[1.1] Three pivotal inquiries define the American trajectory following the Civil War.

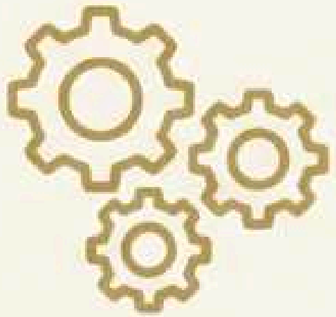
The Retreat of Equality

Why did the effort to rebuild the South on the basis of equal rights give way after 1877?



The Industrial Machine

How did industry transform the country in the late nineteenth century?



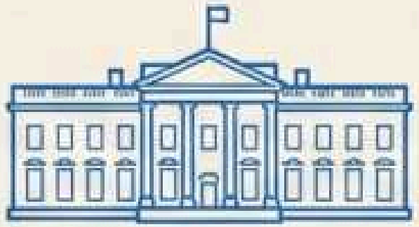
The Societal Friction

How did workers, farmers, and immigrants respond to the new order?



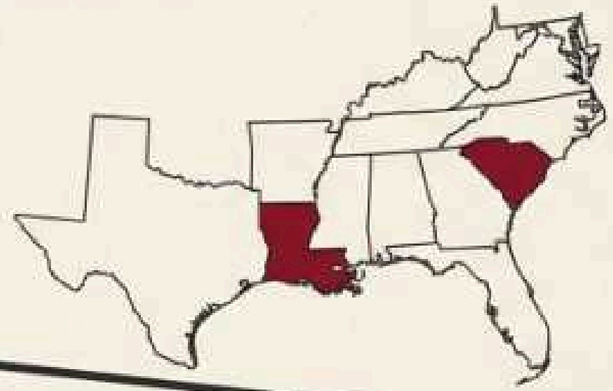
[1.2]

The disputed election of 1876 triggers a transactional compromise that alters the South.



Rutherford Hayes secures the Presidency over Samuel Tilden.

