

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY:

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BRYAN THE CAMPAIGNER

Keith Melder

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Figure 1.—A FEW OF THE FIVE MILLION PEOPLE who saw the Democratic candidate during the campaign of 1896. Years before the electronic era, Bryan carried his personal message into the heart of America in his national campaign tours. Here, his train has stopped for a brief appearance at Wellsville, Ohio. In the background is the Ohio River. (WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, *The First Battle*, 1896, facing p. 528.)

Bryan the Campaigner

In recent years, the Smithsonian Institution has acquired a rich and varied collection of political campaign objects—tokens, buttons, badges, ribbons, banners, torches, clothing, and novelties of every sort. Some of these political items are now exhibited in the Smithsonian's new Museum of History and Technology.

Growth of these political collections and preparation of plans for exhibiting them have stimulated serious research into the development of campaigning. Members of the staff and scholars from outside the Museum have begun to investigate the changing manner in which campaign objects were used and the changing patterns of their symbolism. The present study has resulted from investigation into the evolution of presidential campaigning in the late 19th century.

Preliminary evidence indicates that a major shift in the pattern of campaigning took place at the end of the century. During the post-Civil War era, political loyalties were reinforced by mass demonstrations, highly organized

marching clubs, and campaign objects. Presidential candidates preferred not to engage in active campaigning.

Between 1896 and 1912 a major change occurred in the pattern of presidential politics, and since that time candidates have felt obligated to go to the people, conducting vigorous and extensive personal campaigns. By entering political contests in their own behalf, candidates have diminished the reliance of their parties upon marching groups and campaign objects as evidence of political loyalties. Although campaign objects have not disappeared from American politics, their significance has been altered by the development of personal campaigning.

It is the purpose of the present study to understand and evaluate the influence of one major candidate—William Jennings Bryan—in bringing about this significant change.

THE AUTHOR: Keith Melder is associate curator, division of political history, in the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of History and Technology.

Introduction

AT THE END OF HIS FIRST dramatic struggle for the Presidency, William Jennings Bryan wrote: "The campaign of 1896 was a remarkable one whether we measure it by the magnitude of the issues involved or by the depth of interest aroused."¹ It also produced

one of the most significant changes in presidential campaigning to occur during the 19th century. Like the Harrison-Tyler contest of 1840, which involved a major departure from previous, less exciting and "popular" efforts, the 1896 contest represented an important stage in the evolution of presidential campaign techniques. In it the candidate himself

¹WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, *The First Battle. The Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago, 1896), p. 11. The present paper has grown out of research into the background and the use of presidential campaign objects in the collections of the Museum

of History and Technology. I am most grateful for suggestions made by Professor Paolo E. Coletta, of the United States Naval Academy. Professor Coletta generously permitted me to read the unpublished manuscript of his political biography of Bryan.

emerged as the principal participant, diminishing the importance of political gadgets, parades, and celebrations, and preparing the way for the now familiar 20th-century presidential contests.

At a time when candidates were not expected to show any strong desire for the high office, Bryan set out on an unprecedented national tour. With limited support from his divided party, and with very meager finances at his disposal, Bryan strove almost single-handedly in an intensely personal effort to dramatize himself and his issue. To defeat Bryan's unusual tactics, William McKinley, Bryan's first opponent, could not avoid participating actively in the contest, although he did not tour the country. Bryan's repetition of his personal campaigning in 1900 and in 1908 solidified the pattern and induced Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft to conduct intensive tours of their own. By 1912, when he was no longer in the presidential race, Bryan's influence had, to a considerable degree, produced a significant change in the pattern of presidential office seeking. No longer could the candidate sit idly by, waiting for the returns to come in. Since Bryan's time, custom has dictated that the candidate lead the contest in his own behalf. By focusing public attention upon himself, Bryan had prepared the way for the present era, in which radio and television have become the natural means of exalting presidential aspirants.

It may be argued that Bryan's political apprenticeship was divided into two periods. During the first period, which ended after the election of 1890, he acquired his campaign style. Drawing upon his experience in the local Democratic politics of Jacksonville, Illinois, he perfected his own style of campaigning, and by November of 1890, at the age of 30, he had established the pattern which would carry him through 20 years of active politics and three presidential contests. Basing his campaigns on a dedication to democratic principles, influenced by evangelical revivalism, and nourished upon the traditional techniques of oratory he had learned so well, Bryan was ready to carry his message to the nation. During the second period of his political apprenticeship, which lasted from his entrance into the House of Representatives in 1891 until after the election of 1894, Bryan solidified and perfected his already familiar power, endeavored to establish a national reputation, and gained important experience in the arts of political organizing. During this period, he operated in several different arenas: the House

of Representatives, Nebraska politics, and the nation as a whole.²

For more than a dozen years before the campaign of 1896, Bryan's own particular style of politics had been ripening. The 1880's, when Bryan served his political apprenticeship, were a golden age of political enthusiasm. Party loyalty and fervor were maintained through an immense network of organizations, political views were circulated by means of gadgets with campaign slogans, group activities; and the American scene was enlivened during election years by extraordinary celebrations, parades, demonstrations, and mammoth feasts of victuals and oratory. The noise, the mass behavior, and the novelties were colorful and exciting, and they contributed to political communication in a pre-electronic era, but they meant very little in terms of providing a meaningful choice to the electorate. The hullabaloo of politics in the 1880's tended to avoid or obscure real issues by creating and reinforcing public excitement with procedures and gadgetry.

Bryan's campaign techniques moved away from the preoccupation with gadgets and organizations, toward a more personal relationship between the candidate and the electorate. Replacing with his own effective rhetoric the varied stimuli offered by the mechanical campaign contrivances available during the 1880's, Bryan depended upon his voice, his message, and his own personal dynamism for his influence over the public. In a limited sense, he was the first "modern" presidential candidate, emphasizing as he did the need

² Only recently have scholars begun to give serious attention to Bryan's career, his accomplishments, and his contributions to American politics. PAXTON HIBBEN's biography of Bryan, *The Peerless Leader: William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1929), is a debunking volume, accepting whatever evidence tended to diminish the Commoner's stature. As recently as 1948, Professor RICHARD HOFSTADTER, in *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 205, dismissed Bryan as a confused and stupid man, a mirror of the lowest level of the popular intelligence. "He [Bryan] closed his career in much the same role as he had begun it in 1896: a provincial politician following a provincial populace in provincial prejudices." Bryan's historical reputation is beginning to shift, however, as shown by the publication of PAUL W. GLAD's recent volume, *The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and His Democracy, 1896-1912* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1960), a sensitive and sympathetic interpretation of Bryan as a son of the Middle Border. The series of carefully documented articles on Bryan's career by Professor Paolo E. Coletta, appearing since 1949, bears promise of a serious definitive biography to come.

for a candidate to have a strong personal "image," and asserting the primary role of the presidential candidate as a party leader.³ Matthew Josephson caught Bryan's impact upon presidential campaigning when he wrote:

With his sheer youthful strength and tireless voice, Bryan rivaled the effect of the modern radio broadcasts. . . . It was a circus-like performance, it was also unprecedented, since tradition held that the candidate for the highest office in the land must dissemble his wish for that honor, and appear not to seek the office overtly.⁴

Like most politicians, he represented a certain combination of attitudes which developed out of his own upbringing and his experiences as a young adult. Professor Paul Glad has described the general framework of attitudes which Bryan shared, to some extent, with other citizens of his time and place:

The Commoner's progressivism was founded not on political contrivances or on economic panaceas; it was founded on the faith that was his heritage as a son of the Middle Border. His appeal to the hearts of his countrymen, his doctrine of love, his emphasis on sacrifice as the measure of greatness, his belief in majority rule, his devotion to the common man, his conception of good and evil, his revivalistic approach to social and economic problems, his confidence in God's purpose as he understood it—all these are traceable to a mentality that found the values of an agrarian environment completely satisfying.⁵

Bryan embodied what Ralph Gabriel has called the American Democratic Faith, consisting of a belief in the fundamental law, in the free and responsible individual, and in the Mission of America.⁶ His commitment to democracy and the unswerving belief which he held in the essential rightness of popular rule were genuine and remained with him until the end of his life, forming both a strength and a major weakness in his capacity for political leadership.

It is the intention of this paper to explore the background of Bryan's campaign techniques, in order to

³ More than half a century earlier, William Henry Harrison had acquired an "image" during the riotous Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign, but Harrison was not in any true sense a party leader, nor did he rely entirely upon a personal campaign to achieve his election. ROBERT G. GUNDERSON, *The Log-Cabin Campaign* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1957), provides a lively account of the Harrison-Tyler campaign of 1840.

⁴ MATTHEW JOSEPHSON, *The Politicos, 1865-1896* (New York, 1938), p. 688.

⁵ GLAD, op. cit. (footnote 2), p. 177.

⁶ RALPH H. GABRIEL, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1956), ch. 2.

arrive at certain conclusions concerning his own contributions to the practices of campaigning, and to suggest the importance of his campaign techniques for the candidate himself.⁷

Shaping the Image

FAMILY BACKGROUND

William Jennings Bryan owed a large measure of his political interest to his father, for it was from Silas Bryan that he inherited his party affiliations and many of his convictions. Silas, a Jacksonian Democrat of ancient lineage and unflinching devotion, had been an Illinois politician of rather modest accomplishments, a state senator and a judge during William's boyhood. Although William recalled his father's intense piety and his stern discipline, he underestimated the elder Bryan's political influence on himself. Legend has it that the boy accompanied his father as the latter stumped for Congress in 1872, other legends put the boy in his father's courtroom, listening to the workings of justice; but for the most part William remembered having little direct contact with his father's political affairs.⁸ Nevertheless, the young man chose a career in politics instead of one in religion, his other great interest, although there is little evidence to show that William was influenced directly by his father's campaign techniques.⁹

⁷ Modern scholars have given little attention to the evolution and significance of Bryan's campaign techniques; however, his own contemporaries were aware of his significance. WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE (*The Autobiography of William Allen White*, New York, 1946, p. 294) recalled that as a conservative if somewhat brash young newspaper editor in Kansas, he feared Bryan's unusual appeal to the masses: "To me, he was an incarnation of demagoguery, the apotheosis of riot, destruction, and carnage." Mark Hanna, McKinley's shrewd and effective campaign director, recognized in 1896 Bryan's extraordinary "personal appeal to the American people In order to save the situation enormous exertions would be required, as well as a plan of campaign for which there was as little precedent as there was for the situation itself." See HERBERT CROLY, *Marcus Alonzo Hanna, His Life and Work* (New York, 1912), pp. 209-210, 212.

⁸ HIBBEN, op. cit. (footnote 2), pp. 46-47.

⁹ WILLIAM JENNINGS AND MARY BAIRD BRYAN, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago, 1925), ch. 1; hereafter cited as *Memoirs*. See also PAOLO E. COLETTA, "Silas Bryan of Salem," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (March 1949), vol. 42, pp. 57-79. See also the letter from S. S. Ruffner, Marksville, Louisiana, September 12, 1896, to Bryan (in Bryan papers Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; hereafter cited as Bryan papers). Ruffner recalled knowing Silas Bryan as a child

His belief in political democracy was nurtured in the personal relations of small-town life in southern Illinois; his firm belief in the virtue of the Democratic Party was inherited from his father. Bryan brought to his political vocation a dedicated application of the evangelical Protestant Christianity common to 19th-century rural America. For Bryan the applications of Christianity were far more important than the doctrine; thus, he was never a sectarian.¹⁰ He spoke feelingly of the relations between public opinion, politics, and morality:

The great questions of state are, after all, simple in their last analysis. Every political question is first a great economic question, and every great economic question is in reality a great moral question. Questions are not settled until the right and wrong of the questions are determined. Questions are not settled by discussion of the details; they are not settled until the people grasp the fundamental principles, and when these principles are fully comprehended, then the people settle the question and they settle it for a generation.¹¹

Politics thus aimed at bringing morality into public affairs, informing the people of the true moral issues in any controversy. Early in his career, Bryan saw the temperance problem as a clear example of this type of moral controversy, but the problem's solution did not lie in legislation, for "law is but the crystallization of public opinion." Reform had to come through a moral revolution, a great temperance revival among the youth of the nation, converting individuals to the principles of righteousness.¹²

Bryan viewed politics as a pursuit very much akin to evangelical Christianity, and he compared the good politician to the revivalist preacher. Evangelical techniques were among the principal ingredients of the Commoner's enthusiastic campaigns: he de-

manded conversion, he fought the "enemy," he insisted upon the righteousness of his cause.¹³

Again the impact of Bryan's childhood experience on his campaigning is evident. At a time when the American Middle West was relatively saturated with piety and religious revivals were accepted as common occurrences, young Bryan was subjected to an uncommonly strong religious upbringing. In addition to being a convinced Democrat, father Silas was a devoted Baptist—so devoted that he prayed three times a day and maintained a family altar. William was expected to memorize and discuss Biblical passages, he was required to carry out his religious obligations faithfully, and through his family he became acquainted with the local clergymen who came to visit and take dinner with the Bryans.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, he heard conversations about the state of local religious excitement, the current "awakenings," so it is little wonder that the boy joined a church as the result of a religious revival. It is significant that Bryan knew from a personal conversion experience the effectiveness and the techniques of religious revivals.¹⁵ To the end of his life he remained a preacher in politics, an exhorter of political righteousness.

One other factor in Bryan's background appears to have influenced his campaigning. Throughout his life he continued to revere his father, emulating the elder Bryan's political career, striving for quick and impressive success, and, in time, living like a country gentleman, as his father had done. Part of the motivation for his political enthusiasm undoubtedly lay in his desire for approval, his need to be revered and respected as his father had been.¹⁶ Long after he had left Illinois, Bryan continued to send newspaper accounts of his political success to many of his youthful

and attending a country school taught by the elder Bryan, whom he remembered as being "kind and impartial, but . . . very strict & woe to the boy or girl big or little who with malice aforethought broke one of his rules."¹⁷ Although he was generally admired and esteemed in the town, Silas was considered a little peculiar because of his philosophical bent.

¹⁰ GLAD, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), pp. 27–30. Professor Glad's interpretations have added much to the present analysis of Bryan's intellectual background.

¹¹ From a speech made in the campaign of 1896 to the ladies of Minneapolis. See BRYAN, *The First Battle* (Chicago, 1896), p. 548.

¹² Bryan papers, "Temperance Address" (MS, n.d.). Evidence indicates that this speech was given early in Bryan's career, while he was a young lawyer at Jacksonville, Illinois.

¹³ These evangelical attitudes are evident in Bryan's political speeches, while his chautauqua and inspirational addresses are characterized by other evangelical elements—love, compassion, optimism, sentiment. Paxton Hibben charges that, although he claimed always to be righteous and consistent, Bryan did not himself live up to these responsibilities.

¹⁴ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, pp. 27–28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 44, 50–51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24. Bryan wrote, "I shall be happy if my children feel toward me in mature life as I feel toward my father; if they revere my name as I revere my father's name and feel as deeply indebted to me for whatever there is in me of good." Silas Bryan's death was front-page news in the Salem *Marion County Herald* of April 30, 1880, as the headlines read: "Marion County's Calamity. One of Her Noblest Citizens and Greatest Benefactors Gone."

acquaintances, apparently seeking their praise.¹⁷ He was willing to go "to the people," regardless of the inconvenience to himself, and he could not stay away from the public platform, whether he appeared in a political, an editorial, or an inspirational role, on the chautauqua circuit. All these factors suggest that in his relationship to his audiences, Bryan gained certain nonpolitical rewards which were deeply satisfying to him.¹⁸

The attitudes which Bryan accumulated during the first 15 years of his life—his democratic faith, his religious enthusiasm and moralism, his interest in politics, and his strong desire for personal recognition—all contributed to the development of his campaign style. Yet he did not run for any office until 1890; his background did not come to fruition until he had served a political apprenticeship of almost 15 years, from 1875 until his first congressional campaign in 1890.

