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POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

1877–1900



HOW WERE the campaigns run in the late 1800s, and what role did partisan politics play?

HOW EFFECTIVE was the federal government in addressing the problems of America's industrializing economy?



WHAT WERE the main policy issues of the 1880s and the 1890s?

WHAT WAS the platform of the Populist Party?



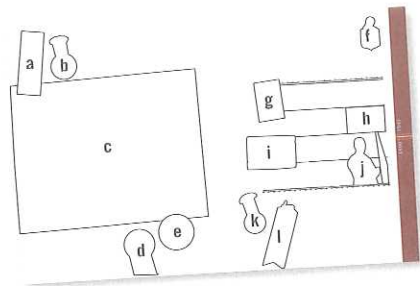
1900

1877



IMAGE KEY

for pages 522-523



- a. 1892 Benjamin Harrison presidential campaign poster sponsored by the Republican Club.
- b. Susan B. Anthony medal. It was for the 1906 NY State Suffrage Association Convention, honoring Susan B Anthony in the year of her death.
- c. Presidential Campaign, 1888. Grover Cleveland and Allen G. Thurman as the Democratic party candidates for President and Vice President on a lithograph campaign poster by Kurz & Allison, 1888.
- d. Campaign buttons for William McKinley, 1896.
- e. McKinley-Roosevelt campaign paraphernalia.
- f. Benjamin Harrison 1888 Presidential campaign paraphernalia.
- g. New Yorkers outside the Madison Square Garden during the Democratic National Convention of 1888, engraving from a contemporary American newspaper.
- h. Coxey's Army with band passing a lumber yard.
- i. Bosses of the Senate by Joseph Keppler. Giant corpulent (steel, copper, oil, sugar) trust figures loom over the deliberations of the US Senate in a 19th century political cartoon.
- j. William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925)-Democratic Convention, 1896, in which he made the "Cross of Gold" speech.
- k. Campaign button for William McKinley, 1896.
- l. "Tilden and Hendricks have been elected" ribbon.

Cincinnati, Ohio

September 28, 1884

Dear Fanny,

Will has been appointed chief supervisor and so has to take means to prevent fraud at the election. He must appoint assistants for each ward.

—Horace

October 12, 1884

Dear Father,

Will has no time for anything but the election and his duties as chief supervisor. . . . I am afraid the election will be a stormy one & violence will not surprise me. I am one of a citizens' committee of the 18th ward and we propose to be on hand from 6 in the morning till the votes are counted at night.

—Horace

October 22, 1884

Dear Mother,

We had an exciting time election day. The Democrats tried to introduce their Southern methods into northern elections and succeeded in one or two wards, but in general the U.S. Deputy Marshals managed to keep the scoundrels quiet. The negroes in many precincts voted at the risk of their lives. I saw a man shot & killed about fifteen feet from me at our polling place. . . . He drew a pistol on a Deputy Marshal but the Deputy was too quick for him.

—Horace

October 22, 1884

Dear Father,

In the 5th, 8th, and 19th Wards the marshals were utterly useless and were soon overpowered. The police did nothing except to set on [incite] the crowd. . . . The negroes were driven away from the polls, beaten and wounded and exposed to as much abuse as they could have been south of Mason's and Dixon's line. No colored votes were polled in those precincts after twelve o'clock.

—Will

William H. Taft Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

HORACE AND WILL TAFT kept their parents and sister Fanny informed of the 1884 congressional election in their hometown of Cincinnati. Alphonso, Louise, and Fanny Taft, all staunch Republicans, were desperate for such political news. Alphonso had served in President Ulysses S. Grant's cabinet and was now American minister to Austria. In Vienna, they eagerly awaited news of their party's success.

As the Taft brothers reported, Cincinnati voters had a difficult journey to the polls. Rabid partisans had staged competing torchlight parades, with thousands of uni-



formed marchers; orators had stirred the huge crowds for hours with patriotic, religious, and cultural bombast. And the election itself produced the violence Horace had expected. The Republican brothers condemned the Democrats for intimidating African Americans and others likely to vote Republican, “importing” Democratic voters from other states, and using the local police to frighten or arrest Republicans.

But the Democrats also complained. The U.S. marshals so praised by Horace had been appointed by Republican federal officials under Will’s supervision, and many of those marshals were merely thugs, paid and armed by local Republicans to improve Republican election prospects. As Will conceded, they first “drove from the city the night before election” hundreds of Democrats they alleged might commit election fraud. On election day itself they sought to incite violence in the city’s Irish wards to keep other Democratic voters from the polls, and they made mass arrests of others trying to vote, often claiming that they were Kentucky Democrats who had crossed the Ohio River to “colonize” Cincinnati’s election. Some deputies fired point-blank into Democratic crowds. As Will admitted to his father about those deputies, “it is attended with risk to furnish revolvers to men who are close to or belong to the criminal class.”

“The Democrats are so mad at not being able to perpetrate these frauds,” Will concluded with unwitting irony, “that they are trying to get even by crying fraud at us.”

Not all American elections in the late nineteenth century were as riotous as this Cincinnati contest, but it suggests much about American politics at the time. From the military-style campaign to the rough act of voting itself, elections were a masculine business—although women were intensely interested. Campaigns attracted mass participation but often avoided substantive issues. The two major political parties shaped campaigns and controlled elections, which were tumultuous if not always violent. Partisan divisions overlapped with ethnic, racial, and other social divisions, and suffrage was a contested issue. Partisanship often determined both the membership and the activities of government agencies, even those charged with maintaining order. Local concerns took precedence over national concerns.

While these features of late-nineteenth century politics endured, they shaped not only campaigns and elections but the form and role of government as well. William Howard Taft eventually became president of the United States. His success, he explained, stemmed from his father’s reputation, his own loyalty to his party, and keeping his “plate the right side up when offices were falling.”

THE STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF POLITICS

Political parties dominated political life. They organized campaigns, controlled balloting, and held the unswerving loyalty of most of the electorate. While the major parties worked to maintain a sense of unity and tradition among their followers, third parties sought the support of those the major parties left unserved. Other Americans looked outside the electoral arena to fulfill their political goals.

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

Campaign pageantry absorbed communities large and small. The town of Emporia, Kansas, once witnessed a campaign rally of twenty thousand people, several times its population. A parade of wagons stretched 5 miles, reported the proud local newspaper. “When the head of the procession was under the equator the tail was coming around the north pole.”

HOW WERE campaigns run in the late 1800s, and what role did partisan politics play?



The excitement of political contests prompted the wife of Chief Justice Morrison Waite to write longingly on election day, 1876, “I should want to vote all day.” But women could not vote at all. Justice Waite himself had just a year earlier written the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court (in *Minor v. Happersett*) that the Constitution did not confer suffrage on women.

But turnout among male voters was remarkably high, averaging nearly 80 percent in presidential elections between 1876 and 1900, a figure far greater than ever achieved thereafter. In many states, even immigrants not yet citizens were eligible to vote and flocked to the polls. African Americans voted regularly in the North and irregularly in the South before being disfranchised at the end of the century.

Political parties kept detailed records of voters, transported them to the polls, saw that they were registered where necessary, and sometimes even paid their poll taxes or naturalization fees to make them eligible. With legal regulations and public machinery for elections negligible, parties dominated the campaigns and elections. Election clerks and judges were not public officials but partisans chosen by the political parties. Until the 1890s, most states had no laws to ensure secrecy in voting, and ballots were printed by the parties. Because they had only the names of the candidates of the party issuing them and often varied

in size and color, ballots revealed the voters’ party allegiance.

Paid party workers known as peddlers or hawkers stationed themselves near the polls, each trying to force his party ticket on prospective voters. Fighting and intimidation were so commonplace at the polls that one state supreme court ruled in 1887 that they were “acceptable” features of elections.

As the court recognized, the open and partisan aspects of the electoral process did not necessarily lead to election fraud, however much they shaped the nature of political participation.

PARTISAN POLITICS

Democrats and Republicans had virtually the same level of electoral support, so they worked hard to get out the vote (see Map 20–1). Rarely did either party control both the presidency and Congress at once. The party balance also gave great influence to New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Indiana, whose evenly divided voters could swing an election either way. Both parties concentrated campaign funds and strategy on the swing states. Thus Republican presidential candidate James Garfield of Ohio commented during the election campaign in 1880: “Nothing is wanting except an immediate and liberal supply of money for campaign expenses to make Indiana certain. With a victory there, the rest is easy.” Garfield carried Indiana by six thousand votes and the nation by nine thousand out of 9.2 million cast.

Interrelated regional, ethnic, religious, and local factors determined the party affiliations of most Americans. Economic issues generally did not decide party ties. Like religious belief and ethnic identity, partisan loyalty was largely a cultural trait passed from father to son, which helps explain the electoral stability of most communities.

