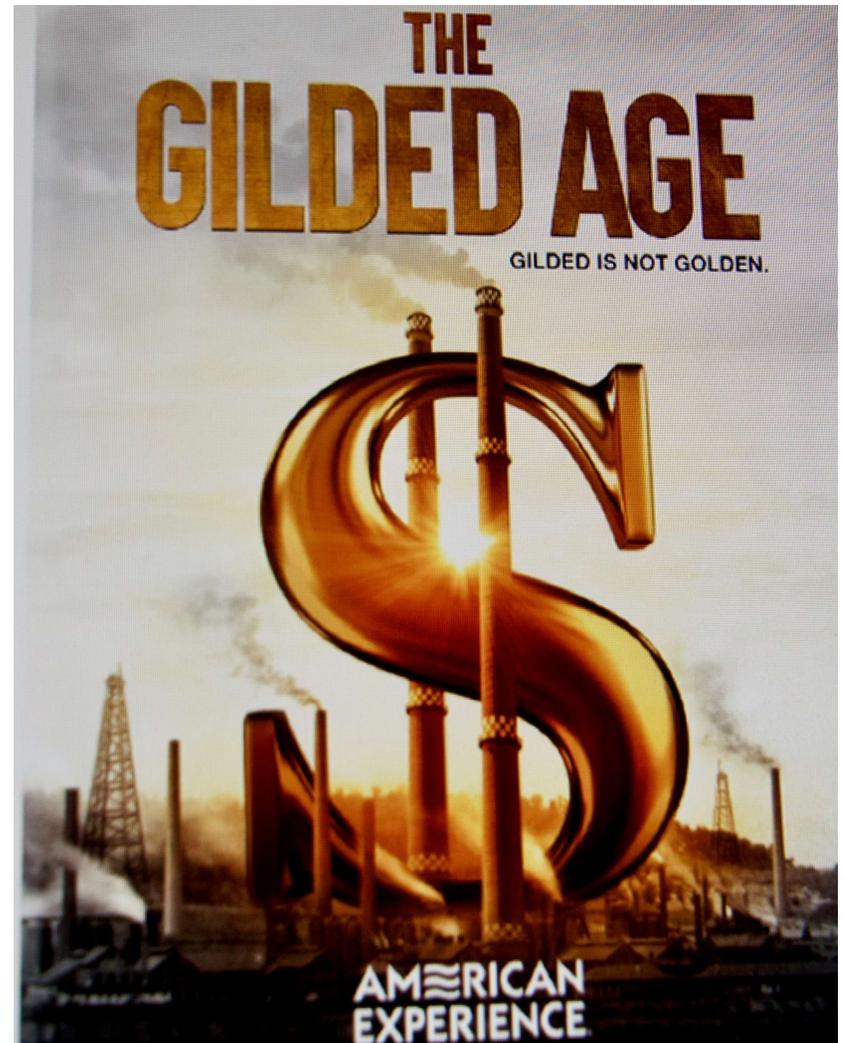


AMERICA IN THE GILDED AGE

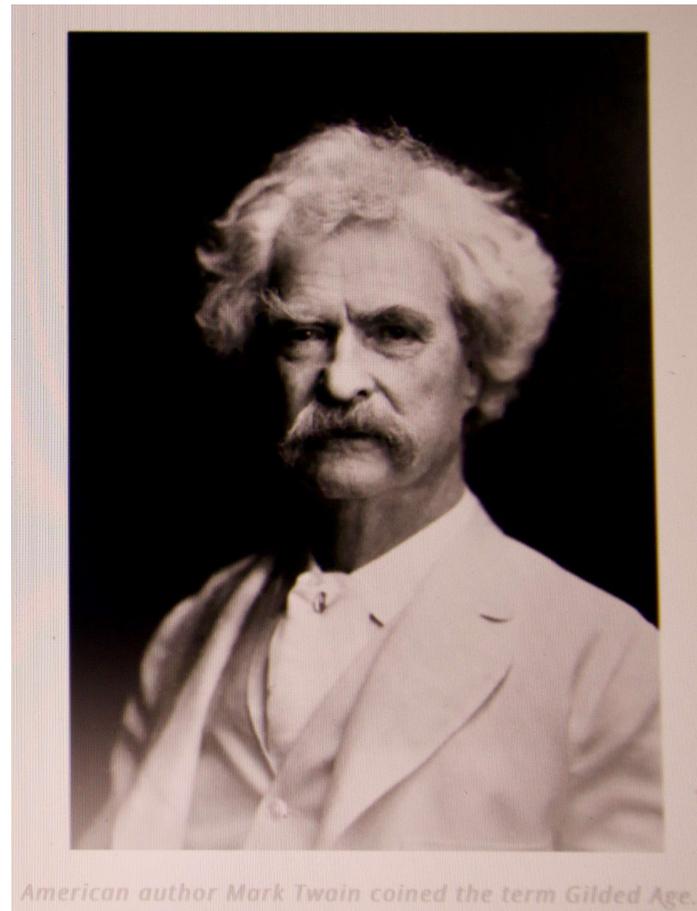
BY: PABLO A. CATANGAY- 10/28/2025

- The Gilded age is the period from about 1860s to the late 1890s.
- The period was glittering on the surface but corrupt underneath.
- The Gilded Age was a period of flashy materialism, greed and corruption of wealthy industrialists, business owners, and politicians.

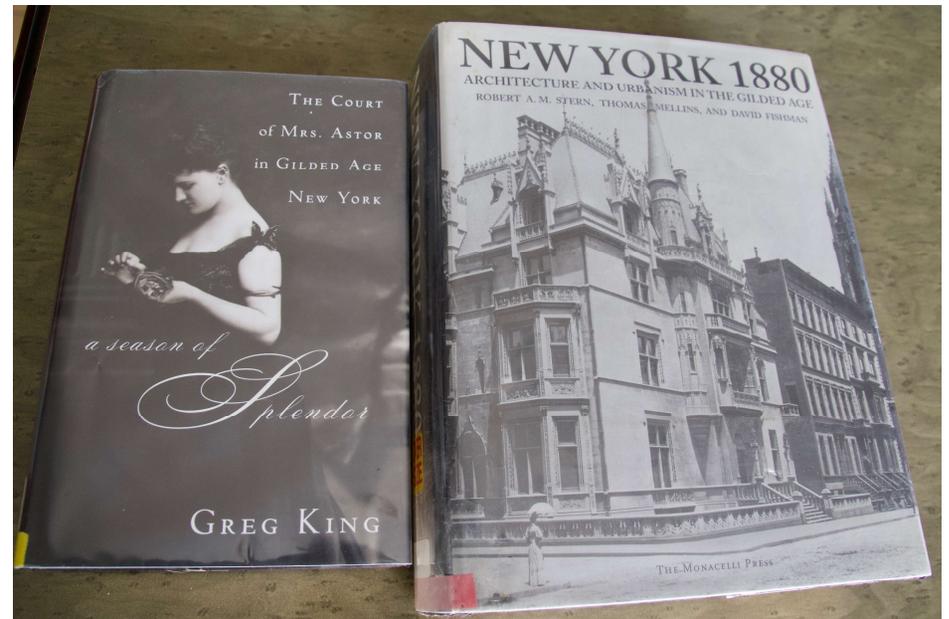
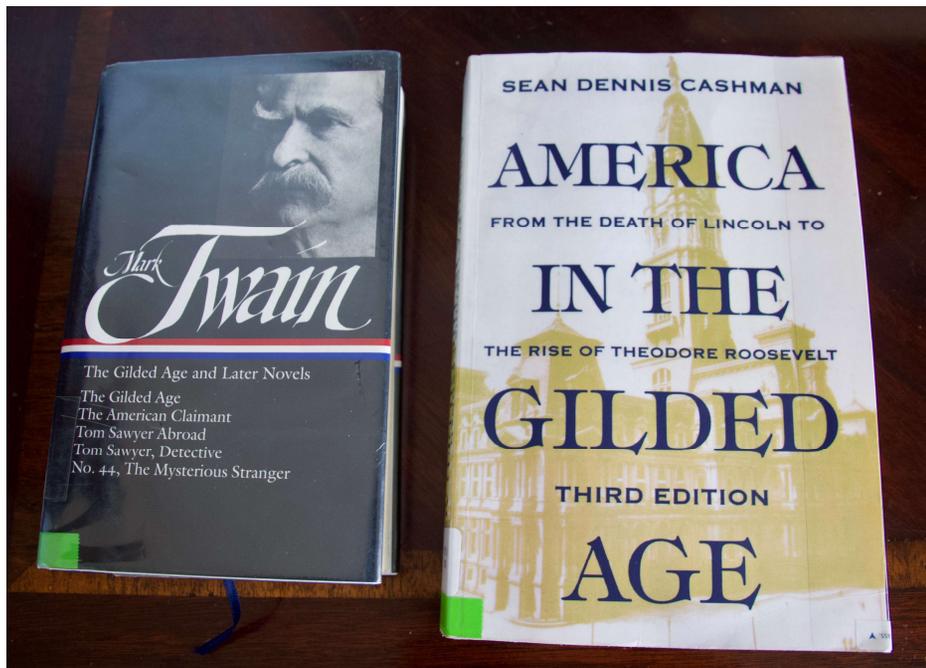


