

US History

Turn of Century America

Learning Target:

I can examine political machines and analyze the corruption that often went with it.

5. Politics in the Gilded Age

Emergence of the Political Machines

Political Machine

- Organized group that controlled the activities of a political party in a city
- Offered services to voters and business in return for political & financial support
- Organized like a pyramid
 - Base – Local precinct workers and captains; tried to gain votes on their block
 - Middle – Ward Boss; Made sure all precincts voted by helping the poor and doing favors
 - Top – City Boss; controlled activities of the political party throughout the city
- All three levels worked together to keep their party in power

Political Boss

- May or may not be the mayor
- Could use their power for good (schools, hospitals, orphanages) or bad (bribes)
- By solving urban problems bosses won additional loyalty

Immigrants Role in the Machine

- Many members of the political machine were 1st or 2nd generation immigrants
- Could relate to immigrants and helped them with naturalization, finding housing and jobs
- In return immigrants voted for who they were told to

Corruption in the Machine

Election Fraud and Graft –

- Election fraud such as voting multiple times common to secure elections
- Graft – the illegal use of political influence for personal gain
 - Having contractors bill the city too much and kick some back to the machine
 - Favors to businesses in return for cash
 - Accepted bribes to allow illegal activities to continue (gambling)

Civil Service Replaces Patronage

Patronage –

- Giving government jobs to people who helped get you elected
- Reformers believed civil service jobs should go to most qualified

Hayes, Garfield, & Arthur

- All three Republican presidents came to support reform
- Rutherford B. Hayes fired political officials who received jobs from patronage
- James A. Garfield was assassinated for his support of reform
- Chester A. Arthur turned reformer after becoming president
 - Passed Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883 where federal jobs would be given on merit

Big Business Buys Influence

Business & Tariffs –

- Alliance between government and business strengthened now that patronage was no longer a source of income
- Big business wanted tariffs to be raised to protect them from foreign companies
- Democrats wanted to lower to tariff to lower prices for consumers

Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison –

- Cleveland (Dem) lowered tariffs and angered big business
- Lost next election the Benjamin Harrison (Rep) who immediately raised the tariff
- Cleveland elected again after Harrison and the tariff was again lowered
- McKinley (Rep) elected after Cleveland and raised the tariff again