

= Cross of Gold speech =

The Cross of Gold speech was delivered by William Jennings Bryan , a former United States Representative from Nebraska , at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on July 9 , 1896 . In the address , Bryan supported bimetallism or " free silver " , which he believed would bring the nation prosperity . He decried the gold standard , concluding the speech , " you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold " . Bryan 's address helped catapult him to the Democratic Party 's presidential nomination ; it is considered one of the greatest political speeches in American history .

For twenty years , Americans had been bitterly divided over the nation 's monetary standard . The gold standard , which the United States had effectively been on since 1873 , limited the money supply but eased trade with other nations , such as the United Kingdom , whose currency was also based on gold . Many Americans , however , believed that bimetallism ( making both gold and silver legal tender ) was necessary for the nation 's economic health . The financial Panic of 1893 intensified the debates , and when Democratic President Grover Cleveland continued to support the gold standard against the will of much of his party , activists became determined to take over the Democratic Party organization and nominate a silver @-@ supporting candidate in 1896 .

Bryan had been a dark horse candidate with little support in the convention . His speech , delivered at the close of the debate on the party platform , electrified the convention and is generally credited with getting him the nomination for president . However , he lost the general election to William McKinley and the United States formally adopted the gold standard in 1900 .

= = Background = =

= = Monetary standards and the United States = =

In January 1791 , at the request of Congress , Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton issued a report on the currency . At the time , there was no mint in the United States ; foreign coins were used . Hamilton proposed a monetary system based on bimetallism , in which the new currency would be equal to a given amount of gold , or a larger amount of silver ; at the time a given weight of gold was worth about 15 times as much as the same amount of silver . Although Hamilton understood that adjustment might be needed from time to time as precious metal prices fluctuated , he believed that if the nation 's unit of value were defined only by one of the two precious metals used for coins , the other would descend to the status of mere merchandise . He also proposed the establishment of a mint , at which citizens could present gold or silver , and receive it back , struck into money . On April 2 , 1792 , Congress passed the Mint Act of 1792 . This legislation defined a unit of value for the new nation , to be known as a dollar . The new unit of currency was defined to be equal to 24 @.@ 75 grains ( 1 @.@ 604 g ) of gold , or alternatively , 371 @.@ 25 grains ( 24 @.@ 057 g ) of silver , establishing a ratio of value between gold and silver of 15 : 1 . The legislation also established the Mint of the United States .

In the early 19th century , the economic disruption caused by the Napoleonic Wars caused United States gold coins to be worth more as bullion than as money , and they vanished from circulation . Governmental response to this shortage was hampered by the fact that officials did not clearly understand what had happened . In 1830 , Treasury Secretary Samuel D. Ingham proposed adjusting the ratio between gold and silver in US currency to 15 @.@ 8 : 1 , which had for some time been the ratio in Europe . It was not until 1834 that Congress acted , changing the gold / silver ratio to 16 @.@ 002 : 1 . This was close enough to the market value to make it uneconomic to export either US gold or silver coins . When silver prices rose relative to gold as a reaction to the California Gold Rush , silver coinage was worth more than face value , and rapidly flowed overseas for melting . Despite vocal opposition led by Tennessee Representative ( and future president ) Andrew Johnson , the precious metal content of smaller silver coins was reduced in 1853 . Silver was now undervalued at the Mint ; accordingly little was presented for striking into money .

The Coinage Act of 1873 eliminated the standard silver dollar . It also repealed the statutory

provisions allowing silver bullion to be presented to the Mint and returned in the form of circulating money . In passing the Coinage Act , Congress eliminated bimetallism . During the economic chaos of the Panic of 1873 , the price of silver dropped significantly , but the Mint would accept none for striking into legal tender . Silver producers complained , and many Americans came to believe that only through bimetallism could the nation achieve and maintain prosperity . They called for the return to pre 1873 laws , which would require the Mint to take all the silver offered it and return it , struck into silver dollars . This would inflate the money supply , and , adherents argued , increase the nation 's prosperity . Critics contended that the inflation which would follow the introduction of such a policy would harm workers , whose wages would not rise as fast as prices would , and the operation of Gresham 's law would drive gold from circulation , effectively placing the United States on a silver standard .

