
U.S. History
Sample Item Set
Political Machines, Corruption, and Progressive Reforms

Standard 2—Western Expansion to Progressivism: Students understand the social, political, and economic changes that developed between the periods of the United States' westward expansion, industrial growth, and the Progressive Era.

GLE US.2.6 Describe the challenges associated with immigration, urbanization, and rapid industrialization and evaluate the government's response

GLE US.2.8 Identify the goals of Progressivism; describe the influence of the Muckrakers, political leaders, and intellectuals; and evaluate the movement's successes and failures

Read and study the sources about political machines, corruption, and Progressive reforms. Then use the four sources and your knowledge of U.S. history to answer the questions.

Source 1

Excerpt from *To Hold Your District: Study Human Nature and Act Accordin'*
by George Washington Plunkitt

This excerpt is from a speech given by George Washington Plunkitt, a member of the Tammany Hall machine, who also served as a state senator between 1884 and 1904.

THERE's only one way to hold a district: you must study human nature and act accordin'. . . .

To learn real human nature you have to go among the people, see them and be seen. I know every man, woman, and child in the Fifteenth District . . . I know what they like and what they don't like, what they are strong at and what they are weak in, and I reach them by approachin' at the right side. . . .

What tells in holdin' your grip on your district is to go right down among the poor families and help them in the different ways they need help. I've got a regular system for this. If there's a fire in Ninth, Tenth, or Eleventh Avenue, for example, any hour of the day or night, I'm usually there with some of my election district captains as soon as the fire engines. If a family is burned out I don't ask whether they are Republicans or Democrats, and I don't refer them to the Charity Organization Society, which would investigate their case in a month or two and decide they were worthy of help about the time they are dead from starvation. I just get quarters¹ for them, buy clothes for them if their clothes were burned up, and fix them up till they get things runnin' again. It's philanthropy, but it's politics, too—mighty good politics. Who can tell how many votes one of these fires bring me? The poor are the most grateful people in the world, and, let me tell you, they have more friends in their neighborhoods than the rich have in theirs.

If there's a family in my district in want I know it before the charitable societies do, and me and my men are first on the ground. I have a special corps to look up such cases. The consequence is that the poor look up to George W. Plunkitt as a father, come to him in trouble—and don't forget him on election day.

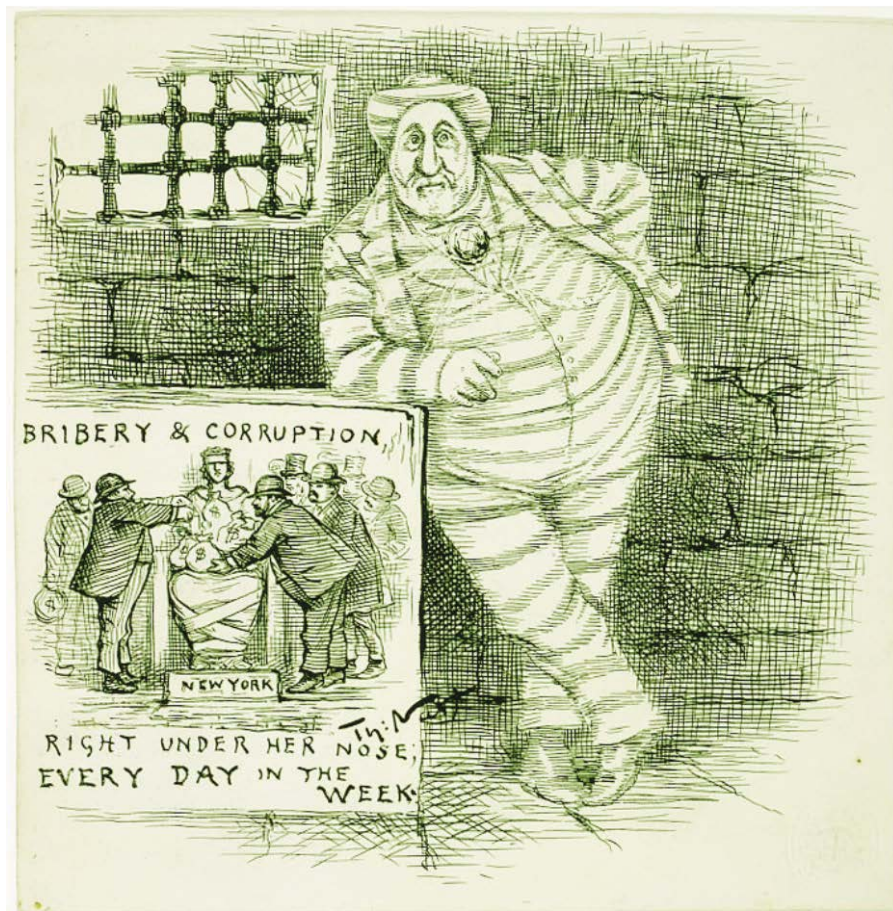
Another thing, I can always get a job for a deservin' man. I make it a point to keep on the track of jobs, and it seldom happens that I don't have a few up my sleeve ready for use. I know every big employer in the district and in the whole city, for that matter, and they ain't in the habit of sayin' no to me when I ask them for a job.

