**Title of Lesson Study:** The Gilded Age

**Observer:** Kate Thomas of Bob Zeidel

**Problem:** Students struggle to learn about strikes and government issued regulations because of their preconceived notions about unions and big government. In order to convey to students the reasons why the working class, middle class, and elite reformers supported workplace and business regulations (the Progressive Era), we have to cover the history of a variety of issues over several social science disciplines: immigration and ethnic social history, Gilded Age economic problems, and urban machine politics.

**General Education requirement:** Our GE requirement means that in addition to the history of this era, we need to connect the past to the present. We are especially concerned about connecting past regulation movements to current labor conditions globally. By connecting the past to the present across academic disciplines, we strive to increase content retention and student engagement as well as encourage student to invest in problem-solving for the future.

1. **Observe and describe the content of what is taught and what you are learning.**

   2 Gilded Ages: glitter and base metal: 2 perspectives 1. labor & ethnicity
   Asking questions: student responses (gilded, agrarian/land=harmony of interests & no conflict, employees temp) but then rise of big business 1865; 2nd industrial revol monopolies LARGE and dominant e.g. Pillsbury. Question of distribution of wealth: Did industrial capitalism work in terms of fairly distributing wealth?
   35 million immigrants; only before Irish – diff. catholic, then lazy drunks; stereotypes Chinese & others: challenges notion of harmony of interests & commonality
   DIVERSITY is upsetting, creates tension amidst growing wealth and poverty
   Tension not only with US and immigrants but btw Americans too
   Explodes in 1877: Martinsburg VA: stop the trains and workers elsewhere do the same
   U of Pitt website “The Great RR Strike of 1877” at “Labor Legacy Home”
   Roundhouse – light RR on fire and push down track to engine; bldgs destroyed
   GREAT PHOTOS
   Asks what we see & what message is being sent: anger, riots, destruction, inequality
   But Bob says add in the context, the cause: class conflict (wealth and power)
   But America not supposed to have classes! Not in our republic of opportunity
   Documents 1878, literary influential mag; author Wendell Phillips abolitionists and for free wage labor is the key to social harmony
   5 years earlier: Paris Commune violence – we’re not like them bec we have same interests
   Back to image and quote – students respond to difference btw violence in image (see their description above) not same as quote that we’re all the same

**I can’t read documents or see images (too light) – told to look at them later (do I have time?)**

1877 doc from Gatling Gun Co., promoting “cannon” gaitling gun to be bought by corporations to keep streets clear, letter to Pres of PA RR company of same 1877 riot
   Student response: interpretation is “meet violence with violence” where if you have Gatling can fire upon and clear strikers
   Evidence of (asks students, gets them to repeat) class violence, will be repeated
   Can happen any time! Be prepared to use it!
Newspaper – publicize that some think it is communist immigrants, not “real” Americans [student interpretation!]

Calling upon students – what would you do when need more workers?
   But newspapers saying their subversives. What would we do?
   Pay the workers what they want [– student shouts it out! Engagement!!]

Did business really want to resolve this problem?
   Bob – take a look at Homestead 1892, Carnegie – still violence 15 years later!
      Had been largest and most profitable, on river
      Unionized – want to make decisions
      Carnegie and Frick decide otherwise

Ok, now students – interpret Homestead – guns were fired, no discussion
   Eyewitness testimony

Student question – why not just pay workers more and keep making money?
   Carnegie and Frick wanted control over workplace
   Workers couldn’t have a say

End of homestead – Disgruntled person posed a reporter and went in and shot Frick, then stab him (missed)
   Photo of the guy – want can we tell about him? Ends up he’s an anarchist
      But what else can we tell from the photo? Russian immigrant & involved with Emma Goldman Jewish immigrant well-known spoke against American capitalism CLASS VIOLENCE GETS ASSOCIATED WITH IMMIGRANTS

Back to Haymarket – arrested not there, press emphasizes that the “bomb” makers were immigrants
   1894 – look at textbook about Pullman Strike; Debs as socialist
   Focus William McKinley assassination attempt – NY world’s fair
      Leon Schlugush – American born in MI but most press ID’d as immigrant bec violent and anarchist
   Police arrested Emma Goldman

Last document: 1903 Immigration Act
   Keep out diseased, etc and anarchists bec they’re the ones causing the violence right!
   It’s not our fault, not the fault of business owners, not of the US but immigrants

Copy down the website, go to 2 documents
   What does it suggest about the Homestead Strike or help you interpret the bigger picture about what’s going on with this violent strike overall.
   [Bob – docs will show that authorities weren’t interested in solving the problem – paying workers more or improving conditions as the student suggested. Rather, they were focused on maintaining control of the workers at all costs.]

2. Was each social science field covered historically? Please address which parts of the lecture and/or discussion worked well for each area and what could be improved.
Immigration and ethnic social history? Immigrants definitely mentioned and discussed. Need to describe their ethnic background more, especially religion.

Gilded Age economic problems? Socialism was mentioned but I’m not sure that the students know the academic definition of capitalism and socialism. Could give definitions or ask students to define them. We decided not to address the specific economic problems of supply and demand since our economist dropped out.

Urban machine politics? Not mentioned.

3. What is your discipline? From your discipline’s perspective, how could this lesson be improved? Address one of the 3 areas (see question 2) in more detail. We can use any and all suggestions that you have to better adapt our lesson to the needs of the students in your area of specialty.

History. From a historians point of view, I think the poverty of workers and wealth of owners needs to be stressed more since today’s students still associated poverty with immigrants and wealth as something that can be had if you work hard enough. More on child labor and working families; inability of workers to find full-time employment and a living wage.

4. Please choose a small discussion group to observe. Introduce yourself and make sure they have all signed the consent form. Please do not partake in their conversation.

Are the students engaged with the primary materials? How can you tell?

NA -- online

Are the students confused by the various strands of social, economic, and political history of the Gilded Age or are they able to effectively discuss each of the 3 areas? How can you tell?

NA -- online

5. Were the students able to articulate why workers, the middle-class, business, politicians, and social reformers embraced government regulations at the turn of the 20th century? How can you tell?

I read their worksheets and online imagined debates following the class. Some groups were very creative in using the documents, but overall, they hadn’t done the textbook reading and were therefore overly vague and not historically specific. I think we need a moderated discussion in class to keep them focused on the reading terms and the historical moment. Then we can connect it to what’s going on today. Some were still using current stereotypes of “lazy immigrants” who just needed to work harder – without addressing the fact that they were working 6 day weeks and 12-16 hour days!

6. Did the professor connect this Gilded Age history of social, economic, and political problems to current global regulatory problems? If so, how was the connection made? If not, how could the professor have done better?
Connected to current issues only in that the professor asked the students if they would want to be treated this way. No connection to current global problems -- or time to do so! It would have overloaded the students to add this on at the end of the class. Again, it’s a good thing to try for a “unit” study of Gilded Age / Progressive Era.

7. Did the students make the connection between Gilded Age problems and current global concerns? If yes, how could you tell that students made the connection? If they didn’t, what could the professor do differently to encourage the students to make the connection. Again, please answer from your disciplinary approach to these issues.