EDUCATION

Although he did not then realize it, one of young William Bryan's first steps toward a political career came with his departure from home for six years of secondary and collegiate education at Jacksonville, Illinois. Bryan's college years included certain collegiate activities which had a particular bearing upon his campaign techniques.¹⁹ Bryan apparently gained some direct political experience at Illinois College; an anonymous classmate wrote:

His college life has been one continuous endeavor to secure place and power He will talk and gesticulate concerning character in a forcible manner. His conscientious principles (we suppose) have impelled him to blarney the boys on different occasions in order to secure their votes.²⁰

¹⁷ Bryan received many letters, now in the Bryan papers, in response to clippings of his speeches or announcements of his achievements which he had sent to old friends in Illinois. They are generally enthusiastic and full of praise.

¹⁸ The desire for esteem seems in general to be unusually well developed among politicians, and it is no denigration of Bryan's motives to point this out. Rather, it is offered as a partial explanation of the Commoner's dedication to personal political campaigning. This very fundamental human force seems to be essential to the success of any democratic political system.

¹⁹ PAOLO E. COLETTA, "The Youth of William Jennings Bryan," *Nebraska History* (1950), vol. 31, pp. 1-24; GEORGE R. POAGE, "The College Career of William Jennings Bryan," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (September 1928), vol. 15, pp. 165-182; BRYAN, *Memoirs*, ch. 2.

²⁰ HIBBEN, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), p. 87.

His principal extracurricular activity, public speaking, was an ideal preparation for a lifetime of addressing the public. "I felt the lure of prizes from the start," he remembered, "and always took part in every contest for which I was eligible."²¹ Young Bryan joined the Sigma Phi Literary Society as soon as he was eligible, and participated in all of the Society's declamations, its essay contests, orations, and debates. He believed debating to be the most useful form of speaking activity because it made the greatest demands upon the speaker's talents, his clarity, his quickness of thought, and his analytical capacities. Not the least positive quality of debating was its impact on the audience:

The debate is superior also because it is the form of public speaking that wins the largest victories and gives the greatest renown. It gives the most conclusive proof . . . of earnestness in its preparation, and therefore is most effective in its impression upon an audience.²²

Throughout his life he maintained an affection for the debate, using the dialogue technique of argument whenever possible. At college Bryan took the usual elocution courses, with their training in the classic techniques of gesturing and the traditional platform mannerisms. Here, too, he began learning to speak in the great, round, rhythmic periods, whose climaxes thrilled his audiences in later years. His voice, almost unrivaled in its impact upon his listeners, also showed its first signs of power during the college years. In 1880, during his junior year, Bryan won the college oratorical contest, entitling him to take part in the intercollegiate oratorical competition. He took second prize in this contest—one of many second prizes for Bryan. His academic record at Illinois College was adequate, but by no means brilliant or impressive. In the field of public speaking, however, he had received a basic education, upon which he would build for the remainder of his life.²³

The next step in the budding politician's life was almost certain; in the fall of 1881 William Jennings Bryan enrolled in the Union College of Law at Chicago. As in college, his academic record was not outstanding, but he continued his public speaking. He benefited substantially from the friendships and

²¹ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 85.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²³ *Ibid.*, ch. 4. For a careful critical account of Bryan as a public speaker, see MYRON G. PHILLIPS, "William Jennings Bryan" (pp. 891-918 in vol. 2 of *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, edit. William N. Briganee: New York, 1943).

personal contacts of that period and maintained many of those relationships for years afterward.²⁴ During his years at law school, Bryan remained a spectator of the political scene, continuing an interest which had been evident since 1876, when, as a student in Whipple Academy, he had traveled to the Democratic National Convention at St. Louis. It would be difficult to estimate the nature of Bryan's political feelings during these years, since he left no record. Like many citizens, his partisanship came by inheritance; he was certainly a loyal Democrat, but it seems doubtful that he had strong feelings about major political issues, or that he was aware of the significant transformations taking place in American society, and the political consequences of these changes.

LAW PRACTICE

Fresh from his course of law, young lawyer Bryan returned in 1883 to Jacksonville to begin his practice. He was hopeful that his established friendships in the college town would aid in the struggle to set up a flourishing practice, but he experienced disappointment as he "awaited the rush of clients" and received no more than a trickle of business.²⁵ For six months Bryan could not make ends meet, but, after a year of waiting, enough business came to him so that he could marry his sweetheart, Mary Baird. The practice of law could not have seemed particularly exciting, however; Bryan was involved in the minutiae of legal work—bill collecting, handling real estate, acting as a financial agent, and other minor business.²⁶

Bryan achieved little more success in politics than he did in law during the Jacksonville years. Expecting perhaps to receive quick recognition from the local Democracy, as his father had done, Bryan was soon disappointed. As a young man, starting out in an already established party organization, he could not expect immediate rewards. The political and community affairs of a small town opened up ample opportunities for a young lawyer to engage

in public speaking, however, and Bryan recorded his own experience:

While I was practicing I had the usual experience of young lawyers in being called upon to speak on many different occasions. The lawyer has the advantage over all others in such matters. He is the natural spokesman of those of his school of thought and he is called upon more at banquets than those of other professions, because in the course of business he has to deal with a greater variety of subjects.²⁷

It is probable that few other young lawyers in Jacksonville were quite as willing, even eager, to address the crowds as was William Jennings Bryan. Many of his speeches were nonpolitical. He was an early and dedicated supporter of the Y.M.C.A., and he often spoke to groups of young men on religious and moral subjects. He won little fame with such activities, but he gained invaluable experience. Indeed, Bryan quickly became a master inspirational, semi-religious public speaker, and in later years earned a substantial portion of his income on the chautauqua and lyceum circuits. His professional speaking to small-town and rural audiences, usually in the Midwest, had the strengths and suffered the limitations of the genre. Dealing with subjects and speaking in rhetoric which his audiences knew well, he inspired tremendous confidence and loyalty among his listeners. But his speeches were necessarily sermoniac, dealing too often with vague generalizations and great abstractions.²⁸ Nevertheless, these nonpolitical speaking experiences contributed substantially to Bryan's style of political oratory.

²⁷ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 68.

²⁸ An interesting account of this sort of oratory appears in an unidentified clipping dated July 6, 1893, in the Bryan papers. Bryan presented a patriotic and inspirational Independence Day address to the multitudes at Greenville, Illinois. Following Dr. Frank Swallow, the "Kansas Cyclone . . . a striking figure full of fire and eloquence . . . greeted with cheers and laughter from start to finish," and a "beautiful overture entitled 'Recollections of the War'" by the Head Consul Band, Mr. Bryan spoke. "The Hon. Wm. J. Bryan, Congressman from Lincoln, Nebraska, was then introduced. He was born in Marion County, and the fact that he was a son of Egypt, in addition to the further fact that he is just now filling the eyes of the Nation with his distinguished personality, caused the crowd to go wild in the enthusiasm of its reception. It was a magnificent audience that he faced and it was no inconsiderable task to fill the great expectations that the heralding of his great name had caused; but Mr. Bryan met in full measure every requirement of the hour. He paid tribute to the Order of Modern Woodmen, and to the cause of fraternity. He made a speech appropriate to the day celebrated. He eulogized America's great statesmen and dwelt in eloquent

²⁴ The Bryan papers contain many letters from his classmates and friends at law school. See also, HIBBEN, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), ch. 9, for an account of Bryan's years in law school.

²⁵ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 63.

²⁶ Bryan's correspondence with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad in 1887 is suggestive of the young man's frustration in Jacksonville. He appealed to the railroad that its route be changed to pass through Jacksonville, apparently hoping for more legal work as a result of the additional railroad connection. See Bryan papers, T. J. Potter, first vice president of the C. B. and Q. Railroad, to Bryan, Feb. 15, 1887.



ROASTING THE OXEN.



PROCESSION OF THE BOYS IN BLUE
THE REPUBLICAN BARBECUE IN BROOKLYN.—[See Page 916.]

Figure 2.—PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING between the Civil War and 1900 was characterized by widespread organizations and innumerable mass demonstrations, designed to maintain party fervor and loyalty. The barbecue and torchlight parade illustrated here occurred in Brooklyn, New York, near the end of the presidential contest of 1876. These were quite typical of political gatherings during this era. (*Harper's Weekly*, November 11, 1876, p. 916.)

GRASSROOTS APPRENTICESHIP

Jacksonville in the 1880's mirrored the concentration of American politics on organizations and gadgetry. Although the town was predominantly Republican, a lively rivalry existed between the organizations of both parties. There was little fundamental difference between Republicans and Democrats, but competition was keen on superficial matters. Both parties achieved a high level of organization during election campaigns, with ward clubs, political marching societies, brass bands, and ladies' political clubs. Within the parties, each ward tried to outdo the others in the skill of its marching club, the beauty and color of its uniforms, the color and profusion of its political decorations, and the enthusiasm of its demonstrations. Both parties held elaborate ceremonies, as their ladies presented handmade political banners to the local marching clubs. During the presidential contest of 1884, the Ladies' Republican Club of Jacksonville held an elaborate ceremony to present two "elegant and handsome" banners to the "Plumed Knights" marching society.²⁹ Some time later in the political season, the home of one of the leading Democratic ladies was elaborately decorated with flowers and lights for the presentation of a magnificent banner to the first ward Democratic Club. Speeches were given, fireworks displayed, and the ladies expressed their sympathies for the great cause. Numerous

words upon the power of the people. He said that the hope of the Nation was not in the strength of its army and navy but in the happy homes of the great middle class. He pointed out the dangers which were set like thorns along the pathway of a Nation. He said that it must not be forgotten that eternal vigilance was the price of liberty; that we must have economy in the administration of public affairs; that love of country must be above love of self. He said that thousands of miniature liberty bells should swing from the trees . . . in the land where this great day was celebrated. He instructed and entertained his audience. He received wrapt attention and his handsome face lit up with the fire of enthusiasm and patriotism shone out upon that immense audience in all the grandeur of a great Patrick Henry, or a Clay or a Webster. After Mr. Bryan's address, Miss Poppleton, of Mulberry Grove, rendered in an excellent manner a very pleasing recitation entitled 'The Matilda Bird,' or 'The Secrets of Woodcraft' which brought down the crowd." A balloon ascension and parachute jump and two ball games finished the day. According to the account, "The merry-go-round, dancing platform, sideshows and eating stands furnished entertainment for the crowd and were kept busy." Bryan probably spoke at hundreds of similar gatherings.

²⁹ Jacksonville *Daily Journal*, October 3, 1884.



Figure 3.—A VIGOROUS SPEAKER, Bryan emphasizes a point during one of his campaign tours during the 1890's. The town is probably somewhere in Nebraska. (Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.)

other presentations, ceremonies, and political demonstrations occurred during the campaign.³⁰

William Jennings Bryan served his political apprenticeship in this active, competitive environment. A leading member of the liveliest Democratic club in Jacksonville, that of the fourth ward, Bryan marched in party parades, attended mass meetings, and spoke briefly during one Democratic "jollification."³¹ During the campaign of 1884, he served as a secondary speaker for the county Democratic Committee, pairing off with other Democrats to tour the country hamlets—Buckhorn, Chapin, Hartland School House, Franklin, and other communities.³² At Concord he spoke to a good crowd, including 60 members of the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1884; Jacksonville *Illinois Daily Courier*, October 15, 1884. For other descriptions of political rallies, see the *Daily Journal*, October 17, and the *Daily Courier*, October 18 and 29, 1884.

³¹ Jacksonville *Illinois Daily Courier*, September 13 and October 23, 1884.

³² *Ibid.*, September 30 and October 22, 1884.

Democratic marching club.³³ Bryan recalled speaking at a picturesque meeting at a country schoolhouse near Jacksonville, where, as the speaker of the evening, he was invited to partake of a Democratic flask of whiskey. Although he refused the drink, and although he was introduced as "Mr. O'Brien," he remembered the occasion as a success.³⁴ Congressman John W. Springer remembered "double teaming" with Bryan in campaigns during the Illinois years.³⁵ This period was an important segment of the young Democrat's political apprenticeship, giving him experience with certain fundamentals of grassroots politics, training him in techniques which he retained, sometimes to his own disadvantage, throughout his life. The county campaigns were organized by school district, and diligent campaigners went from school district to school district, contacting the voters, seeing that all Democrats were brought to the polls.³⁶ As he worked in the county politics of rural Illinois, Bryan learned that in some manner politics had to be a personal vocation, that "Mr. O'Brien" had to be able to refuse a generously offered drink of whiskey, yet still retain the attention and the affection of his listeners. In the rural schoolhouses, Bryan discovered the need to create a personal relationship between the candidate and his audience, and he became committed to the democratic notion of appealing directly to the people.

Illinois politics brought little renown and few rewards to William Jennings Bryan. Although he served the Democratic organization faithfully, he was never accorded more than a secondary role in local politics. In his quest for Federal patronage appointments, the young man was largely rebuffed.³⁷ After four years in Jacksonville, he was still a struggling country lawyer and petty politician; however, four years after leaving Jacksonville, Bryan was a member of Congress, and a major political figure. Undoubtedly, the lessons of political campaigning which he learned in Illinois contributed to his later techniques as a congressional and presidential campaigner.

³³ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1884.

³⁴ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, pp. 302-303. The *Daily Journal* (Jacksonville) recorded very few speeches by Bryan in the campaign of 1884, but this may be partially accounted for by the paper's Republican leanings. See the *Daily Journal*, July 6, 1884, for an account of Bryan's Fourth-of-July oration.

³⁵ Bryan papers, letter from John W. Springer to Bryan, August 24, 1888; Jacksonville *Daily Journal*, August 30, 1884.

³⁶ Bryan papers, letter from Millard F. Dunlap, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Bryan, August 14, 1888, describing the techniques of Dan Pierson, a local Democrat.

³⁷ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 73.

In the summer of 1887 Bryan moved from Jacksonville, his home for more than a decade, to Lincoln, Nebraska. The prospects for immediate success must have seemed far more promising in this growing western community than they were in Jacksonville. One of Bryan's law-school classmates, Adolphus Talbot, practiced law in Lincoln, and numerous residents from Jacksonville and Morgan County had moved to southeastern Nebraska during the 1880's.³⁸ In the spring of 1887, Bryan heard from an acquaintance at Lincoln who was attempting to sell stock in a newly incorporated National Bank; "Lincoln is a live city," his friend wrote.³⁹ So, in the summer of 1887 Bryan visited Lincoln, was favorably impressed, and in the early fall of the year he moved to Lincoln, leaving his family in Jacksonville until spring, when a new house could be finished in the Nebraska city.⁴⁰

Lincoln must have seemed far more exciting politically than Jacksonville. The state of Nebraska was beset by growing pains which were somewhat typical of the problems facing other western states. Major interest groups were already battling for political supremacy; the powerful railroads, which had dominated the state for years, and had support from both Republicans and Democrats, were beginning to meet serious opposition from agricultural interests.⁴¹ Polit-

³⁸ Jacksonville *Daily Journal*, September 11 and 21, 1884.

³⁹ Bryan papers, letter from George G. Waite, Lincoln, Nebraska, to Bryan, March 29, 1887.

⁴⁰ For details on Bryan's career in Lincoln, see PAOLO E. COLETTA, "William Jennings Bryan's First Nebraska Years," *Nebraska History* (March 1952), vol. 33, pp. 71-94. Two other important American political figures arrived in Nebraska at about the time Bryan did. George Norris and Charles G. Dawes, both young lawyers, moved from Ohio to the West, in search of new opportunities.

