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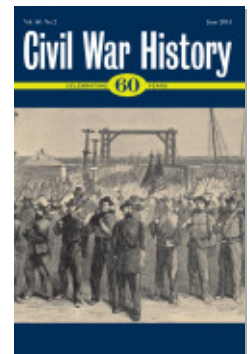
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## The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory

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# The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory

PATRICK J. KELLY

The country is in greater danger than it has been since 1861. This is not merely our opinion, and is not merely a party opinion. It is the profound belief of patriotic men without distinction of party and in every section of the country.  
*New York Daily Tribune*, Oct. 30, 1896

Gilded Age Republicans were notorious for attacking their Democratic opponents by waving the bloody shirt, a campaign tactic designed to activate the historical remembrance of the Civil War among Northern voters. Carefully selected, the wartime memories used by bloody-shirt Republicans became as familiar as the scriptures: GOP candidates reminded Northern voters of the party of Lincoln's firmness in the face of secession and portrayed the wartime Democratic party as treasonous, hijacked by Southern fire-eaters during the secession crisis, and closely associated with Northern Copperheads during the fighting itself. They also dramatically recalled the suffering of Union soldiers, especially prisoners-of-war, in the struggle to save the nation. Speaking directly to the North's enormous cohort of Union veterans, GOP candidates exhorted, "Vote as you shot." The tactic of waving the bloody shirt, always controversial within the GOP—many in the party thought its heated rhetoric needlessly inflamed sectional tensions between North and South—became even more contested in the 1880s, when the rhetorical focus shifted toward memories of the GOP's role in emancipation and in securing African Americans the right to vote. The last stand of bloody-shirt Republicans came in January 1891 with the defeat in Congress of the Force Bill, legislation designed to use Federal police power to enforce black suffrage in the South. By 1896, then, the day when Republican party candidates could marshal remembrance of the Civil War to win elections seemingly had become a thing of the past.<sup>1</sup>

1. See Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860–1910* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1997); Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877–1893* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962).

Yet a striking feature of the momentous 1896 presidential campaign was the role that Civil War–era memory played in the successful effort of William McKinley to defeat William Jennings Bryan. By the mid-1890s the GOP was led by a new generation intimately associated with the emergent corporate capitalist elite—most notably Mark Hanna, a successful Cleveland industrialist, McKinley’s closest adviser and presidential campaign manager—and its political language had shifted away from the racial commitments of the previous generation of party leaders. Stunned by Bryan’s nomination and alarmed by his appeals to both rural and working-class laborers, the 1896 Republican campaign crafted an electoral strategy that emphasized a renewed nationalism based on sectional reconciliation. Speaking to a group of Confederate veterans visiting his Canton home in October 1896, McKinley articulated the new Republican creed when he proclaimed, “Let us remember now and in all the future that we are Americans, and what is good for Ohio is good for Virginia.”<sup>2</sup> Tragically, however, the GOP’s shift from a sectional to a national strategy was predicated upon the party’s acceptance of the racial apartheid that by the mid-1890s had taken firm hold in the South. Most tellingly, the 1896 Republican platform, for the first time since the end of the Civil War, omitted any demand that the Federal government use its police power to guarantee black suffrage in the South. This omission, the *New York Times* noted approvingly, was an important indication of McKinley’s “sagacity . . . in depreciating sectional division and appealing to a common patriotism to protect the Nation’s honor.”<sup>3</sup> In 1896, then, GOP leaders, indifferent to the intensified attacks on the social and political rights of African Americans and eager to promote a patriotic nationalism based on the reconciliation of whites in the North and South, distanced the party from its historical role in revolutionizing U.S. race relations during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

In restructuring the public remembrance of the Civil War to further its nationalist message, the McKinley campaign mobilized a potent but racially neutral historical memory, the secession crisis of 1861. In comment typical of GOP rhetoric Henry Cabot Lodge wrote shortly after Bryan’s nomination that those aligned against the Democratic candidate were “fighting to save the country from a disaster which would be only second to 1861.”<sup>4</sup> A Bryan presidency posed a renewed threat to national solidarity in two ways. First, his pro-silver monetary policies promised once more to tear the nation apart along sectional lines. Writing in *The North American Review*, Republican senator William Chandler argued that the Democratic convention “deliberately, in the year 1896, undertook to organize the solid South with a few states of the West, to menace the prosperity of the North and East, by as wicked a movement as that after which is was deliberately patterned, the Southern rebellion of 1861.”<sup>5</sup> For the millions

2. *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1896.

3. *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1896.

4. Quoted in Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 293.

5. Senator William E. Chandler, “Issues and Prospects of the Campaign,” *North American Review* 163:2 (Aug. 1896): 182.

of Americans who remembered the staggering amount of death and destruction resulting from the Civil War, the dangers of sectional division remained very real. In 1896, however, McKinley's campaign paired sectional conflict with a new and deeply ominous threat to a nation undergoing rapid urban and industrial growth: class warfare.

Seizing on Bryan's statement that the "sympathies" of the Democratic party "are on the side of the struggling masses," prominent McKinley supporters accused the Democratic candidate of fomenting social strife among the expanding population of working-class Americans.<sup>6</sup> In October 1896 John Ireland, archbishop of St. Paul, issued a public letter, reprinted and widely circulated by the Republican National Committee, cautioning that the "movement which had its expression in the Chicago [Democratic] convention . . . is, in its right logical effects, revolution against the United States: it is secession, the secession of 1861." Ireland concluded with the grim warning, "The war of class against class is upon us." Speaking at a rally in New York City a few nights before the election, General Horace Porter reminisced, "During the heroic age of the country, in 1861, the old soldiers went to the front to save the nation's life." But, he warned, the times "were more perilous" than in 1861. "The only words in the English language that can describe the threatened situation are 'redhanded anarchy.'"<sup>7</sup>

The GOP's restructuring of Civil War memory to include the dangers of class division was especially concentrated in the key electoral battleground states of the Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ireland's home state of Minnesota. The Midwest had seen some of the most violent labor strife of the 1890s. This region also was home to one of the largest concentrations of Union veterans in the nation, a key GOP constituency. By stirring historical remembrance of the secession crisis of 1861 in this and the country's other regions, the Republican party was able to position itself as the patriotic defender of the nation-state against political forces that in 1896, or so McKinley and his campaign surrogates claimed, threatened to divide the country along the explosive fault lines of section *and* class.

The GOP's use of a wartime remembrance that elided emancipation and evoked instead the public memory of sectional divide supports David Blight's argument that in the battle to define the historical meaning of the Civil War the "inexorable drive for reunion . . . trumped race." Unlike the nation's white population, African Americans viewed the secession crisis of 1861 as a largely positive historical event, because the coming of the Civil War marked the beginning of the end of chattel slavery. During the secession winter the great fear of Frederick Douglass was not war between North and South; he feared that white politicians would leave the institution of slavery intact by agreeing to "peaceful disunion." Soon after Southern artillery shelled Fort Sumter, the brilliant African American physician and abolitionist James McCune Smith wrote, "circumstances have been so arranged by the

6. William Jennings Bryan, *The First Battle: The Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Co., 1896), 205.

7. *Des Moines Leader*, Oct. 13, 1896; *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 31, 1896.

degrees of Providence, that in struggling for their own nationality they [white Northerners] are forced to defend our rights.”<sup>8</sup> In the decades after the Confederate surrender, Douglass and other African American leaders articulated what Blight calls an “emancipationist” memory of the Civil War, a vision that defined the conflict as a struggle for black freedom, citizenship, and constitutional equality. The emancipationist vision of the Civil War, however, ran counter to strong reconciliationist currents in the national culture, and as early as 1875 Douglass wondered aloud, “If war among the whites brought peace and liberty to blacks, what will peace among the whites bring?”<sup>9</sup>

Douglass’s apprehension proved justified. By the mid-1890s, Blight argues, the “forces of reconciliation [had] overwhelmed the emancipationist vision in the national culture . . . [and] delivered to the country a segregated memory of the Civil War on Southern terms.”<sup>10</sup> In its drive to gain control of the White House, the nationalist rhetoric of the powerful and well-financed McKinley campaign played an important role in solidifying the reconciliationist vision within American culture. With very few exceptions, white America remembered the sectional crisis of 1861 as a national catastrophe. Drawing from this well of collective memory among the nation’s white population, in 1896 the Republican party attacked Bryan’s monetary policies by deploying a historical remembrance that highlighted the perils of sectional division while at the same time ignoring the party’s role in the transformation of U.S. race relations during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Sectionalism, then, remained a vitally important national concern in 1896, and Blight offers a convincing argument that white America’s acceptance of a reconciliationist memory of the Civil War played a key role in facilitating sectional reunion by the time of World War I. In addition to sectionalism, however, by the mid-1890s, a decade marked by industrial depression and violent labor conflict, many Americans were also deeply concerned about an emerging threat to the nation’s solidarity, class warfare. Seizing upon Bryan’s convention statement that the Democratic party sided with the “struggling masses” against the “idle holders of idle capital,” the GOP accused the Democratic candidate of fomenting civil strife and deployed the public recollection of 1861 as a stern warning against social division.<sup>11</sup> Focused on race as “the central problem of how Americans made choices to remember and forget about their Civil War,” Blight’s model deemphasizes the capacity of the McKinley campaign to restructure the memory of the Civil War to buttress the GOP’s combined goals of sectional and class solidarity. Establishing the links among public memory, partisan ideology, and campaign strategy will reveal a Civil War

8. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 2; David Blight, “They Knew What Time It Was: African Americans and the Coming of the Civil War,” in *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory and the American Civil War* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 28–52; Blight, “They Knew What Time It Was,” 48.

9. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 132.

10. *Ibid.*, 2.

11. Bryan, *The First Battle*, 205.

memory that warned against sectional division and, transcending race as the “central problem” of wartime remembrance, allowed the Republican party to brand political protest against America’s growing social and economic inequalities as unpatriotic threats to national unity.

In July 1896, when the Democratic party gathered in Chicago to nominate its candidate for president, the United States was a nation in distress. The repercussions of the business depression that began with the bankruptcy of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company in February 1893 continued to haunt the nation’s economy, with an estimated 15 percent of the nation’s workforce still unemployed in 1896. With hard times came social and political unrest. In 1894, a group of jobless workers, under the leadership of Jacob S. Coxey, marched to Washington demanding Federal assistance. Coxey’s desperate “army” of the unemployed was easily dispersed but, paired with the nation’s growing industrial labor unrest—in 1894, the year of the great Pullman Strike, there were one hundred industrial work stoppages averaging nearly fifty days in length and involving nearly 46,000 workers—his movement alarmed many middle- and upper-class Americans.<sup>12</sup>

Labor agitation, however, was only one problem facing the nation’s comfortable classes in 1896. In the 1890s the Populist movement demanded stronger government intervention into the economy, including the free and unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one. Gaining the support of millions of Americans in the nation’s western and Southern states, the Populists offered a powerful agrarian challenge to the nation’s two-party system. In 1896, then, the political status quo was under attack in both the industrial and agricultural areas of the United States. It is no wonder that as the presidential election approached many Americans feared that the nation was, once more, about to tear itself apart.<sup>13</sup>

If the United States was a nation in distress in July 1896, the Democratic party was a political organization in disarray. In 1892 the Democrats captured control of the executive and legislative branches of the Federal government for the first time since 1856. As a consequence of hard times, however, the party suffered staggering congressional losses in the mid-term elections of 1894. By the summer of 1896, discontent with Grover Cleveland and the conservative Bourbon Democracy was rampant among the party faithful, and a new generation of party leaders had emerged.

12. Paul Kleppner, *Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850–1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 179–92.

13. See Kleppner, *Cross of Culture*. For a discussion of the monetary question see Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997). For works on the Populist movement see Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999); *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Politics Histories of Rural America*, eds. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnson (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001); Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978); Robert McMath, *Populism: a Social History, 1877–1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

One such leader was Senator Ben Tillman of South Carolina. Speaking in favor of the free coinage of silver at the Chicago convention, Tillman maladroitly interjected the memory of the Civil War into the 1896 campaign.

In the words of his biographer Stephen Kantrowitz, Tillman regarded bimetallism as a “bridge between disaffected producers in the Democratic South and their brethren in the Republican West.” The senator believed that this regional alignment would “redefine American sectionalism and rally white producers everywhere against their common enemies in the seats of monopoly [and] finance.” Tillman’s attempt to redefine sectionalism in Chicago, however, proved disastrous. Speaking during the early part of the convention, days before Bryan’s surprising nomination, Tillman opened with the words, “I come from the South, from the home of secession.” This defiant opening startled his listeners, who greeted his remarks with loud hisses from the convention floor. The senator’s statements haunted the Democratic national campaign until election day. But there was more to come.<sup>14</sup>

Raising his voice to be heard over shouts of disapproval from members of his own party, the undaunted Tillman continued, “Some of my friends from the South and elsewhere have said that this is not a sectional issue. I say it is a sectional issue.” “We of the South,” he continued, “have turned our faces to the West, asking our brethren of those States to unite with us in restoring the government, the liberty of fathers, which our fathers left us.”<sup>15</sup> Tillman left the speaker’s podium to a torrent of boos; Kantrowitz argues that this speech “destroyed his chances to become a national candidate,” but the damage to the party was done.<sup>16</sup>

Coming from a senator representing South Carolina, Tillman’s intemperate remarks on secession and section offered opponents of bimetallism an opportunity to attack free silver as both financially unsound and as a new threat to national unity. They wasted no time in exploiting the opening. On July 9, the day before Bryan’s nomination, the staunchly Republican *Chicago Tribune* warned that the convention’s “Southern fire-eaters . . . are just as rancorous now as they were in 1861, when they repudiated their debts, confiscated Northern private and Union national public property, and proceeded upon their mad effort to destroy the republic.”<sup>17</sup> Conservative Democratic newspapers, angry at the convention’s rejection of Grover Cleveland’s sound money policies, joined in the attack. The *Chicago Chronicle* argued that the “hothead silver leaders of the South . . . are of the same class who got the South to pass the secession ordinances in 1860–’61 and followed it by repudiation of public and private debts due the North.” The *Chronicle* concluded ominously, “History repeats itself, and threatens a renewal of its calamitous episodes.”<sup>18</sup> Even before Bryan’s dramatic nomination, then, the proponents of

14. Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 245, 251.

15. *The Nation*, July 16, 1896.

16. Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 251.

17. *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1896.

18. Quoted in *ibid.*

sound money seized the opening provided by Tillman by aggressively reviving the public memory of the secession crisis of 1861 as a new front in their determined attack against the free coinage of silver.

Although it became apparent during the convention that the Democratic party would renounce the sound money policies of Grover Cleveland, the party's nomination of William Jennings Bryan still came as a shock to most Americans, including the leadership of the Republican party. The GOP had nominated William McKinley as their presidential candidate earlier that summer and planned a campaign centered on the message that protective tariffs would return economic prosperity by protecting American jobs and wage scales. Hearing the news of Bryan's nomination while yachting off the New England coast, McKinley's campaign manager Mark Hanna telegraphed the candidate, "The Chicago convention has changed everything. . . . With this communist spirit abroad the cry of 'free silver' will be catching."<sup>19</sup> Hanna quickly regained his balance and even mocked other Republicans who were panic-stricken at the possibility of Bryan's election as "just a lot of damn fools," but even he was startled when the advance "sixty-day" polls he commissioned indicated that Bryan held a lead over McKinley. Reflecting the fluid political situation, Josiah Quincy wrote in the August issue of the *North American Review*, "With the old political fences so completely down, and in the face of conditions so chaotic, there is no warrant for any assurances as to the result of the election in November."<sup>20</sup> The prospect of a Bryan victory seemed, for a short time at least, very real to contemporary observers, and in response the anti-Bryan "counter-crusade" began organizing its extraordinarily well-financed and well-coordinated assault on the Democratic candidate.<sup>21</sup>

After the election, the GOP's national campaign committee reported that it had raised and spent nearly \$4 million between July and November 1896; however, by some estimates, the party spent more than \$16 million electing McKinley.<sup>22</sup> Most of this unprecedented campaign money came from the nation's corporate elite who, genuinely alarmed by Bryan's nomination, flocked to the McKinley banner. One of McKinley's most powerful supporters was railroad magnate James J. Hill, a conservative Democrat who was a political ally and close friend of Grover Cleveland. Outraged by the Democratic convention's renunciation of the sitting president and his pro-gold policies, Hill energetically opposed the Bryan campaign. In mid-July he wrote to J. P. Morgan, "I feel it is very important that the sound money men not

19. J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), 87.

20. Bryan quoted in Malcolm Charles Moos, *The Republicans: A History of Their Party* (New York: Random House, 1956), 215; Josiah Quincy, "Issues and Prospects of the Campaign," *The North American Review* 163 (Aug. 1896): 194.

21. In his excellent discussion of the election of 1896, Richard Jensen defines the McKinley campaign as a "classic counter-crusade." See his, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 284, 288-89.