Mark Twain

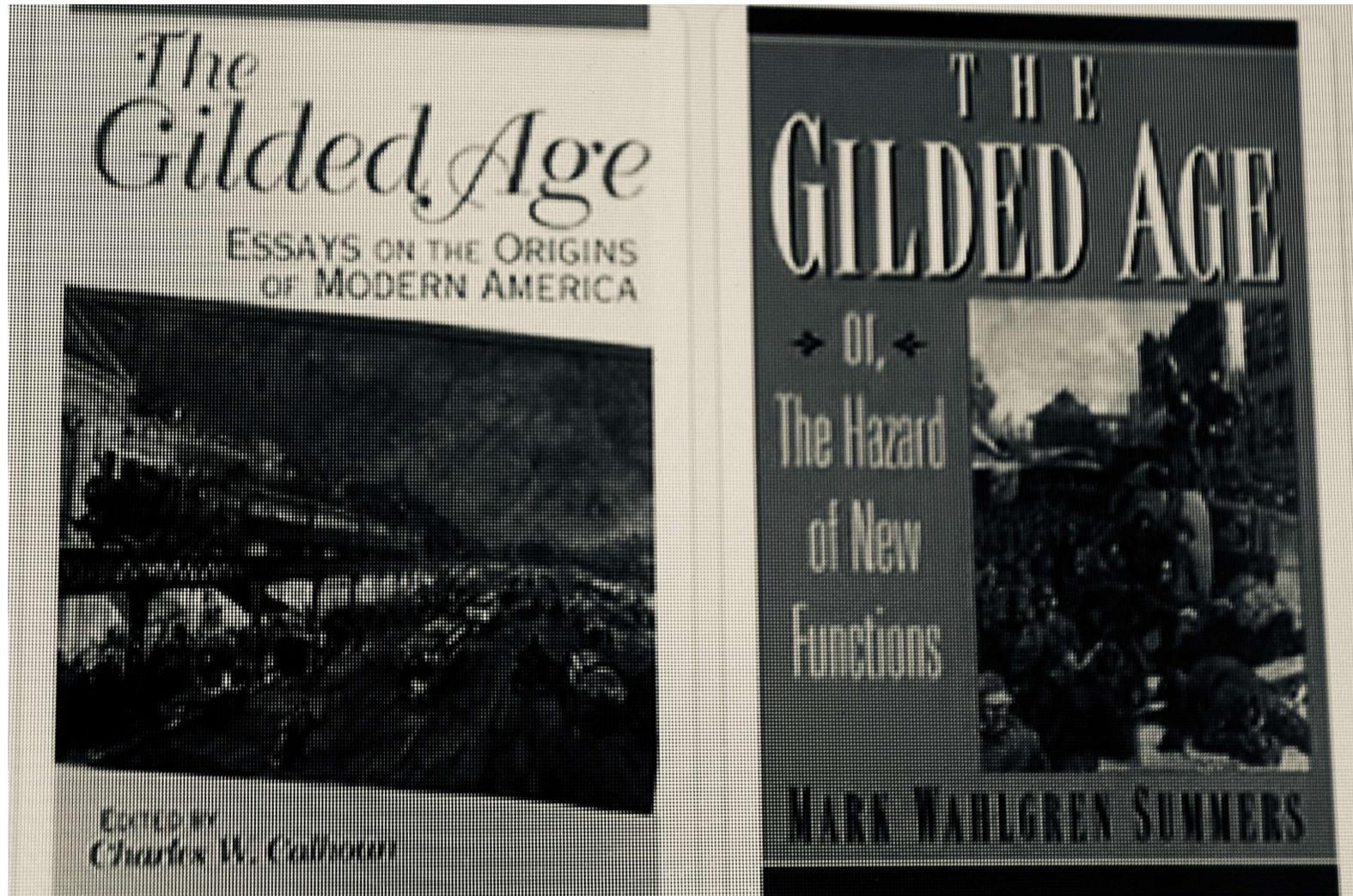
- Mark Twain is credited with coining the term Gilded Age. It was the title of his book published in 1873, in which he highlighted the greed and corruption of wealthy industrialists, business owners, and politicians.



Reference Books



Reference Books



GILDED AGE: BEGINNING AND ENDING

- The period begins with the assassination of a president, Abraham Lincoln on April 4, 1865.
- It ends with the assassination of another president, William McKinley on September 6, 1901.

Gilded Age- was a transformative era in American history. Significant events:

1. Reconstruction Era.
2. Rapid Industrialization.
3. Economic Growth.
4. Rise of Powerful Industrialists.
5. Immigration and Labor Unrest.
6. Technological Innovations.
7. Social and Political Developments.

RECONSTRUCTION ERA

- Following the end of the American civil war in 1865, the US entered a period known as Reconstruction Era. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 also known as Military Reconstruction Act mandating a new state constitution (former Confederate States), that also included male black suffrage and requiring ratification of the 14th Amendment for readmission to the union.
- This period aimed to address the challenges of rebuilding the South and integrating the formerly enslaved African American into society as citizens.
- The key elements of the Reconstruction included the passage of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery and the 14th Amendment which granted citizenship and equal protection under the law to all individuals born or naturalized in the United States.

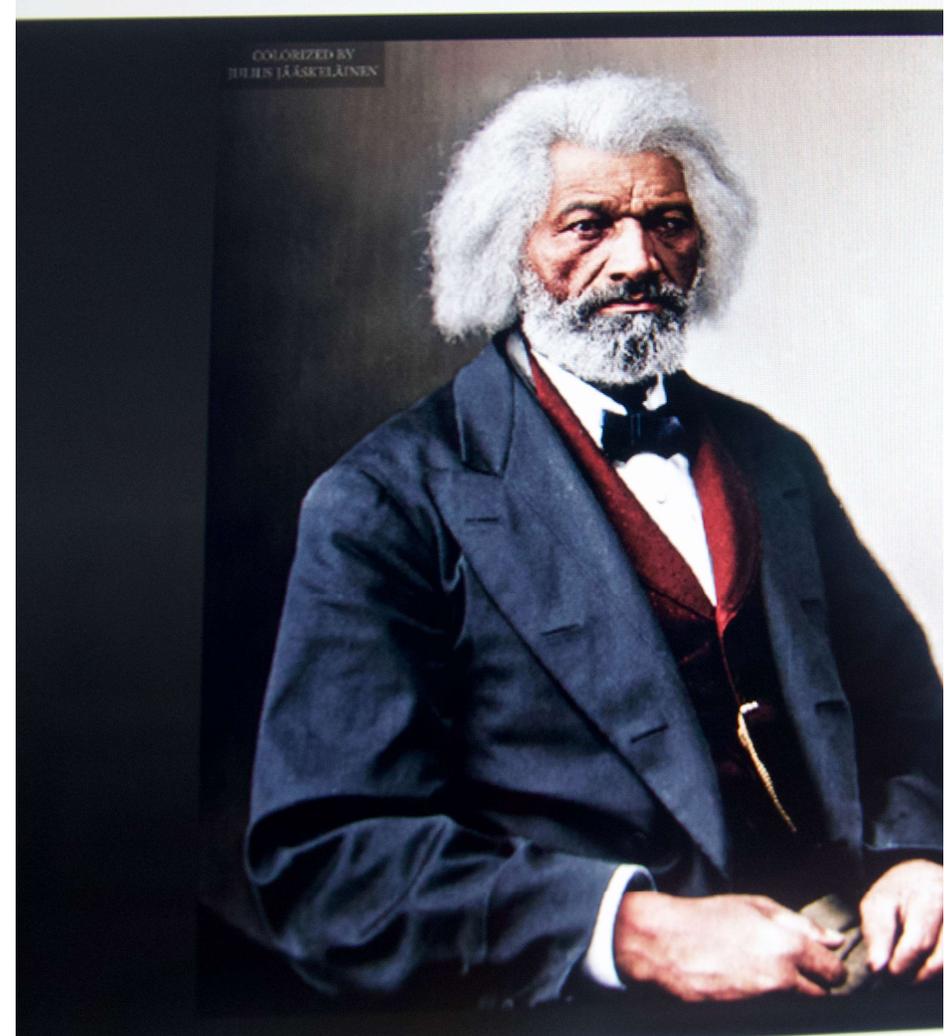
RECONSTRUCTION ERA

- The Reconstruction Era established the Freedoms' Bureau to provide support to the newly freed slaves and efforts to establish government in the South.
- Abraham Lincoln fought the Civil war to free the slaves, but to save the union he would have freed none.
- The victory of the Union army over the Confederates dispossessed the very people it had emancipated.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS: “IF THERE IS NO STRUGGLE, THERE IS NO PROGRESS.”

The plight of the “freed-man:”

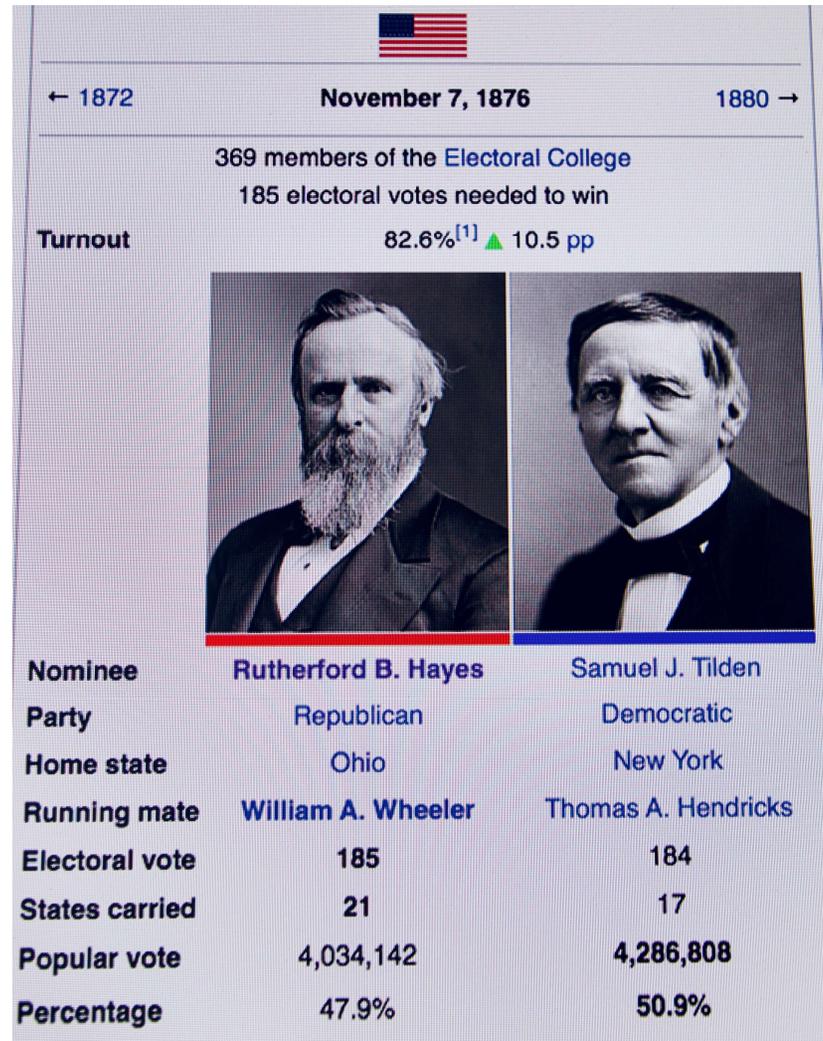
1. The African-American was freed from individual master but slave of society.
2. He had neither money, property or friends.
3. He was free from the old plantation, but had nothing except dirty road under his feet.
4. He was free from quarter- that once gave shelter, but slave to the rains of summer and the frost of winter.
5. He was turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute to the open sky.



THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1876- Problematic and Contentious

1. Democrat Samuel Tilden ran against Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. At the end of election day, no clear winner emerged.
2. Tilden outpolled Hayes in the popular vote, and had 184 electoral votes to Hayes' 165, with 20 votes uncounted. These electoral votes were in dispute: in three states (Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina), each party reported its candidate had won every state, while in Oregon one elector declared illegal- and replaced.
3. To address this constitutional crisis, Congress established the Electoral Commission: consisted of 5 congressmen, 5 senators and 5 Supreme Court justices. The commission with a Republican majority, ultimately awarded all the disputed 20 electoral votes to Hayes, resulting in a narrow 185-184 electoral college victory.

Presidential Election of 1876 between Hayes and Tilden:



The Compromise of 1877: Wormley Agreement

- The Compromise of 1877- “Corrupt Bargain” This decision is closely linked to the an unwritten agreement between Republicans and Southern Democrats. The Democrats agreed to accept Hayes’ presidency in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, effectively ending the Reconstruction era.
- This withdrawal of federal troops from the South allowed Southern Democrats to regain political control of the South, leading to the disenfranchisement of African American voters and the rise of Jim Crow laws.

RECONSTRUCTION ERA ENDS

- The compromise of 1877 Ended the Reconstruction Era.
- The Republican claims to the state governments of S.C., Florida and La was forfeited- immediately after the withdrawal of federal troops.
- As soon as the federal troops were removed, the Democrats who already dominated the state governments in the South, took control.
- With the end of the Reconstruction- the Jim Crow era “Racial Segregation” begins. No story in the Gilded Age is more harrowing than the tragedy of American Reconstruction.
- By 1905- African-Americans were “disenfranchised” in the south.

