

CHAPTER
15

GUIDED READING *Politics in the Gilded Age*

Section 3

A. As you read this section, fill out the chart below by writing answers to questions about the Gilded Age.

1876	Rutherford B. Hayes elected president	→	1. What was Hayes’s position on civil service reform? What did he do to promote it?
1880	James A. Garfield elected president	→	2. In the debate over civil service reform, did Garfield seem to favor the Stalwarts or the reformers?
1881	Garfield assassinated; Chester A. Arthur assumes the presidency	→	3. What position did Arthur take on civil service reform, and what did he do to support it?
1883	Pendleton Act passed	→	4. What did the Pendleton Act do?
1884	Grover Cleveland elected president	→	5. What was Cleveland’s position on tariffs, and what did he do to promote this position?
1888	Benjamin Harrison elected president	→	6. What was Harrison’s position on tariffs, and what did he do to support that stand?
1892	Cleveland reelected president	→	7. What happened to tariffs during Cleveland’s second presidency?
1897	William McKinley elected president	→	8. What happened to tariffs during McKinley’s presidency?

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B. On the back of this paper, define **political machine** and describe how it worked.

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SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Interpreting Political
Cartoons*

The corruption and graft exhibited by numerous politicians during the Gilded Age did not go unnoticed by the nation's political cartoonists. Examine the political cartoon below and then answer the questions that follow. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. R24.)



1. What is the subject of the cartoon?

2. From where is the politician stealing money? How is he doing it?

3. What is the meaning of the cut "red tape"?

4. What point is the cartoonist trying to make?

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CHAPTER
15**Section 3****RETEACHING ACTIVITY** *Politics in the Gilded Age***Sequencing**

A. Number the events of the Gilded Age below in the order in which they occurred.

- _____ 1. Law officials break up the Tweed Ring.
- _____ 2. President James Garfield is assassinated.
- _____ 3. Congress passes Pendleton Civil Service Act.
- _____ 4. Boss Tweed becomes head of Tammany Hall.
- _____ 5. McKinley Tarriiff raises tariffs to highest level yet.
- _____ 6. Rutherford B. Hayes becomes president.

Finding Main Ideas

B. Choose the word that most accurately completes the sentences below.

Thomas Nast	kickbacks	Grover Cleveland
business	immigrants	farming
Roscoe Conkling	Chester Arthur	African Americans

1. Elected president in 1884 and again in 1892, _____ was the only president to serve two nonconsecutive terms.
2. _____ was the political cartoonist who helped arouse public outrage against the Tweed Ring.
3. Political machines won loyal support from _____ for helping them find housing and jobs.
4. Many political machines enriched themselves with _____, or illegal payments for their services.
5. The _____ community favored high tariffs because they protected domestic industries from foreign competition.

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PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Shame of the Cities*
by Lincoln Steffens

Muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens investigated political corruption in American cities. As you read this excerpt from his book, consider why he viewed Philadelphia as “a disgrace not to itself alone, nor to Pennsylvania, but to the United States.”

The Philadelphia machine isn't the best. It isn't sound, and I doubt if it would stand in New York or Chicago. The enduring strength of the typical American political machine is that it is a natural growth—a sucker, but deep-rooted in the people. The New Yorkers vote for Tammany Hall. The Philadelphians do not vote; they are disenfranchised, and their disenfranchisement is one anchor of the foundation of the Philadelphia organization.

This is no figure of speech. The honest citizens of Philadelphia have no more rights at the polls than the Negroes down South. Nor do they fight very hard for this basic privilege. You can arouse their Republican ire by talking about the black Republican votes lost in the Southern States by white Democratic intimidation, but if you remind the average Philadelphian that he is in the same position, he will look startled, then say, “That's so, that's literally true, only I never thought of it in just that way.” And it is literally true.

The machine controls the whole process of voting, and practices fraud at every stage. The assessor's list is the voting list, and the assessor is the machine's man. . . . The assessor pads the list with the names of dead dogs, children, and non-existent persons. One newspaper printed the picture of a dog, another that of a little four-year-old Negro boy, down on such a list. A ring orator in a speech resenting sneers at his ward as “low down” reminded his hearers that that was the ward of Independence Hall, and, naming the signers of the Declaration of Independence, he closed his highest flight of eloquence with the statement that “these men, the fathers of American liberty, voted down here once. And,” he added, with a catching grin, “they vote here yet.”