⁴¹ For the influence of railroads in politics and the opposition of the farmers to the railroads, see JOHN D. ICKES, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the Peoples' Party* (University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1931), pp. 60-74. (Reprinted, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1961.) CHARLES G. DAWES, *A Journal of the McKinley Years* (Lakeside Press: Chicago, 1950), pp. 12-13, summarizes very succinctly the problem of railroad rates. JAMES H. KYNER, in a picturesque reminiscence of his career as a railroad contractor, *End of Track* (told to Hawthorne Daniel, originally published in 1937, reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press: 1960), p. 94, recalled that he served as a representative of the railroad interests in the Nebraska legislature: "I took my seat in 1881, which was a period of great railroad activity, and legislation adverse to the railroads was forever being proposed. During my four years in the legislature I opposed all this, with

ical control of the state rested with the Republican Party; and the Democrats were divided into two major factions, neither having much vitality, concerned with little more than the distribution of Federal patronage. No established party spoke for the great body of citizens, or represented the undercurrent of agricultural discontent.

To the young lawyer from Illinois, just entering partnership with Adolphus Talbot late in the year 1887, the explosive potentialities of Nebraska politics may not have been evident. Yet great opportunities for political leadership existed among the discontented country folk and younger members of the Democratic Party who were unrecognized and dissatisfied by the old party organization.⁴² Carrying a letter of introduction to J. Sterling Morton, the "Sage of Arbor Lodge" and the most eminent Nebraska Democrat, Bryan quickly joined the Morton faction of the party. Within six months of his arrival in Nebraska, he was corresponding with state Democrats and discussing national issues such as the tariff. There is evidence that the newcomer was already in touch with Democrats who were dissatisfied with the old state machine.⁴³ With both presidential and congressional elections in the offing 1888 was a promising year, and Bryan was ready to test his political skills in the new environment.

The Nebraska campaign of 1888 followed a familiar pattern. Both parties set out to generate public interest and enthusiasm through the organization of local clubs, political marching societies with brass bands, and even women's political clubs.⁴⁴ In the larger communities, such as Omaha, each ward had its various organizations, its leaders and its orators, but outside of the cities, on the thinly settled prairies, party organization was not so easy a task. Most of the prairie hamlets were too tiny to support permanent political organizations, and

many of them did not have populations large enough even to man temporary Democratic or Republican clubs. For the rural people, isolated on their farms and kept at home by the unceasing burden of agricultural toil, there was virtually no opportunity for direct participation in political affairs. Nebraska's problems were typical of 19th-century American politics—the need to develop the political machinery of a mass democracy under the conditions of a scattered, decentralized population.

Nebraska's political parties used two major techniques in mobilizing their supporters: in one form of party gathering they attempted to bring large groups of the rural population together at some central point; or, if this could not be done, the parties sent orators "to the people" in their prairie hamlets, drumming up enthusiasm and interest for candidates and party programs. Many "grand demonstrations," "enthusiastic rallies," and "pole raising" ceremonies took place in Nebraska during the summer of 1888. Like other social and cultural events on the prairies—camp meetings, chautauquas, and county fairs—these gatherings offered to farm families who could spare the time and expense a brief escape from their work, an interlude of excitement and novelty in an otherwise monotonous life. Similarly, for town dwellers who could more readily take part in these affairs, politics offered drama and variety in the everyday round of activities. Political rallies were often scheduled to take place in connection with some other public occasion—a county fair, for example, or simply a small-town Saturday, when the streets were crowded with shoppers and loungers. Sometimes, local party organizations arranged for special trains, hired at reduced rates, to bring large groups of the party faithful to swell attendance at their rallies. Typical of this sort of gathering was "the most enthusiastic demonstration of the season in northwestern Nebraska," at the town of Gordon, far out in the sparsely settled prairies:

The Gordon democrats have been arranging for the past week or more for a glorious blow-out and ratification of the nomination of Cleveland and Thurman, and they are surely having it. A special train from the west brought in large delegations from Rushville, Chadron, and Hay Springs to join in the celebration. The town is elaborately decorated with flags and bandanas. The speakers' stand, located at the intersection of the two principal streets, is surrounded by a dense crowd of eager listeners.⁴⁵

more than a little success. Not one adverse act was passed while I was there.³⁹

⁴² Hicks, *op. cit.* (footnote 41), chs. 3–6; COLETTA, *op. cit.* (footnote 40); ROBERT V. SUPPLE, "The Political Rise of William Jennings Bryan from 1888 to the Nomination for the Presidency by the Democratic Party in 1896" (doctoral dissertation, New York University, New York: 1951).

⁴³ Bryan papers, letter from J. L. McDonough, Ord, Nebraska, to Bryan, March 3, 1888.

⁴⁴ Several Nebraska cities had Frances Cleveland Clubs, composed of young single women, who wore special clothing and sashes, marched in parades, and cheered at Democratic rallies. See, for example, Omaha *Daily Herald*, September 21, 1888.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, July 15, 1888.



Figure 4.—POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS offered farmers and small-town dwellers a brief period of excitement. The hats of his Nebraska audience, here, suggest the interest which the young orator aroused among the common people. (Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.)

Other political celebrations, such as that held at Minden in early October, were on a more modest scale, but even here the occasion was described as “a big democratic rally and torchlight procession, headed by a band and enthusiastic crowd on the streets.”⁴⁶

Much of the political work was carried on by devoted party laborers and candidates who went out to the people, meeting with them in crossroads schoolhouses or tiny villages, without the excitement of banners and bands and parades. One Democratic candidate for the state legislature from Lancaster County spent so much time stumping the countryside that he was hardly known in Lincoln, the county seat.⁴⁷ These traveling speakers were, to a considerable degree, the forgotten heroes of rural politics.

Many of them hoped for rewards—patronage appointments or help in obtaining local elective offices, but there were never enough rewards to satisfy all the party faithful. While some party men served simply out of loyalty, the recruitment of effective speakers was an endless problem for the party leaders, particularly in the Nebraska Democracy, since the party had been perpetually out of office.

This was the setting of William Jennings Bryan’s first political triumphs and his rapid rise to political prominence. Bryan quickly made known his interest in campaigning, and he entered at once into the battle. Once enrolled, his particular combination of talents—as an entertainer, a debater and exhorter, a phrasemaker skilled in the popular idiom, and an inspirational speaker of great ability—coupled with his tremendous physical endurance, made him one of the indispensable stars in the Nebraska Democratic galaxy. The years of training in local politics at Jacksonville

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, October 4, 1888.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, October 26, 1888.

had prepared Bryan for this opportunity, and he was quick to grasp it.

At first, he seems chiefly to have been a supporting speaker, an entertainer, rather than a leading Democratic orator. During a lull in the Democratic State Convention at Omaha, Bryan filled in when other possible speakers were occupied. In a "spirited address," he predicted his own course in the ensuing campaign:

He thought if the democrats went out to the farmers and the people who live in Nebraska and showed them the iniquity of the tariff system, they would rally around the cause which their noble leader, Grover Cleveland, had championed.⁴⁸

Again, at the grand Democratic rally and pole-raising ceremony at Weeping Water, Bryan, the "chosen spokesman" of Lincoln, spoke only after the more prominent Democrats were exhausted. Late in the evening, the opportunity came: "At this juncture the crowd being unwilling to disperse W. J. Bryan of Lincoln was introduced and so captivated his hearers that they hung upon his words for over an hour, and when the speaker wished to stop they would not have it so, but begged him to go on."⁴⁹ At Columbus, on July 20, he was the "speaker of the evening," delivering a "masterly address," a "clear and forceful" tariff argument, illustrated "by apt stories and bright quotations," to a large audience of citizens and Democrats.⁵⁰ Appearing at Fremont in August, Bryan spoke "without any apparent effort . . . presenting the tariff question in a straightforward and honest manner with frequent humorous illustrations . . ."⁵¹

By September, he was devoting his full time and all his bountiful energy to the campaign, carrying the message of tariff reform to large rallies and tiny hamlets. As his reputation spread, Bryan received invitations to speak throughout the state. A resident of the small town of Sutton pleaded with him to speak at that town:

The Boys all prefer you If Possible . . . We want to have a big time & It will do you no harm in the future perhaps. (*No Politics* You know).⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1888.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, August 6, 1888.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1888.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, August 13, 1888.

⁵² Bryan papers, letter from W. Keller to Bryan, October 29, 1888. Many such invitations are contained in the Bryan papers; see, for example, letter from J. H. Morehead, Barada, Nebraska, to Bryan, September 6, 1888.

In late September, Bryan was invited to travel under the direction of the State Central Committee, an invitation which he apparently accepted.⁵³ He also received occasional requests for information on particular campaign issues, the Democratic platform, or President Cleveland's position on certain points.⁵⁴

Bryan's vigorous, rather informal speeches seem to have created much enthusiasm among his supporters. One man wrote,

Your speech here last Saturday night did a great deal of good—demoralized the Republicans fearfully. They sent off yesterday for 123 torches and are going to try to eclipse our meeting in numbers, enthusiasm, &c.⁵⁵

To some admirers, he was known as "*Bryan the Invincible*."⁵⁶ Following a debate at McCook, one Democrat summed up Bryan's impact upon his audience:

By your personal magnetism you won all hearts & by the force of your logic & argument you vanquished the enemy, and you gave us the day—Our fair minded republicans admit this.⁵⁷

Toward the campaign's end, Bryan spoke successfully in a number of joint debates.⁵⁸ He did not let up in his attack, giving a speech on November 3, three days before the election:

His presentation of the campaign issues was the ablest of the year. Mr. Bryan is one of the finest campaign orators in the west.⁵⁹

Despite the Democratic defeat at the polls, one of Bryan's admirers telegraphed him:

Congratulations on your splendid victory, Dem[ocracy] honors you and will ever remember your magnificent campaign.⁶⁰

⁵³ *Ibid.*, letter from Euclid Martin, treasurer of the Democratic State Central Committee, to Bryan, September 26, 1888. In August, at the Democratic State Convention, Bryan was nominated for both lieutenant-governor and state auditor, but he refused both nominations.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, letter from Ed. P. Smith, Seward, Nebraska, to Bryan, July 26, 1888.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, letter from W. S. White, Palmyra, Nebraska, to Bryan, September 3, 1888; letter from C. D. Casper, David City, to Bryan, September 16, 1888.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, letter from Thomas Colfer, McCook, to Bryan, September 21, 1888.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1888.

⁵⁸ *Omaha Daily Herald*, October 5, 13, and 22, 1888.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, November 5, 1888.

⁶⁰ Bryan papers, letter from R. A. Batty, Hastings, Nebraska, to Bryan, November 5, 1888. It would be difficult to estimate the number of speeches given by Bryan during the campaign of 1888, but more than 30 are listed in the *Omaha Daily Herald* between July and November. Probably the actual number was 60 or more.

The campaign of 1888 was indeed a personal victory for William Jennings Bryan. His extraordinary efforts had taken him into many areas of the state, and had given him an enviable reputation as a speaker and as an effective campaigner. During the campaign, he had perfected his speaking techniques and had measured the great power he was capable of exercising over his audiences.⁶¹ Accounts of his campaigning at this time indicate that Bryan had scarcely any rivals in the realm of oratory. Nature had equipped him with an unusually fine and powerful voice, and he had learned how to use this instrument most effectively. Other political figures depended upon torchlight parades, brass bands and gadgets of every sort to arouse public interest, but Bryan could rely on his voice and his oratorical power. His success in 1888 undoubtedly settled his own convictions that the most effective political campaign techniques required the candidate to meet the people on their own ground, to appeal to them directly. Bryan's personal triumph perhaps suggested to him that his future political success would depend substantially upon his own personal magnetism. In many respects, Bryan's tour of Nebraska in 1888 was a rehearsal of his great presidential campaign eight years later. Already, there were suggestions that Bryan might emerge to take over the reins of the state Democratic Party from its old-line leadership. A defensive letter from the treasurer of the Democratic State Central Committee to Bryan on the eve of the election indicates the challenge which the vigorous young man already presented to stalwart Democrats.⁶² Already, too, there were signs that certain young men within the Party were chafing at the dominance of elderly and perennially unsuccessful leaders. Frank Morrissey, a young Omaha newspaperman, openly expressed his dissatisfaction with J. Sterling Morton, the leader of the old-line Democrats:

Give us new men and fresh leadership. Get away from old heartaches and put new hopes in our bosoms if you would have militant democracy triumph. If you cling to ghosts haunting the charnel house of the past, demoralization of the party will continue and the shadow of defeat will remain heavy over it.⁶³

⁶¹ More than thirty years later, Mrs. Bryan recalled her husband's return from a campaign trip to western Nebraska where he discovered that he possessed "more than usual power as a speaker," that he could move his listeners as he chose. See BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 249.

⁶² Bryan papers, letter from Euclid Martin to Bryan, November 1, 1888.

⁶³ Omaha *Daily Herald*, August 20, 1888.

Bryan was beginning to emerge as the type of dynamic young leader who might revive Nebraska's exhausted Democratic Party.

Between campaigns, during the years 1889 and 1890, Bryan worked in maintaining his own reputation and establishing useful contacts in Nebraska.⁶⁴ He set out to become an expert on the favorite Democratic campaign issue, the tariff, publishing a letter on the subject in the *New York Post* and endeavoring, unsuccessfully, to publish a book on tariff reform.⁶⁵ By early 1890, there could be little doubt that Bryan would be a major contender for the Democratic congressional nomination. The coming campaign was complicated by the growing agricultural unrest in the rural areas of Nebraska which became manifest with the rapid development of the Farmers' Alliance movement and its growing political influence in the state.⁶⁶ The Alliance movement added a third force to Nebraska politics with which both established parties would need to contend. Particularly for the Democrats, the Alliance posed a problem. Always a minority in the past, the Democratic Party might be able to take advantage of the new development if old party wounds could be healed, and if a candidate sufficiently attractive to the discontented farmers could be found. By the spring of 1890, Bryan's friends were urging cooperation and possible "fusion" of the Democratic and Alliance tickets with Bryan as the candidate for the House of Representatives from Nebraska's First Congressional District.⁶⁷ Everywhere, the Independent movement seemed

⁶⁴ He continued his interests in Y.M.C.A. work; see Bryan papers, letter from J. H. Waterman, president of the Y.M.C.A., Plattsmouth, Nebraska, to Bryan, January 14, 1889, and other correspondence from the Y.M.C.A. His work with the Democratic leadership is suggested in a letter (Bryan papers) from J. Sterling Morton to Bryan, October 10 and 11, 1889; Morton wished Bryan to prepare statements against subsidies for the Democratic state convention.

⁶⁵ Bryan papers, letter from Walter Hinds Page to Bryan, August 27, 1889; G. P. Putnam's Sons to Bryan, September 3 and 13, 1889.

⁶⁶ The Farmers' Alliances were a phase in the formation of organizations among the agricultural population. Beginning in the South in the late 1870's, the Alliance movement spread into the Midwest wherever there was distress among the farmers. During the late 1880's, the Alliance became increasingly interested in political action and by 1890 the organization prepared to nominate and campaign for its own slate of candidates. See chapters 4-6 in Hicks, op. cit. (footnote 41).

