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## Article Title: The Presidential Election of 1900 in Nebraska: McKinley Over Bryan

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Article Summary: The presidential election of 1900 proved to be a crucial battle in the state of Nebraska. President William McKinley and former Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan were the major party candidates. Nebraska voters turned against Bryan, part of a general national pattern that sounded the death knell of the Populist Party in the United States.

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Photographs / Images: William Jennings Bryan speaking from the observation car of a special train, probably 1908; map of Presidential Election of 1900 in Nebraska by county; William Jennings Bryan and his wife Mary Baird Bryan, 1898, at Camp Cuba Libre near Jacksonville, Florida; Colonel Theodore Roosevelt campaigning in Nebraska; President William McKinley and Marcus A (Mark) Hanna



*William Jennings Bryan campaigned extensively in all his national campaigns from the observation car of a special train. Bryan (in light-colored Homburg) speaks to crowd in an Iowa town, probably in the presidential campaign of 1908.*

# THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1900 IN NEBRASKA : McKINLEY OVER BRYAN

by JOHN W. BAILEY, JR.

The presidential election of 1900 proved to be a crucial and hard-fought battle in the state of Nebraska. President William McKinley and former Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan were the major party candidates, as they had been in the election of 1896. In both national elections the Republicans swept to victory under the McKinley banner. Illustrating the nation's general disapproval of Bryan and his political views in 1900, Nebraska voters turned against the man who had represented them in the United States House of Representatives from 1890 through 1894, the man who had served as colonel of the 3rd Nebraska Regiment during the Spanish-American War, and the man who had carried the good wishes of a majority of Nebraskans in the election of 1896.

The transition in Nebraska political thinking from this pivotal year to the turn of the century was part of a general national pattern that sounded the death knell of the Populist Party in the United States. Accepting the national leadership of the Democrats in this last year of decision, the Populists faced the coming events with apprehension.

Nebraskans and other Americans turned their attention to the national arena as the excitement and glamour of the political conventions approached. The Republican National Convention convened on June 19 in Philadelphia. Few were surprised when Joseph B. Foraker of Ohio nominated McKinley for the presidency. Senator John M. Thurston of Nebraska made a rousing seconding speech, and shortly thereafter McKinley was chosen by acclamation.<sup>1</sup> The center of interest also focused on the task of filling the office of the vice-presidency.

Republicans considered many names while searching for a

man who would appeal to the masses. New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt seemed a popular choice to some. The hero of San Juan Hill did have exceptional credentials. He was an Easterner and naturally was popular in his home state of New York, which had proven difficult for Republicans to carry on numerous occasions. He also had a national reputation with a large and enthusiastic following in the West.<sup>2</sup>

J. Sterling Morton, a Nebraska Democrat and former Secretary of Agriculture in the second Cleveland administration, characterized Roosevelt in his newspaper, the *Conservative*, as

the complement to McKinley — in age, temperament, record and influence. He will supply the magnetism and inspire the ardor necessary to a hurrah campaign. He will attract a large element of the independent vote. Roosevelt will draw the young man's vote. A bold and picturesque figure — youthful, well-balanced; a gentleman, a cowpuncher; a man of letters, a man of action.<sup>3</sup>

Mark Hanna, the Republican national campaign leader and senator from Ohio, strongly opposed Roosevelt and described him as "a second-class Bryan." After much backroom politicking and complicated maneuvering, delegates made an appeal to Roosevelt to accept the nomination and become the running-mate of McKinley. Roosevelt accepted, and the Republican ticket was set. The opposition party was not far behind.<sup>4</sup>

The Democratic National Convention opened on July 4 in Kansas City. William Jennings Bryan, the man who had captured the 1896 convention with his memorable "Cross of Gold" speech, also dominated the convention of 1900. Climaxing a movement that had begun in Chicago several months prior to the opening of the national convention, Bryan became the Democratic Party's presidential candidate for the second time. Placed in nomination by William D. Oldham of Nebraska, Bryan was backed unanimously. Democrats reasoned that the western states would be the main battleground of the election and here Bryan had strong support. He was identified not only with the common man but also with the long-suffering staple farmer of the West and the South. Adlai E. Stevenson, the dignified Illinois silverite and vice-president during Cleveland's second term, was chosen Bryan's running mate. The Nebraska delegation cast ten of its sixteen votes for Charles A. Towne, a Minnesota silver Republican, but the Stevenson backers prevailed.<sup>5</sup>