22. Elizabeth Sanders estimates that the GOP raised from \$4 million to \$16 million for its 1896 "educational fund." See Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 140.



waste a single day in getting to work.” Hill, whose railroads purchased coal from Hanna’s mines, introduced Hanna to New York City’s leading industrialists and financiers.<sup>23</sup> In mid-August Hill accompanied Hanna “on a tour through the high places of Wall Street, and during the next five days they succeeded in collecting as much money as was immediately necessary.”<sup>24</sup> John McCall, president of New York Life Insurance Company, authorized a \$50,000 contribution to the GOP.<sup>25</sup> The J. P. Morgan Bank and Standard Oil contributed \$250,000 each to the McKinley campaign. Declaring, “I can see nothing for else to do, to serve our Country and our honor,” John D. Rockefeller sent Mark Hanna a personal check for \$2,500.<sup>26</sup> The \$500,000 contributed to the GOP by Standard Oil and the House of Morgan alone constituted more than the entire campaign chest of the Democratic party in 1896. Well organized under the watchful eye of Hanna, the GOP’s “educational” campaign hired more than one thousand speakers to address targeted audiences throughout the United States and printed and distributed tens of millions of pieces of campaign literature, in up to a dozen languages, for distribution to the nation’s voters. At the end of the campaign Theodore Roosevelt complained to a GOP official that Hanna had advertised McKinley “as if he were patent medicine.”<sup>27</sup>

Given the GOP’s overwhelming advantage in money and organization and the weakness of a Democratic party that bore the onus for the depression of the 1890s while being split over the nomination of Bryan, McKinley’s election was not surprising. The GOP’s aggressive deployment of Civil War memory was but one of many factors propelling McKinley into the White House. In addition to electing party candidates, however, presidential campaigns are in part mass movements of political education that exert great influence on the nation’s understanding of its past. The makers of campaign rhetoric are architects of national and political consciousness, and presidential campaigns, especially in watershed elections such as 1896, are part of the continuing process of nation building and, in post-Civil War America, nation rebuilding. The overarching theme of McKinley’s “shrewd campaign,” in the words Bryan biographer LeRoy Ashby, emphasized “unity rather than social and regional conflict.”<sup>28</sup> In crafting a campaign of national solidarity, GOP tacticians quickly initiated the practice of deploying a historical recollection that reminded voters of the perilous consequences of national division. In selecting this remembrance, the McKinley campaign, a political organization with the power to advertise its nationalist

23. Joseph Gilpin Pyle, *The Life of James J. Hill*, vol. 1 (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1917), 496; Herbert Croly, *Marcus Alonzo Hanna: His Life and Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 219.

24. Croly, *Marcus Alonzo Hanna*, 219.

25. Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), 583.

26. Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 1998), 388. For the House of Morgan contribution, see LeRoy Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan, Champion of Democracy* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 67.

27. Thomas Beer, *Hanna* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1929), 165.

28. Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan*, 68.

message into virtually every household in the nation, fundamentally restructured the meaning and memory of the Civil War in American culture.

In 1896 the Republican party waged its campaign of memory along two fronts. The first was the party's charge that Bryan's pro-silver policies endangered national unity by pitting the U.S. North and East against its South and West. Days after Bryan's nomination McKinley attacked the Democratic candidate by evoking public remembrance of the Civil War. "Then section was arrayed against section," McKinley declared. "Now men of all sections can and will unite to rebuke the repudiation of our obligations and debasement of our currency." In an editorial the *New York Times* noted approvingly that in his speech McKinley had "drawn clearly" the "parallel between the duties imposed by the civil war and those imposed" by the supporters of free silver. "He is moderate in saying," the *Times* concluded, "that never since that time have honest Americans had a 'greater duty.'"<sup>29</sup>

William Jennings Bryan, like Tillman and most other supporters of bimetallism, envisioned a political coalition of western and Southern states working together in the fight against the gold standard. Unlike Tillman, Elizabeth Sanders argues, Bryan "assiduously counseled tolerance and avoided divisive social issues."<sup>30</sup> Realizing that Republican charges of sectionalism were damaging his campaign, Bryan insisted that the Democratic platform was "not the platform of section. It is the platform of our common country, and appeals to those who love mankind to rise to its defense." Unlike his opponent, Bryan rarely discussed the war and, offering a different historical memory to voters, he argued that his party "breathes the spirit of the Declaration of Independence."<sup>31</sup> Bryan's reluctance to stir voters' memories of the Civil War echoed the desire of Populist leaders from earlier in the decade who, unsuccessfully, urged Americans to bury the passions generated from this fratricidal conflict.

Bryan ran for president on both the Democratic and Populist tickets. In the early 1890s, however, the Populist party existed solely as an independent third-party movement facing the immense challenge of appealing to Northern voters while simultaneously attracting white voters in the Democratic stronghold of the "Solid South." Determined to focus the nation's attention on the rapidly expanding economic and social dislocations resulting from the rise of unregulated corporate finance and industrial capitalism, Populist leaders called on American voters to transcend the sectional divisions growing out of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Leonidas Polk, president of the Southern Alliance, argued in 1891 that the modern struggle was not the conflict of twenty-five years ago, "but the gigantic struggle of today is between the classes and the masses." He concluded, "In the appalling presence of such an issue, buried and forgotten forever be the prejudices, animosities, and estrangements of that unfortunate war."<sup>32</sup> The party's 1892 Omaha platform

29. *New York Times*, July 12, 1896.

30. Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 144.

31. *Chicago Tribune*, July 18, 1896.

32. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise, the Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 259.

argued that “the civil war is over . . . and every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it, and that we must be, in fact, as we are in name, one united brotherhood of free men.”<sup>33</sup> That year the Populists, attempting to neutralize the politics of sectionalism and attract Southern voters, fielded a blue-gray ticket headed by Union veteran Gen. James B. Weaver of Iowa as its presidential candidate and, as his running mate, Confederate veteran James G. Field of Virginia. In 1892, the Populist party tried to convince voters to focus on current economic struggles; in 1896 Bryan, who rarely mentioned the war, adopted the same tactic.

Ultimately, however, Bryan’s attempt to overcome sectionalism by restraining public recollection of the war was no match for the tactics of his opponent. Possessing vastly greater resources, the McKinley campaign promoted sectional unity in the opposite manner, by mobilizing a remembrance of the Civil War that attacked Bryan’s monetary policies by linking free silver with regional conflict. Writing in the *North American Review*, Republican Senator William Chandler argued that the “late Chicago mob, misnamed a Democratic convention . . . deliberately, in the year 1896, undertook to organize the solid South with a few states of the West, to menace the prosperity of the North and East, by as wicked a movement as that after which it was deliberately patterned, the Southern rebellion of 1861.”<sup>34</sup> Prominent Union army veterans were especially useful in the Republican effort to link the memory of sectional conflict with free silver. In September former Union major general Daniel Sickles argued in a speech that Bryan and “many of his supporters are trying to combine the South and West against the North and East. This is sectionalism—of which the rebellion was the offspring.”<sup>35</sup> A few days later Sickles, who had lost his leg to a combat wound during the battle of Gettysburg, was the featured speaker in a giant veterans’ rally for McKinley. Speaking to the aging Billy Yanks, Sickles argued:

The rebellion grew out of sectionalism and the veterans who are here and their comrades all over the land know too well what it cost us to put that rebellion down. Five hundred thousand lives and uncounted millions of treasure. A million homes left desolate. Widows, sisters, fathers, and mothers bereft. Our country covered with graves of the noble heroes sacrificed to maintain and preserve our unity. We cannot tolerate, will not tolerate, any man representing any party who attempts again to disregard the solemn admonitions of Washington to frown down every attempt to set one portion of the country against another.<sup>36</sup>

Widely reprinted in the nation’s newspapers, Sickles’s grim warning of the dangers of sectional conflict was typical of the emotional rhetoric utilized by an aggressive Republican campaign determined to utilize historical memory of the Civil War in its assault on Bryan’s economic plank.

33. *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, July 5, 1892.

34. Chandler, “Issues and Prospects of the Campaign.”

35. *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 19, 1896.

36. *Ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1896.

In selecting a memory designed to stamp Bryan's free-silver policies as dangerously divisive, his opponents were careful to portray the affable Nebraskan as a mere figurehead, a dupe controlled by Southern politicians who were, like the fire-eaters of 1861, leading the nation once more into disaster. According to the Republican campaign narrative, national unity was threatened once more by a sinister campaign hatched by a group of radical Southern political leaders, a group which, in 1896, consisted of Tom Watson of Georgia—Bryan's running mate on the Populist ticket—Marion Butler of North Carolina, and, most notoriously, Tillman. The South Carolinian literally became the poster child of sectionalism: clutching his trademark pitchfork, he often appeared alongside Bryan in hostile political cartoons during the summer and fall of 1896. Speaking in Iowa, the ubiquitous Sickles, useful to McKinley because he was a conservative Democrat deeply opposed to bimetallism, noted: "I could not permit Jeff Davis to make a platform for me in 1861. I cannot permit Tillman to do so in 1896."<sup>37</sup>

The former Confederate president, of course, did not make a platform for Sickles, or anybody else for that matter, in 1861. Sickles's statement illustrates the practice, characteristic of the McKinley campaign, of merging memories of the election campaign of 1860 with the secession crisis of 1861. Historical accuracy aside (in 1860 Davis was considered a moderate on secession), the important link between these two events in the GOP's campaign narrative was the allegation that in both 1861 and 1896 the people of the South were held hostage by the disastrous policies of a radical political leadership determined to wreck the Union. This attack on the Southern political elite offered a tactical advantage to the Republican campaign by separating the Southern people from the actions of the region's political leadership. Holding a tiny group of Southern political leaders responsible for secession absolved the vast majority of white Southerners from responsibility for the Civil War.

