

STATE BEFORE SELF:
A STUDY OF SILVER AND SECTIONALISM IN THE CRIPPLE CREEK MINING
DISTRICT, 1896-1904

Throughout the late decades of the 19th century a political battle raged over the question of bimetallism, or whether or not the United States should use both silver and gold as the basis for its currency. Beginning in 1878, the nation operated under a “limping standard” in which gold was utilized almost exclusively as currency standard, with silver used sparingly.¹ Many western states whose economies relied heavily on silver mining, such as Colorado and Nevada, were adversely affected this policy, as it resulted in consistently slumping silver prices even as production in such states accelerated. Meanwhile, financial conservatives in the eastern states, and particularly the banking bastions of the Northeast, were supportive of pro-gold policy.² As western communities increasingly felt the effects of falling silver values in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the debate transformed from an economic disagreement confined primarily to financial hubs and legislative halls to an open-field political maelstrom. The rising tide of Populism came to adopt “free silver” throughout the West.³ Pro-silver forces came to control the Democratic party, and small, locally-based single-issue silver parties were founded. Silver supporters believed they had won a political victory with the passage of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, which increased the amount of silver to be purchased monthly by the U.S. government. As the Panic of 1893 set in, however, the act was targeted as a cause of the economic turmoil by President Grover Cleveland and other eastern, pro-gold politicians and, against the protestations of silver leaders such as Colorado Senator Henry M. Teller, was repealed.⁴ Thus, as the presidential election of 1896 appeared on the horizon, the fury of pro-silver Westerners was renewed.

This battle of Eastern and Western sectional interests put unique pressures on a

¹J. Laurence Laughlin, *The History of Bimetallism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900).

²Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America* (New York: Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, 1997), 153.

³This argument is the premise of Allen Weinstein’s *Prelude to Populism: Origins of the Silver Issue, 1867-1878* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

⁴Henry J. Ford, *The Cleveland Era: A Chronicle of the New Order in Politics* (New York: United States Publishers, 1972), 180.

handful of industrially anomolous communities in the West.⁵ The Cripple Creek Mining District of Colorado, organized in 1891, sat atop one of the largest gold deposits in the world.⁶ It benefitted from high gold prices that would be threatened if a bimetallic system were instated. Yet nearly every other community in Colorado was suffering as a result of the current pro-gold standard and was desperate for the monitization of silver to reinvigorate the state's economy.⁷ The editors of the Cripple Creek Mining District's flourishing journalism industry, within which dozens of newspapers operated throughout the 1890s, were forced to reconcile Colorado's overwhelming sectional interest in silver with the district's local dependence on gold.

These editors were, in 1896, forced to declare allegiance for or against silver as politicians from Colorado and other western states formally sectioned themselves from the East in June of that year. The national Republican party leadership had, under the influence of financial conservatives, marginalized silver elements in the West for years. It was clear in the weeks before the party's national convention in St. Louis that the matter was to come to a head.⁸ On June 18, 1896, Senator Teller, a delegate to the convention, pleaded to his contemporaries that they adopt a pro-silver plank into the presidential platform rather than continue supporting the gold standard. He was refused.⁹ In previous years Teller had

⁵The terms "section" and "sectionalism" in this study refer to self-interested zones of homogenous political and/or economic interest first defined by Frederick Jackson Turner in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1932). In this episode of American history, the western states of the United States can be recognized as a bloc in favor of silver, ignoring allegiances with states outside the section on other issues.

⁶Marshall Sprague, *Money Mountain: The Story of Cripple Creek Gold* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1979), 299.

⁷The Panic of 1893 itself closed half of Denver's banks, which, coupled with the crash of silver prices in 1894 and 1895, spelled unprecedented disaster for the state's economy. See: Douglas Steeples and David O. Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation: The Depression of 1893* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 35; Laughlin, *History of Bimetallism*, 210, Chart XVII.

⁸R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 60.

⁹*Ibid.*, 62.

returned to his seat after being rebuked by his eastern Republican colleagues. This time, a tearful Teller led twenty-two western pro-silver delegates out of the convention hall, bolting the party to form influential state-based Silver Republican parties throughout the West.¹⁰ Those parties would support Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan, a champion of bimetallism, while lifting pro-silver fusion tickets in local and state elections. In Colorado, the bolt was so significant that it consumed the Republican party for several years as pro-silver fusion and, later, the Democratic tickets found success.

