

Gilded Age Politics: 1869 – 1896



THE TRUST GIANTS POINT OF VIEW.
"WHAT A FUNNY LITTLE GOVERNMENT!"

Definition

“Gilded”: Covered by a layer of gold, but under the glittering surface, the core has very little value

A major period of social, economic, and political change in the United States.

- Economically – rapid expansion of factory production, mining, and RR construction
- Socially – massive urbanization, immigration, and expansion into the West
- Politically – corruption and two party stalemate

A. Stalemate of

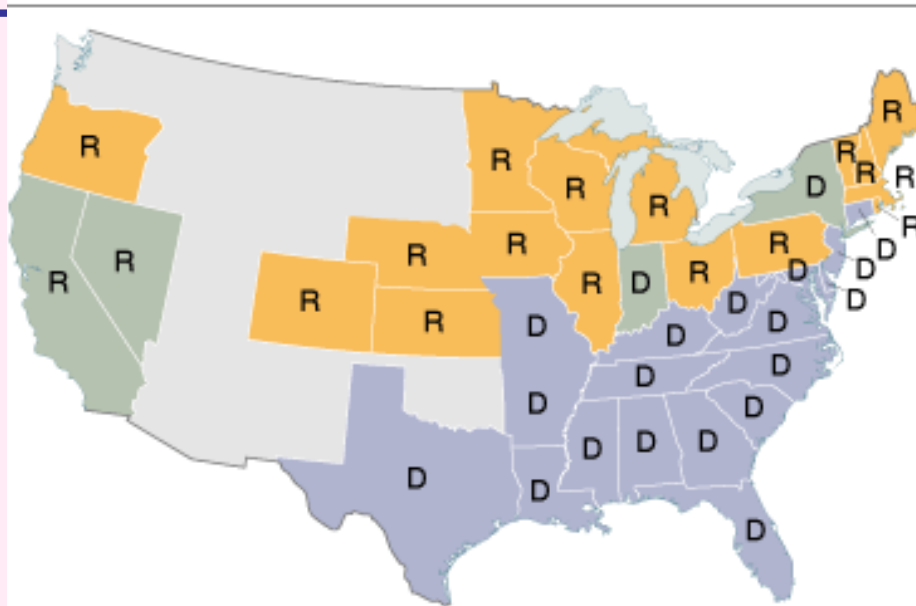
the Two Parties



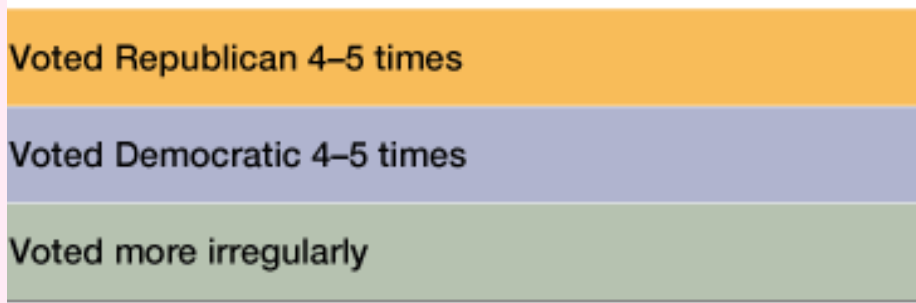
Well-Defined Voting Blocs

Democratic Bloc

Republican Bloc



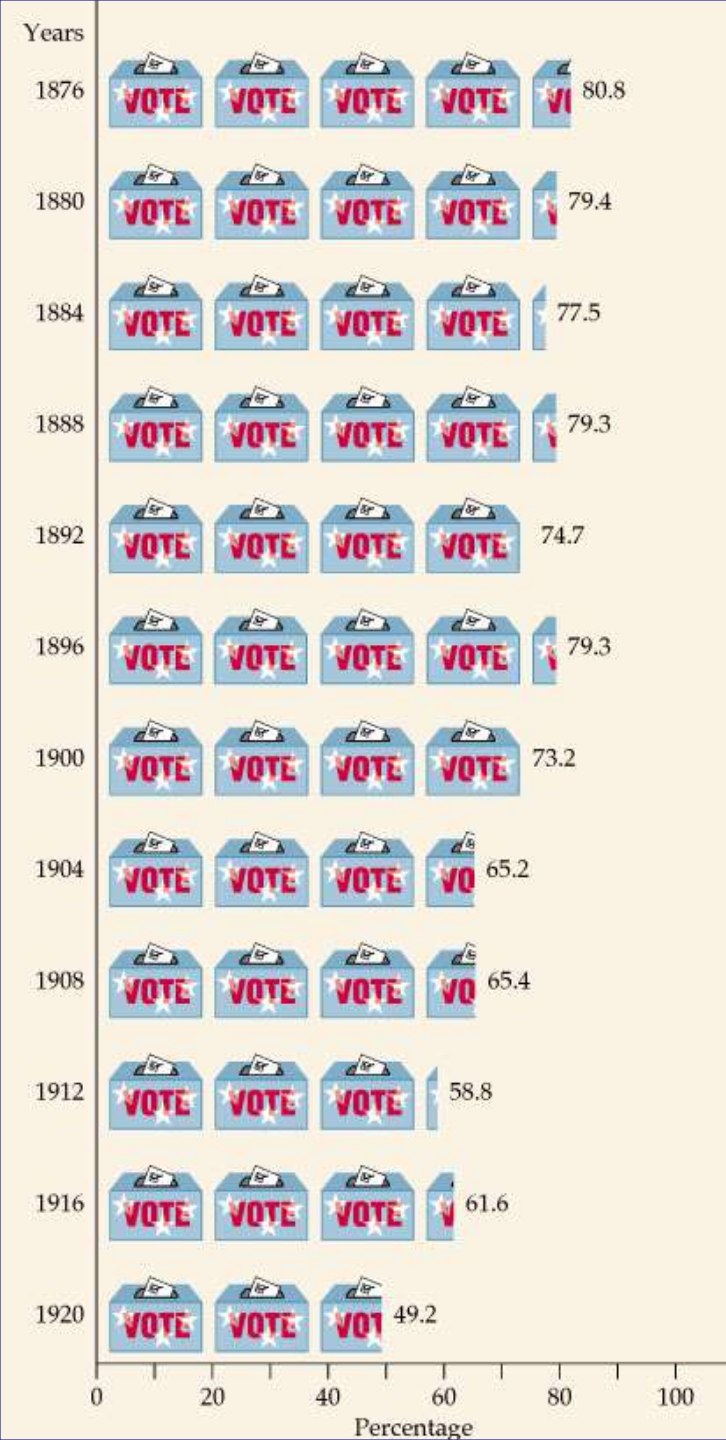
Elections of 1876-1892



- ★ White southerners (preservation of white supremacy)
- ★ Catholics
- ★ Recent immigrants (esp. Jews)
- ★ Urban working poor (pro-labor)

- ★ Northern whites (pro-business)
- ★ African Americans
- ★ Northern Protestants
- ★ Most of the middle class

Voter Turnout



- Intense voter loyalty to the two major political parties
- Led to an increase in voter turnout
- All presidential elections are very close
- 1-2% of popular vote dividing the candidates
 - Twice the winner of the popular vote doesn't win the election

The Balance

- One party never controls both the Executive and Legislative Branch for more than 2 years
- Are able to use checks and balances against one another



Laissez-Faire Federal Government

- From 1870-1900 → Govt. did very little domestically.
- Main duties of the federal govt.:
 - Deliver the mail
 - Maintain a national military
 - Collect taxes & tariffs
 - Conduct a foreign policy
- Exception → administer the annual Civil War veterans' pension

