

Reformers champion the cause of poor immigrants, workers shoot it out with Pinkertons, and farmers rally to the People's Party. Race enters the picture, and in an excellent chapter, Brands details both sides of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. He points out that the case arose in 1892, but Plessy's lawyers put it off, hoping to build public support against segregation. Their strategy collapsed when, in 1895, Booker T. Washington put his imprimatur on Jim Crow. Brands traces the origins of Washington's faith in self-improvement, and introduces his most noted critic, W. E. B. DuBois.

Many of Brands's debates swirl around politics. Local bosses, for example, vie over Chicago streetcars, while at the national level, politicians debate currency. After contrasting the work of William Harvey and William Allen White, Brand delves into the capstone 1896 election. He follows Democratic squabbles, the tepid Republican contest, and Populist indecision. In the fall campaign, Bryan barnstormed the country while McKinley stayed home, relying on Mark Hanna's fundraising to flood the country with political propaganda. When it was over, McKinley won the big prize, Bryan claimed a moral victory, and together they laid the political foundations for the next century.

McKinley and Bryan jostle with more obscure characters, almost all of them men: Fred Sutton, "Bathhouse John," and the "Great Unknown." Brands tells their stories well, effectively using them to contrast the opposing sides in the debates of the 1890s. The stories, filled with absorbing characters, discerning details, and vivid quotations, are the book's main strength. None of the sources are cited, although an extensive bibliography does include works from the 1890s to the 1990s. In a prefatory note, we are told that initially the book had pictures; unfortunately, they have been deleted in this edition.

Brands's suggestion that the 1890s resemble the 1990s carried little weight with me. Neither does his title, for Brands makes the decade's debates seem more resolute than reckless. Nevertheless, his book remains a reliable survey of a fascinating era. As far as its use as a teaching tool, the book seems too dense for lower-level undergrads, and its lack of citations would make me hesitate to use it with upper-level or graduate students.

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Theresa M. Collins & Lisa Gitelman. *Thomas Edison and Modern America: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Pp. xiv, 205. Cloth, \$39.95; ISBN 0-312-29476-X. Paper, \$14.95; ISBN 0-312-24734-6.

Arguably, no individual personifies the emergence of modern America better than Thomas Edison. He received over 1000 patents between 1869 and 1931, a period marked by tremendous growth in immigration, urbanization, domestic and foreign expansion, and of course industrialization.

Theresa M. Collins, a current co-editor of the Thomas Edison Papers, and Lisa Gitelman, a former co-editor, have provided over 100 documents in the latest volume of the Bedford Series in History and Culture. Their achievement is particularly noteworthy since Edison left behind more than five million documents. The selected materials are arranged into four chapters, preceded by a rich and useful introduction to Edison's life.

The first chapter offers a personal glimpse of Edison the man, followed by a chapter on his invention of a "speaking machine," the phonograph. Chapter three reveals his work on electricity, while the final chapter looks at his later projects, including storage batteries and motion pictures. The book also includes nearly twenty illustrations, a brief chronology of Edison's life, and a dozen "Questions for Consideration," which should be an excellent tool for in-class discussion or out-of-class writing assignments. An excellent and up-to-date select bibliography is also included.

Thomas Edison and Modern America contains remarks from his personal diary, letters and essays written by Edison, articles written about him, hand drawings, and advertisements of his inventions. For example, German scientist Wilhelm Roentgen announced his discovery of the X-ray in November 1895. Edison immediately set out to apply the discovery to practical use by displaying the image on a fluorescent screen. Several letters to Edison are reprinted, including an urgent plea to use Edison's technology to assist doctors as well as a 1904 newspaper article on one of his chief associates, Clarence Dally, who died from cancer, one of the learned side effects from long exposure to X-rays.

This short volume, less than 200 pages, should be strongly considered for any college-level course dealing with the Progressive Era. It could also be used for advanced high school courses of the same period. It is "teacher-friendly" in that the authors have provided a brief but useful introduction to each chapter, complete with some thought-provoking questions prior to the documents themselves.

The Progressive Era is synonymous with a nascent American nation, and Edison proved to be the right man with the right ideas at the right time. From the stock ticker to cement to an electric pen to the phonograph, Edison was both a scientific genius and someone who could be confused as one of his employees, since he often dressed in work clothes. Yet there was nothing common about Thomas Edison, nor the times in which he lived. The American landscape was changing rapidly, led by technological innovations, many of which Edison developed or improved. In short, to understand Edison is to understand the emergence of the United States as a global power. In sum, there is much to appreciate and use in this book, much like Edison himself.