# 1900

## *William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan*

A 50-minute lesson on the 1900 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

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

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (50 min)
3. Background: key terms + source
4. Worksheet (6 questions)
5. Answer key

# 1900: William McKinley vs William Jennings Bryan

## Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.6-8 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.6-8 (causation). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 (central ideas in primary sources).

## Timing

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5 min** | **Warm-up** | List two structural conditions in 1900 America that would make foreign policy a major presidential election issue for the first time. For each, identify the specific 1898-1900 development most responsible. |
| **15 min** | **Reading + vocab** | 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.<br><br>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). 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 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).<br><br>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 (some estimates as high as 1 million Filipino deaths including from disease and famine). The brutality of U.S. counterinsurgency tactics - including concentration camps and torture (the "water cure") - produced an Anti-Imperialist League in the U.S. that included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, William James, 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 (1899-1900) 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 governance (Roosevelt was a reformer who had been challenging Republican corruption). Mark Hanna had famously remarked at the convention: "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 - though the issue had been politically resolved by the Gold Standard Act), 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 primary issues were: (1) The Republican prosperity argument - "Four years more of the full dinner pail" (or its variant "the full lunch bucket"). 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 structural problem for Bryan: anti-imperialism was philosophically appealing but did not connect with ordinary voter concerns about prosperity, jobs, and wages.

The 1900 campaign was less innovative than 1896. Bryan continued his whistle-stop tour but in a less revolutionary way (he was no longer the surprise dark-horse candidate). 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% - first Eugene V. Debs presidential candidacy); 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 (137 EV) was larger than his 1896 271-176 margin (95 EV). The 1900 result demonstrated structural Republican strength.

McKinley was inaugurated to a second term on March 4, 1901. He delivered his second inaugural address emphasizing prosperity, expansion, and constitutional governance. Six months later, on September 6, 1901, McKinley was shot at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. The Pan-American Exposition was a six-month world's fair celebrating the achievements of the Western Hemisphere; McKinley had delivered a major foreign-policy speech on September 5. On September 6, McKinley was holding a public reception in the Temple of Music; anarchist Leon Czolgosz approached the President in the receiving line with a gun hidden behind a handkerchief. Czolgosz fired twice at point-blank range. One bullet was deflected by McKinley's breastbone; the other lodged in his abdomen. McKinley initially appeared to recover - newspapers reported him improving for several days. But gangrene developed around the abdominal wound; McKinley died on September 14, 1901. Czolgosz was tried, convicted (in just over a week), and executed by electric chair on 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 on September 12-13 (initially summoned to Buffalo, then released when McKinley appeared to recover; then re-summoned when McKinley's condition worsened). Roosevelt rushed by horse-drawn buckboard 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 (born October 27, 1858; sworn in September 14, 1901) - 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 case 1906 leading to 1911 breakup); federal regulation (Hepburn Act 1906 expanding ICC railroad regulation, Pure Food and Drug Act 1906, Meat Inspection Act 1906); conservation (150 million acres of national forests, the U.S. Forest Service 1905, 5 new national parks); foreign policy (Panama Canal acquired 1903, Roosevelt Corollary 1904, Russo-Japanese War mediation 1905 - first U.S. Nobel Peace Prize). Roosevelt would be elected to his own term in 1904 and decline to run again in 1908. The 1900 election's structural significance was largely retrospective: it produced the Roosevelt succession that transformed American politics.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **10 min** | **Primary source** | Read aloud once. Annotate individually. Quick pair-share on the source-analysis question. |
| **10 min** | **Discussion** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Small groups (3–4). Pick one prompt; report back two sentences. |
| **10 min** | **Worksheet** | Six questions: 2 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer, 1 map-read. |

# Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

## Key terms

### Theodore Roosevelt

McKinley's 1900 running mate and the 26th U.S. president (1901-09). Rough Rider colonel in Cuba 1898, NY governor 1899-1900. Became president at age 42 after McKinley's September 1901 assassination - youngest U.S. president in history.

### Spanish-American War

The April-August 1898 war between the U.S. and Spain. Caused by USS Maine explosion February 1898. Treaty of Paris (December 1898) gave U.S. the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

### Anti-Imperialist League

The 1898-1920 American organization opposing U.S. colonization. Members included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, William James, former Republican president Benjamin Harrison.

### Square Deal

Theodore Roosevelt's 1901-09 progressive policy agenda. Three pillars: 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).

### 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.

### Philippine-American War

The February 1899-1902 war between U.S. forces and Filipino independence fighters led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Killed ~4,200 American soldiers and at least 200,000 Filipino civilians.

### Leon Czolgosz

The anarchist who assassinated President McKinley on September 6, 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. McKinley died September 14, 1901. Czolgosz executed October 29, 1901.