B. Corruption

and

National Politics

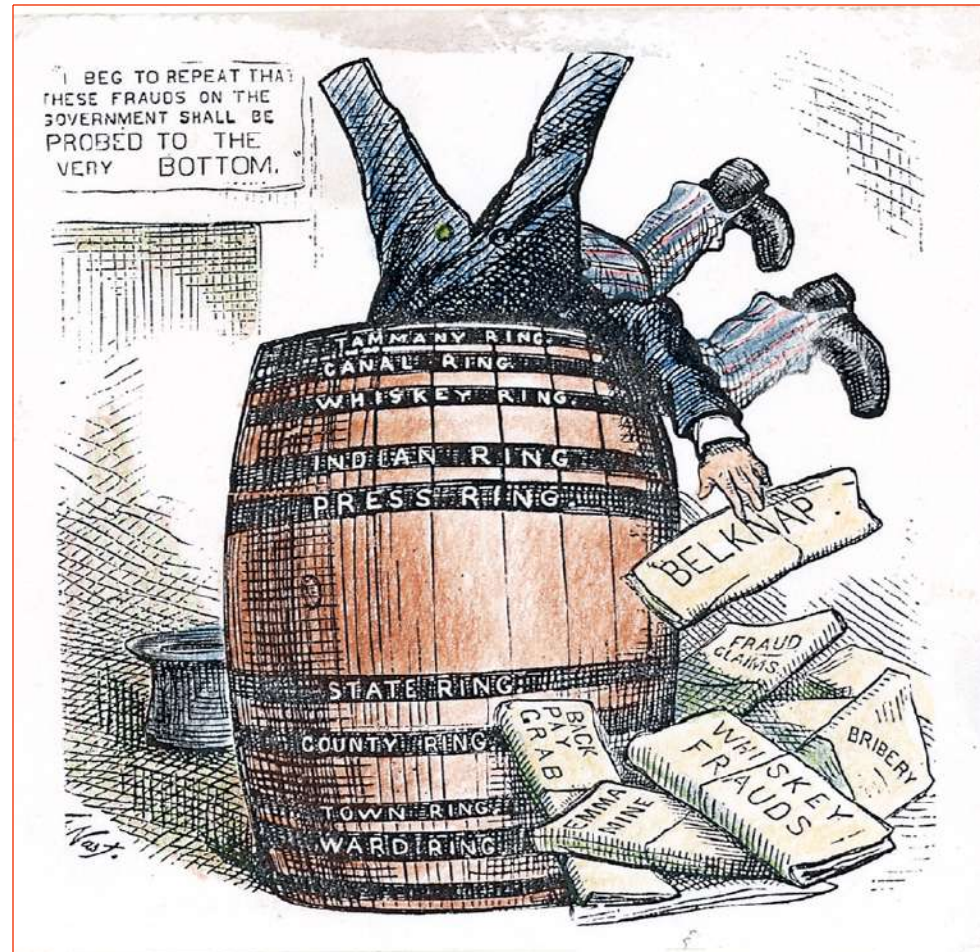


The Big Problems

- Graft: the acquisition of gain (as in money) in dishonest, questionable, or illegal ways
- Spoils System (a.k.a Patronage): giving government positions or kickbacks to your supporters
- Bribery: paying someone off to get what you want
- Political Machines: an organization (usually just in a city) that had a “Boss” that dominated politics and supported one political party

President Grant in Office (1869-1877)

- Grant refused to end the graft and corruption in his own administration
 - Black Friday
 - Tweed Ring
 - Credit Mobilier
 - Whiskey Ring



Political machines

The Boss

- A party organization that commands enough votes to maintain political and administrative control of a city

Ward Captains

- Offered services to businesses in exchange for financial or political support

- The head of the machine is “The Boss”

Precinct Captains

Precinct workers

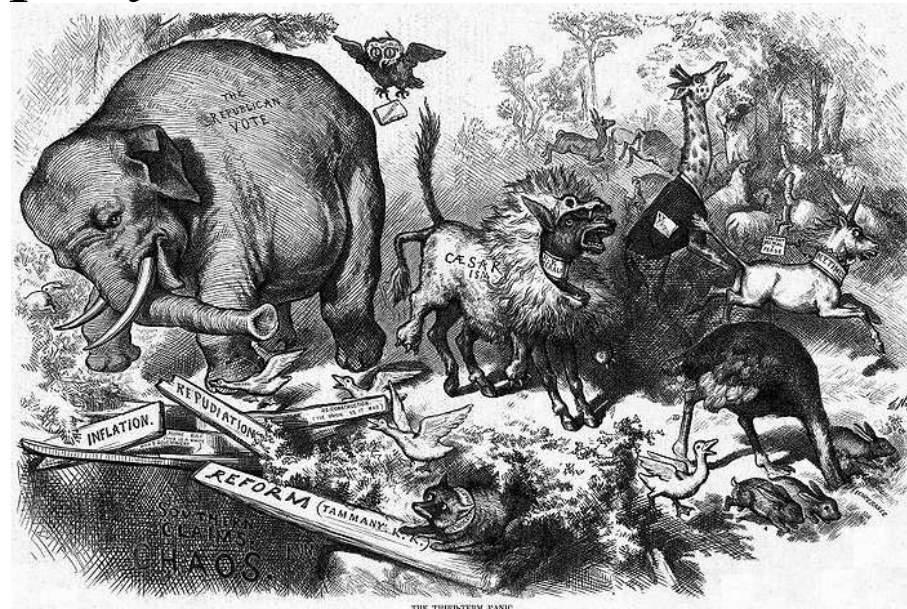
Tweed Ring

- **William Marcy Tweed** notorious head of democratic **Tammany Hall's** political machine
- **Thomas Nast** → crusading cartoonist/reporter



Republican Party Factions

- Republican Party tainted by scandals
 - Almost lost presidency in 1876
- Reform in the Civil Service became an important issue to the party
 - Leads to factions within the party
- Stalwarts: Against Reform
- Half Breeds: Wanted Reform



1880 Presidential Election:

Republicans



Sen. James G. Blaine
(Maine)

Sen. Roscoe Conkling
(New York)

compromise



James A. Garfield



Chester A. Arthur (VP)

1880 Presidential Election:

Democrats

TO OUR NEXT PRESIDENT.
"The Soldier Statesman with a Record as stainless as his Sword."

HANCOCK *and* ENGLISH

GENERAL ORDER No. 40. AUGUST 21st, 1867.
*** The right of trial by jury, the habeas corpus, the liberty of the press, the freedom of speech, the natural rights of persons and the rights of property, must be preserved. Free institutions, while they are essential to the prosperity and happiness of the people, always furnish the strongest inducements to peace and order. ***
By command of MAJ-GEN. W. S. HANCOCK.