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

1. It was a time of rapid industrialization and economic growth, especially in the Northern and Western United States.
2. American wages grew much higher than those in Europe, and industrialization demanded an increasingly skilled workers- the period saw an influx of millions of European immigrants.
3. The rapid expansion of industrialization led to real wage growth of 40 % from 1860 to 1890.
4. Railroads were the major growth industry, with factory system, oil, mining and finance increasing in importance.
5. Immigration from Europe and Eastern United States led to the rapid growth of the West based on farming, ranching and mining.

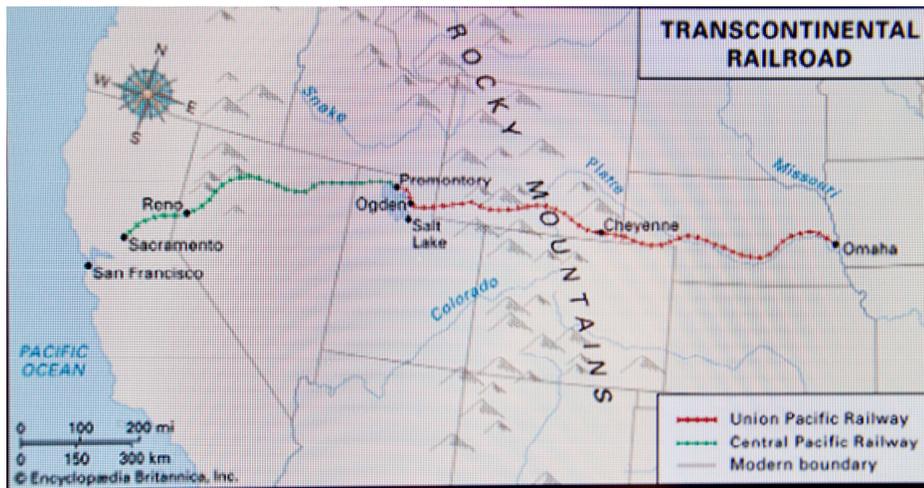
ON THE CONTRARY

- The Gilded Age was also an era of poverty, especially in the South, and growing inequality, as millions of immigrants poured into the United States, and the high concentration of wealth became more visible and contentious.
- The South remained economically devastated after the Civil War; the region's economy became increasingly tied to commodities like food and building materials, cotton for thread and fabrics, and tobacco production, all of which suffered from low prices.
- The African American in the South were stripped of political power and voting rights, and were left severely economically disadvantaged.

THE RAILROADS

- The railroad industry was the largest and most influential during the Gilded Age in the United States.
- It was a major growth sector, driving economic expansion and linking the nation from coast to coast.
- The impact of the railroad industry can be examined through five aspects: shipping, finance, management, careers, and popular reaction.

5/10/1869- the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads met at Promontory Summit, Utah



THE RAILROADS

- **SHIPPINGS:** the railroads provided a highly efficient network for shipping freight and passengers throughout the U.S., spurring the evolution of a large national market. This had a tremendous impact on most sectors of economy including manufacturing, retail and wholesale, agriculture and finance.
- **FINANCE:** Railroad financing provided the basis for a dramatic expansion of the private financial system. Construction of railroads was far more expensive than factories. Funding came primarily from private sector throughout the Northeast, and from Europe, especially U.K., with about 10 % coming from the Federal government, especially in the form of land grants. In 1860, combined total railroad stocks and bonds was \$1.8 billion; 1897, it reached \$10.6 billion (compared to a total national debt of \$1.2 billion).
- **MODERN MANAGEMENT:** Railroad management designed complex systems that could handle far more complicated simultaneous relationships. Civil engineers became senior management of railroads. The leading innovators were the Western Railroad of Mass., the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads, the Erie Railroad and Pennsylvania Railroad.
- **CAREER PATHS:** The Railroad invented career path in the private sector for both blue- and white-collar workers. Railroading became a lifetime career for young men. A young man hired at 18 as shop laborer and promoted to skilled mechanic at age 24, brakeman at 25, freight conductor at 27 and passenger conductor at age 57. White-collar career paths likewise were delineated. At each level they had more and more knowledge, experience and human capital. They were very hard to replace and were virtually guaranteed permanent jobs and provided with insurance and medical care.
- **IMPACT ON FARMING:** The growth of railroads from 1850's to 1880's made commercial farming much more feasible and profitable. Millions of acres were opened to settlement once railroad was nearby, and provided a long-distance outlet for wheat, cattle and hogs. Rural America became one giant market, as wholesalers bought the consumer products produced by the factories in the East and shipped them to local merchants in small stores nationwide.

The Railroads



ECONOMIC GROWTH

1. During the 1870s and 1880s, the U.S. economy rose at the fastest rate in its history, with real wages, GDP, and capital formation all increasing rapidly.
2. From 1865-1898, the output of wheat increased by 256 %, corn by 222%, coal by 800 % and miles of railway track by 567%.
3. The corporation became the dominant form of business organization, and a scientific management revolution transformed business operations.
4. By the end of 1900, gross domestic product and industrial production in the U.S. led the world. The U.S. was the envy of the whole world.

RISE OF POWERFUL INDUSTRIALISTS

“ROBBER BARONS”

Captains of Industry

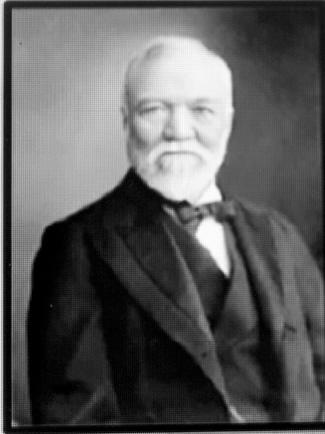
Entrepreneurs & Industrialists like Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan were able to build great fortunes during the Gilded Age

Railroads



Cornelius Vanderbilt

Steel



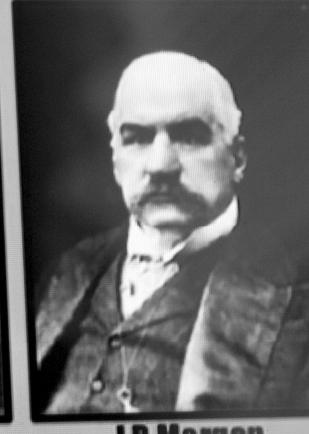
Andrew Carnegie

Oil



John D. Rockefeller

Banking



J.P. Morgan

The government created policies to support the industrialists

- *High tariffs led to lower prices for American made goods*
- *There were very few government regulations on big business*
- *Government supported owners over workers in labor disputes*

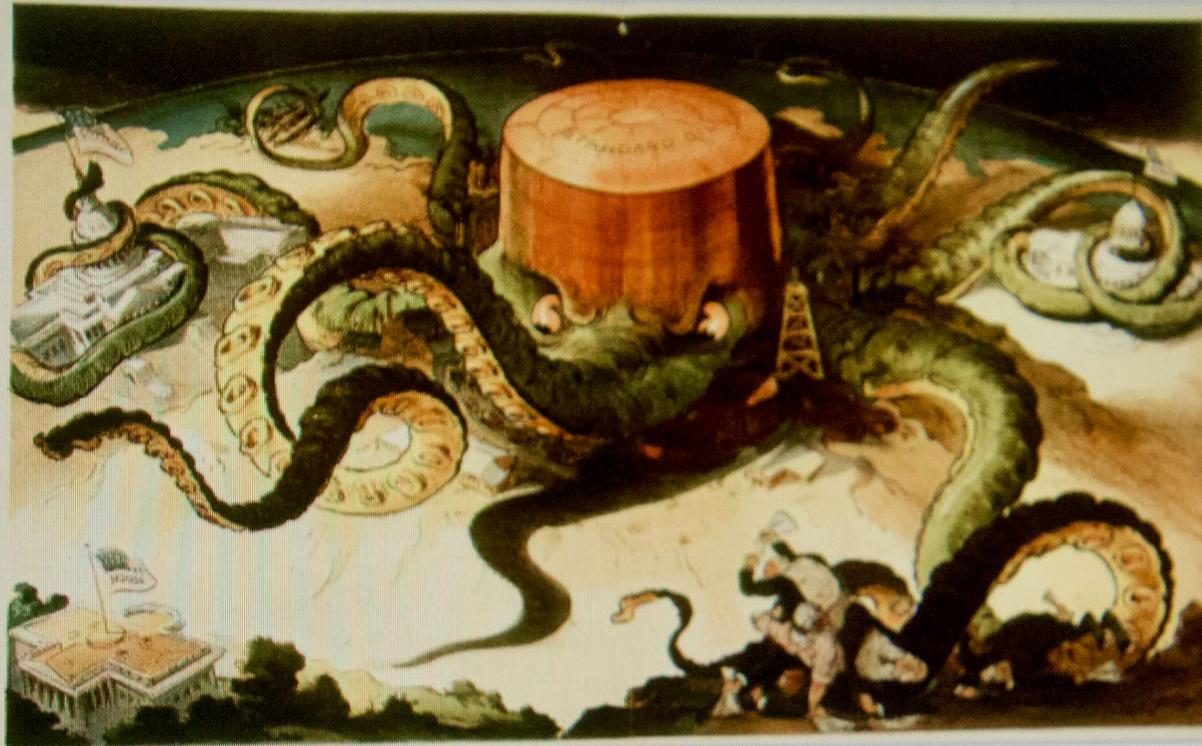
The richest man in the Gilded age

- Rockefeller made his immense riches from monopolizing America's oil industry (Standard Oil).
- The consortium colluded with the railroads to monopolize oil delivery, prompting competitors to allow themselves to be bought by Standard Oil or forced to pay outrageous shipping costs that would drive them out of business. Those who stubbornly resisted were confronted with price wars.
- In 1881 Rockefeller and associates placed the stock of Standard Oil and its affiliates in other states under the control of a board of nine trustees, with Rockefeller as the head. They thus established the first major U.S. "trust" and set a pattern of organization for other monopolies.
- By 1890, the Rockefeller trust owned 90 % of the "petroleum production" in the U.S. that led to the passage of Sherman Antitrust Act that same year.

