3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1900

William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

A 35-minute lesson on the 1900 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Progressive Era	ELECTORAL VOTES 447 total
WINNER William McKinley (Republican) · 292 EV	RUNNER-UP William Jennings Bryan (Democratic) · 155 EV
KEY ISSUE Imperialism and the Philippine-American War; prosperity and the gold standard	TURNOUT 73.7%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (35 min)
3. Reading + key words
4. Worksheet (4 questions)
5. Answer key

1900: William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

Timing

5 min	Warm-up	When a country acquires overseas colonies for the first time, what political and moral questions does it have to answer? Why might "anti-imperialism" become a political movement?
15 min	Reading	The 1900 election was the 29th U.S. presidential election. It produced William McKinley's 292-155 electoral-vote victory over William Jennings Bryan - a rematch of the 1896 election. The 1900 result confirmed and expanded the 1896 realignment: McKinley's 292-155 EV margin (137 EV) was larger than his 1896 margin (271-176, 95 EV). The election's structural significance was the confirmation of the Republican-dominant alignment and the elevation of Theodore Roosevelt to the vice presidency - leading to his assumption of the presidency after McKinley's September 1901 assassination. The political conditions had been transformed by the 1898 Spanish-American War. The war had begun on April 25, 1898 after the February 15, 1898 explosion of the USS Maine in Havana harbor (killed 266 sailors; cause never definitively established but blamed on Spain by U.S. press). McKinley had requested a war declaration after Spain refused U.S. demands for Cuban independence. The war was short and decisively American: Commodore George Dewey destroyed the Spanish Pacific fleet at Manila Bay on May 1, 1898; the U.S. Army landed in Cuba in June 1898; the Spanish surrendered in July. The August 1898 armistice ended the fighting. The December 10, 1898 Treaty of Paris gave the U.S. the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam; Cuba became formally independent but under heavy U.S. influence (the 1901 Platt Amendment gave the U.S. continued intervention rights). The Philippines acquisition was deeply controversial. The Philippine-American War began in February 1899 when Filipino independence fighters (led by Emilio Aguinaldo) refused to accept U.S. colonization. The war would last until 1902 (and beyond in the Moro province until 1913) and would kill approximately 4,200 American soldiers and at least 200,000 Filipino civilians. The brutality of U.S. counterinsurgency tactics - including concentration camps and torture - produced an Anti-Imperialist League in the U.S. that included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, and former Republican president Benjamin Harrison. The Republican National Convention met in Philadelphia on June 19-21, 1900. The convention renominated President McKinley on the first ballot. McKinley's first vice president, Garret Hobart, had died November 21, 1899, requiring a new running

mate. Theodore Roosevelt - the 41-year-old governor of New York and famous Rough Rider Colonel from the Spanish-American War - was the convention's choice. Roosevelt had been pushed by New York Republican boss Thomas Platt, who wanted Roosevelt out of New York; Mark Hanna had famously remarked: "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?" The Republican platform endorsed the gold standard (now law via the March 1900 Gold Standard Act), the Dingley Tariff, the annexation of Hawaii and the Spanish colonies, and the construction of an isthmian canal in Central America.

The Democratic National Convention met in Kansas City on July 4-6, 1900 and renominated William Jennings Bryan by acclamation. Adlai E. Stevenson I of Illinois - Cleveland's second-term vice president - was the vice presidential candidate. The Democratic platform endorsed free silver (still), tariff reduction, an income tax, and anti-imperialism (specifically opposing the colonization of the Philippines).

The campaign's primary issue was no longer the gold/silver question - the March 1900 Gold Standard Act had effectively settled it. The primary issues were: (1) The Republican prosperity argument - "Four years more of the full dinner pail." Industrial production had recovered from the Panic of 1893; employment was high; wages were rising. The Republican coalition was united on prosperity. (2) Imperialism vs anti-imperialism. Bryan made the Philippines' fate the central moral question. He argued that U.S. colonization violated the Declaration of Independence's principle of government by consent of the governed. Republicans countered that the Philippines required American civilizing influence and that Filipino independence would produce chaos.

