

VOLUME 2

*Building
the
American
Republic*

A NARRATIVE
HISTORY FROM 1877

Jane Dailey

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Preface

When Benjamin Franklin left the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in July 1787, a bystander reportedly asked him what sort of government the delegates had created. “A republic,” he replied, “if you can keep it.”

Keeping a republic is no easy task. The most important requirement is the active involvement of an informed people committed to honesty, civility, and selflessness—what the Founders called “republican virtue.” Anchored by its Constitution, the American republic has endured for more than 220 years, longer than any other republic in modern history.

But the road has not been smooth. The American nation came apart in a violent civil war only 73 years after ratification of the Constitution. When it was reborn five years later, both the republic and its Constitution were transformed. Since then, the nation has had its ups and downs, depending largely on the capacity of the American people to tame, as Franklin put it, “their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views.”

Our goal in writing *Building the American Republic* has been to craft a clear, engaging, readable, and thoughtful narrative history of the United States. In a world of increasing complexity and danger, America’s civic tradition, both past and present, is a vital public asset and a continuing source of national renewal. Those who want to build a better America, however they define it, must understand the nation’s history, its place in the world, the growth of its institutions, and their own role in preserving and reinvigorating the Republic.

Harry L. Watson
Jane Dailey



FIGURE 1. *The Bosses of the Senate*, by J. Ottmann Lith. Co., after Joseph Keppler, published in *Puck*, January 23, 1889. Courtesy of the United States Senate, catalog no. 38.00392.001.

CHAPTER 1

Incorporation, 1877–1900

On July 2, 1881, the 20th president of the United States, James A. Garfield, was shot in the back as he walked through a railway station in Washington, DC. His deranged assassin, Charles Guiteau, is frequently described as a “disgruntled office-seeker,” and indeed he was: Guiteau considered himself responsible for Garfield’s election and demanded repeatedly to be appointed consul to Paris. The stricken president lingered through the summer heat, suffering from infection, blood poisoning, and pneumonia. He succumbed to a massive heart attack on September 19, 1881.

Garfield’s death was deeply disturbing to a nation still governed by the Civil War generation. Poet Walt Whitman, who had spent the war caring for wounded soldiers, captured the apprehension occasioned by the second presidential assassination in fewer than 20 years. Of the tolling bells that announced “the sudden death-news everywhere,” Whitman wrote

The slumberers rouse, the rapport of the People,
(Full well they know that message in the darkness,
Full well return, respond within their breasts, their brains, the sad
reverberations,)
The passionate toll and clang—city to city, joining, sounding,
passing,
Those heart-beats of a Nation in the night.

Americans who had lived through the Civil War were not easily rattled. They pulled up roots and settled the continent their fathers had claimed but never truly conquered. They endured colossal loss of life to achieve monumental feats of engineering such as the transcon-

tinental railroad and the Brooklyn Bridge. They adapted to shifting, even convulsive, economic conditions, spurred by a deluge of inventions (like electricity). They tolerated if not necessarily celebrated the strange languages and customs tucked away in the bags of millions of newcomers to the nation's shores.

What *did* frighten many Americans was anything that undermined the fragile mutual understanding—the rapport—of the people. This was especially true of future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., one of the most influential American thinkers of his (or any other) time. Holmes saw the worst of the worst during his three years with the 20th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, which suffered more battle deaths than all but four Union regiments. Wounded three times himself, Holmes survived, but the war convinced him that certitude is dangerous, and that only democracy can prevent competing conceptions of how to live from overheating and leading to violence. Whereas some—for example, white supremacists and opponents of woman suffrage—worried that expanded access to democracy would destroy American civilization, Holmes was convinced that the only way to *preserve* the Republic, restored through the sacrifice of millions, was to make sure that the political playing field was as accessible and even as possible. Everyone must have a say.

For Holmes, participatory government—government of the people, by the people, and for the people, as Lincoln had put it at Gettysburg—*was* the Republic, not a means to it. Lose one and the other disappears. The fundamental unity of the people was maintained through the democratic process. Threats to that process, whether violence, corruption, unchecked power, overbearing wealth, or disenfranchisement, endangered that sense of unity. Holmes understood that today's losers have to believe that victory is possible tomorrow. Loss of faith in the system imperils the Republic itself.

A higher percentage of eligible voters participated in American politics during the last third of the nineteenth century than any time before or since. In presidential election years, turnout averaged 78 percent, and this takes into account the suppression of black and white Republicans by white supremacists in the South. Voters perceived fundamental differences between the two political parties. Democrats, dominated by their southern wing, argued for the rights of the states against an ever-expanding federal government. Republicans, empowered by the war and Reconstruction, embarked on a 40-year crusade of nation-building. The future of that nation depended, in great

measure, on the capacity of the American political system to absorb newcomers—African Americans, immigrants, women—into the political system, and keep the peace.

In Motion

During the last third of the nineteenth century, the United States underwent a rapid and profound economic revolution. This economic transformation was rooted in abundant natural resources (e.g., land, lumber, coal, and oil), an expanding market linked by new transportation and communications networks (railroads and telegraphs), a brimming pool of labor constantly restocked from abroad, new forms of business organization that facilitated both economic growth and contraction, and a strong federal government determined to incorporate into the nation the territory (if not necessarily the indigenous peoples) of the great American West.

IRON HORSES

The importance of railroads to late nineteenth-century American history cannot be overstated. US railroad mileage tripled between 1860 and 1880, and tripled again by 1920, opening vast western expanses to commercial farming, facilitating a boom in coal and steel production, and creating a truly national market for manufactured goods and staples like beef and grain. Railroad cars transported the army that “pacified” the Indians, and then unloaded the settlers who organized and incorporated the West into the nation. No models of efficiency or rationality themselves, railroads nonetheless created the conditions that allowed other industries such as steel, grain, and meat-packing to incorporate and innovate a new capitalist logic. Railroads came to symbolize American progress. In his book *Triumphant Democracy* (1886), steel magnate Andrew Carnegie declared, “The old nations of the earth creep on at a snail’s pace; the Republic thunders past with the rush of the express.”

Railroads changed everything they touched, beginning with space. The transcontinental railroads effected a massive spatial turn: the axis of North America, which had previously run North–South, was turned East–West. Railroads altered people’s sense of time and space. Because people experience distance in terms of time, linked by rail, places grew closer together: what German philosopher Karl Marx called “the anni-

hilation of space by time.” It took less time in 1880 to travel from Boston to Montana (a distance of circa 2,000 miles) than to Charleston (a mere 1,017 miles). Together, railroads and telegraph systems, whose lines were strung alongside tracks, “shrank the whole perceptual universe of North America.”

Beyond people’s understandings of time and space, railroads reorganized time itself. Before 1883, clocks were set locally according to the sun. Noon was the moment when the sun stood highest in the midday sky, which varied according to longitude. When clocks read noon in Chicago, it was 11:50 a.m. in St. Louis, 11:27 a.m. in Omaha, and 12:18 p.m. in Detroit. Two trains running on the same tracks at the same moment but with clocks reading different times could find themselves suddenly occupying the same space, with deadly consequences. In November 1883, the railroad companies carved the continent into four “standard” time zones, in each of which clocks would be set to exactly the same time. Not that this meant the trains ran on time. As one rider complained, the train “was seldom there when the schedule said it would be, but occasionally it was, and [people] were amazed and angry when they missed it.”

Railroads even liberated people from weather. When the Great Lakes were frozen and nothing could move by ship, the railroads ran. As one railroad promoter announced, “It is against the policy of Americans to remain locked up by ice one half of the year.” Railroads allowed an entrepreneurial butcher named Gustavus Swift to “store the winter” by transporting ice, a large-bulk, low-value commodity, to the stockyards in Chicago, where meat-packers used it to create refrigerated boxcars, which enabled them to ship beef and pork in all directions.

By the 1890s, five transcontinental rail lines linked western mines, ranches, farms, and forests with eastern markets. The South, which laid track even faster than the rest of the nation, became integrated into this national market economy. With the trains came towns. Previously dominated by plantations, the southern landscape was dotted with villages, whose numbers doubled between 1870 and 1880, and then doubled again by 1900.

“VAST, TRACKLESS SPACES”:
THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI WEST

What Walt Whitman referred to as the “vast, trackless spaces” of the Trans-Mississippi West was first an extension of the Mexican North.

