

Committee: Committee on Economic Advancement and Social Reform (CEASR)

Topic: Gilded Age: The Turn of the Century



Theme of AUSMUN 2024

The theme for this year's AUSMUN is "Forging Tomorrow with Yesterday's Lessons". Dating back to 500 BC, great minds such as Confucius have spread this ideal: "Study the past, if you would divine the future". During a typical Model United Nations conference, delegates are expected to learn from their country's past and, in many cases, actively rewrite it. Historical knowledge when used effectively can lead to informed decisions; by reflecting on what has and has not worked in the past, collectively we are able to gain perspective on current and future policy. We encourage delegates to keep this ideal in mind while wrestling with the nuances and complications inherent in the ideas of modern day problems.

AUSMUN is committed to actively serving its community and combating pressing issues. As we continue to expand in numbers, we further seek to expand our positive impact on the world around us. We are proud to announce that we have partnered with Dress for Success, a non-profit organization that enables women to become economically independent by offering professional clothing, a network of support, and the resources necessary for both personal and professional growth. By participating in AUSMUN 2024, in addition to debating "model" policy, you are actively bettering society and changing the world.

The 2024 AUSMUN board is honored to host all delegates for our largest conference yet. We cannot wait to see what delegates bring forward to each committee in their efforts to embody values of collaboration and this year's theme. Looking twenty twenty-forward to seeing you!

Rationale

Each year the human race becomes more and more advanced. As the United States leads the globe in innovation and economic advancement, it is important to remember the history behind its affluence. The turn of the century, 1900, was an important date in the creation of the modern world as we know it. The Gilded Age bolstered economic opportunity at a rate never seen before in American history. However, with the growth of railroads and industries came a new generation willing to take advantage of new technologies and labor sectors to increase their own opulence. While employment increased, so did the exploitation of workers and the need for labor unions. With every advancement that solved an old problem, a new problem arose. In response to these developments, activists across America united to fight for reform and preserve their rights. This trend quickly gained national attention with the fast-growing influence of unions continuing to expand their reach and power. This rapidly changing era needs the fresh eyes of our modern generation to tackle old problems from a new angle, learn from past mistakes, and rewrite history.

Background of the Issue

Coined from an 1873 book by Mark Twain, the Gilded Age refers to the period from the 1870s to 1900s which marked both great industrial growth and political corruption. On center stage during this time were big corporations, often referred to as “captains of industry” by their supporters and “robber barons” by their critics. These corporations monopolized their respective industries, collecting unheard of amounts of wealth and influence. Their leadership, combined

with the implementation of laissez-faire policies, grew industries such as oil, steel, and electrical at unprecedented levels (Library of Congress). This growth increased wages in America as industrialization increased the need for more unskilled workers, primarily immigrants. The word “gilded” implies that the thin layer of gold on the surface covers something of little worth. Though the economic expansion in America seemed exciting from the outside, from this came the exposure of fundamental issues that plagued the nation.

One of the problems that garnered the most attention was growing unrest from the labor force in America. Stemming from the long history of low wages, long hours, and dangerous conditions, this era saw the continuation and expansion of labor unions formed in the late 1700s. The first major organization, the Knights of Labor, was created in 1866 and remained prevalent by organizing strikes and opening membership to anyone regardless of race, gender, or skill. The main goals of the Knights of Labor and many other labor unions were to have an 8-hour workday, equal pay for men and women, and safety laws that protected workers. As the unions grew, so did their influence. Some peaceful events turned violent; though the Haymarket Square Riot started as a peaceful protest of police brutality towards workers, it ended with a bomb thrown into the crowd and eight dead (VandeCreek). Violence often resulted from frustration and desperation from workers in addition to the brutal suppression of protests by factory owners and local governments.

On the other hand, corporate leaders had made their fortune off the backs of workers and were looking to expand the system. Many chose to spend their massive amounts of wealth to bribe politicians to support policies that favored big businesses. In addition to bribery, the Gilded Age saw the creation of political machines—organizations run by a single boss that remained in power by providing favors for the lower class and immigrants, often becoming involved in

corruption scandals. These groups secured votes for politicians and bills through this loyalty and were often criticized for taking advantage of marginalized groups. The most famous example of this is William “Boss” Tweed, the leader of the Tammany Hall political machine. Tweed was known for dealing out jobs and support to those who could prove their loyalty, often accepting bribes to sway his influence. While much of the money made by these political machines went to serving the poor and immigrants, the vast majority was used to change the outcome of elections, bribe judges, and for the personal gain of the machine “bosses” (Bill of Rights Institute). However, as the progressive era began, many started to push back against the widely accepted patronage system for more liberal policies such as direct elections and private ballots.

The turn of the century marked the beginning of the United States being recognized as a world power. The frontier was coming to an end, and the United States was establishing itself as an industrial superpower.

