

Populism, Paranoia, and the Politics of Free Silver

by

Samuel DeCanio
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Yale University
87 Prospect St.
New Haven, CT 06520
samuel.decanio@yale.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper defends the Populists against charges that they espoused an irrationally conspiratorial view of American history. Focusing on monetary policy, and the free silver issue in particular, the paper argues that the Populists correctly suspected bankers conspired to demonetize silver by demonstrating that William Ralston, Cashier of the Bank of California, secretly bribed Treasury Department bureaucrats and used Western Congressmen to pass the Coinage Act of 1873. Ralston's involvement in silver's demonetization has important ramifications for our understanding of the free silver movement. For some of the Congressmen who helped Ralston demonetize silver paradoxically went on to lead the free silver movement, blaming Eastern financiers for the measure they helped pass, and created organizations such as the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party, organizations that popularized the ideas subsequently adopted by the Populists and William Jennings Bryan. As some leaders of the free silver movement were deeply involved in silver's demonetization, this period exhibited levels of duplicity that have remained unrecognized.

Thanks to John Bullock, Greg Caldeira, Daniel Carpenter, Seth Center, Stephen DeCanio, Mark Fenster, Jeffrey Friedman, Jonathan Ladd, Morgan Marietta, Hans Noel, Corwin D. Smidt, and David Stebenne for helpful comments and suggestions. A previous version of this paper was presented at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Throughout American history, certain elections have been viewed as pivotal moments in American politics.¹ By mobilizing new electoral groups, shifting voters' partisan affiliations, and altering party ideologies, certain elections have caused American politics to develop in new and unique ways.² Frequently the election of 1896 is believed to have been a turning point in American politics. By harnessing popular outrage toward bankers and demanding the free coinage of silver, William Jennings Bryan drew on a long history of American conflict over financial issues.³

Indeed, conflicts over banks and financial markets have been an enduring topic in American politics. During the second party system, the status of paper currency, wildcat banks, and the recharter of the Second Bank of the United States consumed elections and dominated public debate.⁴ Bryan's demands for free silver were not especially radical, nor were they the only contentious economic issue during this period. Yet while demands for greenback inflation and railroad regulation emerged during the 1870's and 1880's, no economic issue consumed a presidential election in the way that free silver dominated the election of 1896. Demanding free silver to aid the disadvantaged and criticizing bankers' influence over politics, Bryan drew on symbols and arguments that resonated with many Americans.

Aside from the specific issues Bryan raised, the election of 1896 deeply influenced the ideology of the Democratic Party.⁵ Prior to the Civil War the Democratic Party had endorsed states rights and nonintervention, positions rooted in their fear of centralized authority and concerns that a powerful federal government could be used to undermine slavery.⁶ While antebellum Democrats resisted enlarging federal authority, when Bryan demanded regulation of financial markets and the free coinage of silver he began to move the Democrats toward a liberal conception of the state's responsibility in regulating the economy.⁷

While Bryan retained antebellum Democrats' hostility toward banks and concentrated economic power, he used the silver issue to reverse their associations with federal regulation. By undermining the

Democrats' antistatism with demands for federal action to aid the disadvantaged, Bryan has been described as the "rightful father" of the Progressive ideology of the Democratic Party.⁸ As Michael Kazin has argued, Bryan and the issues associated with the election of 1896 set the Democrats on a course that led away from their laissez-faire past and toward the liberalism of the new Freedom, the New Deal, and the Great Society. To demand that the government control the money supply . . . was not quite a blueprint for a regulatory state. But the platform [of 1896] officially declared that Democrats were in favor of beginning to redistribute wealth and power in America. In rhetoric at least, the party has never gone back.⁹

While these demands would be elaborated during the New Deal, progressives such as Benjamin Parke De Witt believed the free silver issue "had begun" the Democrats' shift toward their contemporary ideological positions.¹⁰ For once the Democrats began calling for federal regulation of the money supply, it seemed logical that these powers be extended to other issues as well.¹¹

However, the ideological transition Bryan initiated had effects extending beyond debates over the scope of state authority. For the Democrats' opposition to federal regulatory authority had to be jettisoned before the American state could assume an active regulatory posture and executive bureaucracies could mobilize popular support for their programs and agendas.¹² Yet once this change occurred, it decisively influenced American state formation. For once the public was accustomed to demanding regulation of the economy, the expansion of state authority appears to have been a "near-automatic response" to industrialization; for with every new market discovered and exploited, corporations were seen to be "fit subjects for regulation."¹³ Bryan and the Democrats' demands for free silver, previously relegated to minor third parties, thus had lasting effects on the American polity as well as on the ideology of the Democratic Party.¹⁴

If 1896 was the turning point in this transition, and if the silver issue was the most important issue of the election, it is critical to understand how free silver arose as a political issue. Two events in

particular require explanation: the demonetization of the silver dollar in the Coinage Act of 1873, and the subsequent development of the free silver movement in the 1870's and 1880's.

While typically associated with Bryan and 1896, Bryan added little that was original to arguments for free silver. Bryan adopted ideas originally popularized by organizations such as the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party, third parties that were created prior to 1896. These organizations had been created to demand the free coinage of silver, and they denounced the Coinage Act of 1873, legislation that demonetized the silver dollar, as the "Crime of '73": a criminal conspiracy to impoverish workers and destabilize the American economy. The free silver movements' claim that Eastern and European bankers had secretly removed silver from the money supply set the terms of political debate throughout the 1890's. While subsequent scholars dismissed the idea that any conspiracy was responsible for silver's demonetization, Bryan adopted these organizations' ideas in their entirety, demanding the free coinage of silver and denouncing the Coinage Act as a sinister plot.

Recognizing his debt to his free-silver predecessors, Bryan's retrospective of 1896, *The First Battle*, noted the importance of silver advocates such as A. J. Warner (D-OH), John P. Jones (R-NV), and William Stewart (R-NV) for popularizing free silver prior to 1896. Bryan suggested that Jones' speeches were the most "complete and comprehensive" defense of free silver ever offered, and specifically commended Stewart, noting he had attended

every National conference where the subject was under consideration, and has devoted all his energies to the restoration of the bimetallic standard. I had frequent occasion to visit the United States Senate during the prolonged struggle which ended in the unconditional repeal of the Sherman law, and I shall never forget the earnestness with which he pleaded against the passage of that act. Not only has he availed himself of every opportunity offered by his official position, but he has been constant in his work outside of the Senate, having for more than a year past been connected with the *Silver Knight* and *National Watchman*, a paper published at Washington and devoted to the restoration of the money of the Constitution.¹⁵

As executive director of both the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party,

Stewart played a critical role in printing and distributing *Coin's Financial School*, a book that was so

widely read that Bryan claimed that nothing else “in recent times has produced so great an effect” in exposing the public to the critical economic issues of the day.¹⁶ Indeed, Bryan credited the American Bimetallic League for printing a pamphlet that was the “first thing” he read regarding the silver issue.¹⁷

By popularizing the ideas that Bryan would adopt in 1896, these organizations played a critical role in the Democratic Party’s transition to a contemporary conception of liberalism.¹⁸ When Bryan made free silver the centerpiece of the election of 1896, and when he redirected the Democratic Party away from their resistance to federal regulation, he did so by adopting ideas initially espoused by organizations such as the American Bimetallic Party and the American Bimetallic Party.¹⁹

To understand the ideological transformation the election of 1896 had upon the Democratic Party, it is critical to understand why silver was demonetized, and why politicians such as William Stewart created the organizations that demanded the free coinage of silver. For silver’s demonetization by the Coinage Act of 1873 provided the basis for subsequent conflict over free silver, and organizations such as the American Bimetallic Party and the American Bimetallic League popularized the ideas Bryan adopted which altered the ideology of the Democratic Party.

