

# The Gilded Age Society & Politics & the Attempt to Reform & the Elections of 1892 and 1896

- Lesson 3**-----
17. Social Gospel
  18. Charles Darwin and evolution
  19. Herbert Spenser, Social Darwinism, “ the fittest”
  20. Pragmatism (background only)
  21. 1890s “new immigration” – their religions, where they came from, and the revival of nativism
  22. Actions forced on Congress or trying for voters
    - Interstate Commerce Act (commission form)
    - Pendleton Civil Service Act (spoils system)
    - Sherman Anti-Trust Act
    - Sherman Silver Purchase Act
  23. Rise of the Populists, beginnings as Grangers and Granger laws and Farmers Alliance (in South and West), state laws about railroads
  24. Panic of 1893, Cleveland, and repeal of silver act
  25. The Elections of the 1890s
    - Election of 1892, 3rd party success of Populists
    - Election of 1896, Republicans’ methods (Mark Hanna), Democrats’ “dark horse” W.J. Bryan, and the Cross of Gold Speech

What’s covered on this webpage:

Views of How the World Works (or Should Work) .....	2
Social Gospel – Letting Them Speak for Themselves .....	2
Social Darwinism – Letting Them Speak for Themselves.....	2
Just to Make Sure You Do Not Assume: a Later Theory That Is Associated with American Thinking .....	3
The Shifts in Immigration and Urbanization by the Late Gilded Age.....	3
Immigration—the Numbers and the Source.....	3
Urbanization and the Immigration Connection .....	3
What Had Been Happening to Farmers and What Are They Doing About It? .....	4
1883-1890 Actions Forced on Congress or Actions Political Parties in Congress Try to Get Voters .....	4
The Populist Plan for 1892 and Example of the Southern Response.....	5
Election of 1892, the Parties, the Candidates, the Popular Vote, and the Electoral College .....	5
The Panic of 1893- Called the Great Depression until the one beginning in 1929 started. ....	5
Government After the Election of 1892 and the Panic of 1893 .....	6
How the Populist Lost Their Candidate for the Election of 1896.....	6
Election of 1896, the Parties, the Candidates, the Popular Vote, and the Electoral College .....	7
Background Information Available as Links Above.....	7

What Is a Commission?..... 7

Getting Crops to Market and a new form of government..... 7

**Tip:** if you want to learn accurately, keep an honorable dictionary always next to you. Thus far *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* has been honorable.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

### Views of How the World Works (or Should Work)

#### Social Gospel – Letting Them Speak for Themselves

These are mainly Protestant ministers in the Gilded Age who are concerned with the changes before them in their modern America and who believe people should do something about. They are not the only reform movement that leads to the Progressive Era, but they are part of it. They do oppose Social Darwinism.

- “[I]t was necessary to ‘Christianize’ the social order to bring it ‘into harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ.’ The church... must ‘demand protection for the moral safety of the people.’”  
Walter Rauschenbush (clergyman, Baptist)
- “‘The Christian moralist,’ he wrote, had to tell ‘the Christian employer’ that the wage system ‘when it rests on competition as its sole basis is anti-social and anti-Christian.’”  
Washington Gladden (clergyman, Congregational)

#### Social Darwinism – Letting Them Speak for Themselves

Charles Darwin develops the *theory* of evolution. **Caution:** Theory does **not** mean fiction:

a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena  
the wave theory of light  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theory>

Herbert Spenser develops the view that Darwinism justifies the current human condition (and he makes his living from that) and the American sociologist also writes about it.

Its British creator	<p>We have unmistakable proof that throughout all past time, there has been a ceaseless devouring of the weak by the strong.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), <i>First Principles</i></p> <p><b>This survival of the fittest.</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), <i>Principles of Biology</i> [1864-1867]. Part III, chap. 12<sup>1</sup></p>
An advocate in the United States	<p>The law of survival of the fittest was not made by man and cannot be abrogated by man. We can only by interfering with it, produce the survival of the unfittest.... <b>The sociologist is often asked if he wants to kill off certain classes of troublesome and burdensome persons.</b> No such inference follows.... but it is allowed to be inferred, as to a great many persons and classes, that <b>it would have been better for society, and would have involved no pain to them, if they had never been born....</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">William Graham Sumner (Yale professor), “Sociology” (1881)<sup>2</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> Both quotations from Spencer are from Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*.

