

DBQ**THE POPULISTS**

CHAPTER 21

Directions: The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of Documents A-H *and* your knowledge of the period referred to in the position. High scores will be earned only by essays that both cite key pieces of evidence from the documents and draw on outside knowledge of the period. Some of the documents have been edited, and wording and punctuation have been modernized. Be sure to:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: Using the documents and your knowledge of the period, (a) explain the reasons for agrarian discontent and (b) evaluate the validity of the farmers' complaints.

Document A

Source: The platform of the People's (Populist) party (1892)

The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the legislatures, the Congress, and even touches the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized. . . . The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of the capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection. . . .

The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders; a vast public debt payable in legal-tender currency has been funded into gold bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.

Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor, and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once it forebodes terrible convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

Document B

Source: Acceptance speech of William McKinley, Canton, Ohio (August 26, 1896)

It is proposed by one wing of the Democratic party and its allies, the People's and Silver parties, to inaugurate action on the part of the United States at a ratio of 16 ounces of silver to 1 ounce of gold. . . .

We must not be misled by phrases, nor deluded by false theories. Free silver would not mean that silver dollars were to be freely had without cost or labor. . . . It would not make labor easier, the hours shorter, or the pay better. It would not make farming less laborious or more profitable. . . .

Debasement of the currency means destruction of values. No one suffers so much from cheap money as the farmers and laborers. They are the first to feel its bad effects and the last to recover from them. . . .

It is mere pretense to attribute the hard times to the fact that all our currency is on a gold basis. Good money never made times hard. . . .

Document C

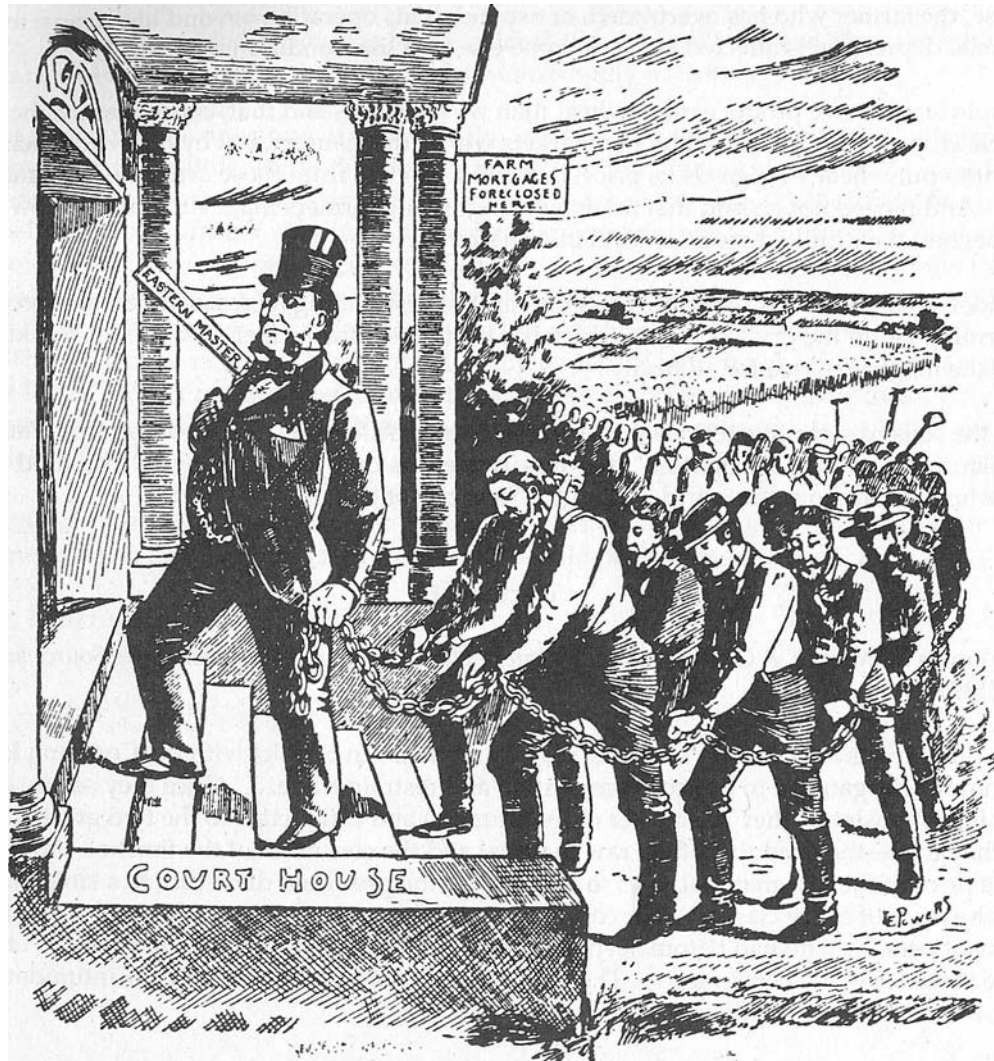
Source: United States government data (1961)

UNITED STATES POPULATION AND MONEY IN CIRCULATION, 1865-1895

	Population (in thousands)	Money in Circulation (in thousands of dollars)
1865	35,701	1,083,541
1870	39,905	774,966
1875	45,073	833,789
1880	50,262	973,382
1885	56,658	1,292,569
1890	63,056	1,429,251
1895	69,580	1,601,968

Document D

Source: *The Farmer's Voice*, a Chicago newspaper (late 1880's or early 1890's)



Designed and Engraved expressly for "The Farmer's Voice."