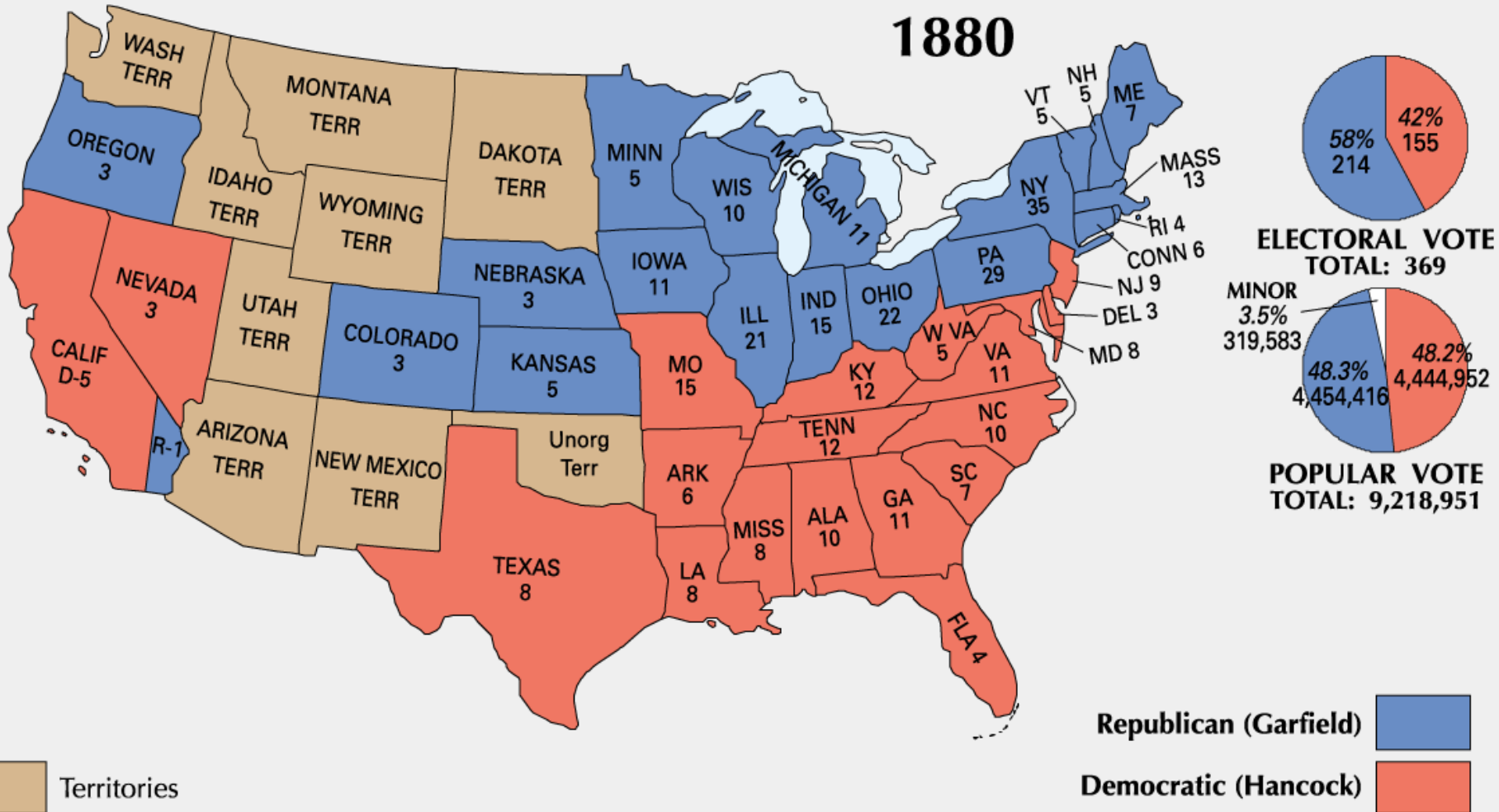
NO NORTH
NO SOUTH
NO EAST
NO WEST

THE UNION of STATES
THE UNION of HANDS
THE UNION of HEARTS forever.

WINFIELD S. HANCOCK. WILLIAM H. ENGLISH.

UNION MARCH.

1880 Presidential Election Results



Garfield as President

- Intent on changing the Civil Service to end the Spoils System
- Problem?
 - He was elected in 1880!
- July 2, 1881 Garfield is shot



Chester A. Arthur

- Conspirator?
- Stalwart
- Assumed that he would maintain the spoils system



- Surprises everyone when he instead is in favor of reform

Pendleton Civil Service Act (1883)

- Provided a classified system where jobs were obtained through written exam
- Office holders could not be removed b/c of party affiliation
- 1883 → 10% of federal govt jobs became civil service exam positions
- 1900 → 50%
- 1980 → 90%



C. Cleveland's

1st Tenure in

Office



1884 Presidential Election

- Republican Candidate:
James Blaine



- Democratic Candidate:
Grover Cleveland



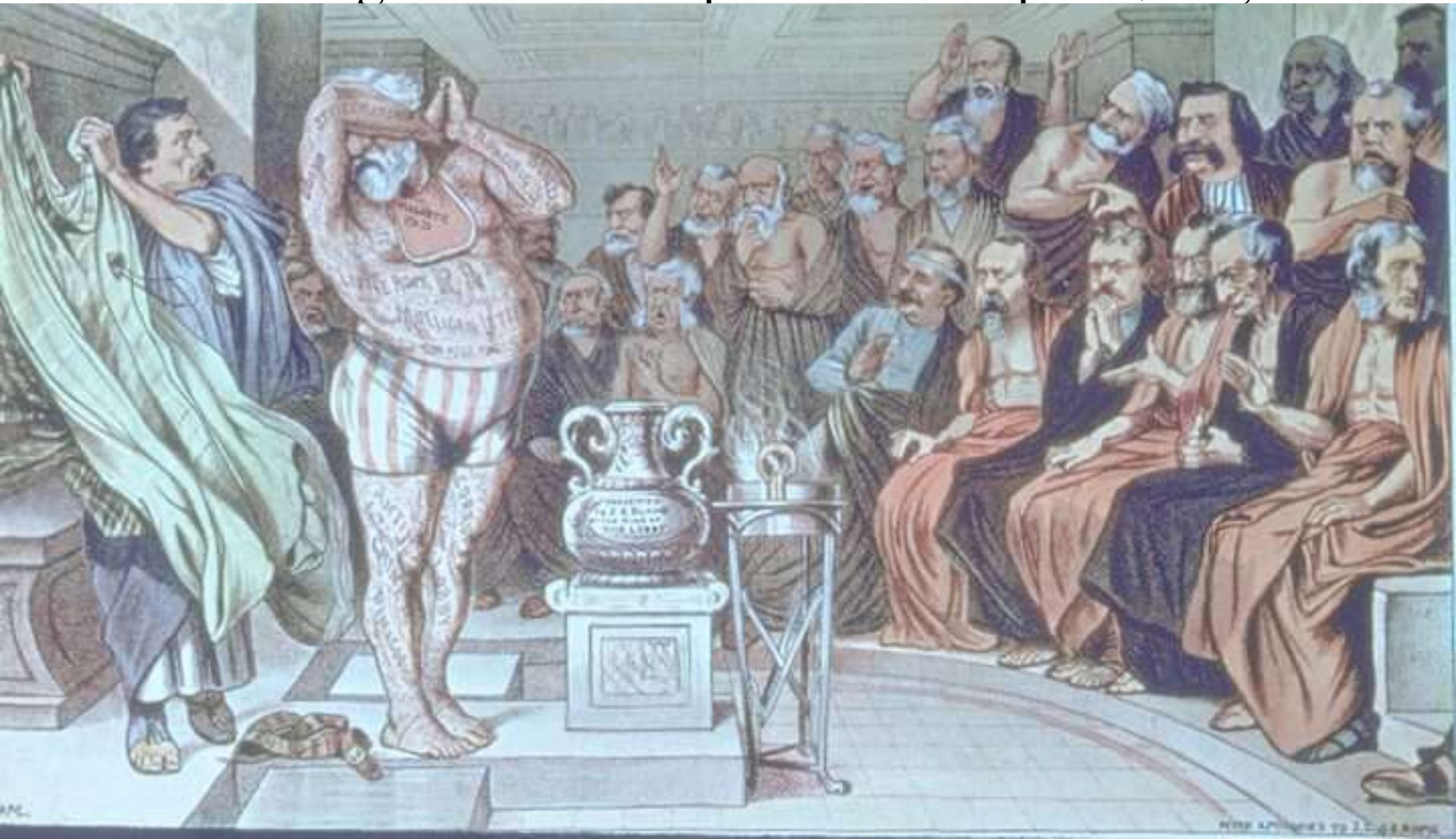
A Dirty Campaign

- Republicans use Cleveland's "illegitimate child" against him



Ma, Ma...where's my pa? He's going to the White House ha ha ha!

- Democrats used Blaine's past in Congress
 - He accepted many bribes from RR companies
 - “Mulligan Letters” exposed he accepted \$110,000



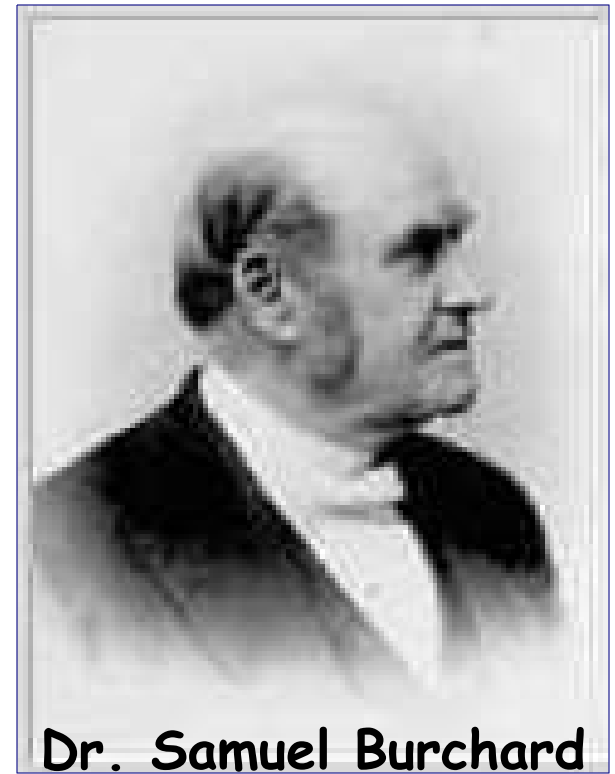
The Mugwumps

- Republicans who wouldn't support James Blaine because of his corruption
- Will support Cleveland in the 1884 election



