Politics and Reform

(1) CHAPTER OUTLINE

Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* contrasts the class divisions and competition of the nineteenth century with a harmonious, cooperative imaginary future society. The novel captures the fears and concerns of middle-class Americans as they struggled to cope with and reform an age marked by serious inequalities of wealth and political neglect.

Politics in the Gilded Age
- Politics, Parties, Patronage, and Presidents
- National Issues
- The Lure of Local Politics

Middle-Class Reform
- The Gospel of Wealth and Social Darwinism
- Reform Darwinism and Pragmatism
- Settlements and Social Gospel
- Reforming the City
- The Struggle for Women's Suffrage

Politics in the Pivotal 1890s
- Republican Legislation in the Early 1890s
- Formation of the People’s Party, 1892
- The Depression of 1893
- The Crucial Election of 1896
- The New Shape of American Politics

Conclusion: Looking Forward
(2) SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* revealed the fears and concerns of many middle-class Americans as urbanization, industrial strife, and immigration changed the face of a once familiar America. The chapter describes the increasing attention of middle-class reformers, many of them Christian intellectuals and women social settlement workers, to urban and other ills in American society. The most serious concern was the growing inequality of wealth, fictionalized in Bellamy's coach scene but actualized in the depression of the mid-1890s.

2. National politics, marked by high voter turnouts and locked in a stalemate between the two major parties, ignored the needs of farmers, workers, and other ordinary Americans, and did little to remedy inequalities of wealth. This chapter draws a sharp contrast between the issues faced (and ignored) at the national level and the lure of such issues as education, temperance, nationality, and race, which were hotly contested in local and state politics.

3. Politics and reform are brought together not only in cities but also in the Populist revolt and the election of 1896, which marked the 1890s as a pivotal turning point in American attitudes and political party alignments.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

**Familiarity with Basic Knowledge**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Characterize Gilded Age politicians, party campaigns, and the two political parties, and briefly explain the three major national and three typical local political issues of the late nineteenth century.

2. Define the following terms: Gospel of Wealth, social Darwinism, reform Darwinism, pragmatism, Social Gospel, Gilded Age.

3. Describe the purpose and the programs of the settlement house movement, the Social Gospel, and urban reformers.

4. State and briefly explain the results of three areas of legislation Congress considered in 1890, and explain the causes of the depression of 1893 - 1897.

5. Explain the party strategies, campaign issues, and results of the election of 1896.
Practice in Historical Thinking Skills

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Analyze the relationship between national and local politics in the Gilded Age and the middle-class movement for reform.

2. Explain the motivations and programs of urban reformers, the Social Gospel and settlement workers, and those seeking women's suffrage.

3. Analyze the significance of the election of 1896 as a response to the crises of the pivotal 1890s.

(4) IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW

1873  Congress demonetizes silver
1875  Specie Resumption Act
1877  Rutherford B. Hayes becomes president
1878  Bland-Allison Act
1879  Henry George writes *Progress and Poverty*
1880  James A. Garfield elected president
1881  Garfield assassinated; Chester A. Arthur succeeds to presidency
1883  Pendleton Civil Service Act
1884  Grover Cleveland elected president
        W. D. Howells writes *The Rise of Silas Lapham*
1887  College Settlement House Association founded
1888  Edward Bellamy writes *Looking Backward*
        Benjamin Harrison elected president
1889  Jane Addams establishes Hull House, Chicago
        Andrew Carnegie promulgates the “Gospel of Wealth”
1890  General Federation of Women's Clubs founded
        Sherman Anti-Trust Act
        Sherman Silver Purchase Act
        McKinley Tariff
        Elections bill defeated
1890s  Wyoming (‘90), Colorado (‘93), Utah (‘96), and Idaho (‘96) grant women suffrage

1892  Cleveland elected president for the second time
      Populist party wins over one million votes
      Homestead Steel strike, Pennsylvania

1893  World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago

1893 - 1897  Financial panic and depression

1894  Pullman strike
       Coxeys “Army” march on Washington, D.C.

1895  *United States v. E. C. Knight*

1896  Charles Sheldon writes *In His Steps*
      Populist party fuses with Democrats
      William McKinley elected president

1897  “Golden Rule” Jones elected mayor of Toledo, Ohio
      Economic recovery begins

**Other Names to Know**

James G. Blaine    Roscoe Conkling    Washington Gladden
Jane Addams        Vida Scudder       William James
Frances Willard    John Dewey         Victoria Woodhull
Kate Chopin        Charlotte Perkins Gilman Carrie Chapman Catt
Horatio Alger, Jr. Andrew Carnegie    Susan B. Anthony
Herbert Spencer    William Graham Sumner Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Dwight Moody       William Jennings Bryan
Charles Eliot      Walter Rauschenbusch

(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

**Gilded Age:** term coined by Mark Twain and C. D. Warner referring to the late-nineteenth-century preoccupation with making money, also suggesting superficiality and corruption

**Gospel of Wealth:** the doctrine, identified with Andrew Carnegie, that the rich had a responsibility, a stewardship, to use their wealth for the public good