= = = Early attempts towards free silver = = =

To advocates of what became known as free silver , the 1873 act became known as the " Crime of ' 73 " . Pro silver forces , with congressional leaders such as Missouri Representative Richard P. Bland , sought the passage of bills to allow depositors of silver bullion to receive it back in the form of coin . Such bills , sponsored by Bland , passed the House of Representatives in 1876 and 1877 , but both times failed in the Senate . A third attempt in early 1878 again passed the House , and eventually both houses after being amended in the Senate . The bill , as modified by amendments sponsored by Iowa Senator William B. Allison , did not reverse the 1873 provisions , but required the Treasury to purchase a minimum of \$ 2 million of silver bullion per month ; the profit , or seignorage from monetizing the silver was to be used to purchase more silver bullion . The silver would be struck into dollar coins , to be circulated or else stored and used as backing for silver certificates . The Bland ? Allison Act was vetoed by President Rutherford B. Hayes , but was enacted by Congress over his veto on February 28 , 1878 .

Implementation of the Bland ? Allison Act did not end calls for free silver . The 1880s saw a steep decline in the prices of grain and other agricultural commodities . Silver advocates argued that this dropoff , which caused the price of grain to fall below its cost of production , was caused by the failure of the government to adequately increase the money supply , which had remained steady on a per capita basis . Advocates of the gold standard attributed the decline to advances in production and transportation . The late 19th century saw divergent views in economics as the laissez faire orthodoxy was questioned by younger economists , and both sides found ample support for their views from theorists .

In 1890 , the Sherman Silver Purchase Act greatly increased government purchases of silver . The government pledged to stand behind the silver dollars and treasury notes issued under the act by redeeming them in gold . Pursuant to this promise , government gold reserves dwindled over the following three years . Although the economic Panic of 1893 had a number of causes , President Grover Cleveland believed the inflation caused by Sherman 's act to be a major factor , and called a special session of Congress to repeal it . Congress did so , but the debates showed bitter divides in both major parties between silver and gold factions . Cleveland tried to replenish the Treasury through issuance of bonds which could only be purchased with gold , with little effect but to increase the public debt , as the gold continued to be withdrawn in redemption for paper and silver currency . Many in the public saw the bonds as benefiting bankers , not the nation . The bankers ' feeling was that they did not want loans repaid in an inflated currency ? the gold standard was deflationary , and as creditors , they preferred to be paid in such a currency , whereas debtors preferred to repay in inflated currency .

The effects of the recession which began in 1893 , and which continued through 1896 , ruined many Americans . Contemporary estimates were an unemployment rate as high as 25 % . The task of relieving the jobless fell to churches and other charities , as well as to labor unions . Farmers went bankrupt ; their farms were sold to pay their debts . Some of the impoverished died of disease or starvation ; others killed themselves .

= = = Bryan seeks the nomination = = =

Among those who spoke against the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan . Known as an orator even then , Bryan had not always favored free silver out of conviction , stating in 1892 that he was for it because the people of Nebraska were for it . By 1893 , his views on silver had evolved , and on the floor of the House of Representatives , he delivered a riveting three @-@ hour address against repeal of the Silver Purchase Act . In his conclusion , Bryan reached back in history :

When a crisis like the present arose and the national bank of his day sought to control the politics of the nation , God raised up an Andrew Jackson , who had the courage to grapple with that great enemy , and by overthrowing it , he made himself the idol of the people and reinstated the Democratic party in public confidence . What will the decision be today ? The Democratic party has won the greatest success in its history . Standing upon this victory @-@ crowned summit , will it turn its face to the rising or the setting sun ? Will it choose blessings or cursings ? life or death ? which ? Which ?

Despite the repeal of the act , economic conditions failed to improve . The year 1894 saw considerable labor unrest . President Cleveland sent federal troops to Illinois to end the Pullman strike ? workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company , which made railroad cars , had struck after wages were cut . Railway employees had refused to handle Pullman cars in sympathy with the strikers ; this action threatened to paralyze the nation 's rail lines . The President 's move was opposed by the Democratic Governor of Illinois , John Altgeld . Angered by Cleveland 's actions in the labor dispute , and by his uncompromising stand against silver , Altgeld began to organize Democrats against Cleveland 's renomination in 1896 . Although Altgeld and his adherents urged voters to distinguish between Cleveland and his party , the Democrats lost 113 seats in the House in the 1894 midterm elections , the greatest loss by a majority party in congressional history . The Republicans gained control of the House , as well as the Senate , which until 1913 was elected by the state legislatures rather than by the popular vote . Among those defeated for Senate was Bryan in Nebraska .