Thus, Cripple Creek district editors were thrust into a caustic political climate that turned local economic interests against those of the state and West section. The present research attempts to better understand how those editors managed their situation editorially and in terms of political orientation beginning with the 1896 election and extending to 1904. It does so through a comprehensive historical analysis of district newspapers that implements triangulating research strategies, applying cultural-historical, narrative, and immersive analyses in the pursuit of well-founded and organic theory.¹¹ This method probes two concepts at the core of this study, silver and political sectionalism, to consider editorialism in district newspapers within the context of the state and national political climate of the time.

The need for such research is high. Despite the overwhelming influence of silver on politics and, therefore, newspaper editors in the sectionally-unified West, very little research has been conducted on the matter. The present study seeks to rectify this oversight by jump-starting interest in the silver question, leading to a more complete understanding of journalism in the American West in the post-frontier era. It does so through analysis very much focused on section and political regionalism, a concept that effects editorial behavior in many different parts of the United States at various points in the nation's history. Along the way, it expands several lines of research currently under development by other media historians, such as works by David Fridtjof Halaas and David Vergobbi on the topic of

¹⁰“Silver Men Walk Out,” *Times* (New York), June 19, 1896.

¹¹Lisa Mullikin Parcell and Margot Opdycke Lamme, “Not Merely an Advertisement’: Purity, Trust, and Flour, 1880-1930,” *American Journalism* 29, no. 4 (2012).

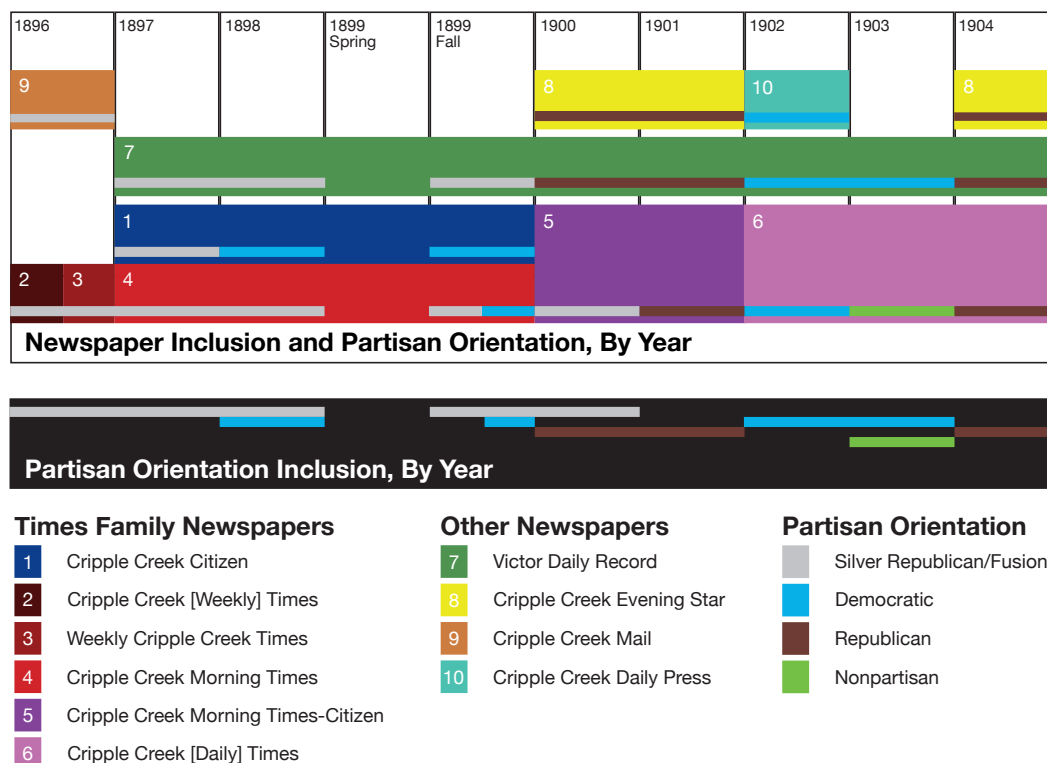


Figure 1: The newspapers utilized in the present study.

mine camp journalism and a small but growing literature regarding Colorado mountain journalism.¹²

To fulfill the objectives of this research, at least two and no more than three Cripple

¹²David Fridtjof Halaas, *Boom Town Newspapers: Journalism on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, 1859-1881* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981); David Vergobbi, "Hybrid Journalism: Bridging the Frontier/Commercial Cusp on the Coeur d'Alene Mining Frontier" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 1992); Jackie Helstrom Cummins, "Colorado Silver Camp Journalism: The Mining Camp Newspaper as Community Builder on the Colorado Silver Mining Frontier, 1865-1885" (Master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1984); Edith Stuart Jackson, "The History of Journalism in Victor, Colorado: In the Cripple Creek Gold Mining District" (Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1959).

