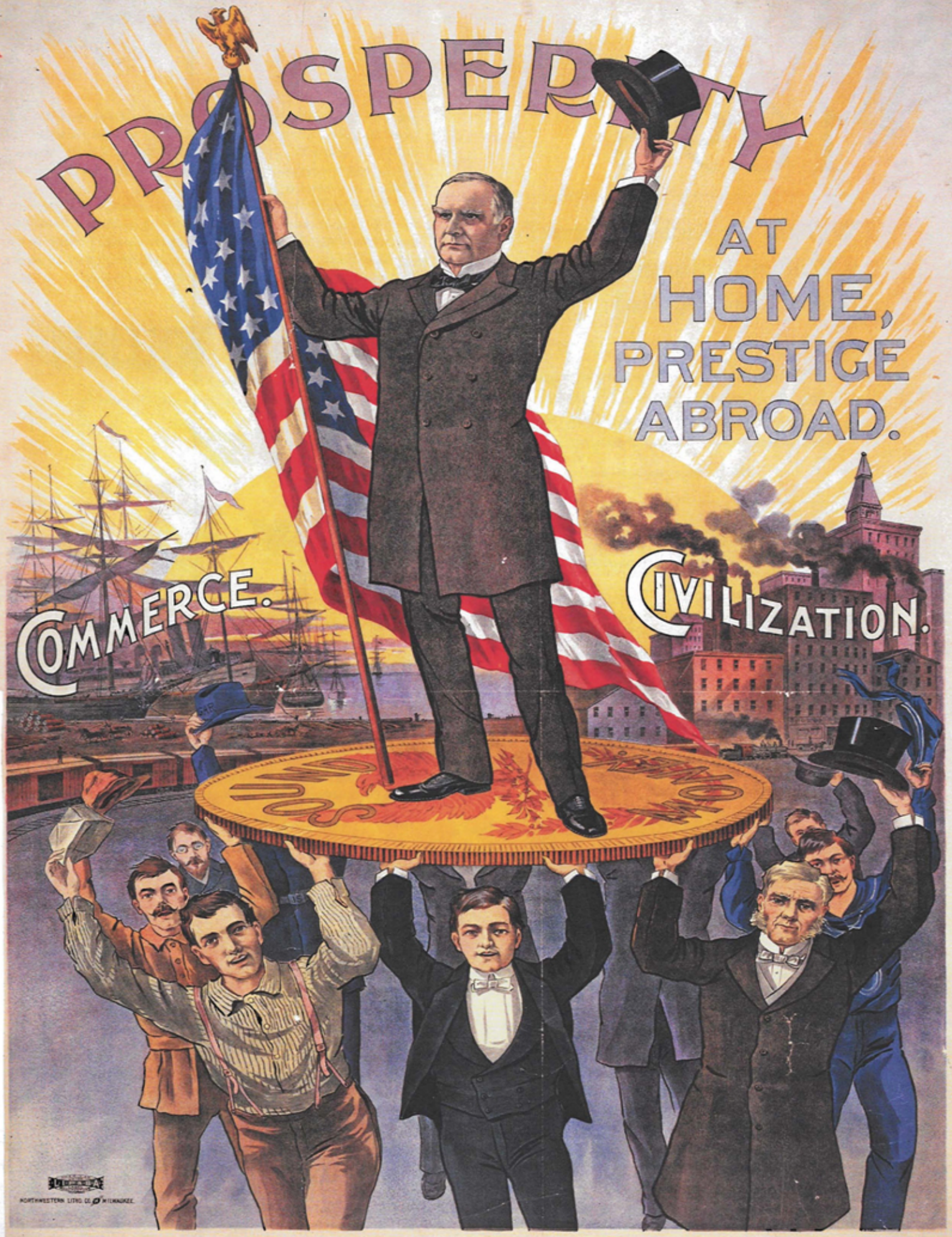

PROSPERITY
AT HOME, PRESTIGE ABROAD.
COMMERCE.
CIVILIZATION.
NORTHWESTERN LITHO. CO. MILWAUKEE.

