

Unit Overview

This unit is part of Gilder Lehrman’s series of Common Core State Standards–aligned teaching resources. These units were written to enable students to understand, summarize, and analyze original texts of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze any primary or secondary source material.

Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

Compare and contrast the two major parties in Louisiana between Reconstruction and 1900.

They will be able to analyze primary sources to understand the views of both parties.

Number of class periods: 1

Grade Level

Please list appropriate grade levels 11-12

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Historical Context

After the Civil War two political parties in Louisiana would eventually emerge to dominate the political landscape and try overthrow or build upon the work done by the Republican Party during Reconstruction. Men like J. Alphonse Prud’homme and other plantation owners of Natchitoches Parish belonged to a Democratic party that was labeled as being reactionary; opposed to progressive social or political change and yearning for the political and economic stability they were used to before the Civil War. Another term for these men was the “Bourbons.” According to William Ivy Hair in his work entitled *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics 1977-1900* the term represented men who... “Unblushingly embraced the sort of Negrophobia which elsewhere was usually attributed to

ignorant poor whites. The Bourbon mentality was most prevalent in parish's where cotton ranked as the major crop and blacks outnumbered, or almost outnumbered the white population." (24).

The population of the 1870's differed dramatically from the census taken in 1860. Yes, slavery was abolished during that time. However the white population increased 16% to 7, 312; former enslaved individuals and people who were considered "free colored" on the 1860 census only increased just over 5 % totaling 10, 929 individuals. Were these newly arrived white citizens all carpetbaggers from the North who would have been political rivals of the Bourbons or could they have been transplants from other Southern states devastated by the Civil War?

By the 1890's a new political movement would take shape in the rural areas of Louisiana. Although the "Populist" movement would falter at that time, it would also lead to a later generation calling for progressive change and ultimately men like Huey and Earl Long would be its biggest advocates. This struggle for power was not inclusive to rural Louisiana; throughout the agrarian South poor whites and blacks, tried to free themselves from repressive laws of the former slave owners, the Bourbon aristocrats.

LESSON 1

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Define the Democratic platform of the 1870's.

Define the term "Populism."

Give examples of the "Populist" platform.

Materials

Newspaper articles:

Natchitoches People's Vindicator (November 4, 1876 and June 7, 1879)

Natchitoches Louisiana Populist (December 7, 1894 and May 1, 1896)

Louisiana Populist, November 23, 1894 (cartoon)

Procedure

Class will break into two groups.

Each group will discuss either the Populist platform or the Democratic platform.

Each group will make a list of the key points for each political party and what they stood for using the primary sources (newspaper articles and cartoon).

Students will use the vocabulary worksheet in Appendix A (see below) to provide meaning for words or terms. All of these terms are in the newspaper articles. They can use a dictionary for help.

After 20 minutes of researching articles each group will share their finding with the rest of the class; key points of their discussions will be put onto board for all students to see.

This document

http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf will help students formulate their thoughts when working with primary source material. Each group will fill one of these out. Have the group elect a secretary to take notes.

Assessment

This will be a class discussion.

1. How do the two parties, Democratic and Populist, differ?
2. Are there any similarities between these two political ideologies and today's political parties?

See Appendix B (see below) to help answer this question

3. From what background your students have, did these two parties fail or succeed?

Democratic Platform

The Bourbon aristocrats could count on *the Natchitoches People's Vindicator* to side with them in controlling the local agricultural interests; this paper was willing to take up their cause as its own; it was very pro-Democratic paper.

The Natchitoches Peoples Vindicator, November 4, 1876

THE PLATFORM.

The Democratic Conservative party of the parish of Natchitoches, in Convention assembled, pronounce the following to be the issues in this campaign, to the fulfillment of which we pledge our people if called to power.

