Name _____ Date _____

The Gilded Age: Industry, Immigration and the Great Labor Strikes

Directions: Read the passage about the Gilded Age and study the table of labor conflicts. Then answer each question, using the passage, the table or both.

Industry, Immigration and Labor in the Gilded Age

Wealth, Workers and Newcomers in the Gilded Age

Historians often call the years from the 1870s to about 1900 the Gilded Age. The name comes from the title of an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. An object that is gilded has a thin coat of gold over a cheaper metal, so the label suggests an age of dazzling wealth on the surface and serious problems underneath.

Industry grew faster than ever before. In 1865 the nation had about 35,000 miles of railroad track; by 1900 it had more than 200,000, tying farms, mines and factories into one national market. Andrew Carnegie built a steel empire around Pittsburgh. John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil bought out or drove off its rivals until, by 1880, it controlled nearly all oil refining in the country. Americans disagreed sharply about such men. Critics called them robber barons, who grew rich by paying low wages, buying favors from politicians and crushing competitors. Admirers called them captains of industry, who built new industries, created jobs, lowered prices and gave fortunes to libraries and universities. In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act to outlaw monopolies, but for years the law was seldom used against big companies.

Industry also needed workers, and millions of immigrants arrived to fill the jobs. Before the 1880s, most immigrants came from northern and western Europe. After that, a growing share came from southern and eastern Europe: Italians, Poles, Greeks and Jews escaping persecution in the Russian Empire. Most settled in cities and worked in factories, mines and construction. In 1892, the federal government opened an immigration station on Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Many native-born Americans, known as nativists, resented the newcomers and wanted to limit immigration. On the West Coast, Chinese immigrants had worked in mines and helped build the first transcontinental railroad, and many white workers blamed them for low wages. Congress answered in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act. It banned Chinese laborers from entering the country for ten years and barred Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens. It was the first major federal law to shut out immigrants of one nationality. Congress renewed it in 1892, later extended it with no end date, and repealed it only in 1943.

Industrial work was hard and often dangerous. Many factory workers labored ten hours a day, six days a week, and steelworkers often worked twelve-hour shifts. Employers cut wages when business slowed, as it did in the depressions that began in 1873 and 1893. To bargain as a group, workers formed unions. The Knights of Labor admitted skilled and unskilled workers, women and Black workers. After a winning strike in 1885, it grew from about 110,000 members that year to more than 700,000 by the summer of 1886. The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886 and led by Samuel Gompers, organized skilled workers by craft and pressed for higher wages, shorter hours and safer workplaces.

A strike was the workers' strongest weapon, but employers had powerful allies. Companies fired strikers, hired replacements and sometimes locked workers out of their plants.

Governors sent state militias, presidents sent federal troops, and courts issued injunctions, orders that forbade strikes or boycotts. The table shows several of the era's best-known conflicts. In 1886, a bomb exploded at a labor rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square, and many Americans came to link unions with violence. That same year the Knights lost a large railroad strike, and within a few years the union had lost most of its members. Most large strikes of the era ended in defeat for workers. Still, these struggles forced Americans to debate the rights of workers, and many reforms of the next era grew out of that debate.

Major labor conflicts of the Gilded Age, 1877 to 1894

Year	Conflict and place	Industry and cause	What happened	Outcome
1877	Great Railroad Strike: began in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and spread to Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Chicago and other cities	Railroads; a 10 percent pay cut during a depression	Strikers stopped trains. State militias and federal troops sent by President Hayes clashed with strikers and crowds, and dozens of people were killed.	Put down within weeks; the strikers gained little.
1885	Strike against Jay Gould's railroads, among them the Wabash in the Midwest	Railroads; pay cuts	The Knights of Labor led the strike, backed by other railroad workers and by towns along the lines.	A win for workers: Gould restored the earlier pay and took the strikers back.
1886	Great Southwest railroad strike, in Texas, Missouri and three other states	Railroads; the firing of a Knights of Labor member	Knights of Labor members struck Gould's Southwest railroads. Strikers stopped trains, and clashes broke out with armed guards and strikebreakers.	Federal court orders and lost public support broke the strike that spring.
1886	Haymarket affair, Chicago	Many industries; a national campaign for an eight-hour workday	On May 4, at a rally protesting a police shooting of strikers the day before, someone threw a bomb at police. Seven officers and an unknown number of civilians died.	Eight anarchists were convicted and four were hanged, though the bomber was never identified.
1892	Homestead strike, Homestead, Pennsylvania	Steel; Carnegie Steel's plan to cut pay and break the union	The company locked out its workers and hired 300 Pinkerton guards. A gun battle on July 6 left about ten people dead, and the governor sent the state militia.	The mill reopened with nonunion workers, and the union was beaten by November.