¹**quarters:** lodgings

Source 2

The Spirit of Tweed is Mighty Still
by Thomas Nast

This political cartoon was published by *Harper's Weekly* in 1886 with the caption: "The spirit of Tweed is mighty still . . . and even yet you don't know what you are going to do about it!"



Source: Library of Congress.

Source 3

Excerpt from *What Will the Harvest Be?*
by Robert La Follette, Sr.

This excerpt is from campaign literature for Senator Robert La Follette that was published in the early twentieth century.

What Will the Harvest Be?

There was a time in Wisconsin when the boss and representatives of the railroads nominated the candidates for both parties. How? By intervening between the voter and the nomination and “getting” the delegates.

You remember how it was done; railroad passes, entertainment, money, influence. Men who could not be elected as delegates sat in conventions on proxies¹ purchased as merchandise. Delegates honestly elected were unseated by fraud, and contesting delegates seated. These were some of the means.

There was a time in Wisconsin when the railroads ruled and ruled supreme. They openly boasted of their power. For more than thirty years no law was enacted except by consent of the railroads.

La Follette secured the anti-lobby law and drove from the capitol some of the most corrupt and notorious characters of the age. This law must be enforced.

La Follette secured the anti-pass law and thus did away with the common and wholesale bribery of public officials.

La Follette secured the corrupt practices acts designed to purify the caucuses² and elections. This law must be strengthened and enforced. It has been flagrantly violated in recent years.

La Follette, with a clear vision, saw then what Roosevelt and Hughes³ see now—that the people must be freed from boss rule.

La Follette secured the primary election law. Under the primary law you vote direct for your choice, your vote is your own, if there is failure it is your failure. Make the fight for right men and right laws in the open, as you can, and you will win.

This great movement in Wisconsin has given Wisconsin a reputation throughout the nation. It is the Wisconsin Idea and other states are following in its wake.

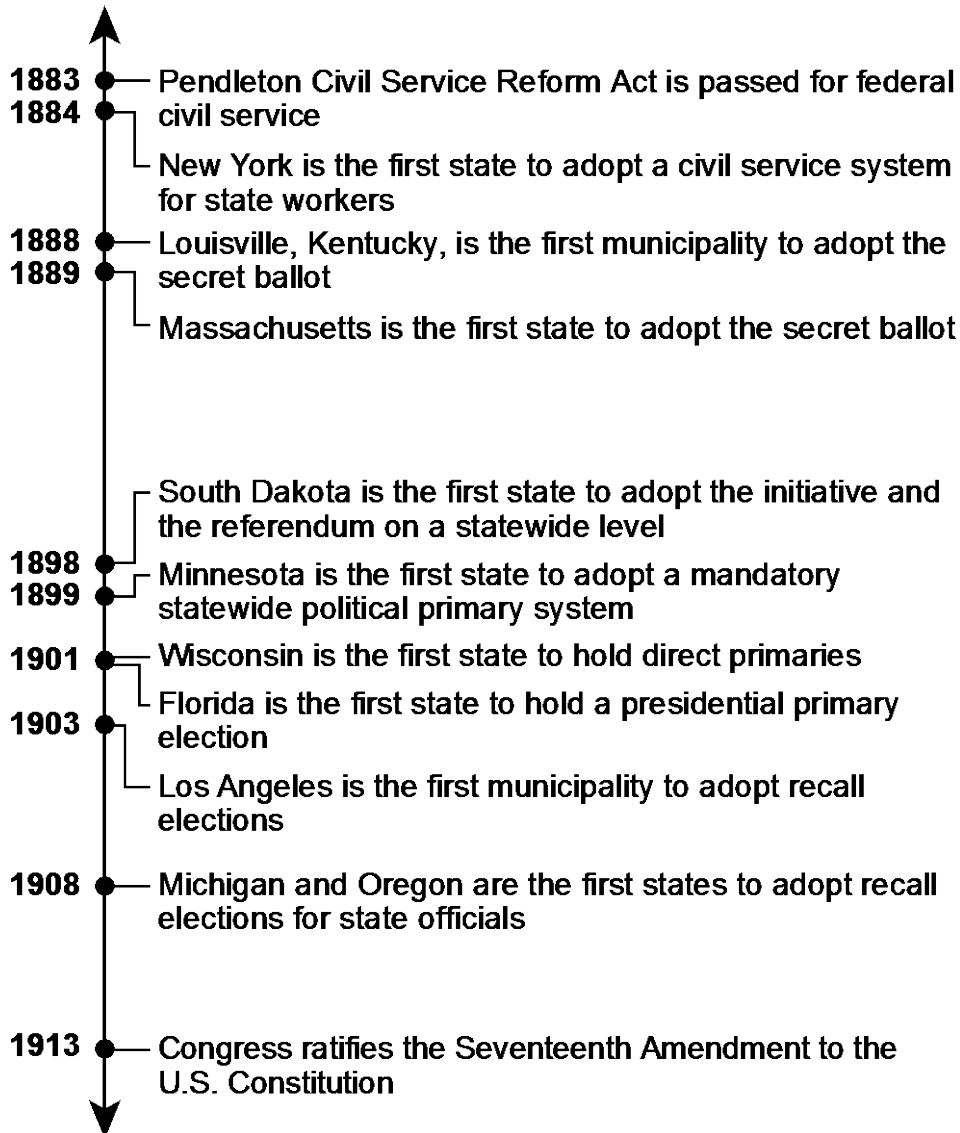
¹**proxies**: substitutes, representatives