The expansive territory that became the American West was nearly all acquired from Mexico in 1848: California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah. Many people were included in this transfer, among them several major Indian nations, including the Papago, Navajo, Puebloan, and Apache, as well as approximately 75,000 Mexicans. The frontier experience of the American West was never an encounter with virgin land. It was, instead, a process in which new wilderness zones were created in places where civilizations had once existed.

At first, Indians remained in their homelands. Americans were quickly incorporated into the extensive Indian agricultural and trading networks that characterized the southwestern United States. For example, the Pima and Papago “River People” who dwelt along the Gila and San Pedro Rivers supplied the US Army with a million pounds of wheat in 1862, plus cotton, sugar, melons, beans, corn, and dried pumpkins.

In 1869, Congress created the Board of Indian Commissioners, which was composed of prominent evangelicals and humanitarians, including old abolitionists, to oversee what President Ulysses S. Grant and others termed the nation’s “Indian problem.” The commission recommended replacing the treaty system, which had treated Indian tribes as akin to sovereign nations, with a new legal status for “uncivilized Indians” as “wards of the government.”

In a departure from the prior policy of Indian removal en masse to another location, the commission recommended the creation of reservations located far from ancestral lands as well as other population centers. The goal was to isolate Indians from outside influences. Under this plan, missionaries were in charge of Indian life. They replaced Indian languages, practices, and religion with English, American models of domestic agriculture, and Christianity. They sent Indian children away to boarding school. In addition to supplanting native cultural practices, the reservation arrangement also undercut the ability of Indians to sustain themselves through trade or employment off the reservation.

What was called the “Peace Policy” was welcomed with hostility by many Indian nations. War with the Apaches broke out in Arizona. In the Great Plains and on the West Coast, the US Army battled the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Modoc Indians. President Grant remained unperturbed. In his opinion, Indians—even the warlike Apaches—could “be civilized and made friends of the republic.”

Republicans considered tribal sovereignty incompatible with the national unity forged in the Civil War. In 1871, Congress stopped negotiating new treaties with Indians and refused to recognize the independent nation status of tribes. Under the terms of the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Plan, Indians were required to distribute communal land among individual families. Those who cooperated became US citizens. So-called surplus land was sold to whites.

Indians held 138 million acres in 1887. During the following 47 years, 60 million acres were declared to be “surplus.” All told, nearly two-thirds of tribal land was conveyed to Americans through a variety of devices. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Amasa Walker, the government’s guardian for the native peoples, declared in 1872, “The westward course of population is neither to be denied nor delayed for the sake of the Indians. They must yield or perish.” Most tribes did both.

MANIFEST DESTINY

Americans settled more land between 1870 and 1900 than in all their previous history. The population of the territory to the west of Illinois and Missouri mushroomed from 300,000 in 1860 to 5 million in 1900. Much desirable land was beyond the reach of homesteaders, however. Enormous grants of public land to subsidize railroad construction, the distribution of land to Union veterans, and the use of dummy corporations allowed speculators (who acquired land not for its use but for its resale value in a rising market) and mining, timber, and cattle companies to acquire land under falsified claims. Under the terms of the Railway Act of 1864, railroad companies received 12,800 acres of public land for every mile of track they laid. This land could serve as security for bonds, or be sold to settlers, who paid for land their government had given away to the railroads.

Article 3 of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 stipulated that “the utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent.” Americans never lived up to this ideal. Instead, they negotiated treaties that pushed Indians westward, broke those treaties to expand farther, and killed Indians who resisted. Sometimes white settlers wanted Indian land to farm. Other times, they coveted water or right-of-way (in the case of railroads) or minerals. In California, white settlers fought a genocidal campaign against the native peoples there.

Of some 150,000 Indians in California when gold was discovered there in 1848, only 30,000 remained by 1860.

With Native American control weakened in the West, settlers poured into the vast central plains. European immigrants, particularly Scandinavians and Germans, established themselves in the northern territories of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. During the period of mass immigration, one out of every two western settlers was foreign-born.

American-born settlers also set out across the continent, including large numbers of white and black southerners. Many rural blacks migrated west to Kansas, Indiana, and Oklahoma, where land was plentiful and cheap. "The Negro exodus now *amounts to a stampede*," exclaimed one North Carolina white in 1890. African Americans also gravitated toward industry, particularly mining. "It was easy," one miner recalled. "All you needed was a pair of gloves, overalls and experience and you could get hired anywhere." The West had another advantage over the South: as one settler wrote to a friend in Louisiana, "They do not kill Negroes here for voting."

Mass influx of settlers from the South and East provoked conflict with Indian nations, some of whom defended their land fiercely and resisted relocation to reservations. In 1876, during the Sioux Wars, Cheyenne and Lakota warriors defeated an overconfident Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, killing him and all his men at the Battle of Little Bighorn.

In the midst of a serious drought in 1889, Congress cut food aid to several Indian nations, including the Lakota. Deaths from hunger and disease rose on the reservations. Instead of an armed uprising, starving Native Americans turned to the Ghost Dance, a spiritual movement associated with the teachings of the Northern Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka. The circle dance of the Ghost Dance represented a broad credo of working the land, Anglo education, and, above all, nonviolence.

In 1890, the US Army massacred more than 150 Lakota, mainly women and children, at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. Some of the Lakota at Wounded Knee were among those who had routed George Custer at Little Bighorn. The massacre has been associated with the Ghost Dance, but in fact was unrelated. The Ghost Dance continued into the twentieth century, practiced by Indians across the country.

IMMIGRATION, MIGRATION, AND URBANIZATION

The population of the United States quadrupled in the half century following the Civil War. High birth rates and wave after wave of immigrants pushed the population to more than 75 million by 1900, leaving America the second-most populous nation in the world.

Immigrants gambling on the wonders of America flooded embarkation centers in New York, Galveston, and San Francisco. Some were pulled by the prospect of a higher standard of living. Others were pushed by one or more of several factors, including political oppression, religious persecution, war, and interethnic rivalries. Still others were simply trying to escape overbearing parents. Between 1879 and 1915, 25 million immigrants arrived “yearning to breathe free,” in the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. By then, immigrants made up nearly 15 percent of the American population.

Although some immigrants joined the stream of western settlement, most gravitated to the jobs, educational opportunities, and ethnic communities of urban America. In a relatively brief period, America’s population shifted from one with predominantly British (including Scots and Irish) and German roots to a much more heterogeneous mix. Over half of the 3.5 million immigrants who entered the United States in the 1890s came from Italy and the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires of central and eastern Europe. The vast majority of them were Catholic. However, hundreds of thousands were Jews, the first major influx of non-Christian immigrants to the United States.

Increasingly “exotic” immigrants and their American-born children constituted a majority in the nation’s largest cities—a fact that worried many native-born Americans. Some charged that immigration diluted American society by allowing “inferior” races to outnumber the Anglo-Saxons. New immigrants, wrote Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Amasa Walker in 1880, were “beaten men from beaten races.”

One immigrant group concerned white Americans more than any other: the Chinese. The first federal legislation designed to discourage immigration was the Page Law of 1875, which was aimed at single Chinese women on the assumption that they were prostitutes. Pressed by nativists in California, Congress passed a more comprehensive law in 1882 that banned further immigration of Chinese laborers. The Chinese Exclusion Act criminalized what had been a normal movement of global labor and stigmatized Chinese Americans as unassimilable—as incapable of ever becoming truly “American.”

Urban immigrants were joined by millions of native-born farm boys and girls. Between 1879 and 1920, nearly 11 million Americans moved from rural areas to the burgeoning cities of New York, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Houston. Newcomers and native-born alike streamed into the industrial labor force, which grew even faster than the general population. By century's end, industrial workers constituted more than a third of the American population. Class boundaries increasingly ran along ethnic, religious, and racial lines.

Between 1860 and 1890, America went from a predominantly homogenous nation to one defined as much by difference as by similarity. The United States was largely an agricultural nation through the Civil War, but by 1880 a majority of the American workforce was engaged in nonfarming jobs. Thanks to a host of technological innovations, those who remained on the land farmed on a scale unimaginable a generation earlier. Cities exploded, buoyed by a constant stream of newcomers. In those cities, the outlines of a new American working class—one dominated by immigrants—were already visible.

The Labor Question

What was referred to euphemistically as “the Labor question” was *the* political issue of the late nineteenth century. The political economist Henry George observed in the 1870s, “Work is the producer of all wealth. How does it happen that the working class is always the poorer class?” In the fifty years that followed, this statement lost none of its force.

The juxtaposition of a new industrial class and a growing army of workers raised questions about the relationship between the Republic's economy and its political system. Walt Whitman posed the question starkly: “If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years . . . then our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure.”

