

= William Jennings Bryan presidential campaign , 1896 =

In 1896 , William Jennings Bryan ran unsuccessfully for President of the United States . Bryan , a former Democratic congressman from Nebraska , gained his party 's presidential nomination in July of that year after electrifying the Democratic National Convention with his Cross of Gold speech . He was defeated in the general election by the Republican candidate , former Ohio governor William McKinley .

Born in 1860 , Bryan grew up in rural Illinois and in 1887 moved to Nebraska , where he practiced law and entered politics . He won election to the House of Representatives in 1890 , and was re-elected in 1892 , before mounting an unsuccessful US Senate run . He set his sights on higher office , believing he could be elected president in 1896 even though he remained a relatively minor figure in the Democratic Party . In anticipation of a presidential campaign , he spent much of 1895 and early 1896 making speeches across the United States ; his compelling oratory increased his popularity in his party .

Bryan often spoke on the issue of the currency . The economic Panic of 1893 had left the nation in a deep recession , which still persisted in early 1896 . Bryan and many other Democrats believed the economic malaise could be remedied through a return to bimetallism , or free silver ? a policy they believed would inflate the currency and make it easier for debtors to repay loans . Bryan went to the Democratic convention in Chicago as an undeclared candidate , whom the press had given only a small chance of becoming the Democratic nominee . His ' Cross of Gold ' speech , given to conclude the debate on the party platform , immediately transformed him into a favorite for the nomination , and he won it the next day . The Democrats nominated Arthur Sewall , a wealthy Maine banker and shipbuilder , for vice president . The left wing Populist Party (which had hoped to nominate the only silver supporting candidate) endorsed Bryan for president , but found Sewall unacceptable , substituting Thomas E. Watson of Georgia .

Abandoned by many gold supporting party leaders and newspapers after the Chicago convention , Bryan undertook an extensive tour by rail to bring his campaign to the people . He spoke some 600 times , to an estimated 5 ,000 ,000 listeners . His campaign focused on silver , an issue that failed to appeal to the urban voter , and he was defeated .

The 1896 race is generally seen as a realigning election . The coalition of wealthy , middle class and urban voters that defeated Bryan kept the Republicans in power for most of the time until 1932 . Although defeated in the election , Bryan 's campaign made him a national figure , which he remained until his death in 1925 .

= = Background = =

= = = Bryan = = =

William Jennings Bryan was born in rural Salem , Illinois in 1860 . His father , Silas Bryan , was a Jacksonian Democrat , judge , lawyer and local party activist . As a judge 's son , the younger Bryan had ample opportunity to observe the art of speechmaking in courtrooms , political rallies , and at church and revival meetings . In post Civil War America , oratory was highly prized , and Bryan showed aptitude for it from a young age , raised in his father 's house in Salem . Attending Illinois College beginning in 1877 , Bryan devoted himself to winning the school prize for speaking . He won the prize in his junior year , and also secured the affection of Mary Baird , a student at a nearby women 's academy . She became his wife , and was his principal assistant throughout his career .

While attending law school from 1881 to 1883 , Bryan was a clerk to former Illinois senator Lyman Trumbull , who influenced him in a dislike for wealth and business monopolies . Bryan was strongly affected by the emerging Social Gospel movement that called on Protestant activists to seek to cure social problems such as poverty . Looking for a growing city in which his practice could thrive , he moved to Lincoln , Nebraska in 1887 .

Bryan quickly became prominent in Lincoln as a lawyer and a public speaker , becoming known as the " Boy Orator of the Platte " . In 1890 , he agreed to run for Congress against William J. Connell , a Republican , who had won the local congressional seat in 1888 . At that time , Nebraska was suffering hard times as many farmers had difficulties making ends meet due to low grain prices , and many Americans were discontented with the existing two major political parties . As a result , disillusioned farmers and others formed a new far @-@ left party , which came to be known as the Populist Party . The Populists proposed both greater government control over the economy (with some calling for government ownership of railroads) and giving the people power over government through the secret ballot , direct election of United States Senators (who were , until 1913 , elected by state legislatures) , and replacement of the Electoral College with direct election of the president and vice president by popular vote . Party members in many states , including Nebraska , demanded inflation of the currency through issuance of paper or silver currency , allowing easier repayment of debt . After a candidate backed by the nascent Populists withdrew , Bryan defeated Connell for the seat by 6 @, @ 700 votes (nearly doubling Connell 's 1888 margin) , receiving support from the Populists and Prohibitionists .

In Congress , Bryan was appointed to the powerful Ways and Means Committee and became a major spokesman on the tariff and money questions . He introduced several proposals for the direct election of senators and to eliminate tariff barriers in industries dominated by monopolies or trusts . This advocacy brought him contributions from silver mine owners in his successful re @-@ election bid in 1892 . In the 1892 presidential election , former Democratic president Grover Cleveland defeated the Republican incumbent , Benjamin Harrison , to regain his office . Bryan did not support Cleveland , making it clear he preferred the Populist candidate , James B. Weaver , though he indicated that as a loyal Democrat , he would vote the party ticket .

In May 1894 , Bryan announced he would not seek re @-@ election to the House of Representatives , feeling the incessant need to raise money to campaign in a marginal district was inhibiting his political career . Instead , he sought the Senate seat that the Nebraska legislature would fill in January 1895 . Although Bryan was successful in winning the non @-@ binding popular vote , Republicans gained a majority in the legislature and elected John Thurston as senator .

= = = Economic depression ; rise of free silver = = =

The question of the currency had been a major political issue since the mid @-@ 1870s . Advocates of free silver (or bimetallism) wanted the government to accept all silver bullion presented to it and to return it , struck into coin , at the historic value ratio between gold and silver of 16 to 1 . This would restore a practice abolished in 1873 . A free silver policy would inflate the currency , as the silver in a dollar coin was worth just over half the face value / Someone who presented ten dollars in silver bullion would receive back almost twice that in silver coin . Advocates believed these proposals would lead to prosperity , while opponents warned that varying from the gold standard (which the United States had , effectively , used since 1873) would cause problems in international trade .

