

# APUSH

## Section 6.5-6.6 (Chapters 23, 26) Student-Created Review Notes (1888-1900)

### \*The Agrarian Revolt\*

- Even before the advent of Populism, angry farmers were getting organized. At first, the “agrarian revolt” took the form of the **Grange Organizations** of the early 1870s, and then the **Farmers’ Alliances** in Texas and the Great Plains. So why were they so pissed off? Hmm...think about it.

- Economic woes faced by the farmers:

- \* **Sharecropping** [the “crop lien” system] – if farmers [usually in South] were unable to pay their debts [for supplies], they had to promise to pay with their crops. The crops would rarely be worth enough, so they would borrow more, etc.
- \* **Economic Change** – in the South, yeoman farmers were being pushed into cotton raising b/c of the debts incurred during the war [it was no longer practical to grow own food]. This made the debt situation worse and put them at the mercy of merchants. In the Midwest, the problem involved dropping prices [due to technological advances] that necessitated increases in production. But since costs weren’t dropping, many farmers got stuck big time.
- \* **Price Inflation/Interest Rate** - to make matters worse, merchants took advantage by charging insane interest and inflating prices.
- \* **RRD Exploitation** – see above
- \* **Weather/Bugs** – well, the industrialists also played a part by making mail order bugs that farmers could let loose on competitors, as well as portable hurricanes. Haha...just kidding!

- **Grange Movement** (1870s) – farmers formed a network of Granges w/elected officers and membership oaths. E/t they began as social things, Granges soon turned to economics/politics. This didn’t work so well, though [they elected people, but couldn’t fight the corporations], so Granges declined in the late 1870s. In the Southwest, Mexican farmers also organized into the **White Hats** [“Gorras Blancas”], who were against the encroachment of English ranchers on their traditional lands, but this failed too.

- **Farmers’ Alliances** (1890s) – there were two (Great Plains & South). They began in Texas, and were generally groups of small farmers that were trying to combat big money, esp. RRDs. Like the Granges, they held rallies, educational meetings, and had cooperative buying and selling agreements.

- **Subtreasury Plan** – proposed by the FA, this was a plan to help indebted farmers that called for the federal gov’t to build warehouses where farmers could keep crops [and receive loans at 80% of the market price] while they waited for higher prices. Also, the gov’t would give low-interest loans to land buyers. This was meant to inject cash into the economy and raise crop prices while keeping others the same.

- E/t early attempts at merging were sabotaged by sectional differences, both Alliances eventually formed a third party in Omaha 1892 – the Populist Party. The Populists nominated **Weaver** for the 1892 election, and he ran on the **Omaha Platform**, which called for gov’t ownership of utilities and RRDs, gov’t ownership of land, farm loans, expansion of the currency, an income tax, direct election of Senators, and a shorter wkday.

- Of course, Weaver lost to Cleveland, but the Populists gained support through their wild speeches, etc.

### \*The Depression of the 1890s\*

- The Depression of the 1890s really started in 1893 with the collapse of the Nat’l Cordage Company, which, like many other RRDs and manufacturers, had borrowed too much and was unable to pay its debts. To try to make up for their debt, companies bought more equipment and worked people harder – but all that did was make workers lose money as well. So companies closed, banks closed...overall, it sucked.

- The worst of it was between 1893 and 1895...people lost money, so they didn’t want to buy things, so prices dropped more, so wages dropped more...you get the picture. Currency was still a problem, as the gold reserves were dropping due to a silver boom, and the more the gold dropped, the more people tried to redeem their securities.

- As a result, the Sherman Act was repealed in 1893, but people STILL didn’t stop, which forced Cleveland to accept an offer from J.P. Morgan (in return for bonds, which they resold for profit). This got Cleveland in trouble with his fellow Democrats and wasn’t even that beneficial, as the economy crashed again in 1895 before it began to rise back up due to gold discoveries in Alaska, good harvests, and industrial growth.

- Strangely enough, the Depression was the last element in cementing the new national economy, b/c it wiped out lots of the weaker industries, I guess.

### \*Depression Era Protests\*

- The first real protests were in 1877 [the RRD strikes], and they were followed by the Haymarket Riot (1866), Carnegie Steel strikes in 1892, violence at a silver mine (also in 1892), etc. These events scared the crap out of many well-off people, who thought, "Oh my GOD ...the ANARCHISTS are behind it all."
- This actually wasn't true at all, though. There were some socialists in America, but it didn't work out so well b/c of factionalism and the constant temptation to get ahead via the capitalist system. The biggest socialist leader, **Eugene V. Debs**, emerged in the aftermath of the 1894 Pullman car strike – but e/t he did form the **Socialist Party of America**, not much came of it until the next century.
- In 1894, another popular movement, **Coxey's Army**, got a lot of attention. Coxey, who advocated public works projects and low-interest gov't loans, led a huge number of farmers/unemployed people on a march to the capital. On the day of the demonstration, however, police stopped the protestors and arrested Coxey.

### \*The Election of 1896\*

- The Populists prepared to run again in the **Presidential Election of 1896** – they were doing well, but their biggest problem was lack of organization, and the effects of racism. The big issue, as they saw it, was the coinage of silver, which they promoted as the obvious sol'n to the country's economic problems.
- But Populists still faced one decision: should they semi-join one of the major party factions, or should they stay totally independent (and not win as many votes)? Republicans were obviously out of the question, as they supported big-business and the gold standard, but union w/the Democrats didn't seem that bad.
- Anyhow, the Republicans went ahead and nominated **William McKinley** [at the suggestion of **Marcus Hanna**, an Ohio industrialist] w/o any problems; their only crisis was that, in response to their gold policies, a small group of silver Republicans walked out.
- The Democrats, on the other hand, became obsessed w/silver and nominated big orator guy **William Jennings Bryan**, who wrote the famous convention pro-silver speech [of course, some gold Democrats had to go and walk out, but who cares about them].
- As a result, the Populists decided to go w/Bryan and the Democrats, only w/a different VP nominee. So, the campaign began. Bryan went on an all out speaking tour full of emotion, evangelicalism, and all that. McKinley sat at home on his butt and waited for the press to come to him so he could tell them about the new jobs he'd make w/his protective tariffs.
- What happened? McKinley killed Bryan, partially b/c the urban-rural coalition the Populists wanted hadn't happened b/c of their silver obsession [took away from other reforms, and urban workers thought it would lower the value of their wages].
- Naturally, McKinley signed the **Gold Standard Act** (1900), which required that all paper money had to be backed by gold; he also raised tariffs and encouraged imperialism. The economy improved, but mainly b/c of the gold discoveries in Alaska, not b/c of McKinley. Nobody cared though, so they elected him again.