

Resource 3 (1 of 2)**1896 Presidential Candidates' Speeches**

William McKinley Accepts the Republican Nomination

The Republicans held their convention in St. Louis in June. The party's platform backed the gold standard, which caused some Westerners, who backed a free silver plank, to walk out of the convention. The platform also called for high tariffs—taxes on imported goods—that Republicans believed would protect jobs and profits in the United States.

William McKinley, a former Congressman and governor of Ohio, handily won the nomination. McKinley was not at the convention, but he accepted the nomination in a speech he gave at his home. In fact, most of his campaigning was done from his home, gaining it the nickname the Front Porch Campaign. Because of his rather passive role in the campaign, the Democrats portrayed McKinley as a puppet of his campaign manager, Mark Hanna, a friend and businessman. The following is part of McKinley's acceptance speech:

Our industrial supremacy, our productive capacity, our business and commercial prosperity, our labor and its rewards, our national credit and currency, our proud financial honor, and our splendid free citizenship—the birthright of every American—are all involved in the pending campaign, and thus every home in the land is directly and intimately connected with their proper settlement. . . . Our domestic trade must be won back and our idle workingmen employed in gainful occupations at American wages. Our home market must be restored to its proud rank of first in the world, and our foreign trade, so precipitately cut off by adverse national legislation, reopened on fair and equitable terms for our surplus agricultural and manufacturing products. . . .

During all the years of Republican control following the resumption [i.e., after the Civil War] there was a steady reduction of the public debt, while the gold reserve was sacredly maintained, and our currency and credit preserved without depreciation, taint, or suspicion. If we would restore this policy, that brought us unexampled prosperity for more than thirty years, under the most trying conditions ever known in this country, the policy by which we made and bought more goods at home and sold more abroad, the trade balance would be quickly turned in our favor, and gold would come to us and not go from us in the settlement of all such balances in the future. . . .

The American people hold the financial honor of our country as sacred as our flag, and can be relied upon to guard it with the same sleepless vigilance. They hold its preservation above party loyalty and have often demonstrated that party ties avail nothing when the spotless credit of our country is threatened. The money of the United States and every kind of form of it, whether of paper, silver, or gold, must be as good as the best in the world. . . .

. . . The dollar paid to the farmer, the wage-earner and the pensioner must continue forever equal in purchasing and debt-paying power to the dollar paid to any government creditor. . . .

Our appeal, therefore, is not to a false philosophy or vain theorists, but to the masses of the American people, the plain, practical people, who Lincoln loved and trusted and whom the Republican party have faithfully striven to serve. . . .

Source: 1896. (2000). Excerpts from William McKinley's acceptance speech to the G.O.P. notification committee. [From the *Cleveland Gazette*, originally published August 8, 1896]. Retrieved from <http://projects.vassar.edu/1896/mckinleyaddress.html>

Resource 3 (2 of 2)**1896 Presidential Candidates' Speeches**

The Cross of Gold Speech (excerpt), by William Jennings Bryan

The Democrats held their nominating convention in Chicago in July 1896. The party was deeply divided between those who favored the gold standard and those who supported “free silver.” William Jennings Bryan, one of the free silver candidates for the nomination, delivered a rousing speech that delegates cheered for an hour. Following his speech, the convention adopted a free silver plank as part of the Democratic platform.

. . . my friends, it is simply a question that we shall decide upon which side shall the Democratic Party fight. Upon the side of the idle holders of idle capital, or upon the side of the struggling masses? That is the question that the party must answer first; and then it must be answered by each individual hereafter. The sympathies of the Democratic Party, as described by the platform, are on the side of the struggling masses, who have ever been the foundation of the Democratic Party. . . .

. . . It is the issue of 1776 over again. Our ancestors, when but 3 million, had the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation upon earth. Shall we, their descendants, when we have grown to 70 million, declare that we are less independent than our forefathers? No, my friends, it will never be the judgment of this people. Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is fought. If they say bimetallism is good but we cannot have it till some nation helps us, we reply that, instead of having a gold standard because England has, we shall restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States have.

If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands 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.

Democrats also passed a resolution in which they condemned President Cleveland, a member of their own party, who sent in federal troops to end the railroad strike. The Republicans referred to this as the “anarchy plank,” using it to raise fears that a Democratic victory would see massive unrest. The Democrats also adopted a plank supporting a national income tax.

William Jennings Bryan became the Democratic nominee for President. He was also nominated by the People’s Party (the Populists). However, the Democrats and Populists nominated different candidates for vice president.

Source: History Matters. (n.d.). Bryan’s “cross of gold” speech: Mesmerizing the masses. Retrieved from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5354/>