

Guided age dbq

Life



The Gilded Age lasted from the post-Civil War industrial expansion to the Progressive Era. During the Gilded Age, the country experienced both rapid economic expansion as well as social turmoil. The American farmer experienced economic hardships caused by several factors. During this time the prices of commodities were going down as the cost of money was going up. Foreigners and western farmers were moving to the cities, thereby making apartments and work places extremely populated. The government enacted what were known as the Granger Laws in an attempt to regain control.

Some may argue that the three main factors negatively impacting farmers were the appreciating dollar, the overproduction or surplus of food (for example wheat, corn and cotton) and the railroads. The effects of the appreciating dollar on the farmer can be seen in the following areas. The appreciating dollar had a significant impact on prices and the farmers' costs to do business. For example, in the years 1870-1873 the market cost of wheat was \$106.7 and from 1894-1897 the market cost of wheat was \$63.3 (Document A).

This decrease in prices kept farmers from making a profit, which forced many of them into bankruptcy. In many instances, farmers were forced to pay higher freight rates to ship their goods to market than they could make selling their goods (Document F). The appreciating dollar also caused banks and mortgage companies to raise their interest rates. Mortgage rates climbed from between 7% and 8% to 40% or more during the Gilded Age (Documents E & G). This rapid change in rates increased the farmers' costs tremendously.

The overproduction and over supply of food also depressed prices in the markets for the farmers. Good growing weather and the government contributed to the overproduction on the farms. The government encouraged farmers to plant more crops and raise more livestock. This helped result in \$0. 08 corn, \$0. 10 oats, \$0. 02 beef, \$0. 00 butter, and \$0. 00 eggs (Document B). Farmers could not make enough money selling their goods at these prices to survive. The government did not help the farmers deal with the problem; instead, it blamed them for overproducing.

The railroads were the one of the biggest source of trouble for the farmers during this period. The railroads controlled the transportation of the farmers' crops and livestock to the markets. The railroads also controlled the silos and warehouses the farmers used to house their goods before sending them to the markets (Document H). The railroads used this control to set exorbitantly high rates to store and ship the goods (Document F). The farmers lobbied the government through Granger parties, which were third parties formed by members of the Patrons of Husbandry.

The Patrons of Husbandry were an organization for farmers commonly called the Grange. The farmers wanted the government to help them with the railroads (Document C). The lobbying initially resulted in the passage of the Granger Laws which regulated the freight and storage rates the railroads could charge the farmers. Current farmers face similar problems as the Gilded Age farmers did. Inflation and deflation effect today's farmers and anyone who makes investments. The competition in transportation keeps prices lower for farmers and the mortgage rates are stable thus allowing land to be more affordable.