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Article Summary: In 1896 Bryan broke with tradition and undertook a series of exhausting campaign tours to sell his ideas directly to the voters. Many political cartoons of the time reflected this new combination of business and politics.

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Photographs / Images: (Fig 1) inset advertisement, "Great Silver Jubilee," *Rocky Mountain News*, October 18, 1896; (Fig 2) Homer Davenport caricature of Republican manager Marcus Hanna, *New York Journal*, September 12, 1896; (Fig 3) "Hanna, the friend of Labor," *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1896; (Fig 4) Carl Browne caricature, "We Want no Crown of Thorns, No Cross of Gold—Like This," *Coxey's Sound Money*, August 20, 1896; (Fig 5) "The Dollar Bryan Would Like to Give Us," *Pioneer Press*, St Paul, September 6, 1896; (Fig 6) "The 16 to 1 Bargain Counter of the (Bryan) Future," *New York World*, November 1896; (Fig 7) "The true laboring man that we all honor and admire, and who desires nothing but a chance to work" and "The self-styled 'down-trodden son of toil' who works nothing but his jaw," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1896; (Fig 8) "A Modern Application of the Story of Potiphar's Wife," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1896; (Fig 9) "Tried to Force Social Equality in His Opera House Decision," *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 30, 1896; (Fig 10) untitled cartoon expressing disgust with the currency question, *The New Orleans Bee*, September 12, 1896; (Fig 11) "The True Situation," *New Road*, August 9, 1896; (Fig 12) "Warning of the Ghost of Kansas: 'Beware, Little Girl; He Ruined Me,'" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 27, 1896; (Fig 13) "Mark Hanna's Medicine," *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 8, 1896; (Fig 14); "Lightning Changes in Politics," *Chicago Record*, October 10, 1896; "Falstaff (Bryan) Reviews His Ragged Army," *Judge*, August 29, 1896; "Little Billy Bryan Chasing Butterflies," *Judge*, October 17, 1896; "Only a Comet . . .," *Judge*, October 31, 1896; "Fishing For Suckers," *Judge*, September 5, 1896; "The Boy Stands On the Burning Deck, Whence All But Him Have Fled," *Judge*, August 8, 1896; "The Sacrilegious Candidate," *Judge*, September 19, 1896

# Popular Appeals in the Campaign of 1896

By Rebecca Edwards

By all rights, the presidential election of 1896 should have been a snoozer. A massive depression had hit the United States in 1893, and voters in the 1894 congressional election had sent droves of Republicans to Washington, apparently blaming the economic crisis on Democrats who held power. President Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, declined to run again and abandoned a party in disarray. With a majority of voters following the Republican trend of 1894, the 1896 campaign sealed Democrats' fate as a minority party for fifteen years.<sup>1</sup>

This result, however, was not clear until the returns came in. In July 1896 young William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska captured the Democrats' Chicago convention with a dramatic speech. He swept the nomination and then won endorsement from the farmer- and labor-based People's Party. Denouncing the gold standard as detrimental to both business and workers, Bryan issued a famous challenge to capitalists and financiers: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." On this platform, against overwhelming odds, Bryan gave Republican candidate William McKinley a run for his money.<sup>2</sup>

With enthusiasm, Americans joined a campaign that in retrospect was the last hurrah of an old political order. In towns and cities nationwide, marching clubs of McKinley Guards and Bryan Knights organized torchlight parades,

picnics, and barbecues. Newspapers reported brawls between rival partisans. With a bicycle craze sweeping the nation, Republicans organized cyclists for impromptu tours. A National Women's Silver League formed to oppose the Republican Women's National Sound Money League; local affiliates of both groups sponsored lectures and teas. Citizens sent each candidate thousands of letters and an overwhelming number of gifts, including pies, quilts, caged bald eagles, live pigs, and a giant watermelon.<sup>3</sup>

