

## Document I. William Jennings Bryan, "Cross of Gold Speech" (1896)

*William Jennings Bryan was a populist and the Populist Party and Democratic Party nominee for president in 1896. At the 1896 Democratic National Convention Bryan spoke on behalf of those in the Democratic Party who favored the free coinage of silver. (Such a policy was sometimes called bimetallism the coinage of silver as well as gold). His stirring speech helped him to capture the party's nomination. He lost the election, however, to Republican William McKinley who favored maintaining the gold standard.*

*As you read the speech carefully examine how Bryan portrays the gold standard and how he portrays the pro-silver and therefore the Populist cause. Also notice how he depicts both urbanism and ruralism.*

And now, my friends, let me come to the paramount issue.... The gold standard has slain tens of thousands....

There is scarcely a State here today asking for the gold standard which is not in the absolute control of the Republican party.... Mr. McKinley [Republican nominee for President] was nominated in St. Louis upon a platform which declared for the maintenance of the gold standard [in part, because the gold standard is the accepted international currency standard]....

No private character, however pure, no personal popularity, however great, can protect from the avenging wrath of an indigent people a man who will declare that he is in favor of fastening the gold standard upon this country, or who is willing to surrender the right of self-government and place the legislative control of our affairs in the hands of foreign potentates and powers....

[This is] a struggle between "the idle holders of idle capital" and "the struggling masses, who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of this country:" and, my friends, the question we are to decide is: Upon which side will the Democratic party fight; upon the side of "the idle holders of idle capital" or upon the side of "the struggling masses?" That is the question the party must answer first.... The sympathies of the Democratic party, as shown by the [pro-silver] platform, are on the side of the struggling masses who have ever been the foundation of the Democratic party. There are two ideas of government. There are those who believe that, if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic ideas, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests upon them.

You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard; we reply that the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country.

My friends, we declare that this nation is able to legislate for its own people on every question, without waiting for the aid and consent of any other nation on earth.... It is the issue of 1776 over again. Our ancestors, when but three millions in number, had the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation; shall we, their descendants, when we have grown to seventy millions, declare that we are less independent than our forefathers? No my friends, that will never be the verdict of our people.... If [Republicans] say that bimetallism is good, but we cannot have it until other nations [adopt it]... we [Democrats and Populists] reply that, instead of having a gold standard because England has, we will [adopt] bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it. If they dare come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation... supported by... the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.

Document II.

