Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ HW#1 – Farmers in Protest

Due: Wed. 2/6/13

Use the chart below to help you take notes as you read the summaries that follow. Think

about how the goals and accomplishments of the Populist Party affect our lives today.

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| --- | --- |
| GOALS OF THE POPULIST PARTY | OUTCOME |
| The government should own the railroads and telegraph lines | no |
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**The Farmers Organize**

Farmers were successful in producing crops in the West. Unfortunately, the demand was not there for all the crops grown. The price a farmer could get for his produce dropped significantly. The farmer still had to pay high prices for his equipment, the seed, and transportation of his harvest to market. There were three groups the farmers blamed for their problems. The railroad companies charged the farmers more than the manufacturing company to ship their goods. The Eastern manufacturers kept their prices high for their products. The bankers charged high interest rates on borrowed money. Farmers could lose their land if they had a poor crop one year and could not repay the loan.

In order to solve these problems, the farmers organized. The first farmers’ organization was known as the ***National Grange.*** It was a network of local self-help organizations that provided the farmers with education, social support, and encouragement. They promoted financial independence. “Cash-only” ***cooperatives***

were created where farmers bought products from one another. The cooperatives were able to keep lower prices than other stores. It was also a local place where the farmers could sell some of their crops. The “cash-only” policy was a way to eliminate the pressure of repaying loans. The cooperatives failed because farmers had little cash until they sold their next crop. Loans were necessary in the life of farmers. The National Grange faded by the late 1870s. New organizations would follow.

In the 1880s farming organizations developed in the West and South. They were called the Farmers’ Alliances. There was a successful Southern Alliance, a Colored Farmers’ National Alliance for African American farmers, and an Alliance group in the Plains. The Alliances supported education and cooperative buying. They developed a plan with the federal government to assist the farmers. The government would offer

loans to farmers. The crops would be stored in warehouses. The loans would be repaid when the crops in storage were sold. This plan eased the burdens put on the farmer from the banks, railroads, and manufacturers. The Alliances could have been more powerful, but the three groups would not work together as one force.

**A Party of the People**

The leaders of the Alliance wanted to create a new political party. It would be a party that supported the common people, called the ***Populist Party.*** The goals of the Party were made to help the farmers and the general public.

1. The Party believed that the government should own the railroads and telegraph lines.

2. The Populists wanted to change the form of money in the country. The country was using gold as

currency. The Populists supported ***free silver.*** Free silver was the unlimited production of silver coins. More silver money in circulation gave farmers more money to repay loans.

3. The Populists wanted to limit the term of the president and the vice president to one term in office.

4. They wanted to directly elect senators.

5. The Populists introduced the idea of using secret ballots for voting.

6. They wanted shorter hours for workers.

7. The Party also called for the formation of an income tax on a national level.

The Populist Party nominated James B. Weaver for president in 1892. Grover

Cleveland, a Democrat, won the election. The Populists later won many state and local

elections, however. In the following election, the Populist Party had strong candidates,

but little money and organization.

The Populist Party struggled to join the Northern and Southern regions of the country together. African American Populists were a growing group. Many Southerners would not be a part of the same political party. The South also created laws that limited the voting rights for African Americans. Many African Americans

would have voted for the Populist candidate, but they were not allowed to vote. The Populists continued to push for free silver. The banks and businesses claimed that free silver would ruin the economy. Silver-mining companies and people with debt joined the fight for free silver under the Democratic Party.

The Democrats did not nominate Grover Cleveland again. He was against free silver. Instead they chose William Jennings Bryan. Bryan strongly supported free silver and other Populist goals that helped the farmer. The Populists backed the Democratic choice for president. The Republicans selected William McKinley for their candidate. He was against free silver. By the time of the election, the economic tone of the country had

turned. The goals for financial help no longer seemed so necessary. McKinley won the election. Although the Populist Party had lost another election, many of its goals eventually passed through Congress. Gold was no longer the base of money. An eight-hour workday and the national income tax became laws. The secret ballot was introduced. Senators were elected directly by the voters, not through representatives. These Populist goals are still in effect today.

**Questions**

**1.** How did the federal government help the farmers?

**2.** What did the Populist Party hope to accomplish with free silver?