⁶⁷ Bryan papers, letter from W. T. H. McClanahan, Elk Creek, Nebraska, May 10, 1890, who wrote to Bryan, "If the Democrats and alliance people can make a comb. this fall and

amazingly powerful. In some areas the new political party nominated its own candidates, but wherever they met the farmers and their leaders were firmly convinced of the righteousness of their cause and were fervently dedicated to winning their battle against oppression. Political meetings took on the evangelical character of camp meetings under Alliance leadership.⁶⁸

Although he strenuously denied it, Bryan was rounding up support, courting the Alliance, and pushing himself for the congressional nomination.⁶⁹ He was urged to present a Fourth-of-July oration which would please the Alliance:

A speech showing the dangerous tendency of the times in the growth of Millionairism which will in a few years more necessitate a standing army to protect these abnormal fortunes will hit our people about right.⁷⁰

Another Bryan supporter saw much reason for encouragement in the complex political situation, and he urged the candidate to strive for Alliance support. "This would practically insure success."⁷¹ With his youthful enthusiasm and his air of earnest conviction, Bryan was gaining favor among young Democrats and incurring the dislike of older party members who viewed him as a "mere stripling" and a newcomer to Nebraska.⁷² But the Nebraska

we can get them to endorse you. why I am betting on the result." See also, T. D. Worrall, Valparaiso, May 13, 1890, and J. W. Barnhart, Auburn, July 22, 1890, to Bryan, on the problems raised by the Alliance and the possibilities of cooperating with the new movement. The *Omaha World-Herald*, July 29, 1890, suggested that Alliance activity would split the Republican Party, throwing the election to the Democrats.

⁶⁸ The *Omaha World-Herald* contains numerous references to Alliance political activities during this period. See *World-Herald* for July 5, 20, 28, 30, and August 15, 1890, for accounts of Alliance conventions and plans.

⁶⁹ In a letter to Charles H. Brown, a rival for the Democratic nomination, June 30, 1890, Bryan insisted that he would work for Brown if he were nominated, that his political motivations were strictly disinterested, and that he had not tried to undermine the strength of the other possible nominees. Enthusiastic letters from friends throughout the district suggest that a great deal of work and planning had gone into Bryan's nomination. See, for example, Bryan papers, letters to Bryan from H. M. Boydston, Nebraska City, June 3 and 23; R. W. Story, Pawnee City, June 3 and 24; L. A. Simmons, Cortland, June 24; Edgar Howard, Papillion, July 3; J. W. Barnhart, Auburn, July 19, 1890.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, letter from George A. Abbott, Falls City, June 19, 1890, to Bryan.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, letter from J. W. Barnhart, Auburn, to Bryan, July 22, 1890.

⁷² *Ibid.*, letter from C. J. Smyth, Omaha, to Bryan, July 25, 1890.

political scene in the summer of 1890 called for new ideas and new political personalities. An enthusiastic campaigner, firmly convinced of his own rightness and familiar with the outlook and the rhetoric of the country people, might be able to attract support from the discontented farmers. The situation was apparently ideal for young lawyer Bryan.

A Voice and a Message—Three Great Efforts

On July 30, 1890, the Democratic Party nominated Bryan for Representative to Congress from Nebraska's First Congressional District. Unable to hide his pleasure and satisfied with the success of his plan to achieve the candidacy, Bryan accepted the nomination and promised to conduct a hard, personal campaign, going into all parts of his district and offering to debate the issues with Republican leaders in every county seat in the district.⁷³ Bryan's friends rejoiced at his nomination; one enthusiast hoped that the Democrats had discovered "a Moses destined to lead the chosen people out of their bondage of trusts, tariff abuses and unnatural taxation."⁷⁴ Even a Republican recognized the candidate's "sterling qualities which whether used in the pulpit on the stump or in the halls of Congress redound to the honor of our Common Humanity."⁷⁵ J. Sterling Morton offered his congratulations and his assistance to the candidate, not realizing, apparently, that the time, the issues, and the more sedate and traditional political techniques were suddenly changing.⁷⁶ The *Omaha World-Herald* was well satisfied with the "young, eloquent, earnest, and able" nominee and predicted a "lively campaign for tariff reform and probably a victory also."⁷⁷

⁷³ With becoming modesty, Bryan referred to his political inexperience and spoke of his need to rely on the Democratic committee; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 31, 1890.

⁷⁴ Bryan papers, letter from Eli H. Doud, South Omaha, to Bryan, July 31, 1890.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, letter from C. F. Harrison, Omaha, July 31, 1890. Bryan received many congratulatory messages from friends both in and outside of Nebraska. See, for example, the letters from Ed. P. Smith of Seward, July 30; S. Hullfish, Wabash, July 31; Carl Morton (son of J. Sterling Morton), Nebraska City, July 31; H. W. Milligan, Illinois College, August 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, letter from J. Sterling Morton, Chicago, to Bryan, July 31. Speaking before the Democratic State Convention two weeks later, Bryan spoke of the Republican crime against the public in demonetizing silver, an issue which later created a sharp division between the two men. An account of this "energetic address to an enthusiastic audience" is contained in the *Omaha World-Herald* of August 15, 1890.

⁷⁷ *Omaha World-Herald*, July 31, 1890.

Bryan's canvass in 1890 was very similar to his efforts in 1888 on behalf of J. Sterling Morton. Like most enthusiastic politicians, he was not reluctant to participate in the endless Democratic rallies, the torchlight parades, and the long-winded oratory of rural campaigning. His campaigning was different in degree, however, from that of his Nebraska political colleagues, for Bryan brought a vigor and enthusiasm to the campaign trail which others could not match. Bryan set out on an intensive speaking tour of his area, attending county fairs, standing by at the opening of a bridge, visiting all the county seats and many of the lesser communities in the First Congressional District. He followed the urgings of his old friends by conducting a "personal campaign," along with his speaking, making individual contacts in addition to his regular party work.⁷⁸ Bryan's power over his audiences, his unusual speaking ability and his great physical energy, made him very desirable as an attraction for local political gatherings.⁷⁹ Invitations poured in pleading with Bryan to appear at local meetings.⁸⁰ Once the campaign was well under way, the scheduling of Bryan's appearances became a major problem, so great was the demand for him to speak.⁸¹ Both railroad timetables and political strategy influenced the planning of Bryan's congressional campaign. He traveled principally by rail to Democratic rallies and "jollifications" in the rural hamlets where many of the voters in his district waited to listen to him, hence train times often were considered in scheduling speaking engage-

⁷⁸ Bryan papers, letter from Charles A. Barnes, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Bryan, August 5, 1890, advised a personal campaign. Edward L. McDonald, another Jacksonville friend, advised: "Speak everywhere—kiss all the babys [sic]—you can do it—you have mouth enough for both." (McDonald to Bryan, August 5, 1890.) James B. Meikle of Omaha wrote to Bryan on August 26, 1890: "My idea of making votes is, that the best plan is to talk to men one at a time and demonstrate to them that it is to their private interest to vote with your party. Of course there must be speech making torchlight processions, etc. etc. to keep up the enthusiasm of the multitude, but the quiet work is what changes votes."

⁷⁹ Bryan papers, Dan Begley, of Papillion, wrote to Bryan on August 9: "When you come to Papillion we expect to have a grand time."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, letters to Bryan from B. F. Good, Wahoo, August 13; L. A. Dunphy, Colon, August 19; W. E. McClanahan, Elk Creek, August 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, letter from J. W. Barnhart, Auburn, to Bryan, September 17, 1890.

ments.⁸² The strength of the Farmers' Alliance in certain areas also influenced Bryan's campaign plans; in some counties Democrats hoped for the collapse of the Alliance, while elsewhere Bryan's supporters advised him to cultivate the Independents.⁸³

Other difficulties hampered the campaign: the candidate had to schedule his appearances in many communities at a time of day or on a certain date when the greatest crowds would hear him, since no electronic means of communication were available to amplify his voice or carry his message to a distant town.⁸⁴ At Rulo, in southeastern Nebraska, local Democrats bought off the "Indian show" which had reserved the town's best hall, in order to provide more space for Bryan's audience.⁸⁵ Party workers sometimes took the liberty of changing arrangements to make the best possible use of a popular speaker. From Wymore, Bryan heard:

We have made some change in the program and will send you to Odell in the morning to shake hands with the dear people and have you address Blue Springs people in the afternoon and Liberty at night.⁸⁶

Everywhere the pattern was similar: the candidate followed a ceaseless round of handshaking, jovial conversations, then introductions (often more verbose than eloquent) from local party officials, and an earnest, clear, and simple address on the tariff by the Congressman-to-be, punctuated by repeated rounds of applause, later perhaps a dinner or reception, or if the town was very small, the candidate might hurry off in a jouncing buckboard or race for the depot to make connections for his next appearance. Fortunately, Mr. Bryan had the necessary physical endurance to meet the very taxing demands of such a campaign. Sometimes, he had to face two or three audiences in a single day. Speeches under these

⁸² *Ibid.*, letters to Bryan from L. A. Dunphy, Colon, August 19; Francis J. Morgan, Plattsmouth, October 21; H. M. Boydston, Nebraska City, October 22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, letters to Bryan from Edwin Falloon, Falls City, August 23, 1890; B. F. Good, Wahoo, August 13; L. A. Dunphy, Colon, August 19; John Sherman, Wahoo, August 24; W. B. Morrison, Hickman, August 26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, letters to Bryan from W. B. Morrison, August 26; J. W. Barnhart, September 17; R. B. Wallace, Union, September 28; Francis J. Morgan, October 21, 1890.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, letter to Bryan from John Cagnon, Rulo, October 10, 1890.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, letter to Bryan from V. A. Tiven, Wymore, September 27, 1890.

circumstances were necessarily brief, even perfunctory, and usually repetitive. During the months of September and October, Bryan devoted his entire time and energy to campaign tours, speaking nearly every day and covering his district intensively, from one end to the other. On Sundays, however, he rested, observing the Sabbath.

As the campaign went on, events became reminiscent of the struggle in 1888. In a well-applauded speech at the Richardson County convention, Bryan supported a radical platform, including silver coinage, and opposed prohibition.⁸⁷ By September 24, approximately the midpoint of the campaign, Bryan had established such a reputation as a speaker that farmers came from miles away to hear him. In Louisville, "At the close of his address old farmers and young farmers and business men rushed forward to shake Mr. Bryan by the hand."⁸⁸ Bryan spoke the language of the farmers and the small-town dwellers by using clear and simple phraseology, homely anecdotes, arguing with evangelical fervor and seemingly transparent logic, and avoiding vicious abuse of his rivals.⁸⁹ He was praised for the decency of his oratory; its upright quality permitted ladies to listen without embarrassment.⁹⁰ In addition to his strenuous campaign in the villages of his district, Bryan made speeches in all the wards of Omaha, and took part in a grand Bryan rally at that city on October 25.⁹¹ Early in September, Bryan heard of the progress of the city organization: "Nearly every ward in the city has a club; and all will have them in a few days. The clubs are good things . . ." ⁹² The Bryan Club at Lincoln, a Republican stronghold, planned to celebrate on October 1st the third anniversary of the arrival in Lincoln of their "brilliant young champion and eloquent standard bearer."⁹³

Bryan's campaign in 1890 was characterized by

⁸⁷ Omaha *World-Herald*, September 21 and 23, 1890. See similar accounts in the *World-Herald* on September 11, 1890, of speeches at Valparaiso and Mead, September 14 at Brownville, September 16 at Peru, September 17 at Falls City, September 27 at Hickman, September 28 at Mead, October 3 at Union, and October 8 at Elkhorn.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1890.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, September 17, 1890, praised Bryan's "plain and simple language," his earnestness, his honesty, and his outspoken positions on the issues; *ibid.*, October 10, 1890, described the candidate as an "evangelist."

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, September 8 and 16, 1890.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1890.

⁹² Bryan papers, letter from C. J. Smyth, of Omaha, to Bryan, September 2, 1890.

⁹³ Omaha *World-Herald*, September 22, 1890.

one new and important feature. On September 25, Bryan challenged his rival, W. J. Connell, to a "joint debate at one place in each county of this district."⁹⁴ The challenge was accepted and the candidates agreed to meet for eleven debates during the last three weeks of October.⁹⁵ No records remain to indicate the origin of the debate idea. Perhaps it was Bryan's; he had grown up in the long shadow of the Lincoln-Douglas debates which took place in his home state of Illinois two years before his birth, and he had been a vigorous debater in college. Whatever the source, the debates were an inspiration and put Bryan in the best possible light as a formidable public speaker. In debate, the young man could demonstrate his earnestness, his preoccupation with "the issues," his knack of simplifying political problems and adopting a strongly moral point of view, and his very capable use of anecdotes to dramatize and illustrate his points. He was, by this time, a confident and impressive speaker, and he became more impressive as the debates drew to a close.

From the first meeting at Lincoln, Bryan put his Republican opponent on the defensive, attacking the McKinley tariff in particular, but not forgetting the indefinite Republican stand on prohibition, the "boss rule" of Speaker Reed in the House of Representatives, and advocating direct election of Senators. In answer to Connell's argument for the protection of American labor, Bryan pointed out the effects of the tariff in bringing higher prices and diminished output. The *World-Herald* reported: "To say that his remarks were punctured with applause would hardly express the situation, as he had hardly time to speak between the cheers and applause which greeted his every remark."⁹⁶ The debates continued to be triumphantly successful for the Democratic contender. Even his "most ardent admirers" were surprised and captivated by "the avalanche of oratory, wit, and logic" which the young candidate displayed.⁹⁷ During the fourth debate, Connell "conceded that Bryan was his superior as an orator and logician and the vast audience fully approved this view."⁹⁸ During the eighth debate at Pawnee City, Connell became angry and "rattled."⁹⁹ Even allowing for the excess enthusiasm and partisan

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1890.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1890.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, October 14, 1890.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, October 17, 1890, describing the third debate at Wahoo.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1890.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, October 23, 1890.

accounts of the debates given in the *World-Herald*, there is little doubt that these meetings created an extraordinary amount of public interest and engendered much enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate. Commenting on Bryan's manner, the sympathetic *World-Herald* called him an orator, "not an apologetic speaker but a commanding one," "enamored with his cause," "impregnated . . . with the idea that his cause is righteous . . .," a speaker who inspired "a sense of exhilaration." Yet, despite his high seriousness and the righteous quality of his addresses, Bryan's arguments were leavened by "a pleasant wit, and even a spirit of mischief."¹⁰⁰ "You do us proud," wrote one admirer. Another wrote: "Am glad you are knocking Mr. Connell out of the box. We are all praying for you."¹⁰¹ The final debate at Syracuse on October 29 was declared to be a triumph for Mr. Bryan, in which he summed up the Democratic views on prohibition, free coinage of silver, the McKinley tariff, and other issues of the campaign. As a grand climax to this final meeting, Bryan presented Connell, his opponent, with a copy of Gray's *Elegy* as a tribute to the humble life. Three cheers were given for each candidate, then a local Democrat stepped forward to present Bryan with two floral pieces, one lettered "Truth," the other "Eloquence." In a brief speech to the conquering hero, the Democratic spokesman asserted that the floral tributes "express every shade of our respect, admiration and honor for the brightest and purest advocate of our cause in Nebraska."¹⁰²



Figure 5.—DURING WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S first campaign for the congressional seat of Nebraska's First District, he took part in a debate with his rival, W. J. Connell, on October 29, 1890. Following the debate, he received two floral pieces from his admirers. Rural audiences throughout the southern and western portions of the district were impressed by the candidate's sincerity, his serious manner, and his eloquence. (Courtesy *Nebraska State Historical Society*.)