Bryan had long planned to run for president . Although he would only be 36 years old in 1896 ? one year above the constitutional minimum ? he believed the silver question could carry him not only to the nomination , but to the presidency . He traveled widely , speaking to audiences across the nation . His speeches impressed many ; even some of his opponents later conceded that Bryan was the most compelling speaker they had ever heard . Bryan 's speeches evolved over time ; in December 1894 , in a speech in Congress , he first used a phrase from which would come the conclusion to his most famous address : as originally stated , it was " I will not help to crucify mankind upon a cross of gold . "

A myth has arisen that Bryan was an unknown prior to 1896 . This was not the case ; Bryan was well known as an orator on the tariff and silver questions . Albert Shaw , editor of The Review of Reviews , stated that after Bryan 's nomination , many easterners professed not to have heard of him but : " If , indeed , they had not heard of Mr. Bryan before , they had failed to follow closely the course of American politics in the past eight years . As a Democratic member of the Ways and Means Committee through two Congresses , Mr. Bryan was by all odds the ablest and strongest orator on the Democratic side of the House . His subsequent canvass [ campaign ] for the United States senatorship in Nebraska was noteworthy and conspicuous on many accounts . "

In the aftermath of the 1894 election , the silver forces , led by Altgeld and others , began an attempt to take over the machinery of the Democratic Party . Historian Stanley Jones , in his study of the 1896 election , suggests that western Democrats would have opposed Cleveland even if the party had held its congressional majority in 1894 ; with the disastrous defeat , they believed the party would be wiped out in the West if it did not support silver . Bryan biographer Paulo E. Coletta wrote , " during this year [ July 1894 ? June 1895 ] of calamities , disintegration and revolution , each crisis aided Bryan because it caused division within his party and permitted him to contest for its mastery as it slipped from Cleveland 's fingers . "

In early 1896 , with the economy still poor , there was widespread discontent with the two existing

major political parties . Some people , for the most part Democrats , joined the far @-@ left Populist Party . Many Republicans in the western states , dismayed by the strong allegiance of eastern Republicans to the gold standard , considered forming their own party . When the Republicans in June 1896 nominated former Ohio Governor William McKinley for president and passed at his request a platform strongly supporting " sound money " ( the gold standard unless modified by international agreement ) , a number of " Silver Republicans " walked out of the convention . The leader of those who left was Colorado Senator Henry M. Teller ; he was immediately spoken of as a possible candidate for the Democratic nomination .

Bryan believed that he could , if nominated , unite the disaffected behind a strong silver campaign . However , part of his strategy was to remain inconspicuous until the last possible moment at the convention . He sent letters to national convention delegates , urging them to support silver , and enclosing copies of his photograph , writings , and speeches . Jones points out that though Bryan 's speaking engagements were not deemed political by the standards of 1896 , by modern measurements he was far more active in campaigning for the nomination than most of the better @-@ known candidates .

Historian James A. Barnes , in his historical journal article pointing out myths that have arisen about Bryan 's candidacy and campaign , stated that Bryan 's efforts bore fruit even before the convention :

By April , 1896 , many individuals were quietly working for Bryan 's nomination . Circulars were being distributed in Illinois , and admirers in Nebraska , North Carolina , Mississippi , Louisiana , Texas , Arkansas , and other states were urging his selection among their friends . It was not in any concerted or open action , however , that Bryan had his strength ; it was in the friendly predisposition of the mass of the delegates that he had hopes .

= = = Selection of delegates = = =

The 1896 Democratic National Convention followed events unique in post @-@ Civil War American history . One after another , state conventions to elect delegates to the national convention in Chicago repudiated an incumbent elected president of their party , who had not declared whether he would be a candidate for renomination . According to Barnes :

The people of the South and the West had for years been convinced of the enormity of the " crime of 1873 " , and they had long since come to regard silver as the sword that would cut the Gordian knot of privilege . Consciousness of grievances of years and not of months was reflected in the decisive action of the state Democratic conventions in the spring and early summer of 1896 .