Republicans were strongest in the North and Midwest, where they benefited from their party’s role as the defender of the Union in the Civil War. The Republican party appealed pri-

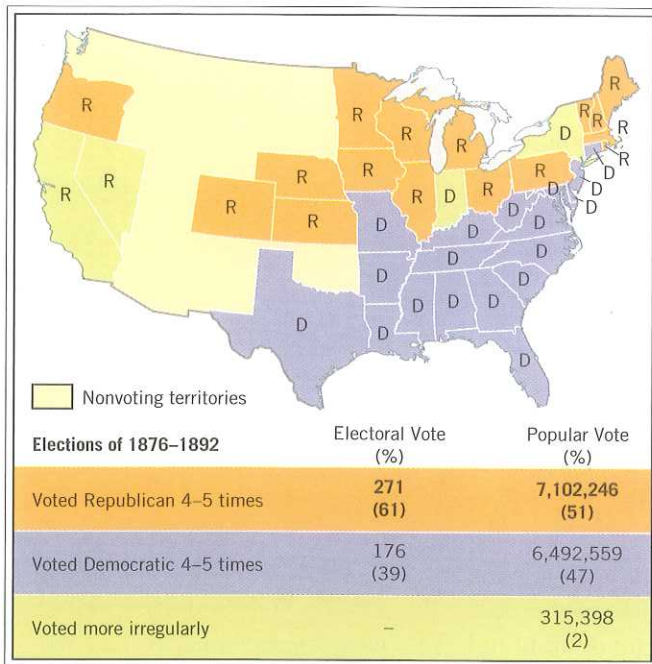


WHERE TO LEARN MORE

★ Rest Cottage, Evanston, Illinois
www.wctu.org/house.html

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to <http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map20.1>



MAP 20–1

The Two-Party Stalemate of the Late Nineteenth Century Strong parties, staunch loyalties, and an evenly divided electorate made for exciting politics but often stalemated government in the late nineteenth century. Most states voted consistently for one of the major parties, leaving the few swing states like New York and Indiana the scenes of fierce partisan battles.

WHAT WAS the geographical pattern of Republican versus Democratic voting during this time period?



marily to old-stock Americans and other Protestants, including those of German and Scandinavian descent. African Americans, loyal to the party that had emancipated and enfranchised the slaves of the South, also supported the Grand Old Party, or GOP, where they could vote. Democrats were strongest in the South, where they stood as the defenders of the traditions of the region's white population. But Democrats also drew support in the urban Northeast, especially from Catholics and recent immigrants.

Each major party thus consisted of a complex coalition of groups with differing traditions and interests. One observer described the Democratic party in California as "a sort of Democratic happy family, like we see in the prairie-dog villages, where owls, rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, and lizards all live in the same hole."

Republicans identified their party with nationalism and national unity and attacked the Democrats as an "alliance between the embittered South and the slums of the Northern cities." They combined a "bloody shirt" appeal to the memories of the Civil War with campaigns for immigration restriction and cultural uniformity. Republican legislatures in several Eastern and Midwestern states in the 1880s and 1890s enacted laws regulating parochial schools, the use of foreign languages, and alcohol consumption.

Democrats portrayed themselves as the party of limited government and "personal liberties," a theme that appealed both to the racism of white Southerners and the resentment immigrants felt about the nativist meddling the Republicans favored. The Democrats' commitment to personal liberties had limits. They supported the disfranchisement of African Americans, the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, and the dispossession of American Indians from their lands. Nevertheless, their emphasis on traditional individualism and localism proved popular.

Both major parties had party machines, especially at the local level, led by powerful bosses like Democrat Richard Croker of New York or Republican George Cox of Cincinnati. These machines not only controlled city politics but also municipal government. Well-organized ward clubs mobilized working-class voters, who were rewarded by municipal jobs and baskets of food or coal doled out by the machine. Such assistance was often necessary given the lack of public welfare systems, but to buy votes the machine also sold favors. Public contracts and franchises were peddled to businesses whose high bids covered kickbacks to the machine.

Third parties organized around specific issues or groups. The **Prohibition party** championed the abolition of alcohol but also introduced many important reform ideas into American politics. Some farmers and workers formed larger but shorter lived third parties, charging that Republicans and Democrats had failed to respond to economic problems caused by industrialization or, worse still, had deliberately promoted powerful business interests at the expense of ordinary Americans. The **Greenback party** of the 1870s denounced "the infamous financial legislation which takes all from the many to enrich the few." Its policies of labor reform and currency inflation (to stimulate and democratize the economy) attracted supporters from Maine to Texas. The most significant third party was the **People's** or **Populist party** of the 1890s.

ASSOCIATIONAL POLITICS

Associations of like-minded citizens, operating outside the electoral arena, worked to achieve public policies beneficial to their members. Farmers organized the Patrons of Husbandry, known familiarly as the Grange (see Chapter 19). Its campaign for public regulation to control the rates charged by railroads and grain elevators helped convince Midwestern states to pass the so-called **Granger laws**. The Grange also sought reforms in the nation's financial system.

To the Grangers' dismay, industrialists also formed pressure groups. Organizations such as the American Iron and Steel Association and the American Protective Tariff League lobbied Congress for high tariff laws and made campaign

Prohibition party A venerable third party still in existence that has persistently campaigned for the abolition of alcohol but has also introduced many important reform ideas into American politics.

Greenback party A third party of the 1870s and 1880s that garnered temporary support by advocating currency inflation to expand the economy and assist debtors.

Populist party A major third party of the 1890s, formed on the basis of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and other organizations, mounting electoral challenges against Democrats in the South and the Republicans in the West.

Granger Laws State laws enacted in the Midwest in the 1870s that regulated rates charged by railroads, grain elevator operators, and other middlemen.



FROM THEN TO NOW

Political Parties

Few things in contemporary American politics present a sharper contrast to the nineteenth century than the role of political parties. In the late nineteenth century, parties dominated politics. They commanded the allegiance of Americans, controlled the selection of candidates, mobilized voters, shaped voting behavior, provided ballots, and ran elections. They also shaped public policies and, through patronage, staffed government positions. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, parties do virtually none of these things.

This transformation began at the end of the nineteenth century. Extreme partisanship prompted states to assert control over elections. The corruption attributed to party machines led gradually to such changes as nonpartisan municipal elections and increased public control over parties. Restrictions on campaign expenditures reduced the party hoopla that had made politics so exciting and voter turnout so high. The connection between parties and voters declined further as new voters unfamiliar with the passions and loyalties of the past joined the electorate.

The inability of the major parties to deal effectively with important national problems, so evident in the depression of the 1890s, prompted Americans to find other ways to influence public policy. Associational groups that had acted outside the partisan arena evolved into effective special-interest lobbying groups. Civil service reform, beginning with the Pendleton Act, steadily reduced party influence in government. So did the growing reliance in the twentieth century on independent regulatory commissions, rather than partisan legislative committees, to make and implement policies.

In recent decades, party decline has accelerated. The introduction and spread of primary elections have stripped parties of their control over nominations. Individual candidates have come increasingly to rely more on personal organizations than party apparatus to manage campaigns. Candidates often appeal for votes as individuals rather than as party members and communicate directly to voters through the mass media, relying less on the old door-to-door person-

al campaign requiring party workers. Television, in particular, with its focus on dramatic and personal sound bites, is better at promoting individual candidates than abstract entities like parties.

Campaign finance reform laws have reduced party control over the funding of campaigns. So too has the rise of political action committees (PACs) as an important source of support for candidates. PACs represent particular interests, not a collection of interests the way parties do. Candidates dependent on specific interests find it harder to make broad-partisan appeals.

Polls show fewer and fewer Americans identifying with a particular party and indicate that partisanship has greatly declined as a factor in voting decisions. Americans increasingly regard parties as neither meaningful nor even useful, let alone essential to democratic government. Nearly half of the electorate favors making all elections nonpartisan or even abolishing parties. More and more people believe that interest groups better represent their political needs than parties. At the same time, fewer and fewer Americans bother to vote. Those who do are much more likely than before to split their ticket, voting for candidates of different parties for different offices. This often results in divided government—with the presidency controlled by one party and Congress by the other. The resulting stalemate increases public cynicism about parties.

Of course, parties endure and retain some importance. Election laws favor the two established parties and obstruct independent candidacies. Public funds subsidize party activities, and party coffers harvest unregulated “soft money” campaign contributions. Congress and state legislatures continue to rely on party divisions to organize their leadership and committee structures, and party discipline still influences the way legislators vote. But while such institutional factors guarantee the continued presence of a two-party system, the parties themselves no longer enjoy the influence they had in the nineteenth century.



CHRONOLOGY

1867	Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange) is founded.	1887	Interstate Commerce Act is passed.
1869	Massachusetts establishes the first state regulatory commission.	1888	Benjamin Harrison is elected president.
1873	Silver is demonetized in the “Crime of ’73.”	1890	Sherman Antitrust Act is passed. McKinley Tariff Act is passed. Sherman Silver Purchase Act is passed. National American Woman Suffrage Association is organized. Wyoming enters the Union as the first state with woman suffrage.
1874	Woman’s Christian Temperance Union is organized.	1892	People’s party is organized. Cleveland is elected to his second term as president.
1875	U.S. Supreme Court, in <i>Minor v. Happersett</i> , upholds denial of suffrage to women.	1893	Depression begins. Sherman Silver Purchase Act is repealed.
1876	Greenback party runs presidential candidate.	1894	Coxey’s Army marches to Washington. Pullman strike ends in violence.
1877	Rutherford B. Hayes becomes president after disputed election. Farmers’ Alliance is founded. Supreme Court, in <i>Munn v. Illinois</i> , upholds state regulatory authority over private property.	1895	Supreme Court, in <i>Pollock v. Farmers’ Loan and Trust Company</i> , invalidates the federal income tax. Supreme Court, in <i>United States v. E. C. Knight Company</i> , limits the Sherman Antitrust law to commerce, excluding industrial monopolies.
1878	Bland-Allison Act obliges the government to buy silver.	1896	William Jennings Bryan is nominated for president by Democrats and Populists. William McKinley is elected president.
1880	James A. Garfield is elected president.	1900	Currency Act puts U.S. currency on the gold standard.
1881	Garfield is assassinated; Chester A. Arthur becomes president.		
1883	Pendleton Civil Service Act is passed.		
1884	Grover Cleveland is elected president.		
1886	Supreme Court, in <i>Wabash v. Illinois</i> , rules that only the federal government, not the states, can regulate interstate commerce.		

contributions to friendly politicians of both parties. A small group of conservative reformers known derisively as **Mugwumps** (the term derives from the Algonquian word for *chief*) devoted most of their efforts to campaigning for honest and efficient government through civil service reform. They organized the National Civil Service Reform League to publicize their plans, lobby Congress and state legislatures, and endorse sympathetic candidates.

