

THE ELECTION OF 1896



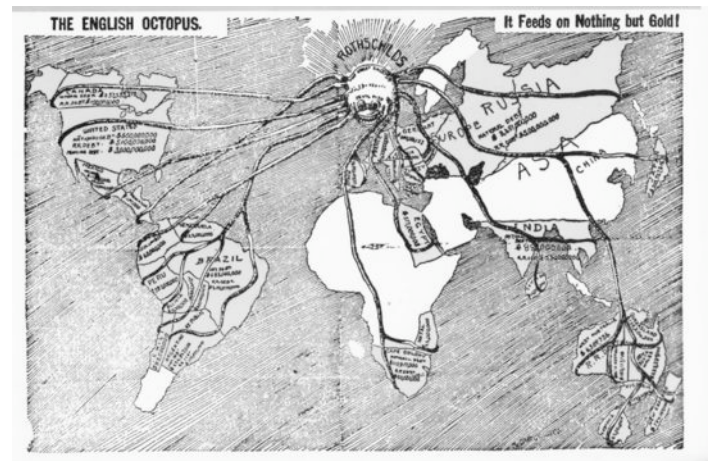
Gilded Age Politics

- Politics focused on personalities and patronage.
- Fierce party loyalty
- Stalemate and inactivity
- Close elections
- Timid presidents
- Laissez-faire
- Rapid industrialization and urbanization stimulated social, economic, and cultural change.



Crisis and Discontent

- Heightened urban-rural tensions
- Building hostility between labor and management
- Increasing poverty and rising resentment against inequalities
- Fear of socialist revolution
- Republicans supported a high protective tariff as a way of promoting American industry and securing full employment, while Democrats favored a reduce tariff (to raise revenue only) as a means of aiding farmers.
- America was deeply divided along socio-economic divisions rather than according to traditional party lines.
- Growing discontent over corruption, the money issue, tariffs, the railroads, and trusts.



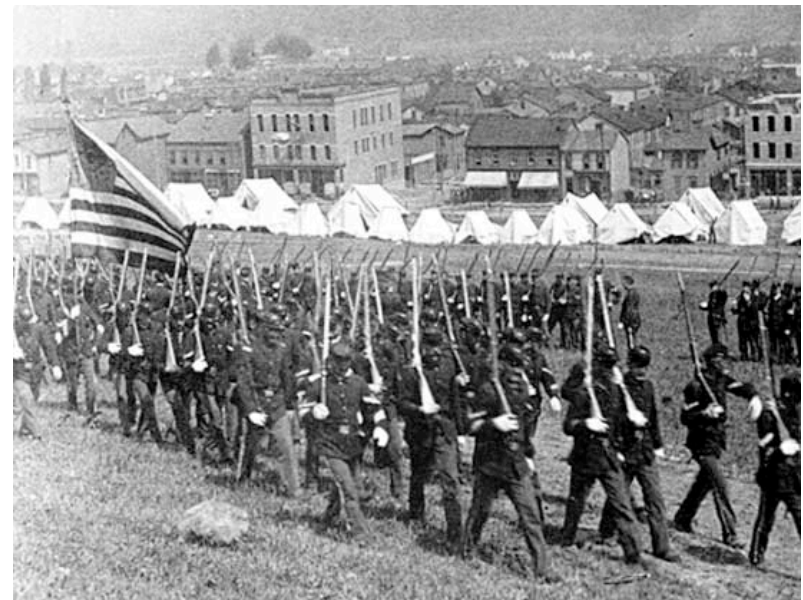
Cleveland and Hard Times

- ❑ Cleveland (D) won the White House (1892) on a promise to reduce the tariff.
- ❑ The Panic of 1893 initiated four years of severe economic depression.
- ❑ The nation blamed Cleveland and the Democratic party.
 - ❑ Banks closed
 - ❑ Railroads bankrupt
 - ❑ Agricultural prices plummeted.
 - ❑ Thousands of farmers faced bankruptcy and foreclosure of their mortgages.
 - ❑ The nation blamed Cleveland and the Democrats.
 - ❑ Soup kitchens referred to as Cleveland cafes
- ❑ Cleveland failed to convince Congress to significantly lower the tariff.
- ❑ Deep rifts in the Democratic party
- ❑ “General” Jacob Coxey’s army attracted considerable publicity and revealed the plight of the poor (1894).