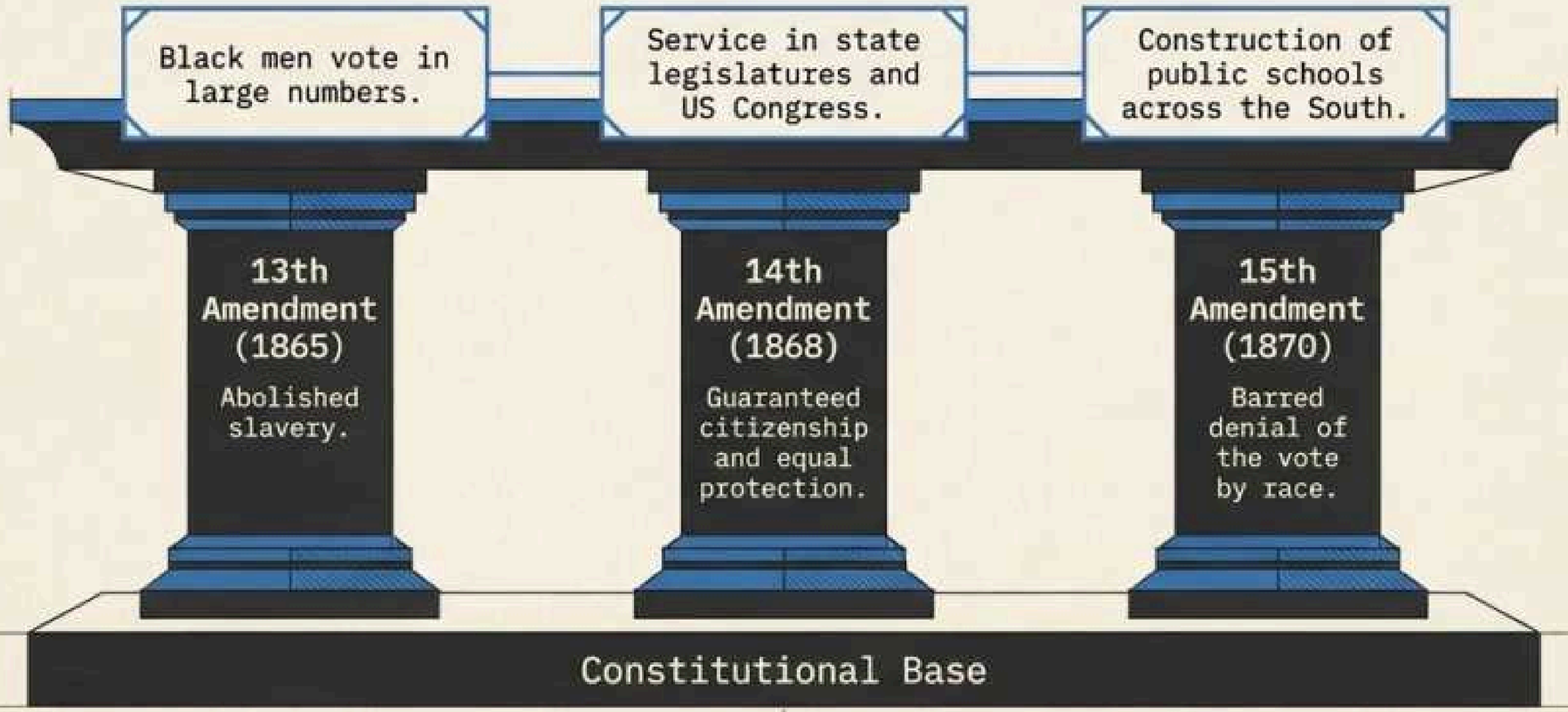
The Compromise of 1877



Federal troops are completely withdrawn from the final occupied Southern states.

[1.3]

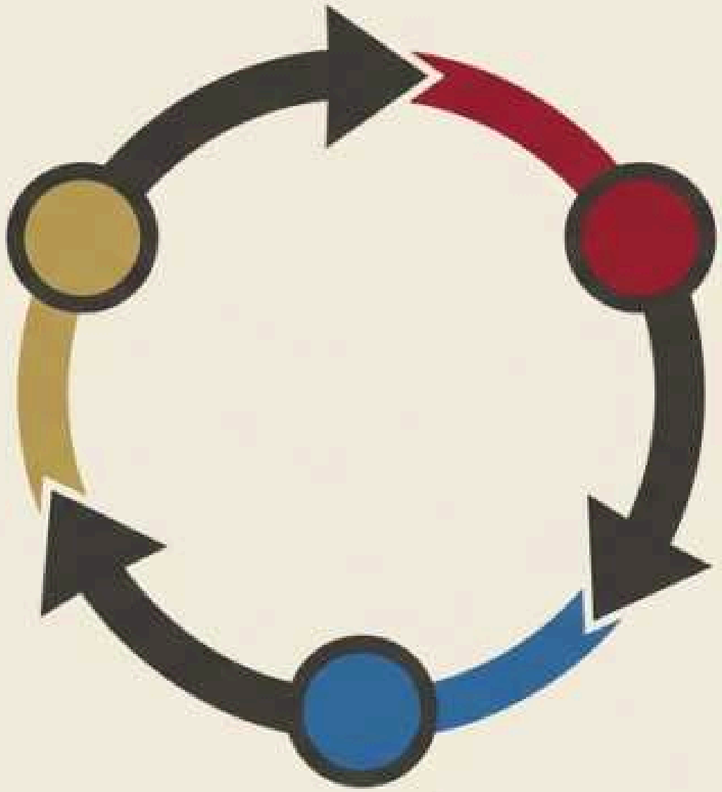
A brief, remarkable era of Reconstruction reshaped the Constitution and Southern society.



[1.4] Fierce white resistance forms a closed loop of terror, political reclamation, and economic subjugation.

Sharecropping System

Stripped of political power, most Black southerners are forced into farming land owned by others for a share of the crop.