Cripple Creek district newspaper titles were analyzed for each year from 1896-1904, with included titles chosen primarily based on the availability and completeness of the collection. The resulting sample included roughly 2,000 issues, which are presented in Figure 1. In each year, all available issues of each selected newspaper were analyzed during September, October, and early November, when political editorialization was found to be at its height. Analysis was initially organized chronologically. That information was then synthesized into three primary findings related to the handling of the silver question by district editors: 1) that Colorado's sectional interest in silver was placed above the local economy's dependence on gold; 2) that the silver question morphed, in the words of district editors, from an political cause to an abstracted political label; and 3) that labor violence within the district ended silver's viability as a political movement in the district press. Each finding is discussed in detail below.

State Needs Came First

The realities facing the Cripple Creek Mining District were significant. If Senator Teller and his Silver Republicans were successful in helping the Democrats into the White House, bimetallism would be, for the first time in decades, a real possibility. William Jennings Bryan had since 1894 decried the gold standard and supported silver, proclaiming in his often cited campaign cry, "I will not help to crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."¹³ Monetization of silver would be an incredible boon for Colorado and other silver-producing states, the value of their chief export returning to previous high levels. The value of gold, however, would almost certainly dip down, digging into the remarkable income totals of the Cripple Creek district.¹⁴ On the other hand, the victory of William McKinley and his fellow mainstream Republicans would preserve the gold standard, ensuring the value of Cripple Creek gold while extending the tribulations of the rest of the state.

¹³Williams, *Realigning America*, 71.

¹⁴In 1896 alone the district produced \$7,456,763 worth of gold, representing 39 percent of its lifetime production (Sprague, *Money Mountain*, 298.)

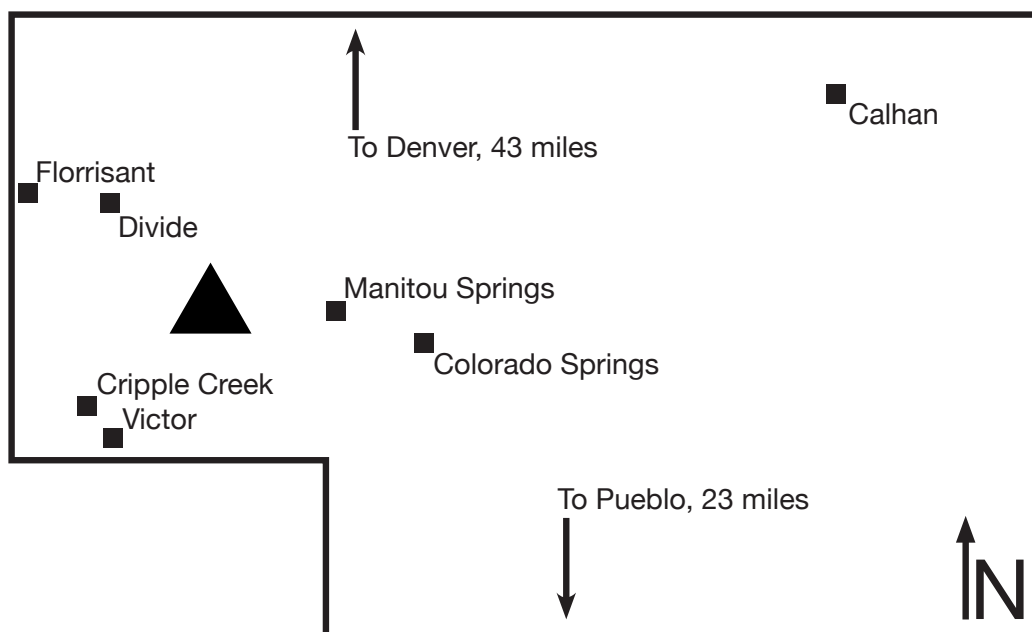


Figure 2: A map of El Paso County (not to scale).

At the same time, the district was neighbor to the only remaining Republican stronghold in the state. Colorado Springs, located about 20 miles east of the district on the other side of towering Pikes Peak, was by 1896 the only major settlement in Colorado that remained strongly supportive of the (McKinley) Republican party. In addition to harboring Republican party machinery in a state suddenly hostile toward the party, Colorado Springs was also widely regarded as the state's only refuge for supporters of the gold standard.¹⁵ Both Colorado Springs and the Cripple Creek district were within El Paso County; thus, should the district follow Teller and the bolt, it would be challenging the politics of its neighbor to the east.

