Beneath the Shine

Growth, hardship, and power in Gilded Age Chicago

USH.C.2.1.E "Examine the complex conditions that characterized the Gilded Age (e.g., rapidly expanding economy, concentration of wealth, corrupt politics, poverty)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline signs of economic growth, circle signs of unequal wealth or hardship, and draw a box around political or government actions that shaped people's lives.

Chicago: The Fair and Its Aftermath

1 In 1893, visitors rode trains into Chicago to see the World's Columbian Exposition. Electric lights lit its buildings, and displays celebrated new machines. Railroads linked distant markets, while steel mills supplied the rails and building materials that helped cities grow. Investors who owned shares in these businesses could gain wealth as production expanded. But a crowded train also carried people who worked long hours for wages and had little money set aside. The fair showed real economic growth, yet its shining displays did not reveal how unevenly the rewards were shared.

2 The same year, a financial panic began, and businesses cut jobs and wages. Near Chicago, the Pullman Company made railroad sleeping cars and owned the town where many employees lived. In 1894, it lowered wages but did not lower rents for company housing. Pullman workers struck; the American Railway Union supported them with a boycott of trains carrying Pullman cars. The boycott disrupted rail traffic and mail delivery. President Grover Cleveland sent federal troops to Chicago, and clashes followed. For workers with rent due, a growing national industry offered little protection when demand fell.

3 Politics shaped who received help and whose complaints were heard. In Chicago and other growing cities, political machines offered jobs or aid in return for votes. Some officials directed public contracts to friends who paid them kickbacks, wasting money meant for public needs. Such exchanges could help a struggling family today while weakening fair government tomorrow. At the same time, railroad companies and other large businesses pressed lawmakers for policies they favored. The Pullman conflict was not simply a story of progress or failure: expanding industries created jobs, but workers faced hardship, wealthy owners held power, and political choices affected the outcome.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a visitor to the fair see economic growth but miss a major problem in the economy? Use two details from the passage.

2. How did the Pullman Company's decisions make the financial panic harder for its workers?

3. How could a political machine help a family while also harming city government?

4. How did a government decision affect the conflict caused by workers' economic hardship?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence museum caption titled "Chicago, 1893 to 1894." Explain whether "progress" alone describes this period. Connect at least three of these conditions: growth, concentrated wealth, poverty, and corrupt politics. Use details from at least two different paragraphs.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.2.1.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline signs of economic growth, circle signs of unequal wealth or hardship, and draw a box around political or government actions that shaped people's lives. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a visitor to the fair see economic growth but miss a major problem in the economy? Use two details from the passage.	**The lights and new machines showed growth, but the displays hid how unevenly wealth was shared. Many wage earners had little money saved.**
2	How did the Pullman Company's decisions make the financial panic harder for its workers?	**Pullman cut wages but kept rents for company housing the same, leaving workers with less money to pay rent.**
3	How could a political machine help a family while also harming city government?	**A machine could offer jobs or aid, but it sought votes in return. Officials who gave contracts to friends for kickbacks wasted public money.**
4	How did a government decision affect the conflict caused by workers' economic hardship?	**President Cleveland sent federal troops to Chicago during the Pullman boycott, and clashes followed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Calling Chicago's 1893 to 1894 story only "progress" hides its costs. Electric lights at the fair signaled growth, while investors could gain wealth from expanding businesses. Yet Pullman workers faced lower wages while their company housing rents stayed the same. Political machines offered aid for votes, and some officials took kickbacks on public contracts. Growth brought impressive changes, but unequal power and corrupt politics left many workers exposed.

Accept other supported connections between conditions, including an explanation that machine aid met immediate needs despite corrupt practices. The caption should take a position and use details from at least two paragraphs.