John D Rockefeller

1870s: The rise of John D Rockefeller





1904 depiction of an acquisitive and manipulative **Standard Oil** (founded by John D. Rockefeller) as an all-powerful octopus

Rockefeller turned his attention to charities and benevolence during 1890s

PHILANTHROPIST

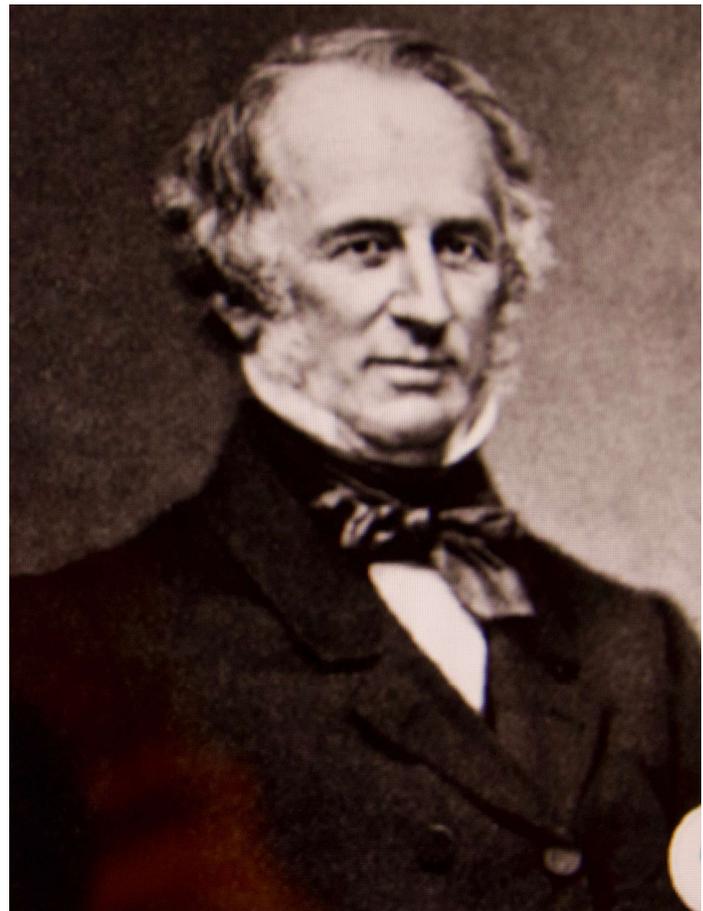
- He founded the University of Chicago in 1892.
- He created major philanthropic institutions, including the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (renamed Rockefeller University) in NYC-1901, General Education Board 1902.
- He established Rockefeller Foundation. He donated more than \$500 million dollars (half of wealth), in his life time.

1880s: Rockefeller ignores a beggar



Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt

1. Shipping and Railroad magnate.
2. Quit school at age 11, in 1810 purchased his first boat with money borrowed from his parents- ferrying passengers between Staten Island and NYC.
3. In the war of 1812- he enlarged his operation to a small fleet with which he supplied government outputs around the city.
4. He formed a company to transport passengers and goods from NYC and New Orleans to San Francisco via Nicaragua. With enormous demand for passage to the West Coast brought about by the gold rush, Vanderbilt's Accessory Transit Co. proved a huge success and at age 36, he was multi-millionaire.



Cornelius Vanderbilt

5) By the 1850's he turned his attention to railroads, buying up so much stock in New York and Harlem Railroads and by 1863 he owned the line.

6) He later acquired the Hudson River Railroad and the NY Central Railroad- consolidated in 1869. He added the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad in 1873- offered the first rail service from NYC to Chicago.

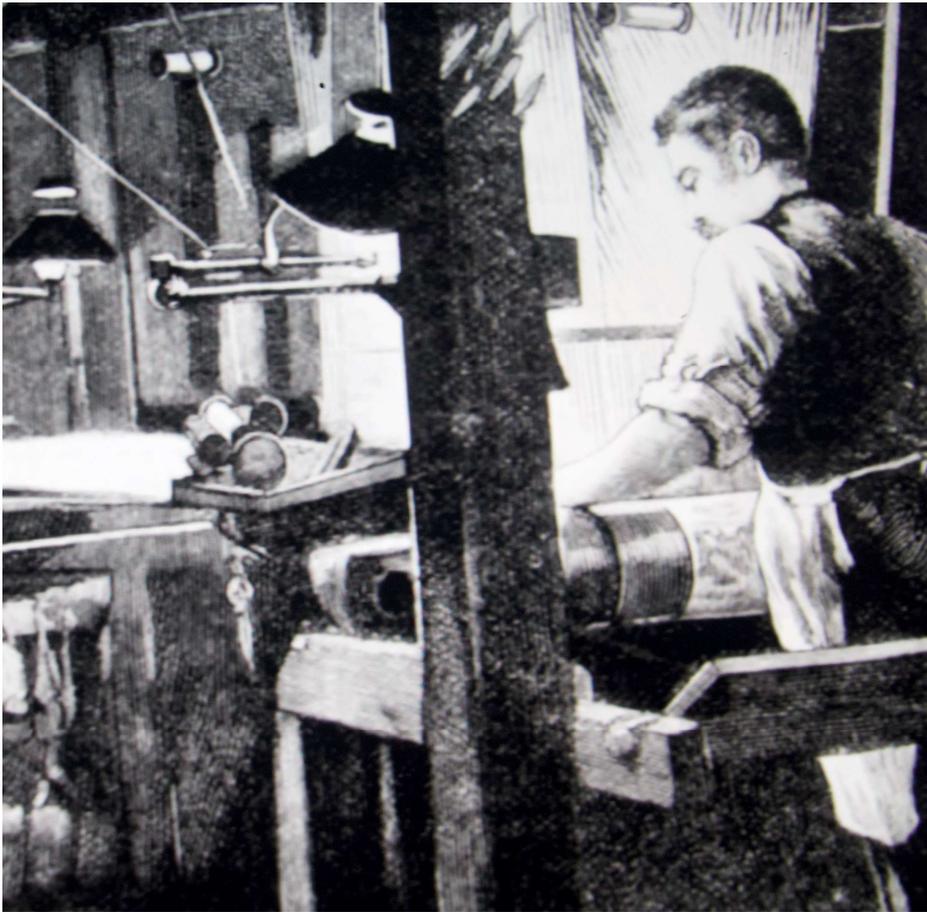
7) Although not interested in Philanthropy- he gave \$ 1 million to Central University of Nashville, Tennessee (later Vanderbilt University).



Grand Central Station, Fourth Avenue and Forty-Second Street, New York.

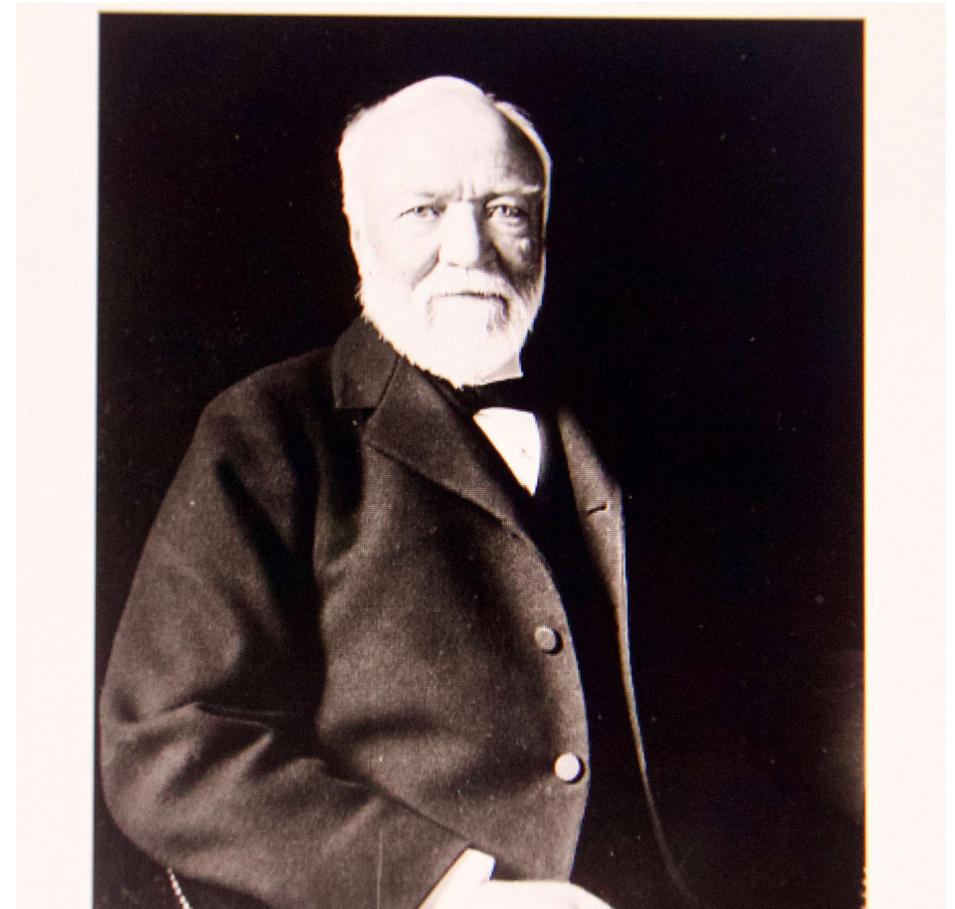
Grand Central Depot in New York City, opened in 1871

Andrew Carnegie's family



ANDREW CARNEGIE

- Scottish-born American. At age 12, he worked in a cotton factory, educating himself by reading, writing and attending night school.
- At 14, became messenger in a telegraph office, caught the notice of Thomas Scott, superintendent of PA Railroad, made Carnegie his personal secretary and at age 34, took over as superintendent.
- He invested in the railroads, blast furnaces, the union iron mills and Pittsburg locomotive.
- During his visit to UK he came to meet steelmakers. Foreseeing future demand for iron and steel, he left PA Railroad and started managing Keystone Bridge Co.
- At age 38, he began concentrating on steel, founded the J. Edgar Thompson Steel Works, which eventually evolved into the Carnegie Steel Co. In the 1870's Carnegie's new company built the first steel plants in the U.S. Other innovations followed that made productions more efficient, he purchased coke fields and iron-ore deposits that furnished raw materials for steelmaking.
- In 1889 Carnegie's vast holdings were consolidated into the Carnegie Steel Company that dominated the American steel industry. In 1890- the American steel industry's output surpassed that of Great Britain.



Andrew Carnegie

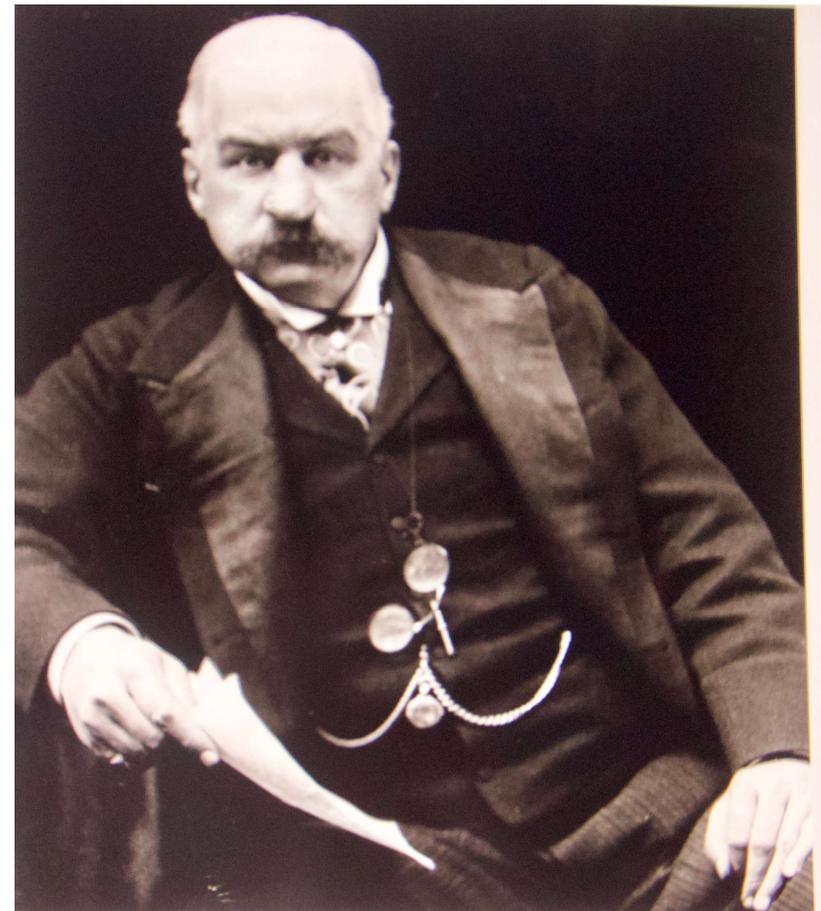
- Carnegie wrote frequently about political and social matters. His famous essay “ Gospel of Wealth”- this doctrine held that a man who accumulates great wealth has a duty to use his surplus wealth for “the improvement of mankind” in philanthropic causes. A man who dies rich dies disgraced.
- He donated 95% of his wealth which amount to \$ 350 million various charities, the largest was Carnegie Corporation of NY.