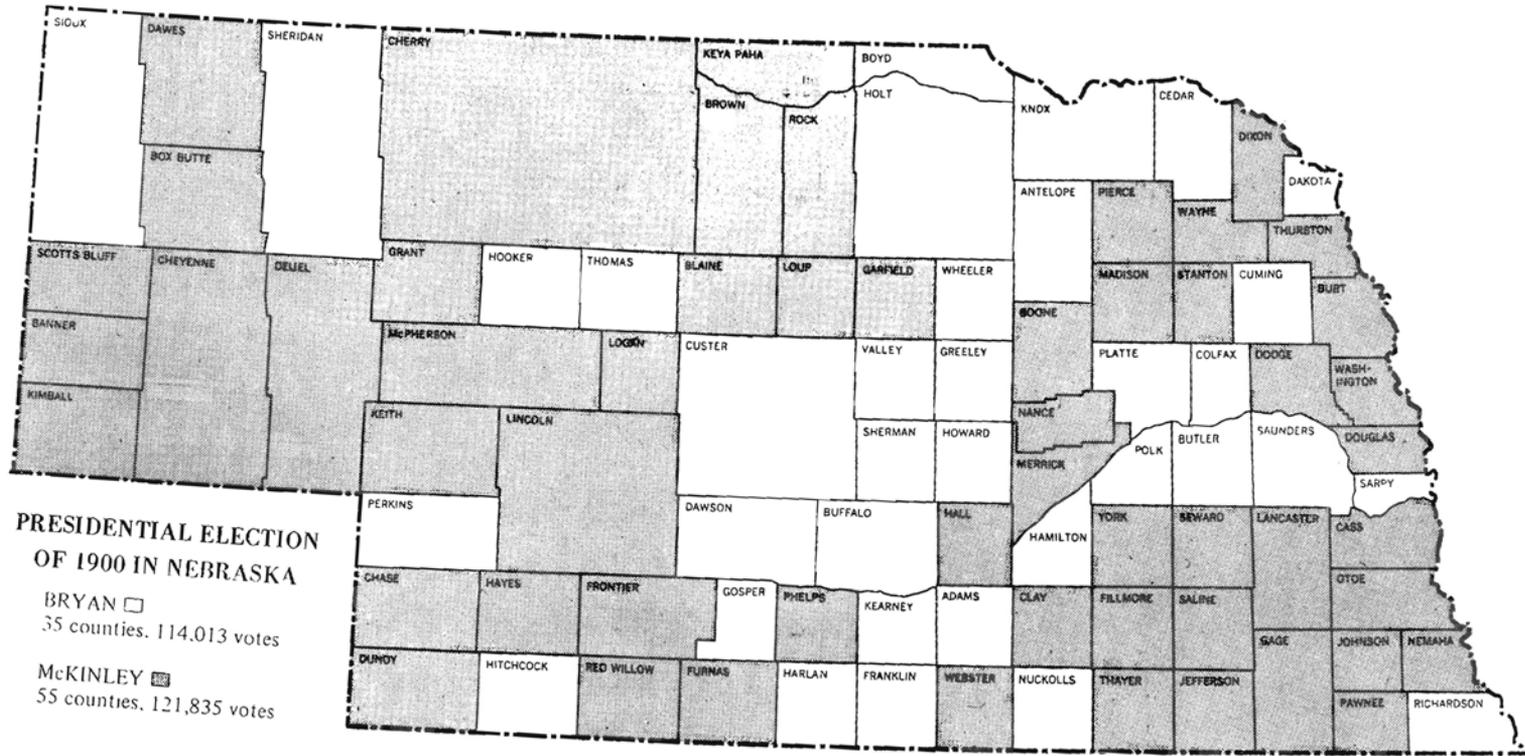
Third party conventions also were held during the summer months. None of these groups received appreciable voting

support during the election, but the silver Republicans and the Fusionists, a segment of the Populist Party, did nominate Bryan as their presidential candidate.<sup>6</sup> As a result he emerged as the standard-bearer of three political parties in 1900. Now he faced the difficult problem of developing significant campaign issues in his quest for victory.

The main issues of the national campaign were also the essential issues in Nebraska. The paramount question, Bryan insisted, was imperialism; no nation could be half republic and half empire, referring to action taken by the United States in 1898 when it had gone to war with Spain over its island colony of Cuba. The war had spread until American forces were stationed in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippine Islands. At that time Bryan was convinced that President McKinley's policy of intervention was sound. Spain's inhuman treatment of the Cubans horrified him. "War is a terrible thing, and cannot be defended except as a means to an end," he said, "but war is the only means left when counsel and persuasion fail and reason and diplomacy prove of no avail." He stood ready "to support the administration in any action necessary for the protection of the nation."<sup>7</sup>

Bryan served with the 3rd Nebraska Regiment until two days after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War. Although warfare continued between insurgent Filipinos and American soldiers, Bryan resigned his commission and rushed to Washington to fight for Senate ratification of the treaty. He hoped that by ratifying the treaty the United States would acquire the Philippines; and then by congressional resolution the Filipinos would be granted their independence. Bryan further suggested an American protectorate over the Philippines, so that the natives might work out their problems under the security of American arms.<sup>8</sup>

Later Bryan changed his mind and opposed American imperialism. The United States, he felt, should not abandon the Monroe Doctrine and become involved in European and Asian affairs. But most of all, the defender of American liberal traditions opposed imperialism on moral and religious grounds. He maintained that American expansionists did not believe in "the White Man's Burden." The immorality of holding weaker peoples in subjection disturbed him. "The command, 'Go ye into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature' has no Gatling gun attachment," he argued.<sup>9</sup>



Bryan's contradictory stand on imperialism proved to be a damaging mistake. The treaty was ratified by a narrow vote, but no congressional resolution granting Filipino independence followed. The people were content to let the question rest. Had the Senate rejected the treaty, Bryan would have had a fine campaign issue for 1900. Instead, his position had been weakened.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Bryan was inconsistent on his stand concerning the application of the Monroe Doctrine to the Philippines. On one hand he advanced an isolationist foreign policy; on the other he called for a United States protectorate over the Philippines. He indicated that the United States could feel free to reserve harbors and coaling stations on the Pacific islands and he had no objection to the Filipinos reimbursing \$20,000,000 to the United States that she had previously paid to Spain for the acquisition of the Philippines.<sup>11</sup> It became fairly obvious that the Republicans could defend their foreign policy against Bryan's inconsistencies.

The holes in the Democratic stand were enlarged by the opposition. The Republicans admitted that American taxpayers had been carrying the expenses of warfare for two years, but they were determined not to be premature in granting independence to the Filipinos. The party platform called for eventual independence but stated that caution was essential. Republicans also took the offensive by pointing out to the nation that Bryan was responsible for imperialism. They felt that he had been a prime factor in ratification of the treaty, thereby giving the United States sovereignty over the Philippines. The Republicans claimed further that Bryan's act of giving hope to Emilio Aguinaldo, the Philippine leader, encouraged the insurgents to continue fighting. Thus, indirectly, Bryan was responsible for the the death of hundreds of American soldiers in the Pacific.<sup>12</sup>

On the positive side the incumbent party could point to the peaceful acquisition of Puerto Rico and Hawaii during this time. The Republicans carried the attack further by asking that the Democrats bring freedom to countless southern Negroes before they haggled over the Philippine question.<sup>13</sup>

It appears that Bryan had tried to settle the question of imperialism before the campaign of 1900, so that once again he might rest his laurels on the free silver issue as he had done in the 1896 election.<sup>14</sup> At the national convention in Kansas City,

Bryan had indicated that he would not run for President in 1900 unless free silver at a sixteen-to-one ratio was included in the Democratic platform. Bryan was satisfied when the principles of the National Democratic platform adopted at Chicago in 1896 were endorsed at Kansas City. He worked diligently for the common man in an effort to bring him a more flexible and abundant currency through his free silver principle, but this too became a vulnerable article in the Democratic platform.