Rum, Romanism, & Rebellion

- Expression used by a Republican minister in NY at a meeting attended by Blaine
- Upset about the Mugwumps
- Derogatory reference to the Democratic Party
- Blaine was slow to repudiate the remark
- Many offended
- Cleveland uses
- to gain votes

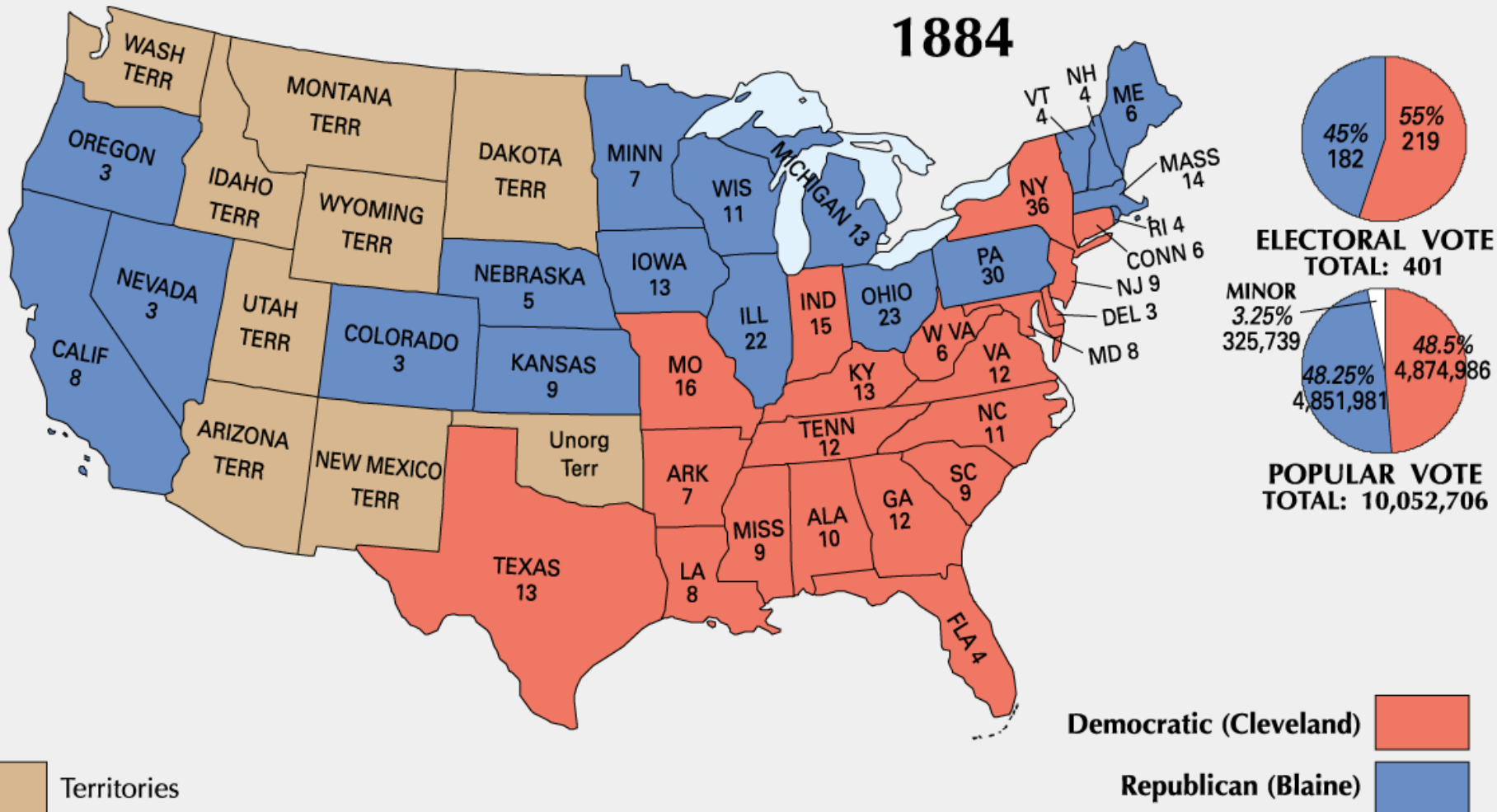


Dr. Samuel Burchard

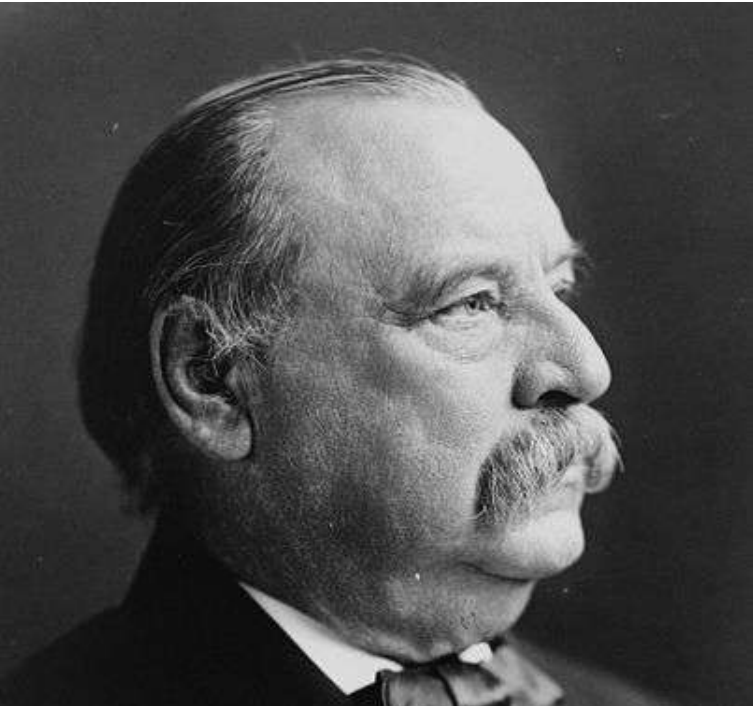
We are Republicans, and don't propose to leave our party and identify ourselves with the party whose antecedents have been rum, Romanism, and rebellion

Election Results

- Cleveland wins
- 1st Democrat since Buchanan in 1856



Cleveland's 1st Term



- The “Veto Governor” from New York
- Married while President
- Opposed imperialism, taxes, corruption, and patronage
- Interstate Commerce Act (1887)
 - Established the ICC



His laissez-faire presidency:

- Opposed bills to assist the poor as well as the rich
- Vetoed over 200 special pension bills for Civil War veterans

The Silver Issue

- Bland-Allison Act (1878) forced the government to buy silver
- Bimetallism specie
- Cleveland against because it devalued currency
- Ordered Sec of Treasury to coin less silver
- Angered members of his own party

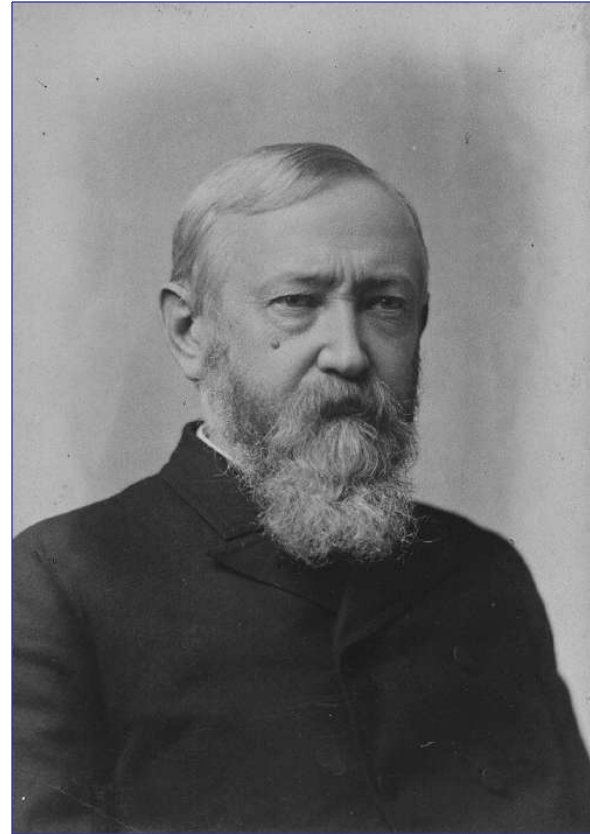
The Tariff Issue

- Congress had raised tariffs to protect US industries
- 1885 → tariffs earned the US \$100 mil. in surplus
- Cleveland was opposed to the tariff because it stifled foreign trade (esp. agriculture)
- Wants to reduce the tariff
- Became a major issue in the 1888 presidential election