The 1878 Bland @-@ Allison Act and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 required the government to buy large quantities of silver and strike it into coin . They had been passed as compromises between free silver and the gold standard . Bryan , who had been elected after the passage of the latter enactment , initially had little to say on the subject . Free silver was very popular among Nebraskans , though many powerful Democrats opposed it . After his election to Congress , Bryan studied the currency question carefully , and came to believe in free silver ; he also saw its political potential . By 1893 , Bryan had become a leading supporter of free silver , arguing in a speech in St. Louis that the gold standard was deflationary " making a man pay a debt with a dollar larger than the one he borrowed ... If this robbery is permitted , the farmer will be ruined , and then the cities will suffer . "

Even as Cleveland took office as president in March 1893 , there were signs of an economic decline . Sherman 's act required the government to pay out gold in exchange for silver and paper currency , and through the early months of 1893 gold flowed out of the Treasury . On April 22 , 1893

, the amount of gold in the Treasury dropped below \$ 100 million for the first time since 1879 , adding to the unease . Rumors that Europeans were about to redeem a large sum for gold caused desperate selling on the stock market , the start of the Panic of 1893 . By August , many firms had gone bankrupt , and a special session of Congress convened , called by Cleveland to repeal the silver purchase act . Bryan , who was still in Congress , spoke eloquently against the repeal , but Cleveland forced it through . The President 's uncompromising stand for gold alienated many in his own party (most southern and western Democrats were pro @-@ silver) . The economy failed to improve , and when the President in 1894 sent federal troops to Illinois to break up the Pullman strike , he outraged even more Democrats . In late 1894 , pro @-@ silver Democrats began to organize in the hope of taking control of the party from Cleveland and other Gold Democrats and nominating a silver candidate in 1896 . In this , they were led by Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld , who had opposed Cleveland over the Pullman strike . The Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress in the 1894 midterm elections , with a number of southern states , usually solid for the Democrats , electing Republican or Populist congressmen .

In 1893 , bimetallism had been just one of many proposals by Populists and others . As the economic downturn continued , free silver advocates blamed its continuation on the repeal of the silver purchase act , and the issue of silver became more prominent . Free silver especially resonated among farmers in the South and West , as well as miners . June 1894 marked the publication of William H. Harvey 's Coin 's Financial School . The book , composed of accounts of (fictitious) lectures on the silver issue given by an adolescent named Coin to Chicago audiences , became an immense bestseller . The book included (as foils to the title character) many of Chicago 's most prominent men of business ; some , such as banker and future Secretary of the Treasury Lyman Gage , issued denials that they had participated in any such lectures . This popular treatment of the currency issue was highly influential . A Missourian , Ezra Peters , wrote to Illinois Senator John M. Palmer , " Coins [sic] Financial School is raising h ? in this neck of the woods . If those in favor of honest money don 't do something to offset its influence the country is going to the dogs . " A Minnesota correspondent wrote in Outlook magazine : " high school boys are about equally divided between silver and baseball , with a decided leaning toward the former " .

= = Dark horse candidate = =

= = = Preparation = = =

In March 1895 , the same month he left Congress , Bryan passed his 35th birthday , making him constitutionally eligible for the presidency . By then , he had come to see his nomination for that office as possible , even likely . Bryan believed he could use the coalition @-@ building techniques he had applied in gaining election to Congress , uniting pro @-@ silver forces behind him to gain the Democratic nomination and the presidency . To that end , it was important that the Populists not nominate a rival silver candidate , and he took pains to cultivate good relations with Populist leaders . Through 1895 and early 1896 , Bryan sought to make himself as widely known as an advocate for silver as possible . He had accepted the nominal editorship of the Omaha World @-@ Herald in August 1894 . The position involved no day @-@ to @-@ day duties , but allowed him to publish his political commentaries . In the 17 months between his departure from Congress and the Democratic National Convention in July 1896 , Bryan travelled widely through the South and West , speaking on silver . At every stop , he made contacts that he later cultivated . Several times , in his addresses , Bryan repeated variations on lines he had spoken in Congress in December 1894 , decrying the gold standard , " I will not help to crucify mankind upon a cross of gold . I will not aid them to press down upon the bleeding brow of labor this crown of thorns . "

Historian H. Wayne Morgan described Bryan :

Robert La Follette remembered Bryan as " a tall , slender , handsome fellow who looked like a young divine " . A streak of the moralist preacher raised his political chances among a people attuned to the biblical phrase and Shakespearan [sic] stance . He was a fine actor , with a justly

famous voice , but was not a charlatan . Bryan believed in the out @-@ dated Jeffersonian virtues he preached in the Hamiltonian world of 1896 ... He was young , had a respectable but not burdensome record , came from the West , and understood the arts of conciliation . Though men thought otherwise at the time , neither fate nor accident created his position in the party .

Through early 1896 , Bryan quietly sought the nomination . Any possible candidacy depended on silver supporters being successful in electing the bulk of convention delegates ; accordingly Bryan backed such efforts . He maintained contact with silver partisans in other parties , hopeful of gathering them in after a nomination . His campaign was low @-@ key , without excessive publicity : Bryan did not want to attract the attention of more prominent candidates . He continued to give speeches , and collected his traveling expenses , and most often a speaking fee , from those who had invited him .

Bryan faced a number of disadvantages in seeking the Democratic nomination : he was little @-@ known among Americans who did not follow politics closely , he had no money to pour into his campaign , he lacked public office , and had incurred the enmity of Cleveland and his administration through his stance on silver and other issues . There was little advantage to the Democratic Party in nominating a candidate from Nebraska , a state small in population that had never voted for a Democrat . As state conventions met to nominate delegates to the July national convention , for the most part , they supported silver , and sent silver men to Chicago . Gold Democrats had success in the Northeast , and little elsewhere . Most state conventions did not bind , or " instruct " , their delegates to vote for a specific candidate for the nomination ; this course was strongly supported by Bryan . Once delegates were selected , Bryan wrote to party officials and obtained a list ; he sent copies of his speeches , clippings from the World @-@ Herald , and his photograph to each delegate .