There are three explanations for the passage of the Coinage Act of 1873. The first, offered by various free silver organizations and the Populists denounced the Coinage Act of 1873 as the “Crime of ’73,” and claimed Eastern and European bankers bribed government officials to remove silver from the money supply. According to this account, the resulting currency contraction destabilized the economy and harmed debtors and agrarians. Popularized by the American Bimetallic League, the American Bimetallic Party, the Populists, and William Jennings Bryan, this narrative featured dramatic intrigue and shadowy financiers manipulating politics for their selfish ends.²⁰

While many 19th century Americans endorsed the these claims, the organizations that espoused them, and the Populists in particular, have been criticized for holding an inaccurate and conspiratorial

view of American history and their grievances are often seen as the irrational ramblings of Americans seeking scapegoats for problems created by industrialization. Studies by Richard Hofstadter, Irwin Unger, Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz suggest impersonal economic forces, and not scheming creditors, were responsible for silver's demonetization.²¹ Finding no evidence that bankers conspired to demonetize silver, these studies conclude that the Populists' "conspiracy theory was, of course, groundless."²² By emphasizing the conspiratorial claims of many free silver advocates, the stark and paranoid tendencies of American politics allegedly frustrated rational political debate.

Another set of studies offers a third explanation, suggesting there was a conspiracy to demonetize silver, yet maintain the Populists' rendition of events is wildly inaccurate. Instead of attributing the Coinage Act to scheming creditors, Paul O'Leary, Allen Weinstein and Walter Nugent argue that congressmen and Treasury Department bureaucrats quietly demonetized silver because they realized collapsing silver prices would threaten the gold standard by making silver attractive to monetary inflationists.²³ Although admitting that there was a conspiracy to demonetize silver these studies argue this conspiracy involved public officials such as Senator John Sherman (R-OH), Treasury Secretary George Boutwell, and Director of the Mint Henry Linderman, and not Eastern or European bankers.²⁴

Although offering different accounts of the groups responsible for silver's demonetization, there is a widespread consensus that the Populists erred in attributing silver's demonetization to economic elites. Thus, the Populists' denunciation of the "Crime of '73" is often seen as an embarrassing chapter of American history best forgotten if it did not foreshadow McCarthyism and other episodes of political hysteria.²⁵ With no evidence linking bankers to silver's demonetization, Richard Hofstadter famously argued the Populists embodied the "paranoid style" of American politics, leaving many concluding: "there was no 'Crime of '73.'"²⁶

While they have been denigrated and dismissed, the Populists' tale of bribery and intrigue is far more accurate than anyone has realized. While they have been criticized for embodying the "paranoid style" of American politics, the Populists were right: there really was a "Crime of '73," a scheme involving bankers and the bribery of public officials that was executed in such secrecy that those responsible for silver's demonetization have never been revealed.

Existing studies argue that Henry Linderman, Director of the Mint, demonetized the silver dollar when he wrote key sections of the Coinage Act of 1873 with Comptroller of the Currency John Jay Knox. By attributing the Coinage Act to these officials, and Linderman in particular, many have concluded the Coinage Act was drafted independently of financiers. The critical oversight shared by existing studies is that Linderman was not acting independently of bankers when he drafted the Coinage Act. Linderman was actually working at the behest of William Ralston, Cashier of the Bank of California, who was involved in various schemes to protect his control of Nevada's Comstock silver mines.

Ralston's method for influencing Linderman was straightforward; Linderman accepted thousands of dollars from Ralston in exchange for influencing the coinage statutes in ways that were advantageous to the Bank of California. Hardly based on circumstantial evidence, Ralston's bribery of Linderman is bluntly recorded in his correspondence, and one of the original checks Ralston used to pay Linderman was retained in Ralston's papers. Just as the Populists' claimed, and contrary to many subsequent studies, bankers and bribery were deeply involved in the Coinage Act's passage.

While indicating that some of the Populists' suspicions were more accurate than many have assumed, Ralston's involvement in the Coinage Act intensifies the mystery surrounding the silver issue. For it is unclear why Eastern and not Western financiers were blamed for silver's demonetization. This error becomes explicable once we recognize that Linderman was not the only official operating at

Ralston's behest. In addition to Treasury Department bureaucrats such as Linderman, Ralston used Western representatives such as William Stewart (R-NV), Eugene Casserly (R-CA) and Aaron Sargent (R-CA) to protect the Coinage Act from harmful amendments and to keep him informed of Linderman's actions.

These Western representatives' involvement in Ralston's scheme appears to explain why inaccurate claims regarding Eastern and European financiers were subsequently popularized. Although the Coinage Act had received little attention or press coverage, in 1876 America slipped into a recession that many newspapers attributed to silver's demonetization. Furthermore, many newspapers also began claiming the Coinage Act had been implemented at the behest of Eastern and European financiers desperate to protect the value of their gold-bearing bonds. Despite mistakenly attributing the Coinage Act to Eastern and European financiers, these editorials caused an explosion of popular outrage in Western states with large silver interests such as Nevada and California. Suddenly, Ralston's congressional allies found themselves facing constituents outraged by a bill that, unbeknownst to anyone, they had helped pass.

Recognizing that their political careers would be ruined if their involvement in the Coinage Act were revealed, Ralston's congressional allies embarked upon a stunning, but entirely comprehensible, course of action. Although they had secretly helped pass the Coinage Act and kept Ralston informed of Linderman's actions, some of Ralston's legislative allies began *echoing* newspapers blaming Eastern and European financiers for the "crime" that *they* had actually committed. By reinforcing popular misconceptions initially created by the inaccurate newspaper editorials, Ralston's congressional allies blamed Eastern and European financiers for silver's demonetization, and went on to take leading roles in the free silver movement by helping create organizations such as the American Bimetallic League. By

creating organizations that popularized deeply misleading accounts of what had occurred, Ralston's allies managed to elude responsibility for what they had done.