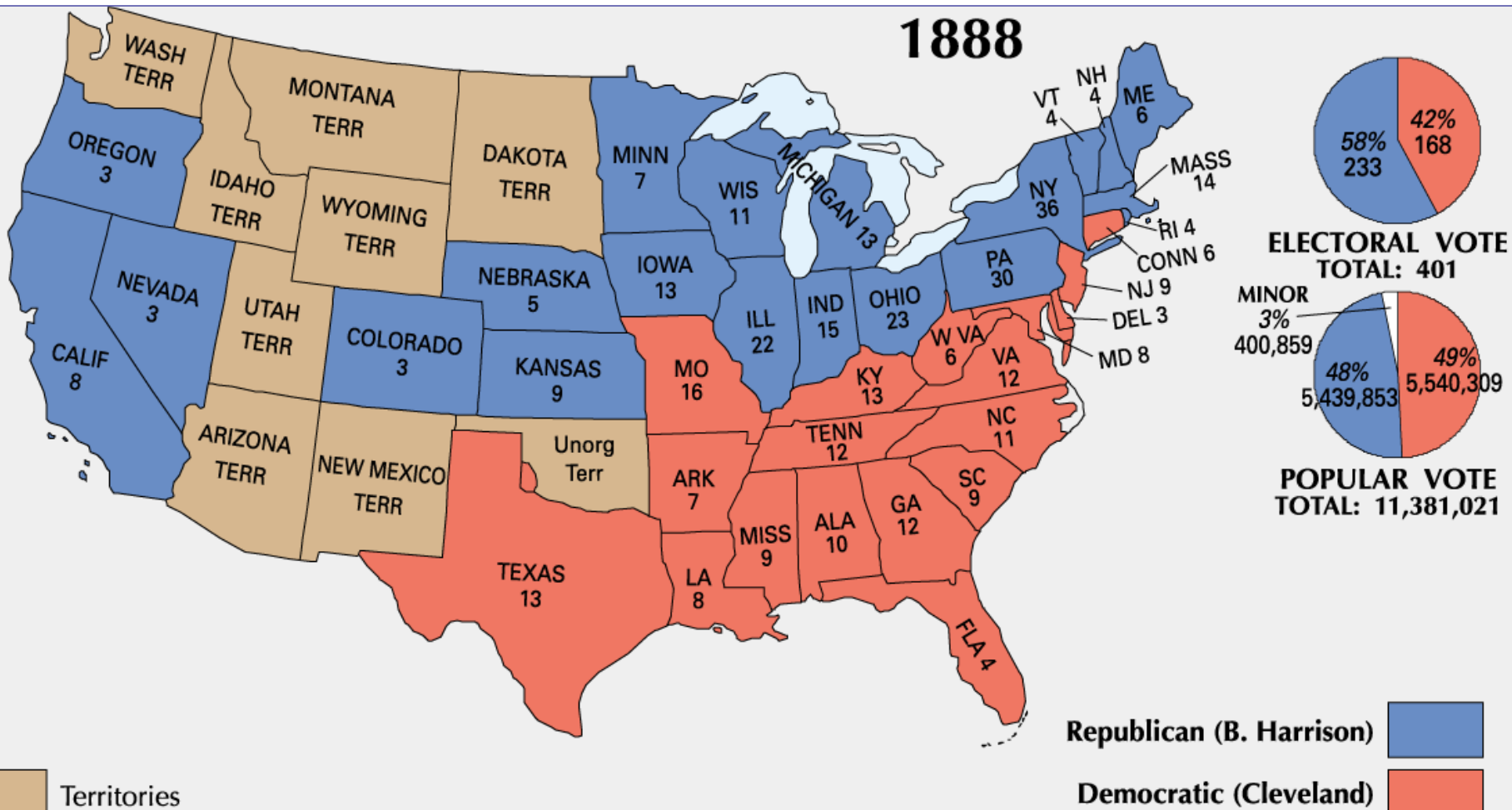
Election of 1888

- Democrats re-nominated Cleveland
- Tariff is an un-just tax
- Republicans nominated Benjamin Harrison
- Tariff protects high wages, high profits, and growth



Election of 1888 Results

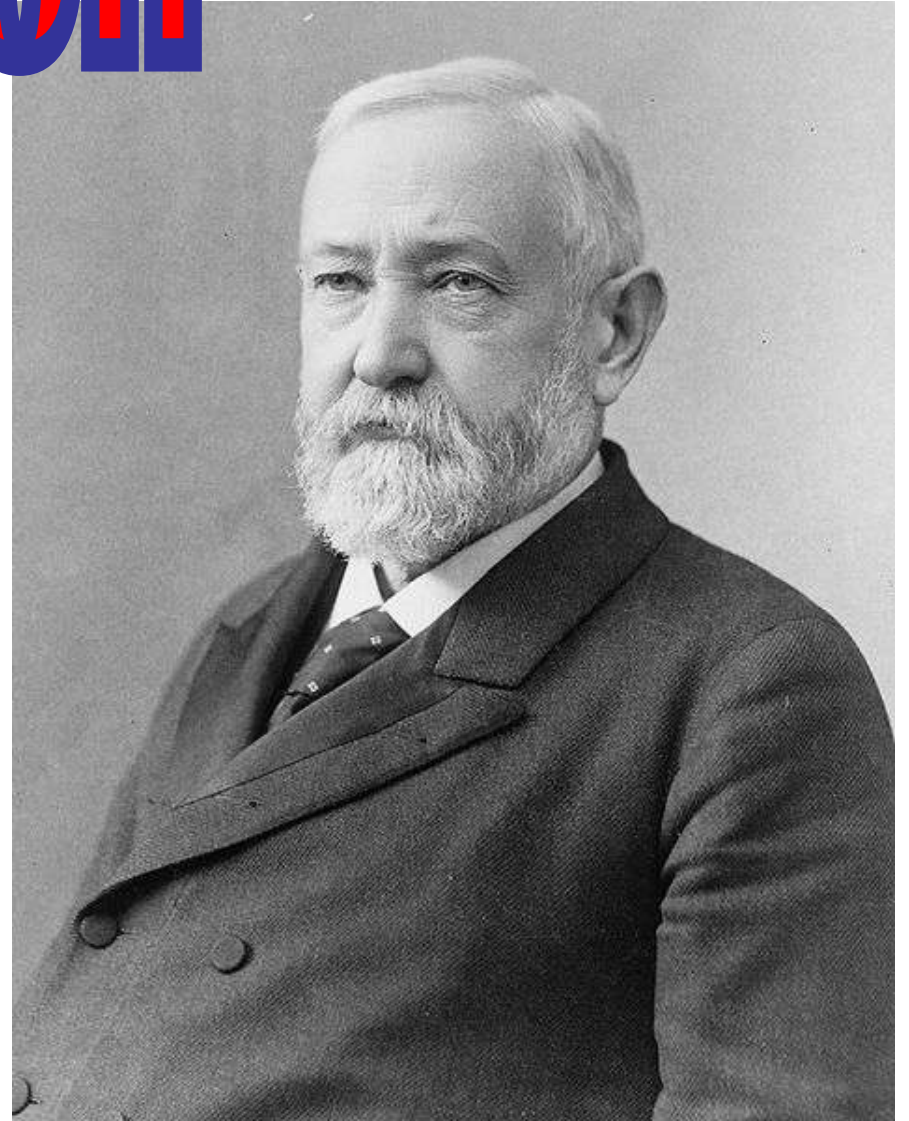
- Harrison will defeat Cleveland in the Electoral College and therefore win