By 1900 the gold standard was functioning well. The cyanide process, a new method for reducing gold from ore, greatly increased the world output of the precious metal. New deposits of gold were found in Alaska, Australia, and South Africa; more gold was issued into trade channels, causing a rise in price levels. Because of poor harvests abroad, the demand for American crops increased in an enlarging American market. Bryan had predicted that "when prosperity fails, the gold standard will lose its charm." He evidently did not believe that the country was prosperous because the free silver issue dominated Bryan's interest from 1890 to 1906.<sup>15</sup>

From the weak issues of imperialism and free silver, the Democrats turned to the trust. This question afforded Bryan the most solid ground for an issue in 1900. In speech after speech the "Great Commoner" called for a larger share of the wealth for the proletarians. He promised unceasing warfare against all private monopolies and claimed that these monopolies were fostered by Republican laws and protected by the administration in return for financial support. Stating his opinion of the farmer's reaction to monopolies, Bryan said:

In 1896 the populists united with the democrats in opposing the trusts, although the question at the time appeared like a cloud scarcely larger than a man's hand. Today that cloud well-nigh overspreads the industrial sky. The farmer does not participate in the profits of any trust, but he sorely feels the burden of them all. He is dependent upon the seasons for his income. When he plants his crop he knows not whether it will be blessed with rain or blighted with drought; he knows not whether wind will blow it down or hail destroy it, or insects devour it, and the price of his crop is as uncertain as the quantity. If a private monopoly can suspend production and fix the price of raw material as well as the price of the finished product, the farmer, powerless to protect himself when he sells, is plundered when he purchases.<sup>16</sup>

Mark Hanna had correctly predicted that the trust issue would be crucial and had made business recovery the keynote of his campaign. The "full dinner pail" was language that all understood, but there was more to the trust question. There had been a growth in the number of monopolies; and some had grown to a tremendous size. When the Republicans tried to check this growth, they found their hands tied by the Supreme

Court. An Industrial Commission was appointed to study the problem. In Congress attempts were made to push through regulatory legislation only to be blocked by Democrats who voted states' rights and opposed federal controls. The issue grew hot at times with both parties probing each other's weaknesses. In the end most Americans were content to sit back and enjoy prosperity.<sup>17</sup>

There were many other issues of lesser magnitude in 1900. Republicans took pride in the Dingley Tariff which they felt symbolized "prosperity at home and prestige abroad." On the other hand, the Democrats wanted tariff changes to put trust products on the free list. Bryan's party called for the direct election of United States senators and the creation of a Department of Labor. McKinley's followers extolled the "open door" in China, which afforded protection for Americans there. But the Democrats expressed dissatisfaction with what they called "militarism" in China.<sup>18</sup>

These issues and others were debated by both parties, but the virtues of imperialism, free silver, and the trust question remained the center of controversy. Dynamic personalities were exhibited and complicated strategy was used effectively. Still, the basic factor in the election of 1900 for Nebraska and the nation was economic.

From the low point of 1896, prosperity in various degrees slowly returned to the nation and many of the people began to feel the results. At this same time the Republicans were victorious on the political front and naturally claimed that McKinley and prosperity went together.<sup>19</sup> The Democrats asserted that this was only a chance happening and that there was no relationship between the two. The general public was not aroused as long as prosperous times continued; thus Bryan had little success in stirring up the masses over economic affairs. Some shuddered to think what the economic situation might have been if Bryan had won in 1896.

It is true that the plight of the farmer was not one of economic abundance. Times were better than they had been for several years, but most farmers lived just above the subsistence level. In 1900 the income for subsistence living in the north central states was about \$500 per year. To live in decent comfort, a farmer needed an income of at least \$1,000 per year. At the turn of the century, farmers from the north central states had an average annual income of about \$815. Large land

holders made profits, but their tenants barely existed. Unfortunately, the number of croppers and tenants increased from 1880 to 1900. In Nebraska there was an 8.9 percent increase, which was below the national average of 9.8 percent and far below the average of neighboring states to the north and south. South Dakota increased by 21.8 percent and Kansas by 18.9 percent. These farmers certainly helped to fill the dinner pail; but at the same time, they experienced an economic ascent from their status of 1896.<sup>20</sup>

In Nebraska the theme of prosperity seems to have been a reality. Available figures indicate an increase in income for the farmer and rancher. The table below is a good example of the prices that Nebraska farmers received for the years 1896 and 1900 from the Omaha Elevator Company, which had elevators in all parts of the state:

	1896	1900
Wheat .....	\$ .44	\$ .62
Corn .....	.12	.28
Rye .....	.20	.36
Oats .....	.08	.17
Hogs .....	2.50	4.50
Labor .....	1.00	1.75
Horses .....	25.00	65.00
Cattle (fat) .....	3.85	4.85
Cattle (feeder) .....	3.10	4.15
Sheep .....	.90	2.15

These figures indicate that Nebraska farmers on 160-acre plots received \$800 more for their crop of 1900 than they received in 1896.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it seems that a reasonably prosperous Nebraska awaited the campaigners of 1900.