1896

William McKinley (Republican) v. William Jennings Bryan (Democrat/Populist)

"The struggle is on the currency question. But these are only symbols, and behind them are gathered the world-opposing forces of aristocratic privilege and democratic freedom."

—Henry George, economist and reformer

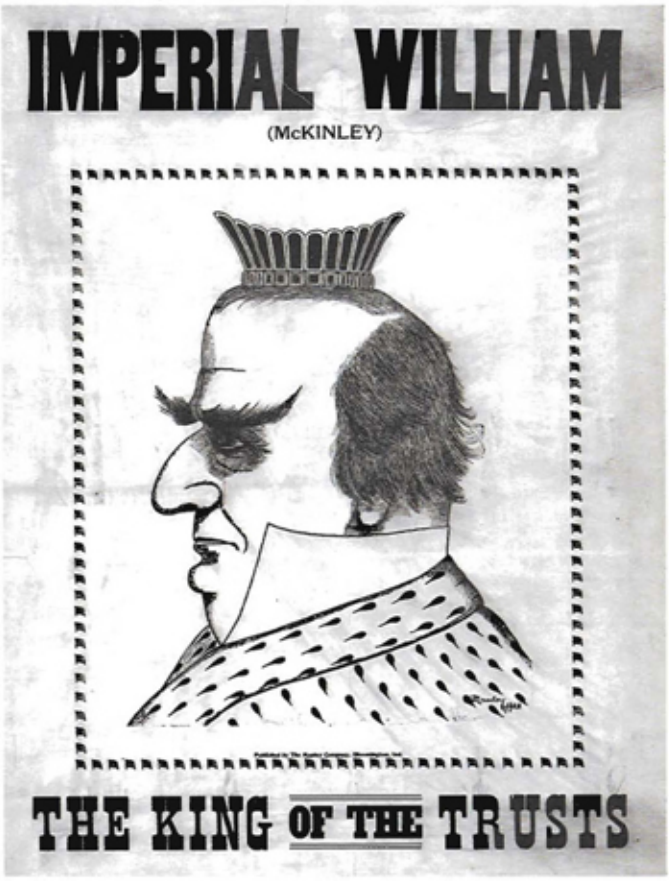
Electoral Votes	Popular Votes
McKinley 271	McKinley 7,108,480
Bryan 176	Bryan 6,511,495

By the time of the 1896 election, the economy had replaced the lingering effects of the Civil War as the country's most pressing issue. Americans were seeking a fresh start after the Panic of 1893 and the slump that followed. Unemployment had surged to more than 20 percent, and an estimated 2.5 million people were homeless. Prior to the campaign, Americans had shown their disapproval of Democratic incumbent president Grover Cleveland by organizing "armies" of unemployed workers to march on Washington. The bloody Pullman Strike of 1894—which arose after employees were forbidden from unionizing at the Carnegie steelworks run by George S. Pullman—further illustrated the dire economic and political climate.

The solution presented to voters by Republicans in 1896 is embodied in the two strikingly similar poses but diametrically opposite messages conveyed in the "Prosperity" and "Imperial" images of candidate William McKinley. The governor of Ohio and former congressman stood for the gold standard, in which the currency in circulation would be linked to the country's available gold. McKinley sought to promote the highest possible value of the dollar, as favored by the urbanized East, industrialists, and creditors. By contrast, many people in the agrarian West and South felt that the gold standard favored the privileged few over the masses, and they tagged McKinley as "king of the trusts."

