



# Populism, The Election of 1896 & the Progressive Movement

By: Mr. Cegielski

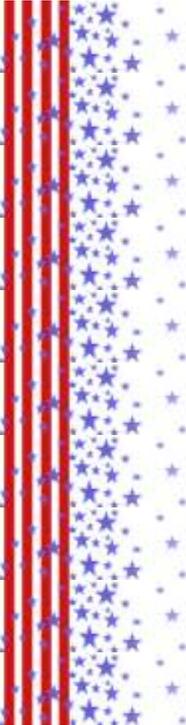


What were some  
of the major  
problems facing  
farmers during the  
Gilded Age ??



## The Silver Issue

- **"Crime of '73"** → demonetization of silver (govt. stopped coining silver).
- **Bland-Allison Act (1878)** → limited silver coinage to \$2-\$4 mil. per mo. (based on the 16:1 ratio of silver to gold).
- **Sherman Silver Purchase Act (1890)**
  - The US Treasury must purchase \$4.5 mil. oz. of silver a month.
  - Govt. deposited most silver in the US Treasury rather than circulation.

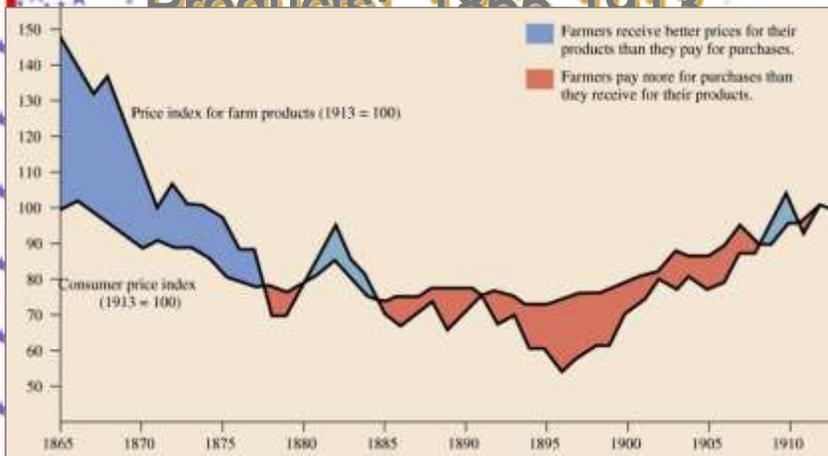


## Populism: An Agrarian Revolt

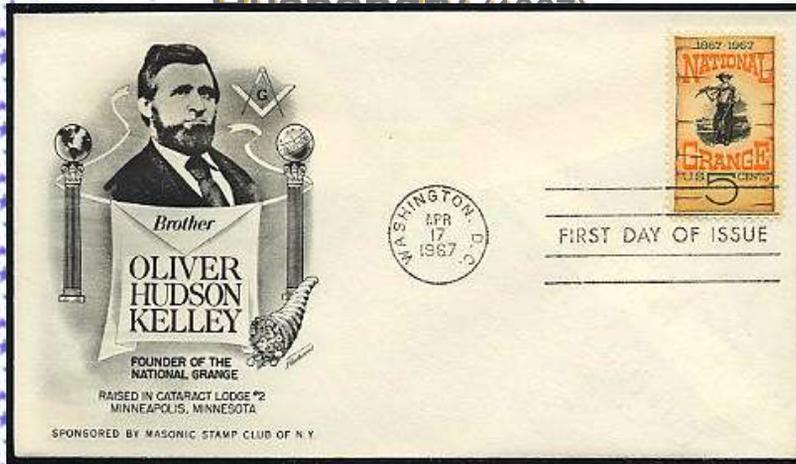
## The Populist Movement

- Began during the economic depression of the 1870's
- There was a sharp decline in farmer's income
- Living and operating costs were rising
- Farmers started organizing in political and economic groups
  - National Grange and the Farmers' Alliances

## Price Indexes for Consumer & Farm Products: 1865-1913



## Founder of the National Grange of the Patrons of



## The Grange Movement

- First organized in the 1870s in the Midwest, the south, and Texas.
- Set up cooperative associations.
- Social and educational components.
- Succeeded in lobbying for "Granger Laws."
- Rapidly declined by the late 1870s.

