**Period 6**

**1865-1898**

**OVERVIEW**

Between 1865 and 1898, the United States was transformed from a primarily agricultural society to one dominated by urbanization and industry. This shift brought with it many environmental, cultural, political, and economic changes. The rise of major industries led to increased migration to cities, resulting in changes in all areas of life for those living in urban areas. The federal government aided the growth of big business, as changes in technology and international communication linked American producers and consumers with the rest of the world.

In the years following the Civil War, the U.S. government subsidized industries that were viewed as essential to national expansion and aided the growth of new technologies and business models. The creation of monopolies allowed a small number of businessmen to expand their companies to dominate entire segments of the economy. These companies also expected that the government would help them control overseas resources. The prevalent belief in Social Darwinism, the idea that the more talented groups and individuals would and should rise to the top, helped justify the growing divide between the few very rich and the increasing numbers of poor. This discrepancy was particularly evident in urban areas, where the lifestyles of the rich were in sharp contrast to the more numerous poorer neighborhoods.

Various groups did offer challenges to the dominance of big business leaders. Labor movements gradually gained influence, hoping for better pay, better working conditions, and limits to child labor. The South continued to be primarily agricultural rather than industrial, with sharecropping and tenant farming replacing the old plantation system in what was called the “New South.”

Westward migration continued to lead to conflicts about the management of natural resources. Some progress was made during this era in the establishment of the first national parks, though conservationists had an uphill battle. More efficient farming technology meant greater demands for land and more reliance on railroads to get farm goods to regional and national markets. Government favoritism toward business, coupled with unpredictable farming conditions, led to the creation of the People’s (Populist) Party to represent the political and economic interests of farmers and other workers.

Immigrants, minorities, and women faced both progress and challenges during these years. America’s cities became destinations for growing numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as African Americans who sought better situations than they could find in the Deep South. They did find economic opportunities, but they also were relegated to poorer neighborhoods, often divided by race and class. Urban areas were often dominated by political machines that preyed on the needs of poorer classes, though some private efforts, such as the settlement house movement, sought to provide some relief to the working poor. Women’s clubs worked to offer opportunities for middle-class women to become involved in civic and political issues.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad and the resulting flood of new settlers to the Great Plains and the West hastened the demise of independent Indian tribes. Those who survived military action were decimated by the loss of the buffalo on which their culture depended. Reservations replaced tribal homelands in a misguided effort to force assimilation. Additional conflicts arose in the Southwest between settlers and Mexican Americans.

The rapid growth of big business during the Gilded Age was characterized by widespread corruption in both industry and government. Soon reformers were calling for changes, but they met stiff resistance from the powers in Congress, the Supreme Court, and the monopolists. Racism and nativism were reinforced with Supreme Court rulings like *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Even so, not all industrial leaders were Social Darwinists. A few suggested that the wealthy and successful did have an obligation to help the poor. Many reformers took up the goals of reform under the banner of the Social Gospel. Others directed their efforts at specific groups, especially African Americans and women.

**KEY TERMS**

Capitalism Naturalism

Commercial domesticity Political machines

Consumer culture Popular culture

Corporate ethic Public sphere

Fact worship Social Darwinism

Gilded Age Spoils system

Literary realism Suffrage

Management revolution Vaudeville

Maternalism

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the agricultural economy of the “New South.”
2. How were white southerners able to “redeem” the South in the aftermath of Reconstruction?
3. Why and in what ways did white Americans attempt to influence Indians to adopt white customs and behaviors?
4. How did women’s roles change during the Gilded Age, and what part did women play in bringing about change, especially in American cities?
5. From the reading, list and describe two factors that led to the development of the Populist Party.
6. How did industrialization and immigration help to transform the American city in the late nineteenth century?
7. From the reading, list and describe three challenges by immigrants, minorities, and women who lived in cities during Period 6 (1865 – 1898).
8. How did economic changes at home affect U.S. policies abroad?
9. Why, despite their shortcomings, were political machines able to become such a powerful force in America’s cities?
10. How were a few industrialists able to consolidate so much production and profit in industries like steel, oil, and railroads?