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US History Weekly 13 – Due 1/24/2020

**Historical Context – The Populist Party**

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| As the United States evolved into an industrial powerhouse in the decades following the Civil War, the growing strength of the railroads and the banks, coupled with the impact of mechanization on agricultural practices, challenged the financial stability of American farmers in ways never before experienced. Inventions such as the McCormick Reaper and steel plows made the work of farmers more efficient but had the side effect of putting many smaller farmers out of business.  Other farmers struggled to make the payments on the expensively priced equipment or struggled to pay the high prices charged by the powerful railroad trusts (monopolies) to ferry their product to the larger markets. As a result, they were forced to borrow money to pay for these costs from banks that charged them unfair rates and often kept them in a cycle of debt and poverty.  Throughout the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, farmers organized collectively, at first locally, and eventually nationally into the Grange Movement and Farmers Alliance, an organization that promoted economic cooperation and broad economic reform to protect the interests of farmers. Both of these movements helped to create the People’s Party, or the Populist Party, which officially established its party platform in Omaha, Nebraska, on July 4, 1892. |

[From: Gilder Lehrman](https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/populism-and-agrarian-discontent/resources/rise-populists-and-william-jennings-bryan)

**Analysis Question:**

1. How did industrialization impact farmers during the Gilded Age?

Respond to the multiple-choice question below

1. Why did the Populist Party develop during the second half of the 1800s?
   1. Farmers struggled to make money due to high railroad rates
   2. Workers didn’t want to join labor unions
   3. Industrialists like Carnegie and Rockefeller supported farmers’ rights
   4. Farmers were succeeding in making profits on their crops

**Document 1 Populist Party Platform:** The Populist Party held their first convention in 1892. Below are excerpts of the platform they chose to adopt as a political party.

**Excerpt #1: Introduction (preamble) to Platform**

(note - words that are ***bolded and in italics*** are defined below the reading)

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| The conditions which surround us best justify our co-operation; 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 touches even the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the States have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places to prevent universal intimidation and bribery. 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***capitalists***. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection, imported ***pauperized*** labor beats down their wages.... The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up ***colossal*** fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same ***prolific*** womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes — beggars and millionaires. |
| *Vocabulary:*   Muzzled: silenced  Prostrated:  overpowered  Impoverished: to be forced into a state of poverty  Capitalists: wealthy person who uses money to invest in trade and industry for profit  Pauperized: to be made into a poor person  Colossal: large, gigantic, many in quantity  Prolific: plentiful |

***Close Reading****:* The preamble provides historical context for the formation of the Populist Party, from the perspective of the Populist Party.  How does the preamble describe the state of America in 1892:

1. Which aspects of the government are corrupt according to the preamble?
2. According to the preamble, what has happened to the freedom of the press?
3. According to the preamble, who owns most of the land in the United States?
4. What has happened to the urban workmen [laborers], according to the preamble?

**Excerpt #2 Populist Party Platform**

(note - words that are ***bolded and in italics*** are defined below the reading)

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| We declare, therefore: *First.—*That the union of the labor forces of the United States this day ... shall be permanent and ***perpetual***  FINANCE.—We demand a national ***currency***, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only   * We demand a ***graduated***income tax. * We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people   TRANSPORTATION—Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people. The telegraph, telephone, like the post-office system, being a necessity for the transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people, not in the interests of capitalists.  LAND.—The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for ***speculative*** purposes, and alien [immigrant] ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens [immigrants] should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only. |
| *Vocabulary:*  Perpetual: everlasting  Currency: system of money  Graduated: changes by a scale (in this case, a graduated income tax would mean you paid more as you earned more, paid less if you earned less)  Speculative: involving high risk of loss |

1. ***Analysis:***Do you think the Populists are supporters of capitalists (also known as captains of industry and/or robber barons) or do they think the government should have a strong hand in the economy and share the wealth? Cite at least two examples from the platform to support your claim.

***Analysis****:* The Populist Party platform called for a graduated income tax - meaning that the more you earned, the more you paid, and the less you earned, the less you paid.  The robber barons and industrialists were against this policy proposal.

1. Why do you think the Populists supported this idea?
2. Why do you think the robber barons opposed this idea?

Respond to the multiple-choice question below

1. During this time period, support for a graduated income tax was based primarily on the
   1. Desire of corporations to reduce their taxes
   2. Need to raise money from the lower classes
   3. Belief that all people should be taxed the same amount
   4. Resentment over the unequal distribution of wealth
2. ***Contextualization:*** Imagine reading this platform in 1890. What is the platform trying to convince the reader of concerning the moral and economic state of America? What does the platform want the government to do in terms of regulating the economy?