FREE LABOR

In 1870, most industrial workers still subscribed to the free-labor ideology of antebellum America. This system, with its explicit promise of economic upward mobility for those with the character and diligence

to earn it, was premised on the idea that wage labor was not a permanent condition. Labor was a means to self-improvement: today's workers were tomorrow's farmers and shopkeepers. As long as the boundary between wage earner and property owner seemed permeable, workers remained confident in their own ability to succeed.

Faith in advancement muted criticism of industrial working conditions. The average workweek in the 1870s was 59 hours, or six 10-hour days. America was the only industrial nation in the world with no workers' compensation program to support workers injured on the job. Predictably, the United States had the highest accident rate in the world. Thousands inhaled toxic gases in fetid coal mines or lint in cotton mills, were burned working with molten steel, and lost fingers and limbs in factories to machines with unguarded moving parts. Between 1890 and 1917, 230,000 railroad employees died on the job, and close to 2 million more were injured. Laws to improve safety conditions were denounced by owners as "class legislation" that favored one group (workers) at the expense of another (employers).

Divided along regional, occupational, ethnic, and linguistic lines, labor was slow to organize. After the Civil War, a group of craft unions, local ethnic associations, and unskilled workers united in the National Labor Union (NLU). The NLU condemned wage labor as enslaving and undemocratic. Calling themselves "masters of their own time," the NLU's 600,000 members devoted themselves to winning the eight-hour day. The NLU's demand for "eight hours for work; eight hours for rest; eight hours for what we will!" announced the determination of the new industrial working class to assert their independence from their employers and bolster their authority as citizens.

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor left a more enduring imprint on American labor politics than the NLU. Founded in 1869, the Knights combined the social network of a fraternal order, the labor focus of a trade union, and the reform instinct of a political party. The constitution of the Knights of Labor announced, "We declare an inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government." After a successful and well-publicized railroad strike in 1885, membership skyrocketed. By 1886, as many as 20 percent of American workers were affiliated with the Knights, united under the motto "An Injury to One Is an Injury to All." The Knights of Labor were active in the South as well as the North, enrolling blacks as well as whites, women as well as men. In the West, however, the Knights were deeply involved in the anti-Chinese movement.

The American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded in 1886, provided an alternative to the Knights' cooperative vision. Led by Samuel Gompers, a cigar-chomping pragmatist from London, the AFL accepted the new economic reality that most workers would be permanent wage earners rather than proprietors. Eschewing the class-conscious language of the Knights, Gompers spoke of "working people" and explained that he wanted workers understood as "real human beings . . . with the same desires and hopes of a better life" as other Americans. Preferring to practice "pure and simple unionism," meaning a narrow focus on wages, hours, and working conditions, the AFL did not run candidates for office. Unlike the Knights, which welcomed unskilled workers, the AFL focused on organizing skilled labor. Gompers positioned union members as "average"—literally in the middle of the social spectrum between an impoverished and potentially dangerous mass below and an unworthy elite above.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Gilded Age America (so dubbed by Mark Twain, for the era's flamboyance and seeming superficiality) was marked by an unprecedented expansion of economic output. The gross national product quadrupled from \$9 billion to \$37 billion between 1869 and 1901. Steel production increased from 77,000 tons in 1870 to 11,270,000 tons in 1900. Exports surged from \$234 million in 1865 to \$1.5 billion by 1900. Vast fortunes were made—and lost—overnight.

Celebrants of cutthroat capitalism explained vast divergences in fortune among groups and individuals through what they called Social Darwinism, after English naturalist Charles Darwin. Darwin's transformative 1859 book *On the Origin of Species* argued that the diversity of life on earth had evolved from a common source through a process of natural selection that privileged and perpetuated species that adapted to changes in environment.

Darwin did not use the phrase "survival of the fittest"—that was coined by British philosopher Herbert Spencer, who adapted Darwin's concept to his own thinking on social and economic competition: In a process as natural as cream rising to the top of the milk bottle, those with talent, industry, and perseverance would succeed while others would fail. Whether nations, races, or individuals, those who succeeded would be rewarded with wealth, power, and acclaim. Winners deserved what they got—they earned it. So did losers.

Spencer's ideas resonated with America's entrepreneurs, whose

vast and ever-expanding wealth was so unprecedented that a new vocabulary had to be coined to describe them: “tycoons,” “Robber Barons,” “magnates.” In New York City, the number of millionaires increased from a few dozen in 1860 to hundreds by 1865. By 1890, the wealthiest 1 percent of the population had the same total income as the bottom half of the population and owned more property than the remaining 98 percent combined. Scottish-born steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, who began his career at age 13 in a cotton mill, dedicated a chapter of his autobiography to “Herbert Spencer and His Disciple.” The owner of Standard Oil of Ohio, John D. Rockefeller, showcased his own adaptive talents when he combined Spencerian insights with Baptist doctrine and insisted that “the growth of a large business is merely survival of the fittest, the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.” Other denominations agreed. “The race is to the strong,” pronounced the Episcopal bishop of Massachusetts, who assured rich men, “Godliness is in league with riches.” Competition was good; it weeded out the weak and assured the survival of the strong.

Sometimes. But competition could also be destructive. Railroads overbuilt and then undercut each other’s freight rates to the point where they were *all* losing money. Fierce competition in the emerging oil industry was creating “a state of chaos,” complained Rockefeller.

At the end of the nineteenth century, during the great merger movement that created the trusts and gave antitrust law its name, “socialism” meant an imposed absence of competition, not public ownership. Business fluctuations were understood to be the result of a lack of economic coordination. The key to limiting industrial risk was to eliminate “ruinous” competition through corporate consolidation. Like life or fire insurance, the corporation was designed to manage risk.

FROM STRIFE TO COOPERATION

A corporation is a legally sanctioned fiction that a group of people collectively constitute a single legal entity—a corporation. Like individual citizens, corporations can hold property, sue and be sued, and enter contracts. Unlike citizens, corporations cannot participate in political life by voting, serving on juries, or running for office. Corporations have two chief advantages over other forms of ownership: they ease access to capital by pooling assets, and they distribute risk across multiple shoulders. Centralized managerial control allows for effective negotiation (with labor, suppliers, transportation), administrative efficiency, and industrial integration.

Integration comes in two shapes: vertical and horizontal. Horizontal integration is the merging of competitors into one big company—what people in the nineteenth century called “trusts.” Mergers benefit the corporation by limiting competition. Taken to the extreme, they can create a monopoly—a business with so much market share that it need not price its goods or services competitively. Vertical integration combines multiple entities involved in different stages of product creation and delivery to accomplish in one massive corporation what had previously involved the combined efforts of many different businesses. When today’s computer companies make everything but their processors, they engage in a form of modified vertical integration.

Rockefeller was the master of both forms of integration. By 1879, Standard Oil controlled over 90 percent of American oil production. A congressional investigative committee found “that the Standard Oil Company brooks no competition; that its settled policy and firm determination is to crush out all who may be rash enough to enter the field against it; that it hesitates at nothing in the accomplishment of this purpose.” Portrayed as heartless, Rockefeller was no more ruthless than his competitors. He was more organized, more efficient, more far-sighted. The key to business success in these years was not only individual striving but effective combination. “The incalculable,” tutored Rockefeller, “must give way to the rational, strife to cooperation.”

Cooperation proceeded apace in the 1880s and 1890s. Trusts proliferated as businesses became aware of their effectiveness. Large companies like American Telegraph and Telephone (AT&T), General Electric, and the American Tobacco Company followed Standard Oil’s example and virtually monopolized their respective industries. The bigger the company, the more capable it was of buying its competitors or running them out of business. The bigger it got, the easier it became to set its own prices, unencumbered by competition.

The immense power wielded by the trusts was not lost on small businesses and farmers, consumers and workers, who came to regard the trusts as potent agents of undue power and unfair advantage. Widespread worry about the concentration of economic power led to the passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890. The act was designed to protect consumers by prohibiting various practices considered to be anticompetitive.

Like industrialists, farmers were exposed to the unpredictability of the market. As American agriculture shifted from subsistence farming to the production of cash crops, farmers were exposed to new risks.

By the 1890s, entire regions farmed a single crop, such as cotton or wheat, which left everyone exposed to fluctuations in market prices. This market was becoming more international, too. American farmers might see high wheat prices owing to a drought in Poland, or low ones caused by a bumper crop in Argentina or Canada.