<sup>2</sup> *American Thought: Civil War to World War I*, ed. by Perry Miller, p. 80, 88

**Video:** The Gilded Age **Search Word:** Darwin (also try “circular logic”)

### Just to Make Sure You Do Not Assume: a Later Theory That Is Associated with American Thinking

William James is an American philosopher and psychologist at Harvard in the 1890s associated with pragmatism. He is really useful for thinking. If you want more on him, click [here on the Harvard site](https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/william-james). (Link Address: <https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/people/william-james>)

an American movement in philosophy founded by C. S. Peirce and William James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the **function of thought is to guide action**, and that **truth** is preeminently to be tested by the **practical consequences of belief** [bold added]

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pragmatism>

Etymology - Latin *pragmaticus* skilled in law or business, from Greek *pragmatikos*, from *pragmat-*, *pragma* deed, from *prassein* to do

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pragmatic>

## The Shifts in Immigration and Urbanization by the Late Gilded Age

Immigration—Notice the Over 2 Times the Prior Number and the Source (and Their Religions)

**In 1877-1890**, 6.3 M immigrants

- from N and W Europe
- to NE or Midwest US cities (mainly)

**In 1880-1917** – 17.9M immigrants – mainly **Catholics and Jews and unskilled** – It brings with it the rise of nativism. (What’s nativism – as the video notes, nativism shows up during times of “social stress.”)

- 20.2% from NW Europe
- 18.5% from E Europe
- 27.1% from Central Europe
- 24.3% from S Europe

**Video:** Moving to the City **Search Word:** 1880

### Urbanization and the Immigration Connection – Notice Their Destination

Increase in number of cities:

- 1869 – 9 cities 100,000+
- 1890 – 28 cities 100,000+

Over 80% of immigrants go to these ports (What’s a port?)

- Chicago, Illinois
- Detroit, Michigan
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- New York City, New York

**Video:** Moving to the City **Search Word:** Ellis

## Reminders of What Had Been Happening to Farmers and What Are They Doing About It?

Date	Situation	Farmer Events
1867-12	<b>Reminders:</b> Farming requires equipment, more land than the Homestead Act Problem: 25% interest charged in Mid-West	Grangers (a medieval term) or Patrons of Husbandry - Begins as non-partisan. Reality issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Railroad rates that higher for farmer (short haul/long haul) than for industry</li> <li>- Middlemen (where do you put your grain while you are waiting for the train)</li> <li>- Protective tariffs on imported products to keep them out, but the farmers sell in a free market world.</li> </ul>
1874	Continuing problems	States - 11 <b>farmer parties</b> , called the Farmers' Alliance – <b>Becomes political—successful with the <u>state Granger laws.</u></b>
1877	<b>Reminders:</b> South out of Reconstruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crop-lien system</li> <li>▪ Cotton up in quantity, down in price</li> <li>▪ Cash poor; trend is to sharecropping and tenant farming</li> <li>▪ <b>50%</b> interest in South <b>Tip:</b> See above the lower interest rate in the Mid-West. Why that difference? Ask if you don't know. Compare that interest rate for loans (or a credit card) today. What does that tell you?</li> </ul>	-
1886	Southern situation harder for blacks	<b>Colored Farmers National Alliance</b> founded – Click <a href="#">here for what Southerners do about them by 1891.</a>
1890-11	Mid-term Elections: Republican losses	Farmers' Alliance victories - <b>National move looks promising.</b>

## 1883-1890 Actions Forced on Congress or by Congress to Try to Get Voters

**Reminders** from Lesson 1 and 2. The Gilded Age is troubled, but Congress does not see the problems.

\* **In the Public's Issue column** = Indicates it had been issue since the time of a group of reform Republicans in the 1870s.