²**caucuses**: meetings of political party members to select candidates

³**Hughes**: Charles Evans Hughes, a Republican governor who was part of the Progressive movement

Source 4

Political Reforms during the Progressive Era



Item 1: Multiple Select

Based on Source 1, which statements **best** describe the relationship between political machines and local communities in the late nineteenth century?

Select the **two** correct answers.

- A. Political machines provided aid to urban communities in exchange for votes.
- B. Political machines worked with labor unions to expand their influence in local communities.
- C. Political machines emerged among immigrant groups in rural communities.
- D. Political machines used a system of patronage to gain the support of voters and their communities.
- E. Political machines worked with voters to eliminate corruption in government.
- F. Political machines worked with voters to block immigrants from moving into their communities.

Item 2: Multiple Choice

Based on Source 2, which statement about political machine bosses would Thomas Nast **most likely** have supported?

- A. Political machine bosses were victims of political harassment.
- B. Political machine bosses fought graft in government.
- C. Political machine bosses worked selflessly for their constituents.
- D. Political machine bosses threatened the democratic process.

Item 3: Multiple Choice

Based on Source 3, which group was viewed as the **main** source of political corruption by Progressives such as Robert La Follette, Sr.?

- A. immigrants
- B. labor unions
- C. corporations
- D. muckraking journalists

Item 4: Multiple Choice

Based on Source 4, which statement **best** explains how Progressive reformers influenced the political process?

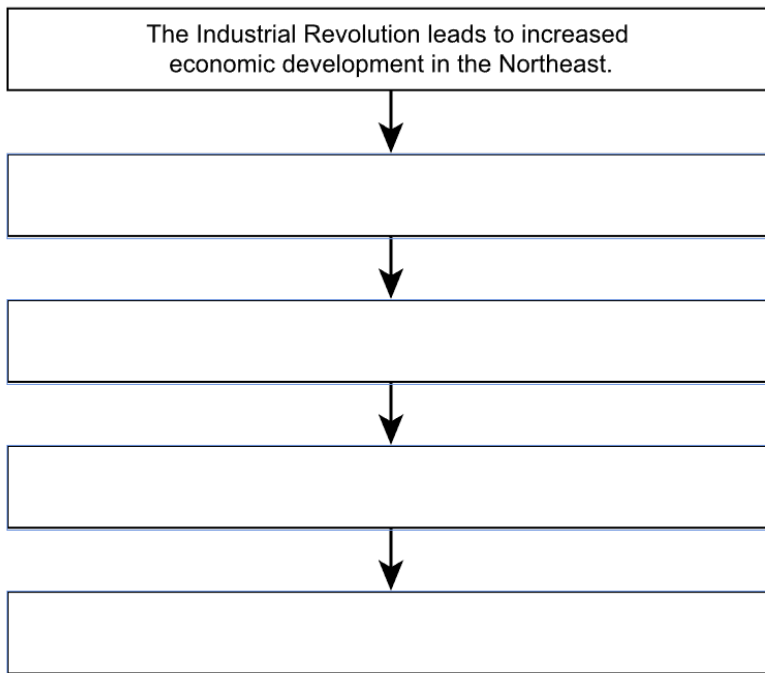
- A. Reform efforts expanded suffrage to racial minorities.
- B. Reform efforts increased public participation in politics.
- C. Reform efforts restricted the power of the federal government.
- D. Reform efforts created a political system with two parties.

