

## Problems of the Farmers

For homework, read each of the following selections on the problems of the farmers and, for each, write one sentence that summarizes the main idea of the excerpt.

1. A farmer with a few dollars in his pocket comes out here and takes a claim. He has six months to make his improvements. These improvements usually consist of a sod shanty, a well four feet deep, and from five to twenty acres of breaking. When he has done this, he can mortgage his land for sufficient money to prove up [gain legal title to his land] and buy a horse or two. When he is known to be in possession of this amount of property, his credit is good for a plow and he obtains his seed by giving a mortgage on his crop in advance. Then he goes into debt for the necessary machinery to harvest his crop, and by the time his grain is ready to sell, he is pretty well buried under a pile of debts. He takes his wheat to market, of course firmly believing that it is nothing less than Number 1 hard, but the elevator man's eagle eye promptly discovers that it has been "frosted" or is "damp" and instead of getting 80 cents a bushel, as he expected, he is forced, from his necessities, to sell for what he can get . . . and he sits down in his lonely cabin on the bleak prairies and imagines that he is being ground down by the despotic heel of monopoly.<sup>1</sup>

—Minnesota farmer

2. This season is without parallel in this part of the country. The hot winds burned up the entire crop, leaving thousands of families wholly destitute, many of whom might have been able to run through this crisis had it not been for the galling yoke put on them by the money loaners and sharks—not by charging 7 per cent per annum, which is the lawful rate of interest, or even 10 per cent, but the unlawful and inhuman country-destroying rate of 3 per cent a month, some going still farther and charging 50 per cent per annum. We are cursed, many of us financially, beyond redemption, not by the hot winds so much as by the swindling games of the bankers and money loaners, who have taken the money and now are after the property, leaving the farmer moneyless and homeless.<sup>2</sup>

—Kansas farmer

3. What Kansas farmers need is to raise less corn and more HELL . . . Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street. . . . The parties lie to us, and the political speakers mislead us. We were told two years ago to work and raise a big crop and that was all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn, ten-cent oats, two-cent beef, and no price at all for butter and eggs; that's what came of it. We want money, land, and transportation. We want the abolition of National Banks, and we want the power to make loans directly from the government.<sup>3</sup>

—Mary Lease, Populist orator

<sup>1</sup>William E. Gardner et al., *Selected Case Studies in American History*, Vol. 2 (Newton, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970), 83–84.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Pollack, ed., *Populist Mind* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1967), 24.

<sup>3</sup>William E. Gardner, et al. *Selected Case Studies in American History*, 82.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

4. All we want is equal justice before the law. The time has come when the railroads will either control the people or the people will control the railroads. The laws regulating the roads are a joke because they either aren't enforced or are so weak they can't be enforced. The only way that we can achieve justice is to have the government take over the roads or regulate them very strictly.

... Right now too much power lies in the hands of railroad owners. They can decide what the rates will be and even whether they will haul our crops. They charge us more for hauling goods a short distance than a long distance; if we complain, our grain lies and rots in storage.

The railroads were built by selling land that belonged to all the people. Now some of the people, the farmers, are suffering. . . . Railroads are just like the post office system; both are needed by the people and both should be owned or controlled by the government in the interest of the people.<sup>4</sup>

—Kansas farmer

5. It is true that railroad companies received land in return for laying track. But the amount of land given the roads has always been exaggerated; no railroads got enough money to pay the whole cost of laying track. Also, we must keep in mind the great public service performed by railroads in opening the West. The owners risked their money doing a good thing for the nation, and they deserve a fair return on their investment.

The profits earned by railroads are not as high as the farmers think. They forget that cars sent to the West to haul grain are sent out empty, and it costs money to do that. Also, because grain is ready for shipment only once a year, railroads have many cars which sit idle the rest of the year. This is very expensive, and since farmers are the only ones using the cars, they have to pay this expense.

Farmers must think that railroad charges are high. Actually, they are very cheap. How much would a man charge to carry a ton of wheat one mile? What would it cost a farmer to hire a horse to do the same? Railroads do it for less than one penny.