Campaign excitement reached all sectors of American society. At Madison Square Garden, 12,000 New Yorkers—including many poor laborers—waited hours in heavy rain to hear Bryan give his acceptance speech. Similar crowds met Bryan in St. Paul, where Populists organized a series of meetings "especially for women." In North Carolina, African American reformer Sarah Dudley Petley exhorted men to vote for McKinley, whose election would bring "better times occasioned by good, sound money." Though black men pressed for a seat on the Republican National Committee, GOP leaders instead created a separate "Colored Bureau," whose list of speakers included anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells.<sup>4</sup>

The candidates adopted markedly different campaign styles. Following Republican precedent, McKinley ran a front-porch campaign from his home in Canton, Ohio. Tens of thousands of visitors tromped through the McKinleys' yard, made speeches of support, and drank lemonade with William and his wife Ida. As the underdog, Bryan broke

with tradition and undertook a series of exhausting campaign tours. In September and October he covered almost 13,000 miles, speaking to huge crowds and sometimes appearing on the train platform at 3 A.M. to wave to admirers. By nineteenth-century standards, both campaigns were astounding feats of showmanship. McKinley said privately, "I might just as well put up a trapeze on my front lawn and compete with some professional athlete as go out speaking against Bryan." Mark Hanna, McKinley's campaign manager, put on his own skillful show. Theodore Roosevelt observed that Hanna marketed his candidate "like a patent medicine."<sup>5</sup>

The campaign was thus a milestone in the history of American marketing, as business and politics intertwined. Taking advantage of a new fad, New York street vendors sold buttons declaring "Free Silver or Bust," "In Gold We Trust," and "Don't Be an \_\_\_" (the latter depicting a Democratic donkey). In Denver, whose residents were overwhelmingly pro-silver, the owner of Appel's Big Store advertised that he would contribute 10 percent of one day's sales to the Bryan campaign (figure 1). C. W. Post, inventor of Postum breakfast drink, encouraged women to send postcards to his headquarters, choosing the candidate they would vote for, if they could. Of course, the Post company printed "Instructions for Voting" on the labels of Postum, available at the local grocery.<sup>6</sup>

Most nineteenth-century newspapers had maintained strong party allegiances in exchange for subsidies during a campaign, or in hopes of patronage. The 1896 campaign revealed changes in

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Fig. 3. This image reminds readers that major Republican donors had put down strikes and broken unions throughout the previous two decades. Despite Hanna's prominence in the cartoon, he was generally considered a liberal employer who dealt relatively fairly with his employees. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1896



Fig. 4. Echoing Davenport, Populist Carl Browne draws McKinley "in Hanna's pocket" and suggests that Republicans' ultimate support came from Jewish bankers in Europe. *Coxey's Sound Money* (Massillon, Ohio), August 20, 1896



Fig. 5. *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), September 6, 1896



Fig. 6. Many cartoons translated this argument for consumers, claiming that silver policies would inflate prices (but not wages). *New York World*, reprinted in *Review of Reviews* (New York), November 1896, 54



Fig. 7. Stereotypes of shiftless bums motivated this Republican attack. On the left, the caption read "The true laboring man that we all honor and admire, and who desires nothing but a chance to work." On the right, "The self-styled 'down-trodden son of toil' who works nothing but his jaw." *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1896

"Thou Shalt Not Steal" and "Thou Shalt Not Kill."<sup>11</sup>

As these pronouncements suggested, Bryan was not the only American who turned to Biblical phrases and images in the heat of the campaign. Using Old Testament stories, a cartoonist for the *Rocky Mountain News* showed Bryan as David slaying the "money power" Goliath, while Chicago's *Inter Ocean* drew the Democratic Party as Jonah, inside the stomach of a Populist whale. The *Los Angeles Times* showed Populism first as Delilah, shearing the head of a Democratic Samson, and later as Potiphar's wife. In this adaptation the American laborer (young Joseph in the story from Genesis 39) resisted the seductive advances of Populism (figure 8).<sup>12</sup>