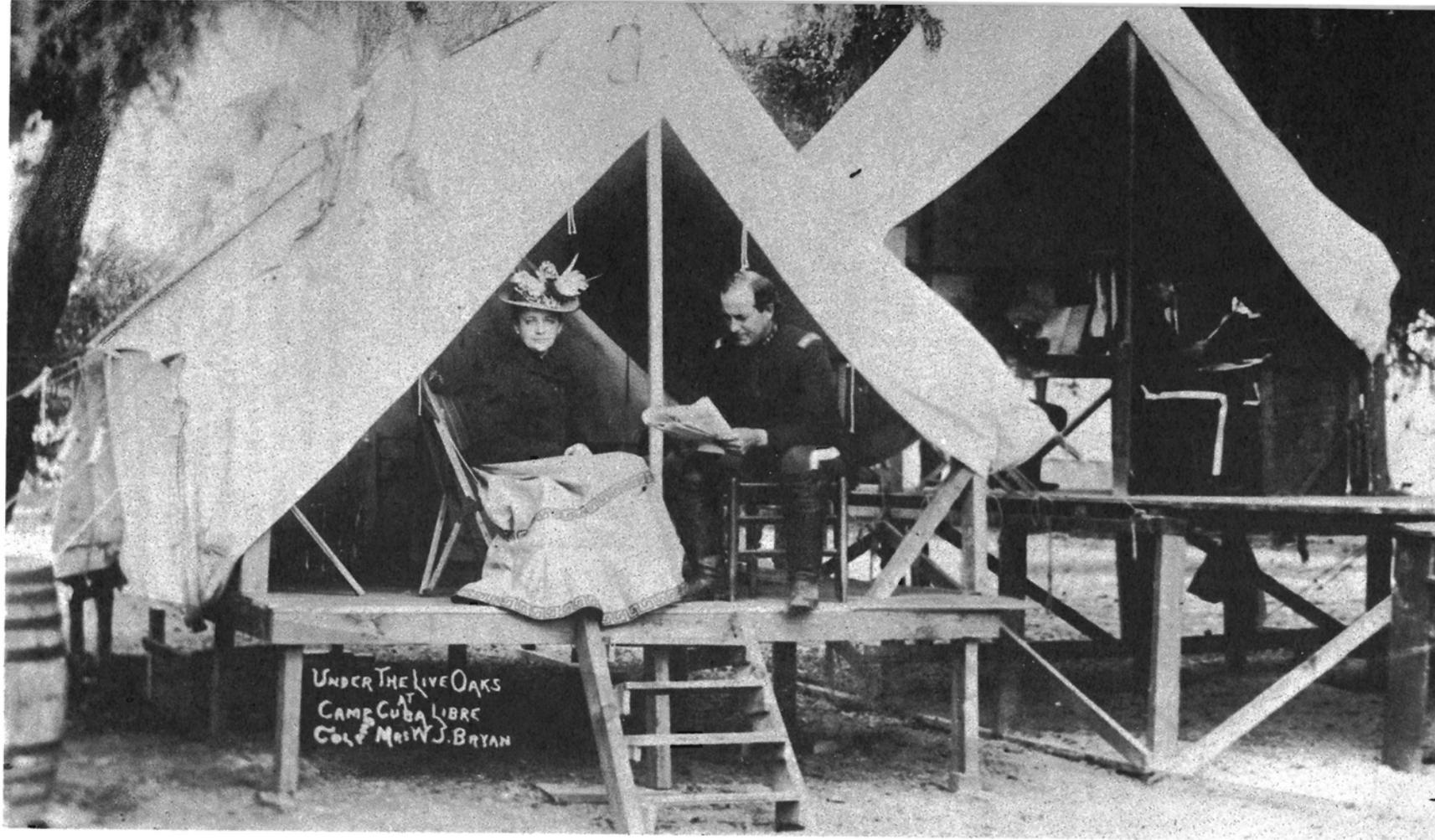
Bryan, in many respects, neglected Nebraska during the campaign. He had carried his state by a comfortable margin in 1896, and undoubtedly felt that he should concentrate his activities elsewhere. Mainly, it became the task of local Fusionists to conduct the local Democratic campaign. In North Platte prominent Fusion leaders declared themselves to be against imperialism. C. V. Svoboda spoke to Nebraskans of German descent in their native German tongue in order to explain the Democratic program to them. These men campaigned hard and were successful, but they could not carry the entire burden.<sup>22</sup>

Bryan did travel through eastern Nebraska giving speeches and soliciting votes. In Auburn he spoke against the Republican stand on imperialism and the trusts. Impressive rallies were held in Lincoln and Omaha. In Nebraska City Bryan did not do as

well. He carried his fight against the trusts to the Argo Starch Works of that city, claiming that it was part of a wicked monopoly. Evidently he did not understand that the city's prosperity depended largely on the maintenance of the industry. It ground 3,000 bushels of corn a day, paid excellent wages, and sold its product in the world market. J. Sterling Morton, Nebraska statesman and local newspaper editor, accused Bryan of trying to drive industry out of Nebraska. He went on to say that the starch company was a corporation, not a trust, and that corporate capital was no longer safe within the jurisdiction of Populism and Bryanism. The editor confessed ignorance over whether Bryan was trying to make political capital or to avenge a private quarrel with his attack on the starch works.<sup>23</sup>

Generally, however, Bryan's limited campaign progressed smoothly in eastern Nebraska, but at no time did he carry his views in person to the western part of the state. Mainly, he concentrated on eastern Nebraska and the eastern and midwestern areas of the nation. He campaigned diligently in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. In New York State 150,000 people heard him, as he set a record by giving thirty speeches in one day. McKinley's home state of Ohio warmly welcomed the talented orator. An enthusiastic rally awaited Bryan in Indianapolis and newspapermen predicted that he would carry such states as New Jersey, Illinois, and West Virginia. The people of Nebraska were able to follow his campaign by reading the local Democratic newspapers where copies of his speeches were usually printed. He had planned to finish his campaign in Lincoln in a whirlwind fashion but found that he was needed in Chicago until the day before the election. While Bryan had made a fairly strong but limited effort in Nebraska, the Republicans covered the state with two of their best men.<sup>24</sup>

