

The Presidential Election of 1896
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Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1-9). Some of these documents have been edited for the purpose of these exercises. This question is designed to test your ability to work with historic documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view.

Question: Based on the documents that follow and your background knowledge answer the following question.

The election of 1896 illustrated economic, political, and social divisions that existed in the United States during the late 19th century. What were these divisions and how did the election bring changes in the United States during the 20th Century?

Document 1:

THE PLATFORM OF THE POPULIST PARTY

Adopted at St. Louis, July 24th, 1896.

The People's party, assembled in National Convention, reaffirms its allegiance to the principles declared by the founders of the Republic, and also to the fundamental principles of just government as enunciated in the platform of the party in 1892. We recognize that, through the connivance of the present and preceding Administrations, the country has reached a crisis in its national life as predicted in our declaration four years ago, and that prompt and patriotic action is the supreme duty of the hour. We realize that, while we have political independence, our financial and industrial independence is yet to be attained by restoring to our country the constitutional control and exercise of the functions necessary to a people's government, which functions have been basely surrendered by our public servant to corporate monopolies. The influence of European money changers has been more potent in shaping legislation than the voice of the American people. Executive power and patronage have been used to corrupt our Legislatures and defeat the will of the people, and plutocracy has thereby been enthroned upon the ruins of Democracy. To restore the Government intended by the fathers and for the welfare and prosperity of this and future generations, we demand the establishment of an economic and financial system which shall make us masters of our own affairs and independent of European control ...

Document 2:

THE DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM.

Adopted at Chicago, July 9th, 1896.

**OPPOSED TO THE GOLD STANDARD--
FREE AND UNLIMITED COINAGE--
OPPOSED TO THE ISSUE OF BONDS--
THE INCOME TAX--
SYMPATHY FOR THE CUBANS--
OPPOSED TO A THIRD TERM.**

We, the Democrats of the United States in National Convention assembled, do reaffirm our allegiance to those great essential principles of justice and liberty upon which our institutions are founded, and which the Democratic party has advocated from Jefferson's time to our own-- freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, the separation of personal rights, the equality of all citizens before the law, and the faithful observance of constitutional limitations.

During all these years the Democratic Party has resented the tendency of selfish interests to the centralization of Government power, and steadfastly maintained the integrity of the dual scheme of Government established by the founders of this Republic of republics. Under its guidance and teachings the great principle of local self-government has found its best expression in the maintenance of the rights of States and in its assertion of the necessity of confining the General Government to the exercise of the powers granted by the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution of the United States guarantees to every citizen the rights of civil and religious liberty. The Democratic Party has always been the exponent of political liberty and religious freedom, and it renews its obligations and reaffirms its devotion to these fundamental principles of the Constitution.

The Money Question.

Recognizing that the money question is paramount to all others at this time, we invite attention to the fact that the Federal Constitution names silver and gold together as the money metals of the United States, and that the first coinage law passed by Congress under the Constitution made the silver dollar the monetary unit of value and admitted gold to free coinage at a ratio based upon the silver dollar unit.

The Demonetization of Silver.

We declare that the act of 1873 demonetizing silver without the knowledge or approval of the American people, has resulted in the appreciation of gold and a corresponding fall in the prices of commodities produced by the people; a heavy increase in the burden of taxation and of all debts, public and private; the enrichment of the money-lending class at home and abroad; prostration of industry and impoverishment of the people.

Opposed to the Gold Standard.

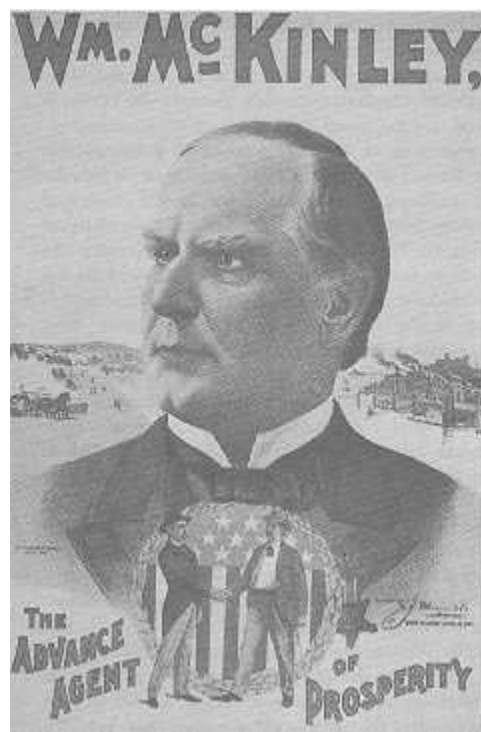
We are unalterably opposed to monometallism, which has locked fast the prosperity of an industrial people in the paralysis of hard times. Gold monometallism is a British policy, and its adoption has brought other nations into financial servitude to London. It is not only un-American, but anti-American, and it can be fastened on the United States only by the stifling of that spirit and love of liberty which proclaimed our political independence in 1776 and won it in the War of the Revolution.

