

**CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: BECOMING A MODERN SOCIETY:
AMERICA IN THE GILDED AGE, 1877–1900**

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

- I. The Rise of the City
 - A. To the Cities
 - B. The Emergence of Ethnic Enclaves
 - C. The Troubled City
 - D. “Boss Rule”: The Political Machine

- II. A Search for Solutions
 - A. The Nativist Impulse
 - B. A Different View: Urban Reforms
 - C. Capturing a New View of Poverty
 - D. Living Among the Poor: Settlement Houses
 - E. The White City

- III. New Habits, Roles, and Lifestyles
 - A. The New Urban Landscape
 - B. New Roles and Expectations for Women
 - C. New Forms of Leisure and Popular Culture
 - D. Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous

- IV. The Challenge from Below
 - A. Out of Touch Politics
 - B. The People’s Party
 - C. Industrial Conflict and Depression
 - D. The Election of 1896 and Political Realignment

Hundreds of thousands of people, including President Chester A. Arthur and countless dignitaries, participated in the joyful ceremonies marking the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge on May 23, 1883. Americans in the late nineteenth century celebrated the onset of the urban age. An astonishing sight and the very embodiment of the modern age, it was the world’s largest suspension bridge, a style made possible by the one product that in many ways defined the industrial revolution—steel. The bridge’s designer, German immigrant John Roebling, emphasized this transition to the modern age by using a stark contrast: he constructed the bridge’s twin towers out of the ancient building material stone) and formed them into gothic archways, a style reminiscent of the great medieval cathedrals of Europe.

The Brooklyn Bridge embodied the new urban and industrial era in ways beyond its cutting-edge technology and symbolic design. Workers who were either immigrants or the children of immigrants constructed the bridge. By connecting the nation’s largest city (New York) and third largest city (Brooklyn), a prelude to their consolidation into one city in 1898, the new bridge also symbolized rapid urban growth. Finally the bridge hinted at the emergence of a

new, more independent American woman. When Washington Roebling (who succeeded his father as chief engineer) fell gravely ill in 1872, his wife, Emily Warren Roebling, spent the next eleven years as the project's onsite manager.

The enthusiasm that attended the bridge's opening masked the grave problems that attended rampant urban growth. Indeed the era's name, the Gilded Age, reflected this notion that the amazing achievements of the period were like a thin gold layer that covered many unresolved social problems. The sections of New York and Brooklyn connected by the bridge, for example, were vast working-class immigrant districts beset by high rates of poverty, crime, and disease. Equally unseen in the immediate glow of the fireworks was the rising discontent among American workers over exploitation at the hands of employers and alienation from an unresponsive political system. Indeed dozens of men had died during the bridge's construction, and on several occasions workers went on strike. These sentiments and those of hard-pressed American farmers in the heartland would explode in the 1890s, leading to the emergence of the People's Party. The party eventually faded away, but not before establishing a reform agenda that would shape the Progressive Era (1900–1920).

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 17, students should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss the style of political campaigning popular in the United States during the late nineteenth century; describe election practices common in the United States during the late nineteenth century.
2. Explain the relative power the Democratic and Republican parties had in the federal government during the late nineteenth century.
3. Compare and contrast the characteristics of supporters of the Democratic and Republican parties at the turn of the century. Outline the policies and issues associated with each of the major parties.
4. List some of the major associations that became politically active at the turn of the century. Describe their agendas and how they attempted to use the political system to advance reform.
5. Describe the importance of the prohibition issue to the political development of American women.
6. List the factors that limited the efficiency and effectiveness of the president and Congress during the late nineteenth century.
7. Define the term *spoils system* and explain its strengths and weaknesses as a means of selecting officials for the federal bureaucracy.
8. Identify the Pendleton Civil Service Act and explain its impact on the quality of federal employees.

9. Explain the protective tariff as an issue reflecting regional as well as agrarian-industrial divisions at the turn of the century.
10. Define the term *laissez-faire* and explain how the Interstate Commerce Act and the Sherman Antitrust Act signaled the beginning of federal movement away from this policy.
11. Distinguish between the sound money policy and the inflationary monetary policy being debated at the turn of the century. Explain why bankers and businessmen supported the sound money policy and why farmers and miners supported the inflationary monetary policy.
12. Outline the provisions of the Bland-Allison Act and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and explain their impact on the money and credit issues of the late nineteenth century.
13. List the economic issues that sparked a crisis among farmers in the late nineteenth century.
14. Discuss efforts made by the Farmers' Alliance to remedy the ills facing farmers. Comment on the success of these efforts.
15. Discuss the political success of the Populist Party on the state and local level during the early 1890s. Comment on the regional variations of support for the Populists.
16. Explain the emergence of the Populist Party and describe the role it played in southern race relations.
17. Discuss the historical significance of the Omaha Platform.
18. Discuss the impact of the 1893 depression on American reform movements and on traditional American ideas regarding *laissez-faire*.
19. Identify Jacob Coxey and comment on the impact of the people's march on Washington, D.C.
20. Discuss the role of the Supreme Court in defining *laissez-faire* policy and how that role impacted reform efforts.
21. Discuss the importance of the gold and silver standards as issues in the presidential election of 1896.
22. Identify Mark Hanna and explain his role in the presidential election of 1896.
23. Discuss William Jennings Bryan's dilemma in the election of 1896. Define the Populist strategy of "fusing" with the Democrats, and comment on its success.