One of Ralston's allies, Nevada Senator William Stewart, would become one of the single most prominent leaders of the free silver movement, editing newspapers such as the *Silver Knight* and the *Silver Knight-Watchman*, and co-founding both the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party, organizations that distributed free silver literature such as *Coin's Financial School* and helped popularize the ideas subsequently adopted by the Populists and William Jennings Bryan.

Although the free silver issue dominated political debate, received extensive press coverage, and captivated the popular imagination, no one realized that the politicians leading the free silver movement were deeply implicated in the measure they were denouncing. Voters either accepted the fictitious interpretation Ralston's allies helped popularize, or they adopted the Republicans' inaccurate claims that nothing duplicitous had occurred. Given the inaccuracy of these explanations, the reality of what had transpired was obscured by an avalanche of denunciation, myth, and political maneuvering that remains poorly understood to this day.

By revealing the actual history of silver's demonetization this paper helps offer a more accurate description of monetary policy during this period. However, revealing the forces responsible for silver's demonetization may also alter our understanding of the ideological shift that culminated in Bryan's candidacy. For if the election of 1896 marked the beginning of the Democrats shift toward contemporary liberalism, and if the silver issue was the preeminent issue in this election, the Democrats' ideological transformation may have been more contingent upon political calculations and pressures than has been recognized.

Furthermore, the manipulation and incomprehension surrounding the silver issue raises a range of questions regarding populism and popular control of democratic politics. While Ralston's

involvement in silver's demonetization indicates that 19th century voters correctly suspected bankers were secretly influencing the coinage statutes, Ralston's legislative coalition managed to popularize an account of events that convinced the public of a largely fictitious depiction of events that insulated them from electoral retribution. This indicates that political elites may be able to disseminate causal narratives that stimulate widespread political engagement, but contain inaccuracies that frustrate popular comprehension and control of democratic politics.

Political elites' manipulation of public opinion raises some of the darker questions that Hofstadter and others asked about public susceptibility to misinformation. Yet reinvestigating these questions may also help us view populism, not as a paranoid psychological tendency, but as a comprehensible reaction to the inescapable complexity of modern politics, and our inevitable reliance upon opinion leaders and other mediators of political information.

The Crime of 1873

Since the founding, finance policy and conflicts over banking regulation have been central topics of American politics. While debates over monetary policy dominated the second party system, slavery and secession had displaced financial issues as the critical issues of political debate. Following the Civil War, monetary policy reentered public debate in 1867 after Ohio Democrat George Pendleton tried to win the presidential nomination of 1868 on an inflationary greenback platform designed to minimize the Democrats' associations with secession and the "bloody shirt."²⁷

Although the Democrats lost the election of 1868, their inflationary demands became popular among certain agrarian and urban constituencies.²⁸ Recognizing the gold standard had become unpopular the Republicans quickly passed the Public Credit Act of 1869, legislation requiring that the public debt be paid in either gold or silver, ensuring that financial issues were removed from political debate.²⁹

However, in the early 1870's massive silver discoveries in California and Nevada coincided with several European countries' decision to demonetize their silver currency. As Henry Linderman, Director of the Philadelphia Mint, noted, these developments in conjunction with technological advances in mining and transportation indicated that silver production "will be carried on . . . to an extent hitherto unknown."³⁰ As surging domestic silver production coincided with several European countries' decision to demonetize their silver currency, Linderman recognized that silver prices were about to collapse, a development that threatened to inject monetary policy back into public debate.

In addition to Linderman, both Senator John Sherman and New Yorker Samuel Ruggles had been alerted to Europe's impending demonetization of silver while attending the Paris monetary convention of 1867.³¹ Ruggles reported that the convention's "object, among others, is to agree, if possible, on a common unit of money for the use of the civilized world," and claimed the conference participants had agreed to "adopting as . . . [a monetary] unit the . . . French five franc piece of gold."³²

Although largely unrecognized at the time, if America remained on a bimetallic standard, the injection of large amounts of demonetized European silver into silver markets could influence the public credit and the value of domestic silver mines. Thus bankers who controlled the Comstock silver mines were monitoring silver markets and assessing how political decisions could influence their financial operations. In 1869 Congressmen, Treasury bureaucrats, and members of the Senate Coinage Committee were invited by California capitalists James G. Flood and William Sharon to tour Nevada's Comstock silver mines. While traveling to Nevada, these government officials were entertained by William C. Ralston, Cashier of the Bank of California, who controlled the Comstock silver mines.³³

Known for his keen business sense, lavish parties, and affable manners, Ralston impressed the delegation with the necessity of revising the coinage statutes. Upon returning to Washington, one member of the Senate Coinage Committee, Samuel Hooper (R-MA), assured Ralston: "I do not forget

the many kind attentions received from you and your friends, which contributed so much, not only to the pleasure of myself and the other members of the [coinage] committee, but to our information of matters in California.”³⁴

Ralston was worried that if America remained on a bimetallic standard after Europe demonetized large amounts of silver currency, European silver would be shipped to America to be exchanged for gold. As Linderman would warn Ralston, if this occurred the Bank of California would face serious losses because “the countries maintaining the double standard will be overrun with silver bullion” making “a serious decline in price in unavoidable.”³⁵ As the Bank of California and the Comstock Lode were “almost totally interdependent” during this period, if America remained on a bimetallic standard after Europe demonetized silver, Ralston could face serious losses.³⁶ Believing the importation of large amounts of European silver would be “harmful both to the United States and to the Bank of California,” Ralston began working to demonetize silver.³⁷

While demonetizing silver would insulate America from a flood of European silver, demonetization would eliminate the domestic silver currency market. The second stage of Ralston’s plan was designed to create a new market for the Comstock’s silver. Ralston sought to create a commercial coin, the Trade Dollar, which was intended for exportation to Asian currency markets to protect the profitability of the Comstock and the solvency of the Bank of California despite deteriorating silver prices.³⁸ As California’s proximity to China minimized transportation costs for exporting Trade Dollars, Ralston would enjoy a virtual monopoly over their production.

Finally, Ralston sought to eliminate the coinage charge the Treasury department placed upon converting bullion into coin. Aside from minimizing the cost of producing the Trade Dollar, eliminating the coinage charge was critical because the Bank of California functioned as an intermediary for refining bullion that the San Francisco Mint converted into coin that San Francisco businesses used to pay import

duties. Ralston hoped demonetizing silver, creating the Trade Dollar, and eliminating the coinage charge would protect the Bank of California from deteriorating silver prices.

To ensure the implementation of this plan, Ralston cultivated contacts with Treasury Department bureaucrats and legislators who would control the revision of the coinage statutes. Perhaps most critical was Ralston's relationship with Henry Linderman, Director of the Philadelphia Mint, and subsequently Director of the Mint in the Treasury Department, whose "matchless knowledge" of monetary theory and bullion price trends gave him unparalleled influence over coinage legislation.³⁹ Indeed, Linderman would write the key sections of the Coinage Act of 1873 that demonetized silver.

