

Year 2:

Unit 4

Making America Modern - Industrialism and the Gilded Age (1865 - 1910): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

The decades following the Civil War were a time of great change all across the United States. While Reconstruction and Redemption clashed in the South and the Indian Wars were waged across the Great Plains, the nation as a whole was industrializing rapidly. The city became the next frontier, the new center of opportunity. Immigrants soon followed, and urban centers like New York and Chicago grew rapidly. A few men, like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, thrived, creating monopolies and trusts that controlled all sectors of industrial production. While these men grew rich, many Americans grew poorer, stuck in low-paying factory jobs. At the same time, immigrants faced discriminatory policies, barred from the paltry opportunities provided to their fellow laborers. As a result, many workers began organizing, forming labor unions to stand up to big business and protect their interests.

Industrialism's complex impact reached beyond American cities. Farms, while thriving on one hand, thanks to the new railroads and mechanized labor, were on the other subject to the hardships brought on by overproduction, predatory pricing, and high interest rates on mortgages and loans. Farmers organized together, forming the Populist Party, a third party that appealed to farmers as well as laborers and attempted to challenge the industrialist powers.

Although ultimately unsuccessful in upsetting the political order, the Populist Party, along with the labor unions, had a lasting impact on American society and government. The Progressive Movement that would emerge soon after would eventually adopt many of the goals of the Populists and the labor unions. The Gilded Age, an era of both immense progress and massive inequality, helped advance American activism and the fight for better opportunities for all Americans.

Unit 4 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 4 Essential Question: *To what extent was the Gilded Age an era of opportunity?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 4 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 4, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 4 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States History Era 6.

- **Big Idea 1: The boom in American industry following the Civil War transformed American society, sparking the growth of the American economy, the birth of the modern American city, and an ever increasing wealth gap between the industrialists and the masses.**
 - Following the Civil War, American industries grew rapidly. Railroads and steel gave way to huge corporations, creating a modern consumer economy and sparking an increased demand for factory labor.
 - New factory jobs and modern marvels drew rural Americans and immigrants alike to urban centers, eager to find prosperity in the face of hardship.
 - While American industrialists argued they promoted industrial growth and used their philanthropy for the greater good, their tight grip on the American economy made them immensely powerful and wealthy at the expense of many Americans.

- **Big Idea 2: While innovation and industrialism provided new jobs and freedoms, discrimination and poverty made life difficult for many Americans and immigrants.**
 - American cities were centers of innovation and entertainment, and these advancements were generally accessible to all Americans, rich or poor.
 - However, crushing poverty and long, hard factory hours along with rampant political corruption made it difficult for all Americans to thrive in American cities.
 - Immigrants came to the United States in search of the new jobs and freedoms American society had to offer, but they often faced the same hardships as urban Americans, as well as widespread discrimination that made their paths to success even more difficult.

- **Big Idea 3: In response to the hardships and inequalities of industrialized society, many Americans organized together to fight for their rights and their livelihoods.**
 - Factory workers formed labor unions to negotiate for better wages, working conditions, and hours. While labor negotiations between unions and management could sometimes lead to better outcomes for factory workers, they could also lead to violent strikes and lesser rights.
 - A new political party was born out of grassroots political activism in rural America. Farmers' alliances joined in support of the Populist Party, which fought for the rights of average Americans against the corrupt power of the wealthy.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Gilded Age
- Transcontinental Railroad
- Industrialism
- Corporation
- Monopoly/trust
- Robber baron
- Industrialist
- Philanthropy
- Urbanization
- Immigration
- Tenement
- Political bosses/political machines
- Income inequality
- Immigration quotas
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Labor union
- Strike
- Labor negotiation
- Financial panic
- Populism/Populist Party

Geography

The following places are foundational to understanding the geographical context of the unit. As you teach Unit 4, continually reference maps in class, not only to build scholars' fluency with geography but also to develop their geographic reasoning skills as they grapple with the Big Ideas of the unit.