J P MORGAN

J. P. Morgan

- Started his career as accountant with the NY banking firm of Dabney, Morgan and Co., and in 1871 became a partner in the NYC firm of Drexel, Morgan and Company- became the predominant source of US government financing. In 1895, largely through Morgan's ability, was reorganized as J.P. Morgan and Company- one of the most powerful banking houses in the world.
- He arranged the agreement of two largest railroads in the country, the NY Central railroad and Pennsylvania railroads to avoid destructive rate war.
- He extended his influence to lines based in PA, Ohio and other rail lines in the country, including Southern Railroad, Erie Railroad and the Northern Pacific. He helped to achieve railroad stability price and discourage chaotic competition. Became world's most powerful railroad magnate controlling about 5,000 miles of American Railroad in 1902.

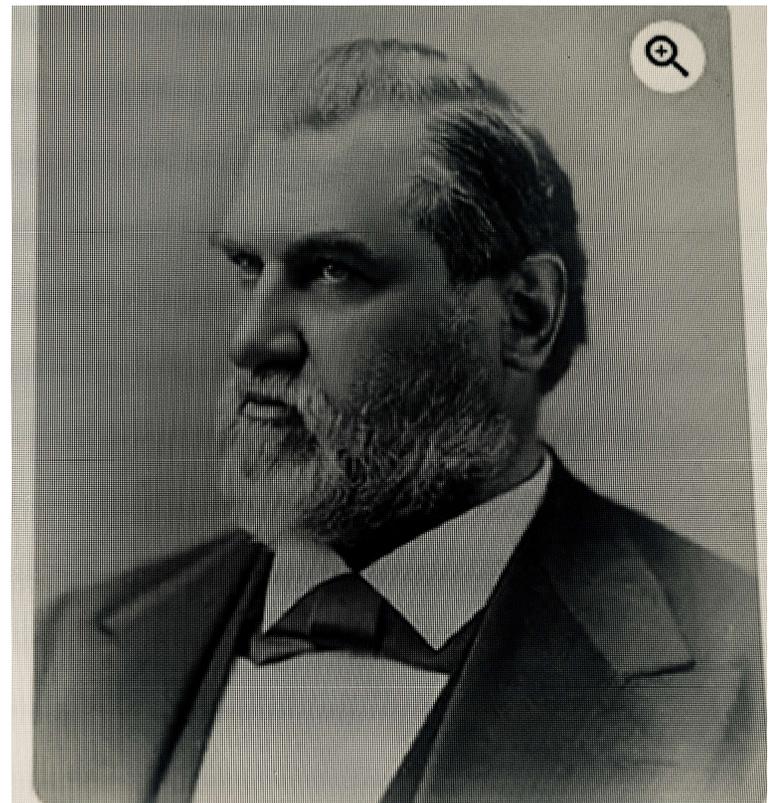


J P Morgan

- In 1891, he arranged the merger of Edison General Electric and Thompson-Houston electric co. to form General Electric (GE).
- During the depression that followed the panic of 1893, Morgan formed a syndicate that resupplied the US government's depleted gold reserve with \$62 million in gold in order to relieve the Treasury crisis.
- He financed the Federal Steel Co. and in 1901 joined in merging with the giant Carnegie Steel Company and other steel companies to form the United States Steel Corporation, which was the world's first billion-dollar corporation.
- He was also involved with the International Mercantile Marine- amalgamation of transatlantic shipping lines including White Star that own the Titanic. He booked on maiden voyage of Titanic but was forced to cancel because of an illness.
- Through a system of interlocking memberships so the board of companies he reorganized or influenced, Morgan and his banking house achieved a top-heavy concentration of control over some of nations corporation and financial institution.
- He donated \$millions to charities and public institution. He gave art collections to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, American Museum of Natural History, American Academy in Rome and Yale University.

Leland Stanford: Senator and Governor of California

1. He was co-owner and president of the Central Pacific Railroad and was instrumental along with the Union Pacific Railroad to create the first Transcontinental Railroad that met at the Promontory, Utah in 1869.
2. He played major in railroad development throughout California and the Southwest.
3. He and his wife Jane, founded Stanford University in 1885.



Leland Stanford Leland Stanford, c. 1890.

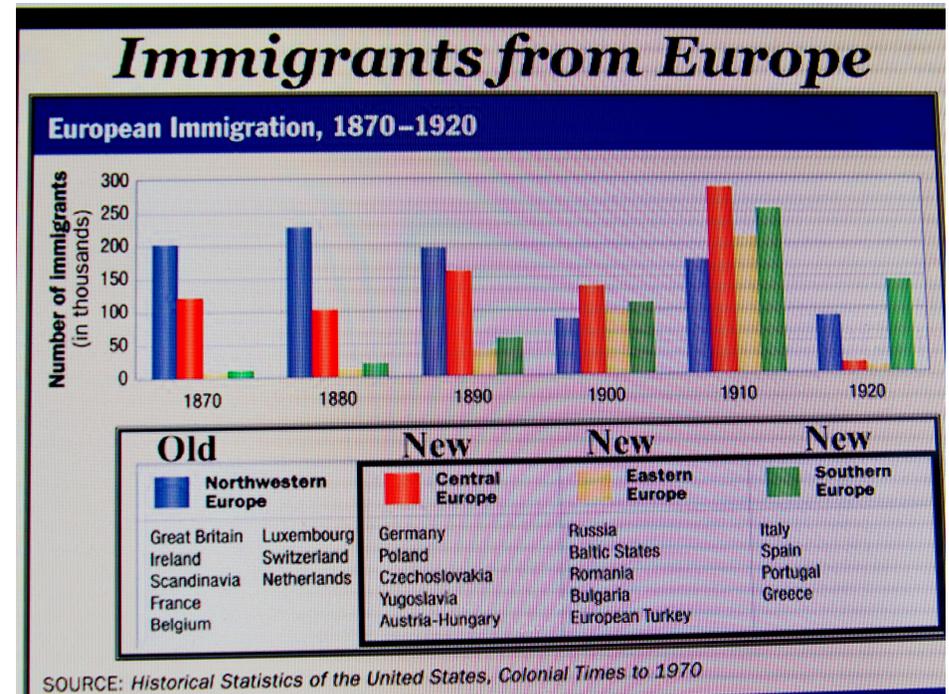
Other Notable Robber Barons in the Gilded Age

1. ANDREW MELLON
2. HENRY FLAGLER
3. HENRY HUTTLESTON ROGERS
4. MEYER GUGGENHEIM
5. JACOB SCHIFF
6. CHARLES CROCKER
7. Jay Gould
8. James Fisk

AMERICA: NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

Why did immigrants come to America in the Gilded Age?

- Immigrants flocked to the U.S., primarily seeking economic opportunities and escaping difficult conditions in their home countries.
- The American Dream: The U.S. was viewed as a land where hard work could lead to prosperity and upward mobility.
- Higher Wages: especially for skilled workers than those in many European countries.
- Escape from Difficult Conditions: Poverty and Famine; Religious and Political Persecution; and War and Instability.



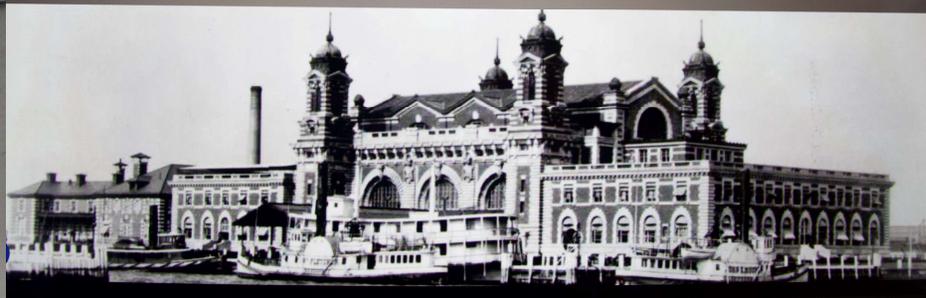
During the Gilded Age- Ellis Island was the main immigration station in the U.S.

While most passed through relatively quickly,
some were detained for various reasons.

From 1892-1924, 12 million immigrants were processed.
On the average process took approximately 3-7 hours



The new facility on Ellis Island began receiving immigrants on January 1, 1892. Annie Moore, a teenage girl from Ireland, accompanied by her two younger brothers, made history as the very first immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island. Over the next 62 years, more than 12 million immigrants would arrive in the United States via Ellis Island.



ELLIS ISLAND

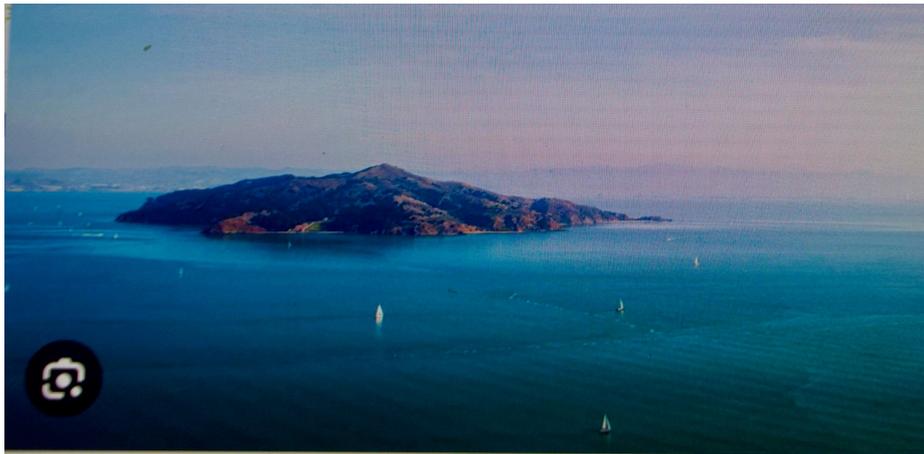
Doctors primarily checked for contagious diseases, like trachoma, tuberculosis and diphtheria. Other health conditions including poor physique, pregnancy and mental disability.