The Republican press was disturbed by the power of Bryan's oratory and his growing popularity. Opposition newspapers attacked him on two fronts: he was rumored to have made a speech in favor of prohibition, and he had stated that he was tired of hearing of laws made for the benefit of laborers working in shops. Bryan countered both arguments, declaring that he had been more outspoken in his opposition to prohibition than any of the Republican candidates, and explaining that he was against legislation such as the tariff which discriminated against one class, farmers, and favored another.¹⁰³ Never-

theless, his apparent prejudice in favor of the farmers was used against him. But Bryan's opponents had little ground for personal attacks on the young candidate. In contrast to many political figures, he was young, clean-cut, apparently honest, and innocent of corrupt connections with the old Democratic organization. Democrats, not surprisingly, were jubilant at the impression which he created:

Mr. Bryan comes nearer being the idol of his friends than any young man who has appeared in politics in the history of Nebraska. His style of oratory is so different from that of any other speaker that it has the charm of originality as well as uniqueness. There is no effort to produce an effect by high-sounding phrases, demagogic appeals to passion or prejudice . . . He thoroughly

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1890.

¹⁰¹ Bryan papers, letters to Bryan from H. M. Boydston on October 16, and from George W. Davy, of Fremont, on October 17, 1890.

¹⁰² Omaha *World-Herald*, October 30, 1890.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, October 25 and November 1, 1890. The Democratic press traded charges with the Republicans, declaring that Prohibition hoodlums were terrorizing Omaha.

believes what he says, and his entire lack of artfulness makes him invincible.¹⁰⁴

The Democratic campaign reached its climax with a great meeting at the Omaha Coliseum on election eve where Boyd, the conservative old-line candidate for governor, and William Jennings Bryan, the dynamic young aspirant for Congress, appeared together.¹⁰⁵

On election day, the miracle occurred: Bryan captured the congressional seat in the First District, winning a significant plurality, but not a majority.¹⁰⁶ He had benefited substantially from several factors not directly related to his personal popularity, including a vigorous struggle against prohibition which resulted in some 4,000 fraudulent votes being cast in Omaha for the Democratic ticket.¹⁰⁷ Without the departure of many Independents from the Republican Party, Bryan could hardly have hoped for success, but the Alliance candidate was relatively weak and pulled fewer votes than a stronger figure might have done. Bryan, himself, undoubtedly attracted some Independent support. One other factor contributed to Bryan's victory: 1890 was a Democratic year throughout the nation, with significant Democratic gains in Congress. Although he campaigned vigorously and attracted much public notice, his own efforts constituted only a partial reason for his success.

Nevertheless, his supporters were enthusiastic about the campaign and its results.¹⁰⁸ There is little doubt

that both the candidate and his friends were profoundly impressed by Bryan's energetic work and its result in the First District. It seemed clear to Bryan that he had won his victory almost single-handedly. J. Sterling Morton, the grand old man of the Democratic Party in Nebraska, contributed not at all to the new Congressman's election.¹⁰⁹ His campaign had been, to a considerable degree, separate and distinct from the organization's work on behalf of Boyd and against prohibition, and he had attracted support from voters who were not normally Democrats, running ahead of the ticket nearly everywhere. The campaign of 1890 was another demonstration to Bryan of his unusual powers as an orator and campaigner, and another rehearsal for the great struggle of 1896.

During his two terms in Congress, Bryan established a substantial reputation as an orator. Of his efforts, two were particularly noteworthy. On March 16, 1892, he spoke on the tariff, arguing in favor of the Wilson Bill, which modified the high duties of the McKinley tariff, and urging that protection be given to the American home, "the grandest home industry that this or any other nation ever had."¹¹⁰ On August 16, 1893, he delivered an even more important address on the free-coinage issue in which he combined impressive erudition, an apparent mastery of the economic issues, and an eloquent appeal on behalf of the "forgotten men" of the United States—the producers, the farmers and laborers, and the small business men who would be hurt by a bill passed in the interests of the financiers of Wall Street and England. Finishing in a blaze of emotional rhetoric, Bryan declared:

God raised up an Andrew Jackson who had the courage to grapple with that great enemy [the United States Bank], and by overthrowing it, he made himself the idol of the people and reinstated the Democratic party in public confidence. What will be the decision today? The Democratic party has won the greatest success in its history. Standing upon this victory-crowned summit,

future for the candidate: "And if the *World-Herald* reads the stars aright the time will come when W. J. Bryan will have a reputation which will reach far beyond Nebraska." (Omaha *World-Herald*, October 18, 1890.)

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, letter from J. Sterling Morton to Bryan, November 3, 1890.

¹¹⁰ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 497. Mrs. Bryan remembered the tension of this first great speech and her relief as its pronounced effects were felt in the House (p. 238). An admirer wrote to Bryan after this speech, "How old are you? Am for you for the Democratic Presidential nomination if you are old enough" (p. 101).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, October 29, quoting the *Plattsmouth Journal*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, November 3 and 4.

¹⁰⁶ PAOLO E. COLETTA, "The Morning Star of the Reformation: William Jennings Bryan's First Congressional Campaign," *Nebraska History* (1956), vol. 37, pp. 103-119; the vote stood Bryan, 32,376; Connell, 25,663; Root (Independent), 13,066.

¹⁰⁷ JESSE E. BOELL, "The Career of William Jennings Bryan to 1896" (master's thesis, University of Nebraska, 1929), pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁸ Bryan papers, congratulatory messages to Bryan from friends. P. O. Cassidy, of Lincoln, wrote on November 6, 1890, "Your canvas was manly, brilliant and aggressive. Such a fight as yours was bound to win." Charles M. Chamberlain, of Tecumseh, enthused on November 6: "It is a grand campaign that you have made & a grander outcome." C. T. Brown, of Omaha, was amazed at the candidate's endurance, November 6: "I am frank to say to you that I don't believe there is another man in the Democratic party in Nebraska who could have taken the stump and made as many votes as you did . . ." Even some Republicans were impressed: W. R. Kelly, the General Attorney for the Union Pacific System in Nebraska, wrote, November 7: "I cannot withhold from you my personal congratulations upon the brilliant canvass which you have made . . ." Omaha's Democratic press prophesied a great

will it turn its face to the rising or the setting sun? Will it choose blessings or cursings—life or death—which? Which?¹¹¹

Perhaps the young Congressman was thinking that God had raised up a new Jackson—William Jennings Bryan.¹¹² Between 1892 and 1896, the silver issue penetrated the nation to become the most controversial, single, public question and the righteous cause of many reformers. Indeed, propagated by a remarkably effective promotional effort, the currency question tended for a time to crowd out other important problems. The cry of “free silver” seemed to offer to Americans, who were accustomed to thinking in terms of moral absolutes, a righteous solution to the national problems.¹¹³ For orators such as William Jennings Bryan, the silver issue created great opportunities for evangelical speechmaking.

Bryan also participated in Democratic campaigns outside of Nebraska, enhancing his reputation and gaining valuable experience. During the state and local campaigns of 1891 in Iowa and South Dakota, Bryan spoke out with his usual vigor and eloquence. At Creston, Iowa, his speech was the “first democratic gun of the Union county campaign” His oration was characterized by “plain, common sense, reasoning and sound arguments” which demolished the tariff advocates. One of the attractive features of Bryan’s style was its simplicity, which made for ease of understanding. The local press commented on the “splendid reputation” which the “energetic young man” had made in

¹¹¹ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, p. 114. On August 16, 1893, Bryan wrote of his strong feelings on the silver question: “I never felt more deeply the gravity of a question. I believe our prosperity depends upon its right solution and I pray that I may be the instrument in the hands of Providence of doing some good for my country Am satisfied that the speech as written is the most forcible I have yet produced. The only thing I fear is the delivery.”

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 121, Bryan spoke out on the silver question on other occasions in Congress. Describing it in evangelical terms as a “righteous cause,” he said, “It will rise and in its rising and its reign will bless mankind.” See pp. 76-121 for extensive excerpts from Bryan’s speeches on the currency issue in Congress.

¹¹³ The full history of the silver campaign has never been told. For a sympathetic view, see chapters 14-17 in ELMER ELLIS, *Henry Moore Teller: Defender of the West* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1941), chs. 14-17. See also, chapters 12 and 17 in JAMES A. BARNES, *John G. Carlisle* (New York, 1931), for a description of the antisilver crusade.

¹¹⁴ Creston, Iowa, *Advertiser*, n.d. [1891], in Bryan clipping collection, unmounted material, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Iowa.¹¹⁴ Bryan also spoke at Sioux City and other Iowa towns.¹¹⁵ Toward the close of the contest, he delivered an impressive address at Sioux Falls, South Dakota. As in Iowa, he appeared young and clean-cut and his oratory was simple yet clear, masterful, and inspiring:

Mr. Bryan is an orator, easy, graceful and possessing a thorough grasp of detail and a power of utterance which drive his points home, and make them stick. His speech was new in the political line. It consisted not in abuse of opponents or empty assertions but in compact logical arguments, founded upon facts and couched in language polished and convincing.¹¹⁶

It would be difficult to assess the impact and importance of Bryan’s work in campaigns of this sort. It surely increased and spread his reputation, and its apparent success must have encouraged the young man to steer an independent political course. For it seemed that he was most successful when he worked by himself, relying on the influence of his own effective oratory and his dynamic manner to convert his audiences.

Bryan ran for a second term in the House of Representatives in 1892, conducting an energetic campaign which followed closely the pattern of his efforts in 1882 and 1890. Even more than in 1890, a victory in 1892 would require much Bryan support from the third party. Nebraska had been redistricted, and Omaha, a Democratic stronghold, had been subtracted from the First District.¹¹⁷ In order to win the election, Bryan needed greater majorities in the country towns. Hoping to gain Populist votes, Bryan came out fully for free silver in this campaign, much to the distress of both his Republican opponents and conservative Democrats such as J. Sterling Morton. The young candidate must have felt somewhat complimented when the Republican Party dispatched William McKinley to Nebraska to campaign against him. After an exhausting canvass, with days of oratory, debates with his opponent, handshaking, and traveling from meeting to meeting, with little time for rest or reflection, Bryan struggled to a close victory with a plurality of only 140 votes, having run well ahead of the Democratic state ticket throughout his district to win a difficult three-cornered contest. It is little wonder that he was satisfied with his performance and

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Sioux City *Daily Tribune*, October (28?) 1891.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, *Argus-Leader*, October 27, 1891.

¹¹⁷ Omaha *World-Herald*, February 22, 1891, describes various plans for redistricting Nebraska.



Figure 6.—WHISTLE-STOPPING DURING THE 1860's, Bryan speaks to a small-town audience typical of the hundreds which he addressed during the campaign of 1866. (Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.)

convinced of the effectiveness of his energetic campaign techniques.¹¹⁸

His two terms in Congress established Bryan's position as a leading Democrat of the new generation, but much important work was accomplished outside of Congress during these years. Between 1892 and 1894, the young man took over leadership of the Democratic Party in Nebraska, supplanting the older generation of Democrats. Although he had begun

¹¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of the campaign of 1892 see PAOLO E. COLETTA, "William Jennings Bryan's Second Congressional Campaign," *Nebraska History* (December 1959), vol. 40, pp. 275-291.

his career in the state as a protégé of J. Sterling Morton, it is unfair to say that he had ever committed himself either to Morton's political organization or to his principles.¹¹⁹ Bryan represented the interests of younger Democrats as Morton would never do, and

¹¹⁹ PAXTON HIBBEN, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), pp. 122-124, argues that Bryan had taken advantage of Morton when the younger man first arrived in Nebraska. But once he had become well known and had no further use for the "Sage of Arbor Lodge," Bryan turned on Morton, attacking and undermining the latter's political position; however, Hibben's argument is not well sustained by the facts. Morton lost his control of the Democratic Party in Nebraska largely through his own inflexibility and unresponsiveness to new conditions.

his capture of party control in Nebraska was important in setting the stage for his assumption of national Democratic leadership at Chicago in 1896. Between 1892 and 1896 Bryan also shifted the focus of his political attack from the tariff to the currency question, becoming a major figure in the national silver movement during these years. His accomplishments during this period depended to no little degree upon his campaign techniques.

To a certain extent, practitioners of politics necessarily operate in two separate arenas, that of the "smoke-filled room"—the machine organization, and that of the public platform. Because the demands of these two arenas are fundamentally different, most politicians maintain two separate personalities or "faces." Bryan was never able to adapt fully to this requirement of politics, and he seems to have preserved essentially similar attitudes in the back room and on the speaker's rostrum. He was never a machine politician, concerned chiefly with developing a loyal organization through the mechanisms of rewards and punishments. William Allen White, one of Bryan's most observant contemporaries, has written:

Bryan showed his greatest personal strength in the fact that he was utterly without a political machine. And Bryan was machineless, not because he abhorred the machine, but because he ignored it. He did not know what to do with captains and lieutenants. He had only his clarion voice.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, in order to succeed at his vocation, Bryan needed to capture control of the party organization in Nebraska. He used virtually the same techniques to accomplish this feat that he had used to gain his seat in the House of Representatives—a voice and a message. By inspiring great enthusiasm among young Democrats in the state, and by appealing to all voters, regardless of their party affiliation, Bryan was able to control and essentially reconstruct the Nebraska Democracy. Although he did not direct the party machinery until 1896, he had become the state's leading Democrat by 1892.¹²¹

¹²⁰ WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE, *Masks in a Pageant* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 274–275.

¹²¹ A major battle for power occurred in the Democratic State Convention of April 13–14, 1892, when the younger generation clashed directly with the older, the latter group maintaining control of the Democratic machinery by a very slim margin. See PAOLO E. COLETTA, "The Democratic State Convention of April 13–14, 1892," *Nebraska History* (December 1958), vol. 39, pp. 317–333.



Figure 7.—THIS FORMAL CAMPAIGN PORTRAIT was characteristic of the impression which Bryan wished to create. A serious, good-looking young man, Bryan appeared to be the antithesis of the sinister influences in political machines. (Courtesy Nebraska State Historical Society.)

CAMPAIGN FOR SENATE

In 1893, Bryan's friends felt confident enough to enter his name in the senatorial race. Democrats had little hope of achieving victory because Senators were chosen by state legislatures, and the Nebraska legislature was almost evenly matched between Republicans and Independents, with only a tiny minority of Democrats. The Democratic leadership was hopelessly split and Bryan, who hoped for support from the Independents, was "the only hope the democracy of this state has."¹²² But because he was in Washington, he could not take advantage of his personal popularity: "If you could be here, without leaving Washington," wrote one of his friends, "you could do a great deal. The main trouble is that the Big Chiefs are against you, & the multitude that is for you has

¹²² Bryan papers, letter from James Devenny, chairman of the Democratic County Committee, Tecumseh, Nebraska, January 21, 1893, to Bryan. See also, L. A. Dunphy, Colon, to Bryan, January 5, 1893; and F. R. Mayes, Bartlett, to Bryan, January 9, indicating much Independent support for Bryan.

neither time nor money to spend in the lobby."¹²³ The Independents, however, had their own strong candidate, William V. Allen, who won the Senate seat with help from Bryan Democrats in the legislature. To a degree, the election of Allen was a victory for Bryan, since the new Senator was favorable to fusion and opposed to both of the old party organizations.¹²⁴ In the meantime, Bryan's men took the offensive in working for control of the state Democratic Party.¹²⁵ In retaliation for Bryan's insurgency, President Cleveland gave control of the Nebraska patronage to J. Sterling Morton and appointed the latter as Secretary of Agriculture.¹²⁶ The extent of support for Bryan in 1893 was very encouraging, but the political situation in Nebraska indicated the need for continued work among adherents of the third party.