Many state conventions elected delegates pledged to support bimetallism in the party platform . Gold Democrats were successful in a few states in the Northeast , but had little luck elsewhere . Speakers in some states cursed Cleveland ; the South Carolina convention denounced him . Cleveland issued a statement urging Democratic voters to support gold ? the next convention to be held , in Illinois , unanimously supported silver ; the keynote speaker prayed for divine forgiveness for Cleveland 's 1892 nomination . Gold and silver factions in some states , such as Bryan 's Nebraska , sent rival delegations to the convention .

= = 1896 convention = =

The 1896 Democratic convention opened at the Chicago Coliseum on July 7 , 1896 . Much activity took place in advance of the formal opening as the silver and ( vastly outnumbered ) gold forces prepared their strategies . Silver forces were supported by the Democratic National Bimetallic Committee , the umbrella group formed in 1895 to support silver Democrats in their insurgency against Cleveland . Gold Democrats looked to the President for leadership , but Cleveland , trusting few in his party , did not involve himself further in the gold efforts , but spent the week of the convention fishing off the New Jersey coast .

The Bimetallic Committee carefully planned to take control of every aspect of the convention , eliminating any threat that the minority gold faction could take power . It made no secret of these

preparations . This takeover was considered far more important than was the choice of presidential candidate , and the committee decided to take no position on who should win the race for the nomination , reasoning that the victor , no matter who he was , would be a silver man . Well aware of the overwhelming forces against them , many gold delegates were inclined to concede the platform battle .

Bryan arrived quietly and took rooms at a modest hotel ; the Nebraskan later calculated that he spent less than \$ 100 while in Chicago . He arrived convinced that he would win the nomination . He had already begun work on a speech . On the evening of July 5 , Bryan was visited by a delegation of Coloradans , seeking his support for Senator Teller . They went away apologetically , not having known Bryan sought the nomination .

= = = Candidates for the nomination = = =

Despite the desire of silver delegates to nominate a candidate who shared their beliefs , and although several states instructed their delegates to vote for a specific candidate , there was no overwhelming favorite for the nomination going into the convention . With a two @-@ thirds vote of the delegates needed to nominate , almost every silver delegate would have to vote for the same candidate to assure success , though any organized support from gold delegates would greatly damage a silver candidate 's chances .

The only gold man who put together any sort of campaign for the Democratic nomination was Treasury Secretary John G. Carlisle , but he withdrew in April , stating that he was more concerned about the platform of the party than who would lead it . However , as late as June , the gold forces , which still controlled the Democratic National Committee ( DNC ) , continued to believe that the nominee could be pro @-@ gold . Cleveland friend and former Postmaster General Donald M. Dickinson wrote to the President in June 1896 hoping that the delegates would recognize " common sense " and be frightened at the thought of nominating a radical .

One of the leaders of the silver movement was Illinois Governor Altgeld ; a native of Germany , he was constitutionally barred from the presidency by his foreign birth . Going into the convention , the two leading candidates for the nomination were former Congressman Bland , who had originated the Bland @-@ Allison Act , and former Iowa Governor Horace Boies , with Bland considered the frontrunner . These were the only two candidates to put together organizations to try to secure delegate votes , though both efforts were cash @-@ starved . Both men had electoral problems : Bland at age 61 was seen by some as a man whose time had passed ; Boies was a former Republican who had once decried bimetallism . There were a large number of potential candidates seen as having less support ; these included Vice President Adlai Stevenson of Illinois , Senator Joseph C. Blackburn of Kentucky , Senator Teller , and Bryan .

= = = Silver advocates take control = = =

Although Bryan had decided on a strategy to gain the nomination ? to give a speech which would make him the logical candidate in the eyes of delegates ? he faced obstacles along the way . For one thing , he began the 1896 convention without any official status ? the Democratic National Committee , which made the initial determination of which delegations would be seated , had chosen the pro @-@ gold Nebraskans to represent their state . Bryan had been waiting outside the committee room when his rivals were seated by a 27 ? 23 vote ; contemporary accounts state he was " somewhat surprised " at the result . The DNC 's action could be reversed , but not until the convention 's credentials committee reported . However , Barnes deemed the actions by the committee immaterial to the outcome due to the silver strength in the convention :

Anyone who doubts the power the silverites were ready to unleash in a disciplined and irresistible attack needs only to read the results of the election of temporary chairman . The gold men , though they possessed the machinery of the party , had neither the power nor the strength to challenge their opponents . They could only beg them to spare the party the humiliation of broken traditions and the overthrowing of established control . Nevertheless , Senator John W. Daniel of Virginia was

by an overwhelming vote elected temporary chairman , and a Committee on Credentials was appointed that seated Bryan and his contesting Nebraska delegation .