Railroads are property; they are private companies doing business under the law. They should no more be controlled or owned by the government than a farmer's land should. Do farmers want the government to tell them how much wheat they can grow? How much money they can make? I think not; yet, that's what they want for railroads. If the government controls private property, none of us will be free people.<sup>5</sup>

—Railroad lawyer

<sup>4</sup>Gardner, et al., 88–90.

<sup>5</sup>Gardner, et al., 91.

## Populism: The Rise and Fall of the People's Party

The documents below serve as a resource for discussion of the Election of 1896.

### Document A

*Men, vote as you please, but if Bryan is elected . . . the whistle will not blow Wednesday morning.<sup>1</sup>*

—Factory owner, 1896

### Document B

WHERE THE WORKINGMAN WILL GET IT.

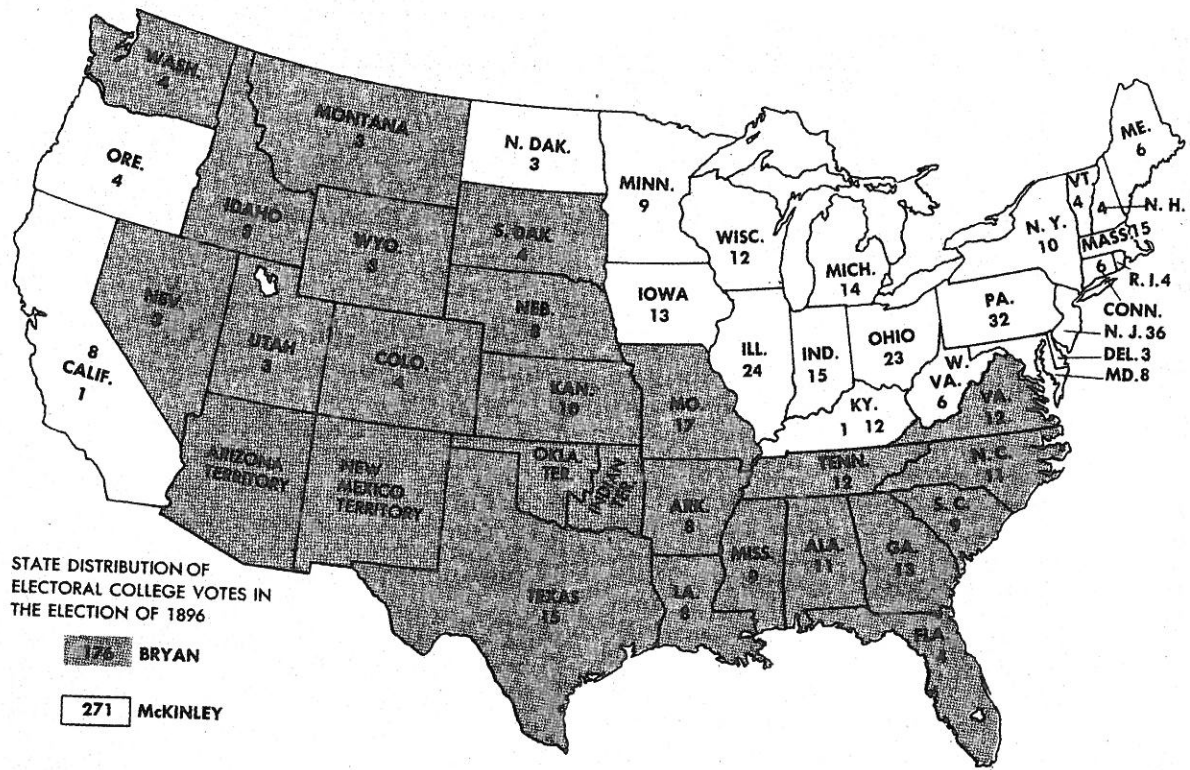


BRYAN TO WORKINGMAN: "Now, hold still, and I'll cut your dollar in two without hurting you a bit."

Figure 1.21 F. McDonald, L. Decker and T. Govan, *The Last Best Hope: A History of the United States*, Vol. II (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1972), 628.

<sup>1</sup>John A. Garraty and Robert A. McCaughey, *The American Nation*, 6th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 623.

### Document C



THE ELECTION OF 1896

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