Ralston also maintained contacts with John Jay Knox, Deputy Comptroller of the Currency in the Treasury Department, who, along with Linderman, would write the initial draft of the Coinage Act of 1873. Knox had offered Ralston financial advice as early as 1869, assuring Ralston that if his advice were followed he would "not only increase your reputation as an able financier but also put money [in] your purse."⁴⁰ Between Linderman and Knox, Ralston enjoyed access to key Treasury department bureaucrats.

Additionally, the Bank of California's importance for California and Nevada ensured numerous Western representatives were attentive to Ralston's concerns as well. Perhaps most important was Nevada Senator William M. Stewart, who had been among the "most eminent and affluent of the Comstock lawyers" and had been involved with Ralston ever since the 1860's.⁴¹ Stewart frequently advised Ralston on legislation influencing the Bank of California and recommended representatives he believed deserved Ralston's support.⁴²

There is some evidence that Ralston's relationship with Stewart extended into questionable business practices. For example, upon his election to the Senate in 1869, Stewart sold his Virginia City mansion to Charles DeLong, his law partner and a "one time California miner who knew Billy

[Ralston].”⁴³ Once in the Senate, Stewart helped secure DeLong an appointment as minister to Japan, and DeLong promptly vacated the residence, selling the house to William Ralston’s brother, Andrew, who “paid DeLong \$10,000 for the once Stewart property.”⁴⁴ Other Western representatives, such as Aaron Sargent, Samuel Axtell, and Eugene Casserly, would assist Ralston with the Coinage Act as well.⁴⁵

The first revision of the coinage statutes was initiated as a consequence of the Public Credit Act in 1869.⁴⁶ Seeking information relevant for the Treasury’s funding operations, Secretary of the Treasury George Boutwell dispatched Linderman to Western mints to collect information relevant for revising the coinage statutes. After they were introduced it was apparent that Linderman and Ralston “liked each other at once.”⁴⁷ As Linderman “came under the influence of . . . Ralston . . . [and] the so-called ‘Bank Crowd’” he began to secure Treasury policies advantageous to the Bank of California.⁴⁸ In addition to using Ralston to obtain information about bullion markets, Linderman would collect thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for his services.⁴⁹

Finding Linderman’s report “intelligent” and conducted in a “business-like manner,” Boutwell thanked him for furnishing his “views upon other kindred topics which are valuable to the Department.”⁵⁰ Using information from Linderman’s report, Knox began to draft legislation to revise the coinage statutes and “eliminate the double standard and make silver subsidiary to gold in the monetary system.”⁵¹

However, Ralston’s access to Linderman and Knox granted him the ability to manipulate the revisions to the coinage statutes. Thus as he drafted the measure, Knox solicited the opinions of “gentlemen as are known to be intelligent upon metallurgical and coinage subjects” and incorporated their suggestions into the bill.⁵² As Knox had written Ralston that his position in the Treasury department ensured he could “very likely be of service here,” it was little surprise that Linderman and

Louis Garnett, manager of Ralston's San Francisco Assaying Works, "were among those . . . consulted."⁵³

Knox noted that prior to the revision the currency statutes could "be so construed as to authorize both a gold dollar unit, and a silver dollar unit, one differing from the other in intrinsic value."⁵⁴ However, after consulting with Linderman, the bill demonetized silver, ensuring "the present gold dollar piece . . . is made the dollar unit . . . and the silver dollar piece is discontinued."⁵⁵ Given the threat European demonetization posed to his financial interests, Ralston explicitly "opposed the inclusion of a silver dollar in the list of coins" authorized by the Coinage Act.⁵⁶ Although appearing to merely rationalize coinage regulations, Ralston was helping "agents of the Treasury Department draw up . . . the bill that was necessary for effecting . . . changes" designed to aid the Bank of California.⁵⁷

Aside from demonetizing silver, Linderman also complained of the coinage charge's inequitable sectional effects, noting that "on comparison, and especially at San Francisco, that the expense of coinage are much greater than abroad, and hence our metallic product commands a higher price in foreign countries than can be realized by its coinage at home."⁵⁸ Claiming that the coinage charge encouraged the exportation of American bullion, Linderman recommended that the coinage charge "should be abrogated altogether," and called for a "return to our uniform practice prior to 1853, which was to coin [bullion] without charge, not only as an expedient for encouraging coinage, but as being more consistent with the theory of money as a universal standard of value."⁵⁹

In addition to removing the coinage charge and demonetizing silver, Knox also recommended creating a 420-grain Trade Dollar that Ralston hoped would replace the Mexican silver dollar widely used in China but which was not a legal tender for domestic transactions.⁶⁰ Using Garnett's suggestions, Knox's draft of the Coinage Act concluded that "if however such a coin is authorized it should be issued

only as a *commercial dollar*, not as a standard unit of account and of the exact value of the *Mexican dollar which is the favorite for circulation in China and Japan.*”⁶¹

Although Knox’s draft of the Coinage Act included most of Ralston’s recommendations, when introduced into Congress the measure met opposition from John Sherman and Eastern representatives who opposed reducing the coinage charge. Linderman complained to Ralston that both Sherman and William Kelly (R-PA), chairman of the Coinage Committee, were “disposed to delay,” forcing him to have “a plain talk” with Kelly where Linderman “showed him the . . . advantages to be [had] by the passage of the Bill.”⁶² As the Coinage Act faced “some apathy in the House and a quiet opposition from [Philadelphia],” Linderman asked Ralston to “write to all your members in the House particularly Sargent and Axtell asking them to give special attention to the Mint Bill in the House” in order to “work up some enthusiasm and interest in the House in order to insure early action by the committee on coinage.”⁶³

These Western congressmen had a number of reasons for assisting Ralston. Many believed the Coinage Act would benefit Western states and favored its passage for sectional reasons. For example, William Stewart (R-NV) assured Ralston eliminating the coinage charge would make “San Francisco a city of exchange” for bullion normally shipped East for conversion into coin.⁶⁴ As the bill would aid Western bullion producers, Stewart was closely monitoring the Coinage Act’s progress. In one instance when Sherman attempted to reinstate the coinage charge Henry Wilson (R-MA) was “dragged up . . . at the last moment by Stewart” defeating Sherman’s amendment by a single vote.⁶⁵

In addition to protecting the Coinage Act from amendments harmful to Ralston’s financial interests, Stewart was also keeping Ralston informed of Linderman’s influence over legislative proceedings. Stewart’s knowledge of Linderman’s activities will be critical for understanding his involvement in the free silver movement, for when Stewart assured Ralston that “Linderman is at work

on your matters in good earnest and I feel confident of results this session,” he revealed that he understood Ralston was using Linderman to influence the measure.⁶⁶ Given Stewart’s exertions on his behalf, Ralston was assured that “Stewart and others of the ‘faithful’” were working “to put the bill [reducing the coinage charge] on as an amendment to some . . . of the money bills in the Senate, so as to ensure its becoming a law.”⁶⁷ Although Stewart would subsequently denounce the Coinage Act and take a leading role in various free silver organizations, his correspondence with Ralston indicates he was deeply implicated in the measure

