

POLITICAL CONSERVATISM
1877 - 1901

1877 -- Hayes's compromise

1901 -- Teddy Roosevelt and Progressive Reform

Due to the confusing era of industrialization, Americans sought stability in politics.

Political Conservatism means:

- status quo
- big business rules
- laissez-faire

Characteristics of the Era:

1. Political leadership was not outstanding.
2. Few issues were discussed.
3. Politicians took few chances (wanted no risks, no changes).
4. Presidents were generally subordinate to congressional superiority.
 - with the exception of Hayes and Cleveland
5. Both major parties supported big business and laissez-faire.
6. The Republican Party elected every President but Grover Cleveland (1884, 1892), but elections were close especially in popular vote and only twice (1874, 1894) were both houses of Congress controlled by the same political party.
7. Both political parties were regional and made up of 3 factions (Stalwarts, Half Breeds, and Mugwumps)
 - Republican support came from the industrial Northeast and the farming Midwest
 - favored high protective tariffs, subsidies and free land and were less laissez faire than Democrats
 - their voting bloc was composed of wealthy businessmen, farmers, blacks, and Union veterans
 - there were 2 factions in the Republican Party:
 1. Stalwarts (Conservatives) led by Roscoe Conkling of New York favored the old issues of the South
 2. Half Breeds (Liberals) led by James Blain of Maine favored new issues
 - Democratic support came from the South ("Solid South") and the political machine cities of the Northeast
 - favored low tariffs, sound money and were more laissez faire than the Republicans
 - their voting bloc was composed of merchants, bankers and new immigrants
 - Democratic leaders in the South were called Conservatives or Bourbons by their enemies
8. Party Bosses controlled the political parties. Such "bosses" as Blaine, Conkling, Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, Senator "Black Jack" Logan of Illinois courted personal loyalty and stressed the spoils system.

- rewarded party workers with jobs
- After the 1883 Civil Service Reform Act, business-type bosses appeared like Marcus Hanna of Ohio

9. A new type of reformer developed during this period:

3. Mugwumps were reformers (usually Republicans) who were liberal on social issues but held conservative economic views (like laissez faire, tariff reform, sound money, civil service reform).

- Examples of Mugwumps were: Carl Schurz
George William Curtis (editor of *Harper's Weekly*)
E L. Godkin (editor of the *Nation*)

RUTHERFORD B. HAYES
Stalwart Republican 1877-1881

Hayes was a former Ohio Governor, an honest and able reformer, who was unable to get new laws because:

- he was opposed by his own party leaders (Stalwarts)
- there was a Democratic majority in Congress
- he lacked public confidence due to the Compromise of 1877

Hayes' Domestic Policies

- He withdrew federal troops from the South *ending Reconstruction* and vetoed the repeal of federal protection of elections
- He selected officeholders on *merit* and challenged Congress on appointments
 - Ex: Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz
 - The Presidential Commission of 1877 under John Jay investigated Custom House patronage in New York City and dismissed Chester A. Arthur, the collector, and naval officer Alonzo Cornell
- He set a *presidential precedent* by sending federal troops to end railroad strikes in 1877.
 - later Cleveland does this in the 1894 Pullman Strike
- The Chinese Exclusion Act (1881) passes over Hayes' veto
- The Bland-Allison Act (1878) passed over Hayes' veto and provided for \$2-4 million of silver a month to be purchased and coined by the government.
 - this favors farmers and blue collar workers
 - Hayes was laissez faire on currency
 - Background on the controversy:
 - "Crime of 73" occurred when the U.S. went on the gold standard so there was no coinage of silver. The Specie Resumption Act of 1875 reduced the number of greenbacks and replaced them with money backed by gold. Greenbackers (in favor of inflation) opposed this law (mostly farmers, debtors) and in 1878 formed the Greenback Party and sought the free coinage of silver at 16 oz. to 1 oz. gold as there were new silver mines in Nevada, Arizona, and Colorado.