D. Harrison

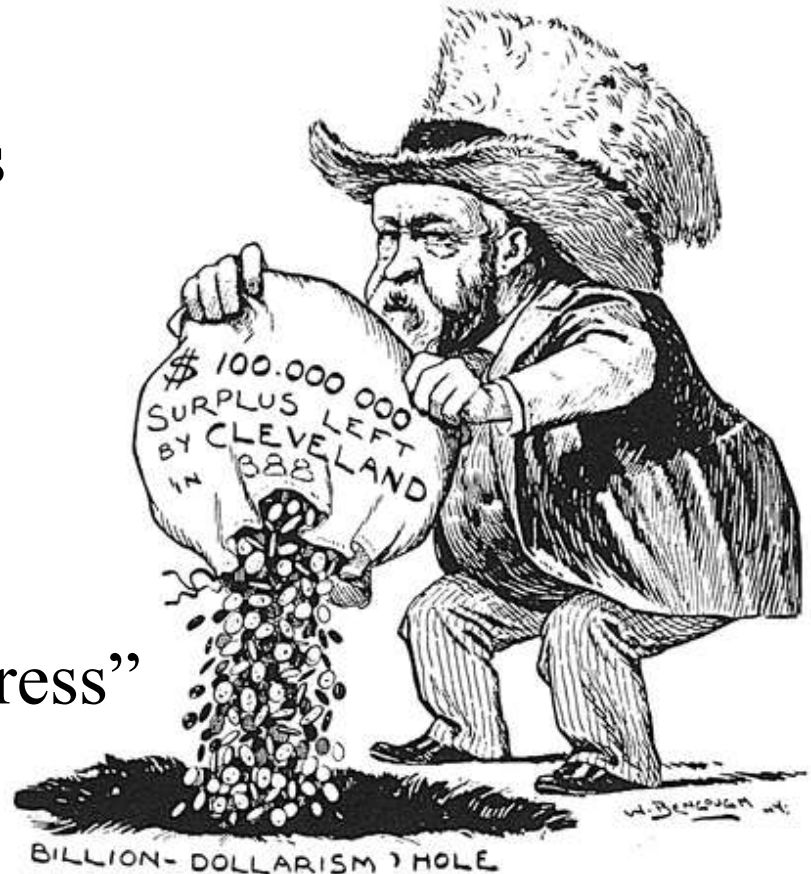
at the

Helm



Dealing with the Surplus

- Congress under Harrison's 1st 2 years was Republican
- Began to spend the surplus
 - Increasing Civil War pensions
 - Increasing the navy
 - Internal Improvements
- Spending was considered lavish and unnecessary
 - Dubbed “Billion Dollar Congress”
- Republicans lost Election of 1890



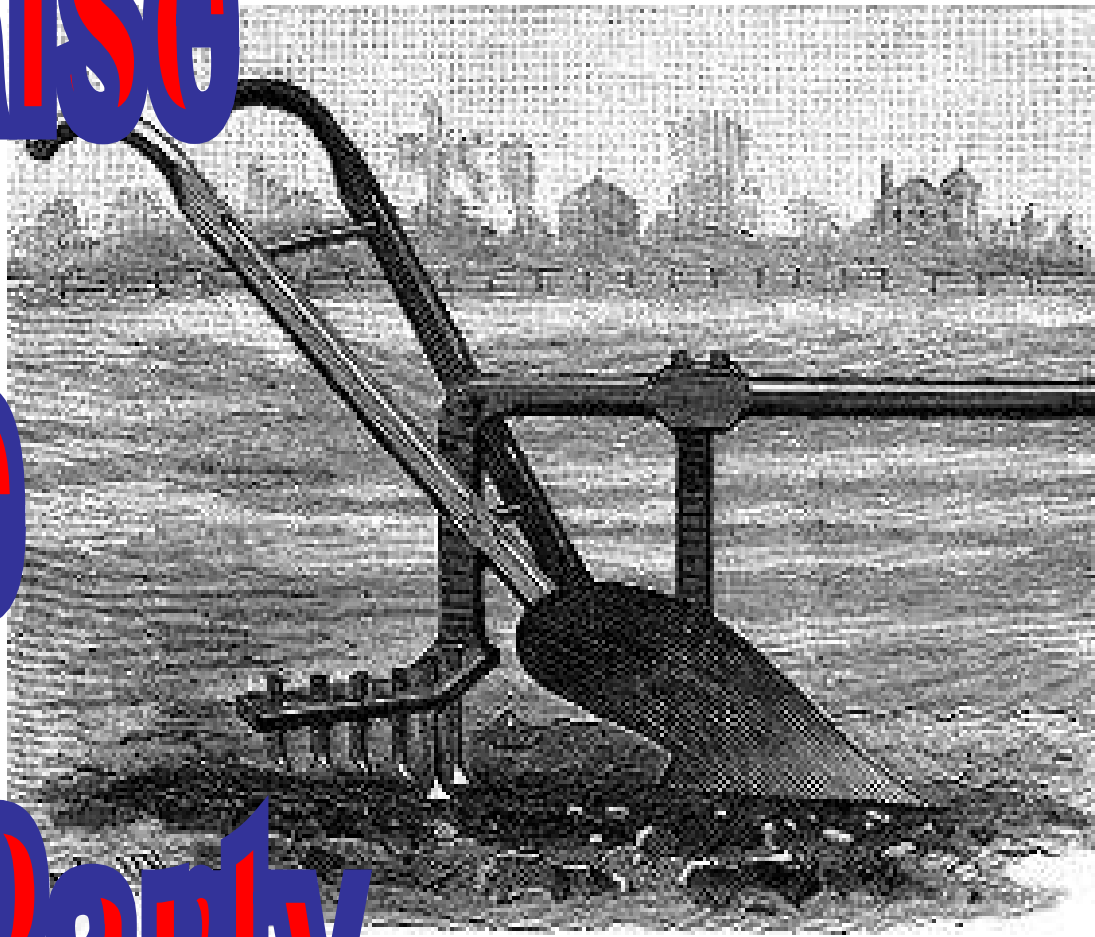
Legislation Passed

- Growing social & economic problems during Harrison's administration
- Major pieces of legislation passed to try to pacify the people
 - Sherman Antitrust Act (1890)
 - Bust the trusts
 - Used against the unions
 - Sherman Silver Purchase Act (1890)
 - To increase the amount of silver purchased/coined
 - Led to instability in the currency
 - McKinley Tariff (1890)
 - Raised the tariff AGAIN!!!

E. The Rise

of the

Populist Party



The Farmers' Alliance

- Began in the late 1880s
- By 1889 membership over 2 million people
- More political and less social than the Grange
- Ran candidates for office
- Controlled 8 state legislatures & had 47 representatives in Congress during the 1890s
- Not enough to change the government's policies

Creation of the Populist (People's) Party

- Founded by James B. Weaver and Tom Watson in 1892
- Grew out of agrarian discontent over the tariff and their opposition to the gold standard
- Combined Farmers' Alliance with labor organizations of the East



James B. Weaver

The Populist Party

- July 1892: Convention held in Omaha, NE to discuss the party platform
- Considered a Platform of Lunacy
- Got almost 1 million popular votes in 1892 presidential election



Omaha Platform

1. A progressive income tax
2. Direct election of Senators
3. Govt. ownership of RRs, telephone & telegraph companies
4. Government-operated postal savings banks
5. Restriction of undesirable immigration
6. 8-hour work day for government employees
7. Abolition of the Pinkerton detective agency
8. Unlimited coinage of silver
9. A single term for President & Vice President