Governor Roosevelt campaigned in Nebraska in early October. President McKinley felt it was below the dignity of his office to campaign, and hence, his vice-presidential candidate carried a great deal of the campaign burden. According to Republican sources, more than 300,000 Nebraskans, or one-fourth of the state's population, heard Roosevelt speak in 1900.<sup>25</sup> His special train carried him to all sections of the state. Sometimes he made short speeches from his train in small towns at odd hours of the day and night. On other occasions there was more ceremony with parades and festivities. Roosevelt's



*Between his first campaign for the presidency in 1896 and his second in 1900, William Jennings Bryan served as colonel of the 3rd Nebraska Infantry in the Spanish-American War. His wife, Mary Baird Bryan, visited him in Camp Cuba Libre near Jacksonville, Florida, in 1898.*

audiences were of various sizes and descriptions. Below is a list of the Republican estimates of audience sizes and the list of stops that Roosevelt made:

150,000 - Omaha	5,000 - York
1,200 - Falls City	2,000 - Seward
1,500 - Auburn	40,000 - Lincoln
2,000 - Tecumseh	5,000 - Ashland
15,000 - Beatrice	12,000 - Plattsmouth
1,200 - Wilber	2,000 - Broken Bow
2,000 - Crete	1,000 - Hyannis
3,000 - Fairmont	3,000 - Alliance
5,000 - Minden	2,000 - Crawford
5,000 - Holdrege	3,000 - Chadron
15,000 - McCook	1,000 - Valentine
5,000 - North Platte	3,000 - Ainsworth
2,500 - Lexington	1,200 - Bassett
10,000 - Kearney	5,000 - O'Neill
10,000 - Grand Island	3,000 - Neligh
2,000 - Aurora	12,000 - Norfolk <sup>26</sup>

Roosevelt's tour was a triumphant one. In Omaha he supposedly drew the largest crowd in the city's history. In Lincoln there was a parade three miles long in his honor. Broken Bow gave three cheers for "Teddy." The people of Alliance blew whistles and set off small bombs to celebrate his arrival. In Valentine, Roosevelt pushed his main theme when he told the westerners, "Boys, you were roping cattle four years ago when they were hardly worth catching—Prices are high now."<sup>27</sup> Through his image as a cowboy and westerner he brought home his theme of prosperity to Nebraskans. Citing his Rough Rider association during the Spanish-American War, he assured his listeners of the wisdom of his party's foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> Republican effectiveness in Nebraska was probably enhanced more by Roosevelt's trip than if McKinley had toured in his place.

Other party statesmen attempted to bring people back to the Republican Party that some had deserted in 1896. Mark Hanna campaigned vigorously, and for personal reasons he concentrated his efforts primarily in South Dakota and eastern Nebraska. His old enemy, Senator Richard F. Pettigrew, was running for re-election in South Dakota, and Hanna successfully campaigned against him. Hanna likewise took great pleasure in campaigning in Bryan's own state, spreading word of the Republican cause to those who listened to his speeches. The Ohio senator was not the horrible, evil-looking man with dollar signs on his coat as he was pictured in numerous derisive cartoons. He was not a terrible looking monster, but a human being! One lady from Auburn remarked that he looked like a Presbyterian elder. Certainly Hanna's campaigning brought joy to the state Republicans.<sup>29</sup>

He wisely emphasized prosperity as his main theme before audiences in Omaha, Lincoln, Schuyler, Auburn, Wayne, and Nebraska City. In October a large reception greeted him in Omaha. The Sunday edition of the *Illustrated Omaha Bee* had the cover picture in its magazine section of Hanna and a railroad engineer. Inside the section were numerous pictures of Hanna. There was even a picture of a baby who had been named after the senator.<sup>30</sup>

As Hanna toured, he was impressed by the number of school children who came to see and hear him. When the senator was in town, classes were usually dismissed and teachers led their children to the speaker's platform. At Winside he found an immense placard warning the Populist farmers to beware, advising them to "chain your children to yourselves or put them under the bed - Mark Hanna is in town!"<sup>31</sup> At Nebraska City he was greeted warmly by its leading citizen, J. Sterling Morton. This time he talked on the trust question, which was pertinent to the people of this city, as Bryan earlier had attacked the local starch company as a trust. Hanna urged the people to back the starch company and pay little attention to Bryan, who was not even a businessman.<sup>32</sup>

In Auburn, Hanna spent another memorable day. A large group of approximately four thousand people had gathered to watch a football game, which would be followed by lunch and a political rally. The bands from Auburn, Johnson, and Peru filled the air with music as the enthusiastic crowd watched Auburn and Nebraska City in a seesaw football game. Nebraska City clearly outplayed the home team during the first half, but Auburn stormed back after intermission and only crowd interference stopped them from scoring a touchdown. The game ended in a scoreless tie. The excited people ate their lunch and awaited the afternoon festivities. At 2 p.m. the celebrities arrived and seated themselves on the six-foot-high speakers' platform. The crowd pushed closer to hear Senator Hanna speak. At that moment to the surprise of everyone, the platform collapsed. An estimated fifty people were entangled in a confused mass. A nearby witness gave this account:

It seemed certain that some must be seriously, if not fatally, hurt. 'Is Hanna hurt?' 'How is Hanna?' cried the spectators, and a panic seemed imminent. Just then Hanna's face appeared above the struggling mass. (He was standing on a chair.) There was the merriest kind of a twinkle in his kindly brown eyes and his smile was even broader than usual. Holding up his hand to command silence, he cried, 'It's all right. No one is hurt. We are just giving you a demonstration as to what is going to happen

to the democratic party. This is an illustration of what a flimsy affair the democrats have erected and what we will do with it in November.' At this sally the crowd went wild.<sup>33</sup>

With this beginning Hanna continued to elaborate on the prosperity of the times in Nebraska and in the nation. His quick thinking, no doubt, had won over numerous voters to the Republican ticket.