¹⁵Identifying precisely why Colorado Springs became the Republican, gold standard sanctuary it did in the middle of a Silver Republican, pro-silver state is difficult. Some possibilities include that the city was deeply connected culturally to England, a nation adamantly in support of the gold standard, and that many Cripple Creek gold mine owners resided in the city. Mine laborers, on the other hand, many of them having formerly been employed in Colorado silver mines, lived within the Cripple Creek district to the west. For more on Colorado Springs' English culture, see Marshall Sprague, *Newport in the Rockies: The Life and Good Times of Colorado Springs* (Chicago: Sage, 1961), 80.

Despite this apparent conflict, district editors wasted no time rallying in support of Colorado, Senator Teller, and the Silver Republicans. Both newspapers considered in this study in 1896, the Cripple Creek *Times* and the Cripple Creek *Mail*, rushed to laud Teller and all candidates who wore the badge of silver, be they Silver Republicans, Populists, or Democrats.¹⁶ Both weekly newspapers, the *Times* and *Mail* were uniformly supportive of silver fusion candidates and critical of the Republican party. The *Mail*, for example, targeted leaders of the Republican party and labeled them as “goldbugs,” regardless of any claimed contemporary or previous loyalty to bimetallism. This included attacks against Teller’s fellow Coloradan in the U.S. Senate, Senator Ed Wolcott, who had refused to follow the bolters to the Silver Republican party and had remained loyal to the McKinley Republicans.¹⁷ The *Mail*, meanwhile, used space on its front page typically reserved for advertisements to highlight Bryan’s speeches as he campaigned across the United States.¹⁸

Bryan failed in his efforts in 1896, Colorado’s support for its sectional interest in silver did not end with the election.¹⁹ As a period of managerial stability came over the Cripple Creek district press its newspapers stood almost unwaiveringly by silver, despite the effects bimetallism might have on the local economy.²⁰ They did so in building a case for the continued influence of the silver question into the 1900 election. Voters were warned by editors of the *Morning Times* and the *Citizen* in Cripple Creek town and *Daily Record* in neighboring Victor, another town within the district, against losing interest in silver. Editors

¹⁶The Cripple Creek *Times* referred to here is the weekly edition; its name changed to the Weekly Cripple Creek *Times* in October of 1896.

¹⁷*Times* (weekly) (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 17, 1896.

¹⁸*Mail* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 3, 1896.

¹⁹Though McKinley won nationally with almost 53 percent of the popular vote, he lost overwhelmingly to Bryan within Colorado. Of the almost 190,000 ballots cast for president in the state, 161,005, or 85 percent, were in favor of Bryan (Williams, *Realigning America*, 186).

²⁰Two dominant district newspapers at the center of this study, the Cripple Creek *Morning Times* and the Victor *Daily Record*, both came under management in 1897 that would remain in place until 1902.

of district newspapers were afraid the votes of Republican, pro-gold Colorado Springs would overwhelm the Silver Republican votes of the district, and they urged readers to protect silver as an issue against goldbug intrusion. The *Citizen*, for example, warned against apathy towards silver parties by claiming that El Paso County was “recognized as the center of gold bugism in the state” and that, should it vote Republican in the local, off-year election, “eastern people” would perceive silver as a dead issue.²¹ This was echoed by the editor of the *Daily Record*, who claimed Republican success in the county “would be heralded in the east as an evidence of a change of sentiment on the silver question in Colorado.”²²

Despite such efforts to maintain silver as a dominant issue into the Bryan/McKinley rematch of 1900, bimetallism *was* losing traction with voters, even in silver-dependent Colorado, when the presidential election approached. In the Cripple Creek district, two major newspapers came under Republican control in 1899; both the Victor *Daily Record* and Cripple Creek *Evening Star* thus denied the relevance of silver in the 1900 election.²³ The Cripple Creek *Morning Times-Citizen*, formed that year through a merger of the *Morning Times* and *Citizen* and self-proclaimed to have the largest circulation in the district, continued to champion silver. Yet even that newspaper seemed to recognize voter apathy towards the issue as it reached out to previously ignored voter blocs. “The men may be convinced that silver is dead,” said one article, “or at least a few of them might be, but not the woman.”²⁴

By the end of 1900, the *Morning Times-Citizen*, like its contemporaries, would fall under Republican ownership, although it would not deny silver as did the *Daily Record* and *Evening Star*.²⁵ The shift away from silver within the district should not be mistaken as a departure from the state’s overall interest. A similar pattern is represented in statewide vote

²¹ *Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 17, 1897.

²² *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Oct. 15, 1897.

²³ For examples, see *Evening Star* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 12, 1900, or *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Oct. 6, 1900.

²⁴ *Morning Times-Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 18, 1900.

²⁵ *Daily Press* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 18, 1900.

counts; Republicans made significant gains in Colorado, limiting Bryan to only 55 percent of the total vote.

