Political Paralysis in the Gilded Age

1869–1896

Grant . . . had no right to exist. He should have been extinct for ages. . . . That, two thousand years after Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, a man like Grant should be called—and should actually and truly be—the highest product of the most advanced evolution, made evolution ludicrous. . . . The progress of evolution, from President Washington to President Grant, was alone evidence enough to upset Darwin. . . . Grant . . . should have lived in a cave and worn skins.

Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams, 1907
#1: What made politics in the Gilded Age so extremely popular—with over 80 percent voter participation—yet so often corrupt and unconcerned with important national issues?

- The “Bloody Shirt” Elects Grant
- The Era of Good Stealings
- A Carnival of Corruption
- The Liberal Republican Revolt of 1872
- Pallid Politics in the Gilded Age *
#2: What caused the rise of the money issue in American politics? What were the backers of greenback and silver money each trying to achieve?

- Depression, Deflation, and Inflation
  - Cheap-money & Hard-money
  - Resumption Act of 1875
  - “Crime of ‘73”
  - Contraction
  - Backlash: mid-term elections 1874 & Greenback Labor Party *
#3: What caused the end of the Reconstruction? In particular, why did the majority of Republicans abandon their earlier policy of support for black civil rights and voting in the South and what were the consequences?

- The Hayes-Tilden Standoff, 1876
- The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction
- The Birth of Jim Crow in the Post-Reconstruction South
- Class Conflicts and Ethnic Clashes *
#4: What were the causes and political results of the rise of agrarian protest in the 1880s and 1890s? Why were the Populists’ attempts to form a coalition of white and black farmers and industrial workers ultimately unsuccessful?

- The Billion-Dollar Congress
- The Drumbeat of Discontent *
#5: Was the apparent failure of the American political system to address the industrial conflicts and racial tensions of the Gilded Age a result of the two parties’ poor leadership and narrow self-interest, or was it simply the natural inability of a previously agrarian, local, democratic nation to face up to a modern, national industrial economy?

- Garfield & Arthur
- The Blaine-Cleveland Mudslingers of 1884
- “Old Grover” Takes Over
- Cleveland: Tariff, Depression, and Backlash *