

CHAPTER
5

GUIDED READING *Farmers and the Populist Movement*

Section 3

A. As you read this section, take notes to answer questions about the pressures that made farming increasingly unprofitable.

In the late 1800s, farmers faced increasing costs and decreasing crop prices.

<p>1. Why had farming become unprofitable during this period?</p>	<p>2. Why did farmers support bimetallism or “free silver”?</p>
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In 1892, farmers and farm organizations, such as the Grange, found support in Populism and the People’s Party.

<p>3. What economic reforms did the People’s Party call for?</p>	<p>4. What political reforms did the party call for?</p>
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In 1896, the Populists supported presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan.

<p>5. What factions did Bryan and the Populists see as opposing forces in the presidential election of 1896?</p>	<p>6. In what ways did the results of the 1896 election confirm this view?</p>
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B. On the back of this paper, note who **Mary Elizabeth Lease** and **Oliver Hudson Kelley** were. Then, briefly explain the relationship between **inflation/deflation** and the “**Cross of Gold**” speech.

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RETEACHING ACTIVITY *Farmers and the Populist Movement*

Finding Main Ideas

The following questions deal with events of the Jeffersonian Era. Answer them in the space provided.

1. What problems did many Plains farmers face during the late 1800s?

2. What was the Grange's plan for improving conditions for farmers?

3. What did the Populist Party platform call for?

4. What were the consequences of the Panic of 1893?

5. What was the difference between the "gold bugs" and the "silverites"?

6. How did the presidential election of 1896 bring an end to populism?

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PRIMARY SOURCE *from* William Jennings Bryan's
“Cross of Gold” Speech

During the 1896 Democratic convention, politicians fiercely debated whether to support the gold standard or bimetallism. William Jennings Bryan, the final speaker at the convention, delivered an eloquent appeal for unlimited coinage of silver. As you read this excerpt from his famous speech, consider his arguments.

I would be presumptuous, indeed, to present myself against the distinguished gentlemen to whom you have listened if this were but a measuring of ability; but this is not a contest among persons. The humblest citizen in all the land when clad in armor of a righteous cause is stronger than all the whole hosts of error that they can bring. I come to speak to you in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity. . . .

Here is the line of battle. We care not upon which issue they force the fight. We are prepared to meet them on either issue or on both. If they tell us that the gold standard is the standard of civilization, we reply to them that this, the most enlightened of all nations of the earth, has never declared for a gold standard, and both the parties this year are declaring against it. If the gold standard is the standard of civilization, why, my friends, should we not have it? So if they come to meet us on that, we can present the history of our nation. More than that, we can tell them this, that they will search the pages of history in vain to find a single instance in which the common people of any land ever declared themselves in favor of a gold standard. They can find where the holders of fixed investments have.

Mr. Carlisle said in 1878 that this was a struggle between the idle holders of idle capital and the struggling masses who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country; and my friends, it is simply a question that we shall decide upon which side shall 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 that the party must answer first; and then it must be answered by each individual hereafter. The sympathies of the Democratic Party, as described by the 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 just legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous that their prosperity will

leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class that rests upon it.

You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard. I tell you that the great cities rest upon these 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 this country. . . .

If they dare to come out and in the open defend the gold standard as a good thing, we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands 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.

from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1895–1904: *Populism, Imperialism, and Reform*, vol. 12 of *The Annals of America* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), 100–105.

Activity Options

1. Deliver Bryan's “Cross of Gold” speech to your classmates. Then discuss why you think this speech moved the Democratic Party to nominate Bryan as its candidate for president.
2. During the 1896 presidential election, the debate over the gold standard raged. The Republican Party favored it, while the Democratic Party supported bimetallism. Create a campaign button that might have been used by either party.
3. Imagine that it is 1896. With your classmates, hold a mock debate in which you role-play a free silverite or a gold bug. If you argue against the gold standard, use Bryan's arguments to support your position. (Review pages 222–223 in your textbook.)

CHAPTER
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AMERICAN LIVES **Mary Elizabeth Lease**
Taking a Stand for Farmers' Rights

Section 3

"We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box . . . [and] the Congress. . . . The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few . . . and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the Republic and endanger liberty."—Populist party platform (1892)

Mary Elizabeth Lease had a long career urging reform causes. She gained fame, though, for her passionate speeches on behalf of farmers and the Populist party in the 1890s.

Lease (1853–1933) was born in western Pennsylvania to Irish immigrants. She moved to Kansas at age 17 to teach, where she met her husband, Charles Lease, a pharmacist. They tried farming in Kansas and then in Texas but returned to Kansas and the pharmacy business in 1883. She began to address meetings to raise money for a group called the Irish National League. She soon expanded her interests to include the Farmers Alliance and the Knights of Labor. By 1890, her career as a speaker was flourishing.

Lease was a passionate speaker, willing to stretch the truth for effect. When she spoke for the Irish National League, for instance, she sometimes said that she had been born in Ireland. Her speeches were built on emotion, not logic, and with them she roused the crowd. She became so carried away that sometimes she could not remember what she had said. Supporters called her "our Queen Mary." Enemies referred to her as "the Kansas Pythoness." She sometimes used the name Mary Ellen, which was transformed by foes into "Mary Yellin."

Her speaking career began in Kansas, where she delivered more than 160 speeches in 1890 alone. Soon she was campaigning in the West and the South. In early 1892, Lease became one of those who plotted a strategy to make the Populist party a national force. Her strength was speaking, however. At the Populist convention of July 1892, she gave the speech that seconded the nomination of James Weaver of Iowa for president. She campaigned with Weaver across the midwest and South, stirring crowds with her cry that farmers should "raise less corn and more hell." She complained that the wealthy had taken control of the country. "It is no longer a government of the peo-

ple, by the people, and for the people," she said, "but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street." She said that it was time for women to enter politics: "Thank God we women are blameless for this political muddle you men have dragged us into. . . . Ours is a grand and holy mission . . . to place the mothers of this nation on an equality with the fathers."

Weaver did not win the election, and Lease returned to Kansas to help the party win control of the state government the next year. She was nominated to run for the U.S. Senate, but she lost the chance to become the nation's first woman senator.

The next year Lease broke with the party. In 1895, she published a book that laid out her new vision for America. She proposed that the United States annex Canada, Cuba, and the West Indies; plant colonies in those areas; and establish free trade for the western hemisphere. She also believed that the government should take control of the railroad and telegraph systems, adopt free silver, and make political reforms.

In 1896, she refused to back the nomination of William Jennings Bryan, preferring William McKinley. She moved to New York, where she became a newspaper writer on politics and taught. She spent the remainder of her life pursuing various causes, including prohibition and women's suffrage. She supported Theodore Roosevelt in his 1912 Bull Moose campaign for the presidency. While still active, Lease was unable to achieve the influence she enjoyed in the 1890s.

Questions

1. How did Lease appeal to audiences?
2. What placed Lease in the forefront of women and politics after 1892?
3. Which of the positions taken by Lease in her book reflect Populist views?