Bryan stumped Nebraska in the fall of 1894, hoping again for a seat in the United States Senate. Despite the fact that his campaign would have no direct impact on the election itself, Bryan wished to demonstrate his own popularity to the Nebraska legislators.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, letter from J. D. Calhoun, of Lincoln, to Bryan, January 23, 1893. Other accounts of this confused situation in the state legislature are contained in letters from T. S. Allen, February 4 and 6, 1893, to Bryan. A letter from T. W. Worrell on February 6 and 9, to Bryan, describes the maneuverings of J. Sterling Morton and the corporations in this strange affair.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, letter from T. S. Allen, of Lincoln, on February 8, 1893, to Bryan: "I think it is safe to say [Senator William V. Allen] will work with you on every question & you can depend on his support & influence in future campaigns here."

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, C. D. Casper, of Lincoln, wrote to Bryan on February 8, 1893: "We propose to reorganize the party. I am going to organize the democratic editors and possibly the independent editors with a view to future work in joint service. Morton and Boyd both hate you." Many other letters among the Bryan papers suggest the eagerness of young Democrats to "cut loose from . . . old fossils."

¹²⁶ Bryan's friends were furious with Morton because of his devious tactics in connection with the senatorial election: see Bryan papers, letter from H. M. Boydston on January 25, 1893, to Bryan, for a severe criticism of Morton. For certain details on the ideological basis of the break between Bryan and Morton, see KENNETH E. MCINTYRE, "The Morton-Bryan Controversy" (master's thesis, University of Nebraska: 1943). An investigation by Senator Henry M. Teller demonstrated that Cleveland had deliberately postponed appointing applicants to work against Bryan on the state level. See ELLIS, *Henry Moore Teller*, p. 219. Some Bryan supporters urged the young man to ignore Cleveland's blatant attempt to use patronage against him. See J. D. Calhoun's letter on March 6, 1893, to Bryan preferring not to press his candidacy for the postmastership at Lincoln.

He was apparently hopeful that a massive indication of his power as a votegetter would influence the legislature in his favor, and that his canvass might aid in the election of Democratic candidates for state offices.¹²⁷ Support for Bryan's candidacy seemed general and enthusiastic, and many friends urged him to visit their communities. One man wrote of the immense opportunities for winning votes at Broken Bow in central Nebraska: "We want you to come & meet our people take them by the hand that they may see the man who is not afraid to defend and work for the West *We must* have enough votes in Lincoln this winter to send W. J. Bryan to the U.S. Senate. *We need help.*"¹²⁸ Reed Runroy, Nebraska's boy poet, predicted a Bryan victory in the Senate race: "And from there I see you stepping into the president's chair" ¹²⁹ Bryan's campaigning in 1894 followed the familiar pattern, but instead of stumping a single congressional district, Bryan

¹²⁷ Bryan papers, J. C. Ecker of Dixon, to Bryan, September 5, 1894. C. J. Smyth, chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, published an appeal in the Omaha *World-Herald*, asking voters to back Democratic candidates for the Nebraska Legislature in order that Bryan would be chosen as Senator instead of the Republican aspirant. PAOLO E. COLETTA, "Bryan, Cleveland, and the Disrupted Democracy, 1890-1896," *Nebraska History* (March 1960), vol. 31, p. 15, argues that Bryan's situation at this time was almost a direct parallel to the campaign of 1896. This article effectively surveys the split in the Nebraska Democratic Party and the implications of this dispute for the national party.

¹²⁸ Bryan papers, letters from S. B. Thompson to Bryan, September 5, 1894. Bryan's friends in other parts of the state were anxious for him to visit their communities. See, for example, letter from John L. Cleaver, Falls City, to Bryan, October 13, 1894. M. H. Weiss of Hebron, wrote on October 6, 1894: "We are sparing neither time nor money to carry this Co. for you and we will do the same to make your meetings a success."

¹²⁹ Bryan papers, letter from Reed Runroy to Bryan, October 6, 1894. Encouragement also came from out of state. Josephus Daniels, a prominent young southern Democrat, favored Bryan, and James B. Weaver, the Populist presidential candidate in 1892, was interested in the young man's future. See Bryan papers, letter from Josephus Daniels to Bryan, September 19, 1894. On September 1, Weaver wrote to Bryan, "Synthesis—not division is the order of God and of common sense." See also, Weaver to Bryan, September 30, urging unity among the silver forces and fostering division in the ranks of the gold people. Typical of the enthusiastic letters received by Bryan from ordinary voters was an encouraging epistle from Edwin C. Wigenham of La Crosse, Wisconsin, dated October 15, 1894: "Knowing your habit of capturing everything you start out to get, I congratulate you in advance If you win this fight the presidency is not beyond your reach." A Missourian, hoping to persuade Bryan to speak in that state, wrote:

needed to cover the entire state. He could not answer every request for help but he did his best, concentrating his speaking engagements in the county seats and the more important towns in the eastern third of Nebraska, the most populous portion of the state. During September and October, Bryan made more than fifty personal appearances in behalf of his candidacy and in support of the Democratic state ticket. On most of the days when he was campaigning, the candidate appeared in two different towns, sometimes traveling long distances to reach both of his meetings. His audiences were generally reported as large and enthusiastic, and he pursued his opponents—both Republicans and gold-standard Democrats—with his usual vigor. Bryan made ample use of Nebraska's railroads as he traveled through the state, a forecast of his extraordinary rail trips in 1896.

The climax of Bryan's campaign for the Senate was a pair of two debates between Bryan and his Republican opponent, John M. Thurston. The debates attracted a great deal of interest and enormous crowds attended the meetings. Eager partisans of both candidates arrived at Lincoln by the trainload, crowding into the Agricultural Building at the State Fair Grounds for the first debate in October 17. At Omaha on the next evening, a crowd estimated at 15,000 heard the debaters argue the justice of the tariff, the need for free coinage of silver, and other great economic questions.¹³⁰ Although one of his friends insisted: "Your debate with Mr. Thurston has strengthened your prestige among farmers up here materially," the signs of victory were not reassuring.¹³¹ On October 4, William McKinley addressed a great crowd at the Omaha Coliseum, denouncing the Democratic depression, defending the gold standard, and extolling the protective tariff.¹³² On November 5, election eve, an exhausted William Jennings Bryan spent the evening with his family at Lincoln; the next

"The people of this county will almost swear by you. You certainly have a most enviable reputation and I want you to come." (John F. Brandon, Carrollton, Missouri, to Bryan, September 27, 1894.)

¹³⁰ Omaha *World-Herald*, October 18, 19, and 21, 1894, carried details of the debates.

¹³¹ Bryan papers, letter from William H. Green to Bryan, October 26, 1894.

¹³² Omaha *World-Herald*, October 5, 1894. McKinley campaigned aggressively during the fall of 1894, defending protection in 371 speeches in 16 States. See MARGARET LEECH, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), pp. 61–62, for an account of this effort.

day it was all over. Nebraska's Democrats were not alone in their total defeat; throughout the nation, the Republican party had won great successes, taking control of the House of Representatives and state legislatures everywhere outside the South. By not running for reelection to the House, Bryan saved himself from almost certain defeat. He may have been consoled by his "preferential" vote of 80,000, an outstanding achievement in a Republican year.¹³³ During the winter of 1895 the Republican, John M. Thurston, was chosen by the state legislature to represent Nebraska in the United States Senate.

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESIDENT

Bryan's political apprenticeship ended with the senatorial vote in 1894; his political style and his campaign techniques were fully developed by this time, and he carried them on with only minor variations for the remainder of his life. Furthermore, his ambitions had, by 1894, encompassed every office that he would ever desire, for he had concluded that the Presidency lay within his grasp. His apparent popularity and success as a public speaker gave him assurance that he would be a strong contender for the highest office. By fulfilling his role as the David of commonsense democracy and free silver, he would vanquish the false and exploitive Goliath of privilege, greed, and gold. But before he would have an opportunity to slay the giant, Bryan needed to become known throughout the nation as a defender of justice for the common man. He had already gained an enviable reputation through his more important speeches in the House of Representatives and his speaking tours outside of Nebraska. In the two years which followed his ill-fated campaign for the Senate, Bryan set out to utilize the techniques and talents which he had developed during the ten years of his political apprenticeship, in order to build on the existing foundation of his fame. His drive for the Presidency was fundamentally an individual effort, represented by two separate campaigns: the first for the Democratic nomination during 1895 and the first half of 1896; the second, for President during the memorable campaign of 1896.¹³⁴

¹³³ BOELL, *op. cit.* (footnote 107), pp. 134–143.

¹³⁴ Bryan's presidential campaign in 1896 has been most fully described in his own volume, *The First Battle* (Chicago, 1896). The campaign deserves a modern scholarly reconsideration from the perspective of both McKinley and Bryan. Bryan's drive for the nomination during the years 1895–96 is a story in itself, deserving of special consideration.

Except for a limited number of special speaking tours, Bryan was unable to concentrate on his presidential hopes until he had completed serving his term as Representative from Nebraska in the Lame Duck Session of Congress in March 1895. Once free of his responsibilities, Bryan actively solicited speaking engagements from every region of the country, and his calendar soon became so crowded that he could not begin to answer the demand.¹³⁵ His great tour of the nation during the winter of 1895–1896 was, in retrospect, a rehearsal of the canvass of 1896, grooming him for the candidacy where his greatest strength seemed to lie—in the agricultural regions of the South and West. He had already attracted support in the South; the impact of his oratory in that region seemed little different from what it had been in Iowa and Nebraska.¹³⁶ In 1895, the times seemed more auspicious. Bryan had become widely known as a spokesman for the free coinage of silver and audiences were ready and eager to listen to his famous lecture, “Bimetallism.”¹³⁷ Even the promoters of lyceums were anxious to arrange traveling coinage debates and engage Bryan as a speaker.¹³⁸

During the late spring and summer, Bryan traveled into the South and the Middle West, delivering a

number of major addresses as well as scores of minor speeches.¹³⁹ On May 23, at Memphis, “the storm center of the South . . . in the agitation of the all absorbing currency question,” Bryan addressed an “honest money” meeting on the day following a speech by Secretary of the Treasury John G. Carlisle in favor of gold.¹⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter, he appeared in Springfield, Illinois, as the guest of honor at the Illinois Democratic silver convention. By this time, he was being spoken of as “David” or “Young Moses,” appellations which must have gladdened his heart.¹⁴¹ Throughout the summer, he toured in this fashion, debating at some places, orating at others. At Mexico, Missouri, “His magic oratory seemed to intoxicate his listeners. Even the local bankers seemed to agree with the silver-tongued orator from Nebraska.”¹⁴² In New Orleans, the reaction was little different: “His speech was a masterpiece of eloquence, the happiest combination of argument, pathos, and humor. New Orleans has heard many of the world’s famous orators, but none have excelled and few have equalled the brilliant speaker from Nebraska.”¹⁴³ By late summer, the interest in Bryan’s lecture tour had grown and changed somewhat in emphasis: his supporters were beginning to ask for him because they regarded him as a possible candidate for high office.¹⁴⁴

Bryan spent September visiting the Far West—Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, and other states.¹⁴⁵ His lecturing continued through fall at such diverse points as Dallas,

¹³⁵ Bryan papers, letters to Bryan from A. S. Colyar, Nashville, Tennessee, March 12, and F. E. Buford, editor of the *Brunswick Gazette*, Lawrenceville, Virginia, March 16, 1895. Many other appeals to Bryan may be found in the Bryan papers.

¹³⁶ Bryan papers, clipping file: the *Atlanta Constitution*, June 15, 1893, reported that an Atlanta audience had cheered mightily at Bryan’s eloquent and witty oration on government economy, tariff reform, and bimetallism. “It was a splendid ovation . . . the enthusiastic audience rose up and proclaimed him with wild shouts the Andrew Jackson of modern times”

¹³⁷ C. Selden Smart, business manager of the Arena Publishing Co., of Boston, regarded Bryan so highly that he hoped to publicize the young man’s views on silver. See Bryan papers, letter from Smart to Bryan, February 18, 1895. See also, letter dated April 24, 1895, from P. A. Regan of Boise, Idaho, inviting Bryan to deliver his “famous lecture—Bimetallism” at Boise.

¹³⁸ Bryan papers, letter from J. E. Brockway, manager of the Brockway Lecture Bureau at Pittsburgh, to Bryan, April 15, proposing the coinage debates. Bryan lectured under the auspices of the Shearer Lecture and Music Bureau; see Bryan papers, J. L. Shearer letters to Bryan, July 30 and August 5, 1895. The Lincoln *Nebraska State Journal*, a Republican paper, commented with a fair degree of accuracy on Bryan’s plan to conduct a lecture tour: “He hopes by this method to increase both his bank account and his reputation throughout the country” (January 14, 1895. Bryan clippings collection, Nebraska State Historical Society).

¹³⁹ Bryan papers, letter from Bryan to L. W. Hubbell, general manager of the St. Louis-Aurora Mining Co., Aurora, Missouri, May 9, 1895. On the way from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Memphis, Bryan spoke at several smaller communities, a practice which put him into direct contact with the ordinary folk from whom he hoped to gain his strongest support.

¹⁴⁰ Bryan papers, clipping file, *St. Louis Republic*, May 9, 1895.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chicago *Times-Herald*, June 6, 1895.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, *St. Louis Republic*, May 28, 1895.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, June 11, 1895.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, letter from Charles M. Rosser, Terrell, Texas, to Bryan, August 21, and October 12, 1895; John W. Tomlinson, Birmingham, Alabama, to Bryan, August 26, 1895.

¹⁴⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, August 13, 28, 29, 1895 (Bryan clipping collection, Nebraska State Historical Society). See Bryan papers, letters during 1895 to Bryan from J. B. Osborne, Rawlins, Wyoming, August 14; C. S. Thomas, Denver, August 15; James A. Summett, Portland, Oregon, August 14; J. J. Kelly, Portland, August 24; Adolph Sutro, mayor of San Francisco, September 19; E. C. D. Shortridge, Bismarck, North Dakota, September 24; M. A. Miller, Lebanon, Oregon, n.d. (inspirational oratory).



Figure 8.—BRYAN CAMPAIGN RIBBONS and badges from the campaign of 1896. In this year, Bryan was nominated by the Democratic Party, the Populist Party, and the National Silver Party which was composed of persons who were devoted to the issue of silver coinage. (Smithsonian photo 48144 K, Becker collection.)



Figure 9.—BRYAN CAMPAIGN RIBBON from the campaign of 1896. Arthur Sewell, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, was a wealthy and relatively conservative gentleman from Maine. (Smithsonian photo 48191-E, Becker collection.)

Texas, and Duluth, Minnesota.¹⁴⁶ At Omaha on November 25–26, Bryan served as president of the Trans-Mississippi Commercial Conference, devoted to securing favorable legislation for the West.¹⁴⁷ During that winter he lectured in the East, and also made a rapid tour of Colorado, speaking under the auspices of the Rocky Mountain Lyceum on “Our Form of Government and the Ills Which Afflict It.”¹⁴⁸ Although he was comforted by some evidence from the East of interest in his cause and himself, Bryan’s chief support continued to lie in the West and South, where his evangelical campaigning had its greatest appeal.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Bryan papers, letters to Bryan during 1895 from Charles O. Baldwin, Duluth, on August 20, October 5, and November 1; George R. Laybourn, Duluth, November 8; Charles M. Rosser, Terrell, Texas, November 3; clippings from *Duluth Press*, n.d.

¹⁴⁷ *Nebraska State Journal*, November 27, 1895 (Bryan clippings collection, Nebraska State Historical Society).

¹⁴⁸ Bryan papers, letters from John Marcus Dickey, director of the Rocky Mountain Lyceum, to Bryan, January 6 and 28, 1896.

¹⁴⁹ Bryan was encouraged by messages from the East. See, for example, B. Lundy Kent of Wilmington, Delaware, who wrote: “After hearing you that evening I know you are one of the powers in this great movement for justice & human liberty,” February 29, 1896. M. E. Hennessy of *Donahoe’s Magazine*, Boston, February 11, 1896, stated: “It may interest you to know that thousands of democratic minds in the East are greatly interested in you and your future.”