LABOR POLITICS

Many Americans worried that economic inequality and workplace antagonism would divide the nation's citizens along class lines and spill over into politics. It did. Those who had recently fought a war that eradicated slave labor and the political economy it built understood that politics and economics were part of the same system. Because even noncitizen white men could vote almost everywhere, the potential political power of American workers was always a factor to consider.

By the late nineteenth century, the independent artisan and the skilled industrial worker had all but disappeared. In their place stood deep ranks of unskilled workers, including agricultural laborers, industrial "pick and shovel men," miners, and assembly-line factory workers. In industry after industry, workers with specialized knowledge and skills were replaced with machines that could be operated by unskilled workers, including children. The 1880 census counted more than one million wageworkers under the age of 16. Unskilled workers earned less than half the daily wage of skilled workers. Depending on the state of the economy, between 20 percent and 50 percent of unskilled workers found themselves out of work for three or more months each year.

A new term was coined in 1887 to describe the growing phenomenon of widespread involuntary joblessness: "unemployment." Whereas employers were content to maintain a "reserve army" of labor available to be called up at any time, working-class leaders began to ask if there was a right to work—or if there was at least a right to some hedge against the overwhelming anxiety of providing for oneself and one's family during periods of unemployment.

The decade known as the Great Upheaval was marked by thousands of strikes involving more than a million workers that culminated in a nationwide general strike for the eight-hour day on May 1, 1886. The eight-hour day movement addressed both workers' quality of life and unemployment by spreading jobs around. "Never before has anything of the kind occurred," observed *Banker's Magazine* in 1886. "The strikes now raging are like a huge wave rolling over the land."

In Chicago, a parade of 40,000 for the eight-hour day merged with a strike at the McCormick reaper factory in which four workers were killed by police. A small, mostly German anarchist group called a mass meeting for the following night in Haymarket Square to protest police brutality. As the final speaker concluded on the evening of May 4, a large group of policemen arrived and ordered the crowd to disperse. Suddenly, a bomb of unknown origin exploded among the police, killing one officer and fatally injuring seven others. The police fired into the crowd, killing a half dozen and wounding approximately 100, including 60 of their own officers.

In the first-ever Red Scare in America, Chicago police raided the meeting places of anarchists, socialists, and other labor leaders indiscriminately, detaining hundreds. Eight defendants, seven of whom were anarchists and all but one of whom was German-speaking, stood trial for the bombing in the summer of 1886.

Although testimony showed that six of the eight defendants were not in Haymarket Square when the bomb was thrown, the state insisted that whereas “perhaps none of these men personally threw the bomb, they each and all abetted, encouraged and advised the throwing of it, and are therefore as guilty as the individual who in fact threw it.” Exhorted by the state attorney general to hang the defendants and “save our institutions,” the jury found all eight defendants guilty of murder, and sentenced seven to death. Of the eight, one committed suicide in jail, three had their sentences commuted in 1893, and four were hanged on November 11, 1886. Two hundred thousand Chicagoans lined the street to witness the funeral procession.

LABOR WARS

In the 1890s, industrial workers waged a series of strikes so brutal on both sides that historians have dubbed them the “labor wars.” In eastern Tennessee, coal miners struck to protest the use of convict labor. The militant Western Federation of Miners was born in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, in a bloody battle with management. The port of New Orleans was closed down by an interracial strike of dock workers. In the context of yet another raging depression resulting in millions of unemployed, labor fought for the right to organize and bargain with bosses collectively through unions for higher wages, better working conditions, shorter hours, and control of the work process.

In the 1870s, steel king Andrew Carnegie wrote that “the right of the workingmen to combine and form trades-unions is not less sacred

than the right of the manufacturer to enter into association and conferences with his fellows.” By 1892 he had changed his mind. A strike at Carnegie’s Homestead Mills led by the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers pitted the rights of labor, including the right to organize, against the rights of private property. Carnegie’s manager Henry Clay Frick employed a “take no hostages” approach to the striking workers, and sicced a large force of private Pinkerton detectives on them. When the workers fought off the Pinkertons and occupied the factory, Frick demanded National Guard troops to protect the mills.

The presence of National Guard troops in Homestead raised a question labor and capital encountered often in the 1880s and 1890s: how far would the state go to protect private property? The answer to this question depended in good measure on who was running the state, and which branch of government was involved.

The drafters of the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act intended the law to check corporate power. But courts found that labor strikes and boycotts were forms of market restraint, and turned the act against labor. Under the common law, it had once been a tort—an act that caused someone harm—for an employer to lure away another employer’s workers. Judges now applied this thinking to labor organizations that encouraged sympathy strikes, in which workers for Company B walked off the job in support of the striking workers of Company A. Courts began to issue injunctions—court orders that forbid specific actions—against labor organizers. Judge and future president William Howard Taft explained the difference between a lawful strike, which was for the “purpose of selling the labor of those engaged in it” for a good price on good terms, and an illegal boycott, in which other workers withdrew their labor in solidarity with striking workers in an effort to induce a third party—the bosses of the striking workers—to act. Labor leaders who disobeyed injunctions risked contempt charges and jail.

After four and a half months, the Amalgamated capitulated. The mills opened in November. The company slashed wages, reinstated the 12-hour day, and fired 500 people associated with the union. Homestead’s production tripled and its profits rose tenfold between 1892 and 1900.

Enlightened Selfishness: Reforming Politics and People

In a time of massive social and economic change, Americans questioned the role and purpose of government. There was no returning to

the antebellum world of a federal government that consisted of a small army and a large post office. It was clear to everyone that government *could* do many things. The question was, what *should* it do? What were the practical and constitutional limits to its authority? James G. Blaine, a highly influential Republican senator and perennial presidential contender, wrote in 1884 that “the basis of much that is wisest in legislation” was “enlightened selfishness.” Americans spent the last third of the nineteenth century trying to determine the correct balance between those two words.

PATRONAGE POLITICS

Nineteenth-century political parties and their supporters inhabited a world of mutual obligation. Voters turned out for their party in droves. The winning party gained access to thousands of state and federal jobs, and parceled them out to their faithful supporters. Growing federal agencies such as the Pension Bureau and the Post Office employed thousands of men and women. Some government posts, such as the head of the New York Custom House (which collected millions of dollars in duties on imported goods), exercised considerable commercial power. State-level political machines employed thousands of workers in government positions and “get out the vote” organizations, and had operating budgets that rivaled the largest corporations.

Capturing the patronage required winning elections. Political campaigns were funded through a combination of state and federal patronage and assessments levied on officeholders (effectively a tax on those who held patronage positions). Parties were a vital mechanism of government. As British observer Lord James Price explained in 1895, “Party organizations in fact form a second body of political machinery, existing side by side with that of the legally constituted government, and scarcely less complicated. Politics, considered not as the science of government, but as the art of winning elections and securing office, has reached in the United States a development surpassing in elaborateness that of Britain or France.”

Political machines were especially powerful in the cities. The machines indoctrinated new immigrants and found them jobs. On Election Day, the machines paid voters’ poll taxes, marched them to the polls, distributed premarked ballots, and passed out cigars and whiskey. Supporters of the secret ballot and other electoral reforms considered this sort of reciprocal politics corruption. The parties and their supporters called it loyalty and friendship.

Congress made no sincere effort to reform the patronage system until President Garfield's assassination, when his successor, Chester A. Arthur, insisted on change. No one was better situated for this task than Arthur. A classic product of the spoils system himself, Arthur's cronyism in the 1870s was so overt that President Hayes stripped him of his post as head of the New York Custom House. The reformist 1883 Pendleton Act established a Civil Service Commission, implemented entrance exams for incoming government employees, and prohibited political assessments.

The end of the spoils system of jobs and assessments eroded party loyalty and forced politicians to find alternative sources to fund their campaigns. Federal and state officeholders turned to their "friends" in business. Railroad lawyers, insurance executives, and corporate managers stalked the floor of Congress. By 1888, the Senate was accurately described as a "Millionaire's Club," whose members—elected by state legislatures, not directly by the people—represented various "principalities and powers in business."

Municipal politicians found revenue in city services. The Tammany machine in New York City charged patrolmen upwards of \$500 for the privilege of joining the police force. Patrolmen, in turn, levied "taxes" on both legal and illegal businesses. Licensed liquor dealers paid between \$5 and \$20 a month. Pushcart vendors were charged \$60. At a charge of \$250 and up, unlicensed saloons paid dearly for the drinks they poured. An 1894 report estimated the annual cost of police "fees" in New York at \$7 million.