What led Cripple Creek district newspapers to so staunchly stand beside Colorado's interests in silver in 1896 and, to a lesser degree, in 1900, despite the fact that the election of Bryan and other silver candidates could jeopardize the value of the district's gold? One answer presents itself, subtly, in the comments of district editors. First, although the value of gold would certainly be affected by the monetization of silver, district editors did not perceive the hypothetical dip to be significant, if possible at all. As early as 1896 newspapers were suggesting that the gold deposits of the Cripple Creek Mining District were so incredible that district mines would remain profitable no matter the value of silver:

The last three months of the year will show a greater production for Cripple Creek than the first six. The free coinage of silver will take 10,000 people out of Cripple to the silver camps but this, the greatest gold producing district in the world, is a unit for the unlimited coinage of the white metal. We are prosperous and we want to see the rest of the country in the same satisfactory condition.²⁶

While this early example shows the rejection of bimetallism as a threat to district prosperity, it does little to explain *why* editors felt so confident about the district's prospects. In 1899, this persistent editorial attitude was more clearly explained when Francis Arkins, editor of the Cripple Creek *Morning Times*, spoke of the district's economic stability, saying, "We have outlived the period of probation and we are still both populous and prosperous. Silver camps will rise and fall according to the changing views on the money question, but the value of our product is permanent and secure."²⁷ In this statement the safety of district editors' decision to side with Colorado's silver interest is made clear. Editors like Arkins at the *Morning Times* were comfortable supporting silver above the district's economic dependence on gold because the prevailing attitude in the district dismissed silver as insignificant

²⁶ *Mail* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 19, 1896.

²⁷ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Jan. 12, 1899.

in the face of the global demand for gold. The fate of the silver question would have remained unsure even had Bryan managed election in 1896 or 1900. Meanwhile, gold was the standard in enough countries that the Cripple Creek district would find a market, regardless of American currency policy.

Silver Changed from Legitimate Issue to Political Label

The campaign for bimetallism was, in 1896, a legitimate political movement around which Coloradans and voters in other western states rallied to support their sectional economic interests. Cripple Creek district editors utilized their newspapers in support of this cause, as described in the previous section. They abandoned the Republican party, which had for decades been the dominant force in the state, in support of Senator Teller and the Silver Republicans, and they went so far as to back Democratic presidential nominee Bryan in the national election. In 1896, editors considered bimetallism a financial policy that could have gained traction within the federal government had Bryan been elected, boosting the economic standing of Colorado and the West.

Despite this initially focused and policy-oriented approach implemented by district editors in 1896, each subsequent election further abstracted the silver cause, with editors increasingly utilizing it not to support of Teller and American bimetallism but to bolster the image of favored candidates and local political interests. In other words, silver lost its original significance and became a political badge to be fought over in editorial skirmishes, with multiple candidates or perspectives claiming to be of the faction most in favor of silver. This practice, which was employed by the editors of almost all included newspapers that claimed to support silver, has its roots in the 1896 campaign, although it would be more prominently utilized in later elections.

Already in 1896 bimetallism was being conflated with local political battles. Cripple Creek district editors were in that year beginning to operationalize regional differences in opinion regarding the silver question as a reason to separate the district from the rest of El Paso County. The Cripple Creek *Mail* in particular was eager to stress the cultural and

political differences between Colorado Springs in the east and the district in the west. “We are tired,” printed the *Mail*, “of being the tail end of Little Lunnion [sic] and a subject of the queen,” drawing on the cultural differences between the communities.²⁸ This attack and others like it were not merely xenophobic, but drew on Great Britain’s well-known support for the gold standard, which Senator Teller had decried for years.²⁹ The *Mail* directly associated Colorado Springs and its newspapers with the gold standard to further stress a growing divide between the communities. In a spat with the Colorado Springs *Gazette*, the *Mail* wrote, “The Colorado Springs Gazette takes pride in advertising itself as the only goldbug paper in the state. Oh, shame!”³⁰

Editors would expand their utilization of silver as ammunition in the fight for county division as the debate was carried into subsequent years. In 1899, when the Victor *Daily Record* decided to oppose the division sought by the editors of the Cripple Creek *Morning Times* and Cripple Creek *Citizen*, each side claimed its position was that most in favor of bimetallism.³¹ The editor of the Victor *Daily Record*, for example, opposed division by claiming, among other things, that a split would strengthen Colorado Springs politically, giving gold proponents an unnecessary boost.³² The silver political forces in the Cripple Creek district had, in the 1898 election, overwhelmed the Republicans in Colorado Springs, an event which prompted the *Morning Times* to declare “that El Paso county has been wrested from the goldbugs, who have long oppressed the pople of the Cripple Creek district.”³³ Should the county be divided, the *Daily Record*’s argument went, the district’s influence would be abolished and gold proponents would gain an uncontested safe haven in Colorado Springs.