One Kansas friend wrote of the contest between good and evil: “. . . The contest upon which we must enter in this country . . . is reduced . . . to a conflict between good and bad men; the honest, the sympathetic, the humane, the true men of the country will stand by the people, come weal, come woe; . . . The knaves, the moral idiots, the depraved and indescribable scamps . . . will stand for the combines, corporations, the trusts, the consolidated enemies of mankind.”¹⁵⁰ To persons who thought in such terms, Bryan’s message was very appealing. He also captivated leaders of the organized silver movement.¹⁵¹

The evidence does not warrant any firm conclusion regarding the impact of Bryan’s lecturing in 1895 and 1896. Several facts are worth noting, however. Toward the end of his travels, Bryan was making valiant efforts to organize the Democratic Convention

¹⁵⁰ David Overmyer, Topeka, Kansas, February 29, 1896, to Bryan. Letters from Ray P. Hisey, Rives (Rome), Richland County, Ohio, March 1, and M. L. Becker, Lima, Ohio, April 17, 1896, indicate the substantial grassroots support which developed out of Bryan’s tour.

¹⁵¹ Bryan papers, letters to Bryan from George P. Keeney, secretary, Pacific Coast Branch of the American BiMetallic League, October 22 and December 30, 1895; and Edward B. Light, secretary of the National BiMetallic Union, October 22, December 18 and 26, 1895.

of 1896 in favor of free silver.¹⁵² It is clear that his lecture tours had created much sentiment for Bryan to head the Democratic ticket, despite the opposition of the Administration and the "old guard" of the Party. Of all the potential silver candidates—Richard P. Bland, Ben Tillman, Horace Boies, perhaps others—Bryan was, in many respects, in the most advantageous position. Not being confined by the duties of office or the dignity of party leadership, the young man could campaign vigorously for himself and for his issue. As William Allen White has observed: "He was an attractive figure in those days as he traveled from town to town, from county to county, gathering about him the advocates of fiat money."¹⁵³ The moral content of his evangelical message seemed ageless, but his enthusiastic campaign manner was fresh and his optimism buoyant in a nation whose spirit had been jaded and discouraged by a serious economic depression. He had an additional advantage possessed by no other contender: having been a fusionist in Nebraska, he could appeal to Populists and insurgent Republicans as well as Democrats. In a nominating convention which was bound to be relatively open and fluid, Bryan was likely to be one of the strongest darkhorse candidates.

The climax of his campaign for the nomination came early in July at the Democratic Convention, after the basic work had been done and after a divisive struggle over the seating of delegates in which the silver forces had defeated and discredited the Cleveland Administration. The convention was hot, dispirited, and deadlocked: "fortune favored me . . .," wrote Bryan almost thirty years later.¹⁵⁴ Although, at first, it seemed that he might not have the opportunity to speak, it came at last when he spoke at the close of the debate on the platform. It was a true Bryan campaign speech, the finest of his career, and one of the great orations in American history. To the overheated and discouraged Democratic Party, Bryan's voice rang with emotion and certainty as he declared:

I would be presumptuous, indeed, to present myself against the distinguished gentlemen to whom you have listened if this were a mere measuring of abilities; but

¹⁵² Bryan, during the first six months of 1896, received many letters from friends concerning the organization of various state delegations for free silver (see Bryan papers). Bryan was clearly one of the central figures in this movement, and was regarded by many as the leading contender for the nomination.

¹⁵³ WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE, *op. cit.* (footnote 120), p. 243.

¹⁵⁴ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 111.

this is not a contest between persons. The humblest citizen in all the land, when clad in the armor of a righteous cause is stronger than all the hosts of error. I come to speak to you in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity.

In the garb of the humble common man, Bryan addressed the Party, pointing out the moral truths of his cause, clarifying and simplifying the silver issue until it became a principle of the purest justice. Thinking again, as he had thought before, of an earlier Democrat, Bryan declared: "What we need is an Andrew Jackson to stand, as Jackson stood, against the encroachments of organized wealth." He spoke for the country folk: "Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country." Concluding with a massive and magnificent Biblical phrase, Bryan exclaimed:

Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.¹⁵⁵

Bryan had used the expression before; it was part of his campaign repertoire and he "had laid it away for a proper occasion."¹⁵⁶

The "Cross of Gold" was no new departure for William Jennings Bryan: he had long experience with this sort of oratory. It was a masterpiece of its type—the moral-inspirational-political address combining high emotional content, Biblical phraseology, glittering imagery, and striking analogies. Bryan had probably rehearsed the speech a thousand or more times—in the campaigns of 1888, 1890, 1892, and 1894, on the lecture circuit, and on innumerable patriotic and inspirational occasions. Although the "Cross of Gold" turned the dispirited Democratic Convention into a howling frenzy of enthusiasm, it did not win for the "boy orator" the Party's nomination: that had been substantially won in the preceding year and a half. But the "Cross of Gold" set the tone for Bryan's campaign in 1896. Patterning his national tour after his Nebraska campaigns for J. Sterling Morton and for his own seat in Congress,

¹⁵⁵ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, pp. 199, 203, and 206.

¹⁵⁶ BRYAN, *Memoirs*, p. 103; HIBBEN, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), p. 161.

Bryan believed he was making the best possible use of his talents.

This is not the place to retell in detail the story of Bryan's "First Battle."¹⁵⁷ In approximately 100 days, Bryan, according to his own estimate, traveled more than 18,000 miles, most of them by rail, visited 27 States, made approximately 600 speeches, and was seen by an estimated 5,000,000 people.¹⁵⁸ Bryan's effort during this season was the first instance of an intensive personal campaign by a presidential candidate, and it was the first true "whistle stop" railroad campaign. Other candidates had spoken briefly and shaken hands from the rear platforms of their trains, but never before had a presidential aspirant made the "whistle stop" technique into a formal feature of the contest. For more than fifty years after the campaign of 1896, "whistle stop" oratory and campaign trains were nearly synonymous with presidential struggles. To the degree that it inaugurated major innovations in campaigning, Bryan's battle in 1896 was a new departure; but for Bryan himself there was little that was really new. He had applied to the presidential contest essentially those principles he had developed during his years in local and state politics, and his experience on the chautauqua and lyceum circuits.

Bryan, in 1896, was seemingly indefatigable: he rode dreary trains for hundreds and thousands of miles, and for days on end. Often, he was awakened in the small hours of the morning to wave from his observation platform to enthusiastic crowds gathered at tiny country depots along his route. For much of the trip, he had no special accommodations—just ordinary sleepers and day coaches—but toward the end of the campaign the Democratic National Committee provided, out of its meager funds, a private car for the candidate. He had the good fortune of being able to sleep anywhere and, apparently, at any time. He was a trial to newspaper men on his campaign journeys, for he frequently arose early in the morning to greet his admirers or make nearly impossible train connections. His long days of campaigning wore heavily on the reporters.¹⁵⁹

As in his earlier political travels, Bryan particularly enjoyed speaking in small towns where his efforts

¹⁵⁷ In view of Bryan's long experience in campaigning, it is scarcely accurate to describe the struggle of 1896 as a "first battle."

¹⁵⁸ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, p. 618.

¹⁵⁹ MATTHEW JOSEPHSON, op. cit. (footnote 4), pp. 688-707; CHARLES WILLIS THOMPSON, *Presidents Few Known and Two Near Presidents* (Indianapolis, 1929), pp. 76-88.



Figure 10.—BRYAN CONDUCTED an aggressive tour of the nation during the presidential campaign of 1896, traveling more than 18,000 miles and visiting 27 States. Here, the campaign train halts for a rear-platform appearance of the candidate and Mrs. Bryan at Crestline, Ohio. (WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, *The First Battle*, 1896, facing p. 528.)

seemed especially successful. His trip through Iowa at the very beginning of the campaign probably typified his small-town speaking techniques. The hostile *New York Times* reported that "Bryan improves many opportunities to talk and say nothing." Speaking at almost every little station on the railroad, he was cut short on numerous occasions because of the train schedule, although at more important places he was able to make more significant statements. At Davenport, Bryan admitted, "I promised myself that I would not do any talking on the road, but the presence of so many enthusiasts presents a temptation which I am not able to withstand." No doubt receptions such as that at West Liberty, Iowa, where a "brass band and 500 people received the nominee," encouraged him to talk. Among other things, Bryan said,

I am very glad to see you and to give you a chance to meet a candidate. I believe that it is the duty of any person who is a candidate for office to become acquainted with the people whom he is to serve if elected A person chosen is nothing but a hired man, no matter how exalted the office or how lowly.¹⁶⁰

Elsewhere the pattern was much the same. During

¹⁶⁰ *The New York Times*, August 9, 1896, p. 2.

his overnight trip from Chicago to Pittsburgh, Bryan was called upon to speak many times. At South Chicago,

The lateness of the hour did not keep a big crowd from gathering at One Hundredth Street. The crowd had a brass band, and were prepared to give the heartiest sort of a reception to the nominee, but the train moved off just as he appeared on the platform.

At Valparaiso, Indiana, more than an hour later, Bryan "made a hasty toilet, and went to the platform, where he was again cheered."¹⁶¹ The popularity of his brief small-town appearances was emphasized by the apparent failure of his tedious and learned acceptance oration at Madison Square Garden, New York City, in the heart of the "enemy's country."

But as the campaign went on, its extraordinary pace began to tell upon the candidate. His voice lost its power for several days in New York State and Pennsylvania, and little wonder that it did. For example, Bryan arrived at Erie, Pennsylvania, in the evening after a full day of vigorous campaigning to find three separate audiences waiting to hear him. He did not disappoint his friends, although some may have had difficulty in hearing his remarks, for "his voice was somewhat hoarse, but otherwise he appeared to be in good condition."¹⁶² On many days of his trip, Bryan spoke again and again, for twelve, fourteen, even sixteen almost solid hours.¹⁶³ A typical city campaign began with the candidate's arrival at the railroad depot, a reception or perhaps a meal which might come before or after his address, his procession to a park or a hall for the speech, and his hurried departure to keep the next engagement for which he was almost certain to be late. Late in September, the candidate traveled from Bath, Maine, to New York City, taking 24 hours for the journey, speaking at many towns, and winding up his labors with huge rallies at Paterson and Newark, New Jersey.¹⁶⁴ The next night, while trying to attend a giant labor rally in Union Square, New York City, Bryan collapsed. Near the close of the campaign, he made some seventy speeches in four days, with about 1,400 miles of travel, in Michigan. He met such huge crowds that, at one point, Mrs. Bryan was almost left behind because she was caught in a jam of people as the train pulled out.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, August 11, 1896, p. 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, August 28, 1896, p. 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, September 15, 1896, p. 3, containing a report of a 14-hour trip from St. Louis to Louisville.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, September 29, 1896, p. 3.

There was no time for fresh thinking, or for an evaluation of what had gone before with such a tight schedule, and the speeches were essentially what they had been for weeks.¹⁶⁵ During the last week of the campaign, Bryan made a three-day whirlwind tour of Chicago, then set out, following an indirect route, to his home at Lincoln. On the day before the election itself, as if to emphasize the character of his extraordinary campaign, Bryan traveled 344 miles, making many short speeches, for "the meetings were so short that no extended argument was possible . . ."¹⁶⁶ His last day of campaigning took the candidate through some of the territory where he had first tried his youthful skills—through the heart of Nebraska where he had spoken and debated and gained sudden, remarkable fame eight years earlier, where he had developed and perfected the pattern of campaigning which had contributed so much to bring him one of the most coveted honors in national politics. *The New York Times* seemed relieved as it summarized Bryan's efforts: the "long and hardworking campaign" is over, stated the paper; the candidate had taken only four weeks off between July 13 and November 2; he had spoken in 27 States; he had probably made more than 25 speeches in three or more days; he had carried out an exhausting campaign and the newsmen seemed to mirror his exhaustion.¹⁶⁷ William Jennings

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1896, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, pp. 602-604.

¹⁶⁷ *The New York Times*, November 2, 1896, p. 1. There is a striking similarity between Bryan's "whistle stop" campaign of 1896 and the national tour of President Harry S. Truman in 1948. Bryan in 1896 and Truman in 1948 labored almost single-handedly against overwhelming odds in their direct appeals to the nation's voters. Bryan lost, Truman won, but both candidates conducted intensive personal campaigns geared to the level of the ordinary voters. It is interesting that both of these presidential aspirants were midwesterners, and that both were professional politicians, trained in the rough and tumble school of politics. Although their value systems differed somewhat, and their messages were not alike, both men sensed the effectiveness of personal campaigning. Truman unexpectedly captured important support from the rural Midwest by using techniques similar to those used by Bryan more than fifty years before. For accounts of Truman's campaign in 1948 see HARRY S. TRUMAN, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (New York: Garden City, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 210-219; RICHARD ROVERE's reports on the campaign trains in the *New Yorker*, October 9 and 16, 1948. A delightful running account of the Truman "whistle stop" tour may be found in MARGARET TRUMAN (with Margaret Cousins), *Margaret Truman's Own Story: Souvenir* (New York: McGraw, 1956), pp. 211-239. Miss Truman traveled with her father over most of the campaign route, and has vivid recollections of the trip.

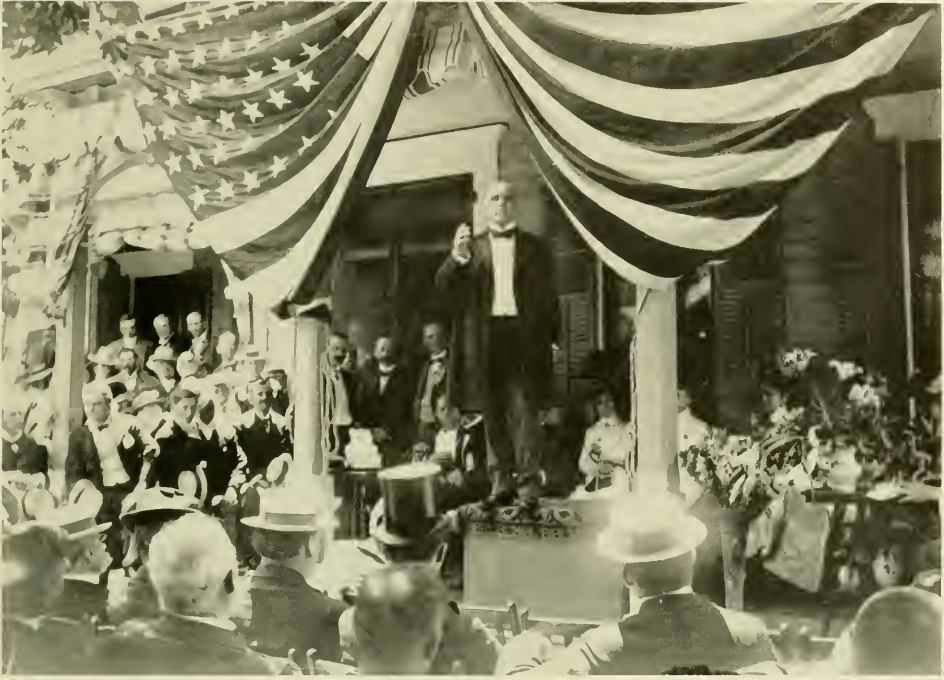


Figure 11.—A “FRONT PORCH” campaign conducted at his home in Canton, Ohio, was Republican nominee William McKinley’s response to Bryan’s vigorous campaign tour in 1896. Republican managers arranged for thousands of voters to travel to Canton to hear the candidate deliver thoughtful and well-prepared addresses on the issues of the day. In this scene, McKinley presents his speech accepting the presidential nomination. Immediately behind the candidate, with his hand resting on a cane, is Mark Hanna, McKinley’s campaign manager. (In the collection of Mrs. Grace Dick Williams of Akron, Ohio.)