Party leaders' appropriation of religious themes extended to the New Testament. *Puck* drew on the temptation of Christ in depicting "the temptation of American labor" by silver devils. In the *St. Louis Dispatch*, Democracy appeared as a beautiful woman exiting the sepulcher, with Bryan having "rolled away the stone." These references must have struck some Christians as blasphemous, especially in a campaign centered on money, but many clergymen showed no qualms about entering the fray. A number of New York ministers denounced Bryan as an anarchist; at First Baptist Church, the Reverend I. M. Haldeman declared that God preferred gold to silver and that "to attempt to raise silver into equality [with gold] when God Himself has drawn the line would be to dilute virtue, minimize honesty, and lacerate every hope of righteousness."<sup>13</sup>

In a no-holds-barred campaign, speakers and cartoonists frequently appealed to ethnic and racial prejudices. Some Populists, like Carl Browne in *Coxey's Sound Money* (figure 4), denounced Jewish bankers as powers behind the Republican throne. (Herbert George of Denver, a virulent anti-Semite, explained unhelpfully that "all Jews are not usurers. Some of the toughest Shylocks on earth are American born Yankees. Some of the most loyal advo-

A MODERN APPLICATION OF THE STORY OF POTIPHAR'S WIFE



Fig. 8. *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1896

cates of Populism we have are Jews.") Southern Democrats attacked their opponents for being too friendly to blacks (figure 9), and the Republican *Los Angeles Times* derided Bryan as a "Nigger on the Safety Valve" who stupidly blocked economic progress. Animosity toward blacks existed side-by-side, as it had for decades, with fears of the enslavement of white laborers. Drawing on themes from the Civil War era, pro-silver cartoonists characterized Republican leaders as slave traders who were selling off "the American producer," bound hand and foot. The *Los Angeles Times* responded by sketching "the national credit" as a woman tied to the auction block, and Bryan as the auctioneer.<sup>14</sup>

Anti-British themes were also prominent, as silverites accused "gold bugs" of working for London bankers, and Republicans claimed that Bryan's "free trade" policies would help Britain at the expense of American jobs. John Bull appeared in many cartoons, but other than this the campaign was emphatically domestic, with little attention given to the diplomatic issues that would lead Americans to declare war on Spain less than two years later. *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orleans*, a Creole newspaper sympathetic to the Cuban independence movement, expressed disgust with the all-absorbing currency question (figure 10). "We're having a presidential campaign," a cartoon Uncle Sam tells his Cuban neighbor, "and discussion of Spanish-Cuban affairs is inconvenient right now."<sup>15</sup>

Artists represented the campaign through two key metaphors: romance and salesmanship. A number of cartoons showed candidates as young suitors courting a woman who represented the voter or a region of the country. (The locale for courtship was always a park bench; presumably readers recognized this as the place lovers went to escape from parental oversight while remaining respectably in the public eye.) Denver's *New Road* used the metaphor to illustrate Bryan's dilemma in having two running mates, since the Demo-



Tried to Force Social Equality in His Opera House Decision.

Fig. 9. North Carolina's Republican gubernatorial candidate, D. H. Russell, appears in this cartoon worshipping abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who had recently died. The cartoonist tried to convince readers that Russell favored integration of public institutions. *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 30, 1896



Fig. 10. *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orleans* (*The New Orleans Bee*), September 12, 1896



THE TRUE SITUATION.

BRYAN: "How happy I could be with either, were I'other dear charmer away."

Fig. 11. A friendly cartoonist pokes fun at Bryan's dilemma in having two running mates, Democrat Arthur Sewall of Maine and Populist Thomas Watson of Georgia. *New Road* (Denver), August 9, 1896



WARNING OF THE GHOST OF KANSAS: "BEWARE, LITTLE GIRL; HE RUINED ME."