²⁸*Mail* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 10, 1896.

²⁹Duane A. Smith, *Henry M. Teller: Colorado’s Grand Old Man* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 192.

³⁰*Mail* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 19, 1896. No italics in original.

³¹The *Daily Record* had since 1897 supported county division; it abruptly shifted course in February of 1899 without explanation. See *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Feb. 9, 1899.

³²*Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Feb. 10, 1899.

³³*Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Nov. 9, 1898.

Both the *Morning Times* and *Citizen* disagreed with this assessment and drew on silver in other ways to make their case. The *Citizen* blamed Colorado Springs gold mine owners for the very presence of anti-division sentiment in Victor and its newspapers.³⁴ The editor of the *Morning Times* attacked the same owners for attempting to control district affairs from their Colorado Springs homes. “The people who live in the district are entitled, in reason, to control its affairs,” one editorial read. “If you wish to reside here, you will have an equal right with us an an equal voice in the affairs of the district; but if you prefer to remain away, you have no right to object to our local self-government.”³⁵

The county division fight was not, however, the only stage upon which editors utilized silver to achieve political goals removed from the fight over bimetallism. Indeed, both 1897 and 1899 saw editors spar with one another over which election ticket was truly in favor of silver. In 1897, editor Arkins of the *Morning Times* lifted the straight Silver Republican ticket as the only option that was fully in support silver and county division, while the *Citizen* claimed the same of the Silver Republican/Democratic/Populist fusion ticket.³⁶ Later, in 1899, the silver cause was demoted to a political football to be grappled over by the various political factions. In September of that year, the *Morning Times* and *Daily Record*, both claiming to be Silver Republican newspapers, were highly critical of Democratic newspapers, including the *Citizen*, for claiming to be of the only party out in favor of bimetallism. In one editorial Arkins claimed, “the Democrats are so busy explaining that they are still for silver, and intend to carry out the Chicago platform of 1896, that people are beginning to get suspicious.”³⁷ At the same time, the *Daily Record* was denying silver any weight in the election whatsoever:

³⁴ *Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Feb. 25, 1899.

³⁵ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Jan. 12, 1899.

³⁶ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 24, 1897; *Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 19, 1897.

³⁷ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 16, 1899.

The Democrats of Colorado are endeavoring to steal all the credit from the silver question and by yelling ‘Bryan and silver’ slip into the offices that are to be filled this fall in the various county elections in this state. As a Silver Republican The Record objects to this mode of procedure. There is no national politics in the election this fall. The silver question is not an issue in our local elections.³⁸

Soon, however, the two newspapers would split paths as Arkins and the *Morning Times* found themselves at odds with the county Silver Republican party. In mid-October Arkins began warning readers of a conspiracy already underway to deliver the party to pro-gold Republican forces, “to capture the machinery of Teller county, the county named after the grand advocate of bimetallism.”³⁹ That same day, the *Daily Record* accused Arkins and other Silver Republicans of being “traitors and disorganizers” and sympathizers of the Democratic party.⁴⁰ Arkins fired back that the manager of the *Daily Record* was “one of the traitors to the interests of silver, and is one of the knowing advocates of being swallowed by the McKinleyites,” further accusing the newspaper of hiring an “immaculate gold bug McKinleyite” editor for the 1899 election.⁴¹ Two days later the *Morning Times* abandoned the Silver Republican party in favor of the Democratic ticket — the very same it had lambasted for singing the praises of silver a few weeks before — on the grounds that there was “no longer any Silver Republican party in Teller County.”⁴² Arkins wrote that the newspaper did not want to support the Democrats but was forced to support it as “the only ticket presented to the the people of Teller county that represents unfaltering opposition to this attempted betrayal of the cause of silver.”⁴³ Meanwhile, as the *Morning Times* and *Daily Record* bickered over who lay claim to the title of silver, the Democratic Cripple

³⁸ *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Sept. 12, 1899.

³⁹ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 10, 1899.

⁴⁰ The article also said Arkins had been removed from the county Silver Republican party’s executive committee, on which both he and Frank Briggs, manager of the *Daily Record*, served. See *Daily Record* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 10, 1899.

⁴¹ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 19, 1899.

⁴² *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 22, 1899.

⁴³ *Morning Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 24, 1899.

