

Chapter 23: Political Paralysis in the Gilded Age (1869-1896)

- Population of the U.S. continued to increase rapidly
 - By 1870 the U.S. was the third most populous Western nation (after Russia and France)
- After the war many people were disillusioned, and graft (political corruption) was common

The “Bloody Shirt” Elects Grant

- The Republicans chose Ulysses S. Grant as political candidate because he was the most popular military general, and generals had the tendency to win
 - Had a strong stance towards military Reconstruction
 - People gave many gifts to him, he accepted them all — not very humble
 - He had the noble words, “Let us have peace,” and a popular presidential slogan: “Vote as you shot”
 - They “waved the bloody shirt,” or brought back memories of the glorious Civil War days under General Grant
- The Democrats were less organized than the Republicans
 - Some Democrats wanted to secure some financial bonds in gold, even though they were based in unstable paper currency
 - Some Democrats wanted the “Ohio Idea” that would keep paper currency in circulation
 - They didn’t want military Reconstruction
 - They chose Horatio Seymour as their presidential candidate
- President Grant greatly won the presidential election of 1868
 - He won the electoral vote 214 to 80 against Seymour
 - Grant won popular vote by only 300,000
 - 500,000 blacks probably voted for Grant for fighting for the Union (anti-slavery) cause and led him to win the election

Politics and Power: The presidential election of 1868 was entirely carried out by standard procedure according to the Constitution, policies that were created to balance out power and keep the political process of voting fair. Both parties chose their political candidate without much conflict or violence. President Grant won over presidential nominee Seymour by a close margin, indicating the fierce competition between the two political parties. The use of the electoral college as a election scoring system and the idea of a two-party system that would compete to maintain the favor of the people help keep power between the parties in check. There was also “mudslinging” and “waving the bloody shirt” that were political tactics meant to increase the popularity, and therefore the power, of their party; however, this was balanced because it happened equally on both sides of the election.

The Era of Good Stealings

- There was a lot of economic corruption as well as political corruption
- Jim Fisk and Jay Gould (1869) manipulated the price of gold in the stock market
 - They would rapidly increase the bid for the price of gold, and then the people would increase the bid prices, and then they would sell it at a high price for a high profit before the price collapsed again

- Ended when the government began to release gold, many people lost money when the price of gold dropped (“Black Friday,” September 24, 1869)
 - Similar to the stock market crashes (“Black Tuesday” and “Black Thursday”) in the 1920s that led to the Great Depression, which were also caused by millionaires manipulating the stock market
- Grant and his brother-in-law were paid \$25,000 to prevent the release of gold so that the price of gold would keep going up, but the Treasury eventually released some
- William Tweed of New York led the Tweed Ring in New York City
 - He “employed bribery, graft, and fraudulent elections to milk the metropolis of as much as \$200 million”
 - People were often bribed into complicity, and he was only discovered when *The New York Times* and cartoonist Thomas Nast avoided heavy bribes to publish information about him
 - Tweed was jailed and could do no more after being convicted

A Carnival of Corruption

- Many people sought out Grant for favors, including his in-laws for money
- The Crédit Mobilier scandal (1872) was when Union Pacific Railroad builders hired themselves under the Crédit Mobilier construction company at inflated wages
 - It gave many shares to congressmen and other politicians, including the vice president, as a bribe
- The Whiskey Ring (1874-5) stole millions of dollars from the Treasury in excise taxes
 - Grant’s private secretary was involved in the Whiskey Ring
- Grant’s Secretary of War William Belknap had taken bribes from suppliers to Native American reservations (1876) and resigned

American and National Identity: Amidst the hardworking, honest Americans, there arose a new class of swindlers, many of them associated with the federal government (the Grant administration). These included the manipulation of the value of gold, the Tweed Ring in NYC, the Crédit Mobilier Scandal, the Whiskey Ring, and Grant’s Secretary of War Belknap. While Grant was not found guilty of direct promotion of any of these scandals, it did taint the American Identity with corruption. The republican system of the U.S. was designed to promote the rights of the people and freedom from suppression, and when federal government or ruling body tried to regulate economics, such as King George’s taxes or Andrew Jackson’s high tariffs, greatly hurt the idea of rule by the people. Now, under President Grant, the government was not only seen as over-powerful and suppressive, but also corrupt. This greatly hurt the image of a pristine, new, democratic, anti-graft government of the U.S.