Rudolph Blankenburg, a persistent fighter for the right and the use of the right to vote (and, by the way, an immigrant), sent out just before one election a registered letter to each voter on the rolls of a certain selected division. Sixty-three per cent were returned marked “not at,” “removed,”

“deceased,” etc. From one four-story house where forty-four voters were addressed, eighteen letters came back undelivered; from another of forty-eight voters, came back forty-one letters; from another sixty-one out of sixty-two; from another forty-four out of forty-seven. Six houses in one division were assessed at one hundred and seventy-two voters, more than the votes cast in the previous election in any one of two hundred entire divisions.

The repeating is done boldly, for the machine controls the election officers, often choosing them from among the fraudulent names; and when no one appears to serve, assigning the heeler [local political party worker] ready for the expected vacancy. The police are forbidden by law to stand within thirty feet of the polls, but they are at the box and they are there to see that the machine's orders are obeyed and that repeaters whom they help to furnish are permitted to vote without “intimidation” on the names they, the police, have supplied.

The editor of an anti-machine paper who was looking about for himself once told me that a ward leader who knew him well asked him into a polling place. “I'll show you how it's done,” he said, and he had the repeaters go round and round voting again and again on the names handed them on slips. “But,” as the editor said, “that isn't the way it's done.” The repeaters go from one polling place to another, voting on slips, and on their return rounds change coats, hats, etc.

from Lincoln Steffens, The Shame of the Cities (New York: 1904). Reprinted in Richard B. Morris and James Woodress, eds., Voices From America's Past, Vol. 2, Backwoods Democracy to World Power (New York: Dutton, 1963), 238–240.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Philadelphia's machine control voting?
2. Why did Steffens claim that Philadelphians do not vote?
3. Why do you think Philadelphia's political machine flourished in the late 19th century?

CHAPTER
15**Section 3****AMERICAN LIVES****William Marcy “Boss” Tweed**
Corrupt Boss of the Political Machine

“There is not in the history of villainy a parallel for the gigantic crime against property conspired [to] by the Tammany Ring.”—Henry G. Stebbins, report of the Committee of Seventy that investigated the Tweed Ring (1871)

William Marcy Tweed was the most spectacular example of the corrupt boss of the urban political machine of the 1800s. Rising from obscurity to control New York City in a time of its great growth, Tweed and his friends raked in a fortune. Then their empire quickly collapsed.

Tweed (1823–1878) was born in New York. He became a bookkeeper and seemed ready for modest success. After becoming chief of a volunteer fire company, he turned to politics, running for alderman as a Democrat. Knowing that he would probably lose the election to the Whig candidate, he persuaded a friend to run as an independent Whig. By splitting that party’s vote, Tweed won the election.

Tweed took over New York’s Democratic Party, called Tammany Hall after its headquarters. Soon he was elected to the board of supervisors. Despite having no legal training, he opened a law office in 1860. One client paid him \$100,000 in one year alone, knowing that his so-called legal advice would prove useful. Winning the election of friends to various city posts, “Boss” Tweed built his power. In 1861 his candidate defeated a rival for mayor. The campaign cost Tweed \$100,000—but he made the money back quickly.

Soon thereafter Tweed was the head of several New York politicians, a corrupt group—known as a “ring”—that took over control of city finances. They cheated the government out of millions of dollars.

In 1868, the ring controlled the mayor of New York City, the speaker of the state assembly, and the state’s governor. In 1869, the ring decided that all bills sent to New York City and the county would be doubled, with the extra money going into their pockets. Later the share was increased even more.

Because the city did not enjoy complete free-

dom from state control, Tweed had a new city charter written. It appeared to simplify city government, thus winning the support of many prominent New Yorkers as a useful reform. Its real purpose, though, was to increase Tammany control over the city government. Tweed got the state legislature to pass the charter.

By authorizing the building of the Brooklyn Bridge, Tweed collected \$40,000 in stock. The millions received from the fraudulent scheme to build the county courthouse was split five ways. Four parts went to Tweed and three friends. The final share was used to distribute among lesser politicians.

In 1870, the press began a campaign against the Tweed Ring. *Harper’s Weekly*, led by cartoonist Thomas Nast, was first. It was followed by the *New York Times*. The next year, two Democratic opponents of the ring gave the *Times* official records that showed widespread corruption. The ring offered the newspaper \$5 million not to publish the evidence—and another \$500,000 to Nast to stop drawing his cartoons. But they went ahead, and New Yorkers rose in anger. An investigating committee condemned Tweed and his partners, who were then arrested. Tweed spent his last eight years in and out of court and prison. He died in jail at age 55.

Questions

1. What was Tweed’s first political “dirty trick”?
2. What was the secret to Tweed’s success as long as it lasted?
3. The evidence offered to the *New York Times* in 1871 included pages from the city’s account books. Why would they be damaging to the ring?