In June 1896 , Bryan 's old teacher , former senator Trumbull died ; on the day of his funeral , Bryan 's mother also died , suddenly in Salem . Bryan spoke at her funeral , quoting lines from Second Timothy : " I have fought a good fight , I have finished my course , I have kept the faith . " He also attended , as a correspondent for the World @-@ Herald , the Republican convention that month in St. Louis . The Republicans , at the request of their nominee for president , former Ohio governor William McKinley , included a plank in their party platform supporting the gold standard . Bryan was deeply moved when , after the adoption of the platform , Colorado Senator Henry M. Teller led a walkout of silver @-@ supporting Republicans . Bryan 's biographer , Paolo Coletta , suggests that Bryan may have played a part in inciting the silver men 's departure ; he was in close contact with Silver Republicans such as Teller and South Dakota Senator Richard Pettigrew . Historian James Barnes wrote of Bryan 's preparations :

The Nebraskan merely understood the political situation better than most of those who might have been his rivals , and he took advantage in a legitimate and thoroughly honorable manner of the existing conditions . He knew that hard work could turn the discontent of the people into a revolt against the gold wing of the party , and no group of individuals ever labored more diligently to gain their political ends than did the silver men in the [Democratic Party] between 1893 and 1896 . Bryan sensed the possibility of becoming the nominee long before 1896 ; his ambition was fully matured several months prior to the convention , and there is evidence that his hopes were becoming tinged with certainty before he left for Chicago .

= = = Convention = = =

In the run up to the Democratic National Convention , set to begin at the Chicago Coliseum on July 7 , 1896 , no candidate was seen as an overwhelming favorite for the presidential nomination . The leading candidates were former Missouri congressman Richard P. Bland and former Iowa governor Horace Boies . " Silver Dick " Bland was seen as the elder statesman of the silver movement ; he had originated the Bland @-@ Allison Act of 1878 , while Boies ' victories for governor in a normally Republican state made him attractive as a candidate who might compete with McKinley in the crucial Midwest . Both had openly declared their candidacies , and were the only Democrats to have organizations seeking to obtain pledged delegates . Neither candidate had much money to spend on

his campaign . In addition to the frontrunners , other silver men were spoken of as candidates . These included Vice President Adlai Stevenson of Illinois , Senator Joseph C. Blackburn of Kentucky , Indiana Governor Claude Matthews , and Bryan . Illinois Governor Altgeld , a leader of the silver movement , was ineligible because he was not a natural @-@ born U.S. citizen as required for the presidency in the Constitution . When Senator Teller walked out of the Republican convention in protest over the currency plank , he immediately became another possible candidate for the Democratic nomination for president . However , he was deemed unlikely to succeed , as many Democrats feared that if elected , he might fill some patronage jobs with Republicans . President Cleveland spent the week of the convention fishing , and had no comment about the events there ; political scientist Richard Bense attributes Cleveland 's political inaction to the President 's loss of influence in his party .

Bryan 's Nebraska delegation left Lincoln by train on July 5 . Carrying some 200 people , the train bore signs on each of its five cars , such as " The W.J. Bryan Club " and " Keep Your Eye on Nebraska . " Bryan 's strategy was simple : maintain a low profile as a candidate until the last possible moment , then give a speech that rallied the silver forces behind him and bring about his nomination . He was utterly confident that he would succeed , believing " the logic of the situation , " as he later put it , dictated his selection . He explained to Champ Clark , the future Speaker of the House , that Bland and others from southern states would fail because of prejudice towards the old Confederacy , that Boies could not be nominated because he was too little @-@ known , and all others would fail due to lack of support ? leaving only himself .

Coletta noted the problems faced by Bryan in obtaining the nomination , and how his groundwork helped overcome them :

The maneuver that paid Bryan highest dividends was his fifteen months of missionary work in behalf of silver and cultivation of the Chicago delegates . He knew personally more delegates than did any other candidate ... and he was on the ground to supervise his strategy . When he spoke of himself as the nominee , some reacted as [journalist] Willis J. Abbot did and doubted his mental capacity . How could a boy in appearance , one not yet admitted to the convention , without a single state behind him , dare claim the nomination ? The answer was simple , Bryan told Abbot ? he had prepared a speech that would stampede the convention .

Bryan stayed at the Clifton House , a modest hotel adjoining the opulent Palmer House . A large banner outside the Clifton House proclaimed the presence of Nebraska 's delegation headquarters , but did not mention Bryan 's campaign , which was run from Nebraska 's rooms . The main candidates headquartered at the Palmer House , their rooms often crowded as they served free alcoholic drinks . The Coliseum was located in a " dry " district of Chicago but the hotels were not .

Just before the convention , the Democratic National Committee (DNC) made initial determinations of which delegations were to be seated ? once convened , delegates would make the final determination after the convention 's Credentials Committee reported . The DNC seated a rival , pro @-@ gold Nebraska delegation , and recommended New York Senator David B. Hill as the convention 's temporary chairman , each by a vote of 27 ? 23 . Bryan was present when it was announced that his delegation would not be initially seated ; reports state he acted " somewhat surprised " at the outcome . Since the DNC action meant Bryan would not have a seat at the start of proceedings , he could not be the temporary chairman (who would deliver the keynote address) ; the Nebraskan began looking for other opportunities to make a speech at the convention . Historian James A. Barnes deemed the DNC 's vote immaterial ; once the convention met on July 7 , it quickly elected a silver man , Virginia Senator John Daniel , as temporary chairman and appointed a committee to review credentials friendly to the silver cause .

As the committees met , the convention proceeded , though in considerable confusion . Many of the silver men had not attended a national convention before , and were unfamiliar with its procedures . Members of the Committee on Resolutions (also called the Platform Committee) intended to elect California Senator Stephen M. White as chairman ; they found that he had already been co @-@ opted as permanent chairman of the convention . Bryan had been widely supported as a candidate for permanent chairman by the silver men , but some western delegates on the Committee on Permanent Organization objected , stating that they wanted the chance to support Bryan for the

nomination (the permanent chairman was customarily ruled out as a candidate) .