Industrial and Political Warfare

- Homestead strike (1892)
 - Management refused to negotiate conditions or grant full union recognition. Violence flared as strikers and Pinkerton agents clashed. Management prevailed, but resentment on both sides prevailed. The state militia helped to crush the strike.
- Pullman strike (1894)
 - Pullman maintained profits and dividends, but he repeatedly cut wages. The conflict escalated into a national railroad strike. Government used the excuse that the strikers interfered with the mails to intervene on behalf of management. The government employed a court injunction and employed troops. Conservatives supported President Cleveland, whereas radicals sympathized with the strikers.
- Sherman Silver Purchase Act (1890) required the Secretary of Treasury to purchase 4.5 million ounces of silver every month and to issue in payment treasury notes of full legal tender value redeemable in gold or silver at the discretion of the U.S. to maintain the two metals on parity with each other upon the present legal ratio or such ratio as may be provided by law.
- Republicans blamed the Democrats for the depression, unemployment, and farmers' suffering.
- Partisan, sectional, and class antagonisms divided the nation.



Supreme Court

- The ultra-conservative Supreme Court rendered decisions that exacerbated tensions.
- *U.S. v. E.C. Knight* (1895): manufacturing is not a conspiracy in restraint of trade and is, therefore, not covered under the Sherman Antitrust Act.
- *Pollock v. Farmers' Loan and Trust Company* (1895) outlawed income tax provisions of the Tariff Act (1894).
- *In Re Debs* (1895): Court upheld the use of the injunction (1894) against the ARU members.
- By the 1894 mid-term elections, the Democratic party was in disarray.



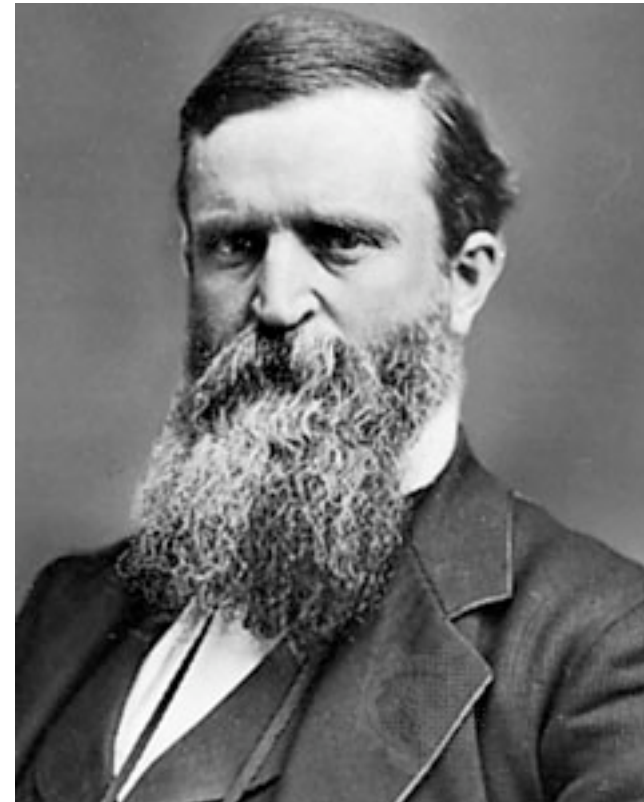
The Money Question

- ❑ Bankers, creditors, investors, and politicians favored deflation and the “gold standard.” Republicans advocated “sound money.”
- ❑ Cleveland called for the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Patronage achieved it.
- ❑ Many charged conservative eastern and northern financial interests and business corporations with ruthlessly exploiting western and southern debtors and farmers who favored inflationist policies. Populists and Democrats began to view the monetization of silver as a means of raising prices, restoring prosperity, and escaping from the burdens of debts.
- ❑ “Free silver” became the dominant political issue.



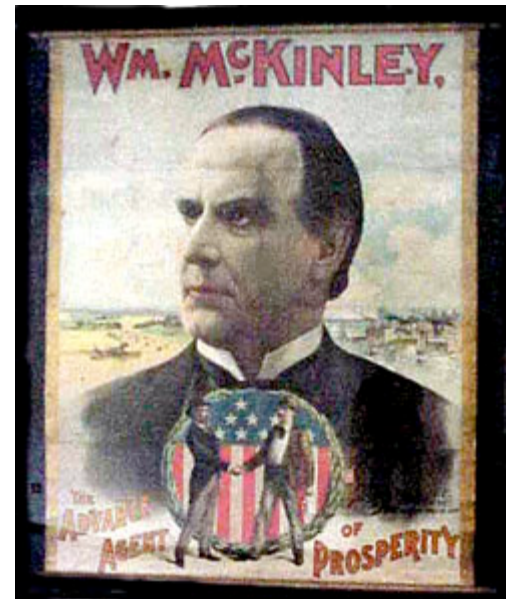
Populist Party and Election of 1892

- Increasingly, Democrats and Populists favored “free silver.”
- Populist James B. Weaver garnered one million votes and twenty two electoral votes.
- The Omaha Platform called for the restoration of government to the people, direct popular election of U.S. Senators, initiative, referendum, and recall at the state level, unlimited coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, and so forth.
- Populists attacked laissez-faire policies and attempted to unite poor whites and blacks.