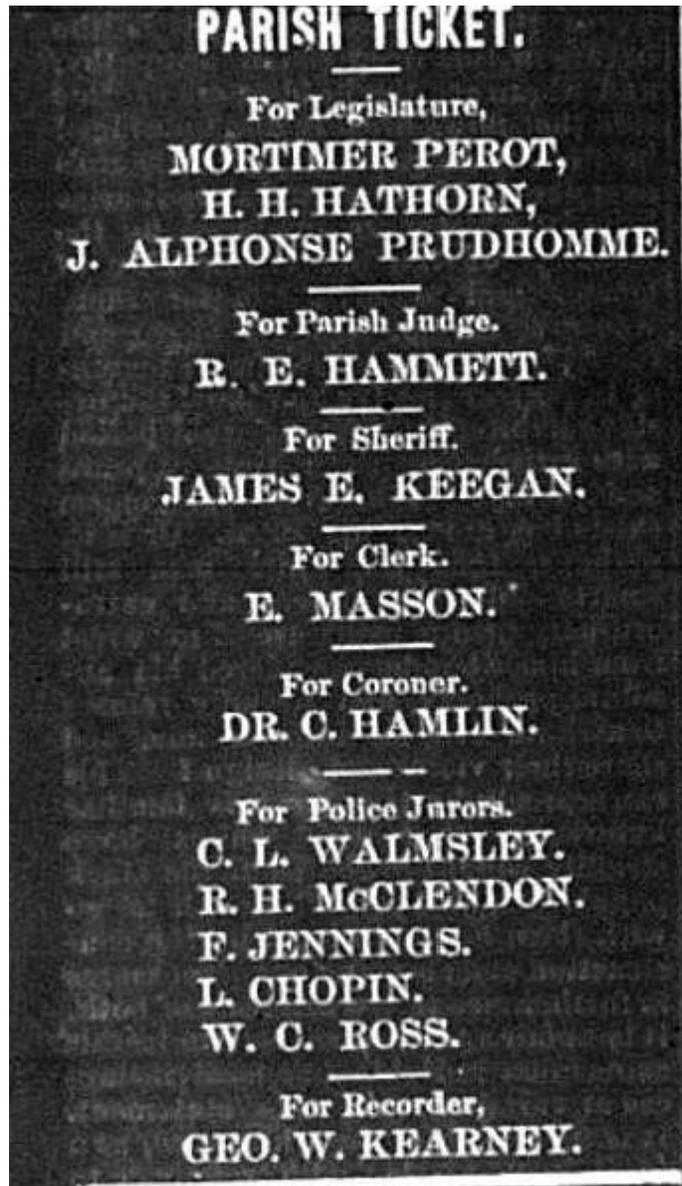
- 1st. The election to, and qualification in office, of capable, competent and honest citizens, thoroughly identified with the material interests of our parish.
- 2d. A reduction of the expenses of the parish to less than one-half of its present parish taxes; and to that end we demand the reduction of fees and salaries of officers to the standard of a fair remuneration.
- 3d. A maintenance and fostering of a rigorous PUBLIC SCHOOL system for the benefit and education of all the children of the parish, both white and black.
- 4th. The full recognition of the rights of all men, without regard to race, color or previous condition, before the law.
- 5th. The enactment and enforcement of a wise code of laws, to protect all laboring men in their rights, and at the same time to protect and encourage the capital invested in our parish.
- 6th. We pledge ourselves that not one dollar of taxes shall be levied to pay past obligations of our parish, for the reason that the law requires that provision to pay, and appropriation for expenses, shall go hand in hand.

The *Natchitoches Peoples Vindicator*, November 4, 1876, editorial written for local Black voters.

What is the main objective of this editorial?

You cannot complain this time that no light has been shown you and that you have been left to grope your way in dark ignorance; on the contrary, you have heard the issues of the day fully discussed, and now if you persist in pursuing your former course it will be plain that you are enemies to the white people and your acts will be so construed by them, and they will be compelled to conduct themselves toward you hereafter in the light of avowed enemies and declared foes to good and honest government. You will not show the sagacity of the simple plant growing in the dark, if you are found on the 7th (next Tuesday) still wedded to your false gods, for the plant will turn and reach its tendrils towards the feeblest ray of light and struggle on to get a foothold in the glorious sun light, given forth from God's eternal laboratory, there to bask and bathe its leaflets in springtime delight; but you heretofore have turned from the light and willfully buried yourselves in disgraceful darkness, cursing those who have extended you the helping hand.

The *Natchitoches Peoples Vindicator* November 4, 1876. Note that on the Parish ticket for legislature is J. Alphonse Prud'homme, the owner of Oakland Plantation which is now part of Cane River Creole National Historical Park. J.A Prud'homme lost his bid for the legislature, but he remained active in the state and local Democratic Party and served on the staff of three Louisiana Governors.