Delegates spent most of the first two days listening to various speeches by silver supporters . The first report from the Credentials Committee , on the afternoon of July 8 , recommended the seating of Bryan 's delegation . This was a matter of intense interest for the silver delegates : Bryan had written to large numbers of delegates urging them to support his men over their gold rivals ; once in Chicago , he and his fellow Nebraskans had spoken with many others about the dispute . The convention , by voice vote , seated the silver Nebraskans , who arrived in the convention hall a few minutes later , accompanied by a band . Soon afterwards , the delegates , bored , shouted for a speech from Bryan , but he was not to be found .

Once seated , Bryan went to the Platform Committee meeting at the Palmer House , displacing the Nebraska gold delegate on the committee . The proposed platform was pro @-@ silver ; Senator Hill had offered an amendment backing the gold standard , which had been defeated by committee vote . As Hill was determined to take the platform fight to the full convention , the committee discussed who should speak in the debate , and allocated 75 minutes to each side . South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman , a silver supporter , wanted an hour to address the convention , and to close the debate . When both Hill and Bryan (who was selected as the other pro @-@ silver speaker) objected to such a long closing address , Tillman settled for 50 minutes and for opening the debate rather than closing it ; Bryan was given 25 minutes to close . Bryan later asked the Platform Committee chairman , Arkansas Senator James K. Jones why he was given such a crucial role as closing the platform debate ; Senator Jones responded that he had three reasons : Bryan 's long service in the silver cause , the Nebraskan was the only major speaker not to have addressed the convention , and that Jones had a sore throat . That evening , Bryan dined with his wife and with friends . Looking upon the loud Boies and Bland supporters , Bryan commented , " These people don 't know it , but they will be cheering for me just this way tomorrow night . "

= = = Speech = = =

On the morning of July 9 , 1896 , thousands of people waited outside the Coliseum , hoping to hear the platform debate . The galleries were quickly packed , but the delegates , slowed by fatigue from the first two days and the long journey from the downtown hotels , were slower to arrive . It was not until 10 : 45 am , three @-@ quarters of an hour late , that Chairman White called the convention to order . Bryan arrived during the delay ; he was greeted with a musical tribute from one of the convention bands , which then returned to playing a medley of Irish melodies . Once White started the proceedings , he turned over the gavel to Senator Jones , who read the proposed platform to great applause from silver delegates , and hissing from gold men . The minority report attracted the opposite reaction .

Senator Tillman , a fiery speaker who wore a pitchfork on his lapel , began the debate . His speech , set as the only one besides Bryan 's in favor of silver , portrayed silver as a sectional issue pitting the poorer folk of the South and West against gold @-@ supporting New York and the rest of the Northeast . It was badly received even by silver delegates , who wished to think of silver as a patriotic , national issue . Senator Jones felt compelled to spend five minutes (granted by the gold side) , stating that the silver issue crossed sectional lines . New York Senator Hill was next : the leading spokesman for gold , both gold and silver delegates quieted to hear him . He was followed by Senator William Vilas of Wisconsin and former Massachusetts Governor William D. Russell . Each made their cases for gold , and likely changed few votes . Only Bryan was left to speak , and no one at the convention had yet effectively championed the silver cause . The New York Times described the setting :

There never was such a propitious moment for such an orator than that which fell to Bryan . The minority [gold faction] had just been pleased and the majority had just been depressed and mortified by the appearance , as the champion of free silver , of Tillman ... The minority had indicated its position . The majority felt exposed , crestfallen , and humiliated .

Writer Edgar Lee Masters , who witnessed Bryan 's speech , remembered , " Suddenly I saw a man spring up from his seat among the delegates and with the agility and swiftness of an eager boxer

hurry to the speaker 's rostrum . He was slim , tall , pale , raven @-@ haired , beaked of nose . " The Nebraska delegation waved red handkerchiefs as Bryan progressed to the podium ; he wore an alpaca sack suit more typical of Lincoln and the West than of Chicago . There was loud cheering as Bryan stood at the lectern ; it took him a full minute to gain silence . He began :

I would be presumptuous , indeed , to present myself against the distinguished gentlemen to whom you have listened if this were a mere measuring of abilities ; but this is not a contest between persons . The humblest citizen in all the land , when clad in the armor of a righteous cause , is stronger than all the hosts of error . I come to speak to you in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty ? the cause of humanity .

Bryan , with this declaration , set the theme of his argument , and as it would prove , his campaign : that the welfare of humanity was at stake with the silver issue . According to his biographer Michael Kazin , " Bryan felt he was serving his part in a grander conflict that began with Christ and showed no sign of approaching its end . " From the start , Bryan had his audience : when he finished a sentence , they would rise , shout and cheer , then quiet themselves to ready for the next words ; the Nebraskan later described the convention as like a trained choir . He dismissed arguments that the business men of the East favored the gold standard :

We say to you that you have made the definition of a business man too limited in its application . The man who is employed for wages is as much a business man as his employer ; the attorney in a country town is as much a business man as the corporation counsel in a great metropolis ; the merchant at the cross @-@ roads store is as much a business man as the merchant of New York ; the farmer who goes forth in the morning and toils all day , who begins in spring and toils all summer , and who by the application of brain and muscle to the natural resources of the country creates wealth , is as much a business man as the man who goes upon the Board of Trade and bets upon the price of grain ; the miners who go down a thousand feet into the earth , or climb two thousand feet upon the cliffs , and bring forth from their hiding places the precious metals to be poured into the channels of trade are as much business men as the few financial magnates who , in a back room , corner the money of the world . We come to speak of this broader class of business men .