The Liberal Republican Revolt of 1872

- The Liberal Republican faction broke off from the Republicans in 1872 when they were disgusted by his scandals
 - They wanted to stop military Reconstruction and to purify the presidency
 - Chose Horace Greeley as presidential candidate

- Greeley was the editor of the *New York Tribune*, but was too radical and outspoken
 - The Democrats also supported Greeley, even though he had condemned them earlier
- Mudslinging happened as usual
 - Greeley condemned as “an atheist, a communist, a free-lover, a vegetarian, and a cosigner of Jefferson Davis’s bail bond”
 - Grant condemned as “an ignoramus, a drunkard, and a swindler”
 - Both presidents had little political background (Grant was general, Greeley was editor)
- Grant won the presidential election of 1872 by a large margin
 - Won the electoral college 286 to 66
- The Liberal Republicans tried to leave their mark in Congress even though they were defeated
 - They removed any restrictions on former Confederates
 - They put some civil-service reform acts through Congress

Politics and Power: During the Gilded Age, both political parties were very similar, and had very similar political roles; nonetheless, they were still very competitive. The two presidential candidates for the election of 1872 both had little political background: Grant was a military general (who was not a very popular president because of the economic scandals under him) and Greeley was a radical writer who also offended many people for his bluntness. Both parties kept mudslinging for the sake of keeping their candidate in office, even though they did not believe strongly in their candidates for their flaws: Grant was too lenient in terms of economic scandal, and Greeley was known to be “an atheist, a communist, a free-lover, a vegetarian, and a cosigner of Davis’s bail bond.” Also, neither party had a strong political opinion, and their platforms had little to argue. The little reform that came was from the radical Republicans who lost the election, who passed some civil-service reforms in Congress after the election. The Republicans were also split into factions (the “Stalwart” and “half-breed” groups), which reduced its efficiency in Congress. Thus, this was a low point in the two-party system, because they did not have differing views that would balance each other out; instead, it was almost like a one-party system, but with unnecessary competition that still limited the power of both parties but prevented any reform from being carried out, leading to an ineffective government.

Depression, Deflation, and Inflation

- The Panic of 1873 was another financial crisis of the time period
- There was too much economic speculation in railroads, mines, factories, and fields, and bankers made many loans
 - There were low profits sometimes and lots of unpaid loans, which in turn led to the collapse of the credit system
- Freedmen were hard hit
 - The Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company went bankrupt, losing millions of dollars that black Americans had
- Debtors wanted paper money again
 - During the war there was \$450 million newly printed money, but \$100 million had already been taken back by the federal treasury by 1868

- Debtors and poor people wanted more money to be printed, which would cause inflation (more money, which would be easier to pay off)
 - They looked to increase deflation by increasing silver as a currency
- Hard-money advocates wanted all of the paper money to be withdrawn
 - This was true of most creditors, who wanted deflation so that they would get back the full value of the money they lent out
 - In 1874 they got Grant to veto a bill to print more paper money
 - They passed the Resumption Act of 1875 that would mean the government would retract more paper money and redeem paper money for face value (current value) of paper money
- The hard-money advocates blocked the debtor's call for silver, and had the Treasury hold back the store of gold, which had a deflationary effect
 - There was a net deflation in the 1870s, which reduced the per-capita earnings
 - By the day of the redemption of the paper money, few people went to redeem their money because their value was almost at the same value as it was before
 - The deflation probably made the Depression worse, but it improved the country's credit, and paper money was usable and stable again
- A lot of people didn't like the Republican Party's deflationary policies
 - The Democrats had a majority in the House of Representatives in 1874
 - The Greenback Labor party was created in 1878 in response to the loss of paper currency ("greenbacks")
 - They had fourteen members in Congress and had over a million votes in a presidential election

Work, Exchange, and Technology: There was the dispute over whether or not the nation should issue inflationary or deflationary policies. Inflation would help the debtors by paying back cheaper money (less value), but deflation would help the creditors and benefit the nation's credit rating with other nations (with a stable, valuable currency). This debate eventually sided with the deflationary side, which worsened the economic crisis (it was harder for the numerous debtors to pay back creditors) but it was better in the long run because of the good credit it established American currency on. However, the move to deflation also spawned the Greenback Labor party, a powerful pro-inflation group that rose up in response to the deflationary policies. Thus economics during the Gilded Age was not simple, and the system of economic exchange was highly debated. As a result of this, people presumably became less speculative and risky with their earnings, investing less on the risky railroads and banks taking less risks with loans, which led to a more honest system of work that would help eradicate the corrupt systems of the Grant administration.

