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Analysis of the Election of 1896 in North Dakota

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ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION OF 1896 IN NORTH DAKOTA

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This Thesis submitted by Roger Milton Klimpel in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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VITA

Roger Milton Klimpel was born April 12, 1939, in Minot, North Dakota. He was graduated from Minot High School in 1957. He attended Valley City State College, Valley City, North Dakota, majored in History, and received the Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1967. He began teaching in Hettinger, North Dakota, in 1968, and continued there until 1970. In 1970, he entered the University of North Dakota graduate school and pursued a Master of Arts degree in History. In August of 1971, he will begin teaching at Mayo High School at Rochester, Minnesota.

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ABSTRACT

The treatment of the election of 1896 has invoked no uniform opinion among historians. The general works as well as the more localized studies have centered around urban-rural differences, voting patterns, and issues. This study follows the course of political events in North Dakota's election of 1896, through the use of newspapers, public documents, and contemporary writings.

Fusion elements failed in their attempts to wrestle the government away from Republicans. Democratic-Populist forces faced a well-entrenched, well-organized and well-financed Republican party. Fusionists centered their campaign on the narrow silver issue. The Republicans circumvented the money question and successfully played up the theory of overproduction and the evils of free trade. The state's newspapers and businessmen overwhelmingly favored the Republican party. Fusion leaders came from the same ranks as Republican leaders. Candidates of the Populists, Democrats, and Republicans were chosen from successful businessmen and large farmers. The "dirt" farmer and laborer were not represented in either of the three parties.

Fusionists were never able to implement a cohesive organization or muster a broad campaign attack. Besides facing the task of unseating

Republicans in a state that showed a marked preference for the party of Lincoln, the Populist-Democratic coalition had the sins of the Cleveland "depression" and the past failure of the Fusionist administration of Eli C. D. Shortridge to bear.

CHAPTER I

THE ELECTION OF 1896: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Seldom has America witnessed such an emotion charged election as 1896. The election capped a transitional stage in American development. In the thirty years prior to 1896, the country had changed from an agrarian to an industrial society. For the first time the city gained prominence over the farm. Not all Americans welcomed this change; and when the period ended with a severe economic depression, people reacted in an emotional and irrational manner. This election of 1896 took on the characteristics of a religious crusade. The political parties did not escape the temper of the times and thrust the issues and the candidates upon the voters with the evangelical zeal of an old camp-ground religious meeting, making the election of 1896 one of the most complex and controversial in America's history. Historians have analyzed the election on the basis of voting patterns, geographical locations of the voters, economic status of the voters, and the issues; few have arrived at the same conclusions.

With the appearance in 1955 of Richard Hofstadter's Age of Reform, a new debate opened on Populism and the election of 1896. Hofstadter

viewed the era and the election as a mighty but misdirected utopian effort on the part of the Bryan Democrats and the Populists.[1] Hofstadter found tendencies in the movement which he labeled irrational, anti-Semite, opportunistic, unrealistic, and impractical. Still, while accusing the farmer of an utopian bent, Hofstadter concluded that the outcome of the election of 1896, "far from being the final defeat of the farmer, . . . was the first uncertain step in the development of effective agrarian organization."[2]

Writing several years before Hofstadter, John D. Hicks struck a pessimistic note in his work, "The Legacy of Populism in the Western Middle West." Hicks wrote, "Bryan's first defeat rang the death knell of Populism and served notice on the people generally that the ousting of the 'plutocrats' was to be no easy task."[3]

Hicks and Hofstadter have one commonality; both have allowed their upbringing and environment to bias their writing. Hofstadter, the urban dweller, views the rural areas with skepticism, while Hicks, a product of rural America, laments the passing of pastoral America.

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[1]Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955), p. 94.

[2]Ibid., p. 96.

[3]John D. Hicks, "The Legacy of Populism in the Western Middle West," Agricultural History, XXIII (October, 1949), 226.

The unsympathetic approach of Hofstadter and his presumption that the reformers in the election of 1896 were Jeffersonian in their outlook has not gone unchallenged. James A. Barnes, the author of "Myths of the Bryan Campaign," points to the emphasis America has placed on consumer goods and the political interest in the welfare of the individual in the twentieth century. Barnes believes the issues of 1896 brought a change from negative to positive action on the part of the government.[4] To Barnes men like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, ". . . who in a few brief years took over the conduct of government, whether they realized it or not, struck their reform roots deep into the well-tilled soil of 1896."[5]

Norman Pollack, another Hofstadter critic, in The Populist Response to Industrial America, observed the election of 1896 and the Populist movement as a radical and progressive force trying to cope with the times. Pollack contends that, "the issue at stake was nothing less than human dignity."[6]

The contemporaries of 1896 faced the currency question with an irrational emotionalism. This has led Stanley L. Jones in his work, The

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[4]James A. Barnes, "Myths of the Bryan Campaign," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIV (1947), 369.

[5]Ibid., 403.

[6]Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 143.

Presidential Election of 1896, published in 1964, to believe Americans were searching for a panacea and in this found free silver as a central issue. This is not to say, however, Jones contends that silver was a sudden invention of the election.[7]

James A. Barnes, in his article "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," agrees with Jones. Barnes observes a psychological blind spot on the part of all parties concerned. He contends that emotions dulled the senses of both gold and silver men. Silver men cast their votes not on an understanding of the economic issue but against hard times. Gold men had been led to believe silver was dishonest and cast their votes accordingly.[8] Barnes believes that drought, misery, poverty, and special privileges were the real issue of the election and that the silver issue was no more than emotional rhetoric. To Barnes, "silver was but a symbol of things deep and fundamental, and its wisdom can be denied without lessening the significance of the revolt Bryan led."[9]

A similar interpretation may be found in Robert F. Durden's Climax of Populism. According to Durden, the panic of 1893 and the

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[7]Stanley L. Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 6.

[8]James A. Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XVII (December, 1930), 445.

[9]Barnes, "Myths of the Bryan Campaign," 369.

conservative administration of Cleveland brought the silver question to the forefront. In Durden's view the Populists and the Bryan Democrats were not in the vanguard of free silver but simply followed part of the public cry.[10] Durden speculates that the ambiguity of McKinley concerning the currency question gave him the critical North Central states. To Durden the, "Republican party's promise of an effort for an international agreement on silver, no matter how unrealistic the promise, furnished the precise and critical ambiguity. . . ."[11]

Supporting the contentions of Jones and Durden, Benton H. Wilcox believes the silver argument was not the real issue of the election. Wilcox holds, that because free silver failed to embody the real grievances of the depressed regions, the fight was lost before it began. Wilson objects to historians arguing that the election was a class struggle or a rural agricultural class pitted against an urban industrial electorate.[12]

Historians who have studied the voting patterns and the outcome of the election are in disagreement. William Diamond, in "Urban and Rural

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[10]Robert F. Durden, "The 'Cow-Bird' Grounded: the Populist Nomination of Bryan and Tom Watson," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, L (December, 1963), 400.

[11]Robert F. Durden, The Climax of Populism (n.p.: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 146.

[12]Benton H. Wilcox, "A Reconsideration of the Character and Economic Basis of Northern Radicalism" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1933), pp. 68-69.

Voting in 1896," views the election as an urban-rural conflict, a clash between two cultures, the laborer and immigrant against the conservative landowners.[13]

Taking issue with Diamond, Gilbert C. Fite refutes the interpretation of the election as an agrarian-industrial conflict. Fite contends that if Diamond's assumptions were true, Bryan should have carried the farm vote between the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers which would have won the election for him. Fite in his work, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," contends that where farms were diversified and farmers fairly prosperous, Bryan did not have much appeal. Fite specifically points to the Old Northwest and the Upper Mississippi Valley. There Bryan had to convert farmers who were traditionally Republican according to Fite.[14]

Stanley Jones' The Presidential Election of 1896 expands Fite's thesis. Jones maintains that Populists were not farmers or foreign born. Jones does not believe the communities or areas of newly arrived immigrants were hot beds of Populist activity. In essence, according to Jones, German and Scandinavian elements shied away from Populist

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[13]William Diamond, "Urban and Rural Voting in 1896," American Historical Review, XLVI (January, 1941), 304.

[14]Gilbert C. Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," American Historical Review, LXV (July, 1960), 805.

activity.[15] Jon Wefald's study of Scandinavian groups in the Midwest shows that Republicanism, ". . . generated an aura of respectability and honor. It radiated an image of everything good and just, a victorious north, anti-slavery, Abraham Lincoln. It seemed to promote the general welfare."[16]

In a 1966 study dealing with the 1890 and 1892 elections Walter T. K. Nugent found the same urban-rural cleavage that Diamond had in 1896. But the two men arrived at the same point for different reasons. Nugent compared groups of Populists and Republicans in a local region in Kansas.

Nugent declares that the urban-rural split was based on occupations and professions. None of the Populist group engaged in manufacturing, medicine, or newspaper work, while twenty-five per cent of Republicans were engaged in these endeavors. Only fifty per cent of the

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[15]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, pp. 74-75.

[16]Jon Michael Wefald, "From Peasant Ideals to the Reform State: A Study of Norwegian Attitudes Toward Reform in the American Middle West, 1890-1719" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1965), pp. 59-60. Wefald's statistical breakdown of party affiliation of Middle Western Norwegian governors and congressmen shows a marked preference for the Republican Party. From the years 1890 to 1925 twelve Norwegian governors were elected, of which ten were Republicans, one was a Populist, and one was a Democrat. In the same years twenty-two Norwegian congressmen were elected, of which eighteen were Republicans, two were Populists, one was a Democrat and one was a Farmer-Laborite.

Republicans in Nugent's study engaged in farming as opposed to eighty-seven per cent of the Populists.[17]

Paolo E. Coletta's research on Bryan's life has led him to believe an economic split took place in the election of 1896. Coletta declares that farmers who owned their own farms voted for McKinley, while tenants voted for Bryan. In states such as Oregon where farmers voted for Bryan, one large city, Portland, gave the state to McKinley.[18]

Coletta and Fite find two precedents were set in the election of 1896. In Coletta's biography of Bryan, William Jennings Bryan Political Evangelist, 1860-1908, he states the financial issue, for the first time in American presidential elections, became paramount. This Coletta explains as the reason for Bryan's failure to capture the presidency. Bryan's financial stand drove the prominent leaders out of the Democratic party. Bryan, therefore, lacked organization and men of experience. Because of this he was unable to hold the farm and labor vote.[19]

The second precedent is Fite's contention the election of 1896 is the first in which a political party tried to explain the farmers' hardships in terms other than money. The Republican party sought to prove that,

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[17]Walter T. K. Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism," Agricultural History, XL (October, 1966), 259.

[18]Paolo E. Coletta, William Jennings Bryan Political Evangelist, 1860-1908, I (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 191.

[19]Ibid., p. 197.

"farmers suffered from domestic overproduction and foreign competition." Words such as "overproduction" and "oversupply" became popular. By arguing that overproduction and limited demand were the real enemies of the farmer, McKinley brought into play the high tariff as protector of the farmer because it increased his domestic market. McKinley bound the farmer and manufacturer together as producers who must be protected from foreign competition.[20]

Bryan and the Populists labored against tremendous odds. The Republicans had the preponderance of money and expertise. To complicate matters further, Bryan's followers were charged with socialism, anarchism, anti-Semitism, and crackpotism. C. Vann Woodward, in "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," points out both parties in 1896 were guilty of irrational thinking when he writes, "anarchism was almost as much a conspiracy symbol for conservatives as Wall Street was for the Populists. . . ."[21]

Taking issue with the Hofstadter theme of anti-Semitism, Pollack, in "Pollack on Hofstadter: A Critique of the Age of Reform," points to evidence that Hofstadter took only what he wished of Bryan's speeches

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[20]Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," 790.

[21]C. Vann Woodward, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," The American Scholar, XXIX (Winter, 1959-60), 69.

and in this way gave Bryan and the Populists an anti-Semite flavor.[22] John Higham contends that no religious aspects were involved but finds some parallels in the economic conditions of the era which gave way to anti-Semite rhetoric.[23]

An interesting analysis of the two central characters of the election of 1896, is found in Paul W. Glad's work, McKinley, Bryan, and the People. Glad emphasizes that McKinley and Bryan were both essentially conservative. He contends McKinley worshipped at the temple of the self-made man and Bryan worshipped at the temple of the agrarian myth. Glad concludes that neither offered anything new or radical.[24] The Populists according to Glad were, "the true realists of 1896 . . . yet a great majority of Americans did not think to ask if there was any merit in their approach." "Ironically," states Glad, "it was such realists and their followers who were most vigorously branded as impractical visionaries.[25]

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[22]Norman Pollack, "Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of the Age of Reform," Journal of Southern History, XXVI (November, 1960), 493.

[23]John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (March, 1957), 563.

[24]Paul W. Glad, McKinley, Bryan, and the People (New York: F. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), p. 49.

[25]Ibid.

Three historians hold that 1894 rather than 1896 was the watershed year. Carl N. Degler in his "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City," sees in the congressional election of 1894 the emergence of a Republican majority that ruled the country for sixteen years.[26] To Degler the campaign battle of 1896 is simply an extension and continuation of precedents set in 1894. Samuel T. McSeveney, in "The Politics of Depression: Popular Voting Behavior, 1893-1896," calls the election of 1894 the watershed of the decade. McSeveney contends that Cleveland's policies and the depression lost Bryan the election long before the campaign of 1896 entered any formal stage.[27] Samuel P. Hays, in The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914, points out the tremendous shift in voting behavior and brands the election of 1894 as "one of the greatest bloodless political realignments that this country has ever experienced."[28] In spite of the contentions of Degler, McSeveney, and Hays, 1896 remains the focal point of American elections in the nineteenth century post-Civil War period.

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[26]Carl N. Degler, "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City," Journal of American History, LI (June, 1964), 42.

[27]Samuel McSeveney, "The Politics of Depression: Popular Voting Behavior, 1893-1896," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVIII (September, 1961), 277-78.

[28]Samuel P. Hays, The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 46-47.