Key Terms & Definitions:

Gilded Age The name for the period 1877–1900 that suggested the amazing achievements of the period were like a thin gold layer that covered many unresolved social problems. (498)

ethnic enclaves Urban neighborhoods dominated by one particular immigrant group, often leading to names such as Little Germany and Little Italy. (501)

tenements Multiple family dwellings of four to six stories housing dozens of families that became the most common form of housing for poor city dwellers by the 1860s. (502)

political machines Powerful urban political organizations that mobilized large blocs of working-class and immigrant voters and often engaged in corrupt and illegal activity. (503)

settlement houses Institutions established in cities beginning in the 1880s and dedicated to helping the poor by providing a wide range of social and educational services. (510)

City Beautiful Movement A movement begun in the 1880s that advocated comprehensive planning and grand redesign of urban space to eliminate pollution and overcrowding. (510)

central business districts Sections of cities devoted exclusively to commercial enterprises such as banks, department stores, and the offices of corporations, accountants, lawyers, and other professions. (512)

suburbs Middle- and upper-class residential communities established just beyond a city's boundary but connected to the urban center by mass transit. (512)

women's suffrage The effort to obtain voting rights for women that eventually gained passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920). (513)

New Woman A phrase used to describe young women in the 1890s and early 1900s that reflected their rising levels of education, economic independence, and political and social activism. (514)

conspicuous consumption A term used to describe lavish displays of wealth by the rich, including construction of opulent mansions and hosting lavish balls.

People's Party A third party effort launched in 1890 by a coalition of farmer organizations, reformers, and labor unions and dedicated to curbing corporate power and increasing the voice of the masses in politics. (517)

farmers' alliances Organizations in the 1870s and 1880s dedicated to helping farmers struggling with rising costs and falling crop prices by advocating farmer cooperatives and laws to regulate banks and railroads. (520)

Coxey's Army A protest march from Ohio to Washington, D.C., in 1894 organized by Jacob Coxey to publicize demands for the federal government to alleviate the suffering brought on by the Panic of 1893. (523)

company town A town built and owned by a corporation and rented to its employees, reflecting both the corporation's desire to help their workers and to control them. (524)

Pullman strike A bitter strike that began on May 11, 1894, at the Pullman Palace Car Company and soon spread nationwide, paralyzing the railroad system. President Cleveland sent in federal troops and broke the strike. (524)

Study Questions:

How did the term Gilded Age reflect both the optimism and anxiety of the late nineteenth century? (498)

Why did so many people flock to American cities? (500)

Why did immigrants form ethnic enclaves in cities? (501)

What problems made life in tenement districts so difficult? (502)

What factors contributed to high rates of crime in cities? (503)

How did political machines gain the support of working-class and immigrant voters? (504)

Why did many Americans worry that the poor were receiving too much charity? (505)

What fears about immigrants fueled nativist sentiment? (506)

What steps did urban reformers take to improve the safety and liveability of cities? (507)

Why was the Pledge of Allegiance adopted in the 1890s? (508)

How did Jacob Riis's portrayal of the poor differ from traditional notions of poverty? (509)

What services did settlement houses provide the urban poor? (510)

How did the White City reflect an optimistic vision of the future of urban life? (511)

How did new modes of transportation promote the development of specialized urban and suburban districts? (512)

What trends contributed to a growing public activism among women? (513)

What was new about the "New Woman"? (514)

How did commercial interests shape the new forms of leisure in the Gilded Age? (515)

How did varied forms of leisure reflect class differences? (516)

How did the great displays of wealth in the Gilded Age represent a break with America's republican traditions? (517)

Why were election results in the Gilded Age so close? (518)

Why did Congress in this period fail to address major social issues? (519)

What grievances led to the rise of farmers' alliances? (520)

How did the People's Party platform reflect the concerns of farmers and industrial workers? (521)

Why did Carnegie's actions in the Homestead strike prompt critics to accuse him of hypocrisy? (522)

What did Coxey and his followers want from the federal government? (523)

What actions by Pullman prompted his workers to strike? (524)

How did President Cleveland justify using federal power to break the Pullman strike? (525)

Why did silver hold such political significance in the late nineteenth century? (526)

How did the election of 1896 lead to a major political realignment? (527)