Many of the elements of the speech had appeared in prior Bryan addresses . However , the business man argument was new , though he had hinted at it in an interview he gave at the Republican convention . Bryan always regarded that argument as the speech 's most powerful part , despite the fame its conclusion would gain . He responded to an argument by Senator Vilas that from silver forces might arise a Robespierre . Bryan affirmed that the people could be counted on to prevent the rise of a tyrant , and noted , " What we need is an Andrew Jackson to stand , as Jackson stood , against the encroachments of organized wealth . " He continued :

Upon which side will 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 which the party must answer first , and then it must be answered by each individual hereafter . The sympathies of the Democratic Party , as shown by the platform , are on the side of the struggling masses , who have ever been the foundation of the Democratic Party .

Bryan concluded the address , seizing a place in American history :

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 . "

As he spoke his final sentence , he brought his hands to his head , fingers extended in imitation of thorns ; amid dead silence in the Coliseum , he extended his arms , recalling with words and posture the Crucifixion of Jesus , and held that position for several seconds . He then lowered his arms , and began the journey back to his seat in the silence .

Bryan described the stillness as " really painful " ; his anxieties that he might have failed were soon broken by pandemonium . The New York World reported , " The floor of the convention seemed to heave up . Everybody seemed to go mad at once . " In a demonstration of some half an hour , Bryan was carried around the floor , then surrounded with cheering supporters . Men and women threw their hats into the air , not caring where they might come down . Delegates were shouting to begin

the vote and nominate Bryan immediately , which he refused to consider , feeling that if his appeal could not last overnight , it would not last until November . Bryan left the convention , returning to his hotel to await the outcome . In the midst of the crazed crowd , Altgeld , a Bland supporter , commented to his friend , lawyer Clarence Darrow , " That is the greatest speech I ever listened to . I don 't know but its effect will be to nominate him . "

= = = Nomination = = =

When order was restored after Bryan 's speech , the convention passed the platform , voting down the minority report and a resolution in support of the Cleveland administration ; it then recessed for a few hours until 8 : 00 pm , when nominating speeches were to be made . According to The Boston Globe , Bryan " had locked himself within the four walls at the Clifton House , down town , and there blushes unseen . The dark horse is in his stall , feasting on the oats of hope and political straws . " Bryan had made no arrangements for formal nominating speeches given the short timeframe , and was surprised when word was brought to him at the Clifton House that he had been nominated by Henry Lewis of Georgia : the candidate had expected the Kansas delegation to name him . As Missouri Senator George Vest nominated Bland , his oratory was drowned out by the gallery , " Bryan , Bryan , W.J. Bryan " .

The balloting for the presidential nomination was held on July 10 , the day after the speech ; a two @-@ thirds majority was needed to nominate . Bryan remained at his hotel , sending word to his fellow Nebraskans , " There must be no pledging , no promising , on any subject with anybody . No delegation must be permitted to violate instructions given by a state convention . Our delegation should not be too prominent in applause . Treat all candidates fairly . " On the first ballot , Bryan had 137 votes , mostly from Nebraska and four southern states , trailing Bland who had 235 ; Boies was fourth with 67 votes and was never a factor in the balloting . Bland maintained his lead on the second and third ballots , but on the fourth , with the convention in a huge uproar , Bryan took the lead . Governor Altgeld had held Illinois , which was subject to the " unit rule " whereby the entirety of a state 's vote was cast as a majority of that state 's delegation directed . After the fourth ballot , the Illinois delegation caucused and Altgeld was one of only two remaining Bland supporters , thus giving Bryan all of the state 's 48 votes and bringing him near the two @-@ thirds mark and the nomination . On the fifth ballot , other states joined the Bryan bandwagon , making him the Democratic candidate for president .

At the Clifton House , Bryan 's rooms were overwhelmed with those wishing to congratulate him , despite the efforts of police to keep the crowds at bay . Bryan quipped , " I seem to have plenty of friends now , but I remember well when they were very few . " He left the choice of a running mate to the convention ; delegates selected Maine shipbuilder Arthur Sewall . Active in Democratic Party politics , Sewall was one of the few eastern party leaders to support silver , was wealthy and could help finance the campaign ; he also balanced the ticket geographically . According to historian Stanley Jones in his account of the 1896 election , " it seemed in retrospect a curious logic that gave a capitalist from Maine a leading role in a campaign intended to have a strong appeal to the masses of the South and West " . Bryan and Sewall gained their nominations without the ballots of the gold men , most of whom refused to vote . Amid talk that the Gold Democrats would form their own party , Senator Hill was asked if he remained a Democrat . " I was a Democrat before the Convention and am a Democrat still ? very still . "

= = General election campaign = =

Bryan 's nomination was denounced by many establishment Democrats . President Cleveland , stunned by the convention 's repudiation of him and his policies , decided against open support for a bolt from the party , either by endorsing McKinley or by publicly backing a rival Democratic ticket . Nevertheless , Gold Democrats began plans to hold their own convention , which took place in September . Many Cleveland supporters decried Bryan as no true Democrat , but a fanatic and socialist , his nomination procured through demagoguery . Some of the Democratic political

machines , such as New York 's Tammany Hall , decided to ignore the national ticket and concentrate on electing local and congressional candidates . Large numbers of traditionally Democratic newspapers refused to support Bryan , including the New York World , whose circulation of 800 @, @ 000 was the nation 's largest , and major dailies in cities such as Philadelphia , Detroit , and Brooklyn . Southern newspapers stayed with Bryan ; they were unwilling to endorse McKinley , the choice of most African Americans , though few of them could vote in the South . Newspapers that supported other parties in western silver states , such as the Populist Rocky Mountain News of Denver , Colorado , and Utah 's Republican The Salt Lake Tribune , quickly endorsed Bryan .

Following his nomination in June , McKinley 's team had believed that the election would be fought on the issue of the protective tariff . Chicago banker Charles G. Dawes , a McKinley advisor who had known Bryan when both lived in Lincoln , had predicted to McKinley and his friend and campaign manager , Mark Hanna , that if Bryan had the chance to speak to the convention , he would be its choice . McKinley and Hanna gently mocked Dawes , telling him that Bland would be the nominee . In the three weeks between the two conventions , McKinley spoke only on the tariff question , and when journalist Murat Halstead telephoned him from Chicago to inform him that Bryan would be nominated , he responded dismissively and hung up the phone . When Bryan was nominated on a silver platform , the Republicans were briefly gratified , believing that Bryan 's selection would result in an easy victory for McKinley .