# Supreme Court Decisions

- *Munn vs. Illinois (1877)*
- *Wabash, St. Louis, & Pacific Railroad Company vs. Illinois (1886)*



Gift  
for the  
Grangers

:

The  
Farmer  
Pays  
for All!

## The Farmers Alliances

- Begun in the late 1880s (Texas first → the **Southern Alliance**; then in the Midwest → the **Northern Alliance**).
- Built upon the ashes of the Grange.
- More political and less social than the Grange.
- Ran candidates for office.
- Controlled 8 state legislatures & had 47 representatives in Congress during the 1890s.

*United  
We  
Stand,  
Divided  
We Fall*

- In 1889 both the Northern and Southern Alliances merged into one—the **Farmers' Alliance**.





## The Grange and Farmer's Alliances

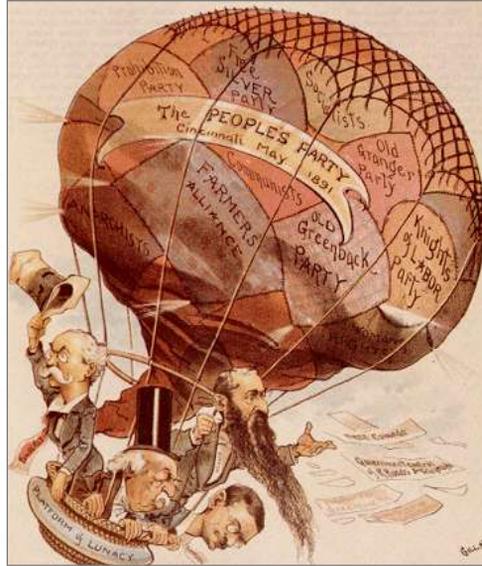
- **Cooperative organizations that tried to lower farmers' costs**
  - Selling supplies at reduced prices
  - Lower interest rate loans
  - Building warehouses to store crops until prices raised
  - Forming political parties and supporting candidates that favored the farmer



## The Populist (Peoples') Party

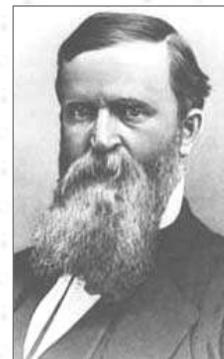
- **1890 Bi-Election:**
  - **So. Alliance** → wanted to gain control of the Democratic Party.
  - **No. Alliance** → ran 3<sup>rd</sup> Party candidates.
- **1892** → 800 met in St. Louis, MO
  - majority were Alliance members.
  - over 100 were African Americans.
  - reps. of labor organizations & other reformers (Grange, Greenback Party).

## Platform of Lunacy



## The Populist (Peoples') Party

- Founded by James B. Weaver and Tom Watson.
- Omaha, NE Convention in July, 1892.
- Got almost 1 million popular votes.
- Several Congressional seats won.