Pallid Politics in the Gilded Age

- The Gilded Age is the era of the three decades after the Civil War
 - Name given sarcastically to this era by Mark Twain
- The federal government was very unstable during the Gilded Age
 - All of the presidential elections polled very closely in votes between candidates
 - The political party that had the majority changed many times

- The two major political parties had similar economic policies but were still very competitive
 - Both groups had very loyal followers, and voter turnouts were the highest they ever were, and voters were very sure what party they were voting for
- Both parties were strongly linked to their cultural roots, and were somewhat sectional
 - Republicans were linked to Puritanism, with a stricter sense of morality
 - They were based in the Midwest
 - Democrats traced themselves back to Lutherans and Roman Catholics, more based on faith
 - They were based in the South and Northern cities
 - Both parties had a patronage system, in which government offices were given in exchange for voting in the direction of the party
 - The seriousness of the system led to infighting
 - There was the “Stalwart” (led by Roscoe Conkling) and “Half-Breed” (led by James Blaine) factions that wanted to vote for different things in the same party, thus mixed patronage
 - This system was well-established and was not shameful

Politics and Power: (see “The Liberal Republican Revolt of 1872”)

The Hayes-Tilden Standoff, 1878

- President Grant was not allowed to have a third presidential term according to a Congressional vote
 - Because Grant could not run and because patronage factions (Stalwart and Half-Breed) fought each other, the Republicans chose a compromise, dark-horse candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes
 - He served as governor in the swing state of Ohio
- The Democratic presidential nominee was Samuel J. Tilden, who had served as an attorney against the powerful corrupt New York City “Boss” Tweed (in the “Tweed ring”)
- Tilden won popular vote 4,284,020 to 4,036,572 but lost electoral vote 184 to 185 (just one difference!)
 - There was a dispute about counting in three states, and two sets of returns (one Democrat and one Republican) were sent to Congress from each state
 - The Constitution said that the returns be sent to Congress, but if the Senate leader (Vice President, a Republican) read them, then Hayes would win; if House leader (Speaker of the House, a Democrat) read them, then Tilden would win
 - Led Congress to a temporary stalemate

The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction

- The Compromise of 1877 was used to break the deadlock
 - It include the Electoral Count Act, which created a commission of fifteen men from Congress to count the votes, from the Senate, House, and Supreme Court
 - The commission in 1877 had eight Republicans and seven Democrats

- Democrats sought to filibuster (impair decision-making) decision because they had minority, probably going to lose
 - Democrats agreed to choose Hayes if he removed troops from Southern states (ended military Reconstruction)
 - Republicans also agreed to give some patronage positions to Democrats, government subsidies for a southern transcontinental railroad, etc.
- Republicans basically ended their movement towards civil rights with this presidential deal
 - The civil rights sentiment had been waning anyways
 - Republicans thought military Reconstruction was a waste of money that didn't even benefit them (the North)
- Civil Rights Act of 1875 was the last act of the radical Republicans
 - It gave equal accommodations to all races
 - Most of it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court

The Birth of Jim Crow in the Post-Reconstruction South

- Reconstruction was somewhat officially ended with the retraction of federal troops in the South
- The white “redeemers” felt no shame in ruthlessly punishing blacks with “unemployment, eviction, and physical harm”
- Many blacks forced into the sharecropping system
 - Blacks and poor whites had landlords that essentially put them into slavery again
 - The workers usually were always in debt to creditors (masters), so they could never really build up a fortune and escape the sharecropping system
- Multiple Southern anti-slavery laws appeared
 - Jim Crow laws that discriminated against blacks were formed
 - States also discriminated against blacks using “literacy requirements, voter-registration laws, and poll-taxes” to disfranchise freedmen
 - The Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” facilities (i.e., segregation) was legal in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)
 - However, in practice this idea was much worse, with blacks segregated into much inferior and more unsanitary facilities
 - Many Southern blacks were lynched if they tried to assert themselves as equals or otherwise defy the Jim Crow Laws — very little sense of justice

