
The Factors Having Led To The Political Paralysis In The Late Nineteenth Century

In the late nineteenth century national politics became dangerously paralyzed, as the evenly divided Democrats and Republicans fought to win power. Improved organization, rigid party loyalty, and broad ideological similarities left neither side in command. Distinctions did exist, however, between the two major parties. Democrats, centered in the South and Republicans, strongest in northern cities. Cultural differences also divided the parties. Democrats tended to belong to "ritualistic" religious sect. For example, Catholicism, Judaism, and more formal brands of Protestantism that did not focus on dictating the conduct of others. Republicans were often "pietistic" Protestants who favored a politics of morality, social control, and energetic government.

How did the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party attempt to resolve the problems faced by farmers?

Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party attempt to resolve the problems by response farmers organized, first in local chapters or "granges" of the Patrons of Husbandry, then in the more economically oriented Farmers' Alliance. In the 1870s, Grangers succeeded in enacting state "Granger laws" regulating shippers and processors, and pressed Congress to create a federal Interstate Commerce Commission (1887). Southern and northern Alliances developed farmer cooperatives and by 1890 were winning local and state elections with their candidates. In 1892 the Alliances convened a national convention of farmers, laborers, and other reformers and nominated candidates for the presidency and vice presidency.

How did the 1896 election resolve the politics of stalemate of the late nineteenth century?

The approaching presidential election of 1896 brought about a decisive political realignment. The Republicans nominated Senator William McKinley of Ohio and staunchly supported gold as the nation's monetary standard. The Democrats split over this issue, with its northern wing in favor of gold and its southern and western wings in favor of adding silver as a basis for coining money.

In 1896 the Republicans became the dominant party, finally breaking the politics of paralysis with a powerful coalition. Centered in northern industrial cities and the far West, they would dominate national politics for most of the next three-and-a-half decades. Once in power, the Republican party became a powerful governing instrument. Well-organized, with modern

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techniques of publicity and management, and relying on an executive with a national agenda, they oversaw economic recovery. At the dawn of the new century, deep divisions of race and class still split the nation, but confidence reigned as McKinley guided the country toward a promising future of prosperity at home and empire abroad.

What social, economic, and cultural factors drew the United States into a race for empire?

After the Civil War, some Americans still considered the idea of annexing either Canada or Mexico—or both. William Henry Seward envisioned growing American links to the Far East strengthened by a canal to be built across Central America, a transcontinental railroad, and island possessions acquired to support an expanded American navy. Supporters of some form of American empire also argued for the economic benefits of such a policy, proclaiming the need for new markets for American products. Still others promoted imperialism as a Christian responsibility to "civilize" the peoples of less developed nations.

Why did imperialists launch their quest for empire, and why did the anti-imperialists oppose them?

The form imperialism would take soon became clear. Unrest in Cuba, played out against the background of severe depression in the United States from 1893 to 1897, led to war with Spain. A series of incidents, peaking with the sinking of the battleship Maine, stirred a war fever President McKinley could not resist. The war had two arenas: the naval war in the Philippines, and a combined naval-military struggle in Cuba. The war opened with Admiral Dewey's smashing victory over the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. After more than three months of fighting, the United States vanquished Spain, liberated Cuba, and took possession of the Philippines, an island nation that proved more troublesome to administer than to conquer. This victory whetted American interest in Asia, leading to an effort to establish an "open door" of free trade in China.

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