Women were also active in associational politics. Susan B. Anthony and others formed groups to lobby Congress and state legislatures for constitutional amendments extending the right to vote to women. The leading organizations merged in 1890 as the **National American Woman Suffrage Association**. Despite the opposition of male politicians of both major parties, suffragists had succeeded by the mid-1890s in gaining full woman suffrage in four western states—Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, and Utah—and partial suffrage (the right to vote in school elections) in several other states, East and West.

With petition campaigns, demonstrations, and lobbying, women’s social service organizations sought to remedy poverty and disease, improve education and recreation, and provide day nurseries for the children of workingwomen. The Illinois Woman’s Alliance, organized in 1888 by suffragists, women assemblies of the Knights of Labor, and middle-class women’s clubs, investigated the conditions of women and children in workshops and factories and campaigned for protective labor legislation and compulsory school attendance laws.

The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) gained a massive membership campaigning for restrictive liquor laws. Under the leadership of Frances

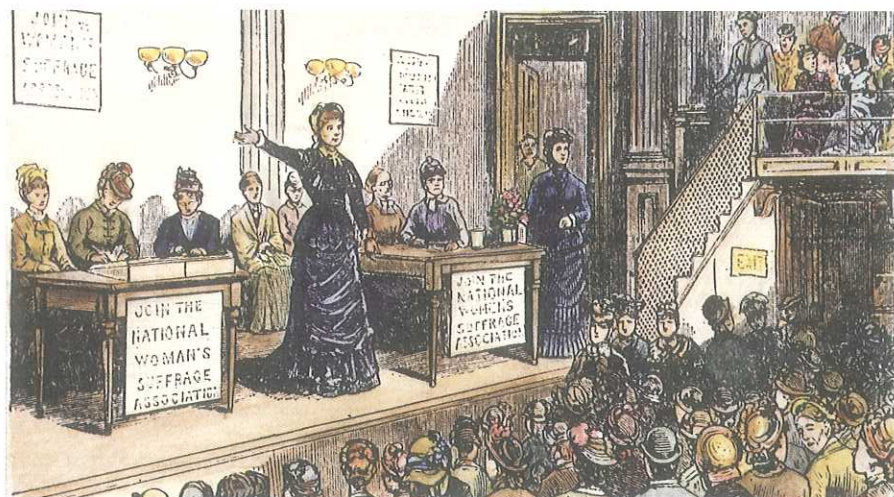
WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Susan B. Anthony House National
Historic Landmark,
Rochester, New York
www.susanbanthonyhouse.org/main.html

Mugwumps Elitist and conservative reformers who favored sound money and limited government and opposed tariffs and the spoils system.

National American Woman Suffrage Association The organization, formed in 1890, that coordinated the ultimately successful campaign to achieve women’s right to vote.



A meeting in 1880 of the National Woman Suffrage Association protested the exclusion of women from electoral politics. Susan B. Anthony noted with regret that “to all men woman suffrage is only a side issue.”

The Granger Collection, New York

HOW EFFECTIVE was the federal government in addressing the problems of America’s industrializing economy?

QUICK REVIEW

The Late Nineteenth-Century Presidency

- ◆ Weak and subordinated to legislature.
- ◆ Presidents between 1877 and 1897 were conservative and offered few initiatives.
- ◆ Presidents of this era made little effort to reach out to public.

THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENT

Despite enthusiasm for politics and the activity of associations, government in the late nineteenth century was neither active nor productive by present standards. The receding government activism of the Civil War and Reconstruction years coincided with a resurgent belief in localism and laissez-faire policies. In addition, a Congress and presidency divided between the two major parties, a small and inefficient bureaucracy, and judicial restraints joined powerful private interests to limit the size and objectives of the federal government.

THE WEAK PRESIDENCY

The presidency was a weak and restricted institution. The impeachment of President Johnson at the outset of Reconstruction had undermined the office. Then President Grant subordinated it to the legislative branch by deferring to Congress on appointments and legislation. And the presidents between 1877 and 1897—Republicans Rutherford B. Hayes (1877–1881), James A. Garfield (1881), and Chester A. Arthur (1881–1885), Democrat Grover Cleveland (1885–1889 and 1893–1897), and Republican Benjamin Harrison (1889–1893)—were all conservatives who proposed few initiatives. The most aggressive of them, Cleveland, vetoed two-thirds of all the bills Congress passed, more than all his predecessors combined. Vetoing relief for drought-stricken Texas farmers, Cleveland stated, “though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people.”

The presidents of this era made little effort to reach out to the public or to exert legislative leadership. In 1885, Woodrow Wilson, at the time a professor of history and government, described “the business of the president” as “not much above routine” and concluded that the office might be made purely administrative, its occupant a sort of tenured civil servant. (Wilson took a different view when he became president himself in 1913.) Benjamin Harrison spent six hours a day dealing with office seekers, and Garfield lamented, “My day is frittered away by the personal seeking of people, when it ought to be given to the great problems which concern the whole country.”

The presidency was also hampered by its limited control over bureaus and departments and by its small staff, which consisted of half a dozen secretaries, clerks, and telegraphers. As Cleveland complained, “If the President has any great policy in mind or on hand he has no one to help him work it out.”

Willard, however, it inserted domestic issues into the political sphere with a campaign for social and economic reforms far beyond temperance. It particularly sought to strengthen and enforce laws against rape. Willard bitterly noted that twenty states fixed the age of consent at ten and that “in Massachusetts and Vermont it is a greater crime to steal a cow” than to rape a woman. The WCTU also pushed for improved health conditions and workplace and housing reforms.





THE INEFFICIENT CONGRESS

Congress exercised authority over the federal budget, oversaw the cabinet, debated public issues, and controlled legislation. Its members, as one senator conceded, “tolerated no intrusion from the President or from anybody else.”

But Congress was inefficient. Its chambers were chaotic, and members rarely paid attention to the business at hand. Instead they played cards, read newspapers, or sent a page to get fruit or tobacco from the vendors who lined the hallways of the capitol. The repeated shifts in party control of Congress also impeded effective action. So too did the loss of experienced legislators to rapid turnover. In some Congresses, most members were first-termers.

Procedural rules often kept Congress from acting. The most notorious rule required that a quorum be not only present but also voting. When the House was narrowly divided along party lines, the minority could block all business by refusing to answer when the roll was called.

But as a nationalizing economy required more national legislation, business before Congress grew relentlessly (see Figure 20-1). The expanding scale of congressional work prompted a gradual reform of procedures and the centralization of power in the speaker of the House and the leading committees. These changes did not, however, create a coherent program for government action.

THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY AND THE SPOILS SYSTEM

The federal bureaucracy remained small and limited in the late nineteenth century. There were little more than fifty thousand government employees in 1871, and three-fourths of them were local postmasters scattered across the nation. Only six thousand, from President Grant to janitors, worked in Washington.

Most federal employees were selected under the so-called spoils system. Its basic principle was that victorious politicians awarded government jobs to party workers, with little regard for qualifications, and ousted the previous employees. Appointees then typically promised part of their salary and time to the political interests of their patron or party. The spoils system enabled party leaders to strengthen their organizations, reward loyal party service, and attract the political workers that parties needed to mobilize the electorate.

Critics charged that the system was riddled with corruption, abuse, and inefficiency. Rapid turnover bred instability; political favoritism bred incompetence. One secretary of the navy, appointed at the behest of Indiana’s Republican machine, was said to have exclaimed during his first official inspection of a ship: “Why, the thing’s hollow!” Certainly the spoils system was ineffective for filling positions that required special skills. More serious, the spoils system also absorbed the president and Congress in unproductive conflicts over patronage.

INCONSISTENT STATE GOVERNMENT

Considered closer and more responsible to the people, state governments had long exercised police power and regulatory authority. They collected taxes for education and public works, and they promoted private enterprise and public health. Still, they did little by today’s standards. Few people thought it appropriate for government at any level to offer direct help to particular social groups, and state constitutions often restricted the scope of public authority.

But state governments gradually expanded their role in response to the stresses produced by industrialization. Following the lead of Massachusetts in

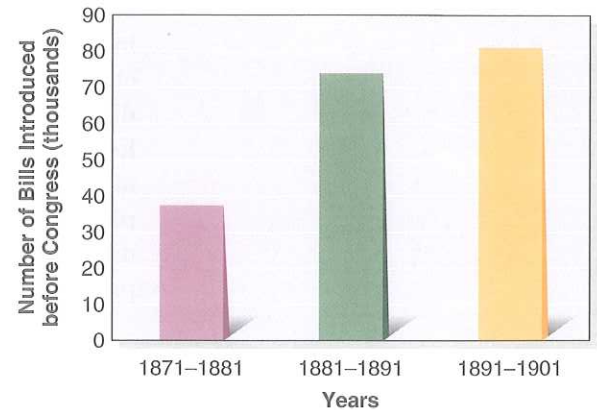


Figure 20-1 Increase in Congressional Business, 1871-1901

Industrialization, urbanization, and western expansion brought increased demands for government action, but the party stalemate, laissez-faire attitudes, and inefficient public institutions often blocked effective responses.