Fig. 12. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 27, 1896

cratic and Populist conventions had chosen different vice-presidential candidates (figure 11). Though a few such cartoons were lighthearted, others depicted romance—with its threat of seduction—as a grave matter. In one, the ghost of Kansas (which had been devastated by the depression of 1893 at a time when Populists held state power) warned Washington state against her Populist suitor (figure 12). As in the adapted story of Potiphar's wife (figure 8), Populist and Democratic ideas appeared seductive and ultimately ruinous in moral, as well as financial, terms.<sup>16</sup>

Even more important to cartoonists was the metaphor of salesmanship. Each party portrayed the other as shallow "showmen" and con artists. The political arena often appeared as a circus show (complete with elephant or kicking donkey). More important was the implication that candidates were purveying false nostrums for their own benefit. One *Chicago Dispatch* cartoon showed a workingman addressing McKinley, who offered passersby the chance to play a shell game. "No matter which shell I choose," the worker declares, "I never find the pea and always lose my all. I've played this game before and I'm tired of the swindle." Another cartoon showed Hanna dispensing a poisonous "tonic" to the American producer, claiming "my treatment is the best" (figure 13).<sup>17</sup>

For their part, Republicans frequently dismissed Bryan as a fast-talking swindler (figure 14). Cartoonists showed him dispensing a "Populistic Cure-All"; one suggested that he should become an auctioneer or circus barker after the campaign. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* drew Bryan as a self-promotional freak who exhibited, for a dime, his tattooed body, marked "FREE TRADE," "SOCIALISM," and "ANARCHY."<sup>18</sup>

These cartoons, at root, addressed not the issue of currency standards, but the methods presidential candidates were using to seek office. Bryan's energetic campaigning was a sharp break from past tradition, and many Ameri-

cans wondered if a presidential candidate should ride the rails like an itinerant salesman, selling his ideas. Hanna's public visits to the offices of financiers, seeking unprecedented campaign donations, created the fear that Homer Davenport expressed (figure 2): were rich men brazenly buying power? As Western mining interests offered their own lavish gifts to the silver cause, the power of trusts to influence politics became an issue on both sides. In this sense the "money question" in politics was not resolved in 1896, even when McKinley won with 7,035,638 popular votes (to Bryan's 6,467,946) and 271 electoral votes (to Bryan's 176). Republican victory temporarily settled certain questions: Tariffs would remain high until Woodrow Wilson's administration, and the U.S. would stay on the gold standard until the Great Depression.<sup>19</sup> But the new money question facing Americans in the wake of McKinley's victory was the system of political marketing and partisan salesmanship that the campaign itself had helped create.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the campaign and realignment, see H. Wayne Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 486-520; R. Hal Williams, *Years of Decision: American Politics in the 1890s* (New York: John Wiley, 1878), 97-127; and Walter Dean Burnham, "The 'System of 1896' and the American Electorate," in *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 74-75.

