

The War Between the States: America's Uncivil War

Chapter 36 – Corruption

Summary:

The corruption identified in Chapter 35 as one of the several divisive themes of post-war and Reconstruction America blossomed into full bloom as the 1870s progressed. In retrospect, it can be seen that the post-war politics of dishonesty, lawbreaking, and even brutality fostered a Darwinian environment of the survival of the fittest that offered precious little accountability for the powerful of either the private or public sector. The United States was, indeed, “reconstructed” during this period—in a welter of scandal, greed, and, ultimately, shame. Some of the consequences—such as national economic calamity and political disgrace and ruin at the highest levels--crashed down soon. Others—such as lingering hatred between groups of Americans, extra-constitutional powers for the executive branch, organized crime-connected labor unions, mercantilist corporate oligarchy, and unconstitutional federal government abuse of power in response to the latter—have unfolded and sometimes even expanded down through the 20th and now 21st centuries.

Identification:

1. Credit Mobilier
2. Panic of 1873
3. Whiskey Ring
4. Henry McNeil Turner
5. Jay Gould
6. Robber Barons

Completion:

1. The _____ construction company, headed by the same board of directors as the _____ railroad company it was formed to build, left the latter's shareholders—and the American taxpayer—holding a \$ _____-million dollar bag of overcharges.
2. _____ and _____ were among the prominent U.S. politicians implicated in the historic Credit Mobilier scandal.

3. Congress passed the _____ Act in the year _____. It removed most sanctions placed on former Confederates by the Fourteenth Amendment.
4. Were railroads in the post-War United States overbuilt, underbuilt, about right, or not known, with regard to the demand for their services? _____
5. _____, _____, and _____ were among the high-ranking Grant Presidential Administrations disgraced by public scandal.
6. Which president owned slaves until well after the war concluded: Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Andrew Johnson, or U. S. Grant?

Thought Questions:

1. Tell the story, in your own words, of Ulysses S. Grant's final years.
2. Describe the "Back to Africa" movement chronicled in this chapter, and give your thoughts about it.
3. Discuss the reasons you believe contributed to the rise and prominence of men like Jay Gould. Describe what happened to his fortune after his death.
4. Discuss the major themes of Senator Benjamin Hill's memorable speech on Reconstruction. Also, list some of your favorite quotes from the speech.