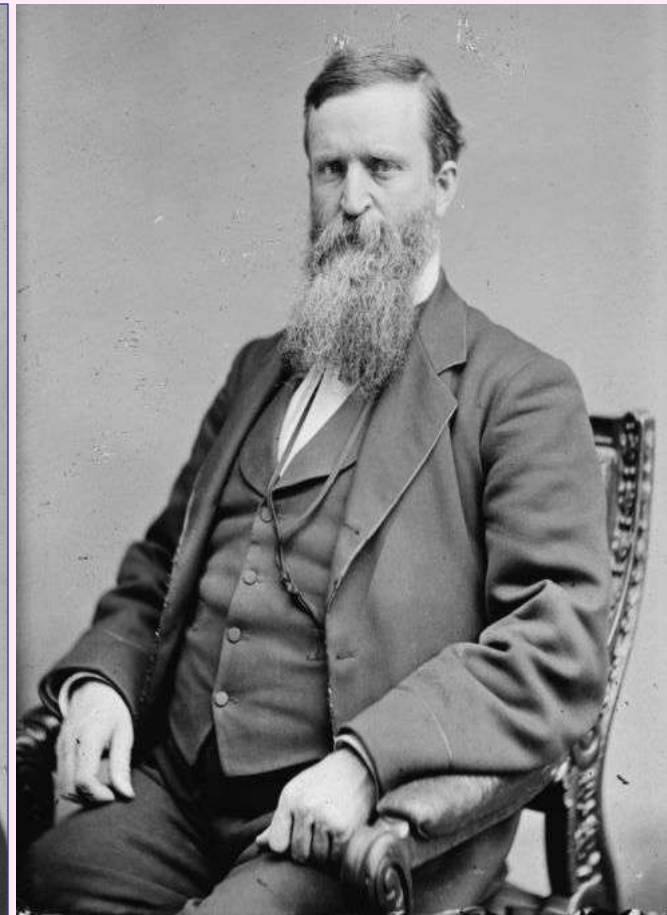
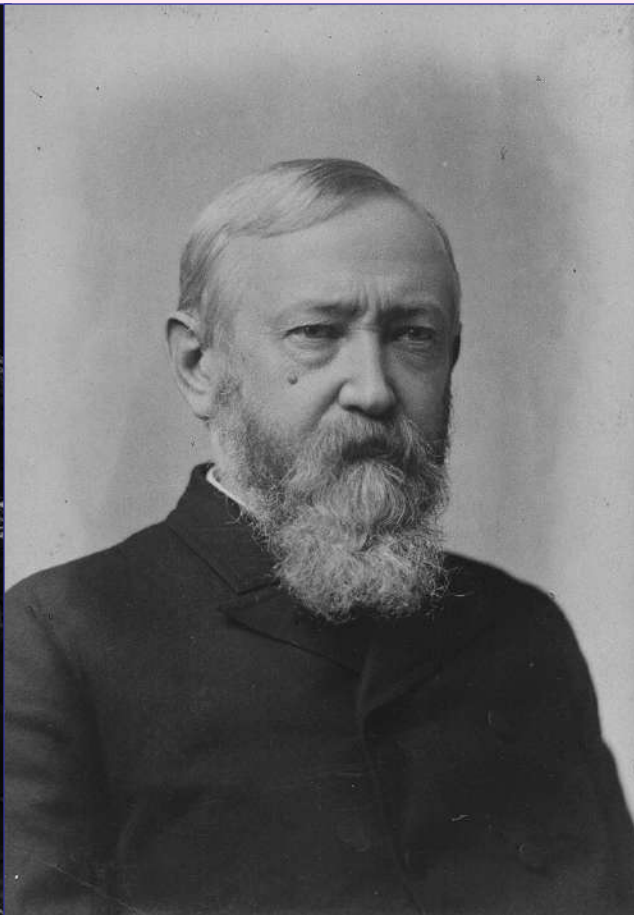
F. The Return

of

Cleveland



Election of 1892

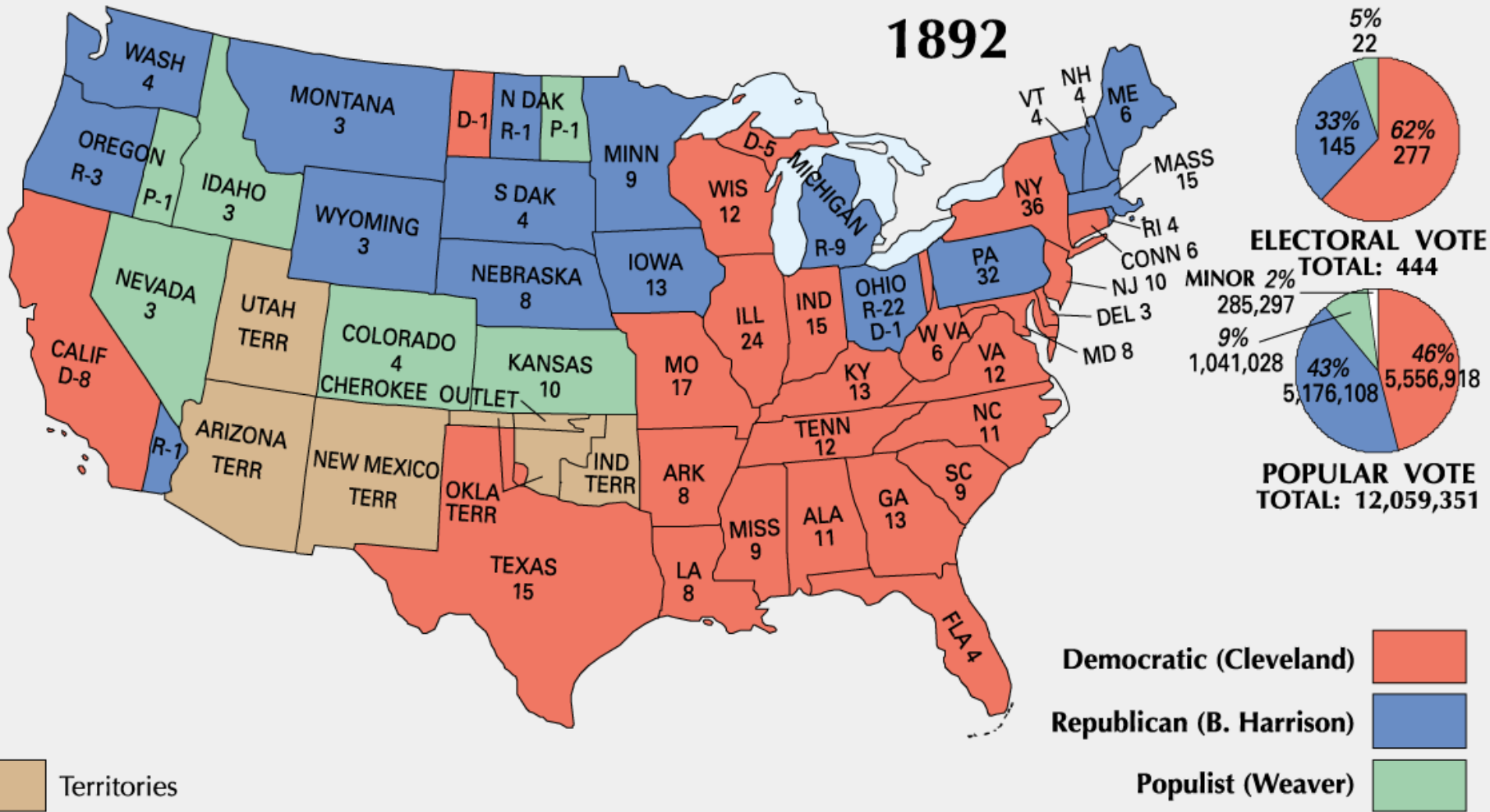


Grover Cleveland
again! (DEM)

Benjamin Harrison
(REP)

James Weaver
(Populist)