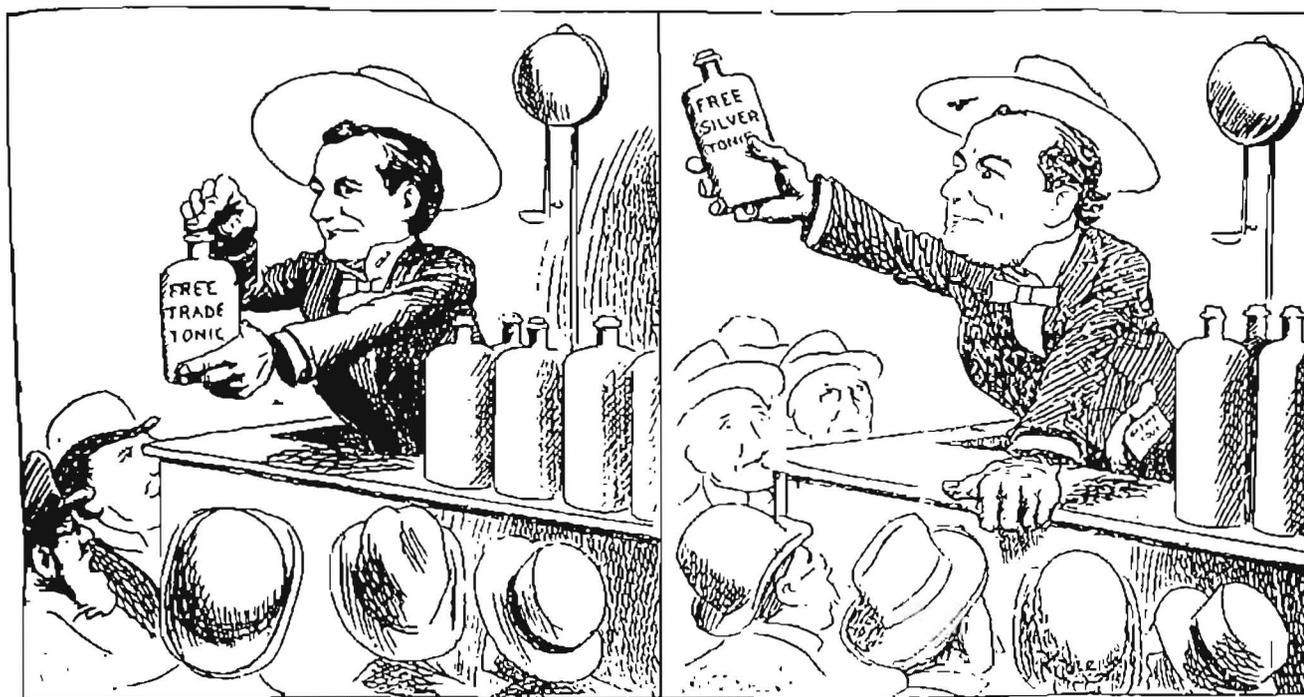
<sup>2</sup> Useful histories of the campaign are in H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1963) and Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961). A popular and lively account is Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964). See also Bryan's version, *The First Battle. A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1896).

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Years of Decision*, 116-19; Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 277. On the women's leagues see *Woman's Journal* (Boston), Oct. 29, 1896, and *Illinois State Register*, Oct. 30, Nov. 1, 1896. The Sound Money League was based in Boston and the Silver League in Chicago. On girls see *New York World*, Aug. 15, 1896; *Rocky Mountain*

MARK HANNA'S MEDICINE.



Fig. 13. Note the skull on the floor, again echoing Homer Davenport's style, and the hint of enslavement suggested by the producer's chains. *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 8, 1896



"MY FRIENDS, THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED!"—Mr. Bryan in 1892.

"IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO DISCUSS THE TARIFF QUESTION AT THIS TIME."

—Extract from Mr. Bryan's letter of acceptance, 1890

Fig. 14. "Lightning Changes in Politics." Bryan as a salesman of patent medicines. *Chicago Record*, reprinted in *Boston Globe*, October 10, 1896

*News* (Denver), Oct. 17, 1896; *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), Oct. 4, 1896; and numerous reports in Joseph P. Smith, ed., *McKinley: The People's Choice* (Canton, Ohio: Repository, 1896)

<sup>4</sup> *New York World*, Aug. 13, 1896; Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 304, 311; Pettey quoted in Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, "Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992, 49-50. On the "Colored Bureau" (not to mention the German and women's departments) see Jones, 279, on black pressure for a place on the executive committee see *New York World*, Aug. 5, 1896

<sup>5</sup> Jones, *Presidential Campaign of 1896*, 270, 284-88, 302, 311-14 (McKinley quoted on 277); Roosevelt quoted in Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 145. See also Smith, ed., *McKinley: The People's Choice* (a record of events and speeches at Canton) and Bryan, *The First Battle* (an account of his travels).

<sup>6</sup> *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), Sept. 21, 1896; *Minneapolis Journal*, Oct. 17, 1896; and *Indianapolis Sentinel*, Nov. 4, 11, 1896. The result of the women's poll (undoubtedly most popular among the middle class) was 78 percent for McKinley, 15 percent for Bryan, and 7 percent for Prohibitionist Joshua Levering.