Many local Republican sympathizers carried on the good work that Roosevelt and Hanna had accomplished by holding rallies and giving speeches throughout the state.<sup>34</sup> Their work was effective, but the sly campaign manager and the colorful aspirant for the vice-presidency had done notable work in Nebraska. Added to their efforts was the work of many newspaper editors who also made effective campaign contributions.

The Nebraska press of 1900 often was characterized by a strict, one-sided political viewpoint. Its importance cannot be denied during the presidential race of 1900. One editor suggested that "our political managers would save much money and gain many votes by investing more in newspapers and less in spellbinders." The Republican press carried on a very strong and positive campaign primarily by espousing Republican opinions and not by deriding the Democrats. Truly, in a few instances it was hard to ascertain the opposition, since it was mentioned so rarely.<sup>35</sup>

Several prominent Americans publicly endorsed McKinley and afforded grist for the mill. Former Presidents Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison backed the Republican candidates.<sup>36</sup> General Lew Wallace of Civil War fame stated that he would vote the entire Republican ticket. He took Bryan to task primarily on the Democrat's financial policy, charging that the free silver program, "if put into effect, would bring disaster and ruin on the country." Jacob G. Schurman, Republican president of Cornell University (New York), delivered a speech in Lincoln expounding his views on the main issues of the campaign. He concluded his speech by stating that the war against Spain was a "unanimous declaration of the United States people." A copy of his speech was reproduced in Republican newspapers throughout the state. Philip C. Hanna, consul general for northern Mexico, visited northwestern Nebraska, explaining to the ranchers that he would vote for McKinley in the coming election. He told his listeners that the Democrats overplayed imperialism and that prosperity was the

real issue. "Do you see that cowhide stretched on the fence?" he asked his audience. "Well, that's worth more than the whole steer would sell for four years ago."<sup>37</sup>

Other men of prominence publicly backed McKinley and Roosevelt. Dr. George L. Miller, Democratic leader for thirty years and founder of the old *Omaha Herald*, was quoted as saying:

I have no faith whatever in his (Bryan's) sincerity . . . because he knew the fallacy of the free-silver proposition when he first thrust it upon the party in this state. The primary objection to Bryan is his continuous assault upon the established institutions of his country, his unremitting attacks upon our citizens who happen to own something, his opposition to the rights of our courts, and his implied carelessness as to the preservation of law and order.<sup>38</sup>

J. Sterling Morton was pleased to see Roosevelt's name on the ticket. He believed Bryan to be a fraud and a "menace to good order." Morton's son, Paul, lent his private railroad car to Roosevelt and vigorously campaigned with his good friend.<sup>39</sup> Personalities were important, but economics was equally significant.

A gigantic effort was made in the Nebraska Republican press to illustrate the prosperity of the times. Paper after paper printed charts and columns of figures showing the profits that farmers and ranchers were making. Nebraskans had listened to Bryan in 1896 because of the bad times, but 1900 was different. One newspaper claimed that prosperity had brought contentment to the entire world.<sup>40</sup> The same editor brought the point home to Nebraskans in no uncertain terms:

Bryan's predictions of hard times are completely shattered. If the Republican policy has brought prosperity, which it surely has, how could an opposite policy, intended to upset the Republican policy, bring other than the reverse? . . . Principles and policies that carry with them a guaranty of prosperity—principles that have been tested and proven sound—can not be exchanged for principles fraught with commercial disaster; without that result attending it.<sup>41</sup>

Much of the state effort was aimed at the farmer and rancher. One newspaper story claimed that one Nebraskan made 50 percent more on his crop in 1900 than he had made on his crop in 1896. Another claimed that farm prices had advanced 45 percent, while the prices on articles bought by farmers rose only 19 percent. Endless figures proclaimed prosperity, and Republicans associated this prosperity with their party.<sup>42</sup>

The "Foolish Calf Story" was another example of the clever tactics that the press used:

While being driven home one evening by a boy, a foolish calf left his mother and ran after a bellowing steer. The boy tried in vain to bring it back to its mother's side.

When finally exhausted, he shook his fist at the calf and cried: You little fool, you! You little fool, you! You ——— fool! You'll be sorry when supper time comes! Moral—Remember the hard times of 1896. Don't be a Bryan calf and get steered away from the full dinner pail, or you'll be sorry when supper time comes. [An illustration of this scene accompanied the story.]<sup>43</sup>

Other types of articles were used to press forward the prosperity issue. The great amount of railroad activity, the increase in the number and amount of bank deposits, and the decrease in the number of mortgages were taken as sure signs of prosperity. In Nebraska alone the number of mortgages had dropped by 578 between 1899 and 1900. In terms of dollars and cents, Nebraskans had paid off \$146,000,000 worth of mortgages during the last three years. It is not essential whether these figures that were printed in the state's newspapers were completely accurate. What does matter is that the average voter generally accepted them as valid. Voters could not leave the party of prosperity. One editor suggested that it would be less expensive to give Bryan a royal pension than to give him the presidency.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the editor of the *Valentine Republic* best summed up his party's stand in the following article:

McKinley's election will mean four years more of confidence and certainty in business circles, a tried and successful financial policy, and the continuance of a protective tariff which turns the wheels of industry and enables our manufacturers to pay good wages to their workmen, who are thereby enabled to pay good prices for the products of our farms and mills.

Bryan's election will mean four years of uncertainty and disturbance of business, wild experiments with a fifty-cent dollar, and assault on the protective tariff and consequent blocking of the wheels of industry and loss of work by thousands, and a tremendous shrinkage of the demand for the products of our farms and mills.