QUICK REVIEW

The Spoils System

- ◆ Fifty thousand federal employees in 1871.
- ◆ Politicians awarded government jobs to party workers.
- ◆ Critics charged that the system was corrupt.



1869, a majority of states had by the turn of the century created commissions to investigate and regulate industry. One observer noted in 1887 that state governments enacted many laws and established numerous state agencies in “utter disregard of the *laissez-faire* principle.” In Minnesota, for example, the state helped dairy farmers by establishing a dairy commission, prohibiting the manufacture or sale of margarine, creating a bureau of animal industry, and employing state veterinarians. Other laws regulated railroads, telegraphs, and dangerous occupations, prohibited racial discrimination in inns, and otherwise protected the public welfare.

Not all such agencies and laws were effective. Southern states especially lagged, and one Midwesterner complained that his legislature merely “meets in ignorance, sits in corruption, and dissolves in disgrace every two years.” Still, the widening scope of state action represented a growing acceptance of public responsibility for social welfare and economic life.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS

WHAT WERE the main public policy issues of the 1880s and 1890s?

Several great issues dominated the national political arena in the late nineteenth century, including civil service reform, tariffs, and business and financial regulation. Rarely, however, did these issues clearly and consistently separate the major political parties. Instead they divided each party into factions along regional, interest, and economic lines. As a consequence, these leading issues often played only a small role in determining elections and were seldom resolved by government action.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

Reform of the spoils system emerged as a prominent issue during the Hayes administration. Reformers like the Mugwumps wanted a professional civil service based on merit and divorced from politics. They wanted officeholders to be selected on the basis of competitive written examinations and protected from removal on political grounds. They expected such a system to promote efficiency, economy, and honesty in government. But they also expected it to increase their own influence and minimize that of “mere politicians.” As one Baltimore Mugwump said, civil service reform would replace ignorant and corrupt officeholders with “gentlemen . . . who need nothing and want nothing from government except the satisfaction of using their talents.”

President Hayes favored civil service reform. He struck a blow for change when he fired Chester A. Arthur from his post as New York customs house collector after an investigation pronounced Arthur’s patronage system to be “unsound in principle, dangerous in practice, . . . and calculated to encourage and perpetuate the official ignorance, inefficiency, and corruption . . .”

The weakness of the civil service reformers was dramatically underscored in 1880 when the Republicans, to improve their chances of carrying the crucial state of New York, nominated Arthur for vice president on a presidential slate headed by James A. Garfield of Ohio. They won, and Garfield immediately found himself enmeshed in the demands of the unreformed spoils system. He once complained to his wife, “I had hardly arrived before the door-bell began to ring and the old stream of office-seekers began to pour in. They had scented my coming and were lying in wait for me like vultures for a wounded bison. All day long it has been a



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

★ Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio
www.rbhayes.org/



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

★ James A. Garfield Home, Mentor, Ohio
www.nps.gov/jaga/index.htm



steeple chase, I fleeing and they pursuing.” Within a few months of his inauguration in 1881, Garfield was assassinated by a disappointed and crazed office seeker, and Arthur became president.

Public dismay over this tragedy finally spurred changes in the spoils system. Arthur himself urged Congress to act, and in 1883, it passed the **Pendleton Civil Service Act**. This measure prohibited federal employees from soliciting or receiving political contributions from government workers and created the Civil Service Commission to administer competitive examinations to applicants for government jobs. A professional civil service free from partisan politics gradually emerged, strengthening the executive branch’s ability to handle its increasing administrative responsibilities.

The new emphasis on merit and skill rather than party ties opened new opportunities to women. By the early 1890s, women held a third of the clerical positions in the executive departments in Washington. Their work in public life challenged the conventional belief that a woman’s ability and personality limited her to the domestic sphere. Julia Henderson described her work as an examiner of accounts in the Interior Department in 1893 as “brain work of a character that requires a knowledge not only of the rulings of this Department, but also those of the Treasury, Second Auditor, Second Comptroller, and Revised Statutes; demanding the closest and most critical attention, together with a great deal of legal and business knowledge.”

THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE TARIFF

Tariffs on imported goods provided revenue for the federal government and protected American industry from European competition. They promoted industrial growth but often allowed favored industries to garner high profits. By the 1880s, separate tariffs covered more than four thousand items and generated more revenue than the government needed to carry on its limited operations.

Reflecting its commitment to industry, the Republican party vigorously championed protective tariffs. Party leaders also claimed that American labor benefited from tariff protection. “Reduce the tariff, and labor is the first to suffer,” declared William McKinley of Ohio. Most Democrats, by contrast, favored tariff reduction. They argued that lower tariffs would encourage foreign trade and, by reducing the treasury surplus, minimize the temptation for the government to pursue activist policies. (See the overview table “Arguments in the Tariff Debates.”)

Regardless of party position, congressmen of both parties voted for tariffs that would benefit their districts. California Democrats called for protective duties on wool and raisins, products produced in California; Massachusetts Republicans, to aid their state’s shoe manufacturers, supported tariffs on shoes but opposed tariffs on leather. A Democratic senator from Indiana, elected on a campaign pledge to reduce tariffs, summed up the prevailing rule succinctly: “I am a protectionist for every interest which I am sent here by my constituents to protect.”

In the 1884 campaign, Republican presidential candidate James G. Blaine maintained that prosperity and high employment depended on high duties. The Democrats’ platform endorsed a lowered tariff, but their candidate, Grover Cleveland, generally ignored the issue, and both parties turned to scandalmongering. The Democrats exploited Blaine’s image as a beneficiary of the spoils system. Republicans responded by exposing Cleveland as the father of an illegitimate child.

Cleveland continued to avoid the tariff issue for three years after his election, until the growing treasury surplus and rising popular pressure for tariff reduction prompted him to act. He devoted his entire 1887 annual message to attacking the “vicious, inequitable, and illogical” tariff, apparently making it the dominant issue



18-7

The Assassination of President Garfield (1889)

QUICK REVIEW

Tariffs and Politics

- ◆ Tariffs provided revenues and protected American industries from competition.
- ◆ Republicans were strong supporters of protective tariffs.
- ◆ Congressmen voted for tariffs that benefited their home districts.

Pendleton Civil Service Act A law of 1883 that reformed the spoils system by prohibiting government workers from making political contributions and creating the Civil Service Commission to oversee their appointment on the basis of merit rather than politics.



OVERVIEW

ARGUMENTS IN THE TARIFF DEBATES

Area Affected	High-Tariff Advocates	Low-Tariff Advocates
Industry	Tariffs promote industrial growth.	Tariffs inflate corporate profits.
Employment	Tariffs stimulate job growth.	Tariffs restrict competition.
Wages and prices	Tariffs permit higher wages.	Tariffs increase consumer prices.
Government	Tariffs provide government revenue.	Tariffs violate the principle of laissez-faire and produce revenues that tempt the government to activism.
Trade	Tariffs protect the domestic market.	Tariffs restrict foreign trade.



WHERE TO LEARN MORE



President Benjamin Harrison's Home, Indianapolis, Indiana
www.presidentbenjaminharrison.org/

of his 1888 reelection campaign. However, Cleveland then proposed a Democratic platform that ignored his recent message and did not even use the word *tariff*. When the party convention adopted a tariff reduction plank, Cleveland named high-tariff advocates to manage his campaign. “What a predicament the party is placed in,” lamented one Texas Democrat, with tariff reform “for its battle cry and with a known protectionist . . . as our chairman.” Cleveland won slightly more popular votes than his Republican opponent, Benjamin Harrison of Indiana, but Harrison carried the electoral college, indicating the decisive importance of strategic campaigning, local issues, and large campaign funds rather than great national issues.

The triumphant Republicans raised tariffs to unprecedented levels with the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. The law provoked a popular backlash that helped return the Democrats to power. Still, the Democrats made little effort to push tariff reform. The *Atlanta Constitution* mused about such tariff politics in a bit of doggerel:

It’s funny ‘bout this tariff—how they’ve lost it or forgot;
 They were rushing it to Congress once; their collars were so hot;
 They could hardly wait to fix it ‘till we harvested a crop;
 Was it such a burnin’ question that they had to let it drop?

THE BEGINNINGS OF FEDERAL REGULATION

Popular pressure compelled Congress to take the first steps toward the regulation of business with the passage of the **Interstate Commerce Act** in 1887 and the **Sherman Antitrust Act** in 1890.

Farmers condemned the power of corporations over transportation facilities and their monopolization of industries affecting agriculture, from those that manufactured farm machinery to those that ran flour mills. Small business owners suffered from the destructive competition of corporations, workers were exploited by the corporations’ control of the labor market, and consumers felt victimized by high prices. The result was a growing clamor to rein in the corporations.

The first target of this concern was the nation’s railroads, the preeminent symbol of big business. Both farm groups and businesses complained of discriminatory shipping rates levied by railroads. Consumers condemned the railroads’ use of pooling arrangements to suppress competition and raise rates. The resulting pressure was responsible for the Granger laws enacted in several Midwestern states in the 1870s to regulate railroad freight and storage rates.