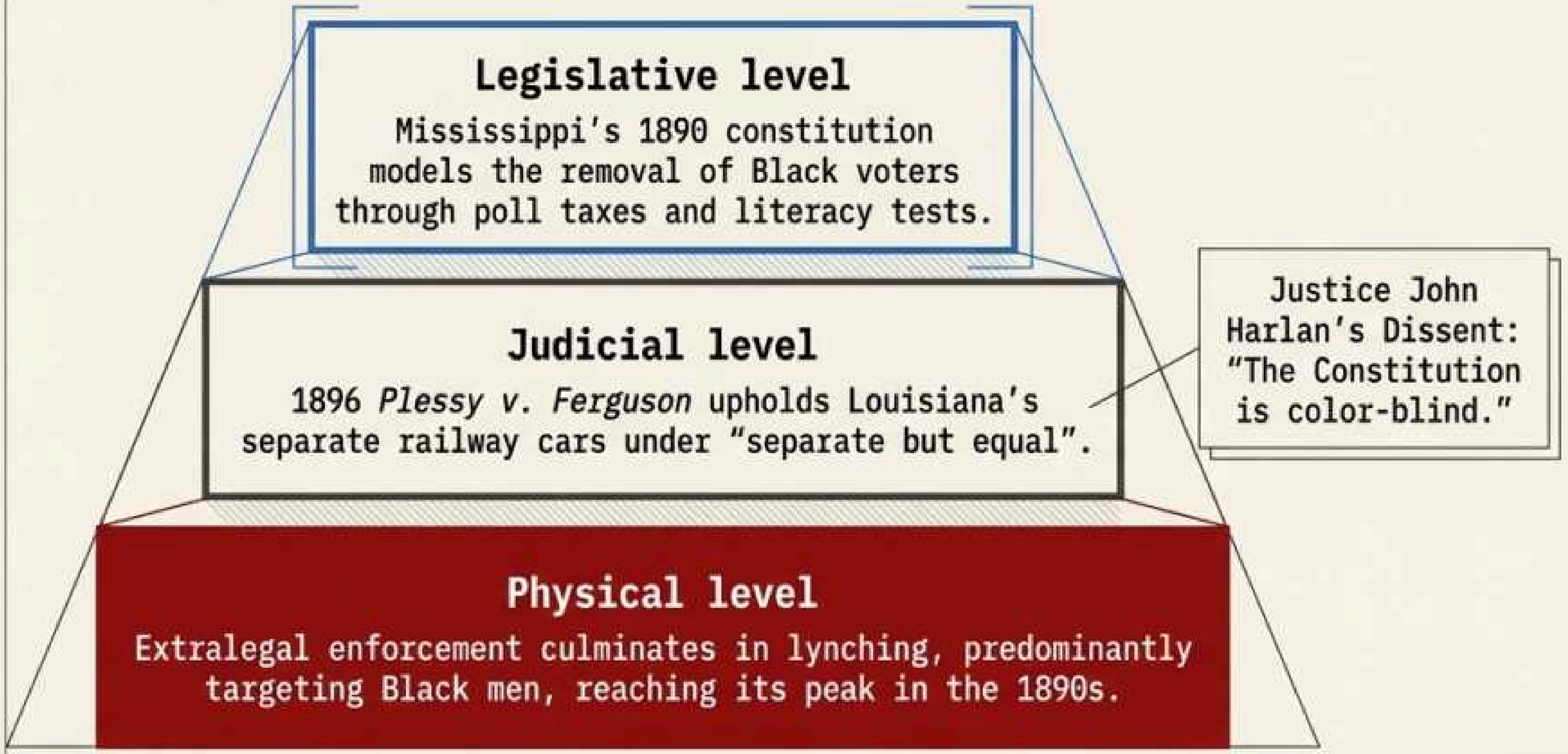
Ku Klux Klan & Paramilitary Terror

Directed against Black voters and their allies.

Redeemer Control

White Democrats systematically regain control of southern state governments.

[1.5] The web of Jim Crow legally engineered a segregated society through multiple tiers of control.

