

CHAPTER 7 Section 4 (pages 291–293)

Politics in the Gilded Age

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about political machines and their corruption.

In this section, you will read about how reformers tried to end corruption.

AS YOU READ

Use this diagram to take notes on the achievements of these presidents regarding patronage and tariffs.

TERMS AND NAMES

patronage The giving of government jobs to supporters

civil service The entire government administration

Rutherford B. Hayes 19th president of the United States

Stalwarts Politicians who supported the patronage system

James A. Garfield 20th president of the United States

Chester A. Arthur 21st President of the United States

Pendleton Act Act that implemented merit system in civil service hiring

Grover Cleveland 22nd and 24th president of the United States

Benjamin Harrison 23rd president of the United States

| PRESIDENT | ACHIEVEMENTS |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Chester Arthur</i> | <i>Pendleton Act—reformed civil service</i> |
| <i>Grover Cleveland</i> | |
| <i>Benjamin Harrison</i> | |
| <i>William McKinley</i> | |

Civil Service Replaces Patronage

(pages 291–292)

How was the civil service system reformed?

The late 1800s was known as the Gilded Age in America. This term refers to a time when the nation appeared wealthy and strong. But beneath this surface, the nation faced corruption and widening gap between rich and poor. During this time, reformers tried to rid some of the corruption in federal government.

For many decades, presidents had complained about the problem of **patronage**. This is the giving

of government jobs to people who had helped a candidate get elected. Patronage was based on the belief that the winning administration deserved to employ whomever it wanted. As a result of patronage, many unqualified workers were hired. Others used their positions for personal gain.

Reformers wanted to end the patronage system. They called for a merit system. Under the merit system, jobs in **civil service**—government administration—would go to the most qualified people. It would not matter what their political views were.

President **Rutherford B. Hayes** attempted to reform civil service. This angered some members of

his own party. Hayes decided not to run for reelection in 1880. As a result, the Republicans had to decide on a new presidential candidate.

The party quickly divided over the issue of patronage hiring. On one side were the **Stalwarts**. These Republicans opposed changes in the patronage system. On the other side were the reformers. They supported changing the system. The party eventually settled on an independent candidate, **James A. Garfield**.

Garfield won the presidential election. However, he turned out to have ties to the reformers. Shortly after being elected he was assassinated by a Stalwart.

Garfield's vice-president, **Chester A. Arthur**, succeeded him. Despite being known as a Stalwart, Arthur turned reformer when he became president. He pushed through a civil service reform bill known as the **Pendleton Act** of 1883. This act created a civil service commission to give government jobs based on merit, not politics. The Pendleton Act helped reform the civil service.

However, the Pendleton Act had mixed results. More qualified workers did fill government positions. But because politicians had no jobs to offer, they had trouble seeking money from supporters. As a result, some politicians turned to wealthy leaders for financial support. This only strengthened the ties between government and business.

1. Describe two effects of the Pendleton Act.

Efforts to Regulate Tariffs Fail

(page 293)

What happened to tariffs?

Political reformers in the late 1800s also addressed the issue of tariffs. A tariff is a tax placed on goods coming into or going out of a country. Most Americans believed that tariffs were necessary to protect U.S. industries from foreign competition. But tariffs did cause prices to rise. The question was how high tariffs should be.

In 1884, Democrat **Grover Cleveland** won the presidential election. He tried to lower tariffs. But Congress refused to support him. In 1888, Cleveland ran for reelection on a low-tariff platform. His opponent was **Benjamin Harrison**. Harrison's campaign was funded by large businesses. These businesses wanted tariffs even higher than they were.

Harrison won the election. As president, Harrison passed the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. This act raised tariffs to their highest level ever.

In 1892, Grover Cleveland was elected president again. He supported legislation to lower the McKinley Tariff Act. However, he refused to sign the bill because it called for an income tax. The bill became law in 1894 without the president's signature. As a result, tariffs decreased. In 1896, William McKinley was elected president. He raised tariffs once again.

2. Which two presidents raised tariffs?



Skillbuilder

Use the picture to answer the questions.

1. What two classes are represented here?

2. How does this image represent the Gilded Age?

A luxurious apartment house towers over a nearby shantytown in New York City in 1889. Credit: The Granger Collection, New York

Answer Key

Chapter 7: Immigrants and Urbanization **(pages 272–295)**