Such endemic corruption characterized American party politics because the Constitution, which provided for elections, offered no advice about how to conduct them or fund campaigns. Torchlight processions cost money, as did treating voters to rounds of drinks in saloons. Assessing the period, historian Gary Gerstle concludes that "the vulnerability of the American democratic system to graft was chronic and even systemic."

THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT

Money questions arising from the Civil War preoccupied Americans for the final third of the nineteenth century. Like the Confederacy, the Union government financed the war through a combination of currency expansion (literally printing money, known as "greenbacks" for their color), bonds (government debt), taxes, and tariffs (duties) on

imported goods. In 1866, Congress resolved to “retire” the greenbacks by buying them with gold coin. The trouble was, greenbacks were a depreciated currency. It took \$130 in greenbacks to acquire \$100 in gold. Although the dollar bill claimed to be worth one dollar, the market treated it as if it were worth only 77 cents. Rather than buy gold with their greenbacks, debtors used them to pay off their loans. Lenders, understandably, were unenthusiastic about this arrangement.

Postwar Congresses eliminated or lowered many wartime taxes, but held firm on the tariff, which generated most of the revenue necessary to run the government and reduce the national debt. Like taxes, tariffs were a government-mandated redistribution of economic resources—in this case, from consumers to producers. The tariff protected American manufacturers from foreign competition by effectively raising the price of imports. Tariff reduction became the lodestar of progressive politics because it revealed so clearly the ways in which federal economic policies could favor or harm specific regions and interests, and expand or limit the activities of the government.

Before 1873, gold and silver coins circulated alongside the greenbacks and private banknotes. When the market price of silver exceeded its mint price, however, people stopped using silver dollars and melted them instead. The Coinage Act of 1873, which ended the production of silver dollars, reflected this reality. But when rich new silver mines in the West glutted the market and the price of silver fell a few years later, silver producers demanded repeal of what they called the Crime of ’73. The Bland-Allison Act of 1878 allowed the Treasury to purchase limited quantities of silver and produce silver coins once again. Congress overrode Republican president Benjamin Harrison’s veto.

Silver promised to make a capitalist economy that seemed rigged in the interest of manufacturing and finance through the tariff more equitable. Farmers and workers joined in the chorus for “free silver” (the free supply of silver coins) because they understood that it would increase the money supply, and therefore lower the real burden of their debts—which, after all, were inflated because of protective tariffs. They were taken aback by the fervent opposition to free silver by business and manufacturing interests, and their representatives in government.

The silver question was only one facet of a broader debate about the role and responsibility of government. To what extent, if any, could government, whether state or federal, attempt to manage the economy? To what ends? “There should be some things to which the whole

people of the United States shall accustom themselves to look to the General Government as a benefactor,” insisted Republican senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts. Democrats disagreed, arguing instead that government aid was paternalistic and tempted the people to a “pitiful calculation of the sordid gain to be derived from their Government’s maintenance.”

FARMERS

The currency issue was relevant to everyone, but was especially important to farmers. Collectively, farmers produced more goods, paid more taxes, and cast more votes than any other group of Gilded Age Americans. Yet their voices seemed to go unheard in Washington, and they felt exploited and abused by business at every level. This was particularly the case when it came to transporting, storing, and selling their crops. Cotton and grain farmers in the South and Midwest were perennially at the mercy of railroads and commodity storage and exchange systems, which often monopolized routes and set their own prices. “We have three crops,” lamented a Nebraskan, “corn, freight rates, and interest. The farmers farm the land, and the businessmen farm the farmers.”

Like workers, farmers with little bargaining power as individuals banded together. The Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange, peaked in the 1870s with 1.5 million members. To increase the bargaining power of its members, the Grange established its own warehouses, cotton gins, and grain elevators in an effort to encourage collective buying and selling. The Granger Laws, a series of laws passed at the state level, asserted the right of government to regulate grain elevators and railroad rates.

In *Munn v. Illinois* (1877), the Supreme Court of the United States ruled 7–2 that the state of Illinois could constitutionally regulate a private business in the public interest. When one “devotes his property to a use in which the public has an interest,” the court declared, “he, in effect, grants to the public an interest in that use, and must submit to be controlled by the public for the common good.” Because both grain elevators and railroads constituted virtual monopolies, they were vulnerable to regulation by the people. *Munn v. Illinois* opened the door to state regulation of the boundary between private interest and public good on economic matters.

Congress has the power to regulate commerce among the states. In

1887, Congress passed the Interstate Commerce Act and created the first independent regulatory agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), to ensure that railroad rates were “reasonable and just.” The act prohibited discriminatory pricing mechanisms, required that railroads both publish and honor their rates, and forced the railways to submit their account books (what historian Richard White considers “one of the nineteenth century’s great fictional genres”) to annual financial reporting. The law lacked teeth, however, which suited the railroad companies just fine. “It satisfies the public clamor for a government supervision of railroads,” wrote corporate lawyer Richard Olney, “at the same time that the supervision is almost entirely nominal.”

The Farmers’ Alliance, which succeeded the Grange, continued to ask questions about how to fund government and about the role of government in regulating commerce. In the 1890s, the federal government had two main sources of funding: the tariff and the liquor tax. In 1894, farmers tired of subsidizing the government through the tariff succeeded in pushing the first-ever federal income tax through Congress. The Supreme Court nullified it a year later. The majority opinion called the law a “communistic” assault on property. In an impassioned dissent, Justice Henry Billings Brown characterized the court’s decision as “nothing less than the surrender of the taxing power to the moneyed class.”

THE FARMERS’ ALLIANCE

By 1890, the Alliance movement had outposts from California to New York. The 1.5 million members of the Alliance—at least one-quarter of whom were women—were joined by an affiliated Colored Farmers’ Alliance with over a million members. The slogan of the Southern Alliance captured the essence of the movement: “Equal rights to all, special privileges to none.” A chief goal was to free working Americans, including farmers, from a demeaning dependence on those who otherwise controlled the economy.

Organizing agricultural workers was daunting. The Farmers’ Alliance spread its message through traveling lecturers and sympathetic newspapers. Alliance organizers were most successful in places, such as Texas, that had experienced rapid population growth in the 1870s and 1880s with the advent of commercial agriculture. Landowners (as opposed to agricultural wage workers and sharecroppers) dominated the order and set its agenda.

In 1890, Alliance members met in Ocala, Florida, and issued the Ocala Demands. The farmers' manifesto expressed deep distrust of "the money power"—banks and corporations whose financial power allowed them to manipulate a supposedly "free" market. As Mary Lease lectured across Kansas, "Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street." Alliance members called on government to even the economic playing field and reduce tariffs on imported merchandise, regulate railroad rates, and expand the currency supply through bimetallism (silver). In addition, the platform called for a federal income tax to support the functions of government, and popular election of US senators.

In 1891, delegates from the many Alliances, the Knights of Labor, the AFL, and other reform groups (100 of them African American) met in St. Louis to discuss forming a third national political party. In the presidential election year of 1892, more than a thousand like-minded delegates met in Omaha, Nebraska, to form the independent People's Party. Representing the "producing classes" of small farmers and wage laborers, the Populists, as they were known, denounced a nation "brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin" by economic inequality and political corruption, and announced that "the fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind."

The Omaha platform proposed a coherent program of far-reaching economic change through government action. Declaring that the time had come "when the railroad corporation will either own the people or the people must own the railroads," the party called for public ownership of transportation (railroads) and communication (telegraphs). The Populists demanded a flexible national currency and banking system that favored the credit needs of producers, a graduated federal income tax, postal savings accounts, the popular initiative and referendum, popular election of US senators, and opposition to "any subsidy or national aid to any private corporation for any purpose." The Populists' proposed Subtreasury Plan was a national system of farm credit, warehousing, and marketing with a confusing name.

The Populist manifesto pit collective ownership and control against private ownership of vital sectors of the economy having to do with exchange, especially money and transportation. More noteworthy than any of its specific proposals was its insistence on government responsibility for the economic well-being of the nation, and the need to estab-

lish reliable democratic controls over corporate capitalism. Populists were not backward-looking—far from it. Their grasp of the interlocking nature of democratic politics and government regulation of the economy was as far-seeing as it was unprecedented.