Good luck favored Bryan ? he was considered for various convention roles by the silverites , but each time was not selected . The temporary chairmanship , for example , would have permitted him to deliver the keynote address . However , Bryan , lacking a seat at the start of the convention , could not be elected temporary chairman . Bryan considered this no loss at all ; the focus of the convention was on the party platform and the debate which would precede its adoption . The platform would symbolize the repudiation of Cleveland and his policies after the insurgents ' long struggle , and Bryan was determined to close the debate on the platform . Bryan , once seated , was Nebraska 's representative to the Committee on Resolutions ( generally called the " platform committee " ) , which allocated 80 minutes to each side in the debate and selected Bryan as one of the speakers . South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman was to be the other pro @-@ silver speaker , and originally wished to close the debate . However , the senator wanted 50 minutes to speak , too long for a closing address , and at Bryan 's request agreed to open the debate instead . Accordingly , Bryan became the final speaker on the platform .

Delegates , as they waited for the committees to complete their work , spent much of the first two days listening to various orators . Of these , only Senator Blackburn , a silver supporter , sparked much reaction , and that only momentary . Delegates called for better @-@ known speakers , such as Altgeld or Bryan , but were granted neither then ; the Illinois governor declined , and the Nebraskan , once seated , spent much of his time away from the convention floor at the platform committee meeting at the Palmer House .

The debate on the platform opened at the start of the third day of the convention , July 9 , 1896 . The session was supposed to begin at 10 : 00 a.m. , but as delegates , slowed by the long commute from the hotels to the Coliseum and fatigue from the first two days , did not arrive on time , proceedings did not begin until 10 : 45 . Nevertheless , large crowds gathered outside the public entrances ; the galleries were quickly packed . Once the convention came to order , Arkansas Senator James K. Jones , chair of the Committee on Resolutions , read the proposed platform to cheers by many delegates ; the reading of the pro @-@ gold minority report attracted less applause .

" Pitchfork Ben " Tillman lived up to his nickname with an incendiary address which began with a reference to his home state 's role in beginning the Civil War . Although Tillman endorsed silver , his address was so laced with sectionalism that most silver delegates remained silent for fear of being seen as supporting him . Tillman 's speech , scheduled to be the only one in support of silver except Bryan 's , was so badly received that Senator Jones , who had not planned to speak , gave a brief address asserting that silver was a national issue .

Senator David B. Hill of New York , a gold supporter , was next . As Hill moved to the podium , a reporter friend passed Bryan a note urging him to make a patriotic speech without hint of sectionalism ; Bryan responded , " You will not be disappointed . " Hill gave a calm speech defending the gold position , and swayed few delegates . He was followed by two other gold men , Senator William Vilas of Wisconsin and former Massachusetts Governor William E. Russell . Vilas gave a lengthy defense of the Cleveland administration 's policies , so long that Russell , fearing that Vilas ' speech would cut into his time , asked that the time given to the gold proponents be extended by ten minutes . Bryan consented , on condition that his own time was extended by the same amount ; this was agreed to . " And I needed it for the speech I was to make . " Bryan later wrote , " This was another unexpected bit of good fortune . I had never had such an opportunity before in my life and never expect to have again . "

Vilas quickly lost his audience , which did not want to hear Cleveland defended . Russell 's address was inaudible to most of the Coliseum ; he was ill and died just over a week later . As the gold men spoke , Bryan ate a sandwich to settle his stomach ; he was often nervous before major speeches . Another reporter approached him and asked him who he thought would win the nomination . " Strictly confidential , not to be quoted for publication : I will be . "