James B. Weaver,  
Presidential Candidate  
&  
James G. Field, VP



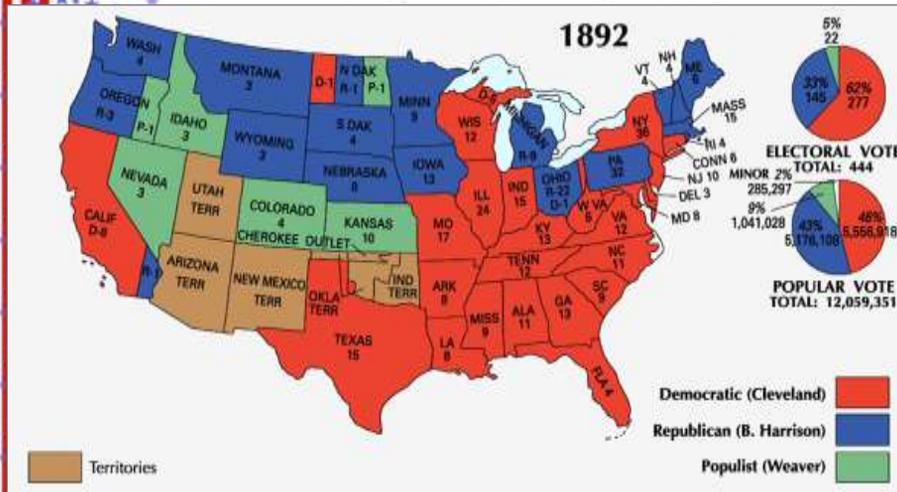
## Omaha Platform of 1892

1. System of "sub-treasuries."
2. Abolition of the National Bank.
3. Direct election of Senators.
4. Govt. ownership of RRs, telephone & telegraph companies.
5. Government-operated postal savings banks.
6. Restriction of undesirable immigration.
7. 8-hour work day for government employees.
8. Abolition of the Pinkerton detective agency.
9. Australian secret ballot.
10. Re-monetization of silver.
11. A single term for President & Vice President.

## Govt.-Owned Companies

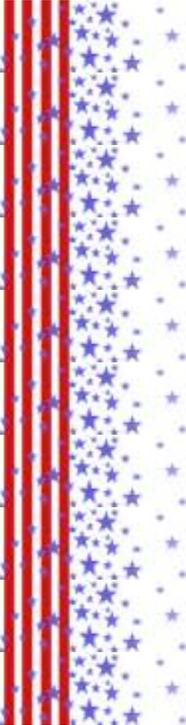


# 1892 Election

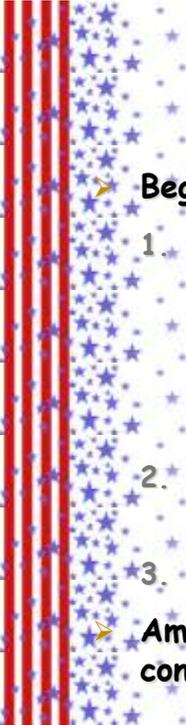


# Bi-Metallism Issue





# The Panic of 1893



## Causes of the 1893 Panic

- Begun 10 days after Cleveland took office.
  1. Several major corps. went bankrupt.
    - Over 16,000 businesses disappeared.
    - Triggered a stock market crash.
    - Over-extended investments.
  2. Bank failures followed causing a contraction of credit [nearly 500 banks closed].
  3. By 1895, unemployment reached 3 million.
- Americans cried out for relief, but the Govt. continued its laissez faire policies!!

## *Here Lies Prosperity*



## *Written by a Farmer at the End of the 19c*

*When the banker says he's broke  
And the merchant's up in smoke,  
They forget that it's the farmer  
who feeds them all.  
It would put them to the test  
If the farmer took a rest;  
Then they'd know that it's the farmer  
feeds them all.*

## Coxey's Army, 1894



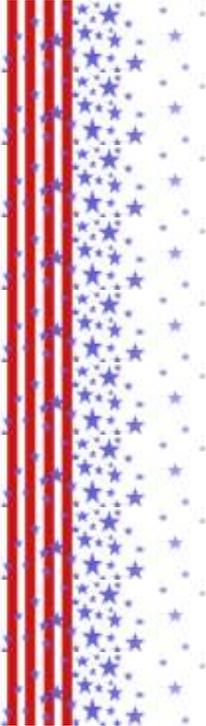
- Jacob Coxey & his "Army of the Commonweal of Christ."
- March on Washington → "hayseed socialists!"

## Result of Election



- Populist vote increased by 40% in the bi-election year, 1894.
- Democratic party losses in the West were catastrophic!
- But, Republicans won control of the House.

By the National Reform Press Association.