## Second Inaugural Address

**WILLIAM MCKINLEY, MARCH 4, 1901**

*McKinley took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 1901 - his second term following the 1900 rematch victory over Bryan. The address was relatively brief (about 2,000 words). It defended the Spanish-American War acquisitions and the federal government's constitutional authority to administer overseas territories. The "consent of the governed" passage directly addressed Bryan's anti-imperialist critique - McKinley argued that consent did not require independence and that the Philippines required American administration. Six months later, McKinley would be assassinated; this address was his final political testament.*

> *"No one can think that even now our work in respect to these new territories is finished. Some people lecturing on the lessons of the Spanish War, have entirely missed its meaning. There is the very real lesson of national obligation, and of the necessities of national strength. We are not advised which way our duty leads. The path of duty is plain. We must adopt for them our highest standards of government. We must instruct, develop, protect. We must continue our progress in extension of the principles of free government, of self-government, of representative government, of constitutional government, until they shall stand on a higher and broader plane than ever before. Our country shall be even greater than our fathers dreamed of."*

**McKinley, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1901). Public domain.**

# The 1900 Election

Read the background page, then answer the six questions below.

**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?

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

**QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER**
Why did Mark Hanna call Roosevelt "this madman" and warn against his vice presidential nomination?

**QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER**
How did the Philippine-American War affect the 1900 U.S. election?

**QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER**

McKinley says in his 1901 inaugural that "we must instruct, develop, protect" the Spanish-acquired territories. What political philosophy does this articulate?

**QUESTION 6 · MAP-READ**

On the 1900 election map, identify McKinley's 28 states and Bryan's 17 states. How did the 1900 map compare to 1896?

# Answer key

## QUESTION 1

292. McKinley 292; Bryan 155.

McKinley's 137-EV margin was larger than his 1896 margin of 95.

## QUESTION 2

42. Roosevelt was 42 years old at his September 14, 1901 oath - the youngest U.S. president in history.

AP students should know Roosevelt's age.

## QUESTION 3

Mark Hanna called Roosevelt "this madman" because of three specific concerns: (1) Roosevelt's reform record threatened the established Republican economic-policy framework Hanna had built around financial-industrial capital. Roosevelt had pursued anti-trust and anti-corruption measures as New York governor; he had attacked Republican machine politics; he had supported federal regulation of corporations. (2) Roosevelt's personality was unpredictable. He was 41 years old, energetic, willing to challenge entrenched interests, and outside the normal Republican establishment. (3) The vice presidency had been historically associated with succession - 7 of the prior 24 U.S. presidents had succeeded from the vice presidency. Hanna correctly assessed that Roosevelt as VP would mean Roosevelt as potential President. Hanna's warning at the convention: "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the White House?" The warning was prescient. Roosevelt succeeded after McKinley's September 6, 1901 assassination and would transform the Republican Party away from Hanna's industrial-financial orthodoxy toward Progressive reform.

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

## QUESTION 4

The Philippine-American War affected the 1900 election in three ways: (1) It produced the Anti-Imperialist League as an organized political force - Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, William James, and former Republican president Benjamin Harrison all joined. (2) It gave Bryan a moral framework for opposing McKinley - Bryan argued the war violated the Declaration of Independence's principle of government by consent of the governed. (3) It produced atrocity reports - the "water cure" torture, concentration camps, civilian massacres - that mobilized urban Northern educated voters against Republican policy. But the war did NOT produce significant electoral movement compared to 1896. Three specific reasons: (a) The war was successful from a U.S. perspective - the U.S. had won quickly and decisively. (b) Anti-imperialism was philosophically appealing but did not connect with ordinary voter concerns about prosperity, jobs, and wages. (c) Bryan's anti-imperialist position was inconsistent with his free-silver position - it appealed to urban educated voters who had supported gold. Anti-imperialism mobilized intellectuals but did not realign the 1896 coalition.

AP students should be able to articulate both the impact and the limitation.

## QUESTION 5

McKinley's "we must instruct, develop, protect" articulates the philosophy of American imperial civilizing-mission. Core elements: (1) The U.S. has a duty (a "path of duty") to administer the Spanish-acquired territories rather than grant them immediate independence. (2) The duty involves "instruction" - teaching the territories self-government - and "development" - economic and infrastructure modernization. (3) The eventual goal is "extension of the principles of free government, of self-government, of representative government, of constitutional government" - but the U.S. must direct this process rather than allow it to develop independently. (4) The U.S. mission elevates American national identity: "Our country shall be even greater than our fathers dreamed of." The philosophy was a version of the late 19th-century imperial civilizing-mission ideology shared by European powers (Britain, France, Germany). It treated non-Western populations as not yet ready for self-government and assigned Western powers the responsibility of administration. The philosophy would be challenged by Filipino independence fighters and U.S. anti-imperialists; it would gradually erode through the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act (Philippine independence by 1946) and decolonization globally after World War II.

AP students should be able to articulate the imperial civilizing-mission ideology.

## QUESTION 6

McKinley states: 28 states - the entire Northeast (Maine to Maryland); the Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota); plus California, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Utah, and several others (gained from 1896 - Wyoming, Utah, Washington went Republican). Bryan states: 17 states - the Solid South (11 former Confederate states); 3 Border States (Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri); plus Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada (lost from 1896 - Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Washington moved to Republican). Compared to 1896: McKinley expanded from 23 to 28 states (gained 5 states); Bryan contracted from 22 to 17 states. The 1900 map demonstrated structural Republican consolidation: states that had been competitive in 1896 (the Mountain West) had now moved into the Republican coalition. The 1896 realignment had hardened into a stable Republican-dominant alignment.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural consolidation.