Perhaps no single fact reinforces the complexities in dealing with the election of 1896 than the ability to use the works of John Hicks and Richard Hofstadter in supplying a common denominator for the many interpretations and questions raised. Hicks, the rural apologist, and Hofstadter, the urban critic, are used by many researchers in building the foundation of their thesis. In summing up the events, both men sound much the same note. While lamenting what he believes was a crucial setback for rural America, Hicks states that "throughout the western middle west, and to a considerable extent throughout the country as a whole, this legacy of Populism determined the course of political development during the opening years of the twentieth century."[29] Hofstadter, latently hostile to the agitation of the era, admits "Populism was the expression of a transitional stage in the development of our agrarian politics; while it reasserted for the last time some old ways of thought, it was also a harbinger of the new."[30]

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[29]Hicks, "The Legacy of Populism in the Western Middle West," 226.

[30]Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 95.

CHAPTER II

THE ELECTION OF 1896: A NATIONAL OVERVIEW

The election of 1896 marked a watershed in American history. The election should not be viewed from the perspective that it determined the final outcome in the battle between agriculture and industry. That battle had been determined long before 1896. The election was unique in that it brought to a head problems which had confronted the body politic since reconstruction days. In one respect the election was a reaction against the principles, the paths, and the fortunes born of the Gilded Age; in another respect, it was the sanction of those very responses. Viewed from a geographical and electoral outlook the latter triumphed.

The period from Reconstruction to 1892 has been traditionally viewed as a Republican era; yet neither party had decisive control. Democratic control of the House of Representatives in eight out of ten Congresses was neutralized by Republican control of the White House.[1] In 1890 the Democrats captured the House and in 1892 the Presidency; many Americans thought this marked the end of the Republican Party. Yet, in two years the Republicans emerged as the majority party in

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[1]Degler, "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City," 41.

Congress and went on in 1896 to begin a control of the House and executive branch which it held for sixteen years.[2]

The events of the 1880's hold the key to understanding this sudden rise in the fortune of the GOP. In the 1880's the country changed from an agricultural to an industrial nation. The pastoral frontier of America ended. The majority of farmers were no longer involved in subsistence agriculture. The agriculturalist became separated from his supplier; the days of the local miller and blacksmith were over. Labor was isolated from management and management from ownership. The concentration of industry and of finance marked the rise of the industrial city.[3] The decade of the 1880's saw, for the first time, the dollar value of manufactured goods surpassing agricultural goods. The rush of immigrants pushed the majority of American workers from agriculture to non-agricultural pursuits. Railroad building and membership in the Knights of Labor reached a pinnacle.[4]

The depression of the early 1890's broke the bubble of prosperity. The Republicans reaped the harvest of the depression in the elections of 1894 and 1896. Workers, as well as farmers, looked at Cleveland's actions when he vetoed a ten thousand dollar fund to aid Texas farmers

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[2] Ibid., 42.

[3] Barnes, "Myths of the Bryan Campaign," 368.

[4] Degler, "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City," 43.

who had "dried out." Cleveland stated, "though the people support the government the government should not support the people."[5] The Republicans in response, were willing to shout they had a national outlook of the problems at hand. They could point to the Homestead Act, railroad building, and the protective tariff. They were the party of well-being and assurance.

The two main characters of the 1896 presidential election, Bryan and McKinley, had long awaited this moment of history and they had laid careful plans to snare their party's nomination, and both were successful. William Jennings Bryan was an anachronism as was his appeal for free silver. William McKinley correctly felt the pulse of the times. He saw that America was entering an age in which she would soon wish to test her new nationalism, and McKinley wisely took a national issue, the tariff, and rode it to victory. The entrance of America into the world order by means of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and its far-reaching consequences add validity to McKinley's perceptiveness.

A third party, the Populists, entered the fray complicating the nature of the election. The splitting of the two major parties over the currency question and the partial fusion worked out among what would ordinarily be belligerents further complicated the issues.

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[5]Ibid., 46.

When the Republican Convention met at St. Louis in June of 1896, McKinley had the nomination secured. Marcus Hanna, the strategist, had started early to gather the delegates into the McKinley fold. As other Republican hopefuls began to canvass, they found Hanna had already spoken to the delegates and won their support. Hanna wisely stressed the fact to the public that political bosses were in a conspiracy to stop the man of the people and deftly named this conspiracy "the combine."[6] McKinley prior to the convention wisely remained silent on the currency question. The man from Canton was adeptly suited for politics. His ability to charm, to remain silent, to avoid issues, and to survive inter-party conflicts in his own state of Ohio allowed him to rise above political conflicts.[7] McKinley's own record, built on the issue of the tariff, helped to put his candidacy in a national framework--a candidate for all the people. Throughout his career, he had been a willing traveler and campaigner for other congressmen and now payment was due on political debts owed him. The McKinley strategy was so well planned that he remained in his home in Canton and received word by telephone that he had won his party's nomination on the first ballot at St. Louis.[8]

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[6]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, pp. 139-40.

[7]Howard W. Morgan, William McKinley and His America (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963), pp. 92-94.

[8]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, p. 175.

The problems facing Bryan were more complex than McKinley's. In order to win his party's nomination, Bryan had to tear it from the grip of the Cleveland Administration. The belief that Bryan won his nomination on his speaking ability, and more specifically, on the delivery of the "Cross of Gold" speech, is unfounded. Bryan built a considerable following in the West and to a lesser degree in the South by attacking President Cleveland for selling out to Wall Street with the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893.[9] In the Congressional elections of 1894, Bryan hit hard at the Cleveland wing of the Democratic party while at the same time treading softly on the Populists. Bryan was basing his political hopes on the cooperation between silver-Democrats and fusion-Populists.[10] Bryan hoped to make himself the only Democrat acceptable to Populist support in 1896.

In line with his attempt to secure the nomination, Bryan ended his term in Congress in January, 1895, and immediately went on an organized speaking tour of every state in the South and West. He spoke widely on the silver issue. He talked to silver leaders of five groups that could help him in his fight for the Democratic nomination and race

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[9]Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," 426.

[10]Coletta, William Jennings Bryan Political Evangelist, 1860-1908, pp. 99-100.

for the Presidency.[11] Bryan wrote to the state chairmen of the Democratic parties before and after the individual state conventions asking for the names and addresses of the delegates chosen for the national convention.[12] In this way he attached many delegates to his camp. He also acted as an intermediary between silver Democrats and silver men in other parties, and by the spring of 1896, Bryan let it be known he was available as a candidate. Unlike McKinley, Bryan was not assured of the nomination, much less on the first ballot. Bryan had to wait for a great moment when he could perhaps make an emotional appeal and use his oratorical ability. Bryan planned his tactics which should not be mistaken as camp meeting evangelicalism. McKinley respected Bryan and did not write his opponent off as some rabid country bumpkin, but saw in Bryan a formidable opponent.

The national Democratic Convention met in Chicago in July of 1896 and the action of the Democratic Convention upset Republican Campaign strategy. The Republicans had hoped to blame Cleveland and the Democratic party for the depression, focusing their fight on linking a return to high tariffs with the return to prosperity. But the Democratic

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[11] Ibid., pp. 104-105. The five groups that Bryan sought support from were the Populist fusionists, silver Democrats, silver Republicans, the American Bimetallic League, and the National Bimetallic League.

[12] Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," 433.

party had repudiated Cleveland; therefore if the Republicans attacked Cleveland, they would drive the gold Democrats away from McKinley allegiance.[13]

Although the break within the Republican ranks may have been more emotional, with Senator Henry Teller of Colorado leaving the convention hall with tears in his eyes and cat calls "Goodbye, my lover, Goodbye" in his ears, the loss was curable--not terminal.[14]

When the silver-Democrats gained the control of the convention, a more serious split occurred. The silver-Democrats alienated Cleveland and the "Gold Democrats" who were in office, and because of this lost the funds and organization of their party.[15] The "Gold Democrats" held their convention in Indianapolis and nominated John Palmer from Illinois for President and Simon Buckner from Kentucky for Vice President.[16] Their purpose was to defeat Bryan and they hoped to draw enough votes away from him in the border states to give the electoral vote to McKinley.[17] Both Palmer and Buckner realized the impossibility

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[13]Eugene H. Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 313.

[14]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, pp. 172-73.

[15]Durden, The Climax of Populism, p. 19.

[16]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, pp. 271-72.

[17]Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," 441.

of victory. Palmer on the eve of the election said in a speech, "If this vast crowd casts its vote for William McKinley next Tuesday, I shall charge them with no sin."[18]

The Populists in 1896 were in a most difficult yet hopeful position. There was the possibility that they could become a major party because of the inter-party fighting in the Democratic and Republican ranks. Still most dangerous to the Populists was the potentiality that one of the major parties would embrace their program and end the reason for Populist existence. When Bryan won the Democratic nomination, he, in effect, stole the Populist reason for existing. The Populists made a tactical error when they held their national convention after the two major parties. Many of the Populists believed the gold men firmly controlled both parties; therefore, with a silver plank, the Populists would be able to attract dissidents from both parties. They failed to realize that the silver men in the Democratic Convention would be victorious.[19]

The split in the Populist Party is often overlooked by historians. This brought Bryan the unenviable embarrassment of having two vice presidential running mates--the Democrat Arthur Sewall and the Populist Tom Watson. Part of this blame must be shared by Bryan and others in

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[18]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, p. 273.

[19]Ibid., p. 84.

his party. The Democrats chose as Bryan's running mate Arthur Sewall of Maine, whose only qualification was his declaration for free silver. Sewall did not appeal to the masses of the South or West, and, more mportantly for Bryan's candidacy, he had no appeal to laboring men in he cities.[20]

When the Populist convention met in St. Louis in July, lack of national appeal or a strong national candidate confronted them. Therefore, Bryan was thrust upon them. The Populist split came to the forefront with middle-of-the-roaders' refusal to support Arthur Sewall, the Democratic running mate of Bryan. The trouble came when middle-of-the-road Populists in the South as well as Republicans chaffed under the Bourbon Democrats' rule. The Southern Populists had hoped to force the Democrats to drop Sewall and substitute Thomas Watson as their vice residential candidate. The problem arose in their disunited front. Western Populists in such states as Colorado and Kansas lacked the ostile attitude toward the Democratic Party which the Southern opulists felt. In fact, Colorado and Kansas Populists never recognized Watson on their electoral ticket.[21]

Bryan and a majority of Populists realized that the fusion was necssary in order to win the election. Bryan had said he would not accept

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[20] Ibid., p. 238.

[21] Ibid., p. 321.

the Populist nomination without Sewall, but he discretely accepted the outcome of the Populist convention.[22] Bryan faced a three-fold problem in fusion. First, his own party shunned the Populists in many Southern states because they felt they could win without them. Second, conservative Democrats saw this arrangement as a sell-out to the Populists. Finally, middle-of-the-road Populists thought fusion betrayed the party and Thomas Watson.[23]

The middle-of-the-roaders' charges had a degree of legitimacy. Fusion, or joint electoral tickets where some agreement was reached, took place in twenty-six states. But, because of the way the electors were split, Sewall had 198 and Watson seventy-eight. Even if Bryan won, Watson would have no chance for office. Therefore, Garret Hobart or Arthur Sewall would become vice president.[24]

The fusion question became even more complicated on the state and congressional tickets. Populists tended to work with Republicans in the South and with Democrats in the West. In the mountain states silver-Republicans chartered their own course and created even more confusion.[25] Fusion was a makeshift and many times an unreliable union.

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[22]Durden, The Climax of Populism, p. 88.

[23]Ibid., p. 70.

[24]Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections, p. 316.

[25]Ibid., p. 317.

McKinley wisely secured an insurance policy in case the Democratic convention declared for silver, as indeed it did. McKinley had openly supported silver from 1877 to 1891, but thereafter had remained judiciously murky on his stand. Marcus Hanna waited until the delegates to the Republican convention declared for gold and then made it appear that McKinley was forced to accept gold by the party. McKinley likely pulled the greatest coup of the campaign when he had included in the money plank a provision to seek an international agreement on free silver.[26]

Once forced to accept free silver as a major issue, the Republicans simply could not admit a relationship between hard times and gold. Yet conditions were so difficult, especially for farmers and laborers, that they dared not develop a strong counter argument to free silver. The Republicans argued that if the lack of money in circulation was responsible for low prices, how could the fact be explained that there was more money in circulation per capita in 1895 than in 1873--before demonetization of silver.[27] The Republicans correctly understood they needed to hold the industrial workers and the conservative farmers of the Middle West to win.

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[26]Coletta, William Jennings Bryan Political Evangelist, 1860-1908, pp. 118-19.

[27]Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," 793.

The Republican strategy was shrewdly aimed at the urban laborer and at the Midwest farmer. Over the years McKinley had judiciously chosen an issue that reflected the era's dominant trend--nationalism. The tariff was a national issue and McKinley identified with nationalism and economic expansion, blessed and protected by a high tariff. By arguing that overproduction and limited demand were the causes of ill for the farmer and not the lack of silver, McKinley could tie the farmer and the industrialists together as producers who must be protected from foreign competition.[28]

The approach McKinley took toward labor was pragmatic--sidestepping the money issue and concentrating on the high tariff as protector of American wages. In his campaign McKinley contended that high tariffs produced high wages and protected the employer as well as the employee.[29] In other words, what was good for ownership was good for labor. McKinley, unlike Bryan, could turn to his past career as an Ohio Congressman elected from a laboring district. His record showed him a defender of workmen's rights.[30] As Governor of Ohio he had been instrumental in obtaining laws for safety devices in industries, laws for

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[28] Ibid., 790.

[29] Morgan, William McKinley and His America, pp. 61-62.

[30] Ibid., pp. 56-59.

arbitration of labor disputes, and laws to allow laborers to join unions.[31] When McKinley went to labor promising them the return to prosperity, he could also point to his favorable labor record. He successfully placed the blame on the Democrats for unemployment. McKinley carried the immigrant vote in the East by promises of higher wages and more jobs. In the final analysis Bryan failed to carry the urban vote. In the eighty-two cities with a population over 45,000 only twelve went for Bryan.[32] Even in the Pacific Coast states the cities went for McKinley, giving Oregon and California to him. In the mountain state region, however, Bryan received a majority among urban voters.[33]

While the Republicans successfully captured the swing vote, the Democrats failed. In essence the Democrats had captured a majority in the South and West, but at too great an expense. The alienation of the Democratic East and their failure to win support of the urban and rural voter in the Midwest sealed their doom. Bryan's campaign issue, free silver, was too narrow, failing to develop a truly national issue. Rather than lead people in a campaign, he joined them and mouthed the people's own complaints. Bryan had to convert farmers who were traditionally Republicans. Where the farmers were diversified and fairly well off, he

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[31] Ibid., pp. 158-59.