Contemporary Evidence

Leading up to the turn of the 20th century, the political, social, and economic climate of the United States was continuously stained by the aforementioned corruption, inequality, exploitation, and general dissatisfaction with the status quo. In response, members of the working class created labor unions and reform movements, while members of the upper class preached capitalist ideals like the Gospel of Wealth and advocated for less government interference in the market.

Directive

The Gilded Age was a time full of newfound prosperity for a select few while the vast majority were forced into increasingly worse conditions as the income gap widened. This left millions of Americans destitute and desperate to see reform in their communities and governments. This committee offers a complex array of individuals ready to tackle these problems and advocate for their interests, addressing the topics of *their* today. There is no doubt that the Gilded Age was a difficult time for Americans due to the growing power of big business through the implementation of Laissez-faire economics. Consequently, this committee will focus on the effects of economic policy on politics and social reform and how these topics are vital strings woven together in the tapestry of American welfare. **Use these questions as a guide while writing your position on the topic:**

1. How should this committee address the growing influence of businesses on politics, if at all?
2. With wealth being concentrated in the hands of a few, how should the growing income inequality be addressed, or should it be?
3. How do the Regional differences in this era impact reform, and what can be done to increase unity?
4. What role should the government play in regulating the economy, labor, and social welfare?
5. What is this committee's role in the development of safe and just urban societies?
6. How can society balance the need for freedom of speech with the need to keep social order?

Resources for Delegates

[The Gilded Age- Britannica](#)

[The Gilded Age- History](#)

[Social Issues in the Gilded Age](#)

[Overview of social, economic, and political issues in the Gilded Age](#)

[Inequality in the Gilded Age](#)

Delegations

- 1. Alexander Graham Bell: (1847–1922)-** Alexander Graham Bell is an inventor and scientist who played a key role in the development of the telephone, something that revolutionized communication during The Gilded Age. He believes that the expansion and manufacturing of industrial capabilities will lead to great advancements in various fields, including science and technology. He sees the Gilded Age as a time of great opportunity and progress for the future.

[Alexander Graham Bell American inventor](#)

[Industrialization And The Gilded Age](#)

- 2. Andrew Carnegie: (1835–1919)-** Andrew Carnegie is a leading figure in the expansion of the American steel industry and played a significant role in shaping the United States. Carnegie believes that the “proper administration of wealth” is the key problem of the

era. He served as an inspiration for the common man of America and embodied the American dream of rising up through the classes and working your way to wealth.

[Andrew Carnegie: Man of Steel](#)

[ANDREW CARNEGIE: Pioneer. Visionary. Innovator.](#)

- 3. Benjamin Harrison: (1833–1901)-** Past president and congressman, Harrison signed substantial appropriation bills for internal improvements, naval expansion, and subsidies for steamship lines. President Harrison also signed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act “to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies,” the first Federal act attempting to regulate trusts. Harrison, the candidate of the Whig party, had a policy that revolved around domestic expansion while supporting the American system created by Henry Clay. Harrison favored this program, which called for a protective tariff, federal subsidies for the construction of infrastructure, and support for a national bank.

[Benjamin Harrison](#)

[Henry Harrison Bio](#)

- 4. Booker T. Washington: (1856–1915)-** A voice for the African American population, Booker T. Washington was an activist for human rights. He was an educator and reformer, the first president and principal developer of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University), and the most influential speaker for Black Americans between 1895 and 1915. He was born in a slave hut, but after emancipation, he moved with his family to Malden, West Virginia. Booker T. Washington believed that the best interests of Black people in this era could be realized through education in crafts

and industrial skills and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise, and thrift.

He believed African Americans should temporarily abandon their efforts to gain full civil rights and political power and instead cultivate their industrial and agricultural skills so as to attain economic security. An advocate for the poor, Booker T. favored reform for the poor and the expansion of rights and reform.

[Booker T Washington](#)

[Booker T. Washington - Quotes](#)

- 5. Eugene V. Debs: (1855–1926)-** Eugene V. Debs, a prominent union leader and socialist, plays a great role in advocating for workers' rights during the Gilded Age. As the founder of the American Railway Union, he fights for fair wages, improving working conditions, and the rights of laborers. Debs critiques the inequalities of the Gilded Age, looking at things like the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few industrial magnates and the exploitation of laborers.

[Eugene V. Debs](#)

[Eugene Debs](#)

- 6. George Westinghouse: (1846–1914)-** George Westinghouse is a notable inventor and industrialist who revolutionized the transportation and electricity industries during the Gilded Age. He is the founder of the Westinghouse Electric Company and introduced innovative technologies. Westinghouse views the Gilded Age as a period of immense technological progress but is critical of the era's inequality and exploitation of workers,

advocating for fair labor practices and advancements of scientific knowledge for the better of society.