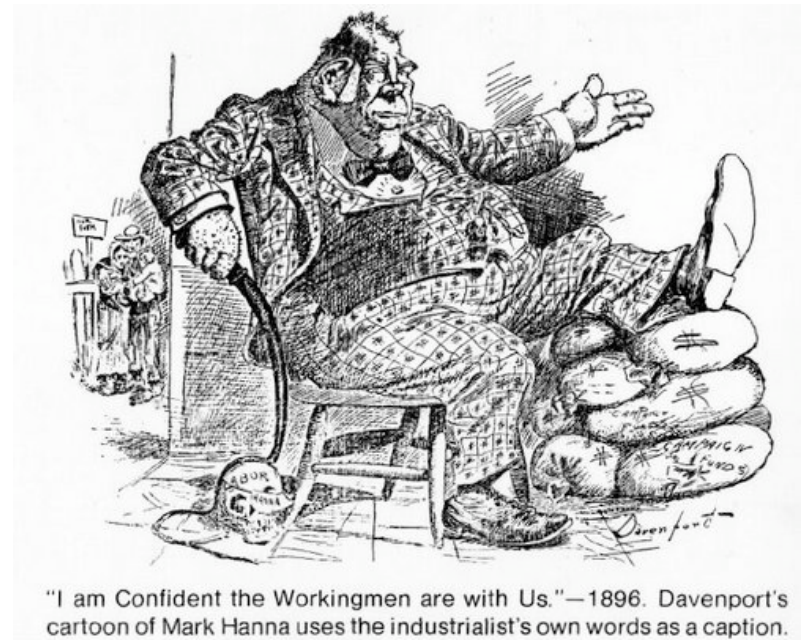
Party Platforms

- The Democrats demanded “the free and unlimited coinage of both silver and gold at the ... legal ratio of 16 to 1.” After the money had been settled, the Democrats would strongly favor a lowering of the tariff as well.
- Bryan “the silver-tongued orator”
 - 36 years old
 - Deeply religious
 - Magnetic personality
 - Simple answers for complex problems
- The Republicans favored a high protective tariff and blamed the Democrats for the depression and all of its consequences.
- McKinley was genial and moderate with the backing of loyal advisers and followers.



The Democratic Campaign

- ❑ The Democrats had a cause and a leader but lacked organization, money, and press support.
- ❑ Bryan went on a grueling speaking tour.
- ❑ Silver symbolized the hopes of the exploited masses. His rhetoric was strong, but he failed to adequately address economic realities.
- ❑ Bryan converted few eastern laborers to his cause, but his platform appealed to southern and western farmers.
- ❑ Debt-ridden farmers viewed free silver as a panacea to raise farm prices and return prosperity.



The Republican Campaign

- Portrayed McKinley as an agent of prosperity
- Front-porch campaign
- Creditors feared abandonment of a strictly gold standard would cause runaway inflation and economic ruin.
- McKinley campaigned for a protective tariff and “sound money.”
- Mark Hanna ran a brilliant campaign by depicting McKinley as a “friend of labor” and Bryan as a reckless proponent of “silver lunacy.”
 - Raised \$ 4 million
 - Pamphlets, articles, posters, cartoons, badges
 - Protect prosperity and living standards
 - “He’s talking silver all the time, and that’s where we’ve got him.”
- Businessmen indoctrinated their employees with the idea that Bryan would ruin the nation if elected.



Results

- McKinley: 7,102,246 popular votes (51%), 23 states, 271 electoral votes
- Bryan: 6,492,559 (46%), 21 states, 176 electoral votes
- Bryan was hurt by rising wheat prices, employers telling their workers to factories would shut down, and the fact that his plank did not appeal to urban workers and the middle class.
- Gold discoveries increased the money supply and thus inflated the currency. Farm prices rose. Factory production increased. The stock market climbed. The Dingley Tariff was enacted. The gold standard became official.
- The Democrats lost because of inferior organization, inadequate funds, and their proposed solution to the nation's problems was both too radical and untried compared to the Republican program.
- Bryan was the champion of an older, more provincial America in the face of an emerging new twentieth-century America .