[32] Degler, "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City," 48.

[33] Diamond, "Urban and Rural Voting in 1896," 286.

did not carry their votes.[34] This was especially true in the all important area between the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.

Bryan's inability to win labor was the direct result of his narrow approach. He spoke of silver, an extremely difficult issue to explain. In his Madison Square Garden speech of August 12, 1896, he spoke on the wrong issue for the audience at hand. The income tax or labor injunction issue would have had meaning and interest for his audience, yet he spoke on silver--not using his oratorical power and spoke with notes, therefore even losing what emotional appeal he might have generated.[35] Bryan failed to realize that the farmer, the laborer, and the businessman had little in common economically. Bryan could have used a broad offensive campaign by implementing many issues, but instead, he allowed himself to be put on the defensive over the silver issue.

Even if Bryan had realized his lack of appeal to the laborers and the farmers, he was operating against great odds. Republicans had money and organization. Most of the small weekly and semiweekly newspapers were Republican. Gilbert C. Fite points out that,

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[34]Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," 805.

[35]Coletta, William Jennings Bryan Political Evangelist, 1860-1908, p. 164.

> The western campaign headquarters in Chicago sent out specially prepared materials weekly, along with plates, and ready prints to country papers which had a weekly circulation of around 2,650,000. Overworked rural editors fitted these 'supplements' into their regular editions and it was difficult for local readers to tell that the material was part of a well organized and liberally financed propaganda effort.[36]

Democratic coffers were hard pressed. At first Bryan even traveled by regular scheduled public train until the Democratic National Committee gave him a private car.[37] The Populists could not even pay for the expenses of speakers going into vital states such as Illinois and Indiana. In Iowa the Populist secretary asked Bryan for free literature reporting only seven dollars on hand to fight the campaign.[38]

The Republicans could carry the national banner, while Bryan had to constantly fight charges that his campaign and his candidacy were nothing more than a bolting sectional off-shoot. Thomas Watson, the Populist vice presidential candidate, campaigned as a sectional candidate. In a speech in Stone Mountain, Georgia, he declared "I thought from the first that this campaign should be made on sectional lines--the south and west against the north and east. That is the real

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[36]Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," 795-96.

[37]Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896, p. 311.

[38]Durden, The Climax of Populism, pp. 62-63.

issue, and why not be honest and say so? Our interests are opposed to the east."[39]

In the election of 1896 Bryan had to defend his campaign against charges of black racism and anti-Semitism. Yet, the Populists and Democrats in the South, like the Negro, were targets of mortgage foreclosure, and scarcity of jobs.[40] The era of the 1890's was marked by references to Jews, but the Populists were not unique in expounding anti-Semitism. Debtors in all regions associated the Jew with wealth and the Jew himself was fond of exaggerating his wealth.[41] The farmer, in general, did not come in contact with the Jew, and consequently, his anti-Semitism was little more than a rhetorical reaction against the wealth he did not possess.

McKinley, from the comfort and security of home, stressed law, order, and patriotism. He himself played a low-key approach, but his tactics were effective in clothing his cause in righteous nationalism.

> Let us settle once for all that this government is one of honor and of law, and that neither the seeds of repudiation nor lawlessness can find root in our soil or live beneath our flag. That represents all our aims, all our policies, all our purposes. It is the banner of every patriot; it is, thank God, today the flag of every section of our common country. No flag ever

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[39] Ibid., pp. 128-29.

[40] Woodward, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," 61.

[41] Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," 567-68.

> triumphed over it. It was never degraded or defeated and will not now be when more patriotic men are guarding it than ever before in our history.[42]

While Bryan went on a break-neck campaign of bringing the candidate to all the people, McKinley invited the people to come to him--expenses paid. Bryan's management was non-existent. In many instances he worked out his own schedule and carried his own luggage, and in one instance, he walked from the train to uptown because no one had met him on his arrival.[43] In comparison, groups of people who wished to visit McKinley were asked to delegate a chairman who drew up a speech and gave it to McKinley prior to the groups converging on Canton. This speech was edited and sometimes completely rewritten. When the group arrived, the leader delivered his reworked speech and McKinley returned the niceties, usually on a subject of special interest or geared to the wants of the particular group of pilgrims.[44]

Bryan's oversimplification of the issues stemmed from his belief in the Jeffersonian tradition. In his famous "Cross of Gold" speech, his reference that the city rested on the fertile prairies and therefore was secondary in importance, blinded him to the growing stature of the city in 1896. In the years of the depression from 1893 to 1898, agriculture

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[42] Canton Repository, September 24, 1896, p. 6.

[43] Durden, The Climax of Populism, pp. 81-82.

[44] Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections, pp. 313-14.

was producing only approximately seventeen per cent of the nation's income while a boom in surface transportation was going on in the city.[45] Factors such as these were sounding the death-knell of agriculture and the birth of the magalopolis.

The Republicans had the organization, the money, and the leverage to exert influence, and in some cases, coercion of laborers and farmers. Still, Bryan's loss cannot be explained as Republican fraud and dishonesty. Bryan was an anachronism crying for the return of an America that had been one of quiet villages, local industry, and bountiful farms.

In looking at the election of 1896 from a national perspective, certain general electoral trends can be ascertained. Investigating a microcosm of the national election--North Dakota--particular questions must be resolved. Was the election of 1896 a unique consequence defying the general national pattern or was the McKinley victory simply a Republican conquest in a traditional Republican state?

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[45]Charles Hoffman, "The Depression of the Nineties," Journal of Economic History, XVI (June, 1956), 144-45.

CHAPTER III

THE ELECTION OF 1896: A STATE OVERVIEW

The citizens of North Dakota were not isolated from the national depression that swept the country in the 1890's. In their search for economic relief the electorate chose a Fusionist for governor. E. C. D. Shortridge's administration failed when it could not work with the Republican controlled legislature. In the following election voters elected Roger Allin for governor, but Allin in an economy drive alienated voters of the state. Therefore Shortridge, the Populist governor from 1892 to 1894, and Allin, the Republican governor from 1894 to 1896, had one commonality; failure to gain a second term in office. The hard times of the 1890's placed both men in office as the electorate searched for a cure. When the cure was not forthcoming, each man fell victim to circumstances he could not control. Although national issues were important, North Dakota had specific issues within the state that wrecked the political fortunes of Shortridge and Allin. These state issues not only determined the nominees, but to a large degree determined the outcome of the election of 1896 in North Dakota.

Kicking off the campaign rhetoric in 1896, editor Matthew H. Kellogg of the Bismarck Tribune blasted the Shortridge combination of Democratic-Populist forces. He believed the voters had been:

> . . . bamboozled in 1892 into electing a mongrel ticket, composed of dyed in the wool Democrats, sore-head Republicans, with a few extremists to give the aggregation a tinge of populism, the people of the state found themselves at the end of two years of office swamped with debt--and nothing to compensate the voters but the memory of some promises of reform--faint, fickle and fleeting. It is not likely the voters will care again to trust the ship of state to so reckless and inexperienced a crew of land lubbers.[1]

Republicans pointed to the financial record of the Shortridge administration and forecasted doom if the fusionist forces swept the state in 1896. George Winship of the Grand Forks Herald accused the Populist-Democratic press of remaining silent against charges of fiscal irresponsibility. According to Winship, after the Populist victory in 1892:

> . . . state treasurer Booker turned over to Knute Nomland, the populist state treasurer, the fat sum of $228,554.29 in the general fund, and that when the populists retired from office they left an overdraft of $26,000, and unpaid bills to the amount of $135,000. . . . no one wonders at the oppressive silence . . . fusionists can ill afford to have the populist's financial record show up in the campaign in contrast with that of the present administration.[2]

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[1] Bismarck Tribune, April 28, 1896, p. 2.

[2] Grand Forks Herald, September 1, 1896, p. 2; Nelson County Observer, October 9, 1896, p. 2; North Dakota Globe, October 15, 1896, p. 2. The figures which the Herald quoted came from a newspaper article entitled, "A Good Record," written by Walter F. Cushing. The Observer and the Globe, two Republican newspapers, substantiated Winship's charges, but none agreed on the exact figures.

Whether these sharp criticisms had as much effect on the minds of the voters as the more subtle approach is difficult to determine. Yet, it is likely that the "thinking voter" listened to editors who pointed out that even though Shortridge's character was above reproach, North Dakota simply could not afford another "costly experiment."[3]

Winship's accusation that the Populists and Democrats did not answer charges of fiscal irresponsibility stemming from the Shortridge administration was unfounded. W. H. Standish, leader of the silver forces in North Dakota, challenged Republican charges. Standish pointed out that although the fusionists of 1892 controlled all the state offices except the secretary of state, they did not control either branch of the legislature. Therefore, the Republican controlled Senate rejected Shortridge's appointments. When the governor turned to the state courts for action he found that the state constitution barred redress. Although the Republicans pictured the fusion party of 1892 as spend-mad lunatics,

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[3]Fargo Forum, May 8, 1896, p. 2; Valley City Times-Record, June 25, 1896, p. 4, and July 2, 1896, p. 4. The Forum admitted that the republican party had angered the citizens of North Dakota to the point of rebellion in 1892. Therefore, the paper asked the party to nominate a good slate of men in 1896, that the people could accept. Dunlap, the editor of the Times-Record, begged the voters not to bolt to the fusionist forces. Dunlap's position was unusual in that he was a free trade-free silver Republican. In 1896 he worked for the Republican ticket on the national, state, and local level. Dunlap constantly called for patience on the part of state silver men, believing that America had to cure the depression first. He was horrified by what he believed the chaos left by the Shortridge administration and expressed a complete lack of faith in the Cleveland administration.

the Republican controlled legislature of 1893 appropriated $15,000 for the world's fair--an action which the hard pressed state could ill afford. In reality Shortridge cut $108,000 from the legislative appropriations of 1893 by use of the veto. Larger sums would have been trimmed but he could not veto individual appropriations within a larger bill, because some agencies and institutions would have been without funds for two years.[4]

Although unjustly accused, the fusion party found itself on the defensive and the Republicans successfully implanted within the minds of the voters a parallel between fiscal catastrophe and the fusion administration. Gilbert C. Fite contends that, "voters do not necessarily act on what is true, but what they think is true."[5]

The political mood of North Dakotans in 1896 had definitely changed from the Shortridge fusion victory of 1892. The Republican sweep of North Dakota and the victory of the Allin forces in 1894 marked the beginning of this change. The signs of a Republican victory were already visible. A forecast of events and forces to come went unnoticed in April of 1896 when voters went to the polls and soundly defeated two

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[4]Grafton News and Times, October 8, 1896, p. 1; Nelson County Observer, October 9, 1896, p. 4. The letter composed by Standish took issue with a newspaper article written by Walter F. Cushing. The letter of Standish's contained the best rational and logical defense of the fiscal responsibility surrounding the Shortridge administration.

[5]Fite, "Republican Strategy and the Farm Vote in the Presidential Campaign of 1896," 801.

Populist candidates for mayor in Jamestown and Bismarck. Bailey Fuller of Jamestown and John Yegen of Bismarck met defeat at the hands of Republican candidates.[6] The Republicans, by taking the offensive over Shortridge's fiscal record, placed the Democrats and Populists on the defensive.

In order to insure victory the Republicans had to come to grips with an extremely knotty problem. In the two years Allin had been in office, the citizenry had become extremely disenchanted with his administration. Allin had instituted extreme belt-tightening policies in the legislative session of 1895. His actions were an honest attempt to rectify problems created in the legislative session of 1893 in which forty-eight of the sixty days allowed by law for the legislative meeting centered around the election of a United States senator for North Dakota. In the few days remaining the majority of legislation passed without much regard to the consequences.[7]

Allin's lack of popularity stemmed from several actions. First, Allin failed to call the state militia into its summer encampment in 1896. Colonel Herber M. Creel of Devils Lake had raised the necessary funds of approximately $11,000 by the sale of wood to pay the transportation

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[6] Mandan Pioneer Press, April 10, 1896, p. 1; Richland County Gazette, April 10, 1896, p. 4.

[7] Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 224.

and encampment expenses. When Allin refused to activate the militia on the grounds of an economy move, he alienated a powerful faction within the state.[8] Second, through no fault of his own, Allin's reputation became tainted in the Jamestown asylum scandal of 1895 and 1896 concerning the management of the institution's funds and the care of the patients.[9] Further friction came from Allin's attempt to balance the budget. He cut the funds for higher education to such an extent that the state's institutions for higher education remained open for the next two years only by means of private subscriptions.[10]

The most serious and potentially explosive political issue for the state Republican party entailed the assessment of railroad property. The state Board of Equalization consisted of ten men including the chairman, Governor Allin. Seven of these men were Republicans and three were holdovers from the Shortridge administration. Of the seven Republicans on the board, three had been appointed by Allin. The controversy arose

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[8]Larimore Pioneer, June 25, 1896, p. 3.

[9]Weekly Plaindealer, January 23, 1896, p. 4.

[10]Louis G. Geiger, University of the Northern Plains: A History of the University of North Dakota, 1883-1958 (Grand Forks: The University of North Dakota Press, 1958), pp. 103-105.

The seriousness of the budget cuts can be appreciated when the bienniums of 1893 and 1895 are compared.

	1893	1895
University of North Dakota	$73,920	$15,980
Agricultural College	19,000	11,250
Mayville Normal	24,000	7,700
Valley City Normal	24,860	4,600

when the railroads had agreed to a tax valuation of $2,800 per mile of track, but the board had lowered this rate of valuation to $2,500.[11]

The action of the Board of Equalization left even the most rabid Republican on the defensive. A few Republicans lamely excused Allin on the grounds that the governor had no way of controlling his appointees once they were in office.[12] While explaining that they had been favorable to the renomination of Allin, many Republicans held him responsible for the board's actions. They went on to explain that even if Allin secured renomination he would lose the election because North Dakotans had lost thousands of dollars in taxes owing to the governor's poor choice of appointees.[13]

Editor D. R. Streetor of the Emmons County Record posed two questions which the Republicans would have to answer in their state convention: "Did it believe that the railroads should be taxed at this average valuation of $2,500 per mile, while collecting freight rates based upon a valuation twenty times that figure? And if it does, will the Republican party of North Dakota deserve success?"[14]

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[11] Emmons County Record, July 10, 1896, p. 1.