Year	Conflict and place	Industry and cause	What happened	Outcome
1894	Pullman strike: began in Pullman, Illinois, near Chicago, and spread to railroads across the country	Railroad cars and railroads; pay cuts of about one-fourth while rents in the company town stayed high	The American Railway Union, led by Eugene V. Debs, refused to handle trains with Pullman cars. A federal court ordered the boycott to stop, and President Cleveland sent federal troops.	Dozens died in clashes. Debs was jailed, the boycott collapsed in July, and the union was defeated.

1. How does the passage present the labels robber barons and captains of industry?

A. As opposing judgments Americans made about the same business leaders

B. As terms that union leaders used to describe the strikers in the table

C. As official titles that Congress gave Carnegie and Rockefeller in 1890

D. As names for two separate groups of businessmen, one honest and one dishonest

2. The passage says employers cut wages when business slowed, as in the depression that began in 1893. Which conflict in the table grew out of a pay cut made after that depression began?

A. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

B. The Homestead strike of 1892

C. The Pullman strike of 1894

D. The strike against Jay Gould's railroads in 1885

3. Which terms from the passage complete these sentences about the era's name and its critics of immigration? Choose from the word bank.

Word bank

nativists • gilded • militias • monopolies • injunctions

The era's name hints that its wealth was only a thin, _____ surface over deep problems. Americans who wanted to limit immigration because they resented the newcomers were called _____.

4. According to the passage, what did the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 do?

A. It set yearly limits on immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

B. It required railroads in the West to pay Chinese workers the same wages as others.

C. It opened a station on Ellis Island to receive immigrants arriving from China.

D. It banned Chinese laborers from entering and barred Chinese immigrants from citizenship.

5. The passage says governors sent state militias and presidents sent federal troops. In which conflict does the table show soldiers sent by a governor but no federal troops?

A. The Haymarket affair of 1886

B. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

C. The Pullman strike of 1894

D. The Homestead strike of 1892

6. The passage and the table give the years of these events. Match each event to First, Second or Third to show the order in which they happened.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Congress passes the Sherman Antitrust Act
2. _____ Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act
3. _____ The Knights of Labor win a strike against Jay Gould's railroads

A. First
B. Third
C. Second

7. Using the passage and the table, what was one effect of the Haymarket bombing?

A. Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act to protect unions.
B. Carnegie Steel agreed to recognize the union at Homestead.
C. The Knights of Labor won an eight-hour day for all workers.
D. Many Americans came to link unions with violence.

8. Match each person to the role the passage or the table gives him.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Andrew Carnegie
2. _____ John D. Rockefeller
3. _____ Samuel Gompers
4. _____ Eugene V. Debs

A. Led a federation of skilled workers' craft unions
B. Opened the immigration station on Ellis Island
C. Built a steel empire around Pittsburgh
D. Controlled nearly all oil refining through Standard Oil
E. Led railroad workers who refused to handle Pullman cars

9. The passage describes court injunctions as one government response to labor disputes. Which two conflicts does the table say involved court orders?

☐ A. The strike against Jay Gould's railroads in 1885
☐ B. The Homestead strike of 1892
☐ C. The Great Southwest railroad strike of 1886
☐ D. The Pullman strike of 1894
☐ E. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

10. Which conclusion do the passage and the table, taken together, support best?

A. Governments usually stayed neutral and left strikes to employers and workers.
B. Most strikes ended when employers raised wages to win their workers back.
C. Unions grew steadily from 1877 to 1894 and suffered no serious setbacks along the way.
D. Workers won some strikes, but most large ones failed, often after courts or soldiers stepped in.