

Period 6: 1865-1898

AP US History ■ Period 6

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What we will cover

- 1 Westward Expansion after the Civil War
- 2 The Rise of Industrial Capitalism
- 3 Labour in the Gilded Age
- 4 Migration and the Cities
- 5 The New Middle Class and Reform
- 6 Politics and the Populist Challenge



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.

But the same forces squeezed farmers: **consolidation in agricultural markets** left them facing high freight rates, expensive credit, and falling crop prices.

The final dispossession of American Indians

the shift in policy

federal policy moved **from treaties** to **reservations**, and then to forced assimilation

the Dawes Act

1887: broke communal land into individual allotments and sold the surplus

boarding schools

children removed from families to be stripped of language and custom

what drove it

railroads, mining, cattle and farming all demanded the land

the buffalo

its near-extirmination destroyed the economic basis of Plains life

The change from treaty-making to reservations is a change in **legal status**: from dealing with nations to administering wards. Say that and the analysis is made.



The Rise of Industrial Capitalism

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

- New **corporate structures** – trusts and holding companies – allowed **consolidation** 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** arguments: competition promoted growth, and government should stay out.

The Rise of Industrial Capitalism, continued

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

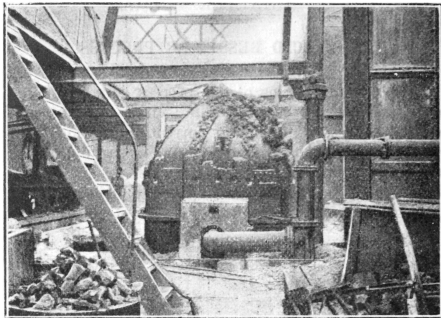


Fig. 30.—Bessemer Converter while Blowing.

a Bessemer converter blowing

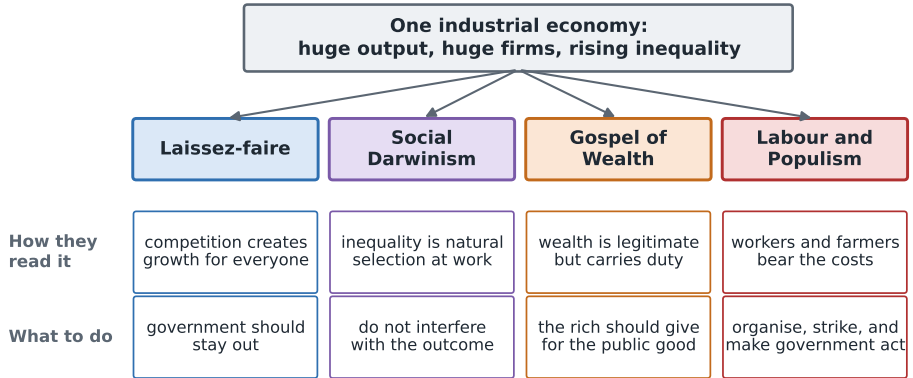


Competing answers to one economy

A **variety of perspectives** on the economy and labour developed.

Workers faced long hours, dangerous conditions, and wages that fell during downturns.

Competing answers to one economy, in detail



A **variety of perspectives** on the economy and labour developed.

Labour in the Gilded Age

A **variety of perspectives** on the economy and labour developed. Workers faced long hours, dangerous conditions, and wages that fell during downturns.

Strikes were frequent, often large, and frequently broken by state or federal force, which itself became an argument about the role of government.

The Knights of Labor and the AFL

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

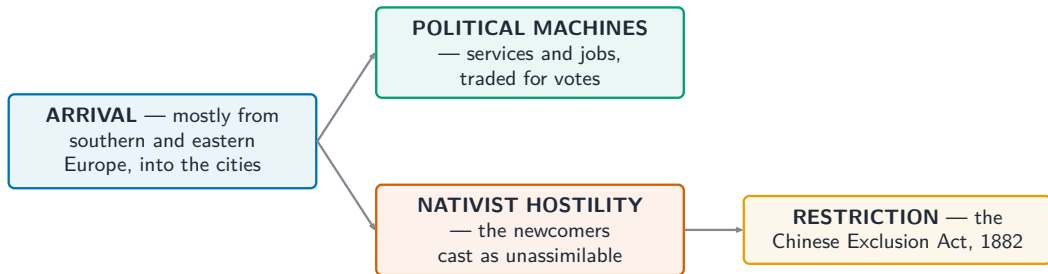


Migration and the Cities

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.