In the Republican efforts to reunite the nation's sections, the memory of 1861 offered another great advantage. It allowed the McKinley campaign to talk about the Civil War without talking about race. Focused on the memory of the secession winter—a historical event that occurred long before the war evolved into what Lincoln referred to as a "remorseless and revolutionary struggle"—the GOP was able to bracket off from public memory the racially charged historical issues of slavery, emancipation, and the crucial role African Americans played in the struggle to save the Union.<sup>38</sup>

The omission of race from the GOP's public remembrance of the war offers a clear illustration of the triumph of what Blight has named the "reconciliationist" vision of the Civil War. Like many Republicans of his generation, McKinley began his political career as a vocal advocate of the rights of African Americans. As governor of Ohio, for instance, he left his New Orleans hotel after it refused to allow a black delegation to meet with him. After the defeat of the Force Bill in 1891, however,

37. *Souix City Journal*, Sept. 27, 1896.

38. James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1982), 269.

McKinley abandoned his commitment to black equality in favor of a nationalist agenda predicated on the reconciliation of whites in the North and South. Expressing his desire for a revived nationalism based on sectional reunion, McKinley declared to a group of Confederate veterans, "Let us remember now and in all the future that we are Americans, and what is good for Ohio is good for Virginia."<sup>39</sup>

After McKinley's nomination, African American newspapers gratefully recalled his prior support for black rights. *The Freeman*, a black newspaper based in Indianapolis, argued that McKinley had always "leaned toward this portion of humanity," and it vigorously supported his candidacy. What black newspapers such as *The Freeman* did not realize, or what they were unwilling to admit, was that by 1896 McKinley had quietly distanced himself from the social and political struggles of African Americans living in the states of the ex-Confederacy. Writing in 1916, McKinley biographer Charles S. Olcott approvingly summed up McKinley's attitude toward the white South: "The demand for 'rights' gave way to brotherliness, and the desire to coerce melted before a flame a deep patriotism."<sup>40</sup> McKinley's desire for a patriotic reconciliation among white Americans at the expense of Southern black people was reflected in the Republican platform of 1896, a document that was silent on the question of Federal protection of the voting rights of African Americans. In October, the *New York Times* noted with satisfaction, "It is safe to say that the era of Force Bills and Federal interference [in Southern elections] has passed." The "fear of Force Bills," the *Times* argued, had kept the "South solid . . . and Major McKinley has given one indication of his sagacity [by] depreciating sectional division and appealing to a common patriotism to protect the Nation's honor."<sup>41</sup> Working for a candidate who was, in Blight's words, an "inveterate conciliator, especially toward the South," McKinley's campaign strategists attacked Bryan's pro-silver policies through a memory of the Civil War that highlighted the common danger of sectional division while erasing a remembrance of that conflict in revolutionizing, for a short time at least, race relations in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Given the social unrest of the 1890s, in fact, the Republican party had no desire to stir up any memory that smacked of revolutionary change. In the previous decade the nation had witnessed three epic battles in the war of labor against capital—the

39. Charles S. Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), 225; *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1896.

40. *Indianapolis The Freeman, an Illustrated Colored Newspaper*, Sept. 12, 1896; Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley*, 226.

41. *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1896. If McKinley's reconciliationist stance was a cynical ploy designed to gain him electoral votes in the South, his hopes remained unfulfilled: in 1896 he lost the states of the ex-Confederacy to Bryan. Yet the future shows that McKinley was sincere in his desire for sectional reconciliation. Even after losing the South, McKinley continued his determined, if racially insensitive, attempt at nation re-building. During the Spanish-American War he appointed two prominent Confederate veterans, Fitzhugh Lee, Robert E. Lee's nephew, and Joseph Wheeler of Alabama, as major generals in the United States Army. Soon after the war's end he traveled throughout the South promoting "the peace treaty and America's new territorial acquisitions in the Caribbean and the Pacific." Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 351.

42. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 351.

Haymarket affair and the strikes at Homestead and Pullman—as well as numerous local skirmishes. The business depression that started in 1893 showed no signs of easing in 1896, and that year nearly 15 percent of the nation's urban workers remained unemployed. The Democratic convention is most often remembered for Bryan's sensational "Cross of Gold" speech, but in attempting to create a farmer-worker coalition the party's platform did not focus exclusively on the question of free silver. At the instigation of the party's urban-based reformers, including Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld, the Democratic platform decried the practice of suppressing strikes with Federal court injunctions.<sup>43</sup> Bryan's opponents found his appeals to urban workers as alarming as his appeals to farmers. When, in his speech accepting the Democratic presidential nomination, Bryan defined the contest as conflict between the "idle holders of capital" and the "struggling masses," and declared the "sympathies of the Democratic Party . . . are on the side of the struggling masses," he thrilled the convention but terrified many Americans.<sup>44</sup> Soon after Bryan's nomination, Mark Hanna wrote to McKinley, "I consider the situation in the West quite alarming, as business is going all to pieces and idle men will multiply rapidly."<sup>45</sup> Determined to halt the Bryan bandwagon in its tracks, the McKinley campaign opened the second front in the war of memory against the Democratic campaign, one that paired the dangers of sectional division with an ominous new threat to national unity, the conflict between labor and capital.

Again and again during the summer and fall of 1896 anti-Bryan periodicals argued that a victory by Bryan would, in the words of *Harper's Weekly*, "mean national dishonor, the triumph of ignorance [and] a sectional and class war upon vested rights." The *New York Mail and Express* called Bryan's campaign a "hysterical declaration of a reckless and lawless crusade of sectional animosity and class antagonism."<sup>46</sup> In attacking the Democrats' platform as a document bent on setting the haves against the have-nots, Bryan's opponents often refrained from personally attacking the candidate himself. Instead, they focused upon another one of the new generation of Democrat reformers, Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld. Much as the Republican press made Tillman the national symbol for "sectionalism," it painted Altgeld as the symbol of "anarchy." Praising Archbishop John Ireland, for example, one of McKinley's strongest supporters, the *New York Times* commented, "Like a patriotic American he rebukes the attempt of BRYAN and ALTGELD to array class against class, and the attempt of TILLMAN to array section against section."<sup>47</sup> The image of Altgeld standing beside Tillman and Bryan, often appeared in cartoons lampooning the Democratic campaign. The names of Bryan, Tillman, and Altgeld

43. A good discussion of Bryan's attempt to create a farmer-worker coalition and why it failed is in Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 139–47.

44. Bryan, *The First Battle*, 205.

45. Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics*, 87.

46. *Harper's Weekly*, July 18, 1896, 698; H.W. Brands, *The Restless Decade: America in the 1890s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 282.

47. *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1896.

were often denounced in the same sentence as dangers to national unity. In early October, *Harper's Weekly* concluded, "well seconded by Senator Tillman and Governor Altgeld—Mr. Bryan's natural allies are the enemies of the state, the conspirators against the existing order—He would set the land on fire with class hatred and sectional strife."<sup>48</sup> In the campaign of memory against the Democratic campaign of 1896, then, sectional and class division were closely linked, with Tillman serving as a surrogate for sectional strife and Altgeld a surrogate for anarchy and class warfare.

Having paired sectional and class conflict as twin dangers to national unity, it was but a short step for Bryan's opponents to turn to the memory of secession as a means of attacking the Democratic campaign. In this effort Altgeld, like Tillman, was a natural target. He was the most prominent left-leaning politician of his day—closely allied with Hull House. Altgeld had appointed Florence Kelley as chief factory inspector of the state of Illinois and Julia Lathrop to the state board of charities. In the words of Morton Keller, Altgeld "rode to power on the first wave of urban Democratic liberalism."<sup>49</sup> Soon after his election to governor, he gained infamy among the property-owning classes by pardoning four anarchists convicted for their role in the Haymarket affair. In 1894 Altgeld, who wanted more time for Illinois authorities to resolve the Pullman strike, vigorously protested Cleveland's decision to order Federal troops into Chicago and sent a widely publicized telegram to the president arguing that "local self-government is a fundamental principle of our Constitution."<sup>50</sup>

The governor's public rebuke of President Cleveland combined with his defense of the principle of local self-determination immediately stirred memories of the South's defiance of Washington during the secession crisis among the editorial pages of many of the nation's newspapers. The *Philadelphia Telegraph* denounced Altgeld's telegram as "an affront more abominable than the degradations submitted to by James Buchanan at the hands of Southern secession." The *Indianapolis American Tribune* argued, "This is the same States Rights rot that was the cause of the rebellion."<sup>51</sup> The spontaneous outpouring of Civil War memory in reaction to Altgeld's dispute with Cleveland illustrates how easily the public's remembrance of secession was stirred to a boil. Two years later, following the takeover of the Democratic party by reformers such as Bryan, Altgeld, and Tillman, McKinley's supporters mobilized the memory of 1861 in a more organized manner by accusing Democratic politicians of fomenting civil war along class as well as regional lines.