1. **What would the supporters of the Gold and Silver Standards say about the Federal Reserve Notes that we use today?**

Document 3:

THE REPUBLICAN PLATFORM

Adopted at St. Louis, June 18th, 1896.
FOR THE EXISTING GOLD STANDARD AND
PROTECTION--
UNMISTAKABLE UTTERANCES OF THE
CONVENTION--
AMERICAN INTERESTS TO BE ADVANCED
AT HOME AND ABROAD--
THE MONROE DOCTRINE REAFFIRMED--
SYMPATHY FOR CUBA.



The Republicans of the United States, assembled by their representatives in National Convention, appealing for the popular and historical justification of their claims to the matchless achievements of thirty years of Republican rule, earnestly and confidently address themselves to the awakened intelligence, experience, and conscience of their countrymen in the following declaration of facts and principles:

For the first time since the Civil War the American people have witnessed the calamitous consequences of full and unrestricted Democratic control of the Government. It has been a record of unparalleled incapacity, dishonor and disaster. In administrative management it has ruthlessly sacrificed indispensable revenue, entailed an unceasing deficit, eked out ordinary current expenses with borrowed money, piled up the public debt by \$262,000,000 in time of peace, forced an adverse balance of trade, kept a perpetual menace hanging over the redemption fund, pawned American credit to alien syndicates, and reversed all the measures and results of successful Republican rule. In the broad effect of its policy it has precipitated panic, blighted industry and trade with prolonged depression, closed factories, reduced work and wages, halted enterprise and crippled American production, while stimulating foreign production for the American market. Every consideration of public safety and individual interest demands that the Government shall be rescued from the hands of those who have shown themselves incapable of conducting it without disaster at home and dishonor abroad, and shall be restored to the party which for thirty years administered it with unequalled success and prosperity. And in this connection we heartily endorse the wisdom, patriotism and the success of the Administration of President [Benjamin] Harrison.

Allegiance to Protection Renewed.

We renew and emphasize our allegiance to the policy of Protection as the bulwark of American industrial independence and the foundation of American development and prosperity. This true American policy taxes foreign products and encourages home industry; it puts the burden of revenue on foreign goods; it secures the American market for the American producer; it upholds the American standard of wages for the American workingman; it puts the factory by the side of the farm, and makes the American farmer less dependent on foreign demand and prices; it diffuses general thrift and founds the strength of all on the strength of each. In its reasonable application it is just, far and impartial, equally opposed to foreign control and domestic monopoly, to sectional discrimination and individual favoritism.

We denounce the present Democratic tariff as sectional, injurious to the public credit and destructive to business enterprise. We demand such an equitable tariff on foreign imports which come into competition with American products, as will not only furnish adequate revenue for the necessary expenses of the Government, but will protect American labor from degradation to the wage level of other lands. We are not pledged to any particular schedules. The question of rates is a practical question, to be governed by the conditions of the time and of production; the ruling and uncompromising principle is the protection and development of American labor and industry.

Document 4:

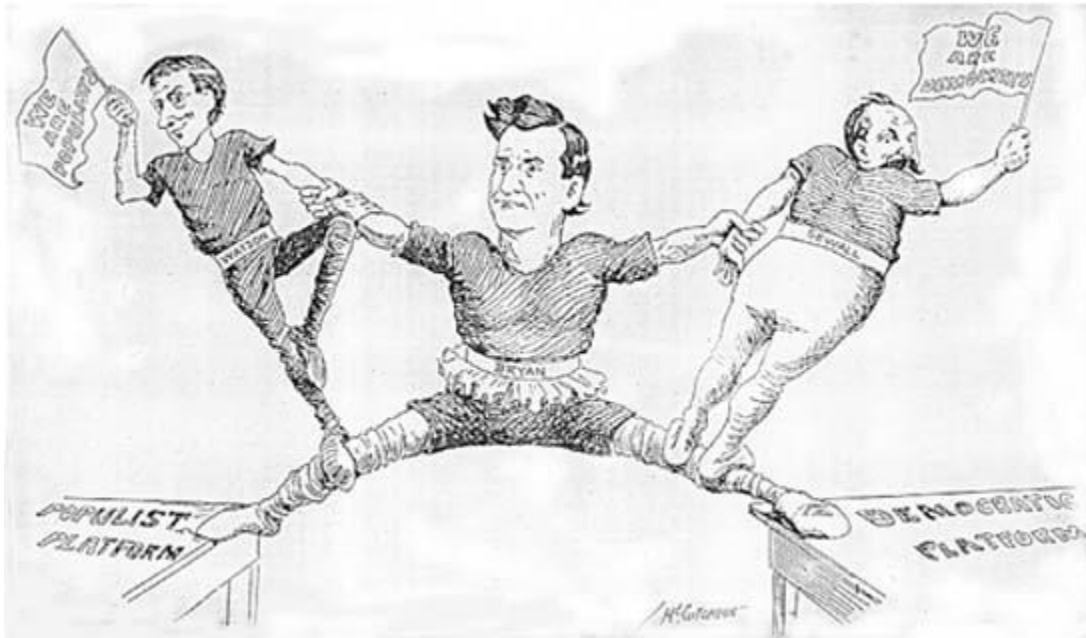
Cross of Gold Speech: William Jennings Bryan 1896