The 1900 campaign was less innovative than 1896. Bryan continued his whistle-stop tour but in a less revolutionary way. McKinley delegated active campaigning to Theodore Roosevelt, who toured 21,209 miles by train and gave 673 speeches in 24 states - exceeding even Bryan's 1896 mileage. Roosevelt's aggressive campaigning style, combined with McKinley's presidential dignity and Hanna's organization, produced an effective Republican operation. Republican fundraising in 1900 was approximately $2.5 million - less than 1896 but still substantial. Bryan's campaign raised approximately $350,000.

McKinley won 292 electoral votes to Bryan's 155. McKinley carried 28 states; Bryan carried 17 states. The popular vote: McKinley 7,228,864 (51.6%); Bryan 6,370,932 (45.5%); Woolley 209,004 (Prohibition, 1.5%); Debs 87,945 (Social Democratic, 0.6%); Barker 50,989 (Populist, 0.4%). McKinley-Bryan popular-vote margin: 861,495 - larger than 1896's 601,316. McKinley's 292-155 EV margin was larger than his 1896 271-176 margin. The 1900 result demonstrated structural Republican strength.

McKinley was inaugurated to a second term on March 4, 1901. Just six months later, on September 6, 1901, McKinley was shot at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo,

New York by anarchist Leon Czolgosz. Czolgosz had approached the President in a public receiving line with a gun hidden behind a handkerchief; he fired twice at point-blank range. One bullet struck McKinley in the abdomen. McKinley lingered for eight days - initially appearing to recover but ultimately dying from gangrene on September 14, 1901. Czolgosz was tried, convicted, and executed October 29, 1901.

Theodore Roosevelt was vacationing in the Adirondack Mountains when he received word of McKinley's shooting. He was hiking on Mount Marcy when news of McKinley's death reached him. Roosevelt rushed by horse-drawn carriage and train to Buffalo and took the oath of office on September 14, 1901 at the home of Ansley Wilcox. Roosevelt was 42 years old - the youngest U.S. president in history. Mark Hanna's reported reaction to Roosevelt's succession: "Now look! That damned cowboy is President of the United States!"

Roosevelt's presidency (1901-09) would transform American politics. He pursued the "Square Deal" agenda: trust-busting (Northern Securities 1902, Standard Oil 1906); federal regulation (Hepburn Act 1906, Pure Food and Drug Act 1906, Meat Inspection Act 1906); conservation (150 million acres of national forests, the U.S. Forest Service 1905, 5 national parks); foreign policy (Panama Canal 1903, Roosevelt Corollary 1904, Russo-Japanese War mediation 1905). Roosevelt would be elected to his own term in 1904 and decline to run again in 1908 (passing the Republican nomination to William Howard Taft). The 1900 election's structural significance was largely retrospective: it produced the Roosevelt succession that transformed American politics.

10 min	**Worksheet**	Four questions: one matches key words, three are short answers.
5 min	**Closure**	One sentence: what surprised you about this election?

The 1900 Election

The 1900 election was the 29th U.S. presidential election. It produced William McKinley's 292-155 electoral-vote victory over William Jennings Bryan - a rematch of the 1896 election. The 1900 result confirmed and expanded the 1896 realignment: McKinley's 292-155 EV margin (137 EV) was larger than his 1896 margin (271-176, 95 EV). The election's structural significance was the confirmation of the Republican-dominant alignment and the elevation of Theodore Roosevelt to the vice presidency - leading to his assumption of the presidency after McKinley's September 1901 assassination.