Arriving Passengers



Angel Island in San Francisco Bay- Ellis Island of the West

Played prominent role during Gilded Age: Processing of Asian immigrants, especially Chinese



Angel Island: The US's little-known 'Ellis Island of the West'

Holding Station for Asian Immigrants



Angel Island — Ellis Island's Racist Uncle that We Don't Like to Talk About - Solow, Hartnett and Galvan...

Asian immigrants awaits processing



Who suffered most during the Gilded Age?

- **Factory Workers:** Immigrant workers toiled in dangerous factories and sweatshops, enduring long hours for minimal pay and experiencing frequent job insecurity.
- Immigrants often unskilled and eager to work, were frequently exploited by employers who offered low wages and poor working conditions.
- As immigration increased in cities, poverty rose as well. Tenements spread across the city landscapes, teeming with crime and filth.
- The poorest crowded into low-cost housing such as Five Points and Hell's Kitchen neighborhood in New York. These areas were overrun with notorious criminal gangs such as the Five Point Gang and the Bowery Boys.

Many families struggled to make ends meet- low wages insufficient to support families



1890s: ...and families had to work extremely hard to get by



Crowded neighborhood market- New York City

- This crowded neighborhood served as market place. This horse-drawn era, streets were unpaved and covered with dirt or gravel. This produced uneven wear, and opened hazards for pedestrian and dangerous potholes for bicycles.
- Manhattan alone had 130,000 horses in 1900, pulling streetcars, delivery wagons, private carriages, and leaving waste behind.



Child Labor

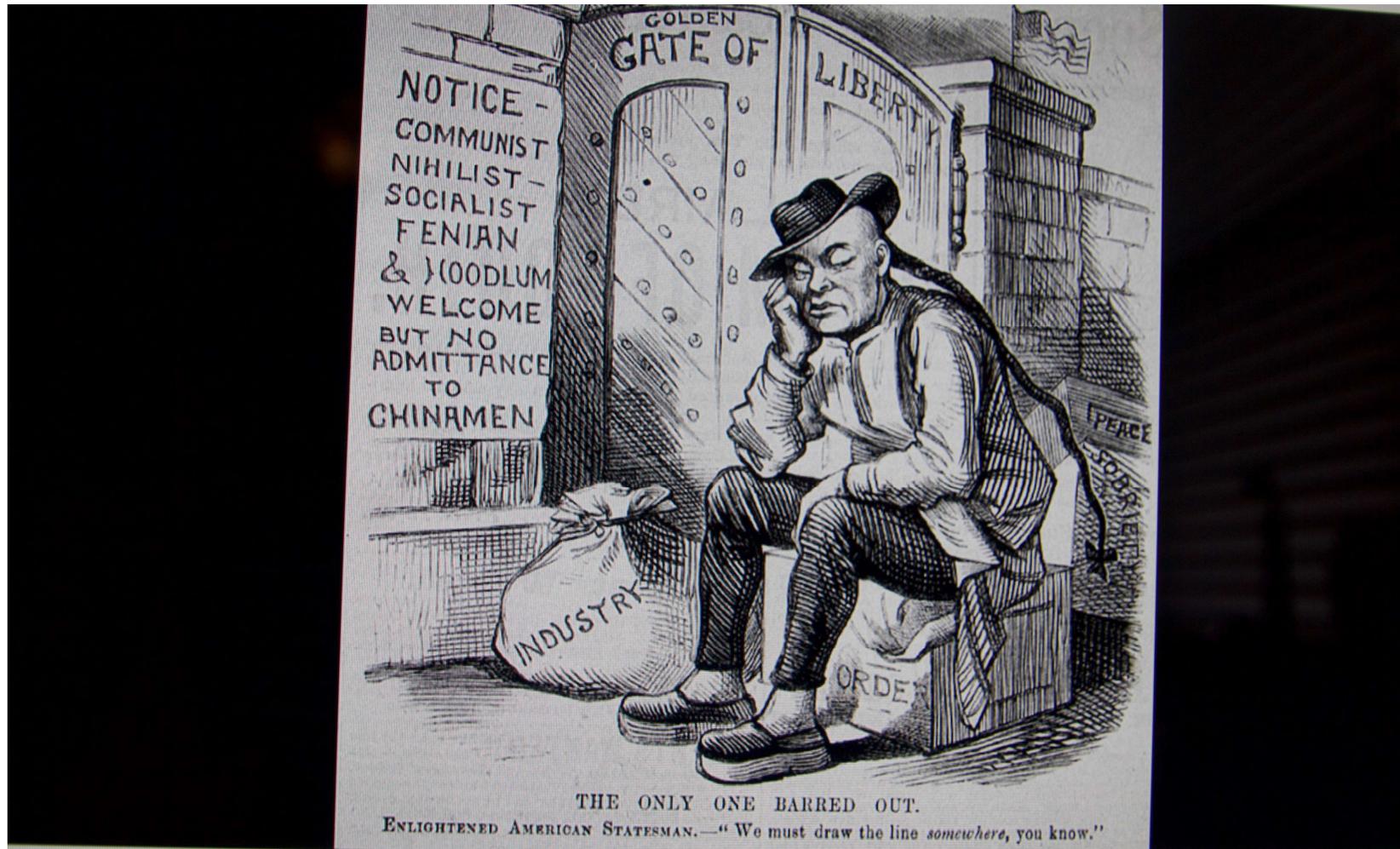
2. In an Era Before Labor Laws, Children Like These Worked Long Hours in Dangerous Conditions



CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

1. Reason for Immigration: Chinese suffered economic hardship due to growing British dominance over China after Britain defeated China in the Opium War of 1839-1842.
2. They worked in the gold mines, agricultural jobs and factory works, especially in the garment industry. These immigrants were disliked by the majority of U.S. citizens due their different culture and threat of lower wages. Chinese were willing to work for lower wages.
3. Due to discrimination and unwelcome, they established "Chinatown." The European immigrants thought of the Chinese as less than human.
4. Twelve thousand Chinese immigrants constructed the Central Pacific Railroad side of the Transcontinental Railroad- with them, making up the majority of the workforce. Many of these workers risked their lives and perished during the harsh winter and dangerous working condition.
5. They faced prejudice, lower wages and social isolation.
6. The CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT OF 1882: passed by Congress and signed by President Chester Arthur. Reasons: Public fear of Chinese influence in the labor market and economy; prejudice and public perception of these immigrants racially inferior and, inability to assimilate into the American culture.
7. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 lasted for 61 years- repealed by 1943 Magnuson Act- was largely driven by wartime consideration, as U.S. and China were allies in World War II.

CHINESE EXCLUSION



THE ONLY ONE BARRED OUT.
ENLIGHTENED AMERICAN STATESMAN.—“ We must draw the line *somewhere*, you know.”

a Chinese man being barred entry to the "Golden Gate of Liberty". The caption reads, "We must draw the line *somewhere*, you know."

Japanese Immigration

- After the Meiji Restoration in 1868 (end of Tokugawa Shogunate and restoration of Imperial Power), Japan underwent rapid urbanization and industrialization- brought about great social disruption and agricultural decline.
- The first recorded immigration of Japanese was in 1868 when 150 workers emigrated to Hawaii to work in sugar plantation.
- Japanese immigrants were later attracted to the mainland labor opportunities, particularly in the West Coast, due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. While many Japanese found success in various industries, like the Chinese, they also faced significant discrimination and prejudice.
- Between 1886-1911, there were 400,000 left Japan and emigrated to the United States- Hawaii and America's West Coast.
- Resentment, prejudice and intolerance toward non-Western European immigrants, Immigration Act of 1924 was enacted. This legislation significantly reduced immigration from Japan until 1952, when an allotment of 100 immigrants per year was designated.

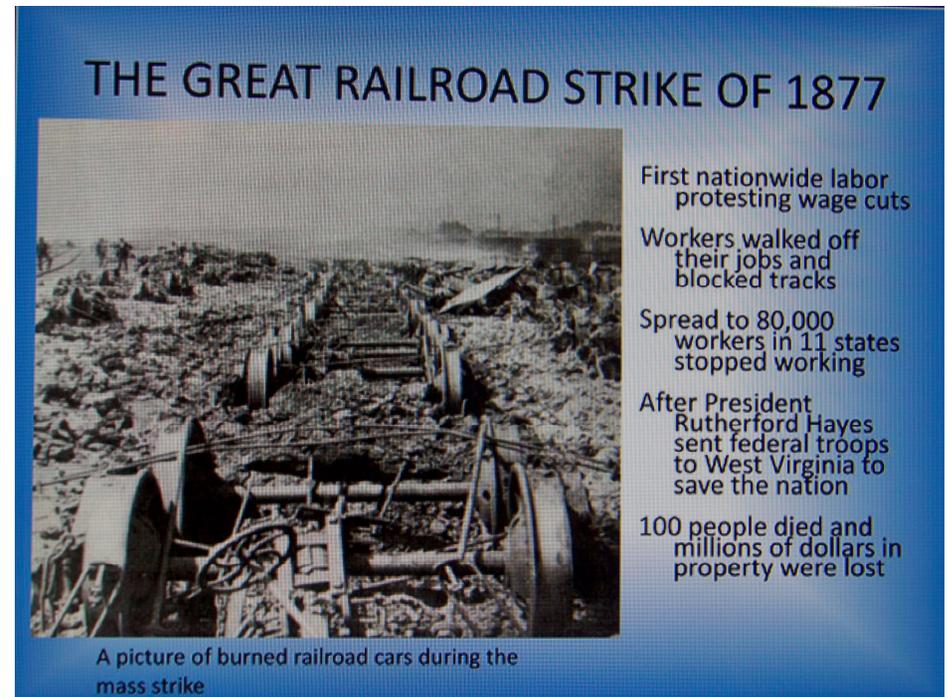
Labor Unrest and Rise of Labor Unions

- Craft-oriented labor unions: such as carpenters, printers, shoemakers and cigar makers grew steadily during the Gilded Age. They blocked women, blacks and Chinese, but welcome most European Immigrants.
- The railroads had their own separate unions. They struck in 1877- “The Great Railroad Strike of 1877.”

GREAT RAILROAD STRIKE OF 1877

Causes of the Strike

- The strikes were precipitated by wage cuts announced by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads, second cut in 8 months. At the time the country was in the fourth year of a prolonged economic depression after the panic of 1873.
- Railway work was already poorly paid and dangerous.
- The railroad companies had taken the advantage of the economic troubles to largely break the nascent trade unions.