My friends, we declare that this nation is able to legislate for its own people on every question, without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation on earth; and upon that issue we expect to carry every state in the Union. I shall not slander the inhabitants of the fair state of Massachusetts nor the inhabitants of the state of New York by saying that, when they are confronted with the proposition, they will declare that this nation is not able to attend to its own business. It is the issue of 1776 over again. Our ancestors, when but three million in number, had

the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation; shall we, their descendants, when we have grown to seventy millions, declare that we are less independent than our forefathers?

No, my friends, that will never be the verdict of our people. Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is fought. If they say bimetallism is good, but that we cannot have it until other nations help us, we reply, that instead of having a gold standard because England has, we will restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it. If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.

Document 5:



**A GREAT EXHIBITION, BUT RATHER TRYING ON THE MAN IN THE
MIDDLE.**

Chicago Record, 27 July 1896

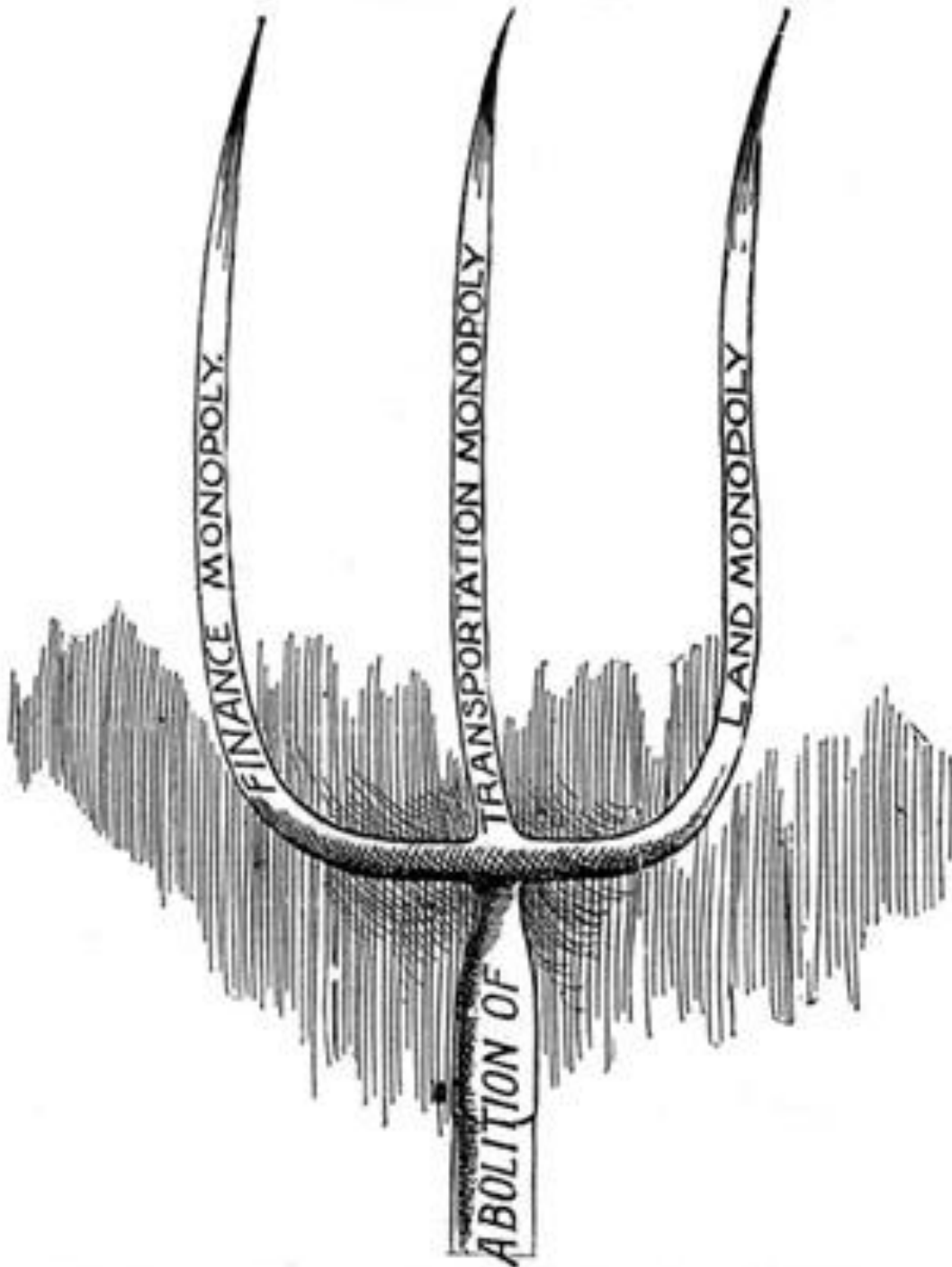
1. Who is the man in the middle?
2. What role did he play in the 1896 election?
3. What is the cartoonist trying to convey in the cartoon?
4. How is the cartoon relevant to the election of 1896?