Despite the confidence of the Republicans , the nomination of Bryan sparked great excitement through the nation . His program of prosperity through free silver struck an emotional chord with the American people in a way that McKinley 's protective tariff did not . Many Republican leaders had gone on vacation for the summer , believing that the fight , on their terms , would take place in the fall . Bryan 's endorsement , soon after Chicago , by the Populists , his statement that he would undertake a nationwide tour on an unprecedented scale , and word from local activists of the strong silver sentiment in areas Republicans had to win to take the election , jarred McKinley 's party from its complacency .

= = = Populist nominee = = =

The Populist strategy for 1896 was to nominate the candidate most supportive of silver . Populist leaders correctly believed the Republicans unlikely to nominate a silver man . They hoped the Democrats either would not endorse silver in their platform or if they did , that the Democratic candidate would be someone who could be painted as weak on silver . Bryan 's sterling record on the issue left the Populists with a stark choice : They could endorse Bryan , and risk losing their separate identity as a party , or nominate another candidate , thus dividing the pro @-@ silver vote to McKinley 's benefit . According to Stanley Jones , " the Democratic endorsement of silver and Bryan at Chicago precipitated the disintegration " of the Populist Party ; it was never again a force in national politics after 1896 .

Even before their convention in late July , the Populists faced dissent in their ranks . Former Populist governor of Colorado Davis H. Waite wrote to former congressman Ignatius Donnelly that the Democrats had returned to their roots and " nominated a good & true man on the platform . Of course I support him . " Populist Kansas Congressman Jerry Simpson wrote , " I care not for party names . It is the substance we are after , and we have it with William J. Bryan . " Many Populists saw the election of Bryan , whose positions on many issues were not far from theirs , as the quickest path to the reforms they sought ; a majority of delegates to the convention in St. Louis favored him . However , many delegates disliked Sewall because of his wealth and ownership of a large business , and believed that nominating someone else would keep Populist issues alive in the campaign . Although they nominated Bryan for president , they chose Georgia 's Thomas E. Watson as vice @-@ presidential candidate ; some hoped Bryan would dump Sewall from his ticket . Bryan did not ; Senator Jones (as the new Democratic National Committee chairman , in charge of the campaign) stated , " Mr. Sewall , will , of course , remain on the ticket , and Mr. Watson can do what he likes . "

Historian R. Hal Williams , in his book about the 1896 campaign , believes that the Populist nomination did Bryan little good ; most Populists would have voted for him anyway and the

endorsement allowed his opponents to paint him and his supporters as extremists . The vice presidential squabble , Williams argues , worried voters who feared that instability would follow a Bryan victory , and drove them towards McKinley . Populist leader Henry Demarest Lloyd described silver as the " cow @-@ bird " of the Populist Party , which had pushed aside all other issues . The National Silver Party , mostly former Republicans , met at the same time as the Populists ; both conventions were in St. Louis . They quickly endorsed Bryan and Sewall , urging all silver forces to unite behind that ticket .

= = = New York visit = = =

After the Democratic convention , Bryan had returned triumphantly to Lincoln , making speeches along the way . At home , he took a short rest , and was visited by Senator Jones to discuss plans for the campaign . Bryan was not interested in campaign organization ; what he wanted from the DNC was enough money to conduct a national tour by train . The campaign , as it proved , was badly organized : This was Jones ' first national campaign , and the party structure in many states was either only newly in the control of silver forces , or in gold states wanted no part of the national ticket . With little money , poor organization , and a hostile press , Bryan was his campaign 's most important asset , and he wanted to reach the voters by traveling to them . According to Stanley Jones in his study of the 1896 campaign , " Bryan expected that he alone , carrying to the people the message of free silver , would win the election for his party . "

Bryan set the formal acceptance of his nomination for August 12 at New York 's Madison Square Garden ; he left Lincoln five days earlier by rail , and spoke 38 times along the way , sometimes from the trackside in his nightgown . While speaking in McKinley 's hometown of Canton , Ohio , Bryan yielded to impulse and called upon his rival at his home with Congressman Bland ; the Republican candidate and his wife , somewhat startled , received the two men hospitably in a scene Williams calls , " surely bizarre . " August 12 was an extremely hot day in New York , especially for the crowd jammed into the Garden ; when Missouri Governor William J. Stone , chair of the notification committee , essayed a lengthy speech , he was drowned out by the crowd , which wanted to hear " the Boy Orator of the Platte " . Many were disappointed ; the Democratic candidate read a two @-@ hour speech from a manuscript , wishing to look statesmanlike , and fearing that if he spoke without a script , the press would misrepresent his words . Many seats were vacant before he concluded .

After several days in upstate New York , during which he had a dinner with Senator Hill at which the subject of politics was carefully avoided , Bryan began a circuitous journey back to Lincoln by train . At a speech in Chicago on Labor Day , Bryan varied from the silver issue to urge regulation of corporations . According to Stanley Jones ,

The period of this tour , in the return from New York to Lincoln , was the high point of the Bryan campaign . Bryan was well rested . After invading " the enemy 's country " , he was returning to his own territory . Wherever his train went people , who had travelled from nearby farms and villages , waved and shouted encouragement . Their enthusiasm at the unrehearsed rear platform appearances and in the formal speeches was spontaneous and contagious . The smell of victory seemed to hang in the air . Perhaps a vote taken then would have given Bryan the election .