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Key words

Theodore Roosevelt	McKinley's 1900 running mate and the 26th U.S. president (1901-09). Former NY state legislator, Civil Service Commissioner, NYC police commissioner, Assistant Secretary of Navy, Rough Rider colonel in Cuba 1898, NY governor 1899-1900. Became president at age 42 after McKinley's assassination - youngest U.S. president in history.
Full dinner pail	McKinley's 1900 campaign slogan: "Four years more of the full dinner pail." A dinner pail was the lunch container industrial workers carried to work. The slogan meant economic prosperity.
Spanish-American War	The April-August 1898 war between the U.S. and Spain. Caused by USS Maine explosion February 1898. U.S. won decisively in 10 weeks. Treaty of Paris (December 1898) gave U.S. the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.
Philippine-American War	The February 1899-1902 war between U.S. forces and Filipino independence fighters led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Killed approximately 4,200 American soldiers and at least 200,000 Filipino civilians. Produced the Anti-Imperialist League in the U.S.
Anti-Imperialist League	The 1898-1920 American organization opposing U.S. colonization of the Philippines and other overseas territories. Members included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, and former Republican president Benjamin Harrison.

Leon Czolgosz The anarchist who assassinated President McKinley on September 6, 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Czolgosz hid a gun behind a handkerchief and shot McKinley twice. McKinley died September 14, 1901. Czolgosz was tried, convicted, and executed October 29, 1901.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did William McKinley win in 1900?

( ) A. 271
( ) B. 276
( ) C. 292
( ) D. 305

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How old was Theodore Roosevelt when he became president on September 14, 1901?

( ) A. 38
( ) B. 42
( ) C. 47
( ) D. 53

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did the Spanish-American War of 1898 transform U.S. politics?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Mark Hanna say "now look! That damned cowboy is President of the United States!" after McKinley's death?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

292. McKinley 292; Bryan 155. McKinley's 137-EV margin was larger than his 1896 margin of 95.

McKinley's 1900 victory confirmed and expanded the 1896 realignment.

QUESTION 2

42. Roosevelt was 42 years old at his September 14, 1901 oath - the youngest U.S. president in history. (John F. Kennedy was 43 when elected in 1960; Roosevelt remains the youngest president by succession, not election.)

AP students should know Roosevelt's age at succession.

QUESTION 3

The Spanish-American War transformed U.S. politics in four ways: (1) It made the U.S. a global colonial power. The U.S. acquired the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam (December 1898 Treaty of Paris) plus Hawaii (July 1898 annexation). For the first time, the U.S. held overseas territories with non-white populations. (2) It produced the Anti-Imperialist League and a structural debate about whether the U.S. was becoming an "empire" - a debate that would influence American foreign policy for decades. (3) It elevated Theodore Roosevelt as a national figure. Roosevelt had organized the Rough Riders volunteer cavalry; his charge up Kettle Hill at the Battle of San Juan Hill in July 1898 made him a war hero. The Rough Rider fame produced his New York governorship in 1898 and his 1900 vice presidential nomination. (4) It established the precedent for U.S. military intervention abroad - a precedent that would shape 20th-century American foreign policy. The 1898 war marked the structural inflection point of U.S. emergence as a global power.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.

QUESTION 4

Mark Hanna's remark "now look! That damned cowboy is President of the United States!" reflected three specific concerns about Roosevelt's succession: (1) Hanna had warned Republicans during the 1900 convention: "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?" The selection of Roosevelt as VP had been politically motivated (Thomas Platt wanted Roosevelt out of New York governance) rather than strategically thoughtful. (2) Hanna and the conservative Republican establishment were concerned that Roosevelt - a Progressive reformer with anti-trust and anti-corruption views - would disrupt the established Republican economic-policy framework that Hanna had built around financial-industrial capital. (3) Roosevelt's personality was unpredictable: he was 42 years old, energetic, willing to challenge entrenched interests, and outside the normal Republican establishment. The "damned cowboy" reference was to Roosevelt's 1880s ranching years in the Dakota Territory. Hanna's fears proved largely correct: Roosevelt's Square Deal would disrupt the Hanna-era Republican consensus and inaugurate the Progressive Era of federal regulation.

AP students should be able to articulate Hanna's structural concerns.