**social Darwinism:** the application of Darwin's theories of the struggle for existence and natural selection (survival of the fittest) in the biological world to the human world of socioeconomic affairs: the strong succeed while the weak do not and should not
Social Gospel: movement in churches to apply Christian principles to social concerns, especially in cities and factories

suffragists: women actively working for the right to vote (not suffragettes—a diminutive, often insulting term)

bossism: system of urban government in which the local party chief, or boss, dispenses many favors and engages in various forms of corruption in return for votes and financial support

pragmatism: an American philosophy that finds the best test of truth in consequences, in how well an idea works

laissez-faire: a doctrine that argued that all would benefit from an economic life free from government interference

(6) ENRICHMENT IDEAS

1. Material culture can provide insights in recovering the social and political life of the past. The study of material artifacts generated by the campaign of 1896 reveals much about the values and issues of American political life. Mail-order catalogs, which show dress styles and the goods purchased by Americans in a given age, can also reveal much about a culture. Today's households are usually inundated with catalogs. Compare a catalog from the Gilded Age with some of the catalogs you receive. What similarities and differences in middle-class life and consumption patterns are suggested? What do you conclude about leisure and gender roles? What do the buttons, bumper stickers, and material artifacts of a recent political campaign show about contemporary political behavior?

2. To what extent do middle-class men and women play a role in local, state, or national politics today? Identify and interview some persons active in politics. Find out what their concerns are, why they are active, and how effective they think they are. Then compare them to the middle-class reformers of the 1890s.

3. The excitement of the Democratic party convention in 1896 and Bryan's “Cross of Gold” speech is worth special research and attention. So is the election itself. Whose side would you have been on? Why?
Multiple choice: Choose the best answer.

1. *Looking Backward* was a utopian novel written by
   a. Henry Adams
   b. Henry George
   c. Edward Bellamy
   d. Kate Chopin

2. Political parties in the late nineteenth century were concerned primarily with
   a. patronage
   b. ideological consistency
   c. racial issues
   d. foreign affairs

3. Tariffs in the late-nineteenth-century were
   a. extremely high and protective
   b. subject to individual adjustments by the president
   c. basically high, although usually a mixture of high and low rates
   d. tied to coinage of silver each time they came before Congress

4. Supporters of hard money wanted
   a. to increase the supply of paper money
   b. to increase the supply of silver
   c. to make greenbacks convertible to specie
   d. to encourage inflation

5. During the Gilded Age,
   a. the Democrats were ascendant
   b. the Republicans dominated
   c. third parties severely disrupted the political process
   d. the two major parties were evenly matched

6. To aid in the campaign for voting, women by the end of the 19th century
   a. raised huge sums of money from corporations
   b. combined into one organization to increase effectiveness
   c. focused their energy on getting acceptance only in the Democratic Party
   d. used noisy protest marches to get arrested in large numbers

7. The large turnout of voters in state and local elections in the Gilded Age meant that voters were probably concerned with
   a. getting jobs and favors as a result of their vote
   b. ethnocultural issues like immigration, temperance, and parochial schools
   c. specific local issues like race and railroad rates
   d. all of the above
8. According to the “Gospel of Wealth,”
   a. the rich had an obligation to become ministers
   b. the rich had an obligation to use their money to help others
   c. Americans were becoming more democratic
   d. profits should be reinvested for more profits

9. All of the following are identified with social Darwinism EXCEPT
   a. Herbert Spencer
   b. William Graham Sumner
   c. Henry Adams
   d. Andrew Carnegie

10. The settlement house movement
   a. blended idealism and practical goals
   b. typified the utter unreality of middle-class women
   c. was at odds with sociology
   d. was a hotbed of socialism

11. Urban bosses
   a. taxed their constituents
   b. offered “welfare” support to people who voted for them
   c. mostly ran saloons
   d. were a figment of reformers' imagination

12. The younger generation of women suffragists in the 1890s primarily
   a. used expedient arguments
   b. cited principles
   c. marched on Washington to hold rallies
   d. quoted Saint Paul and the Bible

13. During the depression of 1893 - 1897, what portion of the American labor force
   was unemployed?
   a. a half
   b. a third
   c. a fifth
   d. a tenth

14. The election of 1896 was significant because
   a. the Democrats became the party of prosperity and national greatness
   b. the Republicans became the dominant party in the United States
   c. the Populists became a permanently significant force in American politics
   d. all of the above

15. Populist Party strength in the 1890s indicated
   a. dissatisfaction with the inequalities in America
   b. that Civil War veterans could create a political movement
   c. that urban reform needed a strong political base
   d. only workers in the urban factories were dissatisfied
16. Populist supporters included
   a. most rural Americans
   b. city workers
   c. farmers living in isolated rural areas
   d. only the poorest and most debt-ridden farmers

17. The Populist party was perceived by many Americans as
   a. just another party
   b. a radical threat to the established order
   c. a splinter group of the Republican party
   d. a rational response to new conditions

**Essays**

1. Explain why the 1890s was a “pivotal” decade.

2. Bossism was a national political response to urban life and shifting social patterns. Discuss with evidence.

3. Middle-class reformers in the Gilded Age were concerned with modifying the political and social system, not discarding it. Discuss.

4. Analyze the significance of the election of 1896 for American politics.

5. Explain how women suffragists changed their strategies to win votes in the 1890s.