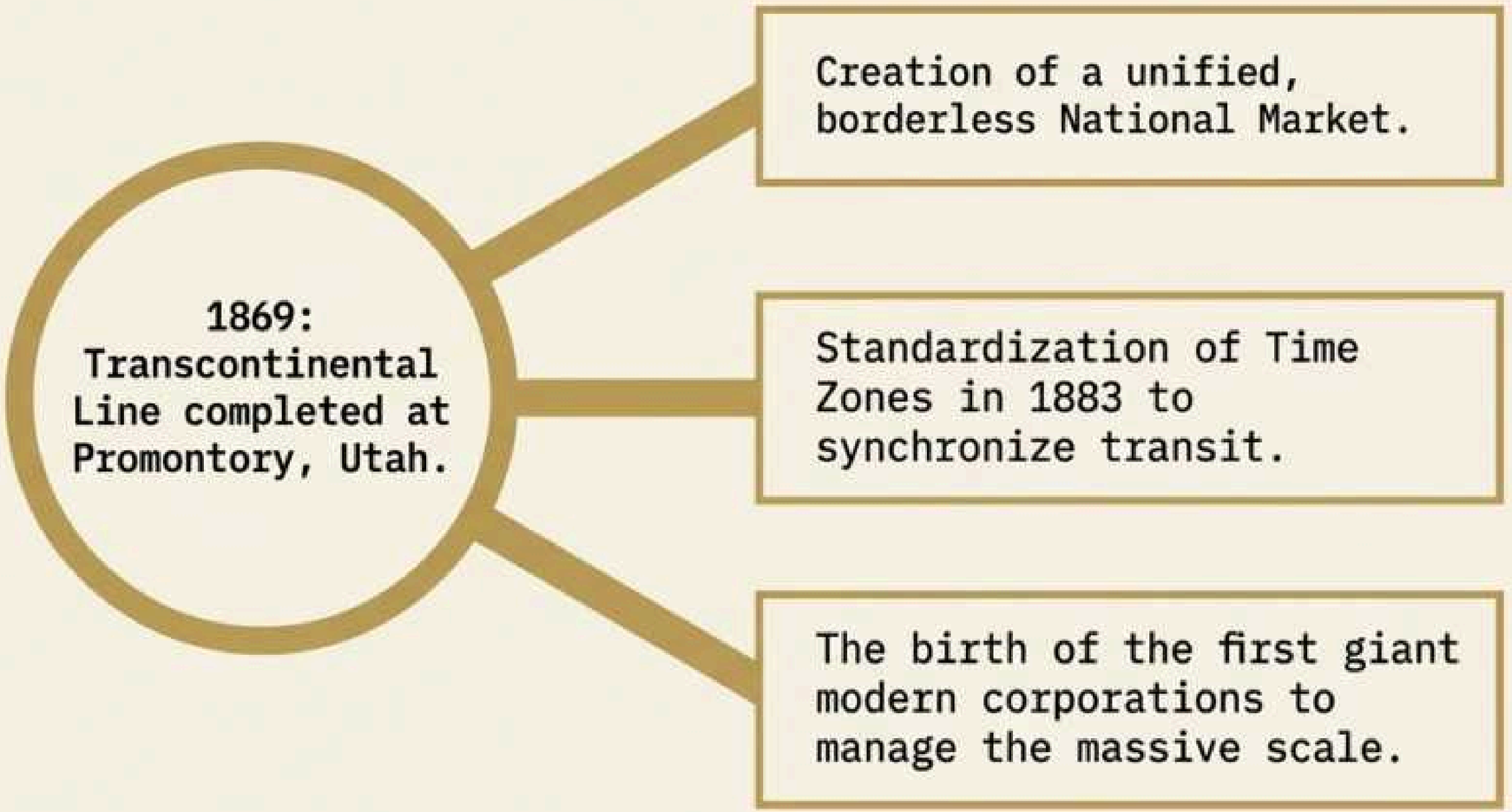


[1.6] Black leaders debated the precise strategy for advancement amidst systematic disenfranchisement.