#### LET WELL ENOUGH ALONE!<sup>45</sup>

Prosperity was an important issue for the Republican press, but it campaigned on other issues as well. It was only natural that many of the important speeches by McKinley, Roosevelt, and Hanna should be reprinted in the newspapers. Many of the western Nebraska newspapers in particular went a step further and printed lists of locally prominent men who had supported the Democrats in 1896 but planned to change their votes in 1900 to Republican. Other lists included names from surrounding states. Still another technique was to print sample Republican ballots. One paper traced the history of national expansion from Jefferson to McKinley, associating the actions of the two presidents.<sup>46</sup>

The Republican side of the imperialism issue also made interesting reading. As well as the usual arguments for McKinley's policy in the Philippines, statements were made that

the veterans endorsed McKinley. One paper asked why the Democrats were so disturbed over Filipino independence when thousands of Negroes in the South were not free to vote. Another article indicated that the editor of a Des Moines paper who had gathered a great deal of material on imperialism for the Democrats had spent time in an insane asylum.<sup>47</sup>

Other important issues captured the limelight as well. Bryan's free silver issue was refuted by the publication of two simple lists. On one list were the names of twenty-three prosperous and well-respected nations, mostly located in western Europe. These were the gold standard countries, among which were the United States, Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and Switzerland. On the other list were the names of the free silver countries, such as Tripoli, Persia, China, Mexico, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and other Latin American countries, making a total of twelve. The reader was asked if he wanted Bryan to shift the name of the United States to the free silver list.<sup>48</sup>

The Populist Party was also attacked by the press. One editor defined a Populist as an "agricultural anarchist." He was a person who claimed that industry was discreditable, that thrift was a crime, and respectability was suspicious. When the population figures for 1900 were released, they showed that Nebraska was not growing in proportion to the rest of the nation. Populism was blamed by some, who said that their "half-baked utopian ideas and radical and iconoclastic attitude toward capital and corporation" had prevented the investment of capital in the industries of the state and checked the growth of immigration.<sup>49</sup>

Bryan was assailed by the Republican press in various ways aside from his stand on political issues. It was reported that Bryan and other Fusionist members of the First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln had asked their minister to resign because of his unfavorable political views and suspected worldliness. The press cited Bryan's financial situation since 1896, showing that he had prospered at about a ratio of sixteen-to-one over the four-year period.<sup>50</sup> Other members of the Democratic party were harassed as well as Bryan.

John C. Fullenwider, a citizen of Lincoln and a member of the Western Wholesale Auction Commission Company, called vice-presidential candidate Stevenson a "stay-at-home and moss-traitor," referring to his Civil War days. The Republicans did not spare James K. Jones, Bryan's national chairman, when



*Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Republican vice-presidential candidate, crisscrossed Nebraska in his campaign train in October, 1900, speaking at about forty towns from Nebraska City to McCook and from Omaha to Chadron. The locations of the above pictures are unknown.*

he stated that one-half of McKinley's 1896 vote had come from ignorant foreigners. Since many Nebraskans were of foreign birth, the Republicans capitalized this unguarded statement in the local press.<sup>51</sup>

Mark Hanna made a real contribution to the Republican effort in his successful mediation of the Pennsylvania coal strike. The miners were asking for a 10 percent wage increase plus recognition of their union. Disorder broke out in the coal fields and the state militia was summoned. Happy Democrats settled back to enjoy the battle between labor and the coal trust, carefully using the strike to point out in their newspapers the evils of big business trusts. Hanna, who knew the coal-mining industry extremely well, cleverly sided with the miners and eventually was able to talk the owners into giving the men the full 10 percent wage increase. The miners in return agreed to drop the demand for recognition of their union for one year. This great labor victory, coming in mid-October only weeks before election time, was hailed by the Republican press as true evidence that their party did care for the common worker. Consequently, the Democrats' best campaign issue was dealt a severe blow at a crucial time.<sup>52</sup>

The Republican press had carried out a strong and vigorous campaign in Nebraska stressing the building prosperity of the times and the attractive personalities within the party. The Democratic press in the state was also aggressive, but outgunned in 1900. Having few strong issues with which to work and a Fusionist party that was losing popularity, their task was difficult indeed.

Bryan had controlled the state Democratic party and had promoted Fusionism in the elections of 1894 and 1896. In 1900 his magnetism again held the Democrats and Populists together for a Fusionist ticket in Nebraska. At first the main issue in the Democratic state press was imperialism. The press claimed that the American taxpayer was paying for a war that was immoral and unnecessary. With the money being spent in the Philippines, claimed one editor, fine macadamized roads could be built throughout Nebraska.<sup>53</sup> Samuel M. (Golden Rule) Jones, a progressive Ohio mayor, stated in a public letter that he could not endorse the Republican stand in the Philippines due to moral reasons. "It is a denial of equality and a contradiction of the principles of human liberty set forth in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence. . . . Nothing but danger and disaster are certain to overwhelm the republic if this policy is continued."<sup>54</sup>

Another Republican strong point to fall under fire was prosperity. It was pointed out that the good times that had come to Nebraska were due to Fusionist leadership, not Republican efforts. The election results, whether Democratic or Republican, will not bring down prices since people still must eat. The farmers will not be deceived, claimed one editor. The party in power does not bring good weather or a bountiful harvest. The farmer does not get his share of prosperity because the prices of products which the farmer buys are going up faster than the prices on farm goods.<sup>55</sup>

The Democratic press produced column after column on the trust question. The coal trust in Pennsylvania, in connection with the miner's strike, received a great deal of attention before Hanna successfully mediated it. The grain trust, soap trust, and many others were attacked with the conclusion always the same—that the capitalists were making most of the profits.<sup>56</sup>

Republican personalities were not spared. Mark Hanna was charged with using too much authority. At the same time he was accused of showing interest in becoming President.

