

TEACHER GUIDE

1896 DOC. #3: McKinley “The Real Issue” Poster

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A candidate’s military career has often been used to attract voters’ support (e.g., Andrew Jackson in 1828, Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, and John Kerry in 2004). McKinley used his former position as a major in the Civil War to strengthen his campaign.

This campaign poster of 1896 includes portions of a speech that McKinley made to his old Civil War Regiment, the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry, when they visited his home in Canton during the Front Porch Campaign. McKinley favored the gold standard. In the speech he said “The country’s honor [of its currency] has been our ship’s anchor in every storm. Lincoln pledged it when in time of war we issued paper money. He [Lincoln] said, ‘Every dollar of that money shall be made good as gold.’”

McKinley also supported high taxes (tariffs) on foreign goods in order to protect American industry from competition, and favored restrictions on immigration. He supported the expansion of women’s rights, which would become an ongoing campaign issue until women won the right to vote in 1920.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION What messages about McKinley does this poster promote? What is your evidence?

SUGGESTED ANSWER McKinley is an upstanding defender of workers.

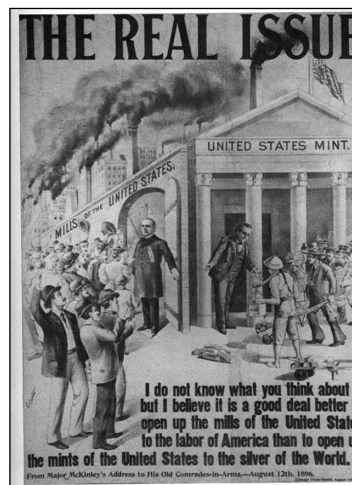
EVIDENCE McKinley stands tall, holding open the doors of U.S. mills for the workers who are cheering him; text: “the labor of America”

QUESTION What messages about Bryan are conveyed by this poster? Give evidence.

SUGGESTED ANSWER Bryan is going to give away the wealth of the U.S. to foreigners.

EVIDENCE holding open the door of the U.S. Mint to foreigners; text: “open up the the mints of the United States to the silver of the world”; Bryan seems to be bowing to “foreign interests”

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PowerPoint Slide

QUESTION **What messages about race, nationality, and gender are communicated by this poster? What is your evidence?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Foreigners will wreck the U.S. economy.**

EVIDENCE the most prominent figures bringing foreign silver to the U.S. Mint are from China (man with long braid) and Mexico (man wearing a sombrero)

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Foreign workers will “take” jobs from whites.**

EVIDENCE foreigners are all in front of Bryan while McKinley’s audience is all white and cheering his remarks about the “labor of America”

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Women workers support McKinley.**

EVIDENCE the group of workers in front of the mills includes women; women are cheering McKinley

FURTHER QUESTIONS

How have issues of foreign trade and immigration been used in campaigns in the era of globalization?

Can you think of other times when candidates have used fear of foreigners to promote their candidacy?

What were the “real issues” in 1896? Was the gold standard a serious issue or merely a distraction? What are the real issues today? What issues distract from more important concerns?

ADDITIONAL INFO

McKinley’s campaign was supported by big business and wealthy donors. He nevertheless made a successful appeal as the candidate who was a friend to the blue collar worker. His campaign slogan was a “Full Dinner Pail,” representing sufficient money for food for workers of that era.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

**Class/Labor
Economic Issues
“Hero”**

Target Audience (white workers)