

The gilded age in the united states history

Life



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Week 2 Response During the Gilded Age (1876-1900), Congress was known for being rowdy and inefficient. It was not unusual to find that agreement could not be achieved because too many members were drunk or otherwise preoccupied with extra-governmental affairs. It was an era in which political corruption seemed to be the norm. Practices that today would be viewed as scandalous were accepted as a matter of routine. The narrow division between Republican and Democratic voters made both parties hesitant to take strong stands on any issue for fear of alienating blocs of voters. The result was that little got done.

The halls of Congress were filled with tobacco smoke, Businessmen wantonly bribed public officials at the local, state and national level, and political machines turned elections into exercises in fraud and manipulation. (Kennedy, pg 591) The Senate, whose seats were often auctioned off to the highest bidder, was known as a "rich man's club," where political favors were traded like horses, and the needs of the people in the working classes lay beyond the vision of those exalted legislators. The dominant fact concerning the American political parties between 1875 and 1900 was that the parties were evenly divided.

The Republican Party held a slight edge in national politics, largely on their repeated claim that it was the Democratic Party that had caused the Civil War. Republicans were noted for waving the "Bloody Shirt," calling Democrats responsible for the blood that was shed over secession. (Kennedy, Pg 602) Union veterans gravitated heavily to the Republican Party, which caused its popularity. Before the Civil War the Democratic Party

had become a heavily Southern party, and its strong Southern base continued until well into the 20th century.

The northern wing of the Democratic Party leaned heavily in favor of the working classes, whose demographic makeup included Roman Catholics of German and Irish descent, and many of the working class immigrants once they became eligible to vote. Neither Democrats nor Republicans were willing to take strong stands on issues important to the voters. Due to the corruption of the parties, little was done in office. The sectionalism caused unfair elections and favored voting that would last for the next decades to come.