The Gilded Age: 1870s-1890s: Part 1

The Gilded Age
- This term was coined by Mark Twain, a prolific author in the late 1800s. Twain mocked greed and selfishness within his culture.
- Twain also attacked political corruption that arose through political leaders who put self-interest above service during the Gilded Age.

Political Machines
- Rapid growth of cities caused the rich to get richer and MORE citizens to become poor. Social Darwinism dominated the economy.
- This is the structure of the political machine: (1) The City Boss: ruled the city as mayor (2) Ward Bosses: secured votes for the city mayor (3) Local Precinct Workers

Corruption, Greed, and Political Machines
- The mayors gave favors to citizens in exchange for power to be in government offices.
- The goal was to GET ELECTED to maintain power.

Immigrants and the Political Machines
- Many leaders involved in the Political Machines were immigrants or the direct descendants of immigrants. The votes of the immigrants mattered a great deal to the political bosses.
- The Political Machines often attempted to accommodate the needs of the immigrants to keep political power.

Social Darwinism and Immigrants
- As immigrants arrived in the USA, they were radically impacted by Social Darwinism.
- Big business leaders paid low salaries and the factories had many health hazards.

The Political Boss
- The “boss” served as mayor in the city. He had access to government jobs and business licenses.
- In some cases, the political machine helped citizens.

Corruption in the Gilded Age
- Kickbacks, over charging the city for a service and giving the surplus to the “boss,” was an example of graft.
- Criminals used bribes to pay a mayor to look the other way while they did illegal activity, another example of graft.

The “Boss” Tweed Scandal
- William “Boss” Tweed led New York City in the late 1860s to the early 1870s.
- Tweed was given a prison sentence of 12 years, served 1 year, escaped, and he was eventually arrested again in Europe.
The Gilded Age
- The Gilded Age refers to the era in US History from the 1870s to the 1890s.
- This term was coined by Mark Twain, a prolific author in the late 1800s. Twain mocked greed and selfishness within his culture.
- Twain also attacked political corruption that arose through political leaders who put self-interest above service during the Gilded Age.

Political Machines
- Rapid growth of cities caused the rich to get richer and MORE citizens to become poor. Social Darwinism dominated the economy.
- “Political Machine” simply referred to groups who offered services to voters and businesses for political power and reelection.
- This is the structure of the political machine: (1) The City Boss: ruled the city as mayor (2) Ward Bosses: secured votes for the city mayor (3) Local Precinct Workers

Corruption, Greed, and Political Machines
- The mayors gave favors to citizens in exchange for power to be in government offices.
- The goal was to GET ELECTED to maintain power.
- This is not necessarily a negative structure. Yet, it depended on the leader. Some leaders used their power corruptly and some used their power to help citizens.

Immigrants and the Political Machines
- Cities grew substantially in the late 1800s, due to the increase of factories and industry. Often, the workers who came to work at these factories were immigrants.
- Many leaders involved in the Political Machines were immigrants or the direct descendants of immigrants. The votes of the immigrants mattered a great deal to the political bosses.
- The Political Machines often attempted to accommodate the needs of the immigrants to keep political power.

Social Darwinism and Immigrants
- As immigrants arrived in the USA, they were radically impacted by Social Darwinism.
- Big business leaders paid low salaries and the factories had many health hazards.
- Many immigrants looked to the political machines to help them achieve better housing, improve city conditions, and to address other needs.

The Political Boss
- The “boss” served as mayor in the city. He had access to government jobs and business licenses.
- In some cases, the political machine helped citizens.
- For instance, Roscoe Conkling, mayor of Utica, New York, gave money to build city structures, helped hospitals, and gave to orphanages with his power.

Corruption in the Gilded Age
- Graft is a term that describes any illegal use of political power for personal gain.
- Kickbacks, over charging the city for a service and giving the surplus to the “boss,” was an example of graft.
- Criminals used bribes to pay a mayor to look the other way while they did illegal activity, another example of graft.

The “Boss” Tweed Scandal
- William “Boss” Tweed led New York City in the late 1860s to the early 1870s.
- He gave $13 Million in tax payer money to build a $3 Million court house and took a “kickback” from the contractor.
- Tweed was given a prison sentence of 12 years, served 1 year, escaped, and he was eventually arrested again in Europe.