= = = Bryan addresses the convention = = =

As Russell concluded , to strong applause from gold delegates , there was a buzz of anticipation as Bryan ascended to the podium . There was loud cheering as Bryan stood there , waiting for his audience to calm . Bryan 's lecture tours had left him a well @-@ known spokesman for silver . As yet , no one at the convention had effectively spoken for that cause , which was paramount to the delegates . According to political scientist Richard F. Bense in his study of the 1896 Democratic convention , " Although the silver men knew they would win this fight , they nonetheless needed someone to tell them ? and the gold men ? why they must enshrine silver at the heart of the platform . " Bense noted , " The pump was more than primed , it was ready to explode . " Bryan would say little that he had not said before ? the text is similar to that of a speech he had given at Crete , Nebraska the previous week ? but he would give the convention its voice .

Bryan began softly ,

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 's opening claimed no personal prestige for himself ? but nevertheless placed him as the spokesman for silver . According to Bense , the self @-@ deprecation helped disarm the delegates . As Bryan was not deemed a major contender for the nomination , even delegates committed to a candidate could cheer him without seeming to betray their allegiance . Bryan then recounted the history of the silver movement ; the audience , which had loudly demonstrated its approval of his opening statements , quieted . Throughout the speech , Bryan had the delegates in the palm of his hand ; they cheered on cue . The Nebraskan later described the audience as like a trained choir . As he concluded his historical recitation , he reminded the silver delegates that they had come to crown their victory , " not to discuss , not to debate , but to enter up the judgment already rendered by the plain people of this country " .

Bryan continued with language evoking the Civil War , telling his audience that " in this contest brother has been arrayed against brother , father against son . " By then , as he spoke in a sincere tone , his voice sounded clearly and loudly through the hall . He denied , however that the contest was personal ; he bore no ill @-@ will towards those who supported the gold standard . However , he stated , facing towards the gold delegates , " when you come before us and tell us that we are about to disturb your business interests , we reply that you have disturbed our business interests by your course . " The gold men , during the address , paid close attention and showed their appreciation for Bryan 's oratory . Bryan then defended the right of silver supporters to make their argument against opposition from gold men , who were associated with financial interests , especially in the East . Although his statements nominally responded to a point made by Russell , Bryan had thought of the argument the previous evening , and had not used it in earlier speeches . He always regarded it as the best point he made during the speech , and only the ending caused more reaction from his listeners :

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 .

Through this passage , Bryan maintained the contrast between the common man and the city @-@ dwelling elite . It was clear to listeners as he worked his way through the comparisons that he would

refer to the farmer , and when he did , the hall exploded with sound . His sympathetic comparison contrasted the hardworking farmer with the city businessman , whom Bryan cast as a gambler . The galleries were filled with white as spectators waved handkerchiefs , and it was several minutes before he could continue . The police in the convention hall , not sharing the enthusiasm for silver , were described by the press ( some of whose members were caught up in the frenzy ) as standing as if they thought the audience was about to turn on them . When Bryan resumed , his comparison of miner with miser again electrified the audience ; the uproar prevented him from continuing for several minutes . One farmer in the gallery had been about to leave rather than listen to Bryan , whom he deemed a Populist ; he had been persuaded to stay . At Bryan 's words , he threw his hat into the air , slapped the empty seat in front of him with his coat , and shouted , " My God ! My God ! My God ! "

Bryan , having established the right of silver supporters to petition , explained why that petition was not to be denied :

It is for these that we speak . We do not come as aggressors . Our war is not a war of conquest ; we are fighting in the defense of our homes , our families , and posterity . We have petitioned , and our petitions have been scorned ; we have entreated , and our entreaties have been disregarded ; we have begged , and they have mocked when our calamity came . We beg no longer ; we entreat no more ; we petition no more . We defy them !

With this call to action , Bryan abandoned any hint at compromise , and adopted the techniques of the radical , polarizing orator , finding no common ground between silver and gold forces . He then defended the remainder of the platform , though only speaking in general terms . He mocked McKinley , said by some to resemble Napoleon , noting that he was nominated on the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo . The lengthy passage as he discussed the platform and the Republicans helped calm the audience , ensuring he would be heard as he reached his peroration . But Bryan first wished to tie the silver question to a greater cause :

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 .