Upheavals

ORGANIZED WOMEN

The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) required a reduction in representation in Congress for any state that denied the right to vote to any of its *male* citizens. This left womanhood the primary marker of disenfranchisement in the United States. Supporters of woman suffrage adopted two very different approaches to address this problem. The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Bostonians Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, formulated a race-based “Southern strategy” designed to allow white women access to the polls while denying it to black women. The National Woman’s Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, made the case for female enfranchisement through the language of male despotism. Turning to familiar republican language about caste, Stanton and Anthony argued that the white man’s democracy of the antebellum years had been replaced by “an aristocracy of sex.” Stanton was not above making racist and nativist arguments—why should a black man or an Irish immigrant vote when noble Anglo-Saxon American women such as she could not? Her main argument, however, was that democracy should not exclude women.

Woman suffrage got nowhere during the 1870s, especially after the Supreme Court held in *Minor v. Happersett* (1875) that women’s rights as citizens did not include the right to vote. In *Bradwell v. Illinois* (1873), the court upheld the notion of coverture, in which “a woman had no legal existence separate from her husband, who was regarded as her head and representative in the social state.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton, married and the mother of seven, was livid: “In crowning all men with this dignity, denying it to all women, we have established here the most odious form of aristocracy the world has ever seen—an aristocracy of sex . . . that exalts . . . the son above the mother who bore him.”

With woman suffrage stymied, temperance became the main vehicle for women’s rights. Dating back to the 1820s, the temperance movement was always associated with women’s rights, because the

campaign against alcohol was designed to protect women and children from abusive male power. Focused initially on changing individual behavior, by the mid-1870s the movement aimed to abolish the liquor trade. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1874, was the most powerful women's organization in the country. The WCTU was led by Frances Willard, the first Dean of Women at Northwestern University. Happily unmarried, Willard was a staunch woman suffragist. "If we are ever to save the State," she declared, "we must enfranchise the sex. . . . Give us the vote, in order that we may help in purifying politics."

"Purifying politics" was a far cry from liberating womankind from the tyranny of men. The WCTU did not challenge male authority. Instead, it concentrated on changing men—the source of so many of women's problems—by teaching them to honor and respect women. The organization's agenda went far beyond shutting down the liquor trade and the other vices that found a home in saloons: gambling, tobacco, and prostitution. WCTU women wanted to abolish the "white slave trade" (sexual trafficking), eradicate venereal disease, and encourage men to share power and resources with their wives. "It is her income as well as yours," the organization lectured, and urged husbands not to drink away the family's resources. In the hands of the WCTU, temperance and woman suffrage were designed to make women better mothers. The WCTU, concludes historian Christine Stansell, made suffrage safe.

By 1890, Christian redemption replaced the Constitution as the centerpiece of the suffrage campaign. While appealing in many ways to many people, this politics of redeemed women and unredeemed men was easily adaptable to antidemocratic uses. It could be turned against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities ("backward" peoples, "inferior" civilizations). And even as the WCTU scorned male weakness and depravity and celebrated female moral superiority, it left unchallenged the legal and economic bases of male privilege. The focus on motherhood as the central value of the women's movement perpetuated the "sentimental nonsense" (in Stanton's words) that women were "above men, celestial, ethereal."

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

A financial panic in 1893 stimulated by a European business contraction and poor harvests led to a banking panic in the United States. When the banks called in the loans to overextended railroads, more

than 70 railroads fell into bankruptcy. By 1894, more than four million jobs had been lost. Nearly 25 percent of American workers were unemployed by 1894. Soup kitchens sprang up in cities, and homeless families slept in the streets.

As the railroads convulsed in 1894, a wealthy Ohio businessman named Jacob Coxey led a cross-country march of unemployed men to the steps of the US Capitol to demand public works and an eight-hour day. The march produced no concrete change, but it helped draw attention to unemployment. Coxey was arrested for walking on the grass.

The official name of Coxey's Army was the Army of the Commonwealth in Christ, which reflects an important truth about the ways Americans responded to the class polarization of the 1880s and 1890s. Many churchgoing Christians found it hard to square their religion, with its condemnation of avarice and selfishness and its egalitarian inclinations, with what they saw happening around them. Civic action offered a way to ease Christian consciences strained by the realities of poverty and injustice. By the late 1880s, many devout Protestants like Jacob Coxey believed that to inherit the Kingdom of God they must first improve their own world.

Adherents of what was eventually dubbed the Social Gospel movement advocated a government of Christian decency, with the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") supplemented by Jesus's repeated command to care for the poor and vulnerable. The two most prominent exponents of the Social Gospel, ministers Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, endorsed workers' rights and exhorted Christians to combat social injustice. For them, salvation was not purely an individual matter but was achieved in part by striving to construct a just society through collective action at the level of government. They were joined in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII, whose encyclical "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour" criticized greed, endorsed workers' right to unionize, and urged governments to care for the poor.

As the pope's encyclical suggests, the labor question transcended national boundaries in the new age of global capital. At the end of the century, a new form of transnational politics based on the social landscapes carved by industrial capitalism developed on both sides of the Atlantic. A new vocabulary evolved around the term "social": the social question, the social problem, social politics, and, most pressingly in the context of ongoing strife between labor and management, social peace.

Creating social peace meant understanding the links between economic and political power and building a state in which, as the Republican governor of New York Theodore Roosevelt put it, “Property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth.” Utopian novelist Edward Bellamy’s 1887 best-selling book *Looking Backward* imagined this world through the eyes of a wealthy Bostonian who falls asleep during the class conflict of the Gilded Age and awakens in the year 2000 to an America of communal property, plenty, cooperation, and full employment. Bellamy was no more a communist than Theodore Roosevelt; his future Americans were moved by nationalism, patriotism, and altruism, not class-consciousness. But like the “marching petition” represented by Coxey’s Army, Bellamy connected economic and political power and the health of the republic, and asserted a role for the government in each.

PULLMAN

The labor wars of the nineteenth century culminated in a national boycott in support of striking workers against the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1894. This epic insurgence paralyzed the economies of 27 states and territories, pitted the United States Army against the American Railway Union, and generated the most destructive civil violence since Reconstruction.

In the 1860s, George Pullman developed a patented railroad car that incorporated pull-down platforms with mattresses. This luxurious “hotel room on rails” was an immediate hit with long-distance travelers and established for Pullman a virtual monopoly on sleeping cars. By the early 1890s, the company was worth over \$36 million and had weathered economic ups and downs sufficiently to pay robust dividends to stockholders for over 20 years.

In 1881, Pullman built a state-of-the-art factory and planned community outside Chicago. The company town was designed to create an environment conducive to steady work, good morals, and industrial peace. The streets of Pullman were smooth and shaded. The homes, which could be rented but not purchased by workers, were a pleasing diversity of architectural style, with indoor plumbing and electricity. The town had a school, a public square, a market, and a library with plush upholstered chairs and books chosen carefully by George Pullman. Rents were higher in Pullman than in surrounding towns. Employees were not required to live there—but George Pullman was not required to state a reason for firing anyone, either.

In the midst of the worldwide economic depression of 1893, George Pullman laid off more than half his workforce of 5,800 employees, and cut wages by 25-40 percent. He did not, however, lower rents in Pullman, cut corporate salaries, or reduce stockholders' dividends. When Pullman refused to negotiate with a workers' grievance committee, the company town staged a walkout on May 11, 1894.

Pullman workers who had joined the American Railway Union (ARU) turned to its leader, the charismatic Eugene V. Debs. To support the Pullman workers, the ARU refused to run trains that included the ubiquitous Pullman Palace cars, shutting down railroads across the Midwest. Federal judges issued injunctions from coast to coast against the railroad strike. Debs shrugged them off and wired a supporter, "It will take more than injunctions to move trains." Declaring that "we have been brought to the ragged edge of anarchy," US attorney general (and influential railroad lawyer) Richard A. Olney advised President Grover Cleveland to send federal troops to Chicago. Olney also advised against informing the governor of Illinois and the mayor of Chicago, both of whom sympathized with the strikers. An outraged Governor John P. Altgeld learned of the troops only after their arrival in Chicago.

Under the pretense of upholding the federal obligation to deliver mail, which traveled by train, President Cleveland ordered US Army troops fresh from fighting Indians to break the strike in Chicago. What had been a largely peaceful strike turned violent within a day. Mobs tipped and set fire to railroad cars. The military responded with bayonets, cavalry charges, and, finally, guns. *Harper's Weekly* warned that in defeating the nationwide strike, the nation was "fighting for its own existence just as truly as in suppressing the great [Confederate] rebellion." The *New York Times* had a different take. The Pullman strike and boycott, the *Times* told its readers, was "in reality . . . a struggle between the greatest and most important labor organization and the entire railroad capital." Chicago reformer Jane Addams agreed with the *Times*, and wondered at the speed with which "the ugliness of the industrial situation" was revealed.