Date	President	Election Issue	Public's Issue	Resolution—and Ripples
1883	Arthur	<b>Assassination of Garfield</b> + 1882 Democratic victories	* <b>Civil service</b>	<b>Pendleton Act</b> – Provides competitive exams, no forced political contributions  Had been supported by the Civil Service Reform Association, one of the many associations popping up at this time.
1887	Cleveland	Grangers + court cases	Railroad practices	<b>Interstate Commerce Commission</b> – Ended rebates, pooling Uses the commission form—this is <b>new then, but it is your life today.</b>
1887	Cleveland	-	Western expansion, Indians	<b>Reminder: Dawes Severalty Act</b> (An act covered in an earlier Lesson.) – Forces the Indians to own land individually with the theory among reformers that this will make the Indians act white. Result: loss of 62% of Indians' land to the whites
1890	Harrison	Pre-election year	* <b>Gold/silver</b>	<b>Sherman Silver Purchase Act</b> – Required purchase 4.5M oz. of <b>silver</b> /month and issuing of paper money Objective: Forced inflation, desired by western miners and by farmers

Date	President	Election Issue	Public's Issue	Resolution—and Ripples
1890	Harrison	Pre-election year	* Protective tariff	McKinley Tariff – <b>Also notice: raised protective tariff level to 49.5%</b> Objective: Desired by manufacturing interests (Who does that hurt?)
1890	Harrison	Pre-election year	<b>Trusts</b>	<b>Sherman Anti-Trust Act</b> – Trial in federal circuit courts, but see <a href="#">1895 Knight case</a> Objective: Desired by West and South

## The Populist Plan for 1892

1892	<p>Omaha meeting – <b>reminders</b> of possible and hoped for supporters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor (Carnegie Homestead strikes)</li> <li>• Farmers' Alliance in South and West</li> <li>• Colored Farmers' Alliance – <b>but</b> the South uses racism to counter the Populists and then later (after 1896) the Populists in the South became racist (p. 381)</li> </ul> <p>Advocate economic changes that require changes in laws:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 8 hour workday</li> <li>▪ The subtreasury plan – An overly complex idea.</li> <li>▪ Government ownership of railroads, telephone, and telegraph</li> <li>▪ <b>Unlimited/free coinage of silver - Why?</b></li> </ul> <p>Advocate Constitutional changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Direct election of Senators - Why?</b> – See the cartoon with Lesson 3 for a clue.</li> <li>▪ <b>Graduated Income tax - Why?</b></li> </ul>
	1891 – strike – Colored Alliance – <b>15 lynched</b>

## Election of 1892, the Parties, the Candidates, the Popular Vote, and the Electoral College

The candidates:

- Republican Benjamin Harrison - 5,109,802 - 145 - Their bill-writing efforts to attract angry voters failed.
- Democrat Grover Cleveland - 5,554,414 - 277
- Populist James B. Weaver - **1,027,329** - 22 – This was an amazing number for a 1<sup>st</sup> time party.

## The Panic of 1893- Called the Great Depression until the one beginning in 1929 started.

<p><i>Quantities and the Panic of 1893:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>17-19%</b> unemployed (In 1893 what helps a worker who has no work and his/her family?)</li> <li>- 600 banks fail</li> <li>- 119 railroads bankrupt</li> <li>- 15,000 business closed (8,000 in the 1<sup>st</sup> 6 months of the Panic)</li> <li>- <b>5/1893</b> 100s of millions – losses in stock market</li> </ul>	<p><i>Causes of the Panic of 1893 and why it lasts so long</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1890-McKinley Tariff (too high to buy—thus lower revenues for the government)</li> <li>- <b>11/1890</b>-British bank failures (Britishers need their cash—thus sell their American investments and take gold, not paper dollars)</li> <li>- Given the coinage of free silver and changes to the money supply, European banks did not want to carry loans they had made to Americans. Think of it this way, if a loan is due, they will not want to give more time.</li> <li>- Given the economy, Americans redeemed their paper dollars in gold.</li> <li>- Government pensions for veterans (too many given out by Harrison)</li> <li>- <b>4/1893</b>-Gold below \$100 million, then 12/1893- \$80 million (perceived as too little—thus too much fear)</li> <li>- <b>2/1894</b>, gold below \$41 million</li> </ul>
---	---

Cleveland (below), however, focuses on only **one** cause: The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. He is wrong. Repeal of the act does not stop the depression. What stops this depression is J.P. Morgan (below). (Think how people who wanted to avoid panics like this might change the government.)