= = = Whistle @-@ stop tour = = =

Bryan 's plan for victory was to undertake a strenuous train tour , bringing his message to the people . Although Hanna and other advisors urged McKinley to get on the road , the Republican candidate declined to match Bryan 's gambit , deciding that not only was the Democrat a better stump speaker , but that however McKinley travelled , Bryan would upstage him by journeying in a less comfortable way . McKinley 's chosen strategy was a front porch campaign ; he would remain at home , giving carefully scripted speeches to visiting delegations , much to the gratification of Canton 's hot dog vendors and souvenir salesmen , who expanded facilities to meet the demand . Meanwhile , Hanna raised millions from business men to pay for speakers on the currency question

and to flood the nation with hundreds of millions of pamphlets . Starved of money , the Democrats had fewer speakers and fewer publications to issue . Bryan 's supporters raised at most \$ 500 @,@ 000 for the 1896 campaign ; McKinley 's raised at least \$ 3 @.@ 5 million . Among the foremost supporters of Bryan was publisher William Randolph Hearst who both contributed to Bryan 's campaign and slanted his newspapers ' coverage in his favor .

On September 11 , 1896 , Bryan departed on a train trip that continued until November 1 , two days before the election . At first , he rode in public cars , and made his own travel arrangements , looking up train schedules and even carrying his own bags from train station to hotel . By early October , the DNC , at the urging of Populist officials who felt Bryan was being worn out , procured the services of North Carolina journalist Josephus Daniels to make travel arrangements , and also obtained a private railroad car , The Idler ? a name Bryan thought somewhat inappropriate due to the strenuous nature of the tour . Mary Bryan had joined her husband in late September ; on The Idler , the Bryans were able to eat and sleep in relative comfort .

During this tour , Bryan spoke almost exclusively on the silver question , and attempted to mold the speeches to reflect local issues and interests . He did not campaign on Sundays , but on most other days spoke between 20 and 30 times . Crowds assembled hours or days ahead of Bryan 's arrival . The train bearing The Idler pulled in after a short journey from the last stop , and after he was greeted by local dignitaries , Bryan would give a brief speech addressing silver and the need for the people to retake the government . The shortness of the speech did not dismay the crowds , who knew his arguments well : they were there to see and hear William Jennings Bryan ? one listener told him that he had read every one of his speeches , and had ridden 50 miles (80 km) to hear him , " And , by gum , if I wasn 't a Republican , I 'd vote for you . " After a brief interval for handshakes , the train would pull out again , to another town down the track .

Throughout the nation , voters were intensely interested in the campaign , studying the flood of pamphlets . Speakers for both parties found eager audiences . Arthur F. Mullen , a resident of O 'Neill , Nebraska , described the summer and fall of 1896 :

O 'Neill buzzed with political disputation from dawn till next dawn . A bowery had been built for the Fourth of July picnic and dance . Ordinarily , it was torn down after that event . In 1896 it was kept as a forum , and by day and night men and women met there to talk about the Crime of ' 73 , the fallacies of the gold standard , bimetallism and international consent , the evils of the tariff , the moneybags of Mark Hanna , the front porch campaign of McKinley . They read W. H. Harvey 's Coin 's Financial School to themselves , their friends , and opponents ... They read Bryan when they couldn 't go off to listen to him .

Bryan rarely emphasized other issues than silver ; leader of a disparate coalition linked by the silver question , he feared alienating some of his supporters . He occasionally addressed other subjects : in an October speech in Detroit , he spoke out against the Supreme Court 's decision ruling the federal income tax unconstitutional . He promised to enforce the laws against the trusts , procure stricter ones from Congress , and if the Supreme Court struck them down , to seek a constitutional amendment . In what Williams describes as " a political campaign that became an American legend " , Bryan traveled to 27 of the 45 states , logging 18 @,@ 000 miles (29 @,@ 000 km) , and in his estimated 600 speeches reached some 5 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 listeners .

= = = Attacks and Gold Democrats ; the final days = = =

Republican newspapers painted Bryan as a tool of Governor Altgeld , who was controversial for having pardoned the surviving men convicted of involvement in the Haymarket bombing . Others dubbed Bryan a " Popocrat " . On September 27 , The New York Times published a letter by an " eminent alienist " who , based on an analysis of the candidate 's speeches , concluded that Bryan was mad . The paper editorialized on the same page that even if the Democratic candidate was not insane , he was at least " of unsound mind " . For the most part , Bryan ignored the attacks , and made light of them in his account of the 1896 campaign . Republican newspapers and spokesmen claimed that Bryan 's campaign was expensively financed by the silver interests . This was not the case : the mining industry was seeing poor times , and had little money to donate to Bryan . In his

account , Bryan quoted a letter by Senator Jones : " No matter in how small sums , no matter by what humble contributions , let the friends of liberty and national honor contribute all they can to the good cause . "

In September , the Gold Democrats met in convention in Indianapolis . Loyal to Cleveland , they wanted to nominate him . However , the President ruled this out ; his Cabinet members also refused to run . Not even supporters thought the Gold Democrats would win ; the purpose was to have a candidate who would speak for the gold element in the party , and who would divide the vote and defeat Bryan . Illinois Senator John M. Palmer was eager to be the presidential candidate , and the convention nominated him with Kentucky 's Simon Bolivar Buckner as his running mate . Palmer was a 79 @-@ year @-@ old former Union general , Buckner a 73 @-@ year @-@ old former Confederate of that rank ; the ticket was the oldest in combined age in American history , and Palmer the second @-@ oldest presidential candidate (behind Peter Cooper of the Greenback Party ; Bryan was the youngest) . The Gold Democrats received quiet financial support from Hanna and the Republicans . Palmer proved an able campaigner who visited most major cities in the East , and in the final week of his campaign , told listeners , " I will not count it any great fault if next Tuesday you decide to cast your ballots for William McKinley . "

The South and most of the West were deemed certain to vote for Bryan . When early @-@ voting Maine and Vermont went strongly Republican in September , this meant that McKinley would most likely win the Northeast . These results made the Midwest the crucial battlefield that would decide the presidency . Bryan spent most of October there ? 160 of his final 250 train stops were in the Midwest . Early Republican polls had shown Bryan ahead in crucial Midwestern states , including McKinley 's Ohio . Much of the blizzard of paper the Republican campaign was able to pay for concentrated on this area / By September , this had its effect as silver sentiment began to fade . Morgan noted , " full organization , [Republican] party harmony , a campaign of education with the printed and spoken word would more than counteract " Bryan 's speechmaking . Beginning in September , the Republicans concentrated on the tariff question , and as Election Day , November 3 , approached , they were confident of victory .