[12] Washburn Leader, July 18, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Grand Forks Herald; Fargo Sunday Argus, July 5, 1894, p. 4, as reprinted from the Mandan Pioneer.

[13] Washburn Leader, July 18, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Minot Mirror.

[14] Emmons County Record, July 10, 1896, p. 1.

The miracle of the railroad assessment question was the state Republican party's ability to disarm what could have been a rallying cry for the opposition. The unequivocal action of dumping Allin in favor of Frank A. Briggs proved to be the masterstroke that would insure a sweeping Republican victory within the state.

To gain the edge, Republicans held their state conventions first. On April 15 the Republicans met at Fargo to select six delegates to the national Republican convention in St. Louis. The selection of these delegates ignored the northeast corner of the state, much to the dismay of Republicans in that area. The convention relied entirely on the business and professional people. Not one farmer went to St. Louis.[15] The St. Thomas Times editor, looking forward to Republican chances for the fall election in the northeast corner, angrily protested, "it is not necessary to disfigure a corpse in order to emphasize death."[16]

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[15] LaMoure County Chronicle, May 1, 1896, p. 2. The following men represented the North Dakota Republican party at St. Louis. None of the delegates were actively engaged in farming. The following are the delegates' names, occupations and geographical residences.

S. T. Satterithwaite	Medical Doctor	Cass County (Fargo)
G. S. Hanson	Merchant	Trail County (Buxton)
Alex Hughs	Attorney	Burleigh County (Bismarck)
George H. Bigenheimer	Merchant	Morton County (Mandan)
G. M. Johnson	Merchant	Richland County (Dwight)
J. M. Devine	Educator	LaMoure County (LaMoure)

[16] Fargo Sunday Argus, April 16, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Cavalier Republican, Sanborn Enterprise, and the St. Thomas Times. All expressed dismay over the Fargo convention and the lack of delegates from the northeast corner.

The Republican state convention met at Grand Forks on July 22 to choose the state candidates for the upcoming election. The real contest centered on the gubernatorial candidate. Allin's past record concerning the Board of Equalization, the state militia, and the education veto made his renomination unacceptable to party leaders. William Budge, postmaster of Grand Forks and a strong contender, lost his bid largely through the efforts of newspapers supporting Allin. George Winship of the Herald, one of Budge's hometown newspapers, had viscously smeared Budge's character. In one instance Budge was accused of taking a trip to the Black Hills in which the expressed purpose was to engage in strong drink and general debauchery. Many editors came to Budge's defense but the stigma of doubt remained.[17] Shortly before the convention the Mayville Tribune labeled Budge a "candidate of the saloon element" who hungered after the state treasury and the taxpayers' money.[18] With Budge and Allin out of contention, the Republican State Auditor Frank A. Briggs received the nomination. Briggs was not a dark horse. He had established himself in Morton County politics and had engaged successfully in the newspaper and real estate business.

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[17] Emmons County Record, July 3, 1896, p. 1; Grand Forks Herald, June 27, 1896, p. 5, and July 1, 1896, p. 4. Editor Streetor of the Record strongly denied such stories. For the anti-Budge statements see the Herald.

[18] Mayville Tribune, July 17, 1896, p. 1.

Endorsement of the national platform produced a minor revolt. A disgruntled minority attempted to substitute a free silver plank for the gold standard. A roll call vote on the issue brought a devastating 465 to 18 defeat to the free silver element.[19]

Although the Republican convention alienated certain factions within the party, the Republicans could write off the northeast corner of the state and still win by a comfortable majority. Their actions and the election results substantiate this premise. First, of the six delegates chosen to the national convention none resided in the northeast corner. Second, Allin's residence in Grand Forks County represented the snubbed corner and he was overthrown for the Missouri Slope candidate Briggs.

Fortunately for the Republicans, Roger Allin's conduct after the July 22 convention contributed to the healing of political wounds. In an interview with the Fargo Forum shortly after the convention Allin stated:

> I accept the result of the Grand Forks Convention with the best of feeling and will do all in my power to elect the ticket. Any statement made that I will knife the ticket or any men on it is without foundation. I expect to take an active part in the campaign and predict a great republican victory.[20]

Fusion became a fact in North Dakota's election of 1896 when a joint committee made up of Democrats and Populists met in Fargo on

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[19] Dickinson Press, July 25, 1896, p. 2; Grand Forks Herald, July 24, 1896, p. 2. The free silver votes came from the following counties: Cass 1, Grand Forks 11, Ramsey 5, and Ward 1.

[20] Fargo Forum, July 30, 1896, p. 1.

uly 30, 1896, and reported to the state Populist convention. The joint ommittee's report favorable to fusion was unanimously embraced.[21] Jpon adoption the leaders of both parties agreed to toss a silver dollar, atic, sixteen to one, and divide the state offices.[22] A problem arose ver the office of governor. The Populists pointed out that the Democrats ad the United States Senator and the federal patronage and therefore, ie Populists should be given the governorship. The Democratic leaders ranted this concession.[23]

The chance or lottery method of choosing offices proved unfortunate or the fusionists, because this led to Republican claims that the so-alled "reformers" were nothing more than political bosses. The Mayville Tribune later pointed out to the voters in North Dakota that:

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[21] Grafton News and Times, August 6, 1896, p. 1.

[22] Jamestown Alert, August 6, 1896, pp. 1, 8; Bismarck Tribune, uly 31, 1896, p. 3. The offices were apportioned accordingly.

Democrat	Independent
Congressman	Governor
Lieutenant Governor	Secretary of State
State Treasurer	State Auditor
Attorney General	Superintendent of Public Schools
Commissioner of Insurance	Commissioner of Agriculture
Judge of Supreme Court	Presidential Electors
Railroad Commissioners (1)	Railroad Commissioners (2)

In the coin toss the Independents won the Supreme Court position ut traded for the Superintendent of Schools with the Democrats because ie two parties agreed a stronger candidate could be placed in nomination f the positions were exchanged.

[23] Jamestown Alert, August 6, 1896, p. 8.

> The populist state convention chose their half of the fusion ticket without the participation or concert of the democratic convention which was not in session. The Democratic half of the ticket was nominated without the participation or concert of the populist convention, which had then adjourned.[24]

The Populist convention proved uneventful despite a four way race for governor. The debate and speeches lasted a day but the vote at the end of the first ballot decided the issue. R. B. Richardson of Pembina County outpolled his nearest competitor, W. A. Bentley of Burleigh County, by twenty-eight votes. The delegates accepted the remainder of the ticket as reported by the nominating committee.[25] The Populists relied heavily on business and professional people in filling their half of the ticket.[26]

The Populist convention unfortunately focused on a narrow idealistic approach. The party willingly placed all issues in a secondary

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[24] Mayville Tribune, October 22, 1896, p. 4. The editor of the Tribune warned if the fusion forces won there would be a scramble for office and reminded the voters of the Shortridge administration.

[25] Grafton News and Times, August 6, 1896, p. 1.

[26] Ibid.; Jamestown Alert, August 6, 1896, p. 1. The following are the offices, candidates' names, occupations, and geographic residences:
Governor: R. B. Richardson, Lumberman, Farmer, Pembina County
Secretary of State: J. E. Hodgson, Farmer, Sargent County
Auditor: J. T. Eager, Furniture Dealer, Stutsman County
Commissioner of Agriculture: G. S. Reishus, Businessman, Ward County
R. R. Commissioner: Oliver Knudson, Politician, Sheriff, Nelson County
R. R. Commissioner: O. G. Major, Farmer, Steele County
Presidential Electors: D. F. Siegried, Druggist, Barnes County
C. A. Digness, Farmer, Traill County
E. C. D. Shortridge, Farmer, Burleigh County

position to silver. The platform stated, "While there are many questions of importance pressing for solution, we regard the money question as paramount to every other question at this time. . . ."[27] With the completion of the state ticket and the state platform, the Populist convention adjourned until August 12, the opening day of the state Democratic convention at Grand Forks. The Populists planned to reconvene in conjunction with the Democratic convention to ratify the Democratic half of the ticket.[28]

The Democratic state convention in its meeting had little to do except fill the offices given to them by the coin toss at Fargo. The business and professional people were in command and when the convention closed the candidates nominated for office did not include a farmer.[29]

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[27]Grafton News and Times, August 6, 1896, p. 1; Towner News and Stockmen, August 7, 1896, p. 2.

[28]Larimore Pioneer, August 6, 1896, p. 3.

[29]Jamestown Alert, August 13, 1896, p. 1. The following are the offices, candidates' names, occupations, and geographical residences:
Congressman: John Burke, Attorney, Rolette County
Secretary of Treasurer: H. D. Albert, County Auditor, Politician, Cavalier County
Attorney General: Marion Conklin, Attorney, Stutsman County
Insurance Commissioner: F. T. Parlin, Businessman, Cass County
Lieutenant Governor: J. L. Cashel, Banker, Walsh County
R. R. Commissioner: W. S. Vent, Merchant, Dickey County
Supreme Court: C. F. Templeton, Attorney, Grand Forks County
The Democrats snubbed the Missouri Slope in the same manner that the Republicans neglected the northeast corner of the state.

The Democratic convention revealed the same narrow idealistic spirit that the Populists had shown in Fargo. The paramount campaign issue centered on money. The state platform unequivocally stated:

> The paramount question now before the people is, shall we be obliged to remain on the British gold standard with all its destructive tendencies, or shall we return to and follow the divisional policy of our fathers, declaring both gold and silver as the standard money of the people?[30]

Many signs about the Democratic convention forecast problems for the fusionists. Newspapers in North Dakota chose to ignore the convention by sending only ten newsmen to cover the proceedings.[31] The Benson County delegation reported that the silver issue was dead in its part of the state.[32] Some delegates believed that a Populist candidate for governor allowed the Republicans a gain of 3,000 votes. Many believed that a number of dissatisfied Republicans and sincere Democrats may have voted for a good Democratic candidate but not for a Populist.[33]

It is possible even with the loss of all the Prohibition newspapers printed in 1896 to piece together some of the events and interaction concerning the Prohibition party. The state convention of 1896 met in mid-September at Fargo. Four candidates were chosen and the rest of the

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[30] Daily Plaindealer, August 13, 1896, p. 3.

[31] Ibid., August 12, 1896, p. 1.

[32] Ibid., August 13, 1896, p. 3.

[33] Bismarck Tribune, July 31, 1896, p. 3.

ticket left unfilled. Mrs. Emma Bates received the nomination for Public School Superintendent and Herbert M. Root for Attorney General. The convention endorsed R. B. Richardson, the fusion candidate for governor, and passed over M. N. Johnson, the fusionist candidate for Congressman, even though he was satisfactory to a majority of delegates. Johnson failed to receive the endorsement at the insistence of H. A. Garver, the editor of the Benson County News, who wished the nomination for himself.[34]

Richardson received the endorsement of the Prohibition forces because prior to the convention the secretary of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Miss Elizabeth Preston, sent each gubernatorial candidate a letter asking them to clarify their positions on women's sufferage and prohibition. Frank Briggs, the Republican nominee, did not reply, but R. B. Richardson, the fusionist candidate, proclaimed he was a life long advocate of prohibition and if elected governor he would work for and sign into law a women's sufferage bill. Richardson had the WCTU on his side as well as M. H. Kiff, chairman of the Prohibition Party, who actively campaigned for him.[35]

An important factor contributing to the prohibitionists' endorsement of Richardson was such pro-Republican papers as the Bismarck Tribune.

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[34]Drayton Echo, September 17, 1896, p. 4.

[35]North Dakotan, September 18, 1896, p. 3.

M. H. Jewell, editor of the Tribune, alienated the prohibitionists by his position on the question. Jewell wrote "the Tribune never has believed in pro-hibition--doesn't believe it is the practical way to control the liquor traffic. . . ."[36]

The fusion forces appeared extremely formidable. Richardson had the endorsement of three political parties as opposed to Briggs who had only the Republican endorsement. Still, the Republicans maintained the offensive throughout the campaign. While the fusionists cursed the rich, the Republicans were saying "up with the poor." When the fusionists called for cheap money, the Republicans asked why should these people settle for less. The Republicans pointed at the fusionist forces and asked the voters which splinter group will operate the government in case of victory.

The state fusionists were cast in a role of "bossed" parties who gambled the people's rights away by flipping a coin. There was some truth to the charges especially over the governor's position and the trading of the Supreme Court Justice and the Superintendent of Public Schools.[37] The Times-Record aptly put the question this way:

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[36] Bismarck Tribune, June 12, 1896, p. 2.

[37] Jamestown Alert, August 6, 1896, pp. 1, 8; Bismarck Tribune, July 31, 1896, p. 3.

> There is a lack of principle and a scramble for office on the part of the democrats and populists of North Dakota. . . . The populists have the governor and the democrats the congressmen. The populists howl for reform . . . it looks like a scramble for office, pure and simple, in which principle is sacrificed for spoils.[38]

W. D. Bates, editor of the News and Times, espoused the "iron law" of the election in February of 1896 when he wrote, "the party that can get the most argument in the greatest number of ways before the people usually wins. . . . The party without newspaper influence is like a ship without a pilot. It is sure to be lost in the storm."[39]

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[38]Valley City Times-Record, August 13, 1896, p. 4.

[39]Grafton News and Times, February 20, 1896, p. 2. The party leaders failed to read Bates' warning.

CHAPTER IV

THE ISSUES OF 1896

The particular issues which dominated the campaign of 1896 in North Dakota were essentially economic--currency, tariff, agriculture, and labor. Of the issues, the money question made the Republicans vulnerable. Yet, the silver men did not offer positive answers to the electorate's dilemma. Instead, their argument centered around the patriotism of the problem rather than the dollars and cents benefits that supposedly could be derived from free silver. Senator William N. Roach, speaking at Grafton, condemned the Republicans as cowards for inserting an international agreement for silver in their national platform.[1] The Fusionists compared the gold men to the Tories of 1776 and asked, "what would the forefathers of the country think of the cowardice . . ."[2] Unfortunately, North Dakota Fusionists did not question the sincerity of the international agreement clause which would have been a much more serious charge.