Document 6:



1. Who is the man in the picture?
2. What political party did he represent?
3. How does his position differ from the Populist and Democratic positions?

Document 7:



SUGGESTED BY SENATOR TILLMAN'S SPEECH IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

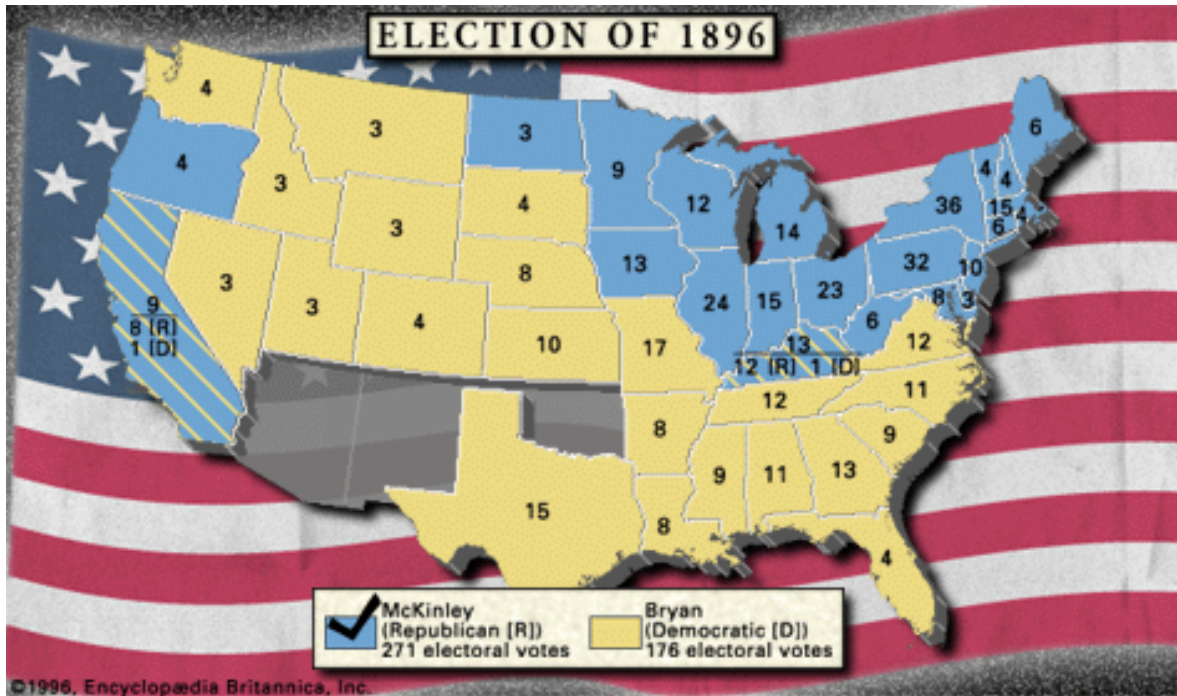
1. What is the issue illustrated in this cartoon?
2. Which party (parties) position does it represent and why?
3. Which economic group was concerned by these issues?

Document 8:



1. What is the issue illustrated in the cartoon?
2. Was this a big issue in the 1896 election?
3. What role did women play in pushing for reforms during the late 19th century?

Document 9:



Candidate	Party	Popular Votes	Electoral Votes
Bryan	Silver Democratic, Populist, Silver	6,502,685	176
McKinley	Republican	7,106,199	271
Palmer	Gold Democratic	132,871	---
Levering	Prohibitionist	131,757	---
Matchett	Socialist Labor	36,258	---

- 1. Who won the election in 1896?**
- 2. Which vote determined the victor in the election?**
- 3. What does the map show about sectional divisions in 1896?**
- 4. Why did these divisions develop during the late 19th century?**