William and Mary Bryan returned to Lincoln on November 1 , two days before the election . He was not yet done with campaigning , however ; on November 2 , he undertook a train journey across Nebraska in support of Democratic congressional candidates . He made 27 speeches , including seven in Omaha , the last concluding a few minutes before midnight . His train reached Lincoln after the polls opened ; he journeyed from train station to polling place to his house escorted by a mounted troop of supporters . He slept much of the evening of election day , to be wakened by his wife with telegrams showing the election was most likely lost .

= = = Election = = =

The 1896 presidential election was close by modern measurements , but less so by the standards of the day , which had seen close @-@ run elections over the previous 20 years . McKinley won with 7 @. @ 1 million votes to Bryan 's 6 @. @ 5 million , 51 % to 47 % . The electoral vote was not as close : 271 for McKinley to 176 for Bryan . The nation was regionally split , with the industrial East and Midwest for McKinley , and with Bryan carrying the Solid South and the silver strongholds of the Rocky Mountain states . McKinley did well in the border states of Maryland , West Virginia , and Kentucky . Although Bryan claimed that many employers had intimidated their workers into voting Republican , Williams points out that the Democrats benefited from the disenfranchisement of southern African Americans . Palmer received less than 1 % of the vote , but his vote total in Kentucky was greater than McKinley 's margin of victory there . Confusion over ballots in Minnesota resulted in 15 @, @ 000 voided votes and may have thrown that state to the Republicans .

In most areas , Bryan did better among rural voters than urban . Even in the South , Bryan attracted 59 % of the rural vote , but only 44 % of the urban vote , taking 57 % of the southern vote overall . The only areas of the nation where Bryan took a greater percentage of the urban than the rural vote were New England and the Rocky Mountain states ; in neither case did this affect the outcome , as Bryan took only 27 % of New England 's vote overall , while taking 88 % of the Rocky Mountain city

vote to 81 % of the vote there outside the cities . McKinley even won the urban vote in Nebraska . Most cities that were financial or manufacturing centers voted for McKinley . Those that served principally as agricultural centers or had been founded along the railroad favored Bryan . The Democratic Party preserved control in the eastern cities through machine politics and the continued loyalty of the Irish @-@ American voter ; Bryan 's loss over the silver issue of many German @-@ American voters , previously solidly Democratic , helped ensure his defeat in the Midwest . According to Stanley Jones , " the only conclusion to be reached was that the Bryan campaign , with its emphasis on the free coinage of silver at 16 to 1 , had not appealed to the urban working classes . "

On November 5 , Bryan sent a telegram of congratulations to McKinley , becoming the first losing presidential candidate to do so , " Senator Jones has just informed me that the returns indicate your election , and I hasten to extend my congratulations . We have submitted the issues to the American people and their will is law . " By the end of 1896 , Bryan had published his account of the campaign , *The First Battle* . In the book , Bryan made it clear that the first battle would not be the last , " If we are right , we shall yet triumph . "

= = Appraisal and legacy = =

Michael Kazin , Bryan 's biographer , notes the many handicaps he faced in his 1896 campaign : " A severe economic downturn that occurred with Democrats in power , a party deserted by its men of wealth and national prominence , the vehement opposition of most prominent publishers and academics and ministers , and hostility from the nation 's largest employers " . According to Kazin , " what is remarkable is not that Bryan lost but that he came as close as he did to winning . " Williams believes that Bryan did better than any other Democrat would have , and comments , " The nominee of a divided and discredited party , he had come remarkably close to winning . " Bryan 's own explanation was brief : " I have borne the sins of Grover Cleveland . "

The consequences of defeat , however , were severe for the Democratic Party . The 1896 presidential race is generally considered a realigning election , when there is a major shift in voting patterns , upsetting the political balance . McKinley was supported by middle @-@ class and wealthy voters , urban laborers , and prosperous farmers ; this coalition would keep the Republicans mostly in power until the 1930s . The election of 1896 marked a transition as the concerns of the rural population became secondary to those of the urban ; according to Stanley Jones , " the Democratic Party reacted with less sensitivity than the Republicans to the hopes and fears of the new voters which the new age was producing " . This was evidenced in the tariff question : Bryan spent little time addressing it , stating that it was subsumed in the financial issue ; Republican arguments that the protective tariff would benefit manufacturers appealed to urban workers and went un rebutted by the Democrats .

One legacy of the campaign was the career of William Jennings Bryan . He ran for president a second time in 1900 and a third time in 1908 , each time losing . Through the almost three decades before his death in 1925 , he was ever present on political platform and speaking circuit , fighting first for silver , and then for other causes . Bryan served as Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson from 1913 to 1915 , resigning as Wilson moved the nation closer to intervention in World War I. His final years were marked with controversy , such as his involvement in the Scopes Monkey Trial in the final weeks of his life , but according to Kazin , " Bryan 's sincerity , warmth , and passion for a better world won the hearts of people who cared for no other public figure in his day " .

Despite his defeat , Bryan 's campaign inspired many of his contemporaries . Writers such as Edgar Lee Masters , Hamlin Garland and his fellow Nebraskan , Willa Cather , like Bryan came from the prairies ; they wrote of their admiration for him and his first battle . The poet Vachel Lindsay , 16 years old in 1896 , passionately followed Bryan 's first campaign , and wrote of him many years later :

= = Results = =

Source (Popular Vote) : Leip , David . " 1896 Presidential Election Results " . Dave Leip 's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections . Retrieved May 19 , 2012 . Source (Electoral Vote) : " Electoral College Box Scores 1789 ? 1996 " . National Archives and Records Administration . Retrieved May 19 , 2012 .