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[1] Grafton News and Times, October 8, 1896, p. 1.

[2] Jamestown Alert, June 25, 1896, p. 4; Towner News and Stockmen, August 28, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Weekly Plaindealer.

Republicans charged Fusionists with attempting to create a class consciousness among the voters in North Dakota. Indeed such men as Walter Muir viewed the election in light of a class struggle. Muir warned farmers always to vote against a "banker class" who were not producers of wealth and whose business it was to loan money at high interest rates.[3] Republicans quickly pointed out that North Dakota owed its greatness, "to the energy of the inhabitants and to the capital of the East." The Mandan Pioneer exclaimed, "Let populistic Rome howl about the grinding heal of the wealthy east. It was its grinding heal that made the great west and northwest."[4]

When editor Kellogg of the Alert stated that if the Republican charge that free silver would create fifty cent dollars were true, the debtor could pay back what he owed in depreciated dollars. The Bismarck Tribune accused the silver forces with insulting the honest farmer by implying that he should vote for free silver because he could then get out of debt by paying one-half of the amount he had contracted to pay.[5] Gold forces emphasized no standard of money was for any particular class.

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[3] Nelson County Independent, September 18, 1896, p. 4.

[4] Mandan Pioneer, August 28, 1896, p. 2.

[5] Bismarck Tribune, September 15, 1896, p. 2.

Not content to answer silver charges, the Republican forces instituted a campaign aimed at all facets of the North Dakota electorate. They warned housewives that grocery prices would double if free silver carried the day.[6] Republicans pointed out that the laborer did not own silver mines and if he unwisely voted for free coinage, he would be paid his salary in money half its present value. The Fargo Forum in an article aimed at the salaried employee of North Dakota charged that,

> Silver owners are trying to induce the poor to vote for free silver so they can sell about 50 cents worth of silver for $1. A day's labor amounts to just so many hours, and cannot be made longer. The working man wants a dollar to correspond and not one which is shortened one-half.[7]

Farmers were asked if voting for silver would raise the price of grain. Republicans answered that prices were regulated by supply and demand. Only a high tariff would reopen the factories and with high employment would come demand. Cutting the value of a dollar in half when they were already in critical short supply could not be the answer.[8]

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[6] Mayville Tribune, August 27, 1896, p. 1, as reprinted from the Mandan Pioneer. A grocery price list comparing free silver Mexico with the gold standard United States warned voters that prices would soon rise to Mexican levels if Bryan won.

	In United States	In Mexico
Breakfast bacon, per pound	$ .11 1/2	$ 1.32
Matches, per gross	.60	1.20
Salt, in two-pound sacks	.40	.90
Beans, per pound	.03	.17
Candles, per box	5.00	11.75

[7] Fargo Forum, July 28, 1896, p. 2.

[8] Bismarck Tribune, October 12, 1896, p. 2.

In ridiculing the Cleveland administration, the gold forces satirically drew a parallel to free silver and the Cleveland depression. The Fargo Forum called free silver a "good racket." Although everyone had the fifty cents worth of nothing to coin, all lacked the fifty cents worth of bullion to make the free silver dollars, except silver mine owners. Therefore, the Forum called for the free coinage of rags because after four years of Democratic rule, every man, woman, and child had an abundance of rags. Rags would make the perfect money according to the Forum. Since seventy million Americans had rags, it would favor all, unlike free silver which favored only the two thousand silver mine owners.[9]

Fear tactics employed by the sound money advocates carefully linked the old and true to the new and untried. The Republicans were fond of saying that old gold coins of the Roman Empire still held their value.[10] But who could tell what was in store for the country if the silver forces won. The Richland County Gazette hazarded a guess designed to keep the voters in the gold standard camp. If silver won, paper money could supplant gold and silver. Prices would advance but not wages. In time business would stop, the poor would starve, and money would be useless because it would not buy goods. Finally,

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[9]Fargo Forum, September 26, 1896, p. 1.

[10]Dickinson Press, August 15, 1896, p. 2.

"stores and shops would be plundered by starving mobs and wretched human beings would perish by the hundred thousand."[11]

Although few Republican North Dakota newspapers used such extreme rhetoric, the free silver forces could not counter the Republican attack. The stigma of an unsound currency, one that could not be counted on to remain constant in value, was the gold forces' greatest ally. Even the silverites' emblem, the daisy, drew fire from gold forces. The Mayville Tribune commented,

> The selection of the field daisy as the free silver emblem appears to have been singularly appropriate. It is true that there are some daisies whose golden center is surrounded by sixteen white petals, but it is also true that the number of petals varies, and frequently runs up to thirty, while the golden center always remains the same. The petals correctly typify the varying ratio of silver with reference to gold.[12]

The tariff question allowed Republicans to negate the currency question. Republicans accused the fusionists of pushing the money question to the forefront in an effort to hide the tariff issue. By tying the Cleveland administration, the Wilson tariff, and the depression together, Republicans were able to bridge the issues and place the greatest emphasis on protection.[13] In another area the North Dakota

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[11] Richland County Gazette, October 30, 1896, p. 4.

[12] Mayville Tribune, August 13, 1896, p. 1.

[13] Lisbon Free Press, May 8, 1896, p. 4. The editor proclaimed that the current money was good enough. The country's troubles began when the "tariff tinkers" caused the closing of factories and high unemployment.

Democratic Party was split over the tariff. Many free-traders dropped out of politics in 1896. They were disgusted with the Democratic majority in congress and the Cleveland administration's dealing with the tariff. A. S. Froslid, a democratic free-trader from Traill County, expressed his group's position.

> This faction turned the scale in favor of the Democratic party in 1892 . . . but the party majority in Congress as well as the administration have done absolutely nothing of what was expected, the tariff being even worse than before. The Democratic party may yet be a party of absolute free trade, but until it becomes such decency demands that people of my persuasion should leave party politics alone, for we vouched for the party once and the people believe us. We should be more careful after this.[14]

In handling the tariff issue, Republicans wisely placed McKinley in the position as arch opponent of European manufacturers. An editorial in The Financial Times spoke of McKinley as the,

> . . . apostle of High Duties and Protection. With Mr. McKinley as president, and his party in power, we should have to face the certainty of higher duties. Fortunately, such a change could not be made immediately. Our merchants and manufacturers would consequently have at least two years before they would again be compelled to face the evils of largely increased duties in America.[15]

The controversy between free trade and protection assumed an added significance on the Missouri Slope and the counties bordering the

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[14] Mayville Tribune, April 30, 1896, p. 1.

[15] The Financial Times (London), May 19, 1896, as reprinted in the North Dakota Globe, June 18, 1896, p. 4.

astern side of the Missouri River. From 1890 to 1900 the percentage of Jorth Dakota's population located on the Drift Prairie-Missouri Slope ɔse from 53 to 64 per cent.[16] The Missouri Plateau and the western alf of the Drift Prairie developed into an extensive sheep raising area.[17] 7ith the passing of free trade on wool in the early 1890's, the economic ɔnditions of North Dakota's wool growers had become acute.

In 1893 the value of North Dakota sheep totaled $125,909,264, and ıe production of wool stood at 348,538,138 pounds. By 1896 the gures had dropped to $65,167,735 and 272,474,708 pounds.[18] By 1895 ılf of America's wool imports came from Britain and the imports of ɔolen carpets increased five times between 1894 and 1896. Woolen oth importation doubled from 1894 to 1895, and the importation of dress ɔods rose by four times in the same period.[19] By August of 1896 Morton ɔunty had in storage over 400,000 pounds of wool which was valued at

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[16]Dwight T. Conner, "The Population of North Dakota from 1890 to 160, a Geographic Study" (unpublished M.S. thesis, University of ɔrth Dakota, 1963), p. 48.

[17]Mandan Pioneer, August 14, 1896, p. 1; William H. Standish, 'he Impending Crisis," Arena, XVI (November, 1896), 979. The Pioneer ated that sheep production was one of the major industries of the issouri Slope. Standish in the Arena credited the western two-thirds North Dakota as given primarily to sheep and cattle production.

[18]LaMoure County Chronicle, October 9, 1896, p. 4; Fargo Forum, ıgust 4, 1896, p. 2. The Forum calculated the loss in number of sheep seventy-five per cent from January, 1892 to January, 1896.

[19]Fargo Forum, February 18, 1896, p. 2.

only six and three-fourths cents a pound. Dickinson wool growers had 500,000 pounds of wool in storage ready to ship to eastern markets.[20] Buyers in Chicago would not even advance the freight because of a plentiful supply of foreign raw materials.[21] The depressed wool market not only affected North Dakota, but spread to the woolen mills of the East where sixty per cent of the milis were shut down. Of the 69,493 employees working in 1893, only 27,206 were employed in 1896.[22]

Because of the free trade stand of Bryan and North Dakota's Democratic Senator William N. Roach, Republicans rallied behind the banner of protection, McKinley, and North Dakota's Republican Senator Henry C. Hansbrough. Senator Hansbrough had voted for emergency relief for wool growers and Senator Roach had voted against the bill in the senate.[23] This along with Bryan's campaign rhetoric that he was for free trade lost the Democrats the sheep producing region.[24]

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[20] Ibid., June 15, 1896, p. 1.

[21] North Dakota Globe, August 6, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Bismarck Tribune.

[22] Bismarck Tribune, April 16, 1896, p. 2.

[23] Ibid., May 9, 1896, p. 2.

[24] Dickinson Press, August 15, 1896, p. 2, and October 24, 1896, p. 2; North Dakota Globe, August 6, 1896, p. 4; State of North Dakota Public Legislative Manual, 1897 (Bismarck, North Dakota: Tribune, State Printers and Binders, 1897), p. 104. The Globe printed Bryan's and McKinley's viewpoints on the wool question. Their remarks point out the degree of appeal each candidate was able to encompass. W. J. Bryan: "I am for free wool in order that a vast majority of the

While the issues on the Slope were clear, the issues surrounding the grain farmers in the eastern half of the Drift Prairie and the Red River Valley were not so clear cut. The farmers' general mood wavered between optimism and anger at the low price of grain. Newspaper coverage of the economic prospects changed with the approaching election, and at times editors were carried away with the rhetoric of the campaign. The overall picture of newspaper journalism of the period substantiates the belief that good times were just around the corner.

In February of 1896 the Alert published an immigration edition extolling the bountifulness of North Dakota. Kellogg called attention to the record crop of 1895 and reported that anyone could find his fortune in the rich soil and healthy climate of North Dakota.[25] Letters back home in early 1896 indicate that farmers did not look on themselves as

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people who do not raise sheep, may buy their clothing cheaper." William McKinley: "I demand 11 cents per pound on wool to protect our farmers, and a good duty on manufactured woolens, to stimulate their manufacture at home, to give employment to our own people and in the end to cheapen the cost of common woolen goods to the consumer."

The statistical breakdown in the Legislative Manual of 1897 shows the Missouri Slope and the counties bordering the eastern side of the Missouri River voted for McKinley by more than two to one. McKinley polled 2,790 votes in Billings, Burleigh, Emmons, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Stack, Oliver, and Williams Counties, as opposed to Bryan's 1,390 votes.

[25] Jamestown Alert, February 1, 1896, p. 1. The Alert published several successful farming ventures. Henry Carr, a farmer at Crystal, North Dakota, raised 5,200 bushels from a single quarter without help except for shocking and threshing. John Halcrow from Bowesmont, North Dakota, harvested 30,000 bushels with only the help of two sons and a hired man.

the downtrodden dirt farmers but as small independent businessmen. Will Truckenmiller, a Ramsey County farmer, expressed his feelings about conditions in North Dakota in a letter to his home town, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania:

> The past year has been very prosperous. Land has nearly doubled in price since last spring, and is still going up. I often think of the many men who are toiling all their lives on rented farms for a mere living in Pennsylvania, when the same amount of labor for ten years in Dakota would make them independent for life. The man of small means has a better chance to start here than in any other state I have ever been in.[26]

By 1896 North Dakota farmers had passed the subsistence level of farming. Young sons and daughters were moving to the cities. Farmers were consolidating and relying less on the garden and more on city bought foodstuffs.[27]

Yet, times were not so good that farmers did not become angry at remarks made by Congressman Martin N. Johnson. The Republican reported that before his election to the House he had made a profit from wheat farming when wheat sold for thirty cents a bushel. Farmers suggested that Johnson be removed from office on the grounds he was too valuable to have in Washington. Johnson should be kept at home teaching farmers to make a profit at growing thirty cent wheat.[28]

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[26] Devils Lake Free Press, January 23, 1896, p. 1.

[27] Fargo Forum, April 1, 1896, p. 4.

[28] Jamestown Alert, January 9, 1896, p. 5.

Republicans could not deny the low prices but placed the blame on oversupply" and the Wilson tariff. Under the McKinley tariff, Canadian arley paid an import tax of thirty cents a bushel, while under the Wilson ariff the tax fell to approximately ten cents a bushel. The effects could ot be denied for in 1893 barley commanded a higher price in Valley City an barley already shipped to Milwaukee brewers in 1896.[29]

Democrats and Populists refused to accept the "overproduction" rgument of Republicans. Thomas Harrison, President of the Board of e Mayville Normal School, reflected the common agrarian misconception at North Dakota was not affected by the world market when he stated,

> We are frequently met with the assertion that too much wheat is grown already and that if we in the Red River Valley would only cease growing wheat for one or two years good prices would return. This is all foolishness. . . . A few million bushels more or less has no perceptible effect on the market price.[30]

Fusionists blamed "wheat brokers" for manipulating prices and harged that buyers had heard that Representative Johnson had made a ight profit at thirty cents a bushel and, therefore, refused to pay more. ditor Jewell of the Bismarck Tribune retorted, "if wheat buyers can fix

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[29] Valley City Times-Record, October 29, 1896, p. 4.