Interstate Commerce Act The 1887 law that expanded federal power over business by prohibiting pooling and discriminatory rates by railroads and establishing the first federal regulatory agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Sherman Antitrust Act The first federal antitrust measure, passed in 1890; sought to promote economic competition by prohibiting business combinations in restraint of trade or commerce.



In 1886, the Supreme Court ruled in *Wabash, St. Louis, and Pacific Railway Company v. Illinois* that only the federal government could regulate interstate commerce. This decision effectively ended state regulation of railroads but simultaneously increased popular pressure for congressional action. “Upon no public question are the people so nearly unanimous as upon the proposition that Congress should undertake in some way the regulation of interstate business,” concluded a Senate committee. With the support of both major parties, Congress in 1887 passed the Interstate Commerce Act.

The act prohibited rebates, discriminatory rates, and pooling and established the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to investigate and prosecute violations. The ICC was the first federal regulatory agency, but its powers were too limited to be effective. Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island, a leading spokesman for business interests, described the law as an “empty menace to great interests, made to answer the clamor of the ignorant.” The railroads continued their objectionable practices. In its first fifteen years, only one court case was decided in favor of the ICC. Not surprisingly, then, popular dissatisfaction with the railroads continued into the twentieth century.

As with railroad regulation, the first antitrust laws—laws intended to break up or regulate corporate monopolies—were passed by states. Exposés of the monopolistic practices of such corporations as Standard Oil forced both major parties to endorse national antitrust legislation. In 1890, Congress enacted the Sherman Antitrust Act with only a single vote in opposition. Although it emphatically prohibited any combination in restraint of trade (any attempt to restrict competition), it was otherwise vaguely written and hence weak in its ability to prevent abuses. The courts further weakened it, and presidents of both parties made little effort to enforce it. Large corporations remained an ominous threat in the eyes of many Americans.

THE MONEY QUESTION

Persistent wrangling over questions of currency and coinage made monetary policy the most divisive political issue in the late nineteenth century. President Garfield hinted at the complexities of this subject when he wryly suggested that a member of Congress had been committed to an asylum after “he devoted himself almost exclusively to the study of the currency, became fully entangled with the theories of the subject, and became insane.”

Creditors, especially bankers, as well as conservative economists and many business leaders favored limiting the money supply. They called this a **sound money** policy and insisted that it would ensure economic stability, maintain property values, and retain investor confidence. Farmers and other debtors feared this would depress already low crop prices, drive debtors further into debt, and restrict economic opportunities. They favored expanding the money supply to match the country’s growing population and economy. They expected this inflationary policy to raise prices, stimulate the economy, reduce debt burdens, and increase opportunities.

The conservative leadership of both major parties supported the sound money policy, but their rank-and-file membership, especially in the West and the South, included many inflationists. As a result, the parties avoided confronting each other on the money issue.

The conflict between advocates of sound money and inflation centered on the use of paper money—“greenbacks”—and silver coinage. To meet its expenses during the Civil War, the federal government issued \$450 million in greenbacks—paper money backed only by the credit of the United States, not by gold or silver, the traditional basis of currency. After the war, creditors demanded that these greenbacks be withdrawn from circulation. Debtors and other Americans caught

QUICK REVIEW

Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)

- ◆ Established by Interstate Commerce Act (1887).
- ◆ Commission was first federal regulatory agency.
- ◆ In first fifteen years, only one court case was decided in favor of the ICC.

Sound money Misleading slogan that referred to a conservative policy of restricting the money supply and adhering to the gold standard.



up in a postwar depression favored retaining the greenbacks and even expanding their use.

In 1875 sound money advocates in Congress enacted a deflationary law that withdraw some greenbacks from circulation and required that the remainder be convertible into gold after 1878. Outraged inflationists organized the Greenback party. The Greenbackers polled more than a million votes in 1878 and elected fourteen members of Congress, nearly gaining the balance of power in the House. As the depression faded, however, so did interest in the greenback issue, and the party soon withered.

Inflationists then turned their attention to the silver issue, which would prove more enduring and disruptive. Historically, the United States had used both gold and silver as the basis of its currency, but in 1873, Congress passed a law “demonetizing” silver, making gold the only standard for American currency. Gold standard supporters hoped the law would promote international trade by aligning U.S. financial policy with that of Great Britain, which insisted on gold-based currency. But they also wanted to prevent new silver discoveries in the American West from expanding the money supply.

Indeed, silver production soon boomed, flooding the commercial market and dropping the value of the metal. Dismayed miners wanted the Treasury Department to purchase their surplus silver on the old terms and demanded a return to the bimetallic system. More important, the rural debtor groups seeking currency inflation joined in this demand. Many passionately denounced the “Crime of ’73” as a conspiracy of Eastern bankers and foreign interests to control the money system to the detriment of ordinary Americans.

Eastern conservatives of both parties denounced silver; Southerners and Westerners demanded **free silver**, which meant unlimited silver coinage. By 1878, a bipartisan coalition succeeded in passing the Bland-Allison Act. This compromise measure required the government to buy at least \$2 million of silver a month. However, the government never exceeded the minimum, and the law had little inflationary effect.

As hard times hit rural regions in the late 1880s, inflationists secured the passage of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. The Treasury now had to buy more silver and pay for it with Treasury notes redeemable in either gold or silver, but this too produced little inflation because the government did not coin the silver it purchased, redeemed the notes only with gold, and, as Western silver production increased further, had to spend less and less to buy the stipulated amount of silver. Debtors of both parties remained convinced that the government favored the “classes rather than the masses.” Gold standard advocates (again of both parties) were even less happy with the law and planned to repeal it at their first opportunity.

Free Silver Philosophy that the government should expand the money supply by purchasing and coining all the silver offered to it.

THE CRISIS OF THE 1890S

In the 1890s, a third-party political challenge generated by agricultural discontent disrupted traditional party politics. A devastating depression spawned social misery and labor violence. Changing public attitudes led to new demands on the government and a realignment of parties and voters.

AGRICULTURAL PROTEST

In the late 1880s, falling crop prices and rising debt overwhelmed many people already exhausted from overwork and alarmed by the new corporate order. “At the age of 52 years, after a long life of toil, economy, and self-denial, I find myself and family virtual paupers,” lamented one Kansan. Their farm, rather than being “a house

WHAT WAS the platform of the Populist party?



of refuge for our declining years, by a few turns of the monopolistic crank has been rendered valueless." To a large extent, the farmers' plight was the result of bad weather and an international overproduction of farm products. Looking for remedies, however, the farmers focused on the inequities of railroad discrimination, tariff favoritism, a restrictive financial system, and apparently indifferent political parties.

Angry farmers particularly singled out the systems of money and credit that worked so completely against agricultural interests. Government rules for national banks directed credit into the urbanized areas of the North and East at the expense of the rural South and West and prohibited banks from making loans on farm property and real estate. In the West, farmers borrowed money from mortgage companies to buy land and machinery. In hard times, mortgage foreclosures crushed the hopes of many farmers. In the South, the credit shortage interacted with the practices of cotton marketing and retail trade to create the sharecropping system, which trapped more and more farmers, black and white, in a vicious pattern of exploitation. The government's policies of monetary deflation worsened the debt burden for all farmers.

Farmers also protested railroad freight rates that were two or three times higher in the West and South than in the North and East. The near-monopolistic control of grain elevators and cotton brokerages left farmers feeling exploited. Protective tariff rates on agricultural machinery and other manufactured goods further raised their costs. The failure of the government to correct these inequities capped their anger.

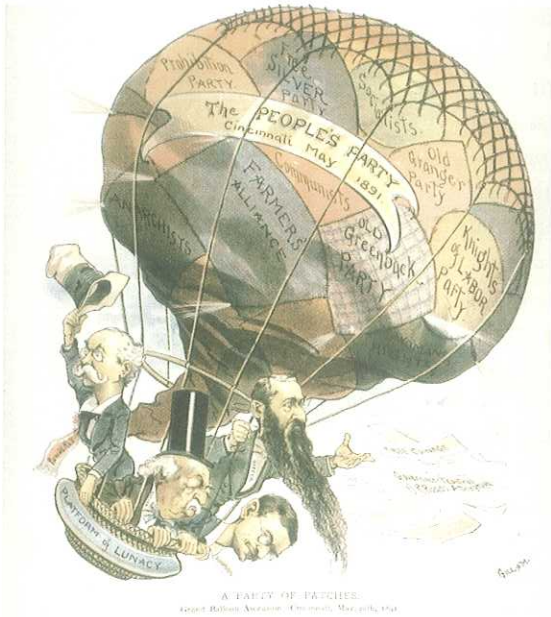
In response, farmers turned to the **Farmers' Alliance**, the era's greatest popular movement of protest and reform. Originating in Texas, the Southern Farmers' Alliance spread throughout the South and across the Great Plains to the Pacific coast. By 1890, it had 1.2 million members. African-American farmers organized the Colored Farmers' Alliance. The Northwestern Farmers' Alliance spread westward and northward from Illinois to Nebraska and Minnesota. In combination, these groups constituted a massive grass-roots movement committed to an agenda of economic and ultimately political reform.