**Video:** The Populist Challenge **Search Word:** 1893

## Government After the Election of 1892 and the Panic of 1893

Date	President	Election Issue	Public Issue	Resolution—and Ripples
1893-11	Cleveland	Disastrous economy of the Panic of 1893	* <b>Gold/silver</b>	<b>Sherman Silver Purchase Act</b> – REPEAL in special session. Objective: Cleveland accepted the <b>faith that the gold standard</b> people held. He was wrong: it did not solve the problem.
1894	-	Pre-election year	* Protective tariff	Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act – Democratic promise to lower tariff. Was signed over Cleveland’s veto.  Personal income tax – Used to compensate for lost tariff funds; later declared unconstitutional.
1895	-	Continued economic problems	-	2/1895-US Bond sale – handled by J.P. Morgan Clarification: A <b>private</b> banker had to be brought in to reassure the public about US solvency – And he made money of course.
	-	-	-	Knight case – Sherman Anti-Trust can’t apply to manufacturing, a severe blow. (But the Supreme Court does use it against labor in the Pullman Strike.)

## How the Populist Lost Their Candidate for the Election of 1896

**First**, Populists did not understand the danger of a **later** Presidential convention. The Democratic Convention and William Jennings Bryan and his “Cross of Gold” speech takes the Populists’ most dramatic issue—free silver—from the Populists.

**Video:** The Populist Challenge **Search Word:** Cross (Just to hear his slogan)

**Second**, all of the groups that Populists in the west tried to appeal to in the early 1890s did not match them:

1. Laborers (factory workers)
 

Problems with that theory:

  - Threat by some Republican businessmen that workers would not have jobs/would have less pay if Bryan won
  - Inflation (that silver-coinage policy) would help debtors like **some** farmers (but not all). On the other hand, what would inflation do to laborers whose pay was at best staying the same and at worst becoming less? Think about it.
2. Farmers in the South, including the Colored Farmers’ Alliance
 

Problems with that theory:

  - In the beginning, looked promising because white and black poor farmers both suffered from the same causes
  - As Populists succeeded, the Democratic Party in the South used racism to weaken the Populists at the ballot box  
(Also remember the lynching of members of the Colored Farmers Alliance)

**Third**, the Republicans are very efficient and well-funded at this moment. William McKinley ran a front-porch campaign, but a dominant Republican supporter, Mark Hanna, handled the campaign management and funding

1. 18,000 paid speakers through the countryside
2. Funding of this campaign to convince voters of \$3.5-\$4M

**Video:** The Populist Challenge **Search Word:** Hanna

## Election of 1896, the Parties, the Candidates, the Popular Vote, and the Electoral College

The candidates:

- Republican William McKinley - 7,035,638 - 271 .
- Democrat (and endorsed by Populists) –William Jennings Bryan - 6,467,946 - 176

## Background Information Available as Links Above

### What Is a Commission?

These traits may help you understand the commission form of government:

- Begins at the state level with the attempt to stop the power of the railroads through the Granger laws. For example, the railroads were monopolies in the western regions and treated farmers accordingly.
- Is a response to the complexity of the new industrial institutions and monopolies of the Gilded Age and those monopolies' use of experts and therefore the commissions also rely on having their own experts and scientists. (Watch for this in the post 1901 era, particularly with the scientists in the Department of Agriculture)
- Is a response to such business practices as rebates and pooling.  
Caution: the word *rebate* did **not** mean what it does today. The closest meaning is kickback—a large corporation paid the official rate for railroad shipping but received part of that back.
- Is a creator of regulations (something thought of traditionally as a legislative function) but it is under the executive branch.
- Starts with the Interstate Commerce Commission but takes off in the Progressive Era (post 1901) with multiple organizations created to regulate big business, including the FDA and the power of the Department of Agriculture to regulate meat packing.

## Getting Crops to Market and a new form of government

Ask yourself how do farmers get heavy crops to market at a price where they can make a profit:

- How did farmers get their crops to market in the colonial era? The rivers to the sea. What did farmers deeper inland do? They distilled grain into whiskey so they could ship it overland. Roads, even the later development of turnpikes, could not carry these crops.
- How did they get crops to market in the 1820s to 1860? In the Northwest and Northeast, canals. In the Southwest and Southeast, primarily rivers to the sea. With all regions, bit by bit with railroads.
- Envision the Great Plains. Do you see any rivers to the sea or canals there? A crop you can't get to market is just something that will rot.

They are in the hands of railroad and middleman and so they work at the state level with a new form of government and that new form of government because national.

Copyright C. J. Bibus, Ed.D. 2020

**WCJC Department:** History – Dr. Bibus  
**Contact Information:** 281.239.1577 or [bibusc@wcjc.edu](mailto:bibusc@wcjc.edu)