JAMES A. GARFIELD
Half Breed Republican 1881

Garfield was a college president, Civil War General, and Congressman from Ohio.

- chosen as a dark horse candidate after the deadlock between Grant and Blaine
- defeated Gen. Winfield Hancock in the 1880 presidential election by a vote of 214-155

His appointment of Blain, a Half Breed, as Sec of State angered Conservatives

Garfield was shot July 2 by Charles Guiteau, a Stalwart disappointed office seeker.

- Garfield was disabled for 11 weeks and died on Sept 19, 1881.
- he was shot in the railroad station in Washington, D C. en route to Williams College for Parent's Weekend (he was also a graduate of Williams)

CHESTER A. ARTHUR
Stalwart Republican 1881-1885

Arthur was the Stalwart V.P. under Garfield who surprised many as he was an able administrator who made good appointments and fought fraud and corruption especially in the Post Office.

Arthur's Domestic Policies

- Congress appropriated money for the first steel warships
- The *Pendleton Act* of 1883 established a merit system of competitive exams for government jobs
 - passed as a direct result of Garfield's assassination
 - main idea of this reform: highest score on the test gets appointed
 - it affected only 10% of federal employees then
 - it affects 90% today
 - it established a Civil Service Commission of three members
 - this is considered to be Arthur's most important achievement

GROVER CLEVELAND
Democrat 1885-1889

Cleveland was a strong executive who took a stand on issues.

The 1884 presidential campaign turned into a personality battle between:

- Republican Blaine who was referred to as the "Plumed Knight" and accused of dishonest political deals with railroad promoters.
- Democrat Cleveland who was accused of being a drunkard and fathering an illegitimate son, being nominated by state bosses and financed by corporations.

The Democrats won in 1884 because:

- Mugwumps deserted the Republican Party
- Blaine's association with dishonesty hurt him badly
- business depression was blamed on the Republicans in power

Cleveland had been mayor of Buffalo and Governor of New York. He became an outstanding President due to his courage, honesty, and concern for public welfare. His administration motto was: "A public office is a public trust." As a conservative, Cleveland was for *sound money and respected property rights*.

Cleveland's Domestic Policies

- Cleveland vetoed the Dependent Pension Bill (1887) which would have provided a retirement fund for honorably discharged veterans unable to work, regardless of their disability.
- He used civil service reform to replace some Republicans with Democrats and appointed Conservatives.
 - he broke with the Mugwumps
- He *encouraged conservation* and regained 81 million acres of land improperly acquired by railroads and ranchers.

- The Wabash Decision of the Supreme Court overturned the state Granger laws and upset farmers.
- Labor unrest was highlighted by the Haymarket Strike of 1886.
- The *Dawes Act* (1887) helped Indians
- The *Interstate Commerce Act* (1887) curbed railroad abuses though Cleveland signed it into law "reluctantly".
- He was unable to get tariff reduction

BENJAMIN HARRISON Stalwart Republican 1889-1893

Harrison was the grandson of former President William Henry Harrison who was in office for only 1 month before he died of pneumonia

- B. Harrison was a former Union General, corporation lawyer and Senator from Indiana
- As a man of honesty and a loyal party supporter, Harrison would rather follow than lead Congress.

The presidential campaign of 1888 was the most corrupt up to that time.

- Cleveland got 100,000 more popular votes, but Harrison got the necessary electoral votes (233-168)
- The Democrats lost votes because they favored tariff reduction and the Republican campaign was led by Sen. Matt Quay of Pennsylvania with his effective organization.