THE GREAT COMMONER

Prosperity was still out of view as Americans prepared to elect a new president in 1896. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats could ignore the threat of the People's Party, which was poised to siphon off significant numbers of votes from both of the major parties. Silver was

the dividing issue, with large numbers of people adamant that the free coinage of silver was the key to restoring prosperity, while others were equally certain that only fidelity to the gold standard would guarantee the future.

Arguments about currency were stand-ins for broader disagreements about economic policy, especially monetary policy and government regulation of business. The Democrats were in open rebellion against their incumbent president, Grover Cleveland. The Republicans looked forward to recapturing the White House. Their nominee, William McKinley, was a former congressman from Ohio popular with business interests and industrial workers for his support of a high protective tariff. He was also a solid gold man, which alienated western silver Republicans, who walked out of the GOP convention. Aided by his brilliant campaign manager, Marcus (Mark) Alonzo Hanna, a wealthy Ohio businessman, McKinley promised Americans social harmony and “a full dinner pail,” and hinted darkly that jobs would disappear if the Democrats were returned to power.

The divided Democrats floundered until southern and western delegates came together at the convention to nominate the 36-year-old former Nebraska congressman and outspoken silverite William Jennings Bryan. An unabashedly Christian man, Bryan’s speech to the delegates in Chicago is famous for its finale, in which he declared that the Democrats represented “the producing masses of the nation,” as opposed to the Republican’s business elite, and declared that the people would answer the GOP’s demand for a gold standard by saying to them: “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold.”

The “cross of gold” crescendo was first-rate political theater, but it did not represent the substance of Bryan’s message to the Democratic delegates. This was contained in his meditation on the role of government in regulating the economy in the interest of the people (“the cause of humanity”) rather than in the interest of the elite. “There are two ideas of government,” he told the Chicago convention. “There are those who believe that, if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests upon them.” For Bryan, the truly democratic government—the truly Christian government—wrote laws that protected the interests of the masses against the prosperous, powerful few.

THE ELECTION OF 1896

Bryan's nomination posed a quandary for the Populists. Should they "fuse" with the Democrats and support Bryan? Or should they nominate their own third-party candidate and run the risk of a McKinley victory? In the end, they threw in their chips with Bryan—but many mourned that they had doomed their party, and their principles, in the bargain.

Bryan's convention speech electrified the Democratic masses and terrified the Republican elite, who, prodded by Hanna, poured unprecedented amounts of money into GOP campaign coffers. In the pre-Pendleton Act era, all Democratic officeholders would have paid an assessment to subsidize Democratic nominees. In the new world of private political contributions, Hanna raised more than ten times the amount of campaign funds available to Bryan. Most of this was spent on campaign literature and to send forth thousands of speakers to sing McKinley's praises. McKinley himself remained sedately, one might say presidentially, on his front porch in Canton, Ohio, where he chatted with small groups of voters handpicked by Hanna.

Bryan, meanwhile, stormed the country, regaling hundreds of thousands with homely stories from his rural youth. Known ever after as "the Great Commoner" for his expansive faith in the plain people, Bryan was unrivaled as an orator and had an unerring capacity to articulate political issues in ways that connected with ordinary Americans. For example, here is how Bryan explained the need for a regulatory state to a Labor Day crowd of 150,000 in Chicago: In Iowa recently, recalled the candidate, he had seen "a number of hogs rooting in a field and tearing up the ground." This reminded him of how, as a boy, he had kept the family's hogs tethered so that they would not destroy the land. "And then it occurred to me," he continued, "that one of the most important duties of government is to put rings in the noses of hogs. . . . We submit to restraint upon ourselves"—through laws—"in order that others may be restrained from injuring us."

The hogs were not amused. Outspent by an energized and unusually united GOP, Bryan lost to McKinley by 500,000 votes out of an estimated 14 million cast. The Republicans were solidly in power and, with the exception of Woodrow Wilson's two terms between 1912 and 1920, would remain in control of the federal government for the next 36 years.

The election of 1896, in which nearly 80 percent of eligible voters

cast a ballot, concluded an era of closely contested national elections and divided government. The People's Party, and with it agrarian politics, was mortally wounded. William Jennings Bryan, however, was just getting started. To some, Kansas journalist William Allen White recalled, Bryan seemed "the incarnation of demagoguery." But the *demos*—the people—were grateful. White acknowledged, "It was the first time in my life and in the life of a generation in which any man large enough to lead a national party had boldly and unashamedly made his cause that of the poor and the oppressed." Of more lasting structural importance, Bryan shed his party's legacy of considering federal power always and everywhere a threat to the liberty of the people. Bryan would never be president, but he made an eloquent case for the regulatory state as the only entity strong enough to create the conditions for business prosperity while still, as he would have put it, tethering the swine.

Race and Equality in the Turn-of-the-Century South

At the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, Ida B. Wells, a young African American journalist, teamed up with the venerable abolitionist Frederick Douglass to author a pamphlet titled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*. The pamphlet documented the extent of American racism and explained that the fair's organizers had refused to include African Americans in the US exhibits. Douglass, who had been ambassador to Haiti and now served as the island nation's representative to the fair, delivered a blistering speech from the portico of the Haitian Building. When white hecklers interrupted him, Douglass turned his steely eyes upon them: "Men talk of the Negro problem. There is no Negro problem. The problem is whether the American people have loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough, to live up to their own constitution." White southerners were already failing the test.

WRESTLING WITH THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

The Civil War settled the question of whether a state could secede from the Union, and the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery. But the critical question of whether individual citizens had any federal constitutional rights against the states remained unsettled. Prior to the Civil War, the Constitution guaranteed individual rights only against

the federal government. This was, indeed, an essential element of the original constitutional compromise. After the Civil War, however, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) expressly defined national citizenship and prohibited any state to deprive any person of “life, liberty or property without due process of law,” to deny any citizen the “privileges and immunities” of citizenship, or to deny any person “the equal protection of the laws.” Section 5 of the amendment authorized Congress to enforce these guarantees through “appropriate legislation.” The Fourteenth Amendment therefore clearly altered the balance of power and responsibility between the states and the federal government. The question was, how much?

In the 15 years after the enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court interpreted its guarantees in a way that sharply limited its potential effect. In the *Slaughter-House Cases* (1873), the court, in a bitterly divided 5-4 decision, defined the “privileges and immunities” of citizenship that were guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment against state infringement in a way that rendered the clause almost meaningless. According to Justice Samuel Miller, who wrote the majority opinion, the phrase did not include such fundamental rights as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, but only a small set of rights connected directly to *national* citizenship, such as the right to travel from one state to another or to be protected on the high seas. The justices also suggested that the Fourteenth Amendment was designed primarily to protect the rights of former slaves, and therefore it could not be invoked by other citizens. In a powerful dissent, Justice Stephen Field accused the majority of having illegitimately rendered the Fourteenth Amendment a “vain and idle enactment.”

Two years later, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which prohibited private individuals from discriminating against African Americans on the basis of race in public accommodations, such as inns, restaurants, and theaters. In the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), the Supreme Court ruled the act unconstitutional. The Fourteenth Amendment, said the court, did not itself prohibit discrimination against African Americans by private individuals, and it did not authorize Congress to enact legislation prohibiting such private discrimination. Rather, the majority concluded, the amendment was directed only against discrimination by the *states* themselves. Thus, the federal government had no constitutional authority to prohibit a private res-

restaurant owner or innkeeper from refusing to serve blacks. The most it could do was to prohibit the states themselves from discriminating on the basis of race.

The state action doctrine enunciated in the *Civil Rights Cases* effectively prevented the federal government from prohibiting private racial discrimination and therefore allowed “local custom” to continue unmolested. The decision was emphatically denounced by proponents of racial equality, who argued that there was no principled distinction between racial discrimination by the state and racial discrimination by private individuals, especially in those domains in which the government routinely licensed and regulated private businesses, such as restaurants, theaters, and public transportation. Together, the *Slaughter-House Cases* and *Civil Rights Cases* sharply limited the potential impact of the Fourteenth Amendment.

THE POLITICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY

Politics in the post-Civil War era was exceptionally fluid across the nation, but particularly in the South, where newly enfranchised black men shook up the party system. After 1877, with the Republican Party in retreat throughout the South, black voters there had two options: accede to Democratic plans to marginalize them politically, or form interracial alliances (“fuse”) with the few remaining white Republicans and a larger group of disenchanted white Democrats.