Roosevelt, it was alleged, had alienated many Nebraskans on his campaign tour.<sup>57</sup> The accusations went on and on.

Other techniques were used. Sample party ballots were printed. Bryan was compared with Jefferson, in that they both had been abused by the people before election time. The *Omaha World-Herald* offered a \$25 reward to anyone who discovered an election fraud. Many Democratic papers saw Bryan winning a magnificent victory with the support of the common people. One editor foresaw a Republican plot to win the states of West Virginia and Kentucky when Negro workers were brought into these states to work on the railroads.<sup>58</sup>

These and similar incidents were carried to extremes in an effort to create a bad Republican image. The fact remains that the Democratic press had little with which to work in the way of issues and only one strong personality—that of William Jennings Bryan.

The state political scene was similar to the national in many respects. Both Governor William A. Poynter, a Fusionist running for reelection, and Charles E. Dietrich, his Republican opponent, ran mainly on national issues. Poynter was called upon, however, to defend his administration. His government was accused of fraud, corruption, and incompetency. The governor was criticized for a seemingly unwise pardon of John Benwell Kearns, who had killed a Cass County farmer. Bad appointments and favoritism with state school funds were other indictments.<sup>59</sup> Fusionists, on the other hand, insisted that Nebraska had never fared better than under Governor Poynter. Each press claimed that the other lied, while the gubernatorial candidates hoped to ride the coattails of their corresponding presidential aspirants to victory.<sup>60</sup>

The time of decision finally came for the voters. J. Sterling Morton cast his vote on November 6 in Nebraska City explaining: "I am going to shut my eyes, hold my nose, vote, go home and disinfect myself."<sup>61</sup> It seems that Morton was not overly excited about the potentialities of either candidate. To the opposite extreme, many Nebraskans enthusiastically flocked to the polls to vote and anxiously awaited the results. The opera house in Auburn was filled to capacity until after midnight with people who listened to the election returns as they were read from the stage. The Fusionists remained until about midnight; then they left one by one, declaring that the returns were from a Republican source. They expressed interest in hearing from

the solid South, but most realized that their cause was lost.<sup>62</sup>

William McKinley gained an overwhelming victory. With a plurality of over 800,000 votes, he captured twenty-nine of forty-five states. His electoral vote was the largest in the previous ten elections, showing a count of 292 to 155. The main reason for this landslide vote was that six western states—Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas, Wyoming, Utah, and Washington—changed from Democratic in 1896 to Republican in 1900. Only Kentucky reversed this trend. Bryan made significant popular vote gains in the Northeast, particularly in New York where he had campaigned so diligently, but he was not able to gain a majority in any of these states. Only the Southern states and four free-silver states in the West backed him.

The Republicans added to their victory by capturing both houses of the United States Congress. In the Nebraska congressional vote, the Republicans won their races in the first and second districts, while the Fusionists won the other four districts. This indicates that the Fusionists had strong candidates in some areas, although nationally their leadership was waning.

In the Nebraska presidential race McKinley reversed the decision of 1896. In their first battle Bryan had carried the state by over 13,000 votes, but in the second contest he lost by over 7,000 votes. McKinley gained most of his strength from the populous eastern part of the state and from the area west of the 100th meridian, where he picked up fourteen new counties from the 1896 tabulation and carried a total of eighteen out of twenty-four western counties in 1900.

The vote for governor was extremely close with Dietrich polling 113,879 votes to Poynter's 113,018 votes. Poynter actually had carried more counties, fifty to forty, but Dietrich was able to carry the important ones, including Lancaster, Otoe, Cass, Douglas, and Dodge. Most of the counties that had gone for McKinley also backed Dietrich. The Republicans made a clean sweep of state offices by carrying both the Nebraska Senate by an eighteen to fifteen margin and the House by a fifty-four to forty-six count.<sup>63</sup>

As the first impact of the election subsided, many reflected on its outcome. "What chance," asked one Nebraska editor, "did poor Bryan have against good times, good money, good crops, good prices, and good men?"<sup>64</sup> Others concurred with



*President William McKinley (right) remained aloof from political activity in the 1900 campaign but Republican Party Chairman Marcus A. (Mark) Hanna (left) brought his special train into Nebraska to electioneer in eastern counties.*

this thinking and added their own ideas. The success of the Republican Party in associating itself with the prosperity at the turn of the century was a major factor. Many Nebraska newspaper editors listed prosperity as the main reason for Republican success in 1900. Even Bryan stated that prosperity hurt his chances more than any other issue.<sup>65</sup> This, coupled with the terrific effort of the Republican press in Nebraska, and the lack of significant Democratic issues were damaging to Bryan.

Also to be considered was the fact that Populism had reached its climax in the failure of 1896 and many voters had returned to the Republican Party by 1900.<sup>66</sup> "Political fusion of all dissatisfied elements may flourish for a time," wrote one editor, "but as soon as the newness wears off, people become tired of affiliating with combinations made for a division of spoils and they fall away to go back to former associations."<sup>67</sup> The farmers wanted higher prices, and by 1900 they were getting them. Now that their main grievance was allayed, they were "content once more to worship at old altars." They felt financially secure again and feared the disturbing effect of any change.<sup>68</sup>

A final and most decisive factor was the excellent and

far-reaching campaigning in Nebraska by the Republicans as opposed to Bryan's partial neglect of Nebraska. Roosevelt and Hanna worked hard and their effort was essential in driving home the main Republican objectives during the campaign. The new vice-president gained a tremendous popularity in Nebraska which became apparent four years later when all ninety Nebraska counties supported him in his successful campaign for the presidency.<sup>69</sup> With the double-barreled attack of the dynamic Roosevelt personality and the prosperity of McKinley's administration, the Republicans swept to victory in Nebraska and the nation in 1900.

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