Harrison's Domestic Policies

- He appointed Republicans to pay off political debts.
 - Sec. of State James Blaine
- The so-called "Billion Dollar" Congress had a Republican majority and a federal budget over a billion dollars especially due to Civil War pensions and subsidies to steamship companies, river and harbor improvements and return of federal taxes by Northern states.
- According to the *Dependent Pension Act of 1890* Union vets got disability payments if they were honorably discharged after a minimum of 90 days service.
- The *Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890* was passed but not enforced.
- The *Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890* replaced the Bland-Allison Act by:
 - increasing the government purchase of silver and silver certificates
 - certificates issued could be redeemed in gold or silver but the government used gold and therefore, there was no currency expansion
- The *McKinley Tariff of 1890* was intended to benefit U.S. business and meant tariff rates went up. It had a reciprocity clause stating that countries lowering their rates on U.S. imports would be allowed a lower tax on exports into the U.S. As this tariff raised duties on most imports, it hurt the farmers
- Labor strikes increased
- The *Populist Party* was formed in 1892.

AGRARIAN REVOLT

American farmers reached their lowest point in the 1890s because communication and transportation changes created a world-wide market with no controls on production so farm prices fell.

Economic Problems

1 *Overproduction*

- high supply/low demand means farmers lose money so they turn to destroying some of their crops by making gasohol, corn mash liquor, corn meal for animals

- all of this isn't enough to help
- 2 *High farm costs* due to monopolies on farm machinery
 - John Deere
 - John McCormick
- 3 *Increased debts* because there were few banks in farm areas and high interest rates due to the risks of farming
- 4 *Deflationary money policies* of little money in circulation and maintenance of the gold standard.
- 5 *Problem of middlemen* especially railroads who cut into profits and discriminate in their rates especially in the South and West.
- 6 *High property tax* seemed unfair to farmers as their land was actually their business
 - unlike a regular business like Crane and Co.
 - the South and West especially affected as they grow staple crops and tight money hurts them more

Economic Solutions

1. The *Grange* or Patrons of Husbandry was formed in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelley to allow farmers to discuss farm problems and to socialize
 - problem: leadership
2. *Cooperatives* were businesses owned and operated by farmers with two purposes:
 - to bypass the middlemen and sell directly to markets
 - Ex: Agway (Agriculture Way) buildings next to railroad tracks
 - to buy supplies and equipment in large quantities at wholesale prices
 - problem: lack of capital and business experience
 - it would take a generation for farm kids to go to college to learn business techniques to take over the family farm (my Grandfather did that!!)

Political Solutions

- State Granger laws were passed so government could regulate the railroads and stop unfair practices
 - occurred in Illinois first in 1877 as Grange formed in 1867
- *Munn v. Illinois* (1877) the Supreme Court ruled the government does have the right to regulate businesses "in the public interest"
- *Wabash Case* (1886) the Supreme Court ruled only Congress can regulate businesses that are interstate commerce
- Interstate Commerce Act (1887) to regulate railroads at the national level
- National Farmers' Alliance of 1877 was led by Dr. Charles Macune as a "subtreasury plan" to raise farm prices, to have government warehouses and loans with crops as collateral.
 - They also favored the direct election of senators, control over railroad and telegraph and had their own press and lecturers
 - overall, in favor of direct government aid to farmers

1892 -- Populist Party

A third political party was formed known as the Populist or People's Party in 1892 out of frustration in trying to work within the Democratic and Republican Parties which ignored farmers' problems.

Two Goals:

1. reform the government of the U S to benefit all people
 - government has a social responsibility
2. reform the economy of the U S to benefit all people
 - against laissez faire

Members: Southern and Western farmers and blue collar workers in cities

7 specific goals of the Populists:

1. silver ratio should be 16 oz./1 oz. of gold
 2. government ownership of railroads, telephone, telegraph
 3. graduated income tax
 4. 8 hour day for government employees
 5. direct election of U S. Senators
 6. implement use of secret ballot
 7. restrictions on immigration
- all of these were achieved by the Progressive Age (1901-1917)

Candidate: James Weaver (Democrat, Iowa)
-- chicken farmer (Weaver Chicken)

In the election of 1892 Weaver received 22 electoral votes and over 1 million popular votes for President.
-- excellent for a third party
-- this scares the other two parties to steal or accept the Populist platform
That same year the Populist Party elected 10 Representatives, 5 Senators, 3 Governors and 1500 state legislators in just one year's existence.