One arrival, two simultaneous responses



The machine and the nativist are responses to the **same** arrival, at the same time. Only one of them ends in a federal law



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.

- **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.

The city, the machine, and the argument over citizenship

political machines

in cities where access to power was unequally distributed, they provided jobs, housing help and services

the exchange

in return for votes – and with corruption alongside the real assistance

why they lasted

they did what no public institution yet did for new arrivals

cultural movements

both **buttressed** and **challenged** the social order – often the same movement doing each

the running argument

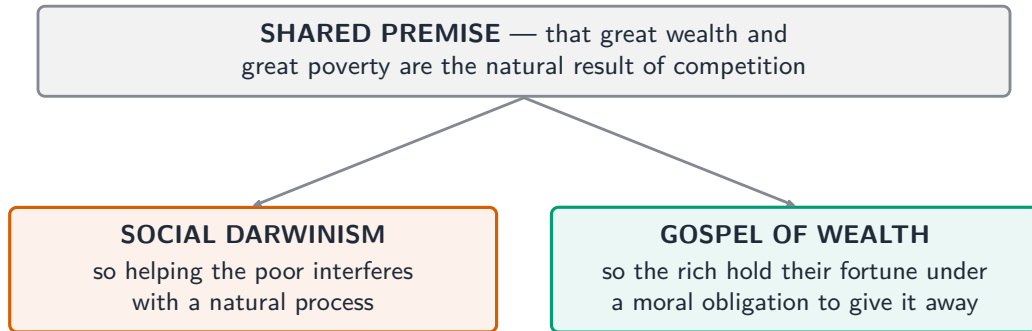
over **citizenship**, **race** and **the role of government**

whose rights

the question of which groups the Reconstruction amendments actually protected was reopened repeatedly

Machines were corrupt **and** functional. Saying only the first misses why immigrants voted for them, which is what the question wants explained.

Social Darwinism and the Gospel of Wealth



Same premise, opposite **duty**. Neither one questions the inequality – which is why the reform movements had to come from somewhere else



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.

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.

Organising against the new economy

Mechanization

Mechanization raised output and cut the skill a job needed – which is what made the worker replaceable.

American Federation of Labor

The **American Federation of Labor** organised skilled workers by craft, and bargained for wages and hours rather than for a new social order.

The Knights of Labor

Organised broadly – skilled and unskilled together – and declined after Haymarket.

The People's Party

The **People's (Populist) Party** was the farmers' answer: rail-road regulation, free silver, and a direct income tax.

Craft against industrial organising, and farmers against workers. Naming which body a demand came from is what separates a strong answer.



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 – naming who was affected differently

2025 long essay: *“Evaluate the extent to which economic changes influenced United States society between 1865” and the end of the century.*

- **Scoring:** *“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.”*
- Naming **who** was affected differently is what allows an argument about extent.

“The economy grew” describes. “It grew, and here is who organised against how it grew” argues.

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.



Period 6 – key takeaways

1

Farmers

freight rates, credit, falling crop prices

2

Responses

laissez-faire, Social Darwinism, Gospel of Wealth, labour

3

Immigration

southern & eastern Europe;
Chinese Exclusion Act

4

Machines

corruption *and* social provision

Check yourself

- 1 Name two mechanisms of farmers' anger.
- 2 What was new about the Chinese Exclusion Act?
- 3 Why keep both sides of political machines?
- 4 What did Populism put on the agenda?

Answers: freight / credit / crop prices ▪ first nationality-based federal restriction ▪ corruption and provision ▪ government intervention