Item 5: Technology-Enhanced Item

Political machines emerged in the late nineteenth century.

Drag and drop the **four** correct events into the flow chart in chronological order from earliest to most recent to show the rise of political machines and their effects.

Rise of Political Machines



Cities in the Northeast grow quickly and experience problems with rapid urbanization.

Party bosses use political machines to encourage immigrant voters to elect them to local government offices.

Political machines accuse local party bosses of corruption.

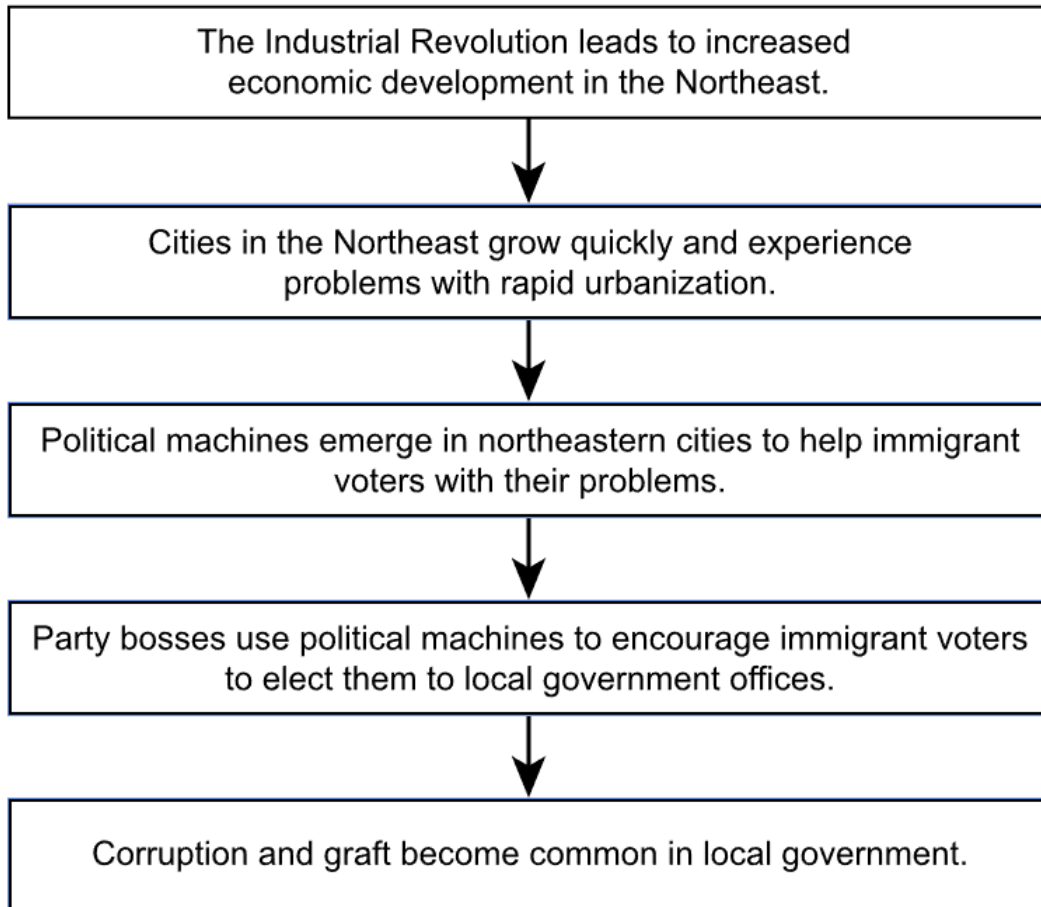
Political machines emerge in northeastern cities to help immigrant voters with their problems.

Corruption and graft become common in local government.

Immigrants move to small rural towns and have difficulty looking for work.

