The Issue — 1900

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1900

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

"[Bryan] had rather be wrong than President."

—Republican Speaker of the House Thomas B. Reed, on Bryan's take on the silver issue

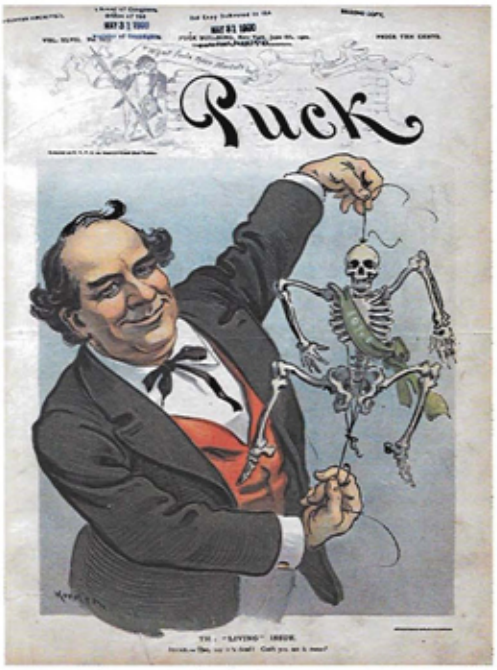
Electoral Votes	Popular Votes
McKinley 292	McKinley 7,218,039
Bryan 155	Bryan 6,358,345

Four years later and not so fresh off his 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech, second-time Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan was still pushing for free silver. This time, instead of eliciting cheers and ovations, the talking point fell flat, as shown in an illustration from the satirical magazine *Puck* (*lower right*), in which Bryan is shown pulling strings to make a skeleton dance. New supplies of gold found in Alaska and South Africa, discovered since the previous presidential race, had allowed the federal government to print more money while upholding the gold standard, rendering the silver issue obsolete. In the past four years, under incumbent president McKinley's administration, the economy had bolstered, harvests were good, and prices were up. The nation was feeling prosperous, and the Republicans' campaign slogan urged "Four Years More of the Full Dinner Pail."

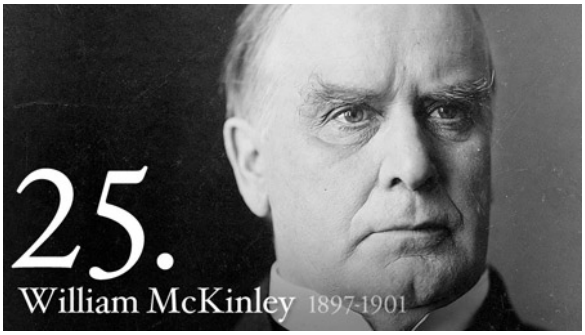
The nation was doing so well, in fact, that people were happy to overlook glaring inconsistencies in the president's leadership. McKinley, who had declared in his 1897 inaugural address that "we want no wars of conquest," just one year later had led the country into conflict with Spain. The Spanish-American War, fought over Cuban independence, had yielded the United States new properties in the Caribbean and Pacific, including Guam and Puerto Rico. Although McKinley had changed his tune and come to believe that U.S. imperialism was God's will, Bryan stood firmly against the idea of empire. In his many speeches—he once made twelve in fifteen hours—he spoke out against the annexation of the Philippines, where a war for independence still raged.

Republican Party leader Mark Hanna asserted: "There is only one issue in this campaign . . . and that is, let well enough alone." And he was right—the economic prosperity and public approval of the Spanish-American War prevailed. The GOP, aided by a large campaign chest, won its largest victory in two decades. In spite of the success of McKinley's first term and his overwhelming victory over Bryan, the president was assassinated in Buffalo, New York, less than one year into his second term. Shot twice by an anarchist, McKinley died of infection and gangrene two weeks later. He was succeeded by his forty-two-year-old vice president, Theodore Roosevelt, making Roosevelt the youngest man to hold the office of U.S. president.

Barking Dogs Never Bite, chromolithograph by Louis Darlymple, 1900. America entered the 20th century riding on a good economy and victory in the Spanish-American War; this prosperity helped secure McKinley's reelection.



The "Living" Issue, chromolithograph by Udo J. Keppler, 1900. This looks more like a dying issue as Bryan, a proponent of the obsolete silver issue, dangles a skeleton sporting the motto "16 to 1."



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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