[30] Ibid., May 5, 1896, p. 4.

the price of wheat at their own sweet will, why do they not cut it down to 10 cents a bushel? The price of wheat depends on supply."[31]

By not recognizing the overproduction issue, Democrats turned their energies to the silver issue. In an effort to tie silver and the price of commodities together, Democrats pointed to Montana. According to their calculations, the repeal of the Sherman Act in 1893 caused North Dakota to lose its best market, the state of Montana. If free silver won, North Dakota would again furnish eggs, butter, flour, and meat to the Montana miners. Silver would travel east through North Dakota helping the unemployment problem and helping farmers secure a nearby market.[32]

In reply to the Fusionists' premise, George Winship of the Grand Forks Herald, asked, "Now who'd have supposed that the employment of only 5,000 silver miners would spread out in effects until the entire nation should be humming with business and prosperity again. . . . But isn't there a little hitch here though?"[33] The Lisbon Free Press supplied the answer:

> Farmers should remember that Bryan is a free trader. He wants free wheat to come here from India, Russia, and Argentina. He wants free barley from Canada and Russia. He wants free cattle

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[31] Bismarck Tribune, September 17, 1896, p. 2. Jewell spoke of the "pop's" campaign of education and price fixing accusations as ridiculous "twaddle" that could not deceive a child in kindergarten.

[32] Jamestown Alert, June 25, 1896, p. 5, and October 29, 1896, p. 1.

[33] Grand Forks Herald, August 29, 1896, p. 2.

from Canada and Mexico. He wants free wool from Australia, China, and South America. He wants free hay and eggs from Canada. He wants free hops from England, Germany and Russia.[34]

The fact that Bryan and the North Dakota fusionists were free traders and free silverites not only helped the Republican cause among farmers, but also among the laborers. Although North Dakota had an extremely small urban population, 5.6 per cent in 1890 and 8.[illegible] per cent in 1900, Republicans did not ignore the labor vote in North Dakota.[35]

The Peavey Elevator Company sent all its employees campaign literature defending the gold standard. F. H. Peavey, president of the company, polled his North Dakota employees on where they stood on the money question.[36] J. W. Kendrick, general manager of the Northern Pacific, asked his employees to give careful study to the money question. If they did, Kendrick stated, he had no doubt that the road's employees would "vote right."[37]

James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern, tended to coerce his employees. He employed large groups of foreign laborers, especially

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[34]Lisbon Free Press, August 28, 1896, p. 4; Ward County Reporter and the Minot Journal, August 21, 1896, p. 1

[35]Connor, "The Population of North Dakota from 1890 to 1960, a Geographic Study," p. 75.

[36]Grafton News and Times, August 13, 1896, p. 3.

[37]LaMoure County Chronicle, August 28, 1896, p. 4; Dickinson Press, August 29, 1896, p. 2.

Italians, in an effort to keep wages depressed and employees in line.[38] As the election drew near, Great Northern shops set aside time to discuss the election from the gold standard point of view.[39] Railroad men formed sound money clubs in Grand Forks. Great Northern officials were sent out from St. Paul to gather lists of employees who signed the gold club roster. These lists were then sent to President Hill. The Plaindealer stated, "Those who failed to sign will find that their positions on the road will be short ones."[40] In an affidavit notarized in Grand Forks on the eve of the election, one hundred nine employees of the Great Northern asserted they had not been coerced or intimidated in supporting McKinley and gold.[41]

Laborers were warned that if free coinage became a fact, employees would pay with the cheapest money possible; purchasing power would be cut in half, because silver would depreciate to approximately fifty cents on the dollar. Republicans pointed out that prices would not double, but

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[38]Jamestown Alert, September 3, 1896, p. 4; Washburn Leader, May 30, 1896, p. 4, as reprinted from the Minot Mirror and the Ward County Reporter. Hill's policy of keeping wages depressed was highly successful. In 1894 the Great Northern's section hands were receiving $1.15 a day. Hill tried unsuccessfully to cut their wages to 90 cents a day. Wages paid to section hands on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad thirty-three years earlier was 80 cents a day.

[39]Weekly Plaindealer, September 10, 1896, p. 4.

[40]Ibid., September 17, 1896, p. 1.

[41]Grand Forks Herald, October 31, 1896, p. 7; Fargo Forum, October 30, 1896, p. 7.

the same amount of money would purchase only half as many goods and services as under the gold standard.[42] Tables of wages were printed, comparing average weekly wages paid by silver and gold countries for specific trades.[43] Republicans charged fusionists with wishing to place the American laborer on the same level as the masses of pauper labor in foreign countries.[44]

Building contractors in North Dakota advertised that they were not building or hiring until after the election. In Fargo a contractor had planned to build two houses. The houses were not erected because the employer related that if the calamity of a fusionist victory became a

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[42] Mandan Pioneer, August 14, 1896, p. 4.

[43] Grand Forks Herald, July 25, 1896, p. 2; Richland County Gazette, August 28, 1896, p. 4. The figures compare average weekly wages paid in five countries on a silver standard as compared with the United States on the gold standard.

Bricklayers		Masons	
United States	$21.18	United States	$21.00
Mexico	10.00	Mexico	10.80
Peru	9.00	Peru	14.76
Russia	4.32	Russia	6.72
Japan	2.04	Japan	2.18
China	1.62	China	1.00
Carpenters		**Blacksmiths**	
United States	15.25	United States	16.00
Mexico	--	Mexico	8.00
Peru	9.00	Peru	9.30
Russia	3.30	Russia	3.32
Japan	1.56	Japan	1.85
China	2.15	China	1.25

[44] Grand Forks Herald, September 12, 1896, p. 2.

reality, men would lose their jobs and no one could afford to pay rent. Therefore, the houses would have to wait for the results of the election. Republicans noted that the cost of labor excluding materials for the houses would have been $1500--money lost to bricklayers and carpenters because of Bryan.[45]

The Republicans successfully branded the fusionists as the party of hard times. Silver was dishonest; wheat prices were depressed because of overproduction and free trade; wool growers were ruined by the free list; and laborers were endangered of having their purchasing power cut in half by free silver. To rectify the present situation and guard against even more trying times, the Republicans called for a McKinley victory.

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[45] Mandan Pioneer, September 18, 1896, p. 1.

CHAPTER V

THE CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTION

North Dakota Democrats and Populists found themselves confronted with empty campaign chests in 1896. A call on citizens to send dollars and cents to finance the coming battle failed. Fusionists angrily cried that if the People's Party had one cent for every ten Republican dollars in the state they would be able to carry on a fighting campaign.[1]

In October the Free Silver Club at Washburn, North Dakota, hosted the past fusionists governor, Eli C. D. Shortridge. When the speaker arrived, the only facilities available was a platform decorated with McKinley, Hobart, and protection symbols.[2] A week later W. H. Clarke, the secretary of the Washburn Silver Club, resigned in protest charging the club's president with intentionally embarrassing Shortridge. In denouncing the action as a Republican conspiracy Clarke said that the presiding officer had been a Democrat eight years ago, a Republican six years ago, a Populist two years ago, and in 1896 passed himself off as a silver Democrat, but in reality was a treacherous Republican. Clarke's

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[1] Jamestown Alert, September 10, 1896, p. 1.

[2] Washburn Leader, October 3, 1896, p. 1.

efforts to place the blame on Republican shoulders rather than face up to the fact that the club had not prepared for Shortridge's visit backfired and the club ceased to exist.[3]

In early October the Democratic State Central Committee received word that Bryan would speak at Fargo on October 10, 1896. The news generated great enthusiasm and interest because Bryan was the first presidential candidate ever to campaign in North Dakota. The Democratic Central Committee negotiated with railroads to run special trains from various sections of the state to Fargo. The railroads agreed to run the special trains upon the condition that seventy-five passengers would book passage on each special train. Editor Kellogg of the Jamestown Alert optimistically declared, "In this they will receive the support of Republicans as well who will do everything possible to make the affair a pleasant one, regardless of politics."[4] Yet fusionists lacked efficient organization to make the event a success. Many of the specials did not run because the Democrats could not supply the necessary number of passengers the railroads required. Kellogg's optimism changed to rage, and he angrily denounced the railroads' action.

> If anything further was wanted to convince the writer that the great corporations and money power of the nation was determined to down the peoples candidate for president, we have it

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[3]Ibid., October 10, 1896, p. 4.

[4]Jamestown Alert, October 8, 1896, p. 1.

> in the action of officials of the Northern Pacific Railway, in refusing all usual customs to allow a special train to run to Fargo at the occasion of President elect [sic] Bryan's speech.[5]

T. H. Bovden, agent for the Northern Pacific, denied Kellogg's charges. "The reason and the only reason why the special train was not run was the requisite number of passengers was not guaranteed."[6] Even the pro-Democratic Plaindealer defended the railroad's actions by pointing out the Chicago and Northwestern and Great Northern railroads had provided a special car for Bryan from Aberdeen, South Dakota, to Fargo, because no switch tracks existed for Bryan's special car.[7] Republicans portrayed Democratic charges as desperate attempts to raise any political plunder on the eve of the election.[8]

Remembering the fusionist victory of 1892, state Republicans increased the tempo of their rhetoric as the election approached. Senator Henry C. Hansbrough warned Republicans against the danger of

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[5]Ibid., October 15, 1896, p. 2.

[6]Lisbon Free Press, October 16, 1896, p. 1.

[7]Weekly Plaindealer, October 15, 1896, p. 3.

[8]Lisbon Free Press, October 16, 1896, p. 4.

over confidence and emphasized fusion as the one source of danger to the Republican party in the state.[9]

Playing on the evils of fusion, state Republicans cast the opposition as degenerate holdovers from the Civil War. Fred Falley, Republican candidate for Secretary of State, in a speech at Fessenden, North Dakota, compared the Bryan forces to the traitors and copperheads of the 1860's. Falley proclaimed, "The ancient enemy of freedom and Americanism is only lifting its heavy head in a new guise. It is the same old rogue, freshly painted and newly burnished."[10] Waving the "bloody shirt," Republican editors compared the campaigns of 1860 and 1896 and urged the voters to stand for law and order as they had from 1861 to 1865 against the Democratic Party of treason.[11]

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[9]Dickinson Press, May 23, 1896, p. 2; Drayton Echo, May 28, 1896, p. 4; Ward County Reporter and the Minot Journal, October 9, 1896, p. 1. The Press and Echo reported prepared comments from Hansbrough's Washington office, released to North Dakota newspapers. In a speech in Minot in October, Hansbrough again stressed fusion as the greatest single danger to the Republican Party.

[10]Washburn Leader, October 3, 1896, p. 4.

[11]Fargo Forum, February 7, 1896, p. 2; LaMoure County Chronicle, July 24, 1896, p. 4; Emmons County Record, September 4, 1896, p. 2; Grand Forks Herald, September 4, 1896, p. 2; Larimore Pioneer, October 1, 1896, p. 10. All of the above papers were guilty of waving the "bloody shirt." Republican editors emphasized law and order and national honor. A vote for the Democratic candidates was a vote for a disunited America, a southern aristocracy, and anarchy. Editor Streetor of the Record called attention to the black man's freedom and the Democratic Party of slave masters.

In accusing Democrats and Populists of less than one hundred per cent Americanism, the state Republicans played up the national appeal of their party. When fusionists attacked Republicans for renominating Martin N. Johnson for the House of Representatives only to keep the Scandinavian vote in the Republican column, Republicans answered that nationality differences should not be raised during the campaign and to do so was an insult to the voter.[12] Considering the large foreign-born population of 44.6 per cent in 1890 and 35.4 per cent in 1900, no political party in North Dakota could afford to antagonize this element.[13] By stressing that the nationality question should not be raised, Republicans left the impression that the state's foreign born were just like any other American. Republicans were then in a position to portray themselves as the party for all, while the fusionists were cast as placing the foreign born somewhat apart from the rest of the citizenry. To recent newcomers in the state, trying to adjust to a new way of life, even the rhetorical acceptance by the Republican Party gave comfort.

The state's major Democratic free silver newspaper, the Alert, played upon ethnic and racial differences. Kellogg blamed the ignorant

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[12] Fargo Forum, June 24, 1896, p. 1; Weekly Plaindealer, July 30, 1896, p. 2; Valley City Times-Record, October 29, 1896, p. 4; Bismarck Tribune, October 29, 1896, p. 2.

[13] State Historical Society of North Dakota, First Annual Report of the State Historical Society of North Dakota to the Governor of North Dakota for the Year Ending June 30, 1906 (Bismarck, North Dakota: Tribune, State Printers and Binders, 1906), p. 185.

blacks and the immigrants for impeding national progress.[14] In another editorial Kellogg wrote that pagan, uncivilized Indians who farmed with wooden plows and let their children run naked received more for their grain than the American farmer who was "civilized and white."[15]

In an effort to attract German and Russian voters, the fusionists enlisted the aid of Anton Klaus, a large property holder in Jamestown. Klaus went to the Chicago Democratic Convention as a supporter of the gold standard; he returned a free silver advocate. He urged the people of his nationality to vote for silver on the grounds that ". . . at present a man can scarcely borrow any money on the best kind of property."[16] Although the wealthy Klaus aired his grievances, a poor German-Russian farmer who had emmigrated from Russia a few years before was well satisfied with his progress in America. In a letter to the Emmons County Record he wrote,

> I, Heronurs Wolf, desire to give information about North Dakota to all friends and acquaintances, and also to strangers, and also to tell them how well people can succeed in America. I came to America in 1893 with four children, 12 to 20 years old--all girls. Two of the girls I hired out at once, and received each month $25. As I was already 53 years old, I did not wish at once to commence farming, so I depended on herding cattle during the summer, and have received for

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[14] Jamestown Alert, July 2, 1896, p. 4.

[15] Ibid., September 10, 1896, p. 4.

[16] Ibid., July 2, 1896, p. 4.

each head $1. I have now 28 head of cattle and two horses and harnesses, and in the house I have everything I need. I came from Russia to America, and therefore would advise people tc come to North Dakota.[17]

The fusionists campaign attempts of appealing to the poor and distressed were not in stride with the general conditions of North Dakota in 1896. The state was on the road to prosperity. Five thousand Scandinavians from the northwest had returned to Norway to celebrate Christmas after the bumper crop of 1895.[18] Railroads had reduced their freight rates within North Dakota during the election campaign.[19] New railroad loading platforms for farmers had been built in time for the crop of 1896, and the harvest was generally good.[20] The State Board of Equalization had raised the assessed valuation of railroad property by $1,250,000.[21] This helped quell the fusionist argument that Republicans were in league with the railroads.

