

CHAPTER 5 Section 4 (pages 235–239)

Farmers and the Populist Movement

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about life for thousands of farmers trying to make a living on the Great Plains

In this section, you will read how these farmers organized and fought to improve their conditions.

AS YOU READ

Use this chart to take notes about the causes of the rise of the Populist Party and the effects the party had.

TERMS AND NAMES

Oliver Kelley Farmer who founded the Grange

Grange Organization that fought for farmers' rights

Populism Political movement that sought advancement for farmers and laborers

bimetallism backing money with silver and gold

William McKinley 1896 Republican presidential nominee

William Jennings Bryan 1896 Populist/Democratic presidential nominee

"Cross of Gold" speech Popular name of Bryan's convention speech supporting bimetallism

CAUSES	EFFECTS
<i>farmers felt cheated</i>	<i>strong showing in the presidential election</i>

Farmers Unite to Address Common Problems (pages 235–236)

How did farmers fight back?

By the 1800s, farmers were facing serious economic troubles. For one thing, the supply of money had gone down in the years following the Civil War. This made each dollar in circulation worth more. This was good news for consumers because their dollars bought more products. But it was bad news for farmers because they received less money for their crops.

The solution to the problem, farmers insisted, was to increase the money supply. This would decrease the value of the dollar. When money is "cheap," the prices of goods and services tend to

rise. Farmers urged the government to increase the the money supply. But the government refused.

Meanwhile, farmers continued to pay high prices to transport grain. Often they paid as much to ship their crops as they received for them. Many farmers were on the brink of ruin. The time, it seemed, had come for *reform*.

Many farmers joined together to push for reform. In 1867, a farmer named **Oliver Kelley** started an organization that became known as the **Grange**. Its original purpose was to provide a place for farm families to discuss social and educational issues. By the 1870s, however, Grange members spent most of their time and energy fighting the railroads.

The Grange gave rise to other organizations. They included the Farmers' Alliances. These organizations included teachers, preachers, and newspaper editors who sympathized with farmers. Alliance members traveled throughout the Great Plains. They educated farmers about a variety of issues, including how to obtain lower interest rates and ways to protest the railroads.

1. What steps did farmers take to address their concerns?

The Rise and Fall of Populism

(pages 236–239)

What did the Populist movement hope to achieve?

Alliance leaders realized that to make far-reaching changes, they needed political power. So in 1892, they created the Populist Party, or People's Party. This party was the beginning of **Populism**. This was a movement to gain more political and economic power for common people.

The Populist Party pushed for reforms to help farmers. It also called for reforms to make government more democratic. These reforms included direct election of senators and a secret ballot to stop cheating in voting.

Most Americans thought the populists' beliefs too radical. However, the party appealed to many struggling farmers and laborers. In 1892, the Populist presidential candidate won more than a million votes. That was almost 10 percent of the total vote. In the West, Populist candidates won numerous local elections. While not as strong as the two major parties, the Populist Party had become a political force.

Then, in 1893, the nation faced an economic crisis called the Panic of 1893. The causes of the panic started in the 1880s. During that decade, many companies and individuals had borrowed too much money. But starting in 1893, many of these companies went *bankrupt* because they were not making enough money to pay back their loans. Many people lost their jobs.

The panic continued into 1895. Then political parties began to choose candidates for the 1896 presidential election. One important issue was whether the country's paper money should be backed with both gold and silver.

Two groups of people debated this issue. One group wanted money to be backed only with gold. They were called "gold bugs." They thought that using only gold would make sure that every dollar had a high value.

The other group wanted to back the paper money with both gold and silver. This policy was known as **bimetallism**. This was a policy in which the government would give people either gold or silver in exchange for dollars or checks.

The group believed that bimetallism would make more dollars available. Prices of goods, including farm products, would rise. Wages would also rise. Common people would be able to make more money.

Republicans were "gold bugs." They elected **William McKinley** for president. The Democrats and the Populists both favored bimetallism. Both parties nominated **William Jennings Bryan**. At the Democratic convention, Bryan delivered an emotional speech, known as the "**Cross of Gold**" **speech**, in support of bimetallism.

But, on election day McKinley won. McKinley's election brought an end to Populism. But many of the reforms Populists wanted would be enacted in the 20th century.

2. Which groups did the Populists appeal to most?

Answer Key

Chapter 5: Changes on the Western Frontier (pages 212–243)

Section 4: Farmers and the Populist Movement (pages 235–239)

1. They formed the Grange. They educated each other.
2. struggling farmers; laborers