Booker T. Washington		W.E.B. Du Bois	
Event:	1895 Atlanta Speech	**Event:**	1903 The Souls of Black Folk
Philosophy:	Urged patience and vocational education.	**Philosophy:**	Demanded full political and civil rights immediately.
Focus:	Gradual economic progress.	**Focus:**	Immediate legal and civil equality.

This vigorous debate shaped the founding of the NAACP in 1909.

[1.7] The rapidly expanding railroad network operates as the catalyst for unprecedented national consolidation.



[1.8] New technologies and organizational structures forge the world's first corporate monopolies.

Steel



Andrew Carnegie utilizes the Bessemer process (cheapening production) to build the world's largest steel company.

1890 Sherman Antitrust Act

The first federal law against monopolies, but weakly enforced at its inception.

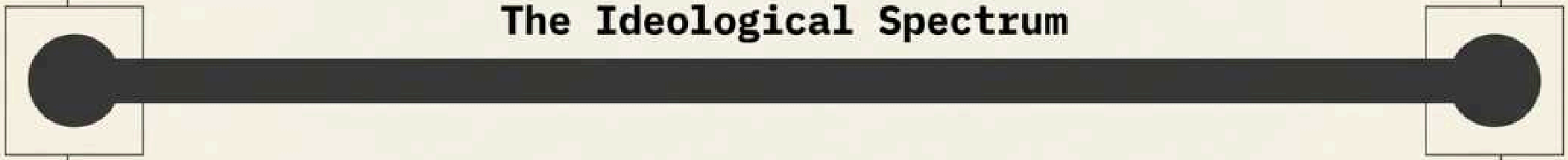
Oil



John D. Rockefeller consolidates most of American oil refining into the Standard Oil trust.

[1.9] Society fractures over how to morally and historically judge the accumulation of immense new wealth.

The Ideological Spectrum



Social Darwinism

Rooted in Herbert Spencer's ideas. Argues that competition rewards the fit and government must not interfere.

[Critics' View: Robber Barons]

Gospel of Wealth

Andrew Carnegie's 1889 thesis. Argues the rich have a duty to give fortunes away for the public good, directly funding some 2,500 libraries.

[Defenders' View: Captains of Industry]

[1.10] Workers facing dangerous conditions and zero safety nets trigger a heavily suppressed labor movement.



