Introduction

In July 1892, the Populist Party (or People's Party), formed by farmers and labor supporters, held its first convention in Omaha, Nebraska. At that convention, the party created and ratified its Omaha Platform and nominated James B. Weaver, a party founder, for president and James Field, former Virginia attorney general and Confederate veteran, for vice president.

This 1892 presidential campaign poster featuring Weaver's and Field's images promotes the Populist Party as offering "Equal Rights to All; Special Privileges to None." The poster also features the full text of the Omaha Platform, which declares that "this Republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation." Weaver and Field ran on the Populist Party tenets of free silver, government control of national industries like railroads, and labor and civil service reform.

The Populists received 8.5 percent of the vote in the 1892 presidential election, more than might have been expected for a newly formed third party. Though defeated, it is likely that the Populists captured some of the Republican vote, allowing Democrat Grover Cleveland to be elected over incumbent Republican Benjamin Harrison.

Excerpt

We demand a national currency, safe, sound and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations; that a just, equitable and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed two per cent. per annum, to be provided, as set forth in the subtreasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or some better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

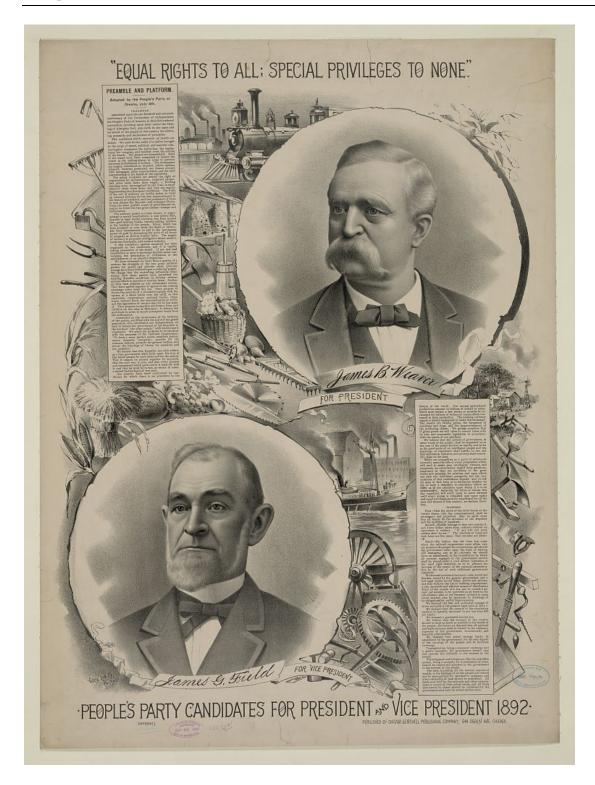
People's Party campaign poster, 1892

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and transcript, examine the image, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

- 1. Create two columns. In one column identify specific complaints of the People's / Populist Party and in the other column list the remedies they suggested.
- 2. Describe items in this platform, written 120 years ago, that include complaints and recommendations heard in current political debates.
- 3. What arguments were used against the People's / Populist Party?

Image



People's Party campaign poster, 1892. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

Image



history of the world. Our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must within a few weeks or months be exchanged for billions of dollars of commodities consumed in their production. The existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange. The besults are falling prices, the formation of commodities are falling prices, the formation of continuous and rings, and the impoverishment of the production of the p center snat ne eat. The interests of rural and cell.

Third—We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations must either own the people or the people the corporations, and should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing any or all railroads we should favor an amendment to the Constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil service regulation of the most rigid characteristic services the most rigid characteristic services.

We demand a national currency—safe, sound and full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the see of banking corporations; a just, equitable and efficient means of distribution direct to the people at a tax not to exceed 2 percent, per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance or some better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

We demand that the amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than 850 per capita.

We demand a graduated income tax.

We demand a graduated income tax. nauge. Pransportation being a means of exchange and ublic necessity, the government should own operate the railroads in the interest of the ple.

Excerpts from People's Party campaign poster, 1892. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)