Altgeld was instrumental in securing Chicago as the site for 1896 Democratic convention. Unlike Tillman, however, he made no inflammatory speeches. Instead,

48. *Harper's Weekly*, Oct. 10, 1896, 995–96.

49. Keller, *Affairs of State*, 581.

50. Ray Ginger, *Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal versus Changing Reality* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1958), 156.

51. Brand, *Reckless Decade*, 153; Mary Dearing, *Veterans in Politics, the Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1952), 442–43.

he played a key behind-the-scenes role in assuring that the Democratic platform called for the abolition of court injunctions against labor unions, and, in a thinly veiled censure of Cleveland's actions in 1894, denounced the "arbitrary interference by Federal authorities in local affairs as a violation of the Constitution."<sup>52</sup>

Describing the trajectory of the presidential campaign in early November, the *New York Times* pointed to the adoption of the Democratic platform as a crystallizing moment of the 1896 election. The *Times* argued, "When to the declaration for unlimited coinage of silver [was] linked to the . . . practical endorsement of the Altgeld doctrine of State rights and riot, and appeals to class and sectional passion," the line of battle was drawn. Echoing attacks during the Pullman crisis, newspapers and magazines opposed to Bryan wasted little time reminding voters that during the secession winter Southern Democrats had offered similar arguments against the reach of Washington's power. In September, *Harper's Weekly*, a fierce opponent of the Democratic party, argued, "In 1861 some of the States undertook to enforce the doctrine that the Federal government had not the power to prevent them from leaving the Union. Their attempt was defeated after a terrible war." The Democratic platform, this magazine continued, "seeks to revolutionize the government by destroying the results established by the war of secession; for if [it] is right, Mr. Lincoln was wrong when he sent his troops into the South to restore the supremacy of the laws of the Union and to protect the property of the United States."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the most damning statement against the Democratic platform came in October, however, when John Ireland, archbishop of St. Paul, publicly denounced Bryan's candidacy.

As part of its campaign of national unity, one scholar argues, the McKinley campaign "openly courted" Catholic voters, and one of the "major developments of the campaign was the announcement by Archbishop Ireland of the St. Paul diocese that he supported McKinley."<sup>54</sup> Ireland's letter ritually attacked the Democracy's support of bimetallism. Significantly, however, Ireland declared the "monetary question . . . a secondary issue in the campaign." For Ireland, free silver "has its importance, but it is of minor importance in the presence of other questions which are brought into issue." Turning to the real meat of his argument, Ireland insisted that the Democratic platform's denunciation of federal interference in local affairs was "the old secession doctrine that states are independent of the national government at Washington." "The movement," Ireland continued, "which had its expression in the Chicago convention . . . is in its logical effect, revolution against the United States; it is secession, the secession of 1861, which our soldiers believed they had consigned

52. Bryan, *The First Battle*, 408.

53. *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1896; *Harper's Weekly*, Sept. 26, 1896, 933.

54. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896*, 290. McKinley's effort with Catholics, however, much like his appeals to Southern voters, failed. Richard Jensen notes, "The Catholics stayed with the Democrats in their hour of crisis, not in the hope of seeing Bryan in the White House, but with the intention of capturing full control of the party they had worked so long to build." Jensen, *The Making of the Midwest*, 296.



to eternal death at Appomattox.” Reaching across the Atlantic to revive the public’s memory of the social convulsion of the Paris Commune of 1871, Ireland warned his readers, “The war of class against class is upon us. . . . Many adherents of the movement do not perceive its full meaning; but let them beware. They are lighting torches, which, borne in the hands of reckless men, may light up the country in the lurid fires of a commune.”<sup>55</sup> Widely reprinted in newspapers throughout the United States, Ireland’s apocalyptic prophecy that Bryan’s election would trigger a new Civil War pitting class against class created a public sensation. A Methodist minister in California wrote the archbishop that a reading of Ireland’s letter as his Sunday sermon “brought the whole congregation to its feet.”<sup>56</sup> Bryan’s supporters, on the other hand, were furious at Ireland’s overheated attacks on the Democratic candidate. William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal* and one of Bryan’s most powerful backers, sent an angry cable to the Vatican’s secretary of state demanding to know if Ireland was speaking officially for the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup>

The story behind the well-coordinated production and publication of Ireland’s statement offers a striking opportunity to explore how, in the words of John Bodnar, political elites “selectively retrieve” historical memories to “advance [their] concerns by promoting interpretations of the past and present reality that reduce the power of competing interests that appear to threaten the attainment of their goals.”<sup>58</sup> Archbishop Ireland was a close associate of James J. Hill. The wealthy and powerful Hill, whose Great Northern Railroad was headquartered in St. Paul, was an energetic supporter of McKinley. Concerned about McKinley’s election chances in the Midwest, in July the railroad magnate had written J. P. Morgan to urge “those who are to manage the McKinley campaign that they to get to work *at once* and open the fight in St. Louis, Chicago, and all the leading Western cities and drive back the wave that is rising over the doubtful states.” Hill performed a number of invaluable favors for the McKinley campaign in the region. Among these favors was his request to Ireland that the archbishop issue a statement denouncing Bryan. On September 30, Hill alerted Mark Hanna, “We are giving Archbishop Ireland, through a non-partisan letter signed by twenty representative men, an opportunity to state his views fully, which he is prepared to do, and I am sure he will cover the ground, stripping the [Democratic] platform to the bone.”<sup>59</sup> Nearly two weeks later, on October 11, Ireland’s statement was released.

Why did the archbishop agree to attack publicly the Bryan campaign? In his careful study of this affair, Marvin R. O’Connell notes that although Ireland’s letter

55. *Des Moines Leader*, Oct. 13, 1896. For a description of the reaction to the Paris Commune in the United States, see Philip Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

56. James H. Moynihan, *The Life of Archbishop John Ireland* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 261.

57. Marvin O’Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1988), 426–27.

58. John Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 75.

59. Pyle, *The Life of James J. Hill*, 497; O’Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church*, 426.

represented his personal views, the public statement was “extracted” from him by Hill as “partial payment for favors rendered [to Ireland] and favors he hoped for.” Although Ireland never admitted to the origins of his public denunciation of Bryan, he certainly never regretted his role in the campaign. After looking into his actions, Vatican officials signaled Ireland their pleasure at this manifestation of his political clout, and soon after the election the archbishop was invited to McKinley’s home in Canton where he fought for the inclusion of a Roman Catholic in the president-elect’s cabinet.<sup>60</sup>

The national dissemination of Ireland’s dire warning that the Democratic platform was the “secession of 1861” was as well coordinated as the letter’s production. Circulated by wire reports, the contents of the archbishop’s letter appeared on the front pages of many of the nation’s newspapers the day after its release. Just as significantly, the Republican National Committee, which, thanks to Hill’s communication to Hanna, had nearly two weeks to prepare its strategy for taking advantage of Ireland’s statement and immediately set to work printing the letter in pamphlet form, ultimately distributing more than 250,000 copies to voters.<sup>61</sup> As the archbishop’s words circulated through the national media, the cover story concocted by Hill—that Ireland had offered his remarks only at the request of a nonpartisan group of prominent Minnesotans—was accepted without question. An editorial in the *New York Times* commented that the “respect in which the Archbishop is held in his own diocese is attested by the fact that the public expression of his opinion on the political issue was not volunteered by him, but was elicited by written request for it, signed by twenty-seven of the leading citizens of Minnesota and representing both political parties.”<sup>62</sup> One historian has observed that the “crafters of memory are eager to erase the origins of the memories they promote,” and this was certainly true of Hill’s role in the production and circulation of Ireland’s famous attack against Bryan.<sup>63</sup>

By September 1896, the month Hill asked Ireland to issue his statement, the focus of the McKinley campaign had turned to the midwestern states of Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the archbishop’s own Minnesota. GOP strategists considered these states as key to victory and feared that the loss of any states in the region would prove disastrous for the Republican campaign. Indiana and Illinois, for example, had both gone for Cleveland in 1892. As the *Review of Reviews* noted about the election, “The East is conceded to McKinley, the South and extreme West to Bryan. The Central Western states are the battleground of the campaign.”<sup>64</sup> Hanna himself chose Chicago as the site of the Republican national campaign headquarters. Leaving New York for Chicago in early October, Hanna announced that the “battleground is in the Middle Western States” and in this region

60. O’Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church*, 426–28.

61. Moynihan, *The Life of Archbishop John Ireland*, 261.

62. *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1896.

63. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “No Deed But Memory,” in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 12.

64. *The Review of Reviews*, Nov. 1896, 525.

the “hardest campaigning is to be done.”<sup>65</sup> Given the GOP’s obsession with winning the Midwest, the solicitation of an anti-Bryan statement from the Roman Catholic archbishop of St. Paul was a smart political tactic. Ireland’s use of historical memory of the “secession of 1861” reflected the determination of the McKinley campaign to win the Midwest by linking the Democratic candidate with the rebels who had started the Civil War.

The decision to attack Bryan by supersaturating the battleground states of the Midwest with wartime remembrance came, in part, because of the presence of a large bloc of voters critical to the election: nearly four hundred thousand Union veterans.<sup>66</sup> Prodded by the veterans’ newspapers, the North’s ex-soldiers saw frightening parallels between the labor upheavals of the 1890s and the Civil War. This was especially true of veterans living in the Midwest. Chicago was a hotbed of labor unrest, and the violent Pullman strike angered many of the old soldiers. At the height of the Pullman crisis a local post of the Grand Army of the Republic wrote the mayor of Chicago volunteering the services of its two hundred men. “We were among those who responded to the call of our country in 1861 to defend our flag,” the members of the Abraham Lincoln Post, No. 91 wrote, “we, therefore, now offer ourselves as ready to respond to a call from you to defend the fair name of our city.” The *Chicago Tribune* wrote during the same period that the “soldiers of 1861 are as ready to fight the Anarchist rebels north of the Ohio as they were secession rebels south of it.”<sup>67</sup> Veterans’ newspapers, usually no friend of Cleveland, were virtually unanimous in praising the president’s decision to put down the strike through force.

For many of the Midwest’s veterans, the growing influence of Altgeld, who angered veterans by pardoning the Haymarket anarchists and challenging the legality of Cleveland’s actions during the Pullman strike, offered a threat to the nation’s law and order potentially as dangerous as the crisis they had faced a generation earlier. Philip Paludan has argued that many Northerners resisted secession in 1861 because they viewed it as a crisis of law and order. “Again and again,” Paludan writes, “newspaper editors and political leaders discussed the degree to which secession was likely to produce disorder, anarchy, and general disrespect for democratic government.”<sup>68</sup> Speaking at a rally of Union veterans’ in Chicago, one prominent veterans’ spokesman declared, “We are told in the Chicago platform, in vague language, but easily read between the lines, ‘You may have more Chicago riots.’ You may have them here, or in New York, or in Boston [and if] your Governor chooses to turn a deaf ear to the appeals of the people for protection of their rights of personal property, you are told, under those circumstances, ‘Let havoc have its way.’”<sup>69</sup> Stuart McConnell,

65. *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 1896.

66. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 23. Jensen estimates that four hundred thousand Union veterans lived in the Midwest in 1888.

67. *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1894; quoted in Dearing, *Veterans in Politics*, 444.

68. Phillip S. Paludan, “The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis in Law and Order,” *The American Historical Review* 77 (Oct. 1972): 1017.

69. *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1896.

writing about the political philosophy of the Grand Army of the Republic, suggested that “when push came to shove the GAR was always to be found in the camp of order and property rights.” Grand Army nationalism, he argues, “combined allegiance to a liberal capitalism of a distinctly ante-bellum variety . . . and loyalty first to the nation state rather than to race, class, gender, region, religion, or any other particularism. Operating within an established state, it functioned not only as an endorsement of that state but also as a negative statement about potential alternative nationalisms that sought to alter it.”<sup>70</sup> The political views of powerful veterans’ organizations such as the GAR, then, meshed perfectly with the memory of the Civil War promoted by the Republican party. With its high concentration of Union veterans, the Midwest featured the region that the GOP’s reconfiguration of Civil War memory gained its greatest intensity for promoting the need for a patriotic unity between the nation’s economic classes.

Writing soon after Bryan’s nomination, the *Chicago Tribune* predicted that veterans will “recognize the danger which confronts the country from an anarchical, repudiating, and revolutionary mob, and they will do their duty in 1896 as they did it from 1861 to 1865. They will help again save the country.” Prominent Union veterans joined in this attack. The former Union general Franz Sigel argued that Bryan’s election would result in the “subversion of the social order, a war of the masses against classes for the possession of wealth.” In an editorial aimed at the North’s veterans, *Harper’s Weekly* concluded: “We do not believe that the honest farmers and working men of this country, from whose ranks came the great mass of Union soldiers, are ready to join this motley throng in its assaults upon the institutions which they once defended.”<sup>71</sup> McKinley’s supporters thus linked the breakdown of law and order in 1861 with the nation’s labor unrest in the more recent past to gain the veteran vote.

The GOP, however, had another potent card to play in its campaign of memory aimed at the North’s ex-soldiers—one that combined historical recollections of 1861 with the economic self-interest of the aging cohort of Union vets. The “public liaison” between the GOP and the Grand Army of the Republic was, in the words of one scholar, “about as secret as the relations between Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton and just as understandable.”<sup>72</sup> The Republican alignment with the GAR, one of the most successful special-interest groups in all of U.S. history, was based as much on hard economic calculations as it was on emotional appeals to wartime memories. What drew Union veterans again and again to the GOP was the combination of the party’s calculated deployment of Civil War remembrance combined with its ability to deliver to the aging Billy Yanks a remarkably generous array of Federal benefits. The economic battle for the veteran vote focused around the ques-

70. Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992), 212, 223.

71. *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, Oct. 9, 1896; *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 10, 1896, 955.

72. William Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans’ and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), 189.

tion of Federal entitlements: government jobs for ex-soldiers, the creation of a system of institutional care for war-disabled and indigent vets, and, above all, the expansion of the number of veterans eligible for pensions. In each of these areas the GOP delivered. In 1882, for instance, nearly half of the Republican patronage appointments in Washington went to Union veterans. In the other two areas—institutional care and pensions—the achievements of the Republican party were even more impressive. By the mid-1890s, for instance, nearly one hundred thousand ex-soldiers had sought shelter in a branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the federal institution created for the care of the old soldiers, and 65 percent of the surviving cohort of Union veterans received a pension check from Uncle Sam.<sup>73</sup> By the mid-1890s, then, the GOP was largely responsible for the creation of a comprehensive veterans' welfare state designed for the care and support of the men who served in the Union army.

By 1896, however, the ties between organized veterans' groups and the Republican party were seemingly attenuating. The Dependent Pension Act of 1890, a great victory for the GAR, offered a pension to "every discharged soldier of ninety days' service who suffered from any disability that incapacitated him for manual labor, no matter what his financial situation and no matter how the disability had been incurred." This legislation virtually granted the North's aging veterans what was closest to their heart's desire: a service pension system. Between 1890 and 1896, the number of ex-Union soldiers receiving a quarterly pension check from the government jumped from 537,944 to 970,678.<sup>74</sup> With their central economic demand met, appeals to the wartime memories of veterans lost their potency, and a significant portion of the North's ex-soldiers drifted from the Republican camp. During the presidential election of 1892 the GAR leadership sensed a loss of public support and adopted a nonpartisan stance. In the key midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, all of which went for Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland, a significant number of veterans voted Democrat. In addition, by the mid-1890s the membership of the GAR itself declined, not because older veterans were dying, but because many members quit the organization. In 1895 the rolls of the GAR dropped by 56,956, and of that total only 7,368 had died.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the apparent weakening of the alliance between veterans' organizations and the Republican party, the machinery necessary to connect the two remained in place and was easily reactivated once a Bryan presidency began to seem real. Soon after Bryan's nomination, two experienced veterans' organizers, L. Edwin Dudley and Sickles, joined together to form the Veteran's National Committee. Sickles was soon busy making speeches throughout the country on behalf of McKinley, and

73. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 25; for figures on veterans' pensions see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policies in America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 109; for veterans' institutions, see Patrick J. Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

74. McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 153; *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1896.

75. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics*, 434–35, 445–46.

his remarks were reprinted in circular form and distributed throughout the nation by Dudley. Branches of the Union Veterans Patriotic League appeared all over the country. In late August Dudley wrote, "The veterans and sons of veterans are responding in the most enthusiastic manner. . . . We are appealing to the old sentiments of loyalty and patriotism and especially to the love and affection which the old veterans have for their comrade, Major McKinley."<sup>76</sup>

In appealing to this key voting bloc of veterans, McKinley once again combined the tried-and-true tactic of appealing both to the wartime memories and the pocketbooks of the North's ex-soldiers. Meeting with a delegation of veterans who came to his Canton home, McKinley noted that the total number of Union soldiers receiving Federal pensions was higher than the total number of American soldiers who had served in nation's army between 1776 and 1860, and he remarked that Union veterans were the "largest creditors of the government." But, he warned, the inflationary monetary policies of Bryan threatened to depreciate the value of pensions paid to the old soldiers.<sup>77</sup> The charge that Bryan's commitment to the free coinage of silver would result in a repudiation of the nation's debt to its creditors, including veterans, was a common theme among Republican spokesmen. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, noted that the "veterans recognize the danger arising from the conspiracy of the Populists, Popocrats, and free silver Republican bolters against the credit of the Nation."<sup>78</sup>

For rational economic reasons of their own, Union veterans proved a very attentive audience to the Republican message. For many old soldiers the pro-silver policies of the Democratic platform were deeply problematic. By 1896, 940,000 veterans and their dependents were receiving just under \$140,000,000 in pension payments annually. The Democratic platform promised to "recognize the just claim of old soldiers," but the *Chicago Tribune* argued that veterans should consider that promise "a contemptible falsehood."<sup>79</sup> Republican newspapers and politicians argued time and again that the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one would halve the purchasing power of veterans' pensions. "Great numbers of the old soldiers are wholly or partially dependent on the pension they receive for their past services," the *Chicago Tribune* reminded its readers in mid-July. If Bryan's monetary policies were enacted, the newspaper warned, "the purchasing power of all the pensions will be cut down one-half. The pensioners will get 140 million 50-cent dollars instead of 140 million 100-cent dollars." The *Tribune* warned Union veterans about the dangers they faced if Southern political leaders such as Ben Tillman gained control of the Federal purse: "The Southern fireaters [*sic*] . . . have no love for the old Union soldiers. Those fireaters would take away their pen-

76. *Ibid.*, 457. McKinley enjoyed a distinguished record of service. Newspapers friendly to the Republican party invariably referred to him as Major McKinley, the rank he had attained before leaving the army.

77. *Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 30, 1896.

78. *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1896.

79. *Ibid.*, July 9, 1896.

sions altogether were it possible. As that cannot be done, it is proposed to cheat them out of half of the money which a million old soldiers, or their wives and children, are receiving from the government. They will feel that they have punished the old Union soldiers who licked them.”<sup>80</sup> Like any aging cohort living on a fixed income, veterans viewed inflationary policies with a jaundiced eye. In 1896, then, the McKinley campaign worked to combine economic unease about Bryan’s free-silver policies with the historical memory of 1861 as a means of gaining support among the large voting bloc of ex-soldiers living in the battleground states of the Midwest.

During the campaign Bryan, who had been far too young to serve in the Union military during the 1860s, proved unwilling or unable to mount an effective appeal to veterans, either emotional or economic. Unlike their opposition, the Democratic party refused to cultivate Union veterans as an interest group. One of the rare occasions that Bryan attempted to utilize historical memory to gain the support of Northern veterans came during a campaign stop in Milwaukee in early September. Beginning in an obviously reluctant tone—“You say you want to hear a little about the old soldiers”—Bryan argued that the “question before the country now appeals to the old soldiers as much as it did in 1861. . . . I am not afraid that the men who were willing at that time to endure the dangers of war because they believed the black men should be free, I am not afraid that these men are going to allow the hosts of the gold standard to enslave 70 millions of people, whites and blacks, in this country.”<sup>81</sup> One of the interesting ironies of the 1896 campaign, then, is that it was the Democratic candidate who employed the memory of emancipation, however briefly and clumsily, to gain the veteran vote. Given, however, the Democratic party’s continued strength among white Southern voters and Bryan’s political alliance with avowed racists such as Ben Tillman, Bryan’s version of an emancipationist vision of the Civil War proved an evanescent moment. After this half-hearted attempt at winning the veteran vote by linking free silver with the freedom of the nation’s slaves, Bryan seldom attempted to assuage the concerns of Union soldiers about the impact of his monetary policies on their pension checks. In 1896, for one last time, the generation-long effort of the Republican party to create a client group out of Union veterans by linking historical memory of the Civil War with a generous package of Federal benefits paid the GOP enormous political dividends in a presidential campaign.

In early September the McKinley-Hanna organization began a focused and determined campaign to win the veteran vote in the Midwest. At the heart of this effort was the GOP’s argument that a Bryan presidency endangered the economic self-interest of the North’s old soldiers in addition to threatening to divide the nation along class lines. The active support that the GAR offered the GOP in this effort proved crucial to the McKinley campaign. The involvement of many of the Union army’s most famous surviving generals played an instrumental role in the party’s effort to construct and disseminate a Civil War memory designed to stigmatize the

80. *Ibid.*, July 18, July 9, 1896.

81. *Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 6, 1896.

Bryan campaign as a modern threat to the nation's unity. In early September 1896 the GAR held its National Encampment in St. Paul, Minnesota, a happy coincidence for McKinley because the city was the corporate headquarters of James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad. Hill fought the Bryan campaign with all his possible means, which were considerable.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to instigating Ireland's attack on Bryan, Hill played a central role in another famous episode of the 1896 presidential campaign, a tour of Union generals who barnstormed on McKinley's behalf in states throughout the Midwest. During the National Encampment Russell Alger—a former commander-in-chief of the GAR, ex-governor of Michigan, and McKinley's future secretary of war—lined up a group of Union veteran all-stars that agreed to combine forces and tour together promoting the Republican candidate. Hill immediately agreed to help. At the conclusion of the encampment an official of the Great Northern Railroad wrote Alger, "Mr. Hill told me to tell you that he will gladly haul you anywhere on his system at any time on the cause your are representing." Hill also discussed the veterans' tour with other railroads, and the official further informed Alger that the head of the Chicago Great Western Railroad had "evinced equal interest" in the proposed tour of Union veterans, "and gladly extends to you the courtesies of his line."<sup>83</sup>

"Patriotism akin to the spirit of '61 will flame in the city this evening" the *Chicago Tribune* announced to its readers on September 21. That evening the participants in what soon became known to the nation as the Patriotic Heroes' Battalion—the most prominent among them ex-Union Generals Daniel Sickles, O. O. Howard, and Russell Alger—gathered together at a giant rally at the Chicago Auditorium in preparation of their tour of the Midwest. "Every seat was taken," the *Tribune* reported on its front page the next day, "and hundreds stood in the side aisles and galleries." The famous old veterans onstage made quite a sight, the *Tribune* noting that "Howard has just as many arms as Gen. Sickles has legs." In his speech Sickles, a colorful figure who was always a crowd favorite, set the tone of their expedition when he declared, "up until the day of the Chicago [Democratic party] platform no party in this country ever dared to present for the approval of the American peoples the doctrines of anarchy, repudiation, and mob rule."<sup>84</sup> After this rousing sendoff, the old veterans began their tour throughout the Midwest. The campaign of the Patriotic Heroes' Battalion was aimed at more than just Union veterans. "The time was due," Richard Jensen in his classic study of the 1896 election wrote of their effort, "for a demonstration that the silent masses of the people did not support Bryan but stood behind sound money, law and order, and McKinley."<sup>85</sup> Aimed as much at defining the country's future as memorializing its past,

82. Pyle, *The Life of James J. Hill*, 496.

83. Letter from M. C. Helion to Russell Alger, Sept. 7, 1896, Beer Family Papers, William C. Beer Correspondence, box 56, folder 15, Sept. 1896, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.

84. *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1896.

85. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 290.



the old generals peddled a memory of the Civil War that articulated the GOP's notion of a patriotic nationalism that legitimated over the rights of property over the rights of labor.

During the last weeks of the 1896 campaign the Patriotic Heroes' Battalion, a group of veterans who quite literally embodied the historical memory of the Civil War, moved rapidly and in tight formation around the countryside demanding that midwestern voters reject the Democratic party and its presidential candidate. Although the McKinley campaign kept its role in the tour quiet—some newspapers speculated that Alger paid for it out of his own pocket—its complicated logistics were handled by William Beer, a young Republican party official. William Hahn, head of the Republican National Committee's Speakers Bureau, ordered Beer to “transact all matters of business” pertaining to the veterans’ “combination . . . in conjunction with the Committees of the states through which the party passes.” Before the tour ended in early November, the old veterans had covered an astounding 8,448 miles, speaking at 276 meetings in 255 separate locations. Howard later wrote that the campaigning began at seven in the morning and often didn't end until eleven at night.<sup>86</sup>

The cars of the Patriotic Heroes' Battalion train were decorated with American flags, two thousand yards of red, white, and blue bunting, and giant pictures of McKinley. The flat car at the end of the train was used for speeches. Giant banners on each side of the train offered the countryside the following messages:

“1896 is as vitally important to our country as 1861”  
 “We are Opposed to Anarchy and Repudiation”  
 “The State of Lincoln will Never Surrender to a Champion of Anarchy”

The tour was front-page news in the Midwest and closely followed by newspapers throughout the nation, even in Southern states. On October 10, for instance, the *Galveston Daily News* reported that the “famous soldiers' combination” had spoken to a crowd of 10,000 in Rushville, Indiana. In South Bend, Indiana, Alger denounced Bryan's political allies as “a dirty set . . . they represent the red flag.” In Indianapolis, Alger claimed that Bryan's “assault upon the integrity of nation and upon the old flag has stirred up again the patriotic fire that called you to the front in 1861.” Writing about his experience on the tour in a Boston newspaper, one of its participants, O.A. Marden wrote, “We believe that we have done something in stirring up the old veterans in a lively sense that a crisis is pending hardly second to that of 1861 to 1865.”<sup>87</sup>

86. W. M. Hahn to William C. Beer, Sept. 21, 1896, Beer Family Papers, box 56, folder 15, Sept. 1896; O. O. Howard, *Autobiography of O. O. Howard, Major General, United States Army* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1907), 569. For William Beer's involvement, see Thomas Beer, *Hanna, Crane and the Mauve Decade* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941), 66–67.