# The 1896 Election



## Gold / Silver Bug Campaign Pins



## Populist Agenda

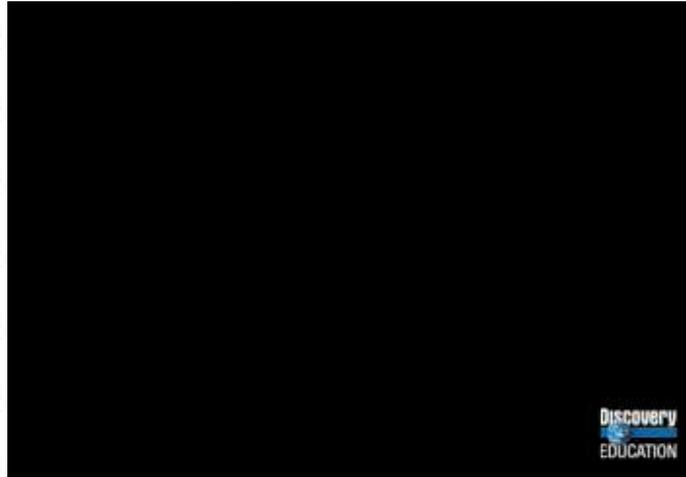
- Free coinage of silver
- Issuance of large amounts of paper currency
- Replicate their cooperative system on a national scale –including nationalizing transportation system to lower costs
- Equitable distribution of wealth and the cost of government – graduated income tax
- Direct elections of U.S. senators
- 8-hour workday

## William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925)



The “Great Commoner”

## Video Clip: William Jennings Bryan ( 4m)



## William Jennings Bryan



*Prairie avenger,  
mountain lion,  
Bryan, Bryan, Bryan,  
Bryan,  
Gigantic troubadour,  
speaking like a siege  
gun,  
Smashing Plymouth Rock  
with his boulders  
from the West.*

- Revivalist style of oratory.

## Bryant's "Cross of Gold" Speech



*You shall not  
press down upon  
the brow of labor  
this crown of  
thorns; you shall  
not crucify  
mankind upon a  
cross of gold!*

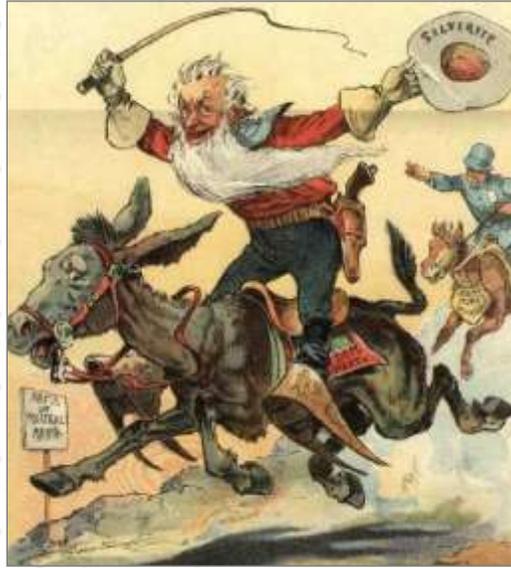
## Bryan: The Farmers Friend

(The Mint Ratio)



18,000 miles of campaign "whistle stops."

## Democratic Party Taken Over by the Agrarian Left



**Platform** → tariff reductions; income tax; stricter control of the trusts (esp. RRs); free silver.

## Mark Hanna: The "Front-Porch" Campaign





## William McKinley (1843-1901)



# Mark Hanna to Candidate McKinley



Hanna: That man Clay was an ass. It's better to be President than to be right!

# "A Giant Straddle": Suggestion for a McKinley Political Poster





The  
Seasoned  
Politician

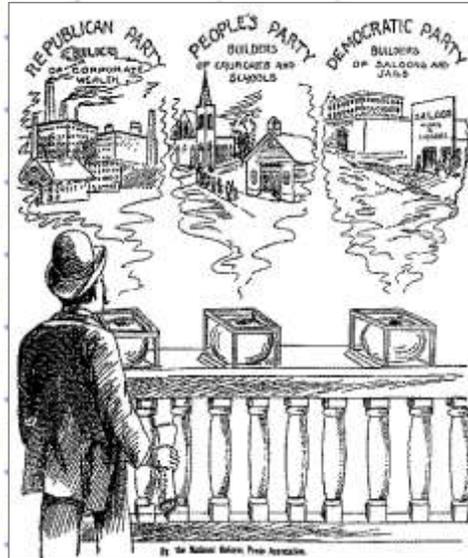
vs.