Introduced to the Senate in April of 1870, the bill was referred to the Finance Committee on April 28 and submitted to the House on June 25, 1870.⁶⁸ After Sherman introduced an amendment to reinstate the charge, Ralston’s allies complained: “Linderman and his boasted influence with . . . Sherman were not here.”⁶⁹ Cornelius Cole (R-CA) protested that the amendment was “exceedingly oppressive . . . to the people of the Pacific coast” that he claimed were “with wonderful unanimity, against this charge.”⁷⁰ However, Sherman complained Western Senators were asking for “the people of the United States shall pay the entire cost of the Mint,” and concluded that it was “only the officers of the mint at San Francisco, who desire to enlarge their business at the expense of the people of the United States” that were in favor of removing the charge, and “that is all there is of it.”⁷¹

Since eliminating the coinage charge was a key component of Ralston’s plan, Sherman was attacked by nearly every member of Ralston’s coalition. Stewart denounced the coinage charge as “a discriminating and unjust tax against the producer of gold,” and Williams denied that the measure would have inequitable sectional effects, claiming: “it is a mistake to suppose that this bill, as it was originally framed, is for the particular benefit of the people of the Pacific coast.”⁷² Hardly benefiting the West, Williams claimed the measure “was framed by persons who do not reside upon that coast and are not in any way interested in its affairs.”⁷³

Recognizing that “a majority of the Senators . . . [to] be controlled by the opinions of the two Senators [Sherman and Morrill] . . . rather than by the merits or the demerits of the question,” Eugene Casserly (R-CA) attempted to counteract Sherman and Morrill’s opposition.⁷⁴ Claiming that the legislation involved “questions which we had not been able to examine for ourselves,” Casserly complained that “it is impossible for any of us to examine personally all the subjects, even those of leading interest, that come before us.”⁷⁵ Casserly then presented the “testimony of an extremely well-informed and capable gentleman in San Francisco,” Louis Garnett, manager of Ralston’s San Francisco Assaying and Refining Company, and read his recommendation to eliminate the coinage charge into the *Congressional Record*.⁷⁶

Despite Casserly’s efforts, Morrill and Sherman were simply not cooperating. Morrill dismissed Western representatives’ arguments, claiming: “the idea that mere speculators go to San Francisco to buy up gold . . . in consequence of this coinage tax, is utterly preposterous.”⁷⁷ Since the logic justifying repeal of the coinage charge was incoherent, and since “no Senators except those from that section of the country [the West] have appeared in opposition to this so-called tax,” it appeared that “the Senators from the Pacific coast seem to . . . believe they have some interest in abolishing this seigniorage charge.”⁷⁸ Yet Morrill confessed he was “unable to see how it is going to benefit the Pacific coast or the miners.”⁷⁹

Despite Ralston’s efforts, Sherman and Morrill reinstated the coinage charge and Ralston’s coalition was again mobilized into action. William Huntington, cashier of H. D. Cooke’s First National Bank, reported having seen “Sherman and . . . [William] Kelly the Chairman of the Committee on Coinage, and a number of other members, and think that the matter is now in *good shape*.”⁸⁰ Yet Linderman complained of “some difficulty in getting action on the Mint Bill by the coinage committee of the House.”⁸¹ The measure faced “local pressure, from [Philadelphia],” and it appeared that “Sherman, Morrill, [and] Fenton . . . undoubtedly wanted the Bill smothered to death.”⁸² While Eastern

financiers would subsequently be blamed for the Coinage Act's passage, Linderman was complaining to Ralston that "the New York folks, through Mason, of the Assay office, are stirring up the question of cheap refining claiming to be able to do it at rates much below S.F."⁸³

Linderman specifically complained: "Seligman or some such man grossly misrepresented matters about 'the repeal of the coinage charge for the benefit of the Bank of California, to enable them [the Bank of California] to avoid paying about \$90,000 per annum into the U.S. treasury.'"⁸⁴ While denouncing this "misrepresentation," Linderman would subsequently assure Ralston: "there will be a saving to producers [i.e. the Bank of California] of \$90,000 per annum on account of reduction of coinage charges," indicating that Eastern financiers' suspicions were hardly wide of the mark.⁸⁵

Despite Eastern opposition Linderman confided to Ralston: "we have the matter well in hand."⁸⁶ Western representatives such as Casserly and Stewart supported their efforts, and Linderman also reported that Thurman (D-OH) "is strong with us for a free coinage."⁸⁷ Linderman claimed that "Mr. Randall of [Pennsylvania] who has much influence in the House was thoroughly posted and assured me of a solid Democratic vote," and Secretary of the Treasury George Boutwell "strongly favors a free coinage, and is very pleased with the results of the present refining system."⁸⁸

Yet Sherman's opposition to reducing the coinage charge remained problematic. Casserly told Ralston he "had quite a talk with John Sherman" after which Sherman "refused decidedly" to endorse Ralston's plan, opposition that persisted after additional lobbying from William Huntington, Cashier of H. D. Cooke's First National Bank.⁸⁹ Even after the measure passed the House, Ralston's allies complained of "the determined opposition by Sherman and the whole finance committee of the Senate."⁹⁰

Despite such resistance, Linderman believed "money will not be required" to pass the bill.⁹¹ However, Linderman informed Ralston that he was "not able to give my services without

compensation.”⁹² While Linderman’s contemporaries claimed to be “shocked at the suggestion that the Director [of the Mint was] . . . bribed,” and although scholars such as Milton Friedman claim “no allegation of bribery has ever been . . . documented . . . against any individual member of Congress or government official in connection with the passage of the Coinage Act of 1873,” Linderman’s requests indicate otherwise.⁹³ As many believe Linderman “broke no laws” when drafting the Coinage Act, it is worth quoting him at length.⁹⁴

For my services and expense here, including anything that may be required in coming to Washington, off and on, or New York and until 30th of June next, you will please send me thirty five hundred dollars—on receipt hereof. I suppose you will desire to have me attend to these matters and the pushing of the Mint Bill next session say up to Sept 1, 1872—13 months, which will carry us to the expiration of your present refining contract and by which time, I hope and firmly believe you will have all matters pertaining to refining and coinage in good shape. If so, I will make no engagement nor enter into any business which would interfere with the service indicated. I am willing to do so for the sum of Five Thousand dollars payable January 1st 1872.⁹⁵

Recognizing the value of Linderman’s services, Ralston assured him: “we concur in all you suggest as to further compensation . . . and all other matters of this nature, and will depend on you *solely* to carry out and *do the needful* . . . as I said *then*, we *will take care of you*,” promptly sending him a check for \$3,500.⁹⁶

[Figure 1 About Here]

Given the requests Linderman was making of Ralston, it is not entirely surprising that Linderman was “strangely subdued” when discussing his involvement in the measure, nor is it surprising that it was only after 1872 that “he made his participation extremely effective.”⁹⁷ However Linderman was not the only official on Ralston’s payroll. William Huntington informed Ralston of a “\$3,000 [draft] enclosed I have placed to the credit of Stevens,” indicating that Ralston was probably bribing others as well.⁹⁸ In addition to Linderman and Knox, Ralston’s congressional allies had offered critical support. As Linderman assured Ralston that “all the Pacific Coast men have done their duty,” and noted that he had “no doubt whatever of full success the next session.”⁹⁹

At this stage of congressional deliberation several things were apparent. First, few representatives understood why the Coinage Act was being introduced, and fewer understood Ralston's influence over the measure. Congressional debate had focused on the repeal of the coinage charge, the only aspect of the Coinage Act with clear sectional ramifications, even though the measures' demonetization of silver would become far more important. Yet even officials such as Sherman who understood the measure would demonetize silver, and supported it to protect the gold standard, did not realize Ralston was manipulating congressional proceedings through Knox, Linderman, and Stewart.