GROVER CLEVELAND (1893-1897)

Cleveland was the first to be elected in a second nonconsecutive time, first to be reelected after a defeat, first to receive a popular vote plurality in three successive elections.

The main campaign issue in 1892 focused on the tariff.
-- Republicans were for a high tariff, Democrats for tariff reform.
-- Cleveland won (277-145) over Harrison and Weaver due to resentment over the McKinley Tariff, and Harrison's use of troops in the Homestead Strike.

Cleveland's Domestic Policies

- *Panic of 1893 and Depression* was blamed wrongly on Cleveland and revived the struggle between gold and silver. Cleveland tried many ways to deal with this Depression with the exception of direct relief
 - he thought it was part of the normal business cycle
- (1893) Cleveland repealed the *Sherman Silver Purchase Act* as a way to avoid damage to the dollar by a reduced gold supply and to maintain the gold standard, but the drain on gold continued so Cleveland used four bond drives but gold still decreased in value.
- Congress refused to pass a *Good Roads Bill* to provide federal work relief for 2.5-3 million unemployed who would work on public roads and be paid with \$500 million in Treasury notes.
- (1894) *Coxey's Army* was a march of the unemployed from Ohio to Washington, D C... They sought work and relief from the government. This resulted in violence and arrests
- (1894) Fourteen strikes occurred; the most notable was the *Pullman Strike* where an injunction was issued against the union and Eugene Debs was imprisoned.
- (1894) *Wilson-Gorman Tariff* was made law without Cleveland's signature as it resulted in minor tariff reductions and had a provision for an income tax on income over \$4000.
- (1895) The Supreme Court ruled the income tax was unconstitutional as it violated the direct tax clause of the Constitution
 - therefore, the 16th Amendment was passed later to allow for an income tax

In the Congressional Elections of 1894 the Republicans won, but the Populists increased their votes by 42%. The Democrats lost due to the split of New England conservatives from the Southern and Western silver Democrats

-- the silver issue split the Democrats

WILLIAM MCKINLEY
Stalwart Republican 1897-1901

Presidential Campaign of 1896:

- Republicans nominate McKinley whose "full dinner pail" slogan emphasized prosperity, the high tariff and the gold standard.
 - though McKinley had voted for both silver laws
- Democrats and Populists nominated William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska who stood for the free coinage of silver at 16 oz /1 oz. of gold and was against the protective tariff, trusts, and the income tax.
 - Bryan (age 36) was known as the "Boy Orator of the Platte" (a river in Nebraska) and traveled 1800 miles by train and gave over 600 speeches; the most famous speech was titled "*Cross of Gold*" in which he stated: "You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold"
- 4 key differences between Bryan and McKinley on issues:
 - Bryan favored silver, nationalism, a low tariff, farmers and blue collar workers to be empowered
 - McKinley favored gold, imperialism, a high tariff, and big business
(this is important because the U S voters had a CLEAR choice of the direction for the U S to take)
- Bryan lost 271-176 as he lost labor support and was accused of being a socialist. He carried only farm areas.

A Congressman and Governor of Ohio, William McKinley's friend Marcus Hanna helped him to win the presidency by raising \$3.5 million from big business sources

-- that was 10 times as much as Bryan raised

McKinley's Domestic Policies

- Prosperity returns as the amount of European wheat decreases and gold is found in Alaska, Australia, and South Africa
- The *Dingley Tariff of 1897* raised tariff duties an average of 52% and included reciprocal trade agreements.
- The *Gold Standard Act of 1900* put the U.S. on the gold standard
- Antitrust laws were not enforced by his administration

McKinley's Foreign Policies

- Hawaii was annexed.
- The Spanish-American War was fought in 1898.