While the Republicans drew ample money from state and national sources, fusionists' shortage of funds was only one reason for losing the election. The fusionists' lack of sound organization, the return of good times, the general satisfaction of the state's large immigrant population

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[17] Emmons County Record, May 15, 1896, p. 1.

[18] Weekly Plaindealer, January 2, 1896, p. 4.

[19] Ibid., April 16, 1896, p. 6.

[20] Fargo Sunday Argus, September 13, 1896, p. 8.

[21] Grand Forks Herald, August 3, 1896, p. 4.

with the Republican party and the ability of the state's Republican newspapers to thoroughly discredit the opposition's attack helped determine the outcome of the election.

Therefore, the Republicans' campaign of prosperity and optimism culminated in a sweeping victory of all the state offices. McKinley carried all the counties but eight with a majority of 5,649 out of a total of 47,021 votes cast. A difference of 1,212 votes would have given McKinley every county in North Dakota. In the gubernatorial race Republican Frank Briggs polled a majority of 5,228 of the total 46,608 votes cast.[22]

Strong Republican majorities were returned to the House and Senate. Of the seventeen Senate seats up for election, eleven Republicans, five fusionists and one Democrat were elected. Of the fourteen Senate holdovers thirteen were Republicans and one was a Democrat.[23] The Senate Republicans entered the legislative session

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[22] State of North Dakota Public Legislative Manual, 1897, p. 104. The eight counties that Bryan carried and the number of majority votes are as follows: Bottineau 20, Cavalier 428, Griggs 42, Pembina 120, Rolette 25, Sargent 49, Towner 91, and Walsh 427. Excluding Griggs and Sargent Counties the vote for Bryan followed traditional Democratic strongholds. Richardson's Canadian background helped the Fusionists in counties with a high percentage of Canadian born. (See Figures 1 and 2 on pages 81-82.)

[23] Ibid., pp. 97-103. The five Fusionist Senators were elected from the following districts: the third district consisting of west and central Walsh County, the thirteenth district consisting of Sargent County, the seventeenth district consisting of Nelson County, twenty-first district consisting of Ramsey County, and the twenty-third district consisting of

of 1897 with twenty-five of the thirty-one seats. The election of 1896 gave the Republicans control of the House of Representatives by more than a three to one margin. Of the sixty-two seats, the Republicans captured forty-four to only eighteen for the opposition.[24]

Commenting on the election results, Editor Jewell of the Bismarck Tribune wrote,

> It looks, from the result as though Populism was effectually wiped out in the state. The combined opposition to the Republicans has been defeated at this election, by a large majority. It was the hottest campaign the Fusionists could wage. No resource was overlooked, no argument was unemployed. It was a significant victory for the Republicans.[25]

Stutsman County. The single Democratic victory took place in the nineteenth district which consisted of Towner and Rolette Counties.

The Senate seat from the twenty-third district was contested and the Republican controlled Senate named the Republican candidate even though he received thirteen fewer votes as reported by official election returns.

[24]Ibid. The eighteen Fusionist Representatives were elected from the following districts: the first and second district consisting of Pembina County, two; the third and fourth districts consisting of Sargent County, two; the ninth district City of Fargo, one; the sixth district part of the City of Grand Forks, one; the twenty-third district consisting of Stutsman County, two; the twenty-first district consisting of Ramsey County, one; the nineteenth district consisting of Towner and Rolette Counties, one; the eighteenth district consisting of Cavalier County, two; and the seventeenth district consisting of Nelson County, one.

Twelve of the eighteen Fusionists' victories followed the Bryan, Richardson pattern. Two of the Fusionists' victories came from the cities of Fargo and Grand Forks.

[25]Bismarck Tribune, November 7, 1896, p. 3.

Editor Jewell's comments on the election of 1896 cannot be denied; the results were indicative of a great Republican victory. Yet, his enthusiasm led him to write that the fusionists had employed every resource and argument at their command. In reality, quite the opposite occurred. Republicans from the outset waged a broad and offensive program, placing the fusionists on the defensive. As the campaign drew to an end, Republicans, unsure of victory, began an intensive program of propaganda and voter coercion.

Fusionists were forced to bear the sins of a Democratic depression. Even the pro-fusionist paper, the Plaindealer, admitted, "It is the common opinion of the American people that the McKinley administration can be no worse than the Cleveland abortion."[26]

Republicans successfully branded the Populist administration of Shortridge with fiscal irresponsibility. They warned the North Dakota voter that a fusionist's victory in 1896 would bring about another "costly experiment" similar to the one in 1892.[27] Although fusionists pointed out that Republicans controlled the House and the Senate during Shortridge's administration, it could not be denied that executive and

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[26]Weekly Plaindealer, November 5, 1896, p. 4.

[27]Grand Forks Herald, September 1, 1896, p. 2; Nelson County Observer, October 9, 1896, p. 2; North Dakota Globe, October 15, 1896, p. 2.

legislative cooperation was an impossibility with a fusionist governor.[28] Therefore, Republicans asked: would it not be better to elect a Republican governor that could work with Republican legislature?

While fusionists were left defending a past administration, Republicans chose an opposite tactic. When Republican Governor Allin became unpopular because of his role in the railroad valuation, Republicans refused to renominate him. Allin, as chairman of the State Board of Equalization, lowered the railroads' valuation to $2,500 per mile of track after railroads had agreed to a tax of $2,800.[29] In this manner state Republicans disarmed what could have been a key campaign issue for fusionists.

In an effort to label Republican forces as the party of "fixed" and "bossed" candidates, fusionists became trapped by their own actions. In order to work out an alliance, Democrats and Populists needed to share the ballot.[30] The lottery method led to Republican charges that

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[28]Grafton News and Times, October 8, 1896, p. 1; Nelson County Observer, October 9, 1896, p. 4; Robinson, History of North Dakota, p. 224. In the legislative session of 1893, the North Dakota Senate debated for forty-eight days before selecting a United States Senator. State Republicans successfully blamed the Shortridge administration.

[29]Emmons County Record, July 10, 1896, p. 1.

[30]Jamestown Alert, August 6, 1896, pp. 1, 8; Bismarck Tribune, July 31, 1896, p. 3.

the "reform leaders" were nothing more than political bosses who did not consult the people.[31]

Unfortunately, the North Dakota fusionist forces concentrated their campaign on the evils of the gold standard. Populists formulated their platform around the money question: 'While there are many questions of importance pressing for solution, we regard the money question as paramount to every other question at this time."[32] One week later the Democratic State Convention in Grand Forks showed the same idealistic narrowness when they wrote into their platform, "The paramount question now before the people is, shall we be obliged to remain on the British gold standard . . . ?"[33]

The Republicans left the fusionist to their panacea and launched an attack that permeated every conceivable area of North Dakota. North Dakota clergy received letters from the National Republican Party asking them to support McKinley.[34] Archbishop Ireland of the St. Paul Diocese condemned Bryan and praised McKinley. North Dakota newspapers carried Ireland's comments in an effort to influence the Catholic voter. In a bitter denunciation of Bryan, Ireland said, "The platform of the

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[31] Mayville Tribune, October 22, 1896, p. 4.

[32] Grafton News and Times, August 6, 1896, p. 1; Towner News and Stockmen, August 7, 1896, p. 2.

[33] Daily Plaindealer, August 13, 1896, p. 3.

[34] Devils Lake Free Press, October 8, 1896, p. 1.

Chicago convention threatens the country with lawlessness and anarchy. I stand by the platform and the presidential candidate of the Republican convention of St. Louis."[35]

Ample Republican campaign funds saturated North Dakota newspapers with free boiler plate defending gold and protection. In addition, special sections were donated exclusively to Republican national candidates.[36] The state's railroads gave newspaper editors and their families free rides hoping to influence their editorials.[37] In some instances railroads threatened to withdraw advertising support if North Dakota newspaper editors refused to print the "proper" news.[38] National manufacturing companies advertised in North Dakota papers warning the farmer to buy machinery before the election. Manufacturers told the farmer prices would double if free silver won.[39]

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[35]Lisbon Free Press, October 16, 1896, p. 1.

[36]Lidgerwood Broadaxe, April 30, 1896, p. 1; Grand Forks Herald, June 17, 1896, p. 4; Larimore Pioneer, September 24, 1896, p. 4. The Broadaxe pointed out that Democrats had no money in which to supply free materials but Republicans were well financed. In an editorial the Broadaxe commented, "Why is it that the Sound Money Fellows offer us poor country editors all the Gold plate matter we can use--that usually costs 20 C. a column--free and the silver plate matter stays at the same price? Who pays the freight?"

George Winship of the Herald believed that editors who printed free Republican boiler plate were doing a patriotic duty by informing the voter.

[37]Grand Forks Herald, August 16, 1896, p. 3.

[38]Valley City Times-Record, February 13, 1896, p. 4.

[39]Lisbon Free Press, August 21, 1896, p. 4; Washburn Leader, August 22, 1896, p. 3.

Businessmen were called upon to lay their work aside and go out and influence the voter for McKinley.[40] Mortgage foreclosures were used to threaten the farmer and insurance companies told North Dakota policyholders that if silver won, beneficiaries would be paid in fifty cent dollars.[41]

In an effort to frighten its depositors into voting for gold, the James River National Bank of Jamestown hung a sign near the cashier's window. The sign consisted of one Mexican dollar and one United States dollar. Over the United States dollar a sign read, "weight 410 3/4 grains, value 100 cents in gold." Over the Mexican dollar a sign read, "422 3/4 grains, value 51 cents." This was caused, warned the Jamestown bank, by the depreciated value of free coinage because Mexico had free silver.[42] During the election, North Dakota banks hoarded gold in an effort to connect fusionists with the depression. Upon McKinley's victory banks reversed this policy and freely dispensed gold to its depositors and customers.[43]

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[40] Weekly Plaindealer, October 29, 1896, p. 4.

[41] Jamestown Alert, August 20, 1896, p. 4, September 10, 1896, p. 4, and November 12, 1896, p. 4.

[42] Ibid., August 13, 1896, p. 4.

[43] Richland County Gazette, June 12, 1896, p. 4; Grand Forks Herald, November 10, 1896, p. 2. The Gazette in an editorial complained that only 1 five dollar gold piece had entered the office in the first six months of 1896.

Voters were approached individually and told in strict confidence that once state Republican candidates were elected they would vote for free silver. The "gold front" for Republican candidates was needed in order not to alienate the national party.[44]

In the last days of the campaign, an extraordinary effort to capture the farm vote was implemented by the Republicans. On the eve of the election, grain brokers advised farmers in North Dakota,

> . . . to make no more shipments until after the result of the election is known. If McKinley is elected, a flood of money will be let loose, much of which will flow into the channels of speculation probably causing an advance in all securities and commodities. Should Mr. Bryan win, the immediate adjustment to a silver basis will result in thousands of failures among banks, business houses and individuals. Weak and strong alike will go because it will be impossible to realize cash upon any kind of assets. Both makers and payers of checks may be forced under while the checks are in transit. Even currency will change from a gold value to a silver value while enroute. Hold your grain until the storm is over. Until you are sure of your money and of the kind of money. From this date until after election we will pay for grain consigned us in currency by express only.[45]

The Churches Ferry Sun three days before the election offered the North Dakota farmer some thought provoking ideas on the way in which he should cast his ballot.

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[44]Devils Lake Free Press, October 15, 1896, p. 1, and October 29, 1896, p. 1. B. A. Kendall, a resident of Ramsey County, signed an affidavit stating he was approached by Senator Henry C. Hansbrough's campaign workers. The campaign workers had told Kendall that the Senator was really for silver and would vote for free silver if reelected in the Senate.

[45]Lisbon Free Press, October 30, 1896, p. 4.

> Wheat men of Minneapolis who never before have been refused money at 3 or 4 percent interest on terminal elevator receipt security, are unable to get money on the same security at 11 percent interest, money loaners claiming it is not a question of rate but one of government that confronts us, and until after election they will not loan money at any rate or any security. This condition of affairs certainly must cause every voter to consider well before casting his ballot next Tuesday for if the bare possibility of Bryan's election can so cripple business, what will the result be should he be elected? Vote then for the election of a sound money president and sound money candidates for the legislature, for through them is our hope of a continuance of the prosperous era upon which this free trade policy has crippled every industry of the country and would soon swamp the government.[46]

On election eve, M. H. Jewell, editor of the Bismarck Tribune, printed a letter he received from Marcus Hanna. In a reassuring effort to cap the election of North Dakota for the Republican column Hanna wrote,

> Our forces are in line everywhere and tomorrow the battle of ballots will determine whether Major McKinley, sound money protection and good government shall win or whether Mr. Bryan, populism, debased currency and national dishonor shall triumph. Assurances from your state justify the placing of North Dakota in the sure McKinley column. It is pleasing to learn that the twin Dakotas, admitted into the union through Republican efforts are still true to that party that stands for an honest dollar and a chance to earn it, and a policy that will increase rather than diminish the demand for products of the ranch and farm.[47]

Hanna's letter was unnecessary; North Dakotans already believed in protection, sound money, and law and order. The Republican party

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[46] Churches Ferry Sun, October 31, 1896, p. 1.

[47] Bismarck Tribune, November 2, 1896, p. 1.

was the party of Lincoln, the party of the Homestead Act, the party of statehood, and the party of all Americans. Good times were on the way and the restoration of confidence rested in the McKinley camp.

With McKinley's victory North Dakota banks began to generously pay out gold to its customers. The day after the election an Italian laborer went to a local Grand Forks bank and received gold in a normal banking transaction. His words upon leaving the bank best summarize the campaign of 1896. "See," he said, showing his money, "what McKinley has done." The Daily Northwest News wrote, "Comment is unnecessary."[48]

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[48] Daily Northwest News, November 4, 1896, p. 4 and November 5, 1896, p. 4; Ward County Reporter and the Minot Journal, November 6, 1896, p. 1.

