

TEACHER GUIDE

1900 DOC. #2: McKinley / Roosevelt “Promises” Poster

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the age of television it is common to see commercials comparing one candidate’s records with another’s. This same practice of comparison happened in earlier years by use of the campaign poster. Then, as now, candidates use these images as quick ways to say, “This is my vision. This is my opponent’s. Which would you choose?”

In 1900 the United States’ economy was strong, having recovered from the “Panic of 1893,” the worst economic depression in U.S. history up to that point. Republicans argued that the reasons for the economic recovery were McKinley’s policies of high protective tariffs, a commitment to the gold standard, and the annexation of Cuba and the Philippines. Others thought that prosperity was purely a result of a dramatic increase in the gold supply due to discoveries of new gold fields in Alaska, South Africa, and Australia.

The 1900 campaign included a national debate on U.S. imperialism: whether to extend America’s territories by taking control of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, which Spain had lost in the Spanish-American War. McKinley felt that the solution was “to take them all and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them” (A. Brinkley, *American History* 567).

This Republican Party poster included portraits of William McKinley on the left, and his new vice-presidential candidate, Teddy Roosevelt on the right. The President who left office in 1896 was Democrat Grover Cleveland.

> **Project** the entire document.

QUESTION What are the messages this poster gives about the Democrats (who were defeated in 1896) and their stance on these issue? Give your evidence.

SUGGESTED ANSWER Democratic policies ruined U.S. trade and the economy.

EVIDENCE ports and ships in disrepair after Grover Cleveland’s Democratic administration; closed factories in 1896

SEE NOTE →

SUGGESTED ANSWER Under the Democrats the banks failed.

EVIDENCE text: “A Run on the Bank”; fearful crowds unable to withdraw money from “closed” banks

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PowerPoint Slide

NOTE

The Democrats opposed tariffs (taxes on imported goods) while the Republicans promoted protectionist trade policies.

SUGGESTED ANSWER The Democrats tolerated inhumane Spanish rule in Cuba.

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION **What are the messages this poster gives about the Republican administration of McKinley and Roosevelt? Give your evidence.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Under McKinley factories and farms are prospering and trade was booming.

EVIDENCE in 1900 trains, ships (trade), farms, and factories are working productively

SUGGESTED ANSWER The Republicans have restored confidence in the economy and the banking system.

EVIDENCE text: "A Run to the Bank" with people entering the bank to deposit money

SEE NOTE →

SUGGESTED ANSWER U.S. rule abroad is humane and benefits colonial people.

EVIDENCE images of schools, farms, and factories under "American Rule in Cuba"; McKinley quote, "The American flag has not been planted in foreign soil to acquire more territory but for humanity's sake"

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why have foreign policy debates historically been less important to voters than domestic issues?

What issues, images, and references might a candidate use today in a similarly formatted poster?

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Attack
Foreign Policy
Economic Issues
Fear

NOTE

McKinley had gone to war against Spain in 1898 and expanded U.S. territories to include the Philippines and Puerto Rico and dominion over Cuba (where Teddy Roosevelt had gained notoriety as a Rough Rider). Bryan criticized McKinley of fostering U.S. imperialism.

NOTE

The stock market crash of 1893, under the Democratic administration of Grover Cleveland, prompted a rush on gold at federal banks and led to an economic depression.

ADDITIONAL INFO

One consequence of the Panic of 1893 was the intense discussion of the "money question," particularly the gold versus silver debate. Another consequence was the rise of the Populist movement which fueled Bryan's presidential bid.

McKinley was initially reluctant to support annexation of the former Spanish territories. But he decided that annexation would be best since returning the former colonies to Spain would be "cowardly and dishonorable," turning them over to another imperialist power such as Britain or France would be "bad business and dishonorable," and granting independence would be irresponsible since the Filipinos were "unfit for self government" (A. Brinkley, *American History* 567).