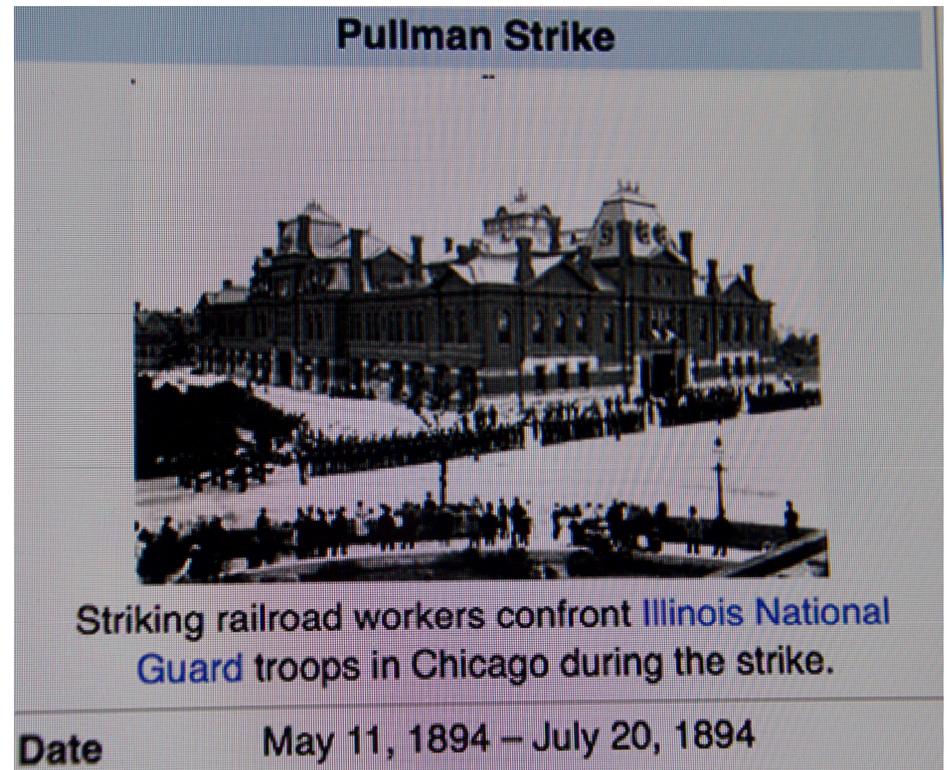


Labor Unrest and Labor Unions

- Strikes organized by the labor unions became routine in 1880's as the gap between rich and poor widened. There were 37,000 strikes from 1881 to 1905. The largest were in the building trades, followed by coal miners.
- One of the most dramatic strike was the 1894 Pullman Strike, a coordinated effort to shut down the national railroad system led by Eugene V. Debs. He was not supported by the railroad unions brotherhood.

DRAMATIC-1894 PULLMAN STRIKE

- Led by Eugene V. Debs, the upstart American Railway Union struck in 1894-not supported by the established brotherhoods.
- The unions defied federal court orders to stop blocking the mail trains. President Cleveland used Army troops to get the trains moving.
- The ARU faded away and the established railroad brotherhoods survived but avoided strikes.



The Period saw several financial crises called PANIC

Panic of 1873

1. The Panic of 1873 was triggered by the failure of the investment firm Jay Cooke and Co., which was heavily involved in railroad construction.
2. This failure, coupled with European stock market crashes and overspeculation in railroads, led to chain reaction of bank failures and economic downturn.

Panic of 1893

- The Panic of 1893 was caused by combination of factors including decline in gold reserves, financial crisis in Europe, and bankruptcy of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Co., defaulting on its loan served as major trigger.
- The McKinley Tariff of 1890 reduced international trade, and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, which required the Treasury to purchase silver, further strained gold reserves.

Technological Advances-World Leader in Applied Technology

1. From 1860 to 1890, 500,000 patents were issued for new inventions.
2. George Westinghouse invented air brakes for trains- making them both safer and faster.
3. Theodore Vail established the American Telephone and Telegraph Company and built great communications network.
4. Elisha Otis developed the elevator, allowing construction of skyscrapers and the concentration of ever greater populations in urban centers.

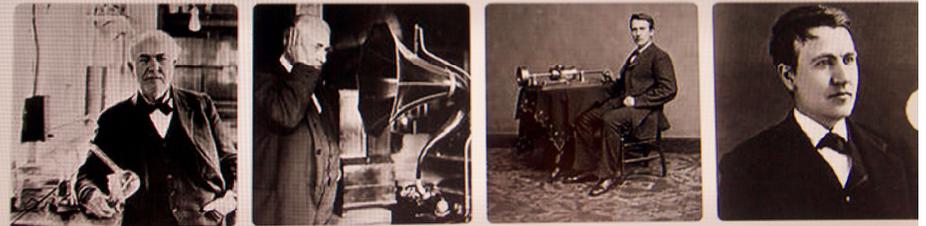
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Prolific Inventor of All Time

1. He held over 1,000 patents.
2. “Anything that won’t sell, I don’t want to invent.”
3. He invented electric light bulb, phonograph, and motion picture camera, revolutionized industries and society.
4. Edison’s most famous invention, the incandescent light bulb, dramatically altered how people lives and works extending work hours and new forms of entertainments.

THOMAS ALVA EDISON: Genius is 1 % Inspiration and 99 % Perspiration!!

Mar 19, 2025 · Thomas Edison (born February 11, 1847, Milan, Ohio, U.S.—died October 18, 1931, West Orange, New Jersey) was an American inventor who, singly or jointly, held a world-record...



Famous Mansions and Buildings- Gilded Age

- Rapid urbanization of the North following the Civil War. New York, Chicago and Philadelphia led the way.
- Louis Sullivan became a noted architect by using steel frames to construct skyscrapers for the first time while pioneering the idea of “form follows function”.
- Chicago became the center of the skyscraper race, starting with the ten-story Home Insurance Building in 1885- by William Le Baron Jenney.



The [Home Insurance Building](#) in Chicago became the world's first skyscraper when it was built in 1885.

Mansions owned by Cornelius Vanderbilt and his wife Gwynne

The Breakers- one of the most lavish mansions in the Gilded Age

Newport, Rhode Island



Biltmore house, Ashville, N.C. built by George Vanderbilt



TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND CONTRASTING FIGURES IN GILDED AGE

CAROLINE SCHERMERHORN ASTOR

- Queen of the “Old money” society. Her prestige came from a prominent old Dutch “Knickerbocker” family giving her a superior pedigree that even surpassed her husband’s Astor real-estate fortune.
- She was undisputed arbiter of high society, famously creating “The Four Hundred,” exclusive list of people deemed acceptable to attend her social functions.
- As the traditional society leader, Mrs. Astor represented the values of convention, stability, and proper form. Divorce was a social scandal she would not have risked. She was the gatekeeper and conservative matriarch of the establishment.
- LEGACY: Mrs. Astor legacy was tied to the Gilded Age social conventions and when she retired, the rigid social order began to fade.

ALVA SMITH VANDERBILT

- A determined “new money” social climber, used her ambition and vast wealth to challenge and eventually infiltrate Mrs. Astor’s inner circle.
- Her wealth came from her marriage to William Kissam Vanderbilt, grandson of Cornelius.
- Alva was a social outsider who sought validation and acceptance for her family. She challenged Astor’s rigid, exclusive social order by using her wealth to demand entry, rather than waiting for invitation.
- LEGACY: Alva became a prominent suffragist, using her wealth and influence for the women’s right movement. She helped found the National Woman’s Party and funded its efforts.

Caroline Schermerhorn Astor- “Mrs. Astor”

The young Mrs. Astor to be



Portrait of Caroline Webster Schermerhorn in 1860

Queen of the Gilded Age



Mrs. Astor residence

350 5th
Ave. and 34th St.



5th Ave and 65th St.



Mrs. Astor's guests on her Grand Ball, "The 400 elite"



The Iron Lady

**Alva Smith Vanderbilt married to
Wm. Kissam Vanderbilt**



**Vanderbilt mansion at 660 Fifth
Avenue, Manhattan**



1883 costume ball for 1000 guests

Alva Vanderbilt-costumed for her 1883 ball, dressed as venetian noble



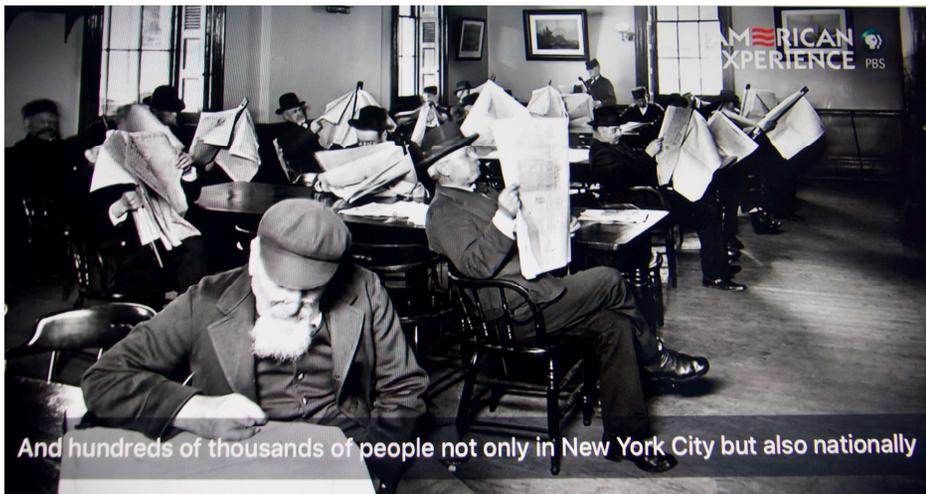
The *Petit Chateau* in 1886.

The grand ball was the talk not just in New York, but the entire nation



Narration: On the day of the ball, March 26th, 1883, New York was abuzz.

The public was so fascinated and captivated by the “grand ball event”



Politics in the Gilded Age: Historian Henry Adams- The period was poor in purpose and barren in results

National Politics

- The Democrats and Republicans had intense competition over control of offices, which were the rewards for party activists.
- Very high turnover during presidential election reaching 90 % in the Northeast.
- In the southern states, lingering resentment over the Civil War remained and meant that much of the South would vote Democratic.
- The Third Party- concern on issues such as prohibitionists, labor unions and farmers.
- Major Scandal- Credit Mobilier Scandal reached Congress in 1872 and disgraced the White House during the Grant Administration (1869-1877).