[George Westinghouse American inventor and industrialist](#)

[American Dynamo: The Life of George Westinghouse](#)

- 7. Gifford Pinchot: (1865–1946)-** During the Gilded Age, Gifford Pinchot emerged as a prominent figure—advocating for conservation and sustainable resource management. As the founding chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Pinchot contributes significantly to the dialogue surrounding economic development and environmental preservation. Critical of the era's tendency to prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability, he tirelessly championed responsible stewardship of the country's forests and natural landscapes.

[GIFFORD PINCHOT \(1865-1946\)](#)

[Gifford Pinchot American conservationist](#)

- 8. Grover Cleveland: (1837–1908)-** Former president and first Democratic president since Johnson, Cleveland took a strong stance against federal economic aid to citizens as well as pensions. In his first term, he made an attempt to institute federal regulation of the railroads and the repeal of protective tariffs. In this conference, Cleveland will want to maintain the lack of federal subsidies as well as support businesses and laissez-faire capitalism.

[Grover Cleveland: Domestic Affairs | Miller Center](#)

[Grover Cleveland | The White House](#)

9. Henry Clay Frick: (1849–1919)- Henry Clay Frick was a prominent industrialist and business magnate during the Gilded Age and plays a significant role in the expansion of the steel industry. As a chairman of Carnegie Steel Company, he is known for his strong business tactics and anti-union stance, which led to confrontations such as the infamous Homestead Strike.

[Life of Henry Clay Frick](#)

[Henry Clay Frick Biography](#)

10. Henry Ford: (1863–1947)- With his founding of the Detroit Automobile Company in 1899, Henry Ford began his journey to become the most famous industrialist in the country. With his heightened wages of \$5/hr (compared to the average \$2.34) and lowering of hours, he employed innumerable people in his Detroit factories. He also was an innovator of the Assembly Line, which increased production and efficiency without requiring skilled workers.

[Henry Ford | Biography, Education, Inventions, & Facts | Britannica Money](#)

[Henry Ford - Biography, Inventions & Assembly Line](#)

11. Ida B. Wells: (1862–1931)- Ida B Wells was a writer and journalist in the late 19th century who served as a monumental figure in the evolving fight for African American rights and feminism. Wells was an important part of the progressive movement, using her passion for social justice and her skills as a journalist to fight for racial and gender

equality. Most significantly, she confronted McKinley on the reality of lynching and discrimination and helped pave the way for future reform movements.

[Ida B. Wells and the Campaign against Lynching - Bill of Rights Institute](#)

[Ida B. Wells, 1862-1931 | Northern Illinois University Digital Library](#)

12. J.P. Morgan: (1837–1913)- As one of the most influential industrialists in American history, J.P. Morgan organized the Morgan “money trust” that owned more than 21 railroads in addition to steel and electric companies. Throughout his most successful years, he held the firm belief that the consolidation of different companies would lead to a reduction in competition and an increase in productivity. Because of his economic status, Morgan will be strongly against any economic reform that would limit trusts or step away from laissez-faire capitalism.

[Who Was J.P. Morgan? How Did He Make a Fortune?](#)

[America’s Gilded Age | Maryville Online](#)

13. James J. Hill: (1838–1916)- James J. Hill was the leader of numerous railroad companies and profited immensely from his efficient and effective management of said railroads. His Northern Securities Companies were the highest profile conglomerate declared unconstitutional by Roosevelt’s Sherman Antitrust Act. He is a prime example of a “captain of industry,” with his building of a railroad empire that eventually dipped into all facets of the American economy. He is a supporter of laissez-faire economics.

[James J. Hill | American financier](#)

[JAMES J. HILL: THE ORIGINAL “EMPIRE BUILDER”](#)

14. Jane Addams: (1860–1935)- Jane Addams was a social reformer, progressive, and leader in the women's suffrage movement. Addams founded the New York Hull House, the first settlement house in North America, to help immigrants adjust to American society. The Hull House provided Child care, cultural training, and education. In terms of reform, she called for social elites to take a greater interest in the needs of the lower classes, advocated that powerful corporations needed to stop trying to block legislation aimed at improving the lives of workers from wages to working conditions, and supported labor unions' intent on ending the practice of child labor.

[Jane Addams](#)

[Jane Adams | Hull House](#)

15. John D. Rockefeller: (1839–1937)- Rockefeller is known best for founding the Standard Oil Company. It dominated the US industry and served as the first great American trust business. John Rockefeller rose from modest beginnings to become the founder of Standard Oil in 1870 and focused his attention on outcompeting or buying other businesses to create a monopoly in the oil industry. While he was a large advocate of Industrialization and big business, he focused his attention later in life on expanding education and philanthropy.