The  
“Young”  
Newcomer



Joshua A. Levering:  
Prohibition Party





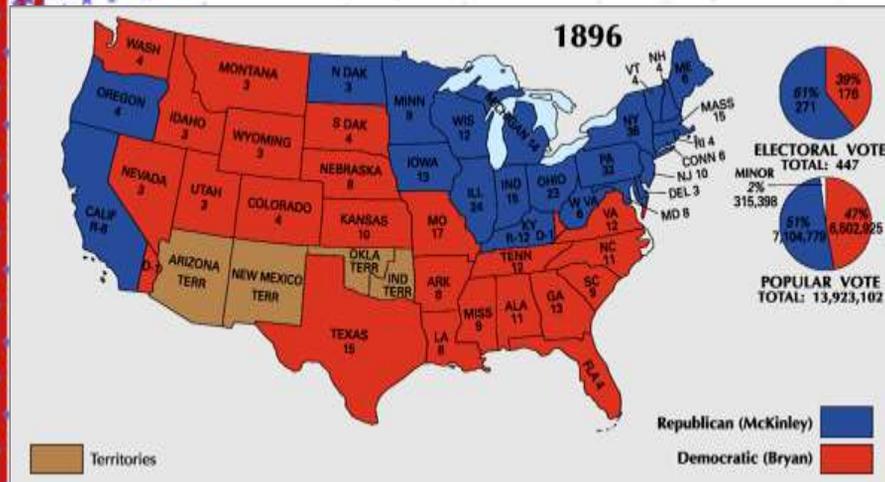
*Into Which Box Will the Voter of '96 Place His Ballot?*



## Heyday of Western Populism



# 1896 Election Results



## Why Did Bryan Loose?

- His focus on silver undermined efforts to build bridges to urban voters.
- He did not form alliances with other groups.
- McKinley's campaign was well-organized and highly funded.

# Gold Triumphs Over Silver



- 1900 → **Gold Standard Act**
- confirmed the nation's commitment to the gold standard.
- A victory for the forces of conservatism.

## The Money Issues: Greenbacks, Silver, & Gold

As one means of financing the cost of fighting the \_\_\_\_\_ War, the government in 1862 began printing legal tender notes. This currency was not backed by specie (\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_) and exerted an inflationary impact on the Northern economy. By war's end about \$450 million was in circulation.

The value of the greenbacks, which were printed with green ink on one side, fluctuated with the war's progress. In early 1864, when Union prospects were dim, the greenback dollar held a value of less than 40 cents; by the end of the war in 1865, it was around 67 cents. The original intention was for the greenbacks to hold the same value as regular gold-backed notes, but that result never occurred.

Pressure from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (groups) in the postwar period led to an effort to retire the greenbacks. These forces did not want to receive payments in cheap money and opposed any government policy that would lead to \_\_\_\_\_ deflation.

By 1867, the wartime economic boom was over. Farmers and debtors, feeling an economic pinch, began agitation to keep the notes in circulation. It was in their interest to foster \_\_\_\_\_ inflation, which would make it easier for them to pay off their debts. A compromise was reached in which \$556 million worth of greenbacks would remain in circulation. Neither side was fully pleased with this result.

In early 1873, Congress de-monetized \_\_\_\_\_, thus tying the nation's monetary system firmly to the \_\_\_\_\_ standard. This measure was labeled the "\_\_\_\_\_ " by western \_\_\_\_\_ (industrial sector) interests and debtors who wanted silver in circulation.

The Panic of \_\_\_\_\_ struck in the fall and was followed by the worst depression in American history \_\_\_\_\_ up to that time. The monetary issue was revived and was argued heatedly by both sides. President \_\_\_\_\_ was originally sympathetic to the farmers' plight, but he eventually caved in to the wishes of his wealthy friends and vetoed a measure that would have expanded the currency.