Bryan had broken most of the established precedents of presidential campaigning.

The efforts made by Republican leaders in 1896 to meet Bryan’s threat were nearly as remarkable as the Nebraskan’s campaign. To combat “Bryanism,” Mark Hanna, the campaign manager for William McKinley, set out to raise the largest war chest used to that time in a presidential contest. By levying tribute upon corporations and wealthy individuals, Hanna succeeded in acquiring a sum large enough to hire some 1,400 stump speakers, and publish millions of antisilver documents to counteract the effect of Bryan’s remarkable national tour. McKinley, who

still adhered to the tradition of presidential dignity, would not take the stump himself, but he did agree to speak to delegations of supporters who traveled to his home at Canton, Ohio. Hanna organized this front-porch campaign in an unprecedented manner, making arrangements for hundreds of groups representing diverse interests to make the trip to Canton. Any group wishing to hear McKinley had to be in touch with the candidate beforehand, giving details about its membership and sending a copy of the greeting to be presented by its leader, in order that the candidate might prepare remarks appropriate to the occasion. The railroads alone brought 507,000 persons, most of

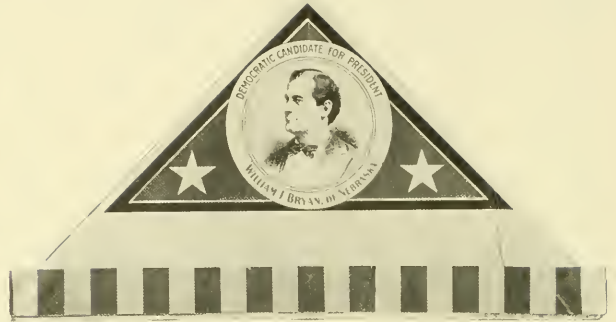


Figure 12-14.—BRYAN CAMPAIGN ITEMS from the campaign of 1896. Bryan's supporters could indicate their devotion in many ways. Shown are a cane, a paper hat, and a paperweight, all bearing the likeness of the Democratic candidate. Although there were many varieties of Bryan campaign objects in 1896, the quantities of such objects did not approach the output of the Republican campaign. With a much greater sum of money at its disposal, the Republican National Committee distributed millions of McKinley campaign objects. (Smithsonian photos 49347, 49347-L, and 49347-E, Becker collection.)

them in trains especially hired for the purpose, to hear McKinley. In this way, the candidate was able to control his audience, he knew exactly how to address each group, and most of the danger of error was taken out of the campaign. McKinley lost no dignity—he was not subjected to the misfortune of mingling with the crowds. Hanna developed an immense, yet tightly knit, machine which was closely in touch with local political situations throughout the country and was able to concentrate and shift its

efforts in the various regions of the nation, according to need.¹⁶⁸

Not only was Bryan confronted with a remarkably aggressive Republican campaign, he also faced a division within his own party. On September 2, the Democratic old guard convened at Indianapolis to

¹⁶⁸ WILLIAM G. SPIELMAN, *William McKinley, Stalwart Republican* (New York, 1954), pp. 92-94; CHARLES G. DAWES, *op. cit.* (footnote 41), pp. 65-107; HERBERT CROLY, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), pp. 209-227; JOSEPHSON, *op. cit.* (footnote 4), pp. 688-707.

denounce the Bryan platform, to assert the fidelity of true Democrats to the gold standard and the conservative principles of Grover Cleveland. "The Democratic party has not yet surrendered to populism and anarchy," declared a New York leader. Another conservative announced: "We are the propagandists of no new creed. We are the upholders of the old. We appeal from Democracy drunk with delusion to Democracy sobered by reason." The gold Democrats, or "National Democrats," as they called themselves, nominated Senator John M. Palmer, of Illinois, for President, and General Simon B. Buckner, of Kentucky, for Vice President. The new party campaigned bitterly against Bryan, cooperating with Republicans and encouraging "Jeffersonian" Democrats to vote for McKinley. Conservatives from both parties rallied to battle against Bryan's undignified, but strenuous and apparently effective campaign efforts.¹⁶⁹

On November 3, a majority of the ballots were cast against Bryan: he received 6,492,559 popular votes, while McKinley received 7,102,246. The electoral count was even more lopsided: 176 to 271. But if he had lost, he had waged an extraordinarily active fight, obtaining more popular votes in losing than any previous victorious candidate. Although McKinley won every state north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi, plus a few western states, West Virginia, and half of Kentucky (because of the closeness of the balloting, Kentucky's electoral votes were divided between the candidates), a change of 19,436 votes perfectly distributed in six states would have given victory to Bryan. Moreover, the gold Democrats attracted 133,148 votes, most of which would normally have gone to the regular party nominee. The question remains: was Bryan's strategy in 1896 appropriate? How accurate was Mark Hanna's famous statement, "He's talking free silver all the time; that's where we've got him"? To some degree, Bryan was hindered by his own commitment to the silver issue: he could not readily switch to other ideas when silver ceased to shine, or where gold was in favor. The evangelical flavor of Bryan's campaign was an asset in some areas of the country, but it fell on unattuned ears in large sections of the East. And his individual exertions, while they were dramatic and impressive, did not fill the need for the careful nurturing of converts which a well-developed political ma-



FIGURE 15.—PRESSED GLASS MUGS from the campaign of 1896. The slogans "Protection and Prosperity" and "The People's Money" emphasized the differing points of view of the two candidates. (Smithsonian photo 49346-B, Becker collection.)

chine could accomplish. Here, the Republicans had a real advantage in possessing Hanna's competent, extensive, and well-financed organization. A few words here, a few dollars there, could strike fear into the hearts of laboring men and change votes.

Had Bryan been more flexible in his emphasis on the issues and his manner of presentation, and had he been possessed of a unified, well-organized, well-financed political machine, the outcome of the balloting in 1896 might have been quite different. Despite its limitations, however, his campaign strategy in 1896 appears in retrospect surprisingly effective. In view of the obstacles to his election, Bryan's showing was truly remarkable. He represented a national party which had been divided and discredited by an economic depression and a lack-luster administration: he battled almost singlehandedly with scarcely any financial support against the majority party of the nation which conducted a tremendously expensive campaign to defeat him; and he fought against a strong, well-financed wing of his own party. To some extent, the moral victory was his, although his opponent won the Presidency. It was Bryan's misfortune that he never came closer to the highest office. The campaign of 1896 was his most successful political battle in his three great attempts to reach the Presidency.

¹⁶⁹ BRYAN, *The First Battle*, pp. 386-387

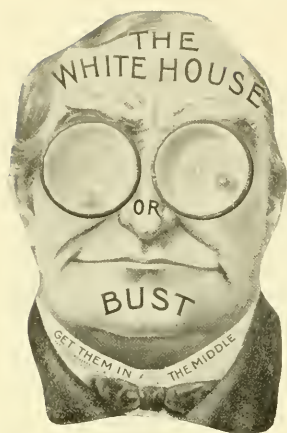


Figure 16 and 17.—TWO BRYAN CAMPAIGN NOVELTIES from the campaign of 1896 that are in a lighter vein. By campaigning three times for the Presidency, Bryan had a substantial impact upon the practice of presidential campaigning, increasing the role of the candidate himself. (Smithsonian photos 48191-P and 49455, Becker collection.)

The Efforts Assayed

Bryan's campaign style grew out of his evangelical religious background, his genuine commitment to popular democracy, and his years of political experience. In practice, Bryan relied upon his remarkable voice to enunciate the popular idiom, his personal dynamism and friendliness, and his tremendous physical endurance to reach people throughout the county, the congressional district, the State, or the Nation. The pattern had been established by 1890, and it remained essentially the same through all three of Bryan's presidential contests.

At the same time that they brought him power and glory, Bryan's campaign methods deceived him: many of the people who gathered to listen and cheer were only curious, not converted. It is probable that Bryan's apparent personal success with the crowds discouraged the building of a strong and effective political machine for his support. His insistence on a single type of campaign brought a relatively high degree of inflexibility to his efforts: the personal, "folksy," evangelical campaign was not necessarily suitable for all occasions and in all localities. In certain parts of the East, Bryan impressed his opponents with his limitations—his lack of sophistication, the superficiality of his learning, and his apparent demagoguery.

Bryan's presidential campaigns had important consequences for other aspirants to the highest office. No

candidate could afford to ignore the precedents set by his three great efforts; no longer could presidential nominees rely on the dignity of the office to protect them from involvement in campaigning. Bryan was one of the first politicians to take serious advantage of the national transportation network. To a considerable degree, he raised the level of campaigning by moving the candidate into the spotlight, where mudslinging and backroom maneuvering were less appropriate than they had been when candidates stayed out of the public view; and it is perhaps significant that Bryan's appearance on the national political scene coincided with an aggressive drive to clean up politics on all levels—the progressive era.¹⁷⁰ Bryan's personal style of campaigning struck a deathblow at the gadgets and pageantry which seemed to dominate American politics during the 1880's. His emphasis during the campaign on his own personality and on certain basic issues continued in the campaigns of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and still later during the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. There is little doubt that the concentration

¹⁷⁰ To some extent Bryan was a bridge between the earlier period of agricultural discontent, with its Populism and evangelism, and the more broadly based Progressive movement. Bryan represented Progressive principles in his drive to purify politics, to bring ethics into practice in public affairs. Many of the specific proposals of his platforms were embodied in Progressive legislative programs. Free silver was *not* one of them.

upon the mechanics of politics—marching societies, empty ceremonies, participation for its own sake, the development of innumerable political gadgets—was made obsolete by the Bryan campaign pattern.

Bryan's impact upon presidential politics was not all gain, however. A political struggle which revolves around the personalities of two candidates may be more bitter than a contest between rival organizations. As in Bryan's case, the candidate may be captivated by his apparent personal influence and neglect the important task of building an effective political organization. The most colorful and appealing campaigners are not necessarily the ablest leaders for their parties or for the nation. To the extent that the personal campaign is physically exhausting, the candidate cannot appear always at his best, and the struggle for office may actually be detrimental to his health. He may be forced to take rigid positions on issues with respect to which he should be free from commitments. The issues which are argued in the campaign are not necessarily important or "real"; they may have been developed merely for obtaining office, or they may involve unrealistic solutions to significant problems. Bryan's "free silver" agitation is an example of the latter situation and, possibly, the former. And, finally, personal campaigning is liable to descend to the level of a popularity contest with little genuine significance in terms of realistic choice for the electorate.

Professor Clinton Rossiter in his study of the functions and implications of our highest office, *The American Presidency*, has distinguished a number of presidential roles. Among them are the constitutional galaxy—Chief of State, Chief Executive, Chief Diplomat, Commander in Chief, and Chief Legislator. But the Presidency involves certain critical extra-constitutional roles which tend to make that office the most significant position in the world today. Two of these roles, that of "chief of party" and that of "voice of the people," seem to have direct relevance to the campaign pattern of William Jennings Bryan. Following a series of Presidents who were reluctant to assert their influence within their own parties, Bryan set out to capture the leadership of the Democratic Party. Although he did not become President, Bryan was certainly the principal national leader of his party for more than a dozen years.¹⁷¹ His strong appeal to the American people through the medium of personal

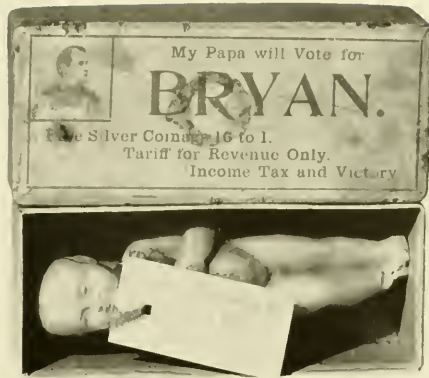


Figure 18.—BRYAN SOAP DOLL from the campaign of 1896. Campaign novelties such as this one communicated the issues of the contest in a humorous manner and had a wide appeal. (Smithsonian photo 48595-G, Becker collection.)

campaigning gave him tremendous power within the Party. But even more than its influence on party leadership, Bryan's campaign style was important in the development of the President's function as "the Voice of the People, the leading formulator and expounder of public opinion in the United States."¹⁷² In both theory and practice, Bryan's campaign technique required a high degree of candidate-voter contact. Bryan loved to meet the people, for he believed that the essence of democracy lay in the person-to-person relationship: having proven himself in this most basic democratic situation, the candidate was qualified to represent on the national scene the views of the people as he interpreted them—qualified, in short, to be the voice of the people. The particular innovations which Bryan introduced into the presidential campaign tended to expand the direct relationship between the political leader and his following. Instead of consulting with party leaders, Bryan campaigned for the votes and the adulation of the public; hence, he was responsible to the public rather than to the leaders.

It would be folly to assume that responsibility to the Nation is exclusive of responsibility to party. Ideally,

¹⁷¹ GLAD, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), ch. 7.

¹⁷² CLINTON ROSSITER, *The American Presidency* (New American Library edition, New York, 1956), p. 22.

both roles coincide, and the President serves the best interests of his partisan followers by serving the people as a whole. William Jennings Bryan did not combine these features ideally; perhaps his weaknesses in the area of political organization cost him the Presidency. Nevertheless, he asserted personal leadership of the National Democratic Party, and he insisted that the candidate should be responsible to the electorate. In practice, the Bryan campaign technique performed both of these functions, gaining for him the position of national party leader and providing a direct connection between the leader and the Nation as a whole. And the Presidents during the 20th century who have seemingly been most effective in the role of voice of the people have campaigned aggressively and personally, just as Bryan did. The fact that they went out to the people, courting public favor during their drives for the highest office, apparently created a relationship of responsibility between candidates and people which pre-Bryan candidates, for the most part, did not have. The personal campaign has become an essential ingredient of 20th-century presidential leadership. Thus, Bryan's campaign style has played a significant role in the development of the modern Presidency.

The questions remain: were Bryan's innovations significant for the technique of presidential campaigning? Were the changes which he introduced of great magnitude or were they relatively minor? Was Bryan a major inventor; were his campaign techniques original or did he borrow and adapt methods developed by others? These questions can never be answered absolutely, yet they are important questions for any final judgment of Bryan and his contribution to American politics and presidential campaigning. Bryan adopted the traditional techniques of stump speaking and local area canvassing which were common in the rural Midwest, but he added his own special physical equipment—an extraordinary powerful yet melodious voice and a tremendously energetic body. Coupled with his physique were Bryan's commitments to evangelical morality and direct democracy, ideas which had grown out of his Midwestern upbringing. Neither his physical nor his intellectual storerooms were unique, yet he fused the two in a new synthesis which became known to some as "Bryanism."

STAR OF THE WEST



Figure 19.—BRYAN CAMPAIGN SONG emphasizing the youth and the western origin of the candidate. (Smithsonian photo 49346 C, Becker collection.)

Bryan did not invent his campaign techniques independently, but he did adapt already existing campaign patterns in a unique fashion to the presidential contest. In this sense, he was an innovator and his contributions were totally new. And judging by the effect that his aggressive personal campaign style has had upon the presidential battlefield itself, and, more fundamentally, upon the Presidency, it must be concluded that the campaign techniques of William Jennings Bryan have been, indeed, a significant innovation in American politics. Although he never achieved his highest political ambitions, Bryan changed American politics in a significant manner. He did not accomplish the change singlehandedly, but more than any other single person he is responsible for the prevalence of the personal campaign in presidential politics.

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