<sup>7</sup> See the largely apolitical comment in Hogan's *Alley* (featuring the "Yellow Kid"), *New York World*, Aug. 2, 1896. On newspapers in the campaign see Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People*, 171-72. Hearst's was the only major New York daily to endorse Bryan.

<sup>8</sup> For background on the complicated currency issue, see Walter T. K. Nugent, "Money, Politics, and Society: The Currency Question," in *The Gilded Age*, ed. H. Wayne Morgan, 2d ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 109-28. For broader critiques of the U.S. financial system see Chester McArthur Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901: Essays and Documents* (New York: Octagon, 1970), and Bruce Palmer, "Man Over Money": *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980)

<sup>9</sup> On Davenport see Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 103-04.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-89.

<sup>11</sup> *New York World*, Aug. 2, 1896; see also, for example, *Puck*, Aug. 19, 1896; *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 9, 1896; *Harper's Weekly* (New York), Oct. 24, 1896; Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 305-06; *Leslie's Weekly Illustrated Newspaper* (New York), Sept. 10, 17, 1896.

<sup>12</sup> *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), July 12, 1896; *Inter Ocean*, Sept. 25, 1896; *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 20, 1896.

<sup>13</sup> *Puck*, Sept. 22, 1896; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 11, 1896; *New York World*, Sept. 13, 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *New Road* (Denver), Oct. 21, 1893; *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 22, 1896; *Rocky Mountain News*, Aug. 5, 1896; *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 26, 1896; see also Coxey's *Sound Money* (Massillon, Ohio), Oct. 15, 1896.

<sup>15</sup> See also *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Sept. 20, 1896; *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), July 17, 1896; *Cleveland Gazette*, Sept. 12, 1896.

<sup>16</sup> See also *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle Orleans*, Sept. 11, 1896; *New York World*, Oct. 4, 1896; *New Road* (Denver), June 21, 1896.

<sup>17</sup> *Chicago Dispatch* reprinted in *Boston Globe*, Oct. 18, 1896. See also *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), July 15, 1896.

<sup>18</sup> *Seattle-Post Intelligencer*, Oct. 1, 1896; *Inter Ocean* (Chicago), Oct. 6, 1896; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Aug. 30, 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People*, 200-201; Williams, *Years of Decision*, 127-29. For analysis of returns see Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 311-45.

## Political Cartoons of the 1890s

By James E. Potter

As Rebecca Edwards has shown, the 1896 campaign sparked the publication in newspapers of hundreds of cartoons supporting one side or the other. The widespread use of cartoons by newspapers, however, was a fairly recent development. For most of the last two decades of the nineteenth century the humorous illustrated weeklies, such as *Puck* (founded 1877) and *Judge* (founded 1881), far overshadowed the daily press as a venue for political cartooning. The weeklies employed a stable of talented artists and printed elaborate colored lithographs (usually on the front and back covers and in the middle) that used satire and caricature to address the economic or political issues of the day. These cartoons were colorful, artistically complex, and much larger than newspapers could accommodate.

William Jennings Bryan was a tempting target for the artists at *Judge*, a comic weekly devoted to the Republican Party. One of the artists was Grant Hamilton, who spent the summer and fall of 1896 lampooning The Boy Orator in cartoon after cartoon. The examples here, most by Hamilton, are from the Nebraska State Historical Society's 1996 exhibit, "Keeping the Faith: William Jennings Bryan's Campaigns for the Presidency." It was Hamilton, too, who is credited with inventing the "The Full Dinner Pail,"

which became the main symbol and slogan for the Republican Party's victorious presidential campaign of 1900.