He faced in the direction of the gold @-@ dominated state delegations :

There are two ideas of government . There are those who believe that , if you will only legislate to make the well @-@ to @-@ do prosperous , their prosperity will leak through on those below . The Democratic idea , however , has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous , their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests upon them . You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard ; we reply that the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies . Burn down your cities and leave our farms , and your cities will spring up again as if by magic ; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country .

This statement attracted great cheering , and Bryan turned to rhetorically demolish the compromise position on bimetallism ? that it should only be accomplished through international agreement :

It is the issue of 1776 over again . Our ancestors , when but three millions in number , had the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation ; shall we , their descendants , when we have grown to seventy millions , declare that we are less independent than our forefathers ? No , my friends , that will never be the verdict of our people . Therefore , we care not upon what lines the battle is fought . If they say bimetallism is good , but that we cannot have it until other nations help us , we reply that , instead of having a gold standard because England has , we will restore bimetallism , and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it . If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing , we will fight them to the uttermost .

Now , Bryan was ready to conclude the speech , and according to his biographer , Michael Kazin , step " into the headlines of 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 Bryan spoke his final sentence , recalling the Crucifixion of Jesus , he placed his hands to his temples , fingers extended ; with the final words , he extended his arms to his sides straight out to his body and held that pose for about five seconds as if offering himself as sacrifice for the cause , as the audience watched in dead silence . He then lowered them , descended from the podium , and began to head back to his seat as the stillness held .

= = Reception and nomination = =

= = = Convention events = = =

Bryan later described the silence as " really painful " and momentarily thought he had failed . As he moved towards his seat , the Coliseum burst into pandemonium . Delegates threw hats , coats , and handkerchiefs into the air . Others took up the standards with the state names on them with each delegation , and planted them by Nebraska 's . Two alert police officers had joined Bryan as he left the podium , anticipating the crush . The policemen were swept away by the flood of delegates , who raised Bryan to their shoulders and carried him around the floor . The Washington Post newspaper recorded , " bedlam broke loose , delirium reigned supreme . "

It took about 25 minutes to restore order , and according to Benschel , " somewhere in the mass demonstration that was convulsing the convention hall , the transfer of sentiment from silver as a policy to Bryan as a presidential candidate took place " . Newspaper accounts of the convention leave little doubt but that , had a vote been taken at that moment ( as many were shouting to do ) , Bryan would have been nominated . Bryan was urged by Senator Jones to allow it , but refused , stating that if his boom would not last overnight , it would never last until November . He soon retired from the convention , returning to his hotel to await the outcome . The convention passed the platform in Bryan 's absence and recessed .

The balloting began the following morning , July 10 , with a two @-@ thirds vote necessary to nominate . Bryan , who remained at his hotel , sent word to the Nebraska delegation to make no deals on his behalf . He stood second out of fourteen candidates in the first ballot , behind Bland . On the second ballot , Bryan still stood second , but had gained as other candidates had fallen away . The third ballot saw Bland still in the lead , but Bryan took the lead on the fourth ballot . According to Jones , it was clear that Bland could not win , and that Bryan could not be stopped . On the fifth ballot , the Illinois delegation , led by Governor Altgeld , switched its votes from Bland to Bryan . Other delegations , seeing that Bryan would be nominated , also switched , securing the victory . Nevertheless , he won the nomination without the votes of the gold delegates , most of whom either left the convention or refused to vote .

= = = Press reaction = = =

Most contemporary press accounts attributed Bryan 's nomination to his eloquence , though in the case of Republican and other gold @-@ favoring newspapers , they considered it his demagoguery . The pro @-@ silver Cleveland Plain Dealer called Bryan 's speech " an eloquent , stirring , and manly appeal " . The Chicago Tribune reported that Bryan had lit the spark " which touched off the trail of gun @-@ powder " . The St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch opined that with the speech , Bryan " just about immortalized himself " .

According to the New York World , " Lunacy having dictated the platform , it was perhaps natural that hysteria should evolve the candidate . " The New York Times disparaged Bryan as " the gifted blatherskite from Nebraska " . The only paper to predict , after Bryan gave his speech , that he would not be nominated was The Wall Street Journal , which stated , " Bryan has had his day " . The Akron Journal and Republican , no friend to Bryan , opined that " never probably has a national

convention been swayed or influenced by a single speech as was the national Democratic convention " .