Recognizing the power his expertise granted him, Linderman told Ralston he "would be astonished at the general want of knowledge on this subject, not half a dozen men in Congress know anything about bullion manipulations."¹⁰⁰ Others informed Ralston: "anything that uses the words bullion, assaying, refining, appears to be a perfectly unfathomable mystery to most people, and unless you were to undertake to explain these things yourself you can scarcely credit the blunders and stupidity of people generally."¹⁰¹

Complaining of confused and unfocused legislative deliberations, William Kelly admonished congressmen to "examine the bill and look into the facts of the cases," complaining that "the gentleman from Ohio [Garfield] has illustrated how little the most industrious and capable members of the House understand about the facts in question."¹⁰² Garfield, who was typically informed of financial issues, admitted having "not looked at the general scope of this bill enough to have formed any judgment about it," and other congressmen similarly confessed they had "not been able to give much attention to this bill, except while it was being read."¹⁰³

Since most Congressmen were unaware of the measures' stipulations, Ralston did not need to influence many representatives; he merely needed to influence the officials who were responsible for drafting the measure and steering it through Congress. Since those who understood the Coinage Act's

ramifications simply did not explain the measure, silver's demonetization appeared to be an irrelevant detail in a technical revision of the coinage statutes, and in the absence of specialized knowledge "most senators voted for the amended measure ignorant of the facts needed for an intelligent judgment on the change in monetary standards."¹⁰⁴

When referred back to the House in January of 1872, William Kelly reported the Coinage Act had "received as careful attention as I have ever known a committee to bestow upon any measure."¹⁰⁵ Yet when House began debate on January 13, 1872, "there was little discussion of the change in monetary standards proposed by the measure."¹⁰⁶ The bill was referred to the Senate on May 29, 1872, where it languished for six months. As the bill was delayed in committee, Germany and the Latin Monetary Union demonetized their silver currency. Linderman warned Ralston that European demonetization would cause "the countries maintaining the double standard will be overrun with silver bullion," a situation which would make "a serious decline in price in unavoidable," and which Linderman believed "we must prevent, by timely agitation and proper measures."¹⁰⁷

Realizing the threat European demonetization posed for American silver producers, Ralston complained that since Germany had "demonetized about \$350,000,000 of silver which must take the form of Bullion and pass into the markets of the world" there was "no market now open to us that we are advised of, to which shipments [of silver] can be made without the possibility of a loss."¹⁰⁸ European demonetization was causing silver prices to collapse, leaving Ralston complaining "the prospects for silver . . . are in no way encouraging."¹⁰⁹

Yet Ralston's plan was generating opposition from Eastern financiers. Linderman complained of having "had a fight since January, with the Assay Officer Eugene Kelley and the Chamber of Commerce (of N.Y.) in relation to the Mint Bill and particularly the refining section."¹¹⁰ Yet Linderman assured

Ralston “a rod is in soak for these New York fellows . . . I have kept them whipped all the while and don’t mean to let them up until the Bill is finally disposed of.”¹¹¹

Linderman enlisted Eugene Kelly to claim the coinage charge ensured that “for every two dollars’ worth of silver deposited by [New York bankers] . . . he gets four half dollars and one ten cent piece,” and as a result “under one defect in existing laws he was making at the cost of the Government from seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand dollars a year.”¹¹² Soon the San Francisco *Alta* was denouncing the New York “Bullion Ring” for enlisting the *Journal of Commerce* to defraud the government.¹¹³ However, Linderman’s orchestration of media coverage had “involved close attention, hard work and some extra expense,” and while he assured Ralston “it is unnecessary to trouble you with details,” he asked Ralston for a “draft or place to my credit fifteen thousand dollars” which would “cover the matter.”¹¹⁴

Although European demonetization threatened the profitability of domestic silver producers, certain public officials worried collapsing silver prices would soon threaten the public credit. In December 1872, Comptroller of the Currency John Pollock warned that “the very large increase in silver deposits . . . [which] have largely increased during the past ten or twelve months” were being “caused by the still larger production of silver in the different mining regions of our country.”¹¹⁵ A confluence of factors indicated that adoption of the gold standard and the demonetization of silver had become a foregone conclusion.¹¹⁶

By the end of 1872, silver’s premium had disappeared, and Linderman warned Boutwell that silver could now be profitably exchanged for gold at the Treasury.¹¹⁷ Deteriorating silver prices had begun to threaten “the whole edifice of specie resumption and protection of the public credit.”¹¹⁸ Unless silver was demonetized, further delay would “result in the mints being flooded with depreciated silver bullion,” a development which posed “a grave threat to the public credit and to successful resumption of

specie payments.”¹¹⁹ Among “knowledgeable advocates” of sound public finance, a bill designed to “drive silver out of circulation became not merely attractive, but absolutely necessary.”¹²⁰

Upon visiting the Comstock again, Linderman warned Boutwell that “a further increase in [the volume of silver is] quite certain,” a development that rendered “the future value of silver as compared with gold . . . a matter of national importance.”¹²¹ Linderman urged Boutwell to recommend immediate passage of the Coinage Act and substitution of the Trade Dollar for the domestic silver dollar.