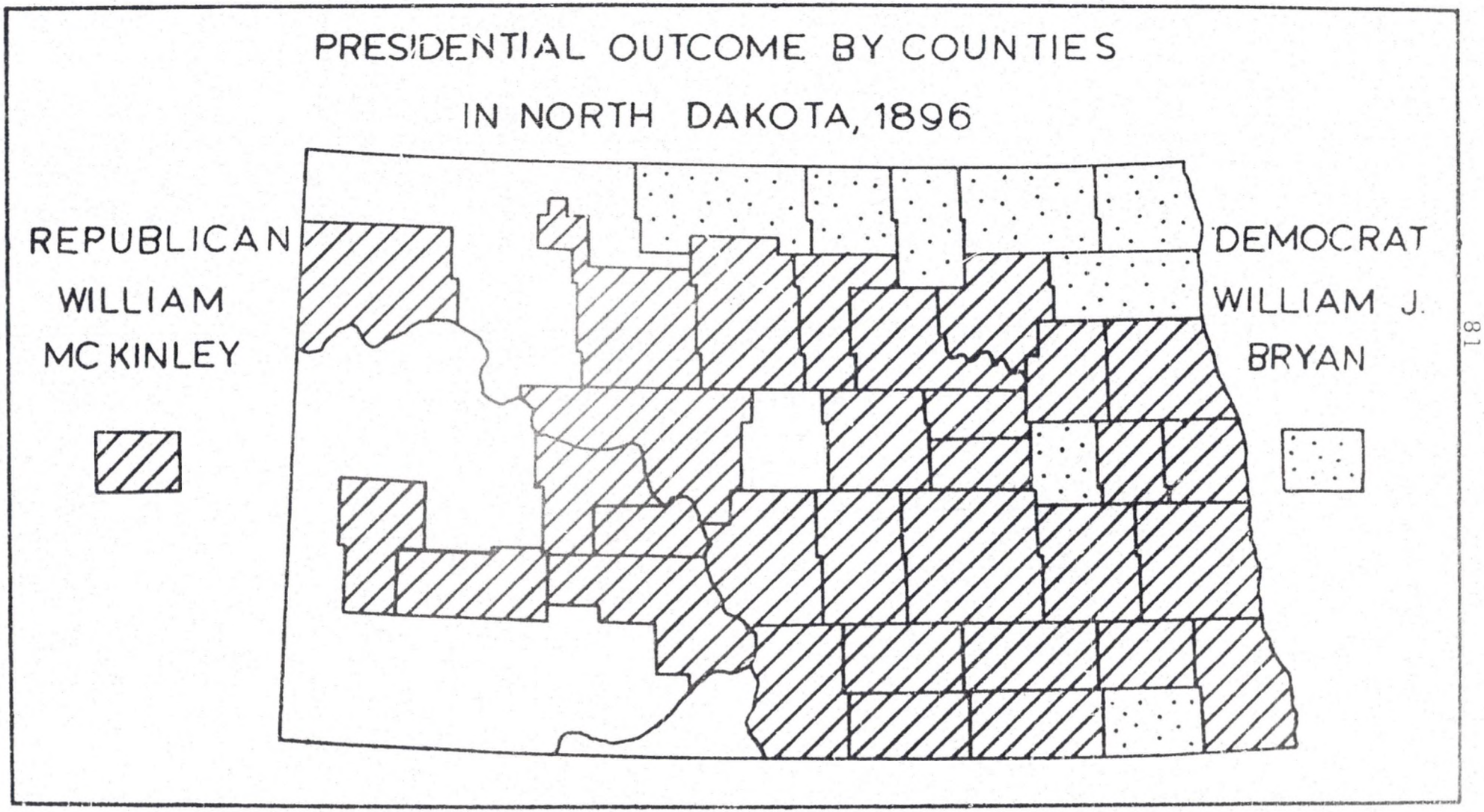
PRESIDENTIAL OUTCOME BY COUNTIES
IN NORTH DAKOTA, 1896
REPUBLICAN
WILLIAM
MC KINLEY
DEMOCRAT
WILLIAM J.
BRYAN

Fig. 1

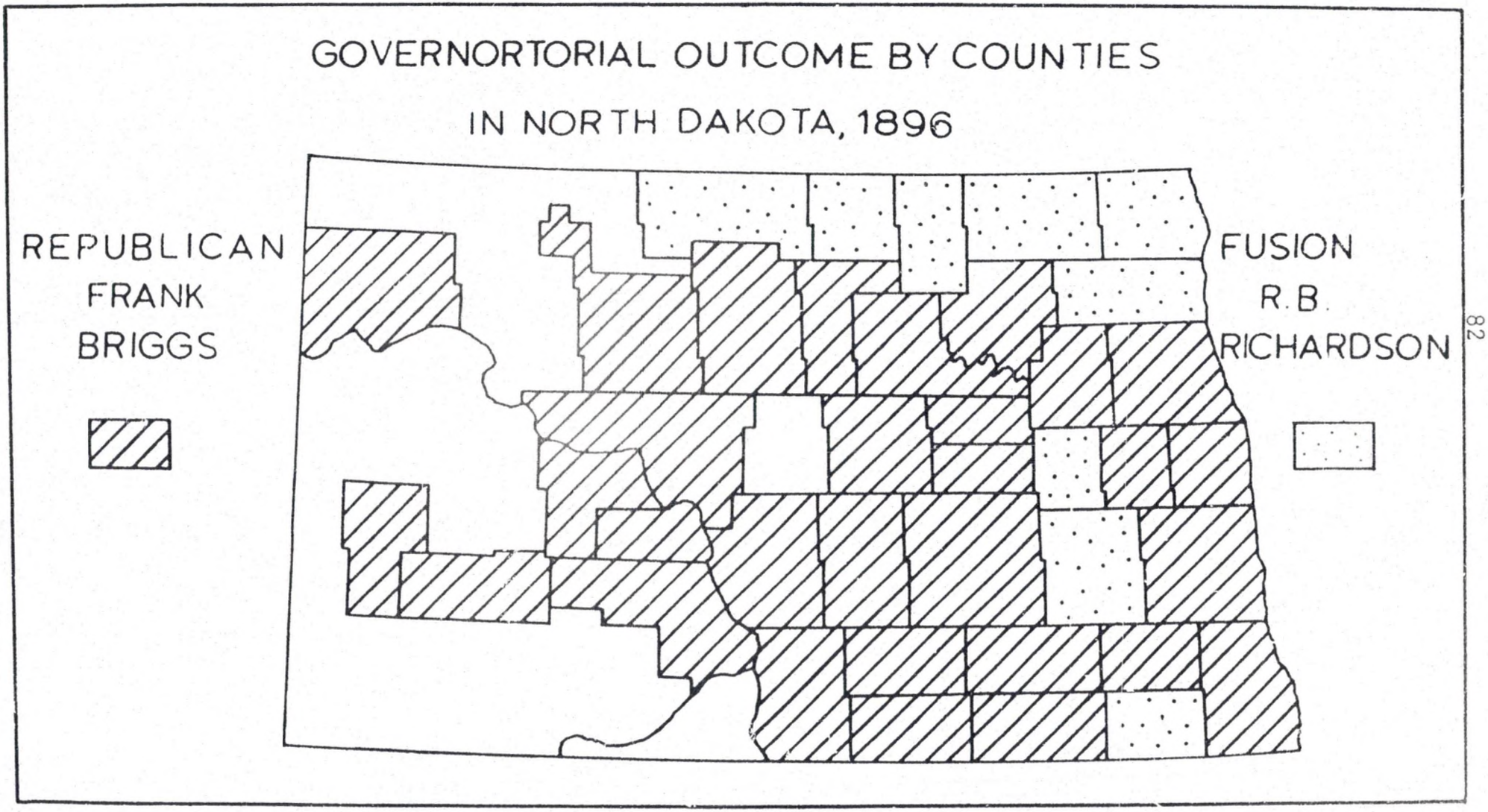
GOVERNORTORIAL OUTCOME BY COUNTIES
IN NORTH DAKOTA, 1896
REPUBLICAN
FRANK
BRIGGS
FUSION
R.B.
RICHARDSON

Fig. 2

CHAPTER VI

HISTORIANS AND THE NORTH DAKOTA ELECTION

The election of 1896 has invoked a great deal of debate among historians. The basic foundation of this debate stems from the historical animosity between rural and urban differences. Because fusionists viewed the 1896 outcome as a true defeat for agrarian America, some historians view the election in terms of class struggle and urban-rural cleavage. William Diamond contends the election battle raged between a city of labor and immigrants opposed to the conservative land holders. The election of 1896 in North Dakota, however, shows no sign of class struggle. Neither Democrats, Populists, nor Republicans chose candidates representing labor or "dirt" farmers. In fact the parties relied almost exclusively on successful businessmen and large farmers. In their campaign rhetoric fusionists attempted to cast the Republicans as an "aristocratic elite," but North Dakota Republicans countered all attempts to make the election a class struggle. In fact Republicans played down nationality differences and successfully campaigned as the party for all North Dakotans and all Americans.

In the election of 1896, North Dakota counties with large Scandinavian elements voted for McKinley. An excellent example was Traill County which was settled by Norwegians and returned the highest percentage of votes cast for McKinley in the state. This supports Stanley L. Jones' contention in his work, The Presidential Election of 1896. Jones does not believe immigrants were the real backgone of the Populist movement. Six of the eight counties Bryan carried were traditionally Democratic and held the highest percentage of Canadian born. Fusionists' candidate for governor, R. B. Richardson, was a Canadian by birth and resided in one of the six counties. Had it not been for this, Bryan's defeat might have been greater.

The election's outcome in North Dakota substantiates Gilbert C. Fite's contention that the election was not based on an urban-rural cleavage. He contends that if this were so, the Old Northwest and the Upper Mississippi Valley would have voted solidly for Bryan. The election results in North Dakota bear this out, for North Dakota was more rural than any state in that geographic region. In 1896 North Dakota was not a state of tenant farmers, but was made up of small independent, if not prosperous, land holders. Bryan's biographer, Paolo E. Coletta, believes that tenants voted for Bryan, and small farmers who owned their own farms voted for McKinley. These farmers had benefitted from the Republican sponsored Homestead Act and Republican sponsored statehood, and Republicans never tired of reminding them.

Although silver occupied the center stage in the national election in North Dakota, the tariff and the price of grain were paramount issues. On the Missouri Slope-Western Drift Prairie the dislike of free wool carried McKinley to victory by more than a two to one margin. Bryan, by his free trade stand, alienated the region. In the Red River Valley and Eastern Drift-Prairie Republicans successfully explained away low prices by the "overproduction" theory, therefore circumventing the currency issue which fusionists blamed for low prices. Gilbert C. Fite contends this is the first time a political party attempted to explain prices in terms other than money.

Fusionists, arguing that the money question must be settled before moving on to other problems, allowed the Republicans to wage a broad offensive. Historians such as Benton H. Wilcox and Samuel McSeveney contend that the election was lost to Bryan before the campaign began. Certainly North Dakota Democrats and Populists were blinded in their search for a panacea, and more importantly they had a double cross to bear which the Republicans did not. The Cleveland "depression" and the failure of the Eli C. D. Shortridge fusionist administration of 1892-1894 put the fusionists in the unenviable position of defending the past sins of their predecessors.

In effect, Republicans traditionally controlled North Dakota politics, yet they were unsure of themselves. C. Vann Woodward contends that Republicans were as hysterical and emotional in their

approach to politics as were the fusionists. This factor came to light in North Dakota in 1896. The majority of the state's newspapers were Republican and "yellow journalism" was developed to a fine art. Free boiler plate and national Republican advertising abounded in the state's papers. The Civil War was refought and Democrats were cast as the traitors of 1860. Church men equated Bryan with anarchy and the anti-Christ. Railroads pressured workmen, gave free rides to newspaper men, and threatened to withdraw their advertising from country newspapers. Farmers were told that loans would be called in, credit would dry up, and insurance benefits would cease to exist with Bryan's victory. Republican alarm and coercion outweighed fusionists verbal rhetoric.

Richard Hofstadter's charges of fusionist anti-Semitism do not hold true in the North Dakota election. No overt evidence exists; words like "shylock" and "Rothschild" can hardly be construed to mean Jew-haters. Yet, Hofstadter correctly labeled the fusionists as unrealistic. By committing themselves to the primacy of silver, they centered their campaign on a narrow theoretical question the voter could not understand.

Taking the premise that the election was lost for Bryan before it began, Samuel Hays has argued that 1894 was the real watershed year. Although North Dakota elected a Republican governor and refuted a Democrat or Populist candidate in 1894, the North Dakota state legislative branch was always controlled by Republicans.

In the Legislative session of 1893, the North Dakota Senate held twenty Republicans as opposed to seven Democrats and four Independents. In the House, the Republicans held thirty-two seats as opposed to sixteen Democrats and fourteen Independents. Two years later in 1895 the legislative makeup was even more Republican. The Senate was composed of twenty-four Republicans, two Democrats and five Independents. The Republicans held a resounding majority of forty-nine House seats while the Democrats held five and the Independents eight.[1]

In the Presidential election of 1892, fifteen counties swung to the Democratic-Populist column, but in 1896 eight of the fifteen went back to the Republican ranks. Only one county, Rolette, switched to the Democratic ranks and this county was located in the traditional Democratic northeast corner of the state.[2]

The state of North Dakota simply followed its traditional Republican preference. Bryan was saddled with the Cleveland "depression" and the Shortridge "failure." McKinley, protection, and sound money rather than

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[1] State of North Dakota Public Legislative Manual, 1897, pp. 89-90.

[2] State of North Dakota Public Legislative Manual, 1895 (Bismarck, North Dakota: Tribune, State Printers and Binders, 1895), pp. 58-59.

The counties lost by the Republicans in 1892 were Barnes, Bottineau, Cavalier, Dickey, Griggs, LaMoure, Mercer, Nelson, Oliver, Pembina, Richland, Sargent, Towner, Walsh, and Williams.

In the election of 1896 Barnes, Dickey, LaMoure, Mercer, Nelson, Oliver, Richland and Williams returned Republican majorities. The Democrat-Populist forces were able to carry Rolette.

Bryan, free trade, and silver promised to be the panacea in the minds of the majority of North Dakota voters in 1896.

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