

## Period 6: 1865 to 1898

**Overview: The transformation of the United States from an agricultural to an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society brought about significant economic, political, diplomatic, social, environmental, and cultural changes.**

**Key Concept 6.1: The rise of big business in the United States encouraged massive migrations and urbanization, sparked government and popular efforts to reshape the U.S. economy and environment, and renewed debates over U.S. national identity.**

I. Large-scale production — accompanied by massive technological change, expanding international communication networks, and pro-growth government policies — fueled the development of a “Gilded Age” marked by an emphasis on consumption, marketing, and business consolidation.

A. Following the Civil War, government subsidies for transportation and communication systems opened new markets in North America, while technological innovations and redesigned financial and management structures such as monopolies sought to maximize the exploitation of natural resources and a growing labor force.

B. Businesses and foreign policymakers increasingly looked outside U.S. borders in an effort to gain greater influence and control over markets and natural resources in the Pacific, Asia, and Latin America.

C. Business leaders consolidated corporations into trusts and holding companies and defended their resulting status and privilege through theories such as Social Darwinism.

D. As cities grew substantially in both size and in number, some segments of American society enjoyed lives of extravagant “conspicuous consumption,” while many others lived in relative poverty.

II. As leaders of big business and their allies in government aimed to create a unified industrialized nation, they were challenged in different ways by demographic issues, regional differences, and labor movements.

A. The industrial workforce expanded through migration across national borders and internal migration, leading to a more diverse workforce, lower wages, and an increase in child labor.

B. Labor and management battled for control over wages and working conditions, with workers organizing local and national unions and/or directly confronting corporate power.

C. Despite the industrialization of some segments of the southern economy, a change promoted by southern leaders who called for a “New South,” agrarian sharecropping, and tenant farming systems continued to dominate the region.

III. Westward migration, new systems of farming and transportation, and economic instability led to political and popular conflicts.

A. Government agencies and conservationist organizations contended with corporate interests about the extension of public control over natural resources, including land and water.

B. Farmers adapted to the new realities of mechanized agriculture and dependence on the evolving railroad system by creating local and regional organizations that sought to resist corporate control of agricultural markets.

C. The growth of corporate power in agriculture and economic instability in the farming sector inspired activists to create the People's (Populist) Party, which called for political reform and a stronger governmental role in the American economic system.

D. Business interests battled conservationists as the latter sought to protect sections of unspoiled wilderness through the establishment of national parks and other conservationist and preservationist measures.

**Key Concept 6.2: The emergence of an industrial culture in the United States led to both greater opportunities for, and restrictions on, immigrants, minorities, and women.**

I. International and internal migrations increased both urban and rural populations, but gender, racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic inequalities abounded, inspiring some reformers to attempt to address these inequities.

A. Increased migrations from Asia and from southern and eastern Europe, as well as African American migrations within and out of the South, accompanied the mass movement of people into the nation's cities and the rural and boomtown areas of the West.

B. Cities dramatically reflected divided social conditions among classes, races, ethnicities, and cultures, but presented economic opportunities as factories and new businesses proliferated.

C. Immigrants sought both to "Americanize" and to maintain their unique identities; along with others, such as some African Americans and women, they were able to take advantage of new career opportunities even in the face of widespread social prejudices.

D. In a urban atmosphere where the access to power was unequally distributed, political machines provided social services in exchange for political support, settlement houses helped immigrants adapt to the new language and customs, and women's clubs and self-help groups targeted intellectual development and social and political reform.

II. As transcontinental railroads were completed, bringing more settlers west, U.S. military actions, the destruction of the buffalo, the confinement of American Indians to reservations, and assimilationist policies reduced the number of American Indians and threatened native culture and identity.

A. Post-Civil War migration to the American West, encouraged by economic opportunities and government policies, caused the federal government to violate treaties with American Indian nations in order to expand the amount of land available to settlers.

B. The competition for land in the West among white settlers, Indians, and Mexican Americans led to an increase in violent conflict.

C. The U.S. government generally responded to American Indian resistance with military force, eventually dispersing tribes onto small reservations and hoping to end American Indian tribal identities through assimilation.

**Key Concept 6.3: The “Gilded Age” witnessed new cultural and intellectual movements in tandem with political debates over economic and social policies.**

I. Gilded Age politics were intimately tied to big business and focused nationally on economic issues — tariffs, currency, corporate expansion, and laissez-faire economic policy — that engendered numerous calls for reform.

A. Corruption in government — especially as it related to big business — energized the public to demand increased popular control and reform of local, state, and national governments, ranging from minor changes to major overhauls of the capitalist system.

B. Increasingly prominent racist and nativist theories, along with Supreme Court decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, were used to justify violence, as well as local and national policies of discrimination and segregation.

II. New cultural and intellectual movements both buttressed and challenged the social order of the Gilded Age.

A. Cultural and intellectual arguments justified the success of those at the top of the socioeconomic structure as both appropriate and inevitable, even as some leaders argued that the wealthy had some obligation to help the less fortunate.

B. A number of critics challenged the dominant corporate ethic in the United States and sometimes capitalism itself, offering alternate visions of the good society through utopianism and the Social Gospel.

C. Challenging their prescribed “place,” women and African American activists articulated alternative visions of political, social, and economic equality.