1877
Great Railroad Strike (Spreads nationally, crushed by federal troops).

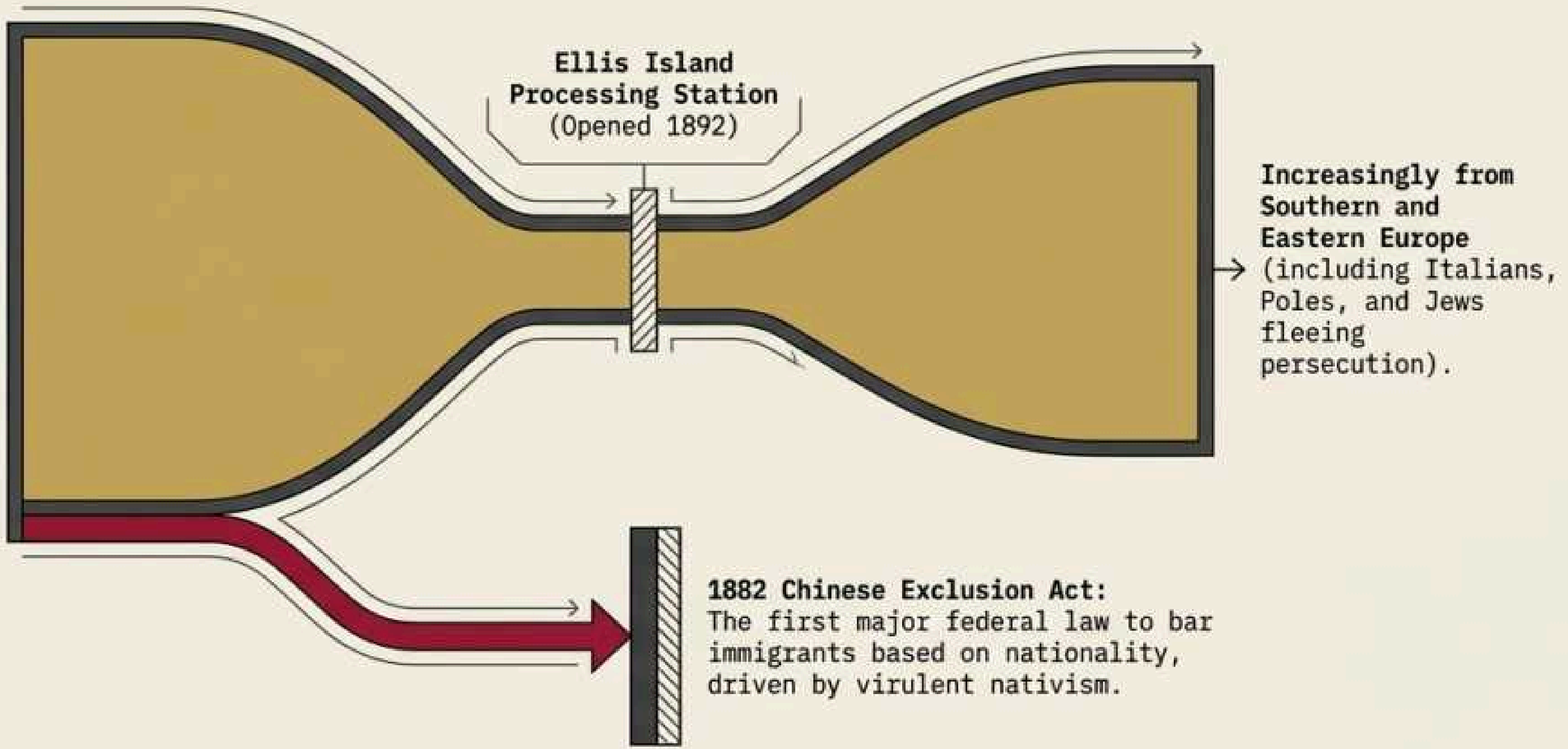
1886
Haymarket Bombing (Causes the rapid decline of the broad-based Knights of Labor).

1892
Homestead Steel Strike.

1894
Pullman Strike (Eugene Debs leads railway boycott; broken by federal injunction and troops).

