Kentucky HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDUCATOR PACKET

OLD STATE CAPITOL:
Analyzing a Photograph

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Court House at Frankfort, Ky., where Goebel was killed.

Kentucky Historical Society

OLD STATE CAPITOL

THEME	Kentucky Governors
CORE CONTENT CONNECTIONS	SS-04-5.1.1; SS-EP-5.1.1; SS-05-5.1.1; AH-04-3.4.1; AH-05-3.4.1

ANALYZING A PHOTOGRAPH

THE ASSASSINATION OF GOVERNOR WILLIAM GOEBEL, 1900

CONTENT RECOMMENDED FOR FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

William Goebel and Politics

William Goebel was born in Sullivan County, Penn., in 1856 to William and Augusta Goebel. The family moved to Covington, Ky. when his father returned from the Civil War. In 1877, Goebel graduated from Cincinnati Law School and went on to specialize in corporate and railroad law. Elected to the Kentucky Senate in 1887 as a Democrat from Kenton County, Goebel became President Pro Tem in 1897. While a senator, he supported such issues and laws as railway rate legislation, anti-lottery laws, end of textbook monopolies, regulation of toll bridges and roads, and extended civil rights for women and minorities. Many have referred to Goebel as "a friend of the common man." On Feb. 1, 1898, the Goebel Election Law was introduced into the General Assembly. This proposal was met with opposition from both sides, for it proposed the creation of a Board of Elections Commissioners, who would be chosen by the General Assembly each election year. In turn, they would select an Election Commissioner for each county. This was seen by many as a way for Goebel to increase his own political power, similar to what he was accustomed to in the politics of Kenton County. In 1899, William Goebel won the Democratic nomination for governor. The election of 1899 proved to be one of the most corrupt elections in Kentucky history. The final tally was 193,714 for Republican candidate William Taylor, 191,331 for Goebel, and 12,040 for another Democrat, John Y. Brown. Taylor was inaugurated governor on Dec. 12, 1899. A few days later, an investigation was ordered by the elections committee to determine whether the election had been fraudulent. In a vote of 2-1, the elections commissioners certified that Gov. Taylor had won. The Democratic majority in the General Assembly was not happy with the results of the investigation, so they launched their own investigation.

The Assassination of Governor William Goebel, 1900

On Jan. 30, 1900, Goebel approached the State Capitol to attend the legislature's deliberations. An assassin hiding nearby in the annex at the Office of the Secretary of State shot him in the chest. Taylor, serving as governor pending a final decision on the election, called out the militia and ordered the General Assembly into a special session, not in Frankfort, but in London, Ky., a Republican area. The Republican minority agreed to meet in London, while Democrats decided to meet in Louisville. Both factions claimed control of the General Assembly, but the Republicans were too few in number to have a quorum.

On Jan. 31, the legislature awarded the election to Goebel and he was sworn in as governor. In his only act in that capacity, Goebel signed a proclamation to dissolve the militia called up by Taylor, an order which was not heeded by the force's Republican commander. Despite the attention of 18 physicians, Goebel died the afternoon of Feb. 3, 1900. In the crisis of Republicans versus Democrats that followed, state militiamen occupied the grounds of the building, and soldiers and armed citizens from both parties faced each other, threatening more violence. Soon after, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the deceased Goebel had been legally declared governor, and his lieutenant governor took office.

ARTIFACT LIST

Old State Capitol in Frankfort, KY, possibly following the shooting of Governor Goebel in early 1900.
Accession No. FF1.207_1

VOCABULARY LIST

Aftermath	*something that results from or follows an event*
Assassination	*a sudden or secretive killing, especially of a politically prominent person*
Capital	*a town or city that is the official seat of government in a political entity, such as a state or nation*
Capitol	*a building in which a state legislative body meets*
Fraudulent	*a deceptive action, usually intentional*
Governor	*the executive head of a state in the U.S.*
Legislature	*an organized body having the authority to make laws for a political unit*
Photograph	*an image of an object, person, scene, etc., in the form of a print recorded by a camera*
President Pro Tem	*a senator, usually a senior member of the majority party, who is chosen to preside over the Senate in the absence of the president*
Primary source	*an artifact, document, recording or other source of information that was created at the time of study*
Quorum	*the majority, or number of group members required to enact laws*

ACTIVITY

Have students complete the attached worksheet. Wait to tell them about the assassination until after they have completed initial observation and analysis of the photograph.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Have the students write a letter from the perspective of the people staying in the tents on the Capitol grounds.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elliott, Ron. *Assassination at the State House*. Kuttawa, Kentucky: McClanahan Publishing, 1995.
Klotter, James C. *William Goebel: Politics of Wrath*. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1977.
Kramer, Carl E. *Capitol on the Kentucky*. Frankfort, Kentucky: Historic Frankfort, Inc., 1986.
Kentucky Historical Society's Digital Collections, online at www.kyhistory.com

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OLD STATE CAPITOL

ANALYZING A PHOTOGRAPH

THE ASSASSINATION OF GOVERNOR WILLIAM GOEBEL, 1900

1. Study the photograph for two to three minutes. Note your overall impressions.

2. Using the chart below, list the people, objects and activities you see

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

3. What text is written directly on the photograph?

4. Who do you think the people in the tents are?

5. Who do you think people on the porch are?

6. What time of year do you think this photograph was taken?

7. Why do you think a photographer chose to document this scene?

8. What does this photograph tell us about the aftermath of the Goebel assassination?