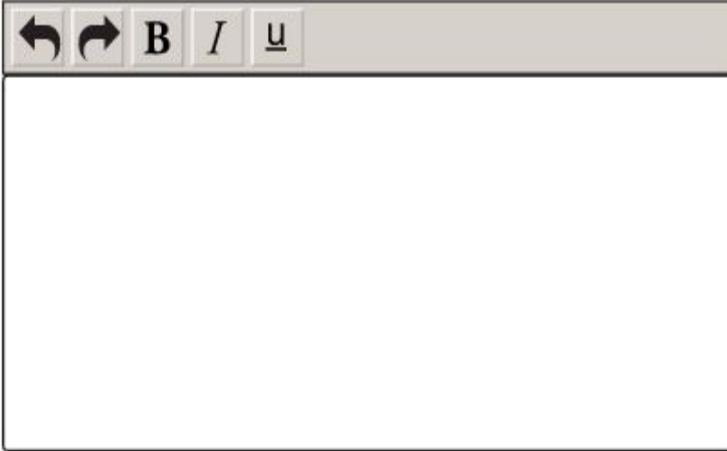
Correct Answers:

Rise of Political Machines



Item 6: Constructed Response

Based on the sources and your knowledge of U.S. history, describe **one** problem caused by political corruption and explain how Progressives proposed to reform that problem.



A text input box with a toolbar at the top. The toolbar contains five icons: a left-pointing arrow, a right-pointing arrow, a bold letter 'B', an italic letter 'I', and an underlined letter 'u'. Below the toolbar is a large, empty rectangular area for writing the response.

Scoring

Scoring Information	
Score Points	Description
2	Student's response correctly describes one problem caused by political corruption and correctly explains how Progressives proposed to reform that problem.
1	Student's response correctly describes one problem caused by political corruption but does not correctly explain how Progressives proposed to reform that problem. OR Student's response does not correctly describe one problem caused by political corruption but correctly explains how Progressives proposed to reform a problem caused by political corruption.
0	Student's response is blank, irrelevant, or does not correctly describe one problem caused by political corruption or correctly explain how Progressives proposed to reform a problem caused by political corruption.

Scoring Notes:

Problems caused by political corruption and responses proposed by Progressives to address those problems:

- Political corruption contributed to government inefficiencies and various social ills, especially in large urban areas where political machines often controlled the local government. Child labor, ineffective workplace safety laws, poor sanitation, overcrowded housing, and poor transportation networks were chronic problems that afflicted cities. However, many politicians had little incentive to solve the problems faced by the urban poor, or to improve the quality of government services, as long as they were able to buy the votes of their constituents. Rather than focusing on long-term public policies and projects, these politicians focused on appealing to voters by providing them with basic goods or temporary jobs. Progressives urged local, federal, and state governments to reform laws relating to child labor, sanitation, transportation, and workplace safety. In addition, Progressives supported political reforms such as initiatives, referendums, recall elections, and the direct election of senators. They believed such reforms would make politicians accountable for their actions, force them out of office, and allow for the election of politicians who were more responsive to the needs of the people.

- Political corruption allowed many politicians to become wealthy through illegal means, which were often beneficial to the wealthy and to corporations. These politicians voted for projects and laws that favored corporations and wealthy citizens, in exchange for bribes and kickbacks from these groups. They also took advantage of inside information that they learned from discussions with businessmen and with other politicians. This information allowed the corrupt politicians to invest in properties and businesses that were expected to make a lot of money, especially if the government enacted certain policies. Progressives believed that journalists should investigate and expose the conduct of politicians who used their political offices to enrich themselves, so that these politicians could be tried in court. To reduce the political influence of corporations and the wealthy, Progressives proposed the passage of legislation to tax the incomes of the wealthy and to break up corporations that they believed had become too powerful.
- Political corruption allowed political parties to become powerful through cronyism, the spoils system, and voter fraud. This undermined the democratic process. Political machine bosses developed relationships with ward bosses and their supporters. Frequently, the politicians hired or appointed supporters who lacked the skills or qualifications to perform their jobs. These ward bosses felt obligated to meet the needs of the political machine bosses rather than genuinely solving real problems facing their constituents. In addition, many voters had little incentive, beyond voting for political bosses and their supporters, to be more active in the corrupt political process, since their votes were often effectively forced or bought. Progressives believed in civil-service reforms that required job applicants to take tests to demonstrate that they were qualified for their positions. Progressives also proposed the adoption of recall elections, referendums, and direct elections to provide voters with a greater voice in public policy and to remove ineffective politicians.

Accept other reasonable answers.