

Political Reform

DAILY ACTIVITY Chapter 19, Section 2

Directions: Read the information below and study the cartoon. Then answer the questions.

From payoffs during Reconstruction to kickbacks in railroad construction, the Gilded Age was one of the most corrupt periods in United States history. Reformers sought to halt this trend in government by using the free press to focus attention on political corruption.

On the local level, political corruption was effectively attacked through newspaper articles and political cartoons. In 1903, Lincoln Steffens wrote a series of articles on corrupt politics in Philadelphia, New York, and other municipalities. The excerpt below is from one of his articles. The cartoon by Thomas Nast, typical of those of the early 1900's, is intended to lampoon the Tweed Ring.

Other American cities, no matter how bad their own condition may be, all point with scorn to Philadelphia as worse—"the worst-governed city in the country. . . ."

The machine controls the whole process of voting, and practices fraud at every stage. . . . Two hundred and fifty-two votes were returned in a division that had less than one hundred legal votes within its boundaries. . . . Six houses in one division were assessed at one hundred and seventy-two voters, more than the votes cast in the previous election in any one of two hundred entire divisions.

The repeating is done boldly, for the machine controls the election officers, often choosing them from among the fraudulent names; and when no one appears to serve, assigning the heeler ready for the expected vacancy. . . .

But many Philadelphians do not try to vote. They leave everything to the machine, and the machine casts their ballots for them.

Interpreting Information

1. How was political graft brought to public attention during the Gilded Age?

2. According to Steffens, what was the cause of corruption in Philadelphia?



3. To what bird does Nast compare Boss Tweed and his friends?

4. What does Nast suggest about Boss Tweed through the comparison?

Developing a Hypothesis

5. Why is a free press vital to the preservation of democratic government?

6. What are corrupt politicians seeking?

The Pendleton Act

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Chapter 18, Section 2

Directions: Read the following information. Then answer the questions.

The Pendleton Act, passed in 1883, reformed civil service work in the United States by placing the first limitations on the operation of the spoils system. Excerpts from the Pendleton Act follow:

The President is authorized to appoint, by and with the advice of the Senate, three persons, not more than two of whom shall be adherents of the same party, as Civil Service commissioners, and said three commissioners shall constitute the United States Civil Service Commission.

It shall be the duty of said commissioners to aid the President, as he may request, in preparing suitable rules for carrying this act into effect. . . . And, among other things, said rules shall provide and declare, as nearly as the conditions of good administration will warrant, as follows:

First, for open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service now . . . classified hereunder . . . said commission shall, subject to the rules that may be made by the President, make regulations for, and have control of, such examinations.

Second, that all the offices, places, and employments so arranged or to be arranged in classes shall be filled by selections according to grade from among those graded highest as the results of such competitive examinations.

Third, appointments to the public service aforesaid in the departments at Washington shall be apportioned among the several states and territories and the District of Columbia upon the basis of population as ascertained at the last preceding census. . . .

Fourth, that there shall be a period of probation before any absolute appointment or employment aforesaid.

Fifth, that no person in the public service is for that reason under any obligations to contribute to any political fund, or to render any political service. . . .

Sixth, that no person in said service has any right to use his official authority or influence to coerce the political action of any person or body.

2. How many persons can serve on the commission?

3. What restrictions exist for members of the commission?

Inferring Information

4. How could a single three-person commission administer so many different kinds of government jobs?

5. Under the Pendleton Act, how could a person obtain a government job?

Understanding Cause and Effect

6. Why did it take so long to achieve civil service reform in the United States?

7. What political abuses was the Pendleton Act designed to prevent?

8. What effect did the Pendleton Act have on the patronage system?

Mastering Facts

1. According to the Pendleton Act, who is responsible for establishing the civil service commission?