

Expository Essay

Every election has a lot to do with the political and economical situation of the country during and long before the election itself. Every event that happened before was to become a make-way. The elections of 1896 were not an exception from this general historical rule. The Republican presidential candidate, William McKinley won a sweeping victory in the Electoral College, with 271 electoral votes to Bryan's 176. William McKinley received the nomination on the first ballot at the Republican convention in St. Louis, in June of 1896. In the campaign Bryan was depicted as a "radical and socialist", while McKinley was called a "tool of business". But if we look through the history since 1865 all the way to the elections of 1896 it is easy to identify certain regularities, which lead to the victory of the Republicans.

These were the premises formed by a mix of different reactions to the massive depression, a mix of racial attitudes, the Civil War issues, and other motivations. The 1896 election brightly showed the political split of the country due to the facts listed above. It showed a sharp differentiation between voters in the economic "metropole"-the Northeast and industrial areas and those in the "periphery"-the South and West. The American society has gone through a lot of changes by 1896 since 1856 and that really caused a lot of arguments, which concentrated around the elections. The Civil War made a deep print in the memories of the American citizens and though racial prejudice was reduced due to the bravery of the black soldiers for some time it was soon renewed. In the 1890s the situation in America was approaching the peak of the race relations between whites and blacks. The number of lynching in 1892 was 230 people, and continued. Southern states invented new measures to disfranchise black voters. In addition to that the country has gone through a hard depression by that time and it had a great influence on the population. During the economic depressions of the 1870s and 1890s the currency question raised a lot. Americans of different incomes experienced the depression in very different ways. A quarter of the nation's railroads went bankrupt. In some cities, unemployment among industrial workers exceeded 20 or even 25 percent. The rate of suicide was very high and ran almost daily in many newspapers. It was a part of the massive worldwide economic crisis. People were shocked.

Conclusion: The depression was still severe in 1896, making economic conditions a critical point of the political situation. President Grover Cleveland could not deal with the depression which American citizens were so aware of. The American society needed changes; a strong hand of a wise politician was required. During the first two years of McKinley's presidency the nation returned to prosperity. The 1896 election, as historians say was a "realigning election". The results of the 1896 elections reveal that the American society needed to stop making "make ends meet", but had a necessity in progress of all the vital national political, industrial and social fields.