Class Conflicts and Ethnic Clashes

- Class struggles opened up in 1877
 - Mostly as a result of the depression and deflation in the panic of 1873
- Railroads were wealthy but railroad workers were not
 - Railroad workers had a 10% wage cut in 1877, which caused rioting, and the rioting was suppressed by federal troops by President Hayes
 - The use of force caused even more support for the workers, which caused work stopping (worker strikes) and violence, leaving 100 dead by the end of the conflict
 - The worker strikes failed to return wages to normal

- The government wanted railroads to function to keep transportation moving, but they did not really care for the workers
- Ethnic differences between workers also caused conflict
 - In California, about 9% of the population was Asian by 1880
 - Many had come over for the gold rush in 1849 (the “49-ers”) and some had left when the gold rush finished, but some stayed to work on the railroads
 - Those who stayed led extremely hard lives because of discrimination against them
 - They were forced into menial jobs
 - They were often only male workers and did not have families that could assimilate into society
 - Many Irish, who could not compete with the cheap labor of the Chinese, terrorized and murdered many Chinese
 - Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) to prevent any Chinese immigrants, which stayed in effect until 1943
 - The Asians who were born in America could not be stripped of citizenship, however, according to the 14th Amendment

Culture and Society: The Compromise of 1877, the presidential election of 1876, and the end of Reconstruction came all together in one big package. It was a cultural change (end of Reconstruction) with a political beginning (the presidential election). Because the vote was so close between those for Hayes and Tilden, and because the Constitution did not have a specific method of counting votes, a compromise was created. However, this compromise shunned the acts of military Reconstructionism that the Republicans argued for in the post-war era, and as a result led to the decay of any Civil War-based civil rights reform. This did not only stop reform and keep civil rights levels as they were during Reconstruction, but the situation quickly degenerated into a racist hatred again, like before the war. The Jim Crow laws were put into effect in the South, punishing and killing blacks without justice, and an increased fear of cheap labor (that had previously been associated with the blacks) was now directed at Asians in the West. Only in the Civil Rights movement about a century later were more equal rights laws enacted. This example of the presidential election and the end of Reconstruction shows that cultural change in the U.S. needs to be carried through with; the dangling end of military Reconstruction was not enough to create equal rights, and as a result the civil rights issue worsened after Reconstruction.

Garfield and Arthur

- President Hayes was disowned by the Republicans, so they nominated dark-horse candidate James Garfield for president in the 1880 election
 - Garfield won against Democratic candidate Winfred Hancock
- Garfield's Secretary of State, James Blaine (a “half-breed”) was in conflict with James Roscoe Conkling (a “stalwart”)
 - Garfield was shot by Charles Guiteau, who was a stalwart and wanted the vice president, who was a stalwart, to be president
 - Vice President Chester Arthur, a stalwart, became president

- He had a notorious reputation for cronyism (carrying out the patronage system) and being a wasteful spender
- Arthur led reform of the spoils system
 - He turned his back on other stalwarts whose only association with him was the stalwart faction
 - He passed the Pendleton Act (1883) that limited the spoils system and patronage by making it illegal for a federal officials to be forced to give campaign money to others, and it created the Civil Service Commission to make the entry into political office competitive and based on political ability rather than loyalty
 - While this decreased corruption, it also decreased the interest in politics because it was harder to get a job and to make money; many former politicians turned to big businesses instead for money.
 - Arthur's reforms were disliked by powerful, well-established Republicans, and he too was disowned by his party

The Blaine-Cleveland Mudslingers of 1884

- James Blaine (Secretary of State under Garfield/Arthur) was the choice for the Republican nomination for the election of 1884
 - The "Mulligan letters" were discovered linking him to a corrupt railroad deal, tainting his reputation
- The Democrats chose Grover Cleveland, known for being a reformer, as their presidential nominee
 - He was discovered to have had an illegitimate son, which greatly hurt his reputation
- Cleveland won the election of 1884 by only 30,000 votes (4,879,507 to 4,850,293) but in the electoral college by 219 to 182

"Old Grover" Takes Over

- President Grover was the first Democratic president since Buchanan before the Civil War (28 years earlier)
 - He was outspoken, but unbending and had clear morals
 - He supported a laissez-faire government, so that government should not participate in economics
- Cleveland laboriously went through pension cases, reading over every application for pension and manually vetoing some
 - Congress had been too compliant with them earlier, giving pensions to people who had not dutifully served in the war