- **The states of the United States in 1900**
- **Major cities with urban and industrial growth:** Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco
- **Major immigration patterns of American immigrants from their nations of origin:** Ireland and Russia (Northeast), Austria-Hungary and Germany (Midwest), China (West Coast), and Japan (Pacific Northwest)
- **Sites of industrial conflict:** the Haymarket Affair, the Homestead Strike, and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study and internalize all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 4 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 4 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 4:

- Browse Khan Academy’s Gilded Age course and the “Gilded Age Timeline” on the University of Houston Digital History website.
- Read the essays “The Gilded Age” and “The Rise of Industrial America” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website and “The Dark Side of the Gilded Age” on the [Atlantic](#) website.
- Watch “Crash Course History: The Gilded Age” and “Crash Course History: Growth, Cities, and Immigration” on YouTube.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 4 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: To what extent was the Gilded Age an era of opportunity?

The first five lessons introduce scholars to the complex impact of industrialism on the United States. Lesson 1 introduces scholars to the emergence of industrial society following the Civil War, and scholars will understand how a prosperous business economy emerged as a result of the industrial developments of the era. In Lesson 2, scholars will examine how these industrial changes led to the growth and development of American cities. In the DBQ, scholars will examine the extent to which the industrialists’ contributions to American society outweighed the detriments and rising economic inequality that resulted from their actions. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand how the United States transformed into a modern, industrialized nation in the late 19th century and the complex impact this had on Americans’ wealth and well-being. Scholars will then be prepared to examine the impact of these transformations on the lives of Americans.

Lesson 1: American Industrialism (Gallery Walk)

- **Central Question:** How did industrialism transform the American economy following the Civil War?

Lessons 2–4: Robber Barons or Captains of Industry? (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** To what extent were the industrialists of the 19th century “robber barons”?

Lesson 5: Urbanization (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did American cities grow so rapidly in the late 19th century?

Lessons 6 through 8 introduce scholars to the consequences of industrialism for many Americans. Americans in cities felt this impact the strongest, and in Lesson 6, scholars will examine the new opportunities that industrialism afforded to Americans, as well as the new challenges it presented. In Lesson 7, scholars will debate this idea to determine whether the positive impact of industrialism on urban Americans outweighed the negative. Lesson 8 examines the experiences of immigrants to the United States — that of Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the West Coast and Eastern European immigrants to the East Coast. While immigrants, too, experienced many of the same opportunities and hardships of urban life, they also faced overt discrimination that made their experiences even more difficult. By the end of these lessons, scholars will be able to explain the complex impact of industrialism on urban life in the United States, and they will be prepared to learn how Americans challenged these inequities.

Lessons 6–7: Life in an Industrialized City (Jigsaw, Debate)

- **Central Question:** Did the opportunities for Americans in Gilded Age cities outweigh the hardships?

Lesson 8: The Land of Opportunity? (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** To what extent was the United States a land of opportunity for immigrants?

Lessons 9 through 12 continue to address the impact of industrialism on Americans and how industrialism inspired many Americans to organize together to fight for their rights and livelihoods. Lessons 9 and 10 introduce scholars to labor unions; these lessons explain how labor unions attempted to fight for better working conditions for laborers while also illustrating the many factors that limited the ultimate success of these unions in providing better opportunities to Americans. Lesson 11 challenges scholars to broaden their understanding of industrialism and understand how these rapid transformations affected life in the rural United States. This lesson prepares scholars to dive into their study of the Populist Movement, which emerged from the frustrations of rural farmers but ultimately became a national political party. Thus, in Lesson 12, scholars will examine how the Populist Party appealed to both those facing the hardships of farm life as well as workers in factories to become a powerful force in American politics. By the end of these lessons, scholars will be able to explain the complex impact of industrialism on American society and the extent to which Americans were successfully able to pursue and fight for their rights and opportunities.

Lessons 9–10: Labor Unions (Simulation, Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** How successfully did labor unions fight for workers' rights?

Lesson 11: Agrarian Discontent (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did industrialism affect the lives of rural Americans?

Lesson 12: Populism (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the Populist Party appeal to millions of Americans during the Gilded Age?