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In the post–Civil War United States, corporations grew significantly in number, size, and influence. Analyze the impact of big business on the economy and politics and the responses of Americans to these changes. Confine your answer to the period 1870 to 1900.

Doc b- political, social , economic - talking about railroad king; very dominate and controls people and gov.

Doc c- economic; manufacturing system has diminished individualism and independce, make everyone less original and more followers than leaders for the common work man

Doc d- political, economic- the major economic powers controlled congress and through trusts

Doc H – economic- person was hurt by rockefellers dominac; coulnt compete with standard oil because it was a monopoly

Doc I- economic; new way to sell- retail/department stores- new way of selling- see the products next to one another

After the Civil War, America had to recover from the losses and build it’s economic and political structure. The North was victorious over the South from the civil war, so the North’s economic system, manufacturing, took control in the United States. The south had to catch up, while the North had some very controlling figures rise to power through economic success. These select elites were able to do so through the idea of Laissez-faire, where there is little government interference with the economy. These economic elites and the idea of Laissez-faire defined the time from 1870-1900 called the Gilded Age. Some believe that these economic elites and their monopolies did not have a big impact on the overall economy and government in America. However, the big businesses of this time greatly impacted the working class, economically, governmental decisions, and style of living during the Gilded Age. Overall, due to the dominance of select businesses and an emphasis on Laissez-faire, America’s economy and political decision were greatly impacted during the Gilded Age.

Due to the presence of economic elites forming monopolies, many of the working class people were affected negatively. The person who had control over the railroads, Vanderbilt, hurt many people working for him because he could choose employees wages and fire them when he wanted to without setbacks due to the fact that he was so dominate (doc b). Without any opposing businesses in the railroad industry, Vanderbilt, could raise his prices very high without problems and ultimately hurt those not only that work for him, but also the working class of the Gilded Age, charging them more than necessary. In addition to the railroad monopoly there was also the oil monopoly run by Rockefeller, whose business was Standard Oil. Smaller oil companies trying to gain revenue where often bought out or went out of business (doc H). Rockefeller was able to do this with his monopoly because he would use tactics like trusts to legalize his monopoly and get around the laws attempting to prevent monopolies. In addition to hurting the common working class, it also hurt the economy during this time because there was limited competition, which drove the US Market economy.

In protest against the economic elites, the common men of the USA formed organizations like the Grange or political groups like The Populist Party. The Grange promoted social and economic needs for farms, as they were very hurt by the industrial economy. The Populist party called for stronger government roles in regulating the American Economy to try and prevent the economic elites from taking over.

In addition to hurting the common man and the economy, big business and the economic elites at this time also negatively impacted the government system. Because the elites had so much power and money over everyone else in America, there often would influence the decisions of congressmen with business deals to help protect their monopolies (doc D). The economic elite fully supported the idea of Laissez-faire where there was no government control on the economy, so they would often do everything in their power to prevent congress from passing laws such as the anti-trust law in order to stay economically dominate.

In addition, another way politics became very corrupted in the Gilded Age was through political machines, which were politicians who would offer new immigrants a place to get settled into America in exchange for their vote. Many immigrants fell into these traps so the votes for political leaders were often very skewed.

The Gilded Age also brought a new way of living for many Americans. There became a new way to sell products, which was through retail stores or department stores. (doc I) This new way of selling attracted many customers because there were products side by side to compare and it made products seem much nicer. With new ways of buying and selling and ways to attract customers, America was able to start prospering again after the civil war and build its industrial economy. On the other hand, there were new problems with the industrial economy. While manufacturing did create jobs for many people, the jobs were often easy jobs in that it didn’t require very much education to work them. This resulted in a loss of individualism and created more followers than leaders (doc C). Due to more jobs that don’t require a lot of education, many employers employed immigrants who would work for less. This definitely caused a change for Americans and those without a job, because of the increased competition from immigrants, and hurt Americans economically.

Overall, the Gilded Age certainly changed the American economy, government and way of life. Many movements started to explain and justify to growing gap between the rich and poor during the gilded age such as social Darwinism. Social Darwinism explained that the elites were at the top of society because they were the fittest to survive and thrive. As these idea were introduced, the growing number of poor started to challenge why the gap was occurring and will start to fight for more government interference in the economy to try and level the playing field. This will result in political debates over the proper relationship between business and government and ultimately cause many debates between the Republicans and Democrats in years to come.