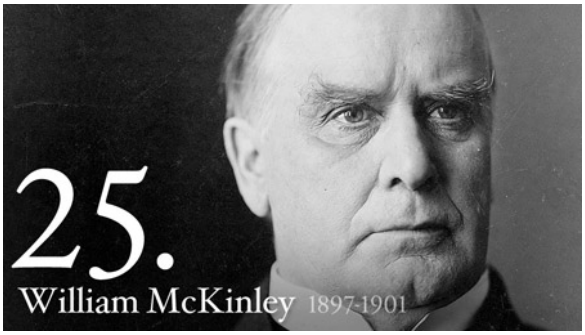
The alternative was the silver standard, and "Free Silver" and "16-to-1" became rallying cries to increase the currency supply through an unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of silver to gold of 16 to 1. Adopting the silver standard would cause inflation, leading to higher farm prices and the opportunity for agriculture to bridge its gap with industry. Democratic and Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan supported the silver solution. Republicans circulated toy coins showing a picture of Bryan and the message "IN GOD WE TRUST . . . FOR THE OTHER 47 CENTS." Factory owners told workers not to come to work the day after the election if Bryan were elected president.

Voter turnout increased by 16 percent over the 1892 election, the greatest gain since 1876 and one not seen again until 1916, during the First World War. McKinley's election marked a victory for capitalism and a strong currency, and the resulting effect on world markets manifested itself throughout the next century.



Imperial William, the King of the Trusts, print, n.d. Political boss Mark Hanna, a leading U.S. industrialist, garnered the support of big businesses to financially fuel McKinley's 1896 campaign.

Democratic Nominees for President . . . Friday, July 10th 1896, broadside, 1896. The original gold and silver colors of this broadside refer to Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech.



Vigésimo quinto presidente de los Estados Unidos de América. Nació en Niles, Ohio, en 1843. McKinley asistió brevemente a la Universidad de Allegheny. Lugo dictó clases en una escuela rural cuando la Guerra Civil se desató. Alistado como recluta en el Ejército de la Unión, fue convocado al final de la guerra como mayor honorario del cuerpo de voluntarios. Estudió leyes, y abrió un despacho en Canton, Ohio. Se casó con Ida Saxton, hija de un banquero local.

A los 34 años, McKinley ganó un asiento en el Congreso. Su atractiva personalidad, carácter ejemplar y aguda inteligencia le posibilitaron un vertiginoso ascenso. Fue nominado en el poderoso Comité de Formas y Maneras.

Abogado de Ohio, ligado al Partido Republicano fue elegido para la Cámara de Representantes en 1876. Se ganó su reputación al impulsar la tarifa aduanera proteccionista conocida como «arancel McKinley» en 1890. Durante sus catorce años en el Congreso, se convirtió en un líder Republicano experto en cuestiones de impuestos, dándole su nombre a las medidas legalizadas en 1890.

Elegido gobernador de Ohio en 1892, su administración fue respaldada por una reelección más holgada en 1894. El apoyo del millonario Mark Hanna le facilitó la elección presidencial en 1896 frente al candidato demócrata popular, William J. Bryan.

Durante su primer mandato (1897-1900) reforzó el proteccionismo aduanero como respuesta a la crisis económica. Ante la Guerra de Independencia de Cuba (1895-98), mantuvo una postura de no-intervención hasta que la explosión en La Habana del navío norteamericano *Maine* le decidió a apoyar la causa de los rebeldes contra la metrópoli española, como venían pidiendo mediante campañas de prensa importantes sectores de la opinión pública norteamericana.

La consiguiente Guerra Hispano-Norteamericana (1898) puso fin a la presencia colonial española en Cuba, Puerto Rico y Filipina. Proporcionó a Estados Unidos la anexión de Puerto Rico, Filipinas y Guam, así como una influencia decisiva en Cuba. Otro problema que tuvo que resolver fue la rebelión de los *bóxers* contra la penetración extranjera en China, que se saldó con el envío de un cuerpo expedicionario multinacional que tomó Pekín en 1900.

Créditos
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Quirk Books, in association with the Library of Congress
ISBN: 978-1-59474-554-6
2012