Politics and Power: Yet another two presidential elections take the scene, with the Republicans' James Garfield winning one election (which was transferred to his VP, Arthur Chester, after his death), and President Grover Cleveland, a Democrat. But while there was no special deals such as with the Compromise of 1877, these elections set some precedents. The election of Cleveland was the first Democratic president since Buchanan and the Democratic party had fell out of favor because of their anti-slavery position. Now that Reconstruction was more or less officially over with the end of military

Reconstruction in the South, the Southern view was not so tainted as before and the Southern politicians could wield political power again. Both of these elections also addressed the issue of political corruption, with the Mulligan Letters condemning Blaine for creating a corrupt deal and Cleveland being accused of having an illegitimate child. However, such mudslinging was part of every election and this only made the presidential election more contested; it gave it a little of the sense of “which-is-the-less-bad-of-the-two” rather than choosing the better President; this was similar to the 2016 election of Trump, in which mudslinging was very high and political and verbal scandals assaulted both Presidents. These examples of political abuse only epitomized the Gilded Age sentiment, begun with the political scandals of Grant.

Cleveland Battles for a Lower Tariff

- The Civil War had greatly jacked up tariffs in order to gain revenue for the troops
 - Since then, the government was gaining \$145 million a year from tariffs, which was embarrassing to the Cleveland, who believed in “fiscal orthodoxy and small-government frugality” (i.e., less government involvement in economics)
 - To lower government profits, money could be spent to gain the favor of certain subsidized groups, or the tariff could be lowered
- Cleveland decided to try to lower the tariff to lower the government surpluses
 - This divided the two parties over a true issue (which had become rare since the Civil War because both parties were very similar in economic beliefs): the Republicans wanted to keep a higher tariff
- For the presidential election of 1888, Cleveland was again chosen as the Democratic party nominee
- Benjamin Harrison (grandson of President William Harrison) was chosen as the Republican party candidate
 - The Republicans raised \$3 million in campaign money, and then shamelessly bribed ordinary people to vote for them (sometimes with only \$20)
- Harrison won the presidential election of 1888 by 233 to 168 electoral votes and 5,537,857 to 5,447,129 popular votes

The Billion-Dollar Congress

- The Congress under Harrison was deemed the Billion-Dollar Congress because its members were very rich, the first to accumulate \$1 billion in total
- Democrats worked hard to obstruct all Republican policies
- Republican Speaker of the House Thomas Reed was very sarcastic and outspoken, bent Congress to his will
- Congress passed the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890 that raised tariffs to the highest levels they had been during peacetime, averaging 48.4% on goods
 - This angered many farmers, who were forced to buy expensive goods from the North and who had to sell their products into the highly competitive global market
 - This caused the Republicans to lose their majority in Congress, and the McKinley Act to be repealed

- Some members of Congress were from the Farmers' Alliance, which was a militant organization of Southern farmers

American and National Identity: The battle on tariffs was a major debate with both sides rooted deeply in different fundamental aspects of American identity, thus rendering both sides very stubborn. The “greenbacks,” including the Farmers’ Alliance, went against the tariffs because they didn’t agree with tariffs, a form of taxes, that limited their economic options much like British mercantilism had before the American Revolution. President Harrison, however, decided to raise tariffs (especially the McKinley Tariff that brought tariffs to almost 50% of the value of the goods) because of the Republicans’ wishes to help Northern industry, which corresponded with the fundamental American resourcefulness and profit-seeking, which allowed them to survive in the frontierlands before America was largely settled by the Europeans. This industrialist sentiment was especially strong because the Congress was very rich, presumably composed mainly of people from prosperous industrial areas, and thus was dubbed the “Billion Dollar Congress.” This in turn enraged many farmers who were forced to buy expensive, local products instead of cheaper ones from the global market. Thus, as usual, the poor and rich classes of American society were in conflict, and this became a common pattern of American identity.