The conservatives scored an important victory in the passage of the \_\_\_\_\_ Act of 1875—a triumph of "\_\_\_\_\_ " money over "\_\_\_\_\_ " money advocates. This measure provided that on January 1, 1879, all greenbacks would be redeemable at full face value. Debtor groups immediately began working for the law's repeal, a movement that developed into the \_\_\_\_\_ Party.

The general population, as well as the Congress, was nearly equally divided on monetary issues. Therefore, in 1878 a compromise was worked out which provided that:

1. The Resumption Act would not be repealed (as many farmers had wanted)
2. The currency supply would be slightly increased through the issuance of additional specie-backed currency.
3. A limited coinage of silver dollars would be allowed through the \_\_\_\_\_ Act (1878), a small inflationary gesture to the debtor interests. Republican President \_\_\_\_\_, influenced by industrial and banking interests, vetoed the measure. Congress promptly overrode the veto, but the presidential administration only purchased minimal amounts of silver each month. This was seen as a "limping form of \_\_\_\_\_ " in which \_\_\_\_\_ remained far more important than silver in the monetary structure.

As prosperity returned in the early 1880s, passions over monetary policies subsided. The public had gained full confidence in the currency. The greenback issue was dead, but attention turned toward another economic panacea—the free and unlimited coinage of \_\_\_\_\_ in the 1890s.

By 1890, farmers were straining under growing debt and sharply falling prices. Western mining interests were anxious for a ready market for their silver and exerted pressure on Congress. Western voices were much stronger with the recent addition of I \_\_\_\_\_, M \_\_\_\_\_, W \_\_\_\_\_, W \_\_\_\_\_ and the D \_\_\_\_\_ a to the Union. The \_\_\_\_\_ Act was part of a broader compromise. The Democrats gave their support to the highly protective McKinley Tariff in return for

Republican votes for silver. This new 1890 law provided that the U.S. Treasury would purchase large amounts of silver each month and the Treasury would issue notes redeemable in either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

The planned government purchases amounted to almost the total monthly output from the mines. However, the increased supply of silver \_\_\_\_\_ the price. Many mine operators in the West tried to reduce expenses by cutting the miners' wages. Labor unrest and sporadic violence followed.

As the price of silver continued to decline, holders of the government notes understandably redeemed them for gold rather than silver. The result of the growing disparity between the two metals was the depletion of the U.S. gold reserves, an event that played prominently during the Panic of 1893 \_\_\_\_.

In this new economic crisis, \_\_\_\_\_ (conservative or liberal) leaders pointed to the \_\_\_\_\_ Act as the root of the nation's ills, but the farmers blamed the \_\_\_\_\_ (region) economic interests --the country was now split over the silver issue. The \_\_\_\_\_ Party was largely in the hands of the \_\_\_\_\_ forces, while the \_\_\_\_\_ Party called for the strict adherence to \_\_\_\_\_ alone.

Public opinion, especially in the rural areas, was heavily impacted by the publication of a paperback book entitled *Coin's Financial School* (1894), which advanced the silver issue in everyday terms. Even the allegorical *Wizard of Oz* demonstrated the division over gold-silver issue and called for a balance between the two. Silver played a prominent, if ill-fated role in the presidential elections in 1892, 1896 and 1900.

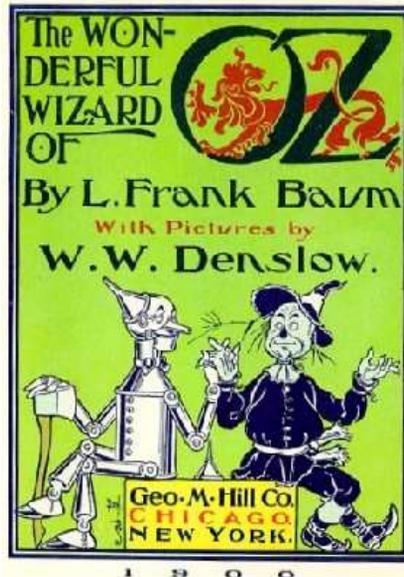
By 1900, the \_\_\_\_\_ Party was firmly in control and advanced the passage of the \_\_\_\_\_ Act, which established gold as the sole standard for all U.S. currency.