Linderman’s public statements claimed this would protect the public credit, suggesting that if silver remained a legal tender government bonds would depreciate “proportionally with the decline in the value of silver; and all attempts to fund obligations at lower rates of interest would no doubt . . . [fail], as it would have been impossible . . . to have sold at par in gold, public securities legally payable in silver dollars of 412 1/2 grains.”¹²²

In this context it became essential for Ralston to have the Trade Dollar replace the domestic silver dollar. Given the “gradual and continued decline in the price of silver bullion,” Linderman believed that “the successful introduction of the trade dollar in the Oriental markets is to us a matter of great importance.”¹²³ As Linderman noted, the Trade Dollar would give “some relief to our mining industries from the serious decline and further apparent depreciation in the value of silver.”¹²⁴ While publicly justifying these decisions to protect the public credit, Linderman was privately assuring Ralston that if the Trade Dollar was “favorably received in China it will prove the most important economic event for California that has yet happened.”¹²⁵

Ralston’s involvement in the creation of the Trade Dollar was hardly surprising. Linderman openly admitted his recommendations were made “after consulting with some of the leading business men of San Francisco” who urged him “to recommend, in lieu of our old dollar, a new coin or disk, which shall be slightly more valuable than the Mexican dollar.”¹²⁶ Ralston’s responsibility for the Trade

Dollar was corroborated by the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprises*' claim that "William C. Ralston, Milton S. Latham, Louis A. Garnett and other philosophic financiers of San Francisco . . . have recommended to influential parties at Washington the addition to our silver money-dollar of a coined ingot or circular disk, to be known as a silver trade-dollar."¹²⁷ Following Ralston's death, it was noted that "to . . . Mr. William C. Ralston is due the origin of the present trade-dollar."¹²⁸

With Linderman warning public officials of silver prices collapsing and "recognizing the dangers of inaction under these circumstances," some public officials began to take immediate steps to demonetize silver "before their expert and specialized information became public knowledge."¹²⁹ Sherman invited Boutwell and Linderman to testify before the Senate Finance Committee to discuss how the declining silver premium would influence resumption.¹³⁰ Four days after this meeting, Boutwell gave Sherman a draft of the Coinage Act substituting the domestic dollar with the Trade Dollar, effectively demonetizing silver.¹³¹

On January 7, 1873, Sherman introduced a draft of the Coinage Act that stripped the 384-grain silver dollar from the bill. Yet instead of explaining this, Sherman claimed the bill included a silver dollar that was "the precise equivalent of the five-franc piece."¹³² Since the French five-franc piece contained 384 grains of silver, Sherman "left the distinct impression among his Senate colleagues that the revised coinage bill . . . now contained both the 384 grain and 420 grain silver dollars."¹³³ Sherman did not explain that the 384-grain domestic silver dollar was no longer included in the bill, nor did he explain "the essential reason for [his] actions—the expected market downturn in silver."¹³⁴ While Sherman's introduction of the Coinage Act would lead many to subsequently blame him for silver's demonetization, Sherman had replaced the domestic silver dollar with the Trade Dollar at Linderman's request.¹³⁵ Sherman noted: "I do not like myself to break in upon this plan, or to change it in the slightest degree, but prefer to leave it to the proper officers of the Mint."¹³⁶

Linderman's recommendation to *substitute* the Trade Dollar for the domestic dollar rules out the possibility that Ralston sought to use the Coinage Act to merely secure distributive benefits, such as the reduction in the coinage charge, or that silver was demonetized in opposition to Ralston's demands. If Ralston had sought to retain the bi-metallic standard, he could have asked Linderman to simply include *both* the Trade Dollar and the domestic silver dollar in the Coinage Act. Linderman's recommendation to *replace* the domestic silver dollar with the Trade Dollar, thus effectively demonetizing silver, indicates that Ralston sought silver's demonetization, and that his bribery of Linderman facilitated this objective.

With most representatives unaware of what was occurring, congressional debate focused on retiring coins whose weight had been eroded and removing the eagle from the back of the coins.¹³⁷ The bill passed the Senate without discussion and when President Grant signed the bill on February 12, 1873 "the crime was now a *fait accompli* as far as Linderman, William C. Ralston and others of the bank crowd were concerned."¹³⁸

Hardly concluding that the Coinage Act had harmed Ralston's silver interests, Linderman was assuring Ralston the Coinage Act "cannot but prove beneficial to the country and the mining interest especially, and I trust that directly or indirectly you will share in it," even though he believed "the next two or three years [look] to be somewhat rough for the Atlantic coast, financially speaking."¹³⁹ Echoing these evaluations, after the Coinage Act's passage, and the Treasury's coinage of Trade Dollars, Ralston assured Secretary of the Treasury Benjamin Bristow: "*we appreciate* what you have had done for this coast most fully."¹⁴⁰

With silver prices continuing their "further depreciation," Linderman believed this trend was "what I have expected for some time past, and will no doubt be accelerated when Germany shall commence exporting silver, as must soon be the case under the operations of their new coinage law."¹⁴¹

As silver prices “exhibited a declining tendency” that would continue so long as “the mines of the United States and Mexico continue to yield so largely,” Linderman concluded “the action of our Secretary of the Treasury was a good shot of policy.”¹⁴²

While it may initially appear that silver producers would have profited from government silver purchases, and hence should have opposed silver’s demonetization, even after the free silver movement fully materialized and Ralston lost control of the Comstock to the “Bonanza Kings,” Flood, MacKay, Fair and O’Brian exhibited little interest in free silver.¹⁴³ Indeed, studies unaware of Ralston’s role in the Coinage Act have noted “surprisingly” the San Francisco financiers who controlled the Comstock “almost unanimously opposed remonetization” of the silver dollar.¹⁴⁴ As the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* observed, any attempt to maintain bimetallism in the face of European demonetization would undermine American mining interests.¹⁴⁵

The Coinage Act’s creation of the Trade Dollar paradoxically caused a silver producer to be responsible for silver’s demonetization. As one observer noted at the time, after the silver dollar had been demonetized

miners and owners of bullion, without complaint commenced the coining of the American trade dollars, and from 1873 to 1878, nearly 36,000,000 trade dollars were coined at the American mints. At that time silver was not in circulation in the United States and whether legal tender or trade dollars were coined at the mints was a matter of indifference to the American people at large. The owners and miners of bullion were alone interested and they preferred the trade dollar to legal tender, as it competed in the markets of the east more successfully with the Mexican dollar. They alone, of all the American people, made an immediate profit of the change and it does not lie in their mouths that the decline in the bullion value of silver has made a return to the old legal tender dollar necessary.¹⁴⁶

For some, it seemed that there could “be no question but that the owners and miners of silver bullion were at once apprised of the effect of the act . . . if the discontinuance of the coinage had not been understood and expected, it would have provoked inquiry and complaint, but it excited no comment.”¹⁴⁷

Indeed, to conclude that Ralston opposed silver’s demonetization one would have to believe that he did not understand that Knox and Linderman had demonetized silver with the initial draft of the

Coinage Act, and that after paying Linderman thousands of dollars, Linderman would implement a policy Ralston opposed. Finally, one would expect Ralston to express dismay once the Coinage Act was passed; yet the exact opposite happened. For both Ralston and Linderman believed the Coinage Act aided Western silver producers. After the Coinage Act's passage, Linderman wrote to James Garfield (R-OH) and arranged a meeting with Ralston, who informed Linderman that he would "do what we can to make him [Garfield] happy."¹⁴⁸ Shortly after meeting with Ralston and Oscar LaGrange, Superintendent of the San Francisco Mint, Garfield purchased several thousand dollars of stock in Comstock silver mines.