The Farmers' Alliance restricted its membership to men and women of the "producing class" and urged them to stand "against the encroachments of monopolies and in opposition to the growing corruption of wealth and power." The Alliance attempted to establish farmers' cooperatives to market crops and purchase supplies. It also developed ingenious proposals to remedy rural credit and currency problems. In the South, the Alliance pushed the subtreasury system, which called on the government to warehouse farmers' cotton and advance them credit based on its value (see Chapter 19). In the West, the Alliance proposed a system of federal loans to farmers using land as security. These proposals were immensely popular among farmers, but the major parties and Congress rejected them. The Alliance also took up earlier calls for free silver, government control of railroads, and banking reform, again to no avail. William A. Peffer, the influential editor of the Alliance newspaper the *Kansas Farmer*, declared that the "time has come for action. The people will not consent to wait longer. . . . The future is full of retribution for delinquents."

THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

In the West, discontented agrarians organized independent third parties, which eventually adopted the labels "People's" or "Populist." The founders of the Kansas People's Party, including members of the Farmers' Alliance, the Knights of Labor, the Grange, and the old Greenback party, launched a campaign marked by grim determination and fierce rhetoric. These people, women as well as men, were earnest organizers and powerful orators. One was *Kansas Farmer* editor Peffer. Others included "Sockless Jerry" Simpson, Annie Diggs, and Mary E. Lease. When hostile

Farmers' Alliance A broad mass movement in the rural South and West during the late nineteenth century, encompassing several organizations and demanding economic and political reforms.



A PARTY OF PATCHES.
reproduced by permission of the artist, Max Jolly, 1914

Established interests ridiculed the Populists unmercifully. This hostile cartoon depicts the People's party as an odd assortment of radical dissidents committed to a "Platform of Lunacy."

Kansas City Historical Society



19-5
The People's Party Platform
(1892)

Omaha Platform The 1892 platform of the Populist party repudiating *laissez-faire* and demanding economic and political reforms to aid distressed farmers and workers.

business and political leaders attacked the Populist plans as socialistic, Lease retorted, "You may call me an anarchist, a socialist, or a communist. I care not, but I hold to the theory that if one man has not enough to eat three times a day and another has \$25,000,000, that last man has something that belongs to the first." Lease spoke as clearly against the colonial status experienced by the South and West: "The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East."

The Populist parties gained control of the legislatures of Kansas and Nebraska and won congressional elections in Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota. Their victories contributed to a massive defeat of the GOP in the 1890 midterm elections after the passage of the McKinley Tariff and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Thereafter, Populists gained further victories throughout the West. In the mountain states, where their support came more from miners than farmers, they won governorships in Colorado and Montana. On the Pacific coast, angry farmers found allies among urban workers and the Populists elected a governor in Washington, congressmen in California, and legislators in both states.

In Oklahoma, the Populist party drew support from homesteaders and tenant farmers, in Arizona, from miners and railroad workers. In New Mexico, the Southern Alliance established itself among small ranchers who felt threatened by corporate ranchers and land companies. The fear of corporate expansion even united usually antagonistic Anglo New Mexicans and poor Hispanics. One Alliance paper wrote of the need to defend Hispanics from the "mighty land monopoly which is surely grinding their bones into flour that it may make its bread." In the 1890 election, Populists gained the balance of power in the New Mexico legislature.

In the South, the Alliance did not initially form third parties but instead swept "Alliance Democrats" into office, electing four governors, several dozen members of Congress, and a majority of legislators in eight states.

With their new political power, farmers enacted reform legislation in many Western states. New laws regulated banks and railroads and protected poor debtors by capping interest rates and restricting mortgage foreclosures. Others protected unions and mandated improved workplace conditions. Populists were also instrumental in winning woman suffrage in Colorado and Idaho, although the united opposition of Democrats and Republicans blocked their efforts to win it in other states. In the South, however, the Democratic party frustrated reform, and most Alliance Democrats abandoned their promise to support Alliance goals in favor of loyalty to their party and its traditional opposition to governmental activism.

Populists met in Omaha, Nebraska, on July 4, 1892, to organize a national party and nominated former Greenbacker James B. Weaver for president. The party platform, known as the **Omaha Platform**, rejected the *laissez-faire* policies of the old parties and declared: "We believe that the powers of government—in other words, of the people, should be expanded . . . to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land." The platform demanded government ownership of the railroads and the telegraph and telephone systems; a national currency issued by the government rather than private banks; the sub-treasury system; free and unlimited silver coinage; a graduated income tax; and the redistribution to settlers of land held by railroads and speculative corporations. Accompanying resolutions endorsed the direct popular election of senators, the secret ballot, and other electoral reforms to make government more democratic and responsive to popular wishes. When the platform was adopted, "cheers and yells,"



one reporter wrote, “rose like a tornado from four thousand throats and raged without cessation for 34 minutes, during which women shrieked and wept, men embraced and kissed their neighbors . . . in the ecstasy of their delirium.”

The Populists left Omaha to begin an energetic campaign. Southern Democrats, however, used violence and fraud to intimidate Populist voters and cheat Populist candidates out of office. Some local Populist leaders were murdered. One Democrat confessed that Alabama’s Populist gubernatorial candidate “carried the state, but was swindled out of his victory . . . with unblushing trickery and corruption.” Southern Democrats also appealed effectively to white supremacy, which undermined the Populist effort to build a biracial reform coalition.

Midwestern farmers unfamiliar with Alliance ideas and organization ignored Populist appeals and stood by their traditional political allegiances. So did most Eastern working-class voters, who learned little of the Populist program beyond its demand for inflation, which they feared would hurt them.

The Populists lost the election but got more than a million votes (one out of every twelve votes cast). Populist leaders began immediately working to expand their support, to the alarm of both Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE DEPRESSION

A harsh and lengthy depression began in 1893, worsening conditions for farmers and most other Americans. Labor unrest and violence engulfed the nation, reflecting workers’ distress but frightening more comfortable Americans. The failure of the major parties to respond to serious problems swelled popular discontent.

Although the Populists had not triumphed in 1892, the election nonetheless reflected the nation’s spreading dissatisfaction. Voters decisively rejected President Harrison and the incumbent Republicans in Congress. Turning again to the other major party, they placed Grover Cleveland and the Democrats in control. But almost oblivious to the mounting demand for reform, Cleveland delivered an inaugural address championing the doctrine of *laissez-faire* and rejecting government action to solve social or economic problems.

The economy collapsed in the spring of 1893. Railroad overexpansion, a weak banking system, tight credit, and plunging agricultural prices all contributed to the disaster. A depression in Europe reduced American export markets and prompted British investors to sell their American investments for gold. Hundreds of banks closed, and thousands of businesses, including the nation’s major railroads, went bankrupt. By winter, 20 percent of the labor force was unemployed, and the jobless scavenged for food in a country that had no public unemployment or welfare programs. “Never within memory,” said one New York minister, “have so many people literally starved to death as in the past few months.”

Most state governments offered little relief beyond encouraging private charity to the homeless. In Kansas, however, the Populist governor insisted that traditional *laissez-faire* policies were inadequate. (See American Views, “A Populist views American Government.”) Cleveland disagreed. The functions of the government, he said in 1893, “do not include the support of the people.”

Jacob Coxey, a Populist businessman from Ohio, proposed a government public works program for the unemployed to be financed with paper money. This plan would improve the nation’s infrastructure, create jobs for the unemployed, and provide an inflationary stimulus to counteract the depression’s deflationary effects. In short, Coxey was advocating positive government action to combat the depression.

Coxey organized a march of the unemployed to Washington as “a petition with boots on” to support his ideas. **Coxey’s Army** of the unemployed, as the excited press

QUICK REVIEW

The Depression of 1893

- ◆ Harsh and lengthy depression began in 1893.
- ◆ By winter 1893, 20 percent of the labor force was unemployed.
- ◆ Most state governments offered little relief.

Coxey’s Army A protest march of unemployed workers, led by Populist businessman Jacob Coxey, demanding inflation and a public works program during the depression of the 1890s.



◆ AMERICAN VIEWS ◆

A POPULIST VIEWS AMERICAN GOVERNMENT



n educator, merchant, and former editor, Lorenzo D. Lewelling became an articulate champion of the Populist party. Elected governor of Kansas in 1892, he headed what was heralded as “The First People’s Party Government on Earth.” The following passages from his inaugural address sketch out both Lewelling’s views of the 1890s and his “dream of the future.”

HOW DOES Lewelling’s rhetoric reflect the deep divisions of the 1890s? What is Lewelling’s view of the proper role of government? Why does Lewelling criticize the government of the 1890s? What does Lewelling mean by his statement that “the rich have no right to the property of the poor”?

The survival of the fittest is the government of brutes and reptiles, and such philosophy must give place to a government which recognizes human brotherhood. It is the province of government to protect the weak, but the government today is resolved into a struggle of the masses with the classes for supremacy and bread, until business, home, and personal integrity are trembling in the face of possible want in the family. Feed a tiger regularly and you tame and make him harmless, but hunger

makes tigers of men. If it be true that the poor have no right to the property of the rich let it also be declared that the rich have no right to the property of the poor.

It is the mission of Kansas to protect and advance the moral and material interests of all its citizens. It is its especial duty at the present time to protect the producer from the ravages of combined wealth. National legislation has for twenty years fostered and protected the interests of the few, while it has left the South and West to supply the products with which to feed and clothe the world, and thus to become the servants of wealth.

The demand for free coinage has been refused. The national banks have been permitted to withdraw their circulation, and thus the interests of the East and West have been diverged until the passage of the McKinley bill culminated in their diversement. The purchasing power of the dollar has become so great [that] corn, wheat, beef, pork, and cotton have scarcely commanded a price equal to the cost of production.