THE EASTERN MASTER AND HIS WESTERN SLAVES

Document E

Source: J. Laurence Laughlin, "Causes of Agricultural Unrest," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1896)

Of course, the farmer who has overtraded, or expanded his operation beyond his means, in a time of commercial depression is affected just as anyone else is in like conditions.

The simple fact that we produce more wheat than we consume, and that, consequently, the price of the whole crop is determined, not by the markets within this country, but by the world-markets, is sufficient to put wheat, as regards its price, in a different class from those articles whose markets are local. . . . And it need not be said that many wheat-growing farmers make little or no allowance for events beyond their limited range of local information. . . .

The sudden enlargement of the supply without any corresponding increase of demand produced that alarming fall in the price of wheat which has been made the farmer's excuse for thinking that silver is the magic panacea for all his ills. . . .

Feeling the coils of some mysterious power about them, the farmers, in all honesty, have attributed their misfortunes to the "constriction" in prices, caused, as they think, not by an increased production of wheat throughout the world, but by the "scarcity of gold."

Document F

Source: James B. Weaver, *A Call to Action: An Interpretation of the Great Uprising, Its Source and Causes* (1892)

It is clear that trusts are contrary to public policy and hence in conflict with the Common law. They are monopolies organized to destroy competition and restrain trade. . . . Once they secure control of a given line of business, they are master of the situation and can dictate to the two great classes with which they deal—the producer of the raw material and the consumer of the finished product. They limit the price of the raw material so as to impoverish the producer, drive him to a single market, reduce the price of every class of labor connected with the trade, throw out of employment large numbers of persons who had before been engaged in a meritorious calling and finally . . . they increase the price to the consumer. . . . The main weapons of the trust are threats, intimidation, bribery, fraud, wreck, and pillage.

Document G

Source: Testimony of George W. Parker, vice-president of the Cairo Short Line Railroad, before the Senate Cullom Committee

Mr. Parker. There is a decided distinction between local and through business. They are influenced by different considerations. Different rules and practices apply to them. . . .

About 33 1/3 percent of the operating expenses of this road is continuous, regardless of whether the road is earning much or little, and it therefore requires a certain volume of business to meet these fixed expenses. In most cases, and especially in some seasons of the year, the local business of the road of itself is not of sufficient volume to make up paying trains, nor is it sufficient to make the earnings, over and above current expenses, sufficient to meet the fixed charges against the road. So that in order to run paying trains we generally, after we have built the road to accommodate the local territory, endeavor to get a connection for through business to be super-added to the local business. Then when we make up a train of ten or fifteen cars of local freight to go over our line from Saint Louis, we can attach fifteen or twenty cars more of strictly through business. We can take the latter at a very low rate rather than go without it. We are justified in doing so, as one does no prejudice to the other. . . .

The Chairman. Suppose you were to carry the freights that you gather along the line of your road for the same rate you carry through freight . . . what would be the consequence?

Mr. Parker. Bankruptcy, inevitably and speedily. . . .

Document H

Source: Frank Norris, *The Octopus* (1901)

For a moment Dyke was confused. Then swiftly the matter became clear in his mind. The Railroad had raised the rate on hops from two cents to five.

All his calculations as to a profit on his little investment he had based on a freight rate of two cents a pound. He was under contract to deliver his crop. He could not draw back. The new rate ate up every cent of his gains. He stood there ruined.

“Why, what do you mean?” he burst out. “You promised me a rate of two cents and I went ahead with my business with that understanding. . . .”

“The rate is five cents,” declared the clerk doggedly.

“Well that ruins me,” shouted Dyke. “Do you understand? I won’t make fifty cents. Make? Why, I will owe—I’ll be—be—That ruins me, do you understand?”

The other raised a shoulder.

“We don’t force you to ship. You can do as you like. The rate is five cents.”

“Well—but—. . . . You told me—you promised me a two-cent rate.”

. . . Dyke stared in blank astonishment. . . .

“. . . Look here. What’s your basis of applying freight rates, anyhow?” he suddenly vociferated with furious sarcasm. . . .

S. Behrman emphasized each word of his reply with a tap of one forefinger on the counter before him:

“All—the traffic—will—bear.”

Referencing the Documents:

1. John Smith, in *History of Virginia*, said: “. . . .”
2. In Document A, John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony agreed with. . . .
3. In the Wage and Price Regulations in Connecticut, . . . (Document E).