## The Wizard of Oz



Parable  
on  
Populism  
?

*The  
Wizard  
of Oz*  
by L.  
Frank  
Baum



**Activity: The Wizard of Oz: “Parable of the Populists”?** Go to the website <http://www.turnmeondeadman.net/OZ/Intro.ph> and identify what each of the following represents:

- Tornado → ?
- Dorothy → ?
- Toto → ?
- Kansas → ?
- Wicked Witch of the East → ?
- Tin Woodsman → ?
- Scarecrow → ?
- Cowardly Lion → ?
- Yellow Brick Road → ?
- Silver Slippers → ?
- Emerald City → ?
- Oz → ?
- The Wizard → ?
- Munchkins → ?
- Wicked Witch of the West → ?
- Flying Monkeys → ?
- Yellow Winkies → ?



## America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Angry and exploited workers go on strike
- President Cleveland sided with employers
- Life on the farms in the Midwest and the South worse than in the cities
- Technology increasing output and forcing prices down



## Lyman Frank Baum

- Born in Syracuse, NY in 1856
- Moved to Aberdeen, SD in 1887
- Was exposed to the farmer's plight
- Baum was not a political activist but his writing did have a theme of tolerance and he was critical of nationalism and ethnocentrism

## The Land of Oz

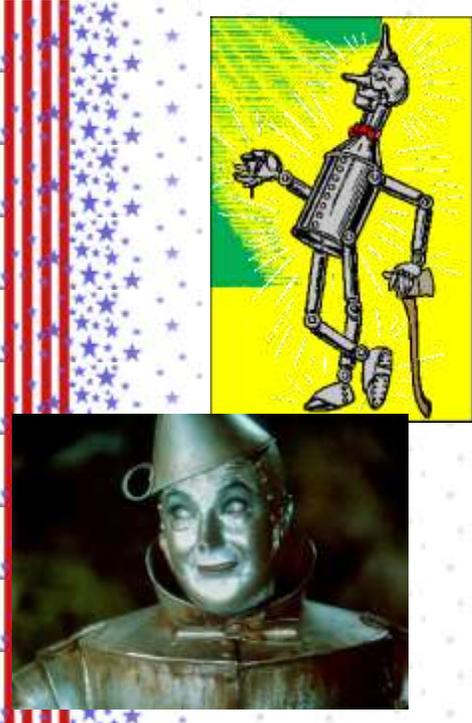


- Setting:
  - Contrast between Kansas and Oz
- Kansas
  - “Old Testament”
  - Nature is gray, impersonal, and angry
- Clear contrast between the paradise of Oz and the stark nature of Kansas

## Dorothy

- Miss Everyman
  - Goodness, innocence
  - She is characteristically American and Midwestern
  - She is one of us
    - Human and Real
- Despite all Oz has to offer, she still wants to go home





## Tin Woodman

- Under a spell by the Wicked Witch of the East
- Symbolic of the laborer – hard working human
  - The harder he worked, the more he was hurt by the spell
  - he is dehumanized by Eastern witchcraft
- He rusts when it rains – parallel to the condition of eastern workers after the depression of 1893
- Deludes himself into thinking that he had lost all humanity especially the most human of sentiments: love. (thus his quest for a heart)

## The Scarecrow

- Determined to replace the (common sense) straw in his head with a brain
- Parallel: 1896 Kansas farmers had been accused of ignorance, irrationality and general muddle-headedness
- Scarecrow emerges as innately shrewd and very capable



## The Cowardly Lion



- Clearly William Jennings Bryan
- Lion couldn't hurt the Woodman
  - Parallel: Bryan lost 1896 election – eastern labor was pressured into voting for McKinley
- Lion not really a coward → neither was Bryan
  - In a time of national expansion he endorsed a platform of anti-imperialism and pacifism

## The Witches of Oz

- Divided into quadrants each ruled by a witch
  - Northern and Southern witches are good
  - Eastern and Western witches are wicked
  - Emerald City in the center ruled by the wizard



