



## **Downtown/Franklinton**

### **The Growth of Business, the New Middle Class, and Gilded Age Corruption**

#### **Historical Context and Overview**

In the decades following the Civil War, often referred to as the Gilded Age, U.S. cities grew rapidly as business owners built their factories in cities with good transportation systems, particularly railroads. Urban growth created workers for industrial factories and a market for manufactured goods. Columbus was home to 800 manufacturing plants by the turn of the century—producing a range of goods from tools, shoes, firefighting equipment, cement mixers and more.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrialization and the growth of large corporations created the need for more white collar workers—managers, engineers, and sales representatives. These workers formed a new group of middle class Americans. With more leisure time and greater income for the middle class, new forms of entertainment emerged. Shows with comedy skits, magic acts, songs, and dances attracted large audiences. Movies, circuses, amusement parks, and sports became increasingly popular. In Columbus, picnics, shopping at Lazarus, dancing at the Lunatic Asylum, and visiting the new statehouse were among the favorite leisure time activities of the new middle class.

Rapid urban growth in the Industrial Era also resulted in political corruption. Cities had profitable contracts and jobs to award. Many cities became dominated by political machines in which constituents supported a candidate in exchange for anticipated support. These votes would be repaid with favors back from the government once that candidate was elected. Candidates were often chosen based on their willingness to play along with the spoils system.

#### **Standards Alignment**

##### **Ohio's New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies**

HS American History Content Statement 10: The rise of corporations, heavy industry, mechanized farming and technological innovations transformed the American economy from an agrarian to an increasingly urban industrial society.

HS American History Content Statement 12: Immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.

#### **Learning Objectives**

- Describe the leisure activities that emerged for the new middle class in Columbus.
- Discuss the ways in which Columbus became recognized as a modern city.
- Explain the impact of industrial growth in Columbus.
- Analyze the connection between urban growth and political corruption around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Discussion Questions

1. What new forms of entertainment and leisure activities emerged in Columbus for the new middle class?
2. What new industries and products were created in Columbus around the turn of the century?
3. What forms of political corruption were present in Columbus? How did this corruption reflect broader patterns of corruption at the national level during the Gilded Age?
4. What was the role of the media in addressing corruption?
5. How was Columbus starting to look and feel like a city? What new institutions emerged in the city?
6. What was the impact of the streetcar in Columbus?

## Extension Activities

Have students research other leisure time activities associated with the rise of the new middle class. Topics could include: Vaudeville, spectator sports, movies, the circus, popular fiction, ragtime and jazz. Research projects should include local connections to the broader national trends. Student could demonstrate their learning through a multimedia presentation.

Have students use newspapers and online news site to locate examples of modern-day “muckrakers”— investigative journalists who expose political corruption, waste, and fraud. Have students compare these articles with those written about political corruption during the Gilded Age, such as Lincoln Steffens’ “The Shame of the Cities.” <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5732/>

## Additional Resources

Teaching Columbus: Downtown and Franklinton Neighborhoods  
<http://teachingcolumbus.org/neighborhoods2.htm>

The Gilded and the Gritty: America 1870-1912  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/index.htm>

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