87. *Galveston Daily News*, Oct. 10, 1896; *South Bend Daily Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1896; *Indianapolis Journal*, Oct. 14, 1896; *Boston Morning Journal*, Oct. 28, 1896.

The tour of generals was a rousing success. Writing from McKinley national campaign headquarters in Chicago, Hahn informed Beer, "I feel assured that the result of the labors of these old war worn soldiers will be of the greatest benefit to our party." He continued, "I wish you would extend to them my congratulations, and on my behalf and in behalf of the National Committee thank them for their labors they have already performed."<sup>88</sup> By the end of the tour, the veterans had spoken to an estimated one million voters, and caused what one Republican weekly called "considerable consternation" among Bryan supporters. "Coin" Harvey, one of the most vocal proponents of free silver, called the veterans' campaign the "old wrecks of the rebellion who have lost all their honor and patriotism . . . [and are] the tool of political Shylocks."<sup>89</sup> Harvey's comments, predictably, backfired and served to increase the popularity of the old generals, but his frustration, as well as the frustration of Bryan supporters was understandable. A full generation after the Confederate defeat, the GOP was able, yet again, to utilize the link between Union veterans, public memory of the Civil War, and a Republican candidate to elect a president.

In the last weeks of the campaign GOP officials grew confident that McKinley would prevail in the election, yet party leaders continued to use Union veterans to rouse the public's remembrance of secession. The continued appeal by Republicans to Civil War memory is, one scholar suggests, best explained by the party's larger and more enduring objective in 1896, "to merge the Republican Party's past defense of the nation with contemporary notions of patriotism itself." "Such an approach," Lawrence Goodwyn continued, promised to fashion a "blend of the American flag and Grand Old Party that might conceivably cement a political bond of enduring civic vitality." As Cecilia O'Leary notes, by the mid-1890s the GAR was at the center of a drive to create a "nationalist consciousness" in the United States.<sup>90</sup> Among the rights and rituals of the GAR's "martial patriotism" were the organization's attempts to fly the American flag over every schoolhouse, have every schoolchild recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and its creation of a national flag day.<sup>91</sup> Hanna, who had chosen the American flag as symbol for the McKinley campaign, borrowed from the GAR and decided to have the McKinley campaign sponsor a flag day of its own on the Sunday before the election.

On October 30, 1896, the day before New York's great flag day parade, forty Union generals gathered at Carnegie Hall in Manhattan for a rally of the Union Veterans' Patriotic League. Many of the generals—Sickles and Howard most prominent among them—had campaigned as part of the Patriotic Heroes' Battalion. They gathered in Carnegie Hall to offer McKinley a final show of support. Presiding over the meeting, as he would over the following day's parade, was former Union gen-

88. W.C. Hahn to William C. Beer, Oct. 2, 1896, Beer Family Papers, box 57, folder 16.

89. Howard, *Autobiography of O. O. Howard*, 569.

90. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 528; Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), 5.

91. O'Leary, *To Die For*, 150–52. For a discussion of the GAR's creation of a national "flag day," usually on June 14, see Dearing, *Veterans in Politics*, 408.

eral Horace Porter. Offering the now familiar attack against Bryan, that the Democratic candidate “stood for revolution and anarchy,” Porter noted: “We are assembled here to greet the veterans of the war—the men who went to the front in 1861 to save the Nation’s life, and who are going to the polls in November to save the Nation’s honor.”<sup>92</sup>

The next day 750,000 New Yorkers marched on the streets of New York. The *New York Tribune* reported that “many of those who marched yesterday have known what it is to march in war under the same flag that covered the city in its folds yesterday all day long.” That same day in Des Moines, Iowa, 10,000 citizens marched in celebration of the American flag, with five hundred Union veterans afforded the honor of leading the line. A local newspaper reported, “The veterans were greeted with shouts and tears along the line; their progress was a moving triumph from first to last.”<sup>93</sup> In the election of 1896, then, the symbolic use of Civil War veterans combined with the GOP’s restructuring of Civil War memory to produce a bellicose patriotism based on the cult of the flag. For one historian the central question of American nationalism in the late-nineteenth century was to “what extent would militarism and claims of safeguarding the nation-state take priority over democratic demands for social equality.”<sup>94</sup> By election day 1896, the answer to that question was clear.

In its final appeal to veterans on the day before the election, the *Chicago Tribune* urged: “STAND TO YOUR GUNS, OLD SOLDIERS.” “Time was,” the *Tribune* reminded soldiers, “when some of you, moved by generous impulses, voted with the Democratic Party. That occasion no longer exists. . . . The call to the peaceful battle of the ballots is to meet an insidious foe . . . whose success augurs as much disaster to your country as the ravages of bloody battles could entail.” The Republican party, the *Tribune* argued, was the “natural home and rally point of the Union soldier. Never, since the rough edge of battle joined in 1861 were loyalty and honor more justly appealed to than now.” And, this editorial concluded: “Your own interest, the interest of your immediate families and friends . . . all demand at this crisis the decided triumph of the Republican party at the polls. You were true to the Republic in the past, comrades, you will be true to her now.”<sup>95</sup>

McKinley, of course, won the presidency in 1896, and the key battleground states of the Midwest fell into the Republican camp, including states such as Illinois and Indiana that Cleveland had claimed in 1892. Bryan won only four out of the forty-two electoral votes at stake in this region, and in Minnesota, home of Archbishop Ireland, McKinley won by sixty thousand votes out of 340,000 cast.<sup>96</sup> There are no exact records illustrating which candidate the Midwest’s veterans supported, but veterans’ newspaper boasted of the contribution of the North’s ex-soldiers in the

92. *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1896.

93. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896*, 292; *Des Moines Leader*, Oct. 31, 1896.

94. O’Leary, *To Die For*, 8.

95. *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 3, 1896.

96. O’Connell, *John Ireland*, 426.

election result. The National *Tribune* declared, "Never since the war were the veterans so thoroughly united . . . on one side of a political question."<sup>97</sup> There were a number of significant reasons McKinley won the watershed election of 1896: the GOP's superior financial and organizational resources, a weak and divided Democratic party, a slight recovery in the prices of agricultural goods just prior to election, and the reluctance of urban workers to gamble on the free-silver monetary policies of Bryan. Among the many factors contributing to McKinley's success, however, was the campaign of memory waged by the GOP against its Democratic opponent. By firmly linking the Republican party to the values of "stability, nationalism, business prosperity and law and order," the McKinley campaign's deployment of the memory of secession helped create the formula which, in the words of one scholar, would allow the GOP to "dominate national politics for more than thirty years."<sup>98</sup>

In the early 1890s the Democratic party seemed on the verge of gaining control of U.S. national politics. The Depression of 1893 halted this brief Democratic ascendancy, and the election of 1896 hammered the final nail in its coffin. The election of McKinley, in addition, essentially ended the Populist insurgency, a movement which one scholar has called "nothing less than the last significant American challenge to industrial capitalism as a system of social, economic and political power."<sup>99</sup> After 1896 the GOP regained its position as the "dominant voice of industrial, middle class America," and maintained effective control of national politics for a generation.<sup>100</sup> A central component of the victorious 1896 Republican presidential campaign strategy was the selective retrieval and mass distribution of, in Archbishop Ireland's words, public memory of the "secession of 1861." In 1896, a new generation of Republican political leadership offered the nation a restructured remembrance of the Civil War. In addition to continuing the process of disengaging the party as the guarantor of the political and civil rights of African Americans, this restructured memory solidified the party's commitment to the country's industrial-capitalist order, stigmatized political critiques of class and class inequality as unpatriotic, and intensified a bellicose conception of a nation-state united along sectional and class lines just at the moment the United States stood ready to enter as an aggressive player on the world stage.

97. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics*, 466.

98. For analysis of election results, see Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 145–47; Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan*, 69.

99. Walter Dean Burnham, "The System of 1896: An Analysis," in Paul Kleppner et al., eds., *The Evolution of American Electoral System* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 147–202.

100. Morton Keller, *Affairs of State*, 586.