## Parallels of the Rulers of Oz

- Wicked Witch of the East  
→ *Businesses of the east*
- Wicked Witch of the West  
→ *Railroad cartels and shipping*
- Witches of the North and South  
→ *They represent goodness but they are unable to understand the real power they hold*
- Wizard of Oz  
→ *Grover Cleveland*

## The Emerald City

- All visitors required to wear green glasses
- Represents the national capital
  - Wizard is a bumbling old man hiding behind a façade of paper mache and noise



## The Wizard



- He assumes different shapes for each in the group depending on their view of national leadership
  - Dorothy:
    - naïve and innocent child
      - big head
  - Scarecrow:
    - idealistic farmer
      - gossamer fairy
  - Woodman:
    - exploited laborer
      - horrible beast
  - Lion:
    - W.J. Bryan
      - ball of fire

## The Fall of the Wizard

- Dorothy and the others reveal the wizard for a fake
  - Allegory in an age when presidents hid in the White House
  - Wizard's former occupation as a circus performer skillfully prepared him as a politician



## Dorothy's Silver Slippers

- Indicative of the silver standard
  - Represents a real force in a land of illusion
- Power of silver delivers Dorothy home
  - Dorothy, the Munchkins, and even Glinda the good witch of the South don't realize the power of the silver slippers
- Economic potential of silver
  - Silver's potency meant a lot to Midwesterners



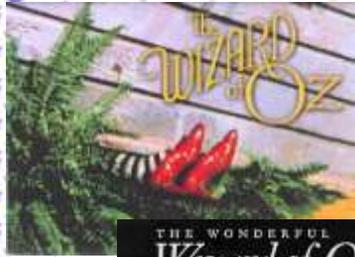
Ruby slippers for the  
"first" color movie

## The Wicked Witch of the West

- Death ordered by the Wizard
- She uses natural forces
  - Baum's version of nature as sentient and malign
  - She sends wolves, crows, and black bees
- She summons the flying monkeys by using the "golden cap"
  - Power of gold used to capture Dorothy
  - Flying monkeys represented the Indians
  - Monkeys not inherently bad, evil controls them
- She takes advantage of Dorothy's innocence and controls her – parallel to the western farmers
- Dorothy finally disposes of the witch with water



## The Loss of the Silver Slippers



- Dorothy finally realizes the power of the shoes to transport her home
- During the magical flight, the shoes are lost forever in the desert
- Dorothy's loss of the shoes is symbolic of America's losses by 1900

## Review: The Wizard of Oz, a Parable on Populism



- Midwestern critique of the Populist rationale
  - Naïve innocence
- The farmer, the laborer, and the politician approach the mystic holder of national power to ask for personal fulfillment
  - Each of the characters carries the solution to their own problems were they able to view themselves objectively

- The Wizard turns out to be nothing more than a common man, capable of shrewd but mundane answers to these self-induced needs
  - He is like any good politician and can give the people what they want
- Baum poses a central thought:
  - the American desire for symbols of fulfillment is illusory
    - Real needs lie elsewhere



President Grover Cleveland – the ultimate wizard?



- The Wizard cannot help Dorothy
  - Her wish is the only one that is selfless
  - Only she has a direct connection to honest, hopeless human beings
- Dorothy returns to Kansas but without the silver slippers

- Baum's prophetic placement of leadership in Oz after Dorothy's departure:
  - The Scarecrow reigns over the Emerald City
  - The Tin Woodman rules in the West
  - The Lion protects smaller beasts



– Therefore: farm interests achieve national importance, industrialism moves West and Bryan commands only a forest full of lesser politicians!!

## Why Did Populism Decline?

1. The economy experienced rapid change.
2. The era of small producers and farmers was fading away.
3. Race divided the Populist Party, especially in the South.
4. The Populists were not able to break existing party loyalties.
5. Most of their agenda was co-opted by the Democratic Party.

## But, Populism Still Lives!



Al Gore (Dem) in 2000

## But, Populism Still Lives!



John Edwards (Dem) in 2008