The Drumbeat of Discontent

- The Populist party (People’s party) came to existence in 1892
 - Mostly consisted of angry farmers who believed that the government was not just to them
 - Included members of the Farmers’ Alliance
 - They wanted inflation, including the creation of a silver currency
 - They wanted “a graduated income tax; government ownership of the railroads, telegraph, and telephone; the direct election of U.S. senators; a one-term limit on the presidency; the adoption of the initiative and referendum to allow citizens to shape legislation more directly; a shorter workday; and immigration restriction”
 - They nominated General James Weaver as their presidential candidate
 - Had a strong showing in the election of 1890, polling over a million and getting 22 electoral votes
- Many strikes led by angry farmers or industrial workers happened in the Populist sentiment against government injustice
 - The Homestead Strike (1892) was an especially vicious one, leaving ten dead and sixty wounded before federal troops broke up the fight
- The South was especially against the Populist party
 - The Colored Farmers’ National Alliance shared a common goal with the Farmers’ Alliance, which could give them unity and power; the Southerners still didn’t want power to blacks
 - Populists responded by heavy campaigning to blacks in the South; Tom Watson was a notable Populist proponent
 - The remainder of African American rights strengthened anti-black sentiment

- The Grandfather clause was invented, only exempting blacks from literary tests and poll taxes whose grandfathers had voted before 1860— this meant none of them, because blacks couldn't vote before 1860
- Even the Populist party strayed from its anti-racism sentiment, became racist itself

Cleveland and Depression

- The Republicans were divided and the Populists were disliked by the Southerners, so Cleveland was elected president in 1896
 - He was and still is the only president who has been elected twice, but not consecutively
- There was a high population of debtors, workers' rights were being disputed, and there was an agricultural depression
- There was the Depression of 1893 that hurt the economy (contrary to Cleveland's first term, in which he had to lower the surplus money of the government)
 - Had similar causes to the Panic of 1873 but worse effects
 - The U.S. had to borrow loans from other countries
 - There was still the dispute over whether or not to introduce silver currency into U.S. economics, and this decision damaged U.S. credit by threatening inflation
 - Treasury gold went below \$100 million for issuing gold in return for paper money; this was lower than the "safe minimum" for the country's money
 - The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 was repealed, and thus gold stopped bleeding away from the Treasury
 - Thousands of businesses went bankrupt, and soup kitchens fed the unemployed
- The issue over silver currency was battled out in Congress
 - Some Democrats argued that silver as a currency should be used, but President Cleveland denied this
- Even though the Sherman Purchase Act was repealed, government gold was still very low
 - This threatened to bring the U.S. off of the gold standard, which would greatly decrease its credit to foreign nations
 - J.P. Morgan, a large bank, offered to lend \$65 million in gold to help restore government credit
- President Cleveland almost died from a medical issue, and soft-money Vice President Adlai Stevenson would have taken his place

Cleveland Breeds a Backlash

- Many people thought of the agreement with J.P. Morgan a "sellout of the national government"
 - Big banks and Wall Street were considered the source of much political corruption
 - Cleveland had no shame in the deal, believed that it was the best option for the country
- Cleveland passed the Wilson-Gorman Tariff (1894)
 - This lowered tariffs like the Democrats promised, but not by much— tariffs almost the same as McKinley Tariff rates
 - It also had a clause about income taxes, which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional

- The Populists saw this decision to show that the government was based on plutocrats (people whose power is derived from their wealth; e.g., powerful wealthy people)
- The dislike for Cleveland's tariff policies made the Republicans again have the Congressional majority
- The Gilded Age presidents— Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, and Cleveland— are known as the “forgettable presidents” because they were relatively normal in personality and did not radically change the government (positively)
 - They left lingering issues on currency, the tariff, and workers' rights

Politics and Power: The repeated swing of the two major political parties from popularity to obscurity led the Gilded-Age presidents to become known as the “forgettable presidents” because they could not get much done. The Gilded Age was full of political corruption and political ineptitude. Eventually, both parties were hated for their economic policies, and the political leadership changed hands many times. This shows that the two-party system is not always effective in moderating issues, as sometimes competition can get so fierce as to block any truly progressive reform without the other party totally undoing the action, such as when the Democrats passed the Wilson-Gorman Tariff whose income tax clause was vetoed by the Republican-majority Supreme Court. In other words, an overly equal distribution of party power will let few political policies to pass through. As a result of this fierce party conflict (and party infighting), there were still the political debates on inflation/deflation, the tariff, and workers' rights after the Gilded Age.