What united black and white voters in the postwar South? Like the Populists who succeeded them, interracial coalitions in the 1880s stressed the benefits of popular democracy and an active government that provided important services such as public education. Threatened by interracial third parties, southern Democrats appropriated their platforms and crushed them with violence and election fraud. At the same time, Democrats looked for more legitimate ways to squelch the competition. As one Mississippi newspaper observed, “There must be devised some legal defensible substitute for the abhorrent and evil methods on which white supremacy lies.”

Outside of the Fifteenth Amendment’s prohibition of voter limitations based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude, states can define their electorates for themselves. Between 1890 and 1908, all 11 states of the former Confederacy rewrote their constitutions to eliminate the votes of black men and those white men misguided enough to support African American political power. The electorate

was slashed by literacy tests, complicated registration procedures, multiple ballot boxes, racially restricted primary elections (white primaries), poll taxes, and “understanding clauses” designed to protect the votes of illiterate whites capable of offering a “reasonable understanding” of the state constitution. In 1898, the Supreme Court ruled in *Williams v. Mississippi* that poll taxes and literacy tests did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment, because they applied to whites as well as blacks.

In the 1880s, more than two-thirds of adult southern men voted. That proportion rose to nearly three-quarters in the 1890s in states that had not yet limited the franchise. By the early 1900s, fewer than one man in three, white or black, voted in the South.

The consequences of disenfranchisement were catastrophic. Although the South as a whole suffered from an uncompetitive party system, African Americans paid the greatest price. If black men could not vote, they could not be elected to office. If they could not be elected to office, they could not shape or administer the laws that governed them. In 1873, 64 African Americans sat in Mississippi’s state legislature; none served after 1895.

African Americans divided over the white supremacist campaigns of the late nineteenth century. Some educated middle-class black southerners suggested that limiting suffrage to the literate might not be such a bad idea. The most influential black man in America, Booker T. Washington—a former slave and the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school in Alabama—implied in an 1895 speech in Atlanta that African Americans should leave politics to white men and focus instead on economic advancement. Suffrage was only one avenue to power, said Washington; labor that resulted in savings, he explained, amounted to “a little green ballot” that “no one will throw out or refuse to count.” Dubbed the Atlanta Compromise by more radical African Americans, Washington’s position was later ridiculed by northern black scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who remarked acridly that “the way for a people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away and insisting that they do not want them.”

MAKING JIM CROW

In 1890, the Louisiana state legislature passed a law requiring “equal but separate” railway cars for black and white passengers. Railroads re-

sisted the separate car law on economic grounds (separate cars meant more cars and trouble for the conductors). African Americans insisted that the law violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments by establishing an “insidious distinction and discrimination between citizens of the United States, based on race.” In an 1892 test case initiated by the New Orleans Citizens’ Committee for the Annulment of the Separate Car Act, Homer Plessy, a mixed-race man who was to all appearances white, violated the law by riding in a coach set aside for whites.

In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court, in an 8–1 decision, upheld the constitutionality of the Louisiana law. Segregation did not treat blacks unequally or even differently than it treated whites: blacks had “black” cars and whites had “white” cars, which were, theoretically, the same. In a key passage, the court explained: “We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.”

With the Supreme Court’s blessing, southern states and municipalities enacted a proliferation of laws separating blacks and whites in nearly every aspect of life. Blacks and whites were required by law to drink from different water pails, use separate toilets, and walk through separate entrances and exits. They were nursed in separate hospitals, educated in separate schools, buried in separate cemeteries, and forbidden to marry each other in the majority of American states. Jim Crow’s power over African Americans came not only from segregation, however, but also from exclusion: exclusion from voting booths, juries, neighborhoods, unions, higher education, restaurants, theaters, hotels, and the professions. Racial hierarchy was backed up by white economic and political control and secured through the power of the state.

For segregation to work, laws racially categorizing people had to exist. State laws varied and were revised repeatedly. Depending on the state and the decade, people who were more than 1/4 black, or 1/8 black, or 1/16 black, or even 1/32 black, were categorized for the purpose of Jim Crow as “nonwhite.” Bureaus of Vital Statistics registered births, marriages, and deaths, and classified and cross-checked people according to race. Yet even as the color line solidified, it became more porous. Untold numbers of light-skinned blacks migrated across the

country and across racial boundaries—they “passed” for white. Many other southerners either challenged or defended their racial identity in court, which forced the judiciary to police the color line.

The deep discrimination of the Jim Crow order was marked through the practice of segregation, but it went deeper than that. As Justice John Marshall Harlan, the lone dissenter in *Plessy* argued, segregation was a “badge of servitude,” a marker of inequality. A landmark in the history of Jim Crow, the *Plessy* decision embraced the reasoning of white supremacy and haunted efforts on behalf of racial equality for the next 75 years. Jim Crow laws were an essential element of white supremacist consolidation of political power at the end of the nineteenth century. By 1900, white supremacy and racial purity had become articles of civic faith.

THE NEW SOUTH

The architects of the Jim Crow South called their creation the New South, which in their eyes was a South bursting with entrepreneurial energy, abundant natural resources, and cheap labor, primed for northern industrial investment. According to the author of *How to Get Rich in the South*, the region abounded in “tempting inducements to the capitalist for profitable investments.”

Although still rooted in agriculture, the southern economy diversified after the Civil War. To encourage industry, southern state legislatures kept taxes low and provided few public services. Those they did provide, such as public schools, were underfunded, racially segregated, and wholly unequal. Draconian penalties for petty crimes, such as theft and vagrancy, combined with racially discriminatory law enforcement, resulted in inflated, and disproportionately black, prison populations in every southern state. Mines, railroads, and lumber companies leased large numbers of convict laborers and housed them in primitive camps that were hotbeds of disease. The availability of cheap prison labor kept the wages of white workers artificially low, which contributed to the overall poverty of the region. In 1900, southern per capita income stood at a mere 60 percent of the national average.

The New South was also characterized by a sickening rise in mob violence directed at African Americans. Between 1882 and 1946, white southern mobs murdered 4,715 black men, women, and children. Composed of respectable citizens as well as the rabble, defended in the press and frequently in the pulpit, lynch mobs acted without fear of

punishment. Local sheriffs colluded with the mobs and released black prisoners to them. White grand juries refused to indict anyone, insisting that lynching victims “died at the hands of persons unknown.” Impervious to outside criticism, the white southern establishment considered lynching a regrettable but necessary evil.

Although there were broader social and political goals to lynching, the primary rhetorical justification for white mob violence was the supposed need to protect white women from allegedly predatory black men who, no longer governed by whites, were “regressing” as a race and indulging their base “primal instincts.” This rationale persisted despite the pioneering work of black journalist Ida B. Wells, who demonstrated that not even a third of black men lynched had been *accused* of rape. Instead, Wells linked white violence to fear of black economic and political advancement.

Mob violence embarrassed elite southern whites, who argued that if interactions between blacks and whites resulted in such horrors, the only logical solution was to limit still further the contact between the races. In tacit recognition of the political nature of mob violence, white southerners justified the segregation by race of streetcars and other public spaces as necessary to establish “public peace and good order” in the South. Others stressed more sinister reasons for both lynching and segregation. In a 1902 article in the *Atlantic Monthly* describing a black man who had been burned at the stake, a professor at Emory College in Atlanta observed that the purpose of such “savagery” was to “teach the negro the lesson of abject and eternal servility,” to “burn into his quivering flesh the consciousness that he has not, cannot have, the rights of a free citizen or even of a fellow human creature.”

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In 1886, political economist and philosopher Henry George reflected on the state of the Union: “We plow new fields, we open new mines, we found new cities, we girdle the land with iron roads and lace the air with telegraph wires; we add knowledge to knowledge and utilize invention after invention.” Yet despite this progress, he declared, “it becomes no easier for the masses of our people to make a living. On the contrary, it is becoming harder.” All the transformations of mechanization and mass production had broadened rather than narrowed the gulf between the employed and the employer. “Social contrasts,” George observed, “are becoming sharper; as liveried carriages appear, so do barefooted children.”

Henry George was not alone in this observation. As the United States approached the line of the new century, many leaders worried about the paradox of immiseration amid massive production. In his opinion in an 1895 antitrust case, Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan worried about avarice. "Combination governed entirely by the law of greed," Harlan pronounced, "threatens the integrity of our institutions." If Harlan was right, what should government do? What *could* it do? What was the relationship between the state and the economy?