The instincts of patriotism have naturally rebelled against these unwarranted encroachments of the power of money. Sectional hatred has also been kept alive by the old powers, the better to enable them to control the products

dubbed it, marched through the industrial towns of Ohio and Pennsylvania and into Maryland, attracting attention and support. Other armies formed in Eastern cities from Boston to Baltimore and set out for the capital. Some of the largest armies organized in the Western cities of Denver, San Francisco, and Seattle. Three hundred men in an army from Oakland elected as their commander Anna Smith, who promised to “land my men on the steps of the Capitol at Washington.” “I am a San Francisco woman, a woman who has been brought up on this coast, and I’m not afraid of anything,” Smith explained. “I have a woman’s heart and a woman’s sympathy, and these lead me to do what I have done for these men, even though it may not be just what a woman is expected to do.”

Despite public sympathy for Coxey, the government acted to suppress him. When he reached Washington with 600 marchers, police and soldiers arrested him and his aides, beat sympathetic bystanders in a crowd of twenty thousand, and herded the marchers into detention camps. Unlike the lobbyists for business and finance, Coxey was not permitted to reach Congress to deliver his statement, urging the government to assist “the poor and oppressed.”

The depression also provoked labor turmoil. There were some 1,400 industrial strikes involving nearly 700,000 workers in 1894. One result was the government’s violent suppression of the Pullman strike (see Chapter 18).



and make the producer contribute to the millionaire; and thus, while the producer labors in the field, the shop, and the factory, the millionaire usurps his earnings and rides in gilded carriages with liveried servants. . . .

The problem of today is how to make the State subservient to the individual, rather than to become his master. Government is a voluntary union for the common good. It guarantees to the individual life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The government then must make it possible for the citizen to enjoy liberty and pursue happiness. If the government fails of these things, it fails in its mission. . . . If old men go to the poor-house and young men go to prison, something is wrong with the economic system of the government.

What is the State to him who toils, if labor is denied him and his children cry for bread? What is the State to the farmer who wearily drags himself from dawn till dark to meet the stern necessities of the mortgage on the farm? What is the State to him if it sanctions usury and other legal forms by which his home is destroyed and his innocent ones become a prey to the fiends who lurk in the shadow of civilization? What is the State to the business man, early grown gray, broken in health and spirit by successive failures; anxiety like a boding owl his constant companion by day and

the disturber of his dreams by night? How is life to be sustained, how is liberty to be enjoyed, how is happiness to be pursued under such adverse conditions as the State permits if it does not sanction? Is the State powerless against these conditions?

This is the generation which has come to the rescue. Those in distress who cry out from the darkness shall not be heard in vain. Conscience is in the saddle. We have leaped the bloody chasm and entered a contest for the protection of home, humanity, and the dignity of labor.

The grandeur of civilization shall be emphasized by the dawn of a new era in which the people shall reign, and if found necessary they will "expand the powers of government to solve the enigmas of the times." The people are greater than the law or the statutes, and when a nation sets its heart on doing a great and good thing it can find a legal way to do it.

I have a dream of the future. I have the evolution of an abiding faith in human government, and in the beautiful vision of a coming time I behold the abolition of poverty. A time is foreshadowed when the withered hand of want shall not be outstretched for charity; when liberty, equality, and justice shall have permanent abiding places in the republic.

Source: *People's Party Paper* (Atlanta), January 20, 1893.

In a series of decisions in 1895, the Supreme Court strengthened the bonds between business and government. First, it upheld the use of a court-ordered injunction to break the Pullman strike. As a result, injunctions became a major weapon for courts and corporations against labor unions until Congress finally limited their use in 1932. In *United States v. E. C. Knight Company*, the Court gutted the Sherman Antitrust Act by ruling that manufacturing, as opposed to commerce, was beyond the reach of federal regulation. The Court thus allowed the American Sugar Refining Company, a trust controlling 90 percent of the nation's sugar, to retain its great power. Finally, the court invalidated an income tax that agrarian Democrats and Populists had maneuvered through Congress as an "assault upon capital." Not until 1913, and then only with an amendment to the Constitution, would it be possible to adopt an equitable system of taxation.

Cleveland's financial policies stirred further discontent. Cleveland blamed the economic collapse on the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which he regarded as detrimental to business confidence and a threat to the nation's gold reserve. He persuaded Congress in 1893 to repeal the law but thereby enraged Southern and Western members of his own party, including William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, who saw the silver issue in the context of a struggle between "the corporate interests of the United States, the moneyed interests, aggregated wealth



William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) at the Democratic Convention, 1896, in which he made the “Cross of Gold” speech.

Culver Pictures, Inc.

and capital, imperious, arrogant, compassionless” and “an unnumbered throng . . . work-worn and dust-begrimed.”

By 1894, the Treasury had begun borrowing money from Wall Street to bolster the gold reserve. These transactions benefited a syndicate of bankers headed by J. P. Morgan. It seemed to critics that an indifferent Cleveland was helping rich bankers profit from the nation’s economic agony. “A set of vampires headed by a financial trust has control of our destiny,” cried one rural newspaper.

THE BATTLE OF THE STANDARDS AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

These unpopular actions, coupled with the unrelenting depression, alienated workers and farmers from the Cleveland administration and the Democratic party. In the off-year elections of 1894, the Democrats suffered the greatest loss of congressional seats in American history. Populists increased their vote by 42 percent, making especially significant gains in the South, but the real beneficiaries of Cleveland’s unpopularity were the Republicans, who gained solid control of Congress as well as state governments across the North and West. All three parties began to plan for the presidential election of 1896.

The silver issue came to overshadow all others. Populist Weaver declared the silver issue “the line upon which the battle should be fought. It is the line of least resistance and we should hurl our forces against it at every point.” Both to undercut the Populists and to distance themselves and their party from the despised Cleveland, leading Democrats began using the silver issue to reorganize their party.

William McKinley, governor of Ohio and author of the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890, emerged as the leader of a crowd of hopeful Republican presidential candidates. His candidacy benefited particularly from the financial backing and political management of Marcus A. Hanna, a wealthy Ohio industrialist. Hanna thought McKinley’s passion for high tariffs as the key to revived prosperity would appeal to workers as well as industry and business. Republicans nominated McKinley on the first ballot at their 1896 convention. Their platform called for high tariffs but also endorsed the gold standard, placating Eastern delegates but prompting several Western Silver Republicans to withdraw from the party.

The Democratic convention met shortly thereafter. With a fervor that conservatives likened to “scenes of the French Revolution,” the Silver Democrats revolutionized their party. They adopted a platform that repudiated the Cleveland administration and its policies and endorsed free silver, the income tax, and tighter regulation of trusts and railroads. A magnificent speech supporting this platform by William Jennings Bryan helped convince the delegates to nominate him for president.

Holding their convention last, the Populists now faced a terrible dilemma. The Democratic nomination of Bryan on a silver platform undercut their hopes of attracting into their own ranks disappointed reformers from the major parties. Some Populists urged the party to endorse Bryan rather than split the silver vote and ensure the victory of McKinley and the gold standard. Others argued that fusing—joining with the Democrats—would cost the Populists their separate identity and subordinate their larger political principles to the issue of free silver. After anguished discussion, the Populists nominated Bryan.

The campaign was intense and dramatic, with each side demonizing the other. Eastern financial and business interests contributed millions of dollars to Hanna’s campaign for McKinley. Standard Oil alone provided \$250,000, about the same amount as the Democrats’ total national expenses. Hanna used these funds to organize an unprecedented campaign. Republicans issued 250 million campaign documents, printed in a dozen languages. Many newspapers not only shaped their editorials but also distorted their news stories to Bryan’s disadvantage.

QUICK REVIEW

Nominees for President in 1896

- ◆ Republicans: William McKinley.
- ◆ Democrats: William Jennings Bryan.
- ◆ Populists: William Jennings Bryan.



The Democrats relied on Bryan's superb voice, oratorical virtuosity, and youthful energy. Bryan was the first presidential candidate to campaign systematically for election, speaking hundreds of times to millions of voters. McKinley stayed home in Canton, Ohio, where he conducted a "front porch" campaign. Explaining his refusal to campaign outside Canton, McKinley said, "I might just as well put up a trapeze . . . and compete with some professional athlete as go out speaking against Bryan." But Hanna brought groups of Republicans from all over the country to visit McKinley every day, and McKinley reiterated his simple promise to restore prosperity.

In the depression, that appeal proved enough. As the Democratic candidate, Bryan was ironically burdened with the legacy of the hated Cleveland administration. The intense campaign brought a record voter turnout. McKinley won decisively by capturing the East and Midwest as well as Oregon and California (see Map 20–2). Bryan carried the traditionally Democratic South and the mountain and plains states where Populists and silverites dominated. He failed to gain support in either the Granger states of the Midwest or the cities of the East. His silver campaign had little appeal to industrial workers. Hanna realized that Bryan was making a mistake in subordinating other popular grievances to silver: "He's talking silver all the time, and that's where we've got him."

The elections of 1894 and 1896 ended the close balance between the major parties. Cleveland's failures, coupled with an economic recovery in the wake of the election of 1896, gained the Republicans a reputation as the party of prosperity and industrial progress, firmly establishing them in power for years to come. By contrast, the Democratic party receded into an ineffectual sectional minority dominated by Southern conservatives, despite Bryan's liberal views. The People's party simply dissolved.

