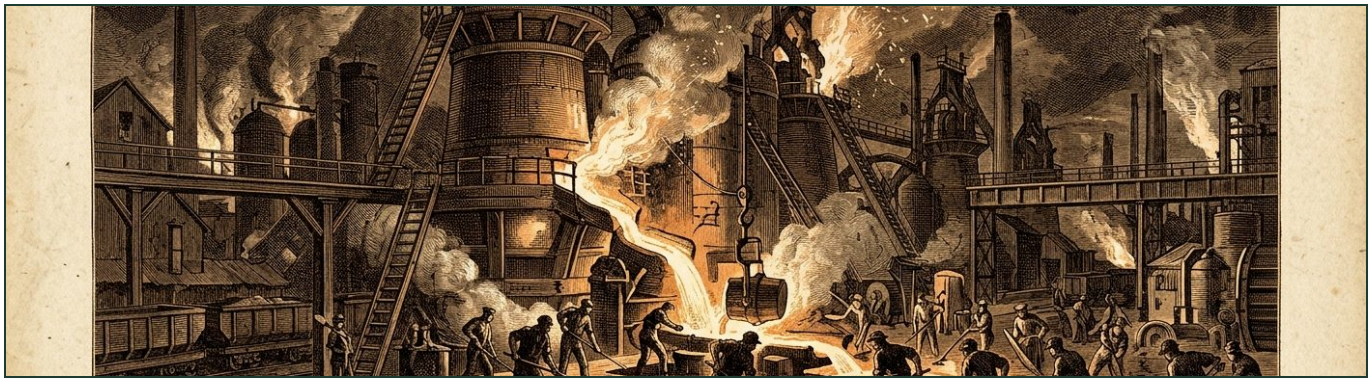


1870 – 1900

# Gilded Age Timeline

*The Gilded Age was an era of explosive industrial growth in the United States – a time when railroads, steel, and oil created enormous fortunes for a few, while millions of workers labored in dangerous conditions for low wages, and new immigrants flooded into American cities.*

**1869**

## Transcontinental Railroad Completed

The Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads meet at Promontory Summit, Utah, creating the first railroad to span the continental United States — built in large part by Chinese and Irish immigrant labor.

> **Why it mattered:** *The transcontinental railroad knit the country together economically, opened the West to commercial farming and ranching, and made possible the industrial supply chains that powered the Gilded Age — while also displacing Native American communities across the Great Plains.*

**1870–80**

## Rise of the Industrialists

Andrew Carnegie builds a steel empire, John D. Rockefeller dominates oil, and Cornelius Vanderbilt controls railroads — amassing personal fortunes larger than anything previously seen in American history.

> **Why it mattered:** *The rise of the great industrialists created a new kind of wealth and a new kind of inequality — factory workers labored long hours for low wages while their employers became the richest people in the country, raising questions about fairness that would define the next era of American politics.*

**1876**

## Centennial Exhibition

Philadelphia's World's Fair celebrates the nation's 100th birthday with displays of American industrial power, including Alexander Graham Bell's new telephone and giant steam engines.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Centennial showcased American industrial optimism — the belief that technology and growth would solve any problem — defining the Gilded Age spirit at its most confident.*

# Gilded Age Timeline *continued*

**1882** — **Standard Oil Trust**

John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust controls roughly 90% of US oil refining — pioneering the corporate trust as a tool for eliminating competition and dominating an entire industry.

> **Why it mattered:** *Standard Oil was the model for Gilded Age monopolies — showing how a single company could dominate an industry, price out competitors, and accumulate enormous political power, eventually provoking the government to respond with antitrust law.*

**1886** — **Haymarket Affair**

A labor demonstration for the eight-hour workday in Chicago's Haymarket Square turns violent when a bomb explodes; police arrest labor leaders and eight are convicted in a deeply controversial trial.

> **Why it mattered:** *Haymarket became the defining symbol of the battle between industrial capital and organized labor — it led to a crackdown on unions and made 'anarchist' a term of fear, but also galvanized the labor movement across the country.*

**1890** — **Sherman Antitrust Act**

Congress passes the first federal law banning business practices that restrain trade — the government's first attempt to limit the power of corporate monopolies.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Sherman Antitrust Act established the principle that the government could regulate business to protect competition — though it was weakly enforced for decades, it became the legal foundation for the Progressive Era's trust-busting campaigns.*

**1892** — **Homestead Strike**

Carnegie Steel workers strike against wage cuts at Homestead, Pennsylvania; Carnegie dispatches Pinkerton armed guards, violence breaks out, the strike is crushed, and the workers' union is destroyed.

> **Why it mattered:** *Homestead showed how far industrial employers would go to suppress organized labor — and how little the government would do to protect workers — fueling demands for reform that defined the Progressive Era to come.*

**1893** — **Panic of 1893**

A stock market crash and bank failures plunge the country into a severe economic depression, with unemployment reaching 20 percent in industrial cities.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Panic of 1893 revealed the instability beneath the Gilded Age's gleaming surface — boom-and-bust capitalism hurt ordinary workers far more than the wealthy, and the depression's severity convinced many Americans that government needed to rein in the power of big business.*