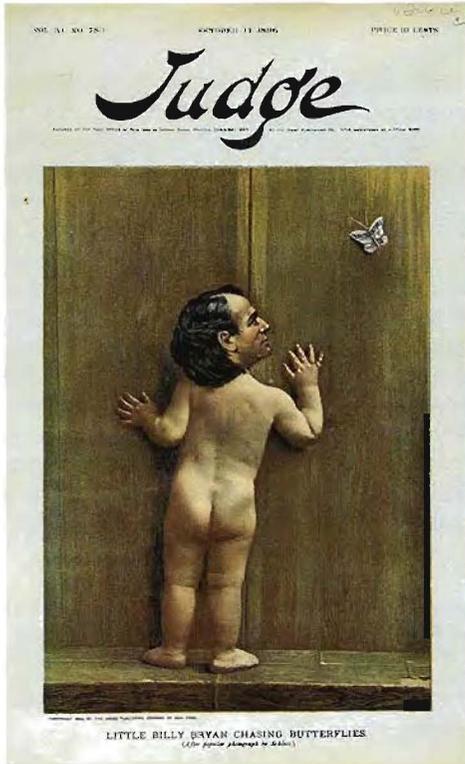
According to historians of graphic humor, the decline of the illustrated weeklies began in the 1890s, when colored Sunday supplements first began to appear in the larger metropolitan dailies. Not only did the weeklies begin to suffer losses in circulation, but they also lost their most popular artists to the competition. As more and more newspapers began to feature cartoons to provide social or political commentary, the pressures of meeting a deadline forced artists to abandon the intricate compositions that had been the staple of the weeklies. The contrasting styles are apparent by comparing the *Judge* cartoons with many of those featured in Rebecca Edwards's article. As one commentator put it, "the new newspaper cartoonists turned more to the symbol, to the swift summing-up of a political situation with a visual figure of speech."<sup>1</sup>

### Notes

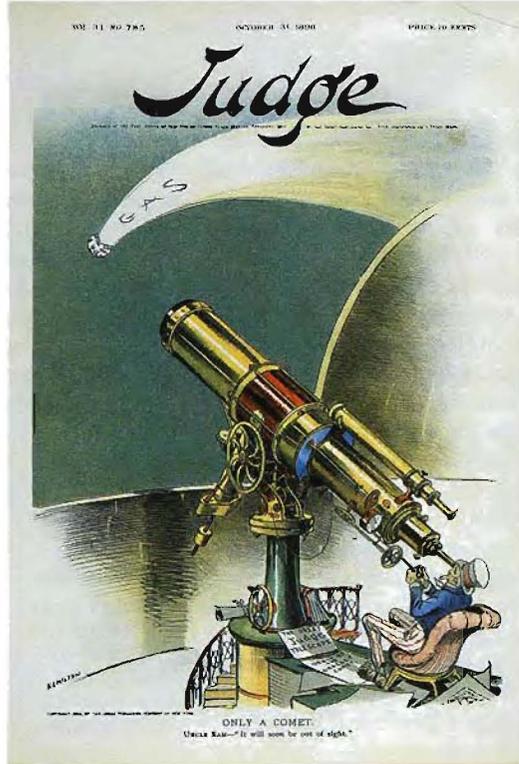
<sup>1</sup> William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor, 1865-1938* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1938. Rpt. by Cooper Square Publishers, 1967), 130. Other useful references on political cartoons are Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), and Maurice Horn, ed., *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons* (New York: Chelsea House, 1980).



"Falstaff (Bryan) Reviews His Ragged Army." *Judge*, August 29, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-1055-1742



Far Left:  
 "Little Billy Bryan Chasing Butterflies." *Judge*, October 17, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-11055-1745



Left:  
 "Only a Comet. Uncle Sam—'It will soon be out of sight'." *Judge*, October 31, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-11055-1739

Opposite Page:  
 "The Sacrilegious Candidate." *Judge*, September 19, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-11055-1943

Right:  
 "Fishing For Suckers." *Judge*, September 5, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-11055-1709



Far Right:  
 "The Boy Stands on the Burning Deck, Whence All But Him Have Fled." *Judge*, August 6, 1896. NSHS Museum Collections-11055-1738



# Judge

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HAMILTON

## THE SACRILEGIOUS CANDIDATE.

No man who drags into the dust the most sacred symbols of the Christian world is fit to be president of the United States.