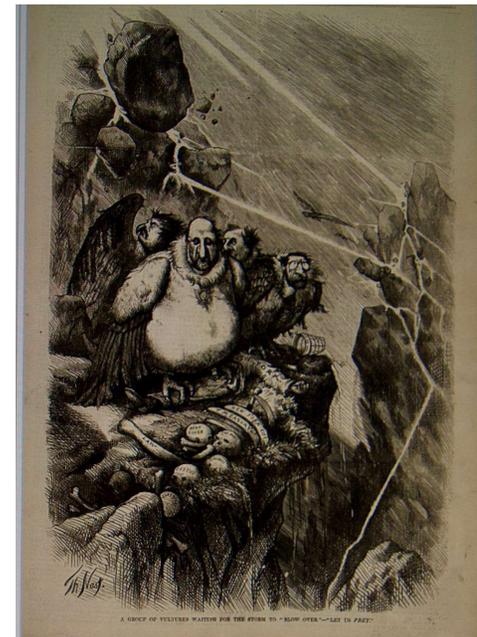
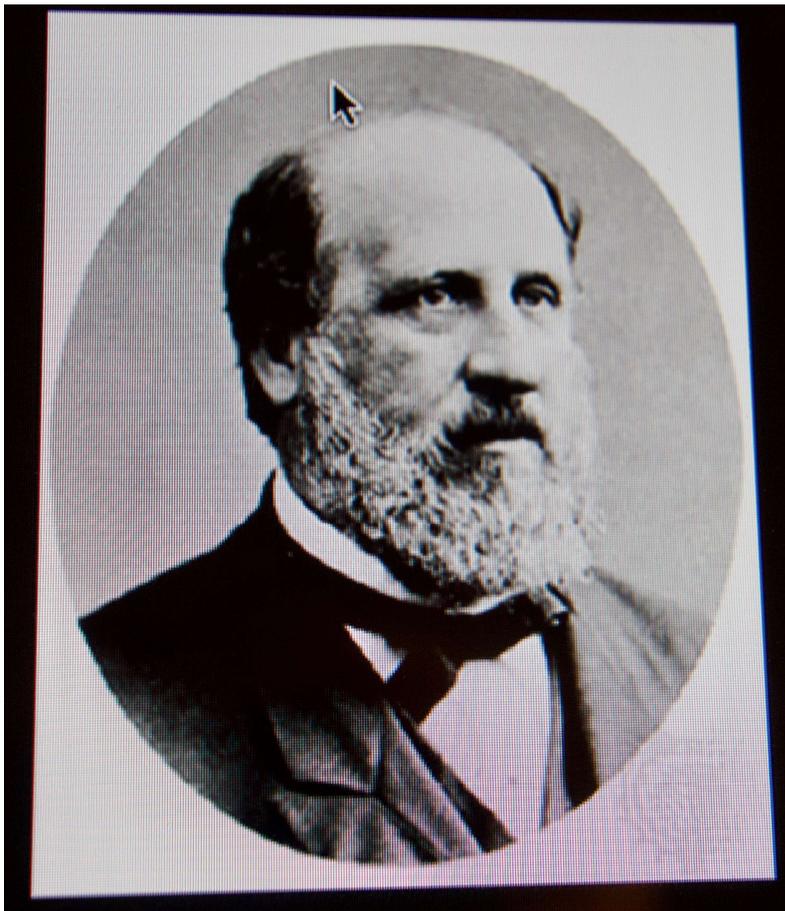
Metropolitan Area Politics

- The major metropolitan area underwent rapid urbanization and as result lucrative contracts and jobs to award.
- Scandals and Corruption- was rampant, as business leaders spent significant amount of money ensuing that the government did not regulate the activities of the big business. Such corruption was so commonplace in the N.Y. state legislator.
- The Political Machines and Spoil System- winning party distributed most local, state and national government jobs.
- All the above exemplified by TAMMANY HALL led by Democratic Boss- William Tweed.
- Historian Allan Nevins deplored “The Moral Collapse in Government and Business,” both local and national level.

Tammany Hall: main political machine of the Democratic party in NYC and State

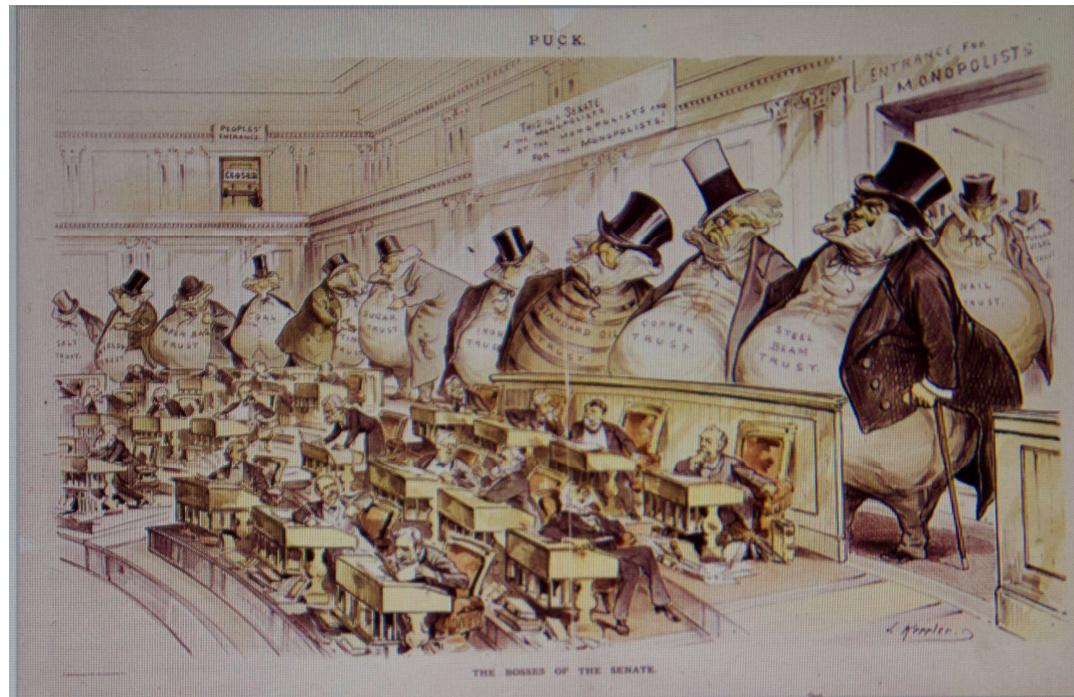
William Tweed: Head of the Tammany Hall political machine

Helped immigrants most notably the Irish, rise in American politics in the 1850s' to the 1960s'



A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to "Blow Over" – "Let Us Prey," a cartoon denouncing the corruption of New York's **Boss Tweed** and other Tammany Hall figures, drawn in 1871 by **Thomas Nast** and published in *Harper's Weekly*

The Congress was Corrupt: Both Houses of Congress own by Business



"The Bosses of the Senate" (1889). Reformers like the cartoonist [Joseph Keppler](#) depicted the Senate as controlled by the giant moneybags, who represented the nation's financial trusts and monopolies.

Laws enacted by Congress during the Gilded Age

1. Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883.
2. The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. Act aimed to regulate railroad rates and prevent discrimination against small shippers, making the first instance of federal regulation of a specific industry.
3. The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. This law outlawed monopolies and trusts, aiming to promote fair competition and prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few large businesses.
4. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.
5. Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896: The SCOTUS by a vote of 7-1 (one justice did not participate), advanced the controversial “separate but equal” doctrine for assessing the constitutionality of racial segregation. It gave constitutional sanction to laws designed to achieve racial segregation by means of separate and supposedly equal public facilities and services for African Americans and whites???. It served as controlling judicial precedent until it was overturned by the SCOTUS in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954.

SCOTUS- Overturned Brown v. Board of Education, 1954



Brown v. Board of Education (From left)
Lawyers George E.C. Hayes, Thurgood
Marshall, and James M. Nabrit, Jr.,... ..(more)

THE PRESIDENCY IN THE GILDED AGE

1. The Presidency was at an all-time low in power and influence.
2. The American Presidents who resided from the White House from the end of the Civil War until 1890s' are sometimes called "THE FORGETTABLE PRESIDENTS OR FORGOTTEN PRESIDENTS."
3. The inaction of Gilded Age presidents during economic crisis- seemed to have matter most. These executives are often dismissed as weak and ineffective non-entities.

Presidents of the Gilded Age



U.S. Grant 1869-
1877



Rutherford B. Hayes
1877-1881



James Garfield
1881



Chester A.
Arthur 1881-
1885



Grover Cleveland
1885-1889 and 1893
-1897



Benjamin Harrison
1889-1893



William McKinley
1897-1901

“ THE FORGOTTEN PRESIDENTS “ : Due to their perceived lack of significant impact and, the prevalence of political corruption and scandals during their terms.

THE PRESIDENCY: Popular Legend- they were “dud Presidents.”

1. Andrew Johnson- was hated and was impeached (1865-1869).
2. Ulysses Grant- president discredited (1869- 1877).
3. Hayes- a president defied (1877- 1881).
4. Garfield- president defunct (1881- died in office).
5. Arthur- a president dismissed (1881- 1885).
6. Cleveland- a president denied (1885- 1889), (1893-1897).
7. Harrison- president derided (1889- 1893).
8. William McKinley- was a good president (1897- 1901), (1901- died in office). Assassinated, 9/14/1901, Buffalo, New York.

Ulysses S Grant- Eighteenth President

Grant as President

- He was unprepared for presidency. He had not held a single elected office and was totally naive to the workings of Washington.
- He relied heavily on the advice of insiders who were stealing public money.
- His private secretary worked with officials in the Treasury Dept. to steal money raised from the tax on whiskey.
- Many members of his Administration were implicated in the CREDIT MOBILIER SCANDAL; including the VP, James Garfield, senators and congressmen, which defrauded the American government public fund..
- President Grant- was above these scandals, but lacked the political skill to control his staff or replace them with officers of integrity.

Hero of Civil War

Ulysses S. Grant was the 18th president of the United States, serving from 1869 to 1877. In 1865, as commanding general, Grant led the Union Army to victory in the American Civil War.

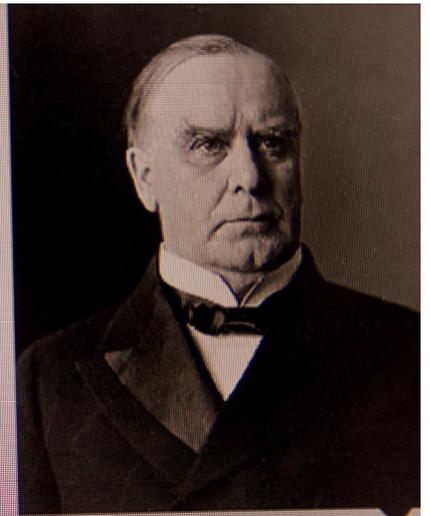


William McKinley: Twenty-Fifth President

Best President in the Gilded Age

1. His presidency was a defining moment in American history, particularly in the area of foreign policy and evolution of modern presidency.
2. In 1897- Beginning of Klondike Gold Rush, completion of Boston Subway and signing of Dingley Tariff Law.
3. 1898- Annexation Of Hawaii. He successfully led the country through the Spanish-American War and oversaw a period of American expansionism (imperialism). He annexed the Philippines by virtue of the Treaty of Paris- Dec. 10, 1898. Added bonus: acquired Puerto and Guam from Spain.
4. 1899- Open Door policy with China; US attend First Hague Conference.
5. 1900- Currency Act; U.S. participated in Boxer Rebellion at Peking,
6. 1901- Platt Amendment; McKinley assassinated in Buffalo, NY, 09/06/1901; Theodore Roosevelt became president.

William McKinley was the 25th president of the United States, serving from 1897 until his assassination in 1901. A member of the Republican Party, he led a realignment that made Republicans largely dominant in the industrial states and nationwide for decades. He



EPILOGUE

- America underwent significant transformation, notably in its economy and society.
- Rapid industrialization led to economic growth and technological advancements, and America became the leading industrial nation in the world, but also resulted in widening inequality and social unrest.
- Immigration surged as people sought opportunities and better life, while nation's infrastructure, particularly railroads, saw considerable expansion.
- The Gilded Age witnessed widespread corruption, particularly in government and businesses, as well as challenges related to labor conditions and social issues.
- America became "imperialist," acquired a large overseas empire.
- It was also transformed by the values of a new industrial and urban society.
- America was and is still is the most Powerful and Richest country in the world.

Gilded Age has Returned: 2025

- Photos left to right: 1) Mark Zuckerberg, 2) Andrew Carnegie, 3) Elon Musk, 4) John D Rockefeller and 5) Jeff Bezos



The Oval Office





UK-PM Keir Starmer and President Trump.

President Trump and President Biden

Hover over the photo



GILDED PHOTO FRAMES

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, President Trump, Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State, Marco Rubio