McKinley plunged into his presidency. Unlike his predecessors, he had a definite, if limited, program, consisting of tariff protection, sound money, and overseas expansion. He worked actively to see it through Congress and to shape public opinion, thereby helping establish the model of the modern presidency. He had promised prosperity, and it returned, although not because of the record high tariff his party enacted in 1897 or the Currency Act of 1900, which firmly established the gold standard. Prosperity returned instead because of reviving markets and a monetary inflation that resulted from the discovery of vast new deposits of gold in Alaska, Australia, and South Africa. The silverites had recognized that an expanding industrial economy required an expanding money supply. Ironically, the new inflation was greater than would have resulted from free silver. With the return of prosperity and the decline of social tensions, McKinley easily won reelection in 1900, defeating Bryan a second time.

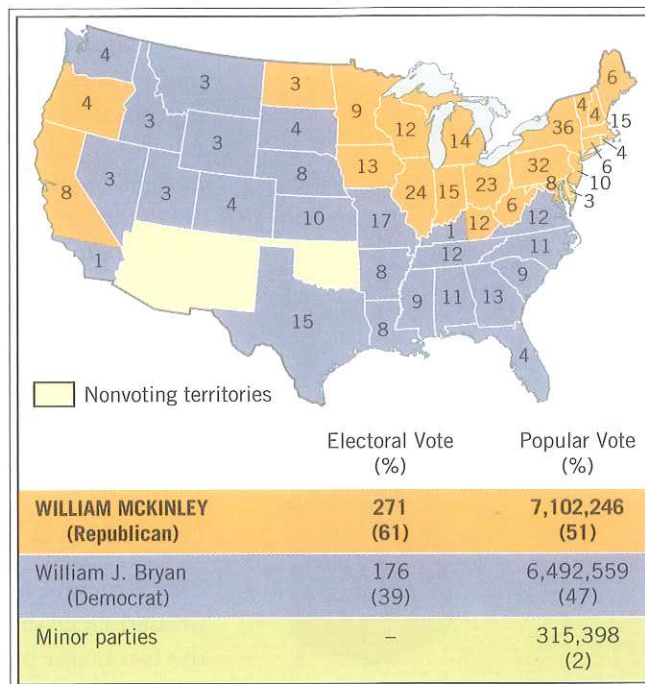
CONCLUSION

In late-nineteenth-century America, politics and government often seemed at cross-purposes. Closely balanced political parties commanded the zealous support of their constituents and wielded power and influence. The institutions of government, by contrast, were limited in size, scope, and responsibility. A weakened presidency and an inefficient Congress, hampered by



MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to <http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map20.2>



MAP 20–2

The Election of 1896 William Jennings Bryan carried most of the rural South and West, but his free silver campaign had little appeal to more urban and industrial regions, which swung strongly to Republican candidate William McKinley.

WAS THE election of 1896 closer than the electoral vote would suggest?

QUICK REVIEW

McKinley's Program

- ◆ Tariff protection.
- ◆ Sound money.
- ◆ Overseas expansion.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Fairview, Lincoln, Nebraska
www.bryanlgh.org/aboutus/fairviewhistory.htm



a restrictive judiciary, were often unable to resolve the very issues that were so dramatically raised in the political arena. The issue that most reflected this impasse was civil service reform. The patronage system provided the lifeblood of politics but also disrupted government business.

The localism, laissez-faire, and other traditional principles that shaped both politics and government were becoming increasingly inappropriate for America's industrializing society. The national nature of the railroad network, for example, finally brought the federal government into the regulatory arena, however imperfectly, with the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. Both the depression of the 1890s and the popular discontent underscored the need for change and discredited the limited government of the Cleveland administration.

By the end of the decade, the Republicans had emerged as the dominant party, ending the two-party stalemate of previous decades. Campaign hoopla in local communities had given way to information-based campaigns directed by and through national organizations. A new activist presidency was emerging, and the disruptive currency issue faded with the hard times that had brought it forth.



SUMMARY

The Structure and Style of Politics Politics in the late nineteenth century expressed social values as they determined who held the reins of government. While the two major political parties dominated, third parties sought to activate those the Democrats and Republicans left unserved. Virtually all men participated in politics; the voter turnout of that era has never been equaled. Religious, ethnic, and regional factors determined party ties, but third parties, such as the Populists, emerged around issues. Women also participated in politics and some states now allowed full or partial suffrage.

The Limits of Government Government in the late nineteenth century was neither active nor productive by present standards; localism and laissez-faire policies were resurgent. Congress and a presidency divided between the two political parties, a small and inefficient federal bureaucracy, and judicial restraints joined powerful private interests to limit the size and objectives of the federal government.

Public Policies and National Elections The spoils system, the system for selecting and supervising federal employees, was finally reformed as a result of the assassination of President Garfield. The Pendleton Civil Service Act emphasized merit and skill; it also opened new opportunities for women. Americans heatedly debated the tariff policies; popular pressure compelled Congress to take the first steps toward the regulation of business; the most divisive political issue of the era was monetary policies with inflationists wanting more money, especially silver, in circulation.

The Crisis of the 1890s Protests from Midwestern farmers over freight rates, tariffs, and the money supply resulted in popular movements of protest and reform. The Populists, a third party, funneled the discontent into politics; their emergence was but one of the many developments combining to produce a national political crisis. A severe economic depression, labor unrest, and government inaction, along with the silver issue underscored the need for change. The presidential election of 1896 was an intense campaign with record voter turnout; with William McKinley's victory over William Jennings Bryan, the Republicans became established as the party of prosperity and individual progress.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What social factors shaped the nature of elections in the late nineteenth century?
 2. How and why did the role of government change during this period?
 3. Why did so many third parties develop during this era?
 4. How might the Omaha Platform have helped farmers?
 5. Why did McKinley win in 1896? How did that election differ from earlier ones?
-

KEY TERMS

Coxey's Army (p. 539)

Farmers' Alliance (p. 537)

Free silver (p. 536)

Granger laws (p. 527)

Greenback Party (p. 527)

Interstate Commerce Act (p. 534)

Mugwumps (p. 529)

National American Woman Suffrage Association (p. 529)

Omaha Platform (p. 538)

Pendleton Civil Service Act (p. 533)

Populist Party (p. 527)

Prohibition Party (p. 527)

Sherman Antitrust Act (p. 534)

Sound money (p. 535)

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

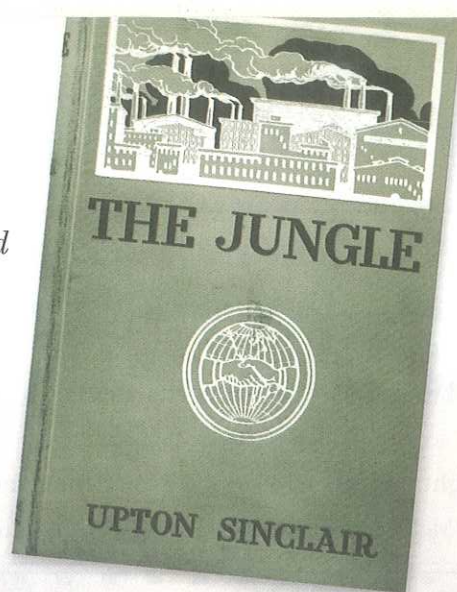
- 🏠 **Rest Cottage, Evanston, Illinois.** Frances Willard's home, from which she directed the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, is carefully preserved as a museum. The Willard Memorial Library contains more memorabilia and papers of Willard and the WCTU. www.wctu.org/house.html
- 🏠 **President Benjamin Harrison's Home, Indianapolis, Indiana.** President Harrison's brick Italianate mansion, completed in 1875, has been completely restored with the family's furniture and keepsakes. The former third-floor ballroom serves as a museum with exhibits of many artifacts of the Harrisons' public and private lives. www.presidentbenjaminharrison.org/
- 🏠 **Fairview, Lincoln, Nebraska.** A National Historic Landmark, Fairview was the home of William Jennings Bryan, who described it as "the Monticello of the West." Faithfully restored to depict the Bryan family's life in the early 1900s, it includes a museum and interpretive center. www.bryanlgh.org/aboutus/fairviewhistory.htm
- 🏠 **Susan B. Anthony House National Historic Landmark, Rochester, New York.** This modest house was the home of the prominent suffragist and contains Anthony's original furnishings and personal photographs. www.susanbanthonyhouse.org/main.html
- 🏠 **Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.** This complex contains President Hayes's home, office, and extensive grounds together with an excellent library and museum holding valuable collections of manuscripts, artifacts, and photographs illustrating his personal interests and political career. www.rbhayes.org/
- 🏠 **James A. Garfield Home, Mentor, Ohio.** Operated by the Western Reserve Historical Society as a museum, Garfield's home is the site of his successful 1880 front-porch campaign for president. www.nps.gov/jaga/index.htm



For additional study resources for this chapter, go to:

www.prenhall.com/goldfield/chapter20

The women, trudging stoutly along under great difficulties, were able to complete their march only when troops of cavalry from Fort Meyers were rushed into Washington . . . No inauguration has ever produced such scenes . . .



The great woman suffrage parade leaves Capitol Hill and heads for the White House, March 3, 1913. Dramatic tactics and careful organizing like those that marked this parade helped secure reform in the Progressive Era. The head of a suffrage parade at Washington D.C. oil over a photograph, 1913, (Granger Collection 4E 1028.04).