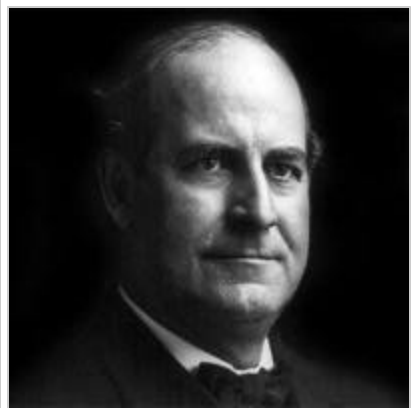


William Jennings Bryan, (March 19, 1860–July 26, 1925) born in Salem, Illinois, was a gifted orator and three-time United States presidential candidate. Bryan was trained as a lawyer at Northwestern University. He practiced law in Lincoln, Nebraska, and represented Nebraska in Congress. Bryan, a Populist, held fast to his Midwestern values throughout his life; his deeply-held religious beliefs and his consistent defense of the ordinary American earned him the moniker "the Great Commoner". He was an outspoken advocate of Christianity, pacifism, women's suffrage, and prohibition, but is probably best known for his outspoken criticism of evolution which culminated in the Butler Act and the Scopes trial.



William Jennings Bryan, 1907

Rise to fame

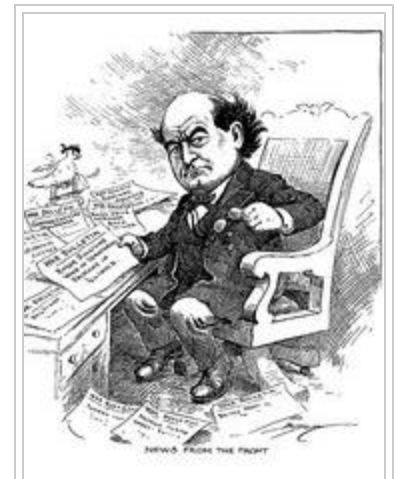
After serving just two terms in the United States House of Representatives, Bryan reached the pinnacle of his political career. In the presidential election of 1896, Bryan defeated incumbent president Grover Cleveland to win the Democratic party nomination for president. Just thirty-six, Bryan managed to attract the support of mainstream Democrats as well as disaffected third party Populists and Free Silverites. His moving "Cross of Gold" speech, delivered prior to his nomination, lambasted Eastern monied classes for supporting the gold standard at the expense of the average worker. Bryan's stance, directly opposing conservative Grover Cleveland, united splintered Democrats and won the handsome "Boy Orator of the Platte" the nomination.

Bryan logged more than 18,000 miles while visiting 27 states in the campaign of 1896. The unpopularity of the incumbent party combined with the Republican candidate's well-filled war chest, catapulted William McKinley into the White House, by a margin of 271 to 176 in the electoral college. Still, Bryan's following was large enough to result in two additional runs for president. Bryan ran again and lost to McKinley and William Howard Taft in the 1900 and 1908 elections.

Secretary of State and the Scopes Trial

Although Bryan never won an election after 1892, he continued to wield considerable influence. After helping Woodrow Wilson secure the Democratic nomination in 1912, he served as secretary of state. A committed pacifist, Bryan resigned on June 9, 1915 over a disagreement regarding his nation's handling of the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* and the push toward World War I. He was still physically active, even attempting to join the army when the U.S. entered World War I in 1917.

Although he moved to a large home in Florida, Bryan never retired. Always pious, during the final years of his life he was extremely active in religious organizations and devoted himself to the defense of fundamentalist Christianity. By the 1920s, Bryan was among America's most outspoken critics of the theory of evolution. Echoing his earlier support of Prohibition, Bryan actively supported a constitutional amendment banning public schools from teaching evolution. His participation in the famous 1925 Scopes Trial served as a capstone to his career. Bryan was exhausted by the trial, especially his examination at the hands of Clarence Darrow who, in an unusual move, called Bryan to the stand. Although Bryan prevailed at the trial, he died on July 26, 1925, just five days after its conclusion (he was diabetic and insulin had only recently been discovered).



This cartoon depicts Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan reading news from war fronts, 1914