= = Campaign and aftermath = =

The Pullman Company offered Bryan a private car for his trip home ; he declined , not wishing to accept corporate favors . As he traveled by rail to Lincoln , he saw farmers and others standing by the tracks , hoping for a glimpse of the new Democratic nominee . He received many letters from supporters , expressing their faith in him in stark terms . One Indiana voter wrote , " God has sent you amongst our people to save the poor from starvation , and we no [ sic ] you will save us . " A farmer in Iowa , in a letter to Bryan , stated , " You are the first big man that i [ sic ] ever wrote to . "

When McKinley heard that Bryan was likely to be the nominee , he called the report " rot " and hung up the phone . The Republican nominee was slow to realize the surge of support for Bryan after the nomination , stating his view that the silver sentiment would be gone in a month . When McKinley and his advisers , such as industrialist and future senator Mark Hanna , realized that the views were more than transitory , they began intensive fundraising from corporations and the wealthy . The money went for speakers , pamphlets , and other means of conveying their " sound money " campaign to the voter . With far less money than McKinley , Bryan embarked on a nationwide campaign tour by train on a then @-@ unprecedented scale . McKinley on the other hand , opted for a front porch campaign . Both men spoke to hundreds of thousands of people from their chosen venues .

Bryan 's nomination divided the party . The dissidents nominated their own ticket ; the split in the vote would contribute to Bryan 's defeat . However , Bryan did gain the support of the Populists , as well as a convention of Silver Republicans . Bryan spoke on silver throughout the campaign ; he rarely addressed other issues . Bryan won the South and most of the West , but McKinley 's victories in the more populous Northeast and Midwest carried him to the presidency . The Democratic candidate failed to gain a majority of the labor vote ; McKinley won in working @-@ class areas as well as wealthy precincts . Although McKinley outpolled him by 600 @,@ 000 votes , Bryan received more votes than any previous presidential candidate .

After McKinley 's inauguration , increases in gold availability from new discoveries and improved refining methods led to a considerable increase in the money supply . Even so , in 1900 , Congress passed the Gold Standard Act , formally placing the United States on that standard . Although Bryan ran again on a silver platform in the 1900 presidential election , the issue failed to produce the same resonance with the voters . McKinley won more easily than in 1896 , making inroads in the silver West .

= = Legacy = =

Bryan 's speech is considered one of the most powerful political addresses in American history . Stanley Jones , however , suggested that even if Bryan had never made it , he would still have been nominated . Jones deemed the Democrats likely to nominate a candidate who would appeal to the Populist Party , and Bryan had been elected to Congress with Populist support . According to rhetorical historian William Harpine in his study of the rhetoric of the 1896 campaign , " Bryan 's speech cast a net for the true believers , but only for the true believers . " Harpine suggested that , " by appealing in such an uncompromising way to the agrarian elements and to the West , Bryan neglected the national audience who would vote in the November election " . Bryan 's emphasis on agrarian issues , both in his speech and in his candidacy , may have helped cement voting patterns which kept the Democrats largely out of power until the 1930s .

Writer Edgar Lee Masters called the speech , " the beginning of a changed America . " Bryan 's words gave rise to later economic and political philosophies , including Huey Long 's 1930s Share Our Wealth program , with its trigger phrase , " Every Man a King " inspired by Bryan 's speech . Author and political commentator William Safire , in his political dictionary , traced the term " trickle @-@ down economics " ( common in the Reagan era ) to Bryan 's statement that some believe that

government should legislate for the wealthy , and allow prosperity to " leak through " on those below . Historian R. Hal Williams suggested that the opposite philosophy , of legislation for the masses leading to prosperity for all , advocated by Bryan in his speech , informed the domestic policies of later Democratic presidents , including Franklin Roosevelt with his New Deal .

Bensel ties the delegates ' response to Bryan 's address to their uncertainty in their own beliefs :

In a very real sense , adoption of the silver plank in the platform was akin to a millennial expectation that the " laws of economics " would henceforth be suspended and that the silver men could simply " will " that silver and gold would , in fact , trade on financial markets at a ratio of sixteen to one . The silver men were thus in the hunt for a charismatic leader who would underpin what they already desperately wanted to believe . They manufactured that leader in the convention , a fabrication in which Bryan was only too happy to assist .