The Pragmatic Alternative: Samuel Gompers leads the American Federation of Labor (AFL), focusing strictly on skilled workers and "bread-and-butter" gains.

[1.11] Twenty million arrivals reshape the population demographics, sparking fierce nativist backlashes.



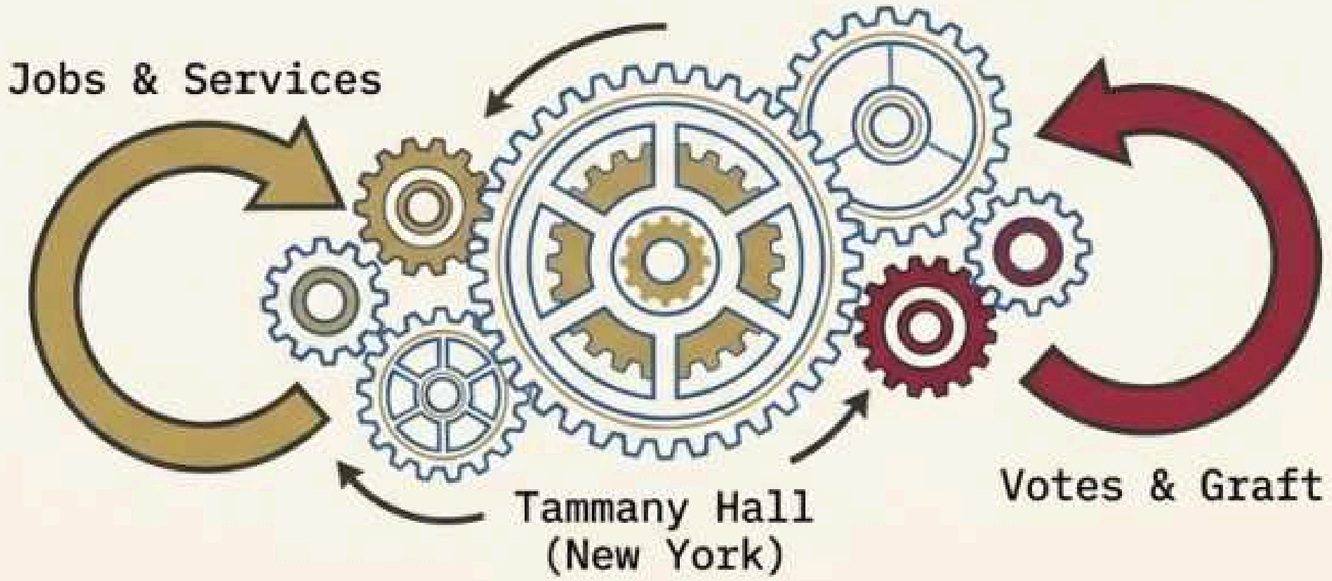
[1.12] Exploding urban centers harbor intense squalor squalor managed by transactional political machines.

