

Power Notes: 1877-1890

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the role of the national government during the period 1877-1890.

- 1) The national government was inactive during this period for the following reasons: a) Presidents had a narrow view of government; b) control of government was split between Democrats & Republicans; c) lack of a national consensus; d) state and local governments dealt with most issues; and, e) the national government lacked the money, information & personnel necessary to do effective work.
- 2) The patronage system (giving government jobs to political supporters) was a contentious issue. The 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act created the civil service system.
- 3) The control of the money supply was debated. The issue was fundamentally was over whether the policy of the government would be one of inflation (silver backed currency) or deflation (gold backed currency).
- 4) Farmers tried to reduce high tariffs (38-58%). They failed.
- 5) Corruption was a major issue, especially during the Grant Administration. It was not as bad during the rest of the era.

Importance: During the “Gilded Age” the national government played a minor role in most people’s lives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the characteristics of the trans- Mississippi West.

- 1) Native American tribes varied greatly in culture. Most Plains Indians were nomadic hunters dependent on the Buffalo. White man's diseases were devastating. Constant warfare between Indians and whites from 1607 until the defeat of Geronimo in 1886.
- 2) In 1887 Helen Hunt Jackson wrote A Century of Dishonor which led to the Dawes Severalty Act. This act made Indians citizens and reduced Indian land from 138 million acres to 48 million acres.
- 3) It was difficult to get capital to move west. The resources of the frontier fueled U.S. expansion. Two groups moved west--those who used nature & those who subdued nature. West of 98th meridian rainfall is generally less than 10 inches a year; timber was not available to settlers and a entire new way of life had to be created.
- 4) Trappers were the first group to exploit the frontier → profitable business. Rendezvous was a method by which trappers got their furs to market. Trapping frontier ended in 1830s.
- 5) The mining frontier lasted about 40 years (1848-1896). Mining provided the capital necessary for U.S. industrial expansion, and helped open up the West.
- 6) The cattle frontier lasted from 1867-1890s. The long drive got cattle to Kansas railroads and caused conflict between Texas cattlemen and Kansas farmers. The winters of 1885-87, the invention of barbed wire, and the movement of farmers to the frontier killed the cattle frontier.
- 7) The lack of national police caused violence to be greater on the American frontier than on the Canadian or Australian frontier. The vigilante dealt with law and order.

Importance: During this period the trans Mississippi West was settled by European-Americans. Native American tribes were defeated either in battle or by disease, and through a succession of frontiers, the West was transformed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: *Understand the impact industrialization had upon America.*

- 1) The U.S. had the resources needed for industrialization: a) natural resources—raw materials were abundant; b) capital resources—provided through the reinvestment of profits, large financial institutions, and government assistance; c) human resources—numbers, education, health & attitude effect human resources.
- 2) Industrialization was caused by the need to reduce the price of goods so they would be competitive in the largest possible market.
- 3) The railroad (1850s) and the steamship (1870s) enabled manufacturers to penetrate previously closed markets. Led to regional specialization (an area concentrates on those goods it can produce the most efficiently).

Importance: Industrialization brought about the most fundamental transformation of human existence in history.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: *Understand the social consequences of early industrialization.*

- 1) Industrialization drastically increased population. Population was redistributed from rural to urban for the following reasons: a) more efficient to put the worker near the sources of raw materials; b) the size & cost of machinery; c) the desire to concentrate manufacturing facilities for efficiency; and, d) city life was perceived as better than country life.
- 2) Work became structured and depersonalized. Most labor moved from skilled to unskilled. Although wages were low (average of \$8.37 a week in 1900) and hours long, real wages rose and the price of goods declined.
- 3) Industrialists responded to competition with: a) pools (a group of producers limit production or set prices); b) trusts (a board runs several companies without legally being the owners of the companies); c) vertical integration (a firm controls all aspects of extraction, manufacturing and distribution; and, d) horizontal integration (a firm acquires control of other firms that make the same product).
- 4) Workers responded to industrialization by attempting to bargain collectively (unions). Government opposition to unions and Welfare Capitalism (companies give benefits in return for labor docility) kept unions ineffective.
- 5) First national union was the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor (1869). Founded for “all who toiled.” Industry and government used the Haymarket Affair of 1886 to kill the union.
- 6) The Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) was a socialist union that appealed to the workers in the most dangerous and lowest paid jobs. Government repression during World War I and the 1917 Communist revolution in Russia killed it.
- 7) The American Federation of Labor (AFL) formed in 1886 for skilled workers. The most successful of all unions until the New Deal (1930s).

Importance: Industrialists and workers try to adjust to the new world created by machines. Industrialists were much more successful than workers.