[John D. Rockefeller | Biography, Industry, Philanthropy, Facts](#)

[Biography: John D. Rockefeller, Senior](#)

16. John Muir: (1838–1914)- Known as the “Father of the National Parks,” John Muir is an environmentalist, naturalist, and advocate for the conservation of American land. His articles and essays on the destruction of natural environments around him led to the establishment of Yosemite National Park, where he later met with President Theodore Roosevelt to discuss national conservation programs.

[John Muir: A Brief Biography](#)

[John Muir - Yosemite](#)

17. Mark Twain: (1835–1910)- Coining the term *Gilded Age* in an 1873 novel, Mark Twain is a leading figure in the early fight for reformation. A potent satirist, Twain’s writings shed light on the underbelly of society and the injustice inherent to the current system. He was also a staunch anti-imperialist. In this conference, Twain will most likely focus on issues such as racism, class mobility, and access to education.

[Mark Twain](#)

[The Politics of Mark Twain](#)

18. Susan B. Anthony: (1820–1906)- Known as one of the main leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, Susan B. Anthony took part in many organizations for the advancement of women’s rights in America such as the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA). In collaboration with her good friend and activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anthony traveled the country, giving speeches in favor of her ideals. Her main goal in this simulation will be to promote the suffrage movement, temperance movement, and abolition.

[Women's Suffrage in the Progressive Era | Library of Congress](#)

[Susan B. Anthony | National Women's History Museum](#)

19. Theodore Roosevelt: (1858–1919)- Incumbent Vice President of the United States, Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt is a simultaneous domestic reformer and foreign imperialist. As president, he used “Big Stick Diplomacy,” something seen in his support of Panamanian secession from Columbia and by how he secured the United States the Panama Canal. Domestically, he revived the Sherman Antitrust Act, dissolving railroad monopolies and corporate corruption.

[The Square Deal of Theodore Roosevelt](#)

[Theodore Roosevelt](#)

20. Thomas Edison: (1847–1931)- While most well known for his invention of the lightbulb, Thomas Edison was also a big proponent of reform and progressive movements. He believed strongly in “initiative, referendum, review of judicial decisions, compensation for injured workingmen, suffrage.” His position as a key inventor in the Second Industrial Revolution also granted him great influence on the lives of everyday Americans as well as insight into the industrialization happening at the time.

[Life of Thomas Alva Edison | Biography](#)

[Thomas Edison | Britannica](#)

21. W.E.B. Du Bois: (1868–1963)- A leading civil rights pioneer, W.E.B. Du Bois advocated for Black Americans to embrace their African heritage and rejected the idea of complete

integration with white society. He led the Niagara Movement and believed in the granting of empirical rights for African Americans. This delegate emphasized reforms and sought change via his newspaper publication in *The Crisis*. Du Bois, who considered himself a socialist, published articles in favor of unionized labor but called out union leaders for barring Black membership.

[W.E.B. Du Bois | NAACP](#)

[Niagara Movement - Definition, Speech, W.E.B. Du Bois | HISTORY](#)

22. William Howard Taft: (1857–1930)- Before his presidency, William Howard Taft was vice president to Theodore Roosevelt and Governor of the Philippines. He is a moderate supporter of labor movements, supporting the right to unionize but opposing strikes and demonstrations. As president, he enacted laws regulating railroads to help American laborers.

[William Howard Taft | Biography, Accomplishments, Presidency, & Facts | Britannica](#)

[William Taft | Miller Center](#)

23. William Jennings Bryan: (1860–1925)- An esteemed orator and three-time presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan is a champion of the people and the face of progressive politics. Bryan is one of the leading advocates for a “free silver” policy to assist farmers in paying off debts. His “Cross of Gold,” speech at the 1896 Democratic National Convention earned him a thirty-minute standing ovation and cemented him in the forefront of American politics.

[William Jennings Bryan Biography | Britannica](#)

[William Jennings Bryan](#)

- 24. William McKinley: (1843–1901)-** Elected president in 1896 and re-elected in 1900, defeating William Jennings Bryan in both, William McKinley is a towering figure of the controversial Republican Party. His domestic policies included the controversial bimetallism legislation and tariff legislation. He raised tariffs to help fund internal improvements and signed the gold standard, which only backed the US currency in gold. McKinley also differentiated between "good" and "bad" trusts and sought to reform and improve "bad" trusts to limit corruption. He saw "good" trusts as beneficial for the people and for industry.

[Knowing the Presidents: McKinley](#)

[WILLIAM MCKINLEY: DOMESTIC AFFAIRS](#)

- 25. Woodrow Wilson: (1856–1924)-** Current politician and future President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson is a strong democrat who aligns himself with the ideals of the progressive movement. Throughout his career, he supported economic reform, social reform, and the creation of the income tax. In this conference, he will be likely to support gearing the American system towards the people rather than big businesses and wealthy elites.

[Progressive Era Politics - President Wilson House](#)

[Woodrow Wilson | Biography, Presidency, & Accomplishments | Britannica](#)

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