Creek *Citizen* unabashedly did precisely what its two contemporaries had been accusing it of, reminding readers that “silver men don’t overlook the fact that the Democratic ticket is the only simon-pure anti-Wolcott ticket.”⁴⁴ Meanwhile, opponents of the *Citizen* were associated with notorious gold supporters within the Republican party, further weaponizing silver in a situation far removed from the 1896 battle for bimetallism.⁴⁵

Thus, Cripple Creek district editors treated silver, by the 1900 election, less as political movement focused on the monetization of silver than as an abstracted label to be fought over by district editors and politicians. This may explain, in part, why silver was so distinctly degraded as an issue in district newspapers in the 1900 presidential election. As noted above, newspapers included in this study for that year failed to give silver the same quality of attention they had in 1896, presumably as a result of the shifting political affiliations of the newspapers. These shifts began during the alleged 1899 coup d’état of the Silver Republican party. The Cripple Creek *Citizen* reported on Oct. 31, 1899, of the sale of the Cripple Creek *Evening Star* to Republicans.⁴⁶ The Victor *Daily Record* supported Republican candidates on a fusion ticket in 1899 and shed any editorial affinity to the silver cause in the summer of 1900, suggesting Arkins’ claim of McKinley Republican meddling in the Silver Republican machinery was true.⁴⁷ This shift was mirrored by voting behavior across Colorado, which, though remaining in favor of silver candidates, marked a clear departure from the single-issue strength of silver in 1896. Combined with the decrease in pro-silver presses in the district, the removal of the monetization debate from the silver fight by 1900 marked a distinct departure from the strength and substance the issue initially carried.

⁴⁴*Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 16, 1899.

⁴⁵*Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Nov. 3, 1899.

⁴⁶*Citizen* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 31, 1899.

⁴⁷For *Daily Record* support of Republicans in 1899, see *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Sept. 27, 1899; for *Daily Record* abandonment of Silver Republicanism, see *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), July 7, 1900.

Labor Violence Killed Silver as a Locally-Viable Political Movement

Silver never managed to attain the legitimacy it held in the 1896 election in the years following 1900, but it did continue, at least temporarily, to influence politics in the Cripple Creek Mining District. In 1901 this was manifest in calls from two Republican-leaning newspapers, the *Morning Times-Citizen* and the *Daily Record*, to stop shunning the Republican party for its support of the gold standard. In one instance, Nevada Senator John P. Jones, who had previously been a Silver Republican, was quoted as returning to the Republican party because “the silver issue is dead and we are face to face with other issues.”⁴⁸ As the district proceeded into 1902, however, management shakeups realigned some newspapers with the floundering silver movement as it struggled to remain relevant. The Cripple Creek *Daily Press*, the official labor organ of the district, frequently quoted state politicians as still standing by silver, and supported Democrats by associating them with silver and Republicans with gold.⁴⁹ The newly-Democratic Victor *Daily Record* joined the *Daily Press* in supporting silver, printing, in one instance, a front-page editorial that claimed the interests of Colorado “demand that we should stand by bi-metallism. Should the republicans carry this state, it would be heralded throughout the east that Colorado had gone back on bimetallism.”⁵⁰ Thus, 1901 and 1902 saw continued operationalization of the silver question by district editors, with the *Daily Press* and *Daily Record* returning in 1902 to treatment of silver in a manner reminiscent of pre-1900 practices.

Despite this pivot back towards bimetallism, its days as an actively-utilized issue in district newspapers were numbered. In 1903 and 1904 a series of far more pressing (and newsworthy) local events would distract editors from silver, effectively ending the bimetallic crusade in the Cripple Creek district. A round of labor disputes between the Western Federation of Miners, of which many district miners were members, and area mine and mill owners

⁴⁸ *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Oct. 27, 1901.

⁴⁹ *Daily Press* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 30, Nov. 4, 1902.

⁵⁰ *Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Nov. 4, 1902. Capitalization and spelling variations in original.

resulted in the calling out of all W.F.M. members from all district mines, roughly 3,500 individuals in all, in the summer of 1903.⁵¹ When mine owners attempted to reopen mines with nonunion labor, violence broke out. Colorado Governor James Peabody responded by ordering over 1,000 troops into the district, beginning a period of prolonged military rule within the district.⁵²

Some newspapers, such as the Cripple Creek *Times* (formerly the *Morning Times-Citizen*, chose to marginalize politics altogether, silver included.⁵³ They focused instead on comprehensive coverage of strike happenings, attempting, at least in the case of the *Times*, to objectively present the news.⁵⁴ Others, such as the pro-labor *Daily Record*, were restricted in their political editorializing by occupying forces. In September, members of that newspaper's staff, including editor George Kyner, were placed under arrest by the National Guard and held overnight in a bullpen in which other labor leaders were being held.⁵⁵ The *Daily Record* remained outspoken in favor of labor after the event, making it the target of military censorship later in the year.⁵⁶ In the chaos, however, the matter of bimetallism was forgotten completely in the *Daily Record*'s editorials.