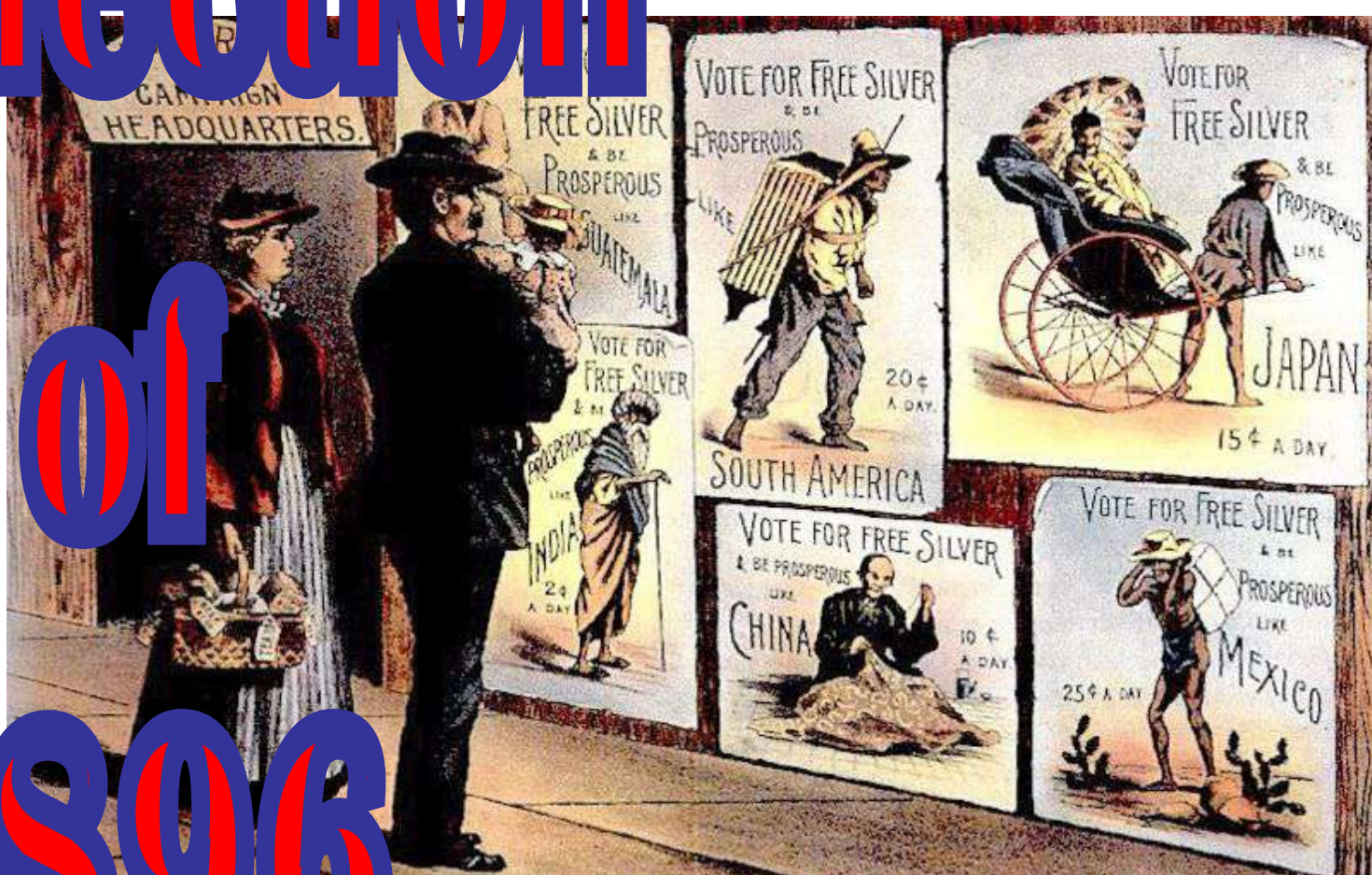
1892 Election Results



Cleveland's 2nd Term

- ★ **Blamed for the 1893 Panic (4 year long depression)**
- ★ **Repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act.**
- ★ **Defended the gold standard.**
- ★ **Hesitated to sign the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894 because it did not lower the tariff enough**
- ★ **Growing discontent throughout the country**

G. Election



of

1896

DUBIOUS.

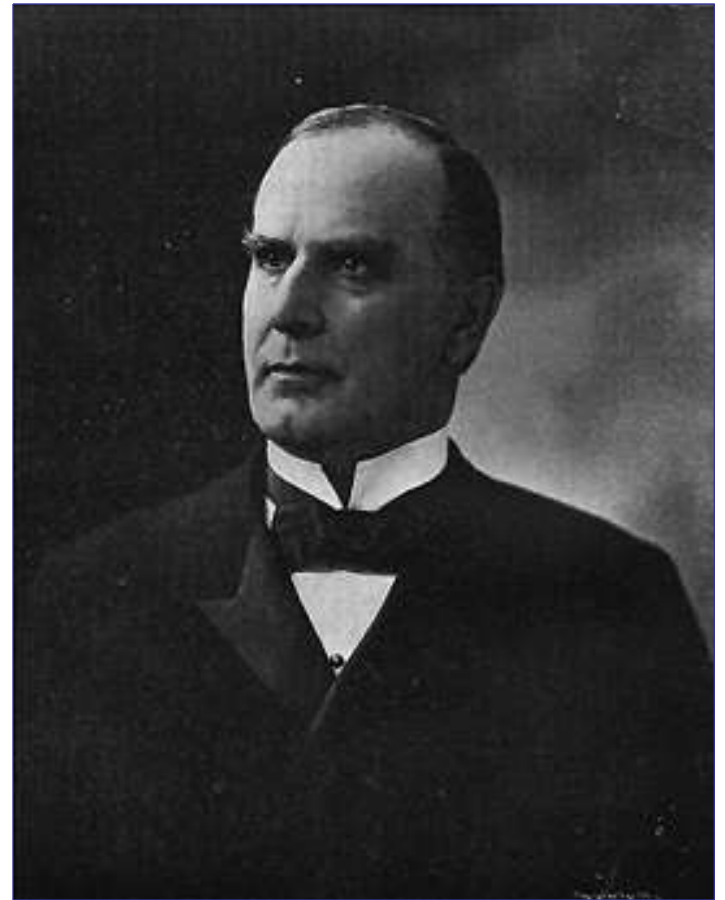
...in all those free silver countries, John?"
"No, but they say it will be different in America."
"I take any of it, John. It's easy to lower wages and hard to raise them. Politicians will tell you anything. We know there was good
...we had no money. We could never buy clothes for the children on what they get in those free silver countries, could we?"

The Candidates

- Democrats nominate Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan



- Republicans nominate William McKinley



Democratic Strategy

- Platform → FREE SILVER, tariff reductions, income tax, stricter control of the trusts (esp. RRs)
- “Cross of Gold” Speech
 - Given by Bryan
 - Promoting bimetallism
 - Appealed to a lot of people



You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!



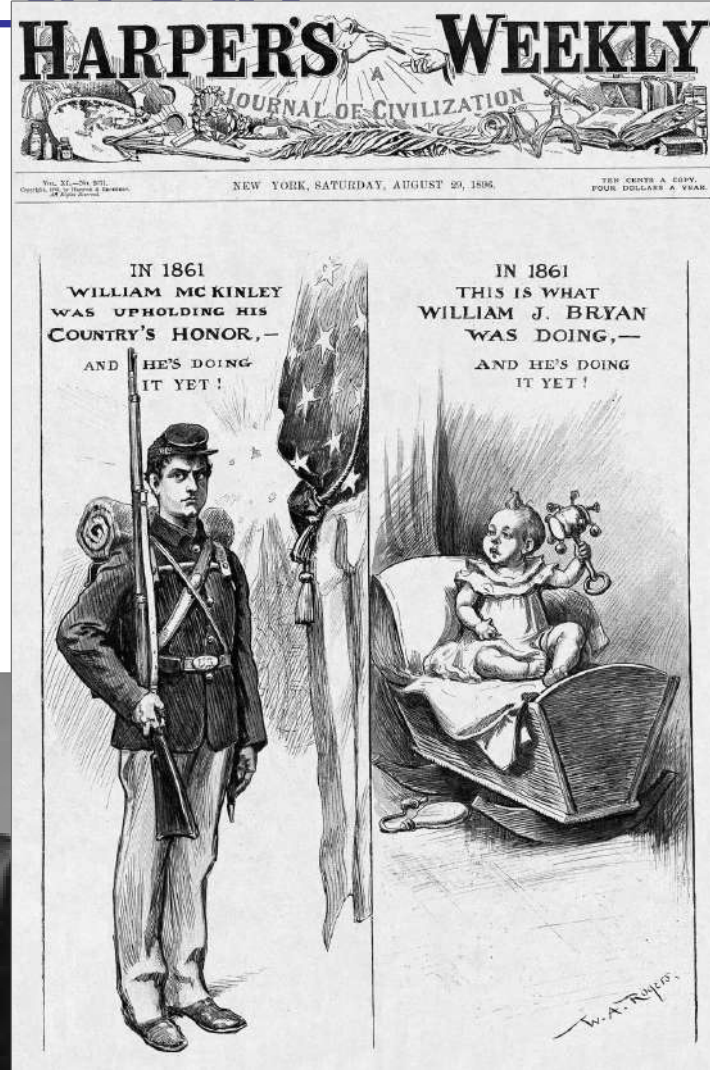
Bryan: The Farmers Friend



18,000 miles of campaign "whistle stops."

The Republican Strategy

- McKinley runs a “Front Porch” Campaign
 - He stays at home
- Marcus Hanna is put in charge of promoting McKinley
- Attack Bryan’s inexperience



1896 Election Results

- McKinley wins