The Squalor

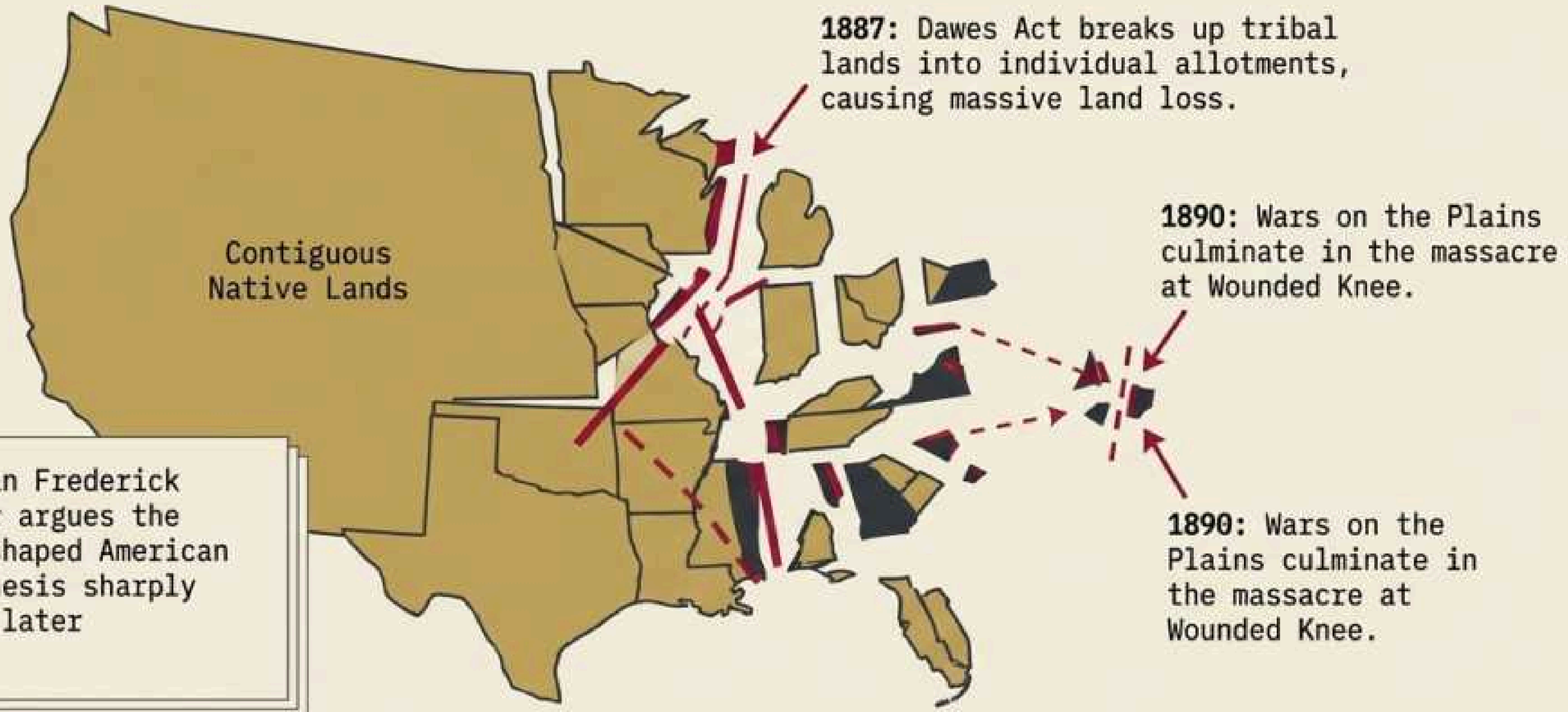


New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia fill with tenements. Photographer Jacob Riis exposes these harsh realities in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).

The Machine

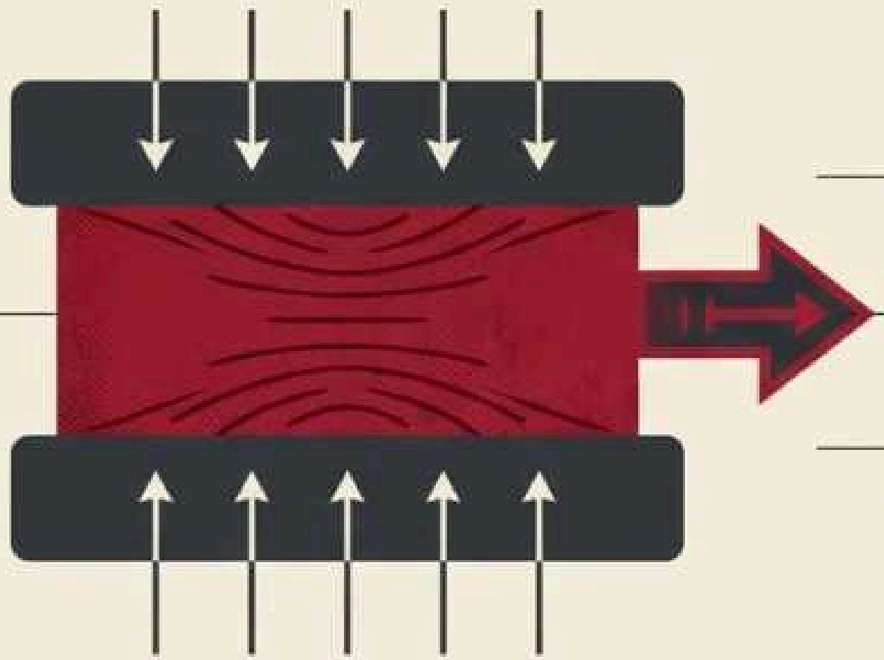


[1.13] The closing of the Western frontier accelerates the systematic dispossession of Native peoples.



1893: Historian Frederick Jackson Turner argues the frontier had shaped American democracy—a thesis sharply challenged by later historians.

[1.14] Crushing economic pressure forces an agrarian political mobilization culminating in the Populist movement.



Grange → Farmers' Alliance → **1892 People's Party (Populists)**

The Omaha Platform (1892)

- Graduated income tax
- Direct election of senators
- Expanded money supply via the free coinage of silver

[1.15] The election of 1896 forces a decisive confrontation between agrarian demands and industrial capitalism.

William Jennings Bryan

- Nominated by Democrats, endorsed by Populists.
- Electrified convention with the “Cross of Gold” speech.
- Championed silver coinage.

William McKinley

- Republican.
- Backed by heavy business money and the gold standard.
- Relied on a highly structured political organization.

McKinley’s victory establishes Republicans as the dominant majority party for a generation, firmly securing the triumph of the new industrial order.