If 1903 began the process of killing the silver movement in the district, 1904 finished it. The strike remained bloody in that year, climaxing in the June 6 dynamiting of a train depot in which thirteen people were killed.⁵⁷ The event rallied the district against the Western

⁵¹For a detailed account of the second labor war of the Cripple Creek Mining District (1903-1904), see Benjamin McKie Rastall, "The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District: A Study in Industrial Evolution" (Master's thesis, The University of Wisconsin, 1906).

⁵²*Ibid.*, 93.

⁵³*Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Oct. 30, 1903.

⁵⁴The *Times* printed in one editorial that it believed "that both capital and labor have rights and that a paper, which pretends to voice the feelings and sentiments of the great people, must give both of these elements a fair and honest hearing through its columns." *Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 16, 1903.

⁵⁵*Daily Record* (Victor, CO), Oct. 1, 1903.

⁵⁶Rastall, "The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District," 111.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 119.

Federation of Miners and its members, who were rounded up by vigilantes en masse and deported from the state, shipped by rail to the Kansas and New Mexico state borders and dumped without formal charges.⁵⁸ The *Daily Record* was finally forced to end its support of the strikers when an armed gang wrecked the newspaper's plant, temporarily putting it out of operation. When Kyner resumed publication, the *Daily Record* was of a distinctly different editorial tone, supporting Republican Governor Peabody and his use of the military in subduing district strikers. The *Times*, too, came to back the Republican party, and the *Evening Star* remained supportive, ushering the district into an era of press Republicanism.⁵⁹ Both newspapers referenced silver in their editorials, but only to draw attention to the fact that 1904 Democratic presidential nominee Alton Parker did not share Bryan's interest in bimetallism and to call Silver Republicans back into the Republican fold in the wake of the alleged death of the silver movement.⁶⁰ Thus, silver met its end in the district's prominent newspapers as they came under Republican domination.⁶¹

Conclusion

Bimetallism was, in elections from 1896 through 1904, a dynamic issue that editors in the Cripple Creek Mining District drew upon heavily when persuading local voters. The utility of the issue is exemplified in the diverse ways it was operationalized to make political arguments. It was first used by district editors primarily to support local, state, and national

⁵⁸Ibid., 131.

⁵⁹*Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 2, 1904; *Evening Star* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 24, 1904.

⁶⁰*Times* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 28, 1904; *Evening Star* (Cripple Creek, CO), Sept. 24, 1904.

⁶¹Although it cannot be determined with certainty, it seems unlikely any major Democratic newspapers remained in publication during or after June 1904. The *Daily Record* was the preeminent Democratic newspaper before its conversion to Republicanism in the wake of the depot explosion, and Edith Stuart Jackson's "The History of Journalism at Victor, Colorado: In the Cripple Creek Gold Mining District" (Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1959) identifies the only other major Democratic newspaper in the district, the *Cripple Creek Daily Press*, as having ceased printing in 1903. No other Democratic newspapers from 1904 have survived.

candidates who advocated for bimetallic currency reform. Given the district's economic dependence on gold, this support of silver out of loyalty to state demands notice. Even more interesting, however, are the reasons given by district editors for supporting silver over gold: that the district wanted to see its prosperity shared throughout Colorado and, later, that gold's value was assured both by demand and by the assured uncertainty of bimetallism. Silver would also be used to drive an ideological wedge between two neighboring communities and to rally behind candidates in races far removed from the currency debate. The degree of abstraction of the issue increased over time, with editors focusing on the currency movement itself in 1896 before transforming "silver" into a contended political title. This process continued until the bloody labor war of 1903 and 1904, when the silver question was toppled from its pedestal by strike violence and, eventually, a local surge of Republicanism in the district's newspapers.

These findings offer much to the study of mine camp and American West journalism in the period following the frontier era. The 1890s and 1900s are sometimes bypassed in studies of the west due to their liminality between the frontier and professional eras, a situation that makes them difficult to contextualize. Through a better understanding of bimetallism, its relationship with politics in the era, and its utilization by editors in the West, we gain a foothold by which we can climb to a better understanding of a complex era. Although the Cripple Creek Mining District was characterized by a conflict between gold and silver shared by only a handful of mining communities, the fact that it so strongly stood in favor of silver speaks volumes of the issues strength in western communities. With further research on the relationship between editorial behavior and the silver question, theory pertinent to the press climate of western states may develop, presenting a glimpse into the culture prevalent in the section as it progressed into the twentieth century.