The Peoples Party or Populist Platform, *Natchitoches Louisiana Populist*, 12.7.1894.

People's Party Platform.

1. We demand a national currency, safe, sound and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debt public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations; a just, equitable and efficient means of distribution, direct to the people, at a tax not exceeding 2 per cent, be provided, as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or some better system also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

a. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.

b. We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.

c. We demand a graduated income tax.

d. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenue shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

e. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

2. Transportation being a means of exchange and public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people.

a. The telegraph and telephone, like the post office system, being a necessity for the transportation of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

3. The land, including all the national resources of wealth, is the heritage of all the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien 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, should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

Louisiana Populist, November 23, 1894. What do you think this political cartoon is saying?

Use this link below for a better understanding of political cartoons.

http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet.pdf



Appendix A:

Vocabulary Worksheet.

Define the following terms: Use the Web for help.

1. Free Silver-

2. Bourbon Aristocrats-

3. Progressive or Populist-

4. Monopolized or Monopoly-

5. Carpetbaggers-

Appendix B

Comparing Political Party Platforms: Then and Now

Issues	Democratic Conservative Platform 1870-1900	Populist Party Platform 1870-1900	Republican Platform Today	Democratic Platform Today
Who should hold office?				
Taxes?				
Education?				
Civil Rights?				
Who does the law protect?				
Government Debt/deficit?				
Monetary policy/banking?				
Public Transportation?				

Public Utilities/
Communications

Public Land Use

Questions:

1. Comparing the two parties' platforms from 1876 and 1896 elections, does one party platform seem to have a more local focus than the other? Why or why not?
2. Why would an election in Natchitoches Parish, LA in 1876 concentrate on who should hold office, who is protected by the law and civil rights? What major change had occurred to the country just before that election?
3. Why does the Populist Party's platform in 1896 concentrate on issues of money? What was going on in the country at that time that would concern people about currency and public lands/transportation/communications?
4. Which issues are still on the current Republican or Democratic parties' platforms?

Comparing Political Party Platforms: Then and Now Teachers Key

Issues	Democratic Conservative Platform 1876	Populist (People's)Party Platform 1896	Republican Platform Today	Democratic Platform Today
Who should hold office?	Citizens who hold "interest" in the parish. AKA large land owners			
Taxes?	Reduce taxes and salaries of office holders	-No more than 2% -Graduated income tax		
Education?	Free public schools for whites and blacks			
Civil Rights?	Equal treatment under the law			
Who does the law protect?	Both "laboring" and "capital investing" men			
Government Debt/deficit?	No new taxes for gov't debts incurred in the past (Civil War/Confederacy)	Most of currency should be in circulation and gov't only collect enough to pay expenses		
Monetary policy/banking?		-National Currency with silver and gold coinage at valuation ratio of 16 (silver) to 1 (gold) -Postal (gov't run) savings banks		
Public Transportation?		Gov't should own and operate railroads for the public good		
Public Utilities/ Communications		Telegraph & telephone should		

Public Land Use

be owned and
operated by gov't
Gov't should own
most of unsettled
land and limit
ownership and
access of public
lands and
resources to
private railroads
and industry

Questions:

1. Comparing the two parties' platforms from 1876 and 1896 elections, does one party platform seem to have a more local focus than the other? Why or why not?
[Democratic 1876 is a more local focus; issues are concerning who holds power in the parish. Populist 1896 is more national focus, issues are how money is created, held and distributed nationally over concerns about corporate monopolies.]
2. Why would an election in Natchitoches Parish, LA in 1876 concentrate on who should hold office, who is protected by the law and civil rights? What major change had occurred to the country just before that election? *[Recent emancipation of slaves following Civil War meant that former slave-owners and large land owners wanted to return power to them.]*
3. Why does the Populist Party's platform in 1896 concentrate on issues of money? What was going on in the country at that time that would concern people about currency and public lands/transportation/communications? *[Large corporations and railroads were creating a large gap between rich and poor. Populist (People's) Party wanted to limit the power of large railroads, corporations, and banks by coining more silver currency and making gov't run savings banks.]*
4. Which issues are still on the current Republican or Democratic parties' platforms? *[any number of issues relating to civil rights, taxes, government debt, election and/or voting rights, education, etc. could be discussed in current political platforms.]*