Hardly drafted by Eastern financiers or public officials solely attempting to protect the gold standard, it was "the Bank of California, and . . . Billy Ralston [who] could claim the major part of the credit" for the Coinage Act's passage.¹⁴⁹ By demonetizing the domestic silver dollar, Linderman ensured the Coinage Act "came very close to being what the West wanted."¹⁵⁰ By insulating domestic silver producers from a flood of demonetized European silver, Linderman concluded: "it is evident that Congress acted wisely in establishing gold as the sole standard of value."¹⁵¹

Nor is it likely that the Coinage Act would have passed in the absence of Ralston's efforts. Linderman and Knox had literally written the measure, and had done so in close consultation with Ralston. Indeed, it was Linderman's reports that originally had drawn attention to the necessity of revising the coinage statutes, and both Linderman and Knox offered critical support at nearly every stage of the legislative proceedings. Similarly, the measure would have been delayed or altered without the support of Ralston's legislative allies.

While certain public officials, such as Sherman and Boutwell, probably understood that the Coinage Act demonetized silver and believed this course of action was desirable for purely public

reasons, these officials relied upon Linderman for information and technical recommendations and it is unlikely that they could have secured the measures' passage in the absence of Linderman's expertise.

As officials such as Sherman and Boutwell pursued demonetization to protect the public credit, Linderman assured Ralston that he could generate support for the measure merely by continuing "to urge the matter *officially* if possible, on the necessities of the service and the importance of cheap refining and a free coinage for the financial and industrial interests of the country," even though other motives were clearly influencing his actions.¹⁵² Echoing the concerns that had motivated Linderman and Ralston to demonetize silver in the first place, financiers such as August Belmont warned Sherman that if silver were remonetized "every dollar of Gold would be taken from us, and we would be flooded with the silver now locked up in the . . . Latin Union and Holland."¹⁵³

Although Linderman was a key figure in the measures' passage, he was using information and suggestions provided by Ralston. After the Coinage Act's passage, Linderman wrote to Ralston:

If it had not been for us (yourself Garnett and myself) this measure never would have come to fruition. It had not the least chance. Never in the history of legislation was a measure more carefully and persistently guarded than this coinage bill by me and of course I could not have been there without some friends behind me.¹⁵⁴

Yet given the secrecy surrounding his actions, few understood Ralston's influence over the measure.

Recognizing the power such secrecy conferred, Linderman assured Ralston: "it will never of course be known to the outside world what labor this measure has taken."¹⁵⁵ Although certain experts had "watched [the Coinage Act] . . . very carefully; most others did not," and as a result, the measure "was not understood by the Congress which passed it," a fact which "is established by the concurring testimony of nearly every member of the Senate and House of 1873."¹⁵⁶

As most congressmen were ignorant of the measures' ramifications, it was a forgone conclusion that the public was unaware of what had happened. Contemporaries bluntly recognized that "the great mass of the citizens of the United States did not now, as late as March 1, 1876, that silver had been

demonetized, and most of them had yet to learn even the meaning of the word *demonetization*.”¹⁵⁷

Those seeking to mobilize popular awareness found the public was “without opinions and without any special knowledge of the facts bearing upon the question of the metallic standards.”¹⁵⁸

The legislation’s complexity ensured that “almost nobody appears to have considered what had happened to the nation’s currency, although some were aware of the consequences even before [the Coinage Act’s] final passage.”¹⁵⁹ Silver’s demonetization had been “an unexpected stab in the dark, unseen until too late to be avoided.”¹⁶⁰ As the Coinage Act had proceeded through Congress, there was “nearly [a] total absence of public notice of it,” and it was “common knowledge,” about which there could be “no dispute,” that the Coinage Act “was not understood by the people.”¹⁶¹

Given the misunderstanding surrounding the measure, it is not entirely surprising that the public would adopt interpretations that were divorced from the reality of what had occurred. Although Ralston and Linderman recognized the measure harmed Eastern silver interests, the public would mistakenly blame the bankers who had opposed the measure for its implementation. Nor was this attribution a random mistake, it was deliberately cultivated to mask Ralston’s congressional allies’ responsibility for a measure that was to become deeply unpopular. To understand how this occurred we must document the sequence of events that forced Ralston’s legislative allies to dissimulate regarding their role in the Coinage Act.

Origins of Free Silver

The public was first alerted to silver’s demonetization in 1876, when editorialist George Weston published articles a series of attributing the Panic of 1873 to silver’s demonetization. By September of 1876, Weston was claiming silver’s demonetization occurred “without discussion, and without the knowledge of the country,” and it was “not certain that even now a majority of the people of the country know that it is so.”¹⁶²

Weston recognized something that, in retrospect, is plainly obvious. The measure's length and complexity ensured that a "critical examination of every part of such an immense work could not be made by members of Congress without neglecting all their other duties," and as a result, it was "impossible to locate the responsibility where so many were employed in various capacities, and where opportunities were so numerous for artful suggestions from persons not employed."¹⁶³

Despite such complexity Weston believed "all that we need to know, and that is, what classes and interests, here and in Europe, profited by the falsifications."¹⁶⁴ Claiming the measure harmed the West and South, Weston's articles began attracting attention and soon "'silver' had seized the public imagination."¹⁶⁵ As public outcry spread, representatives from states such as California, Nevada, and Ohio suddenly found themselves facing enraged constituents. Reacting to the public's outrage, representatives such as John P. Jones and Richard P. Bland began echoing Weston's claims that silver had been demonetized "in the interest of a few plutocrats in England and in Germany," blaming demonetization on Eastern creditors who "did not care which metal was demonetized, provided money was made scarce and dear."¹⁶⁶

As Nevada was plunged into recession, Jones began claiming that efforts to "remonetize silver offered the promise of eventual relief," and began to "channel economic discontent among the state's merchants and businessmen as well as among the miners themselves."¹⁶⁷ By focusing on the silver issue Jones worked to transform "a previously indifferent or venal group of voters into a passionate and issue-conscious electorate."¹⁶⁸ After leading a congressional inquiry into silver's demonetization in 1876, Jones was reelected to the Senate in 1878, becoming one of Nevada's most popular representatives, an "inconceivable achievement" before his adoption of the silver issue.¹⁶⁹

Soon others, such as Thomas Ewing (D-OH), were claiming silver had been demonetized "at the insistence and for the benefit of European money kings," claiming that after European bankers and the

Rothschilds “had stricken down silver in Germany, they sent Mr. Ernest [Seyd] to the United States, and had our Congress demonetize it also.”¹⁷⁰ For some silver had been demonetized by “the great money power—the worst legacy of the war—[who] intend, by this scheme of forced resumption, to make gold the sole measure and payer of debts.”¹⁷¹

However few of these claims were accurate; Seyd had written a book *endorsing* bimetallism,¹⁷² and although the Rothschilds were being blamed for the “Crime of ’73,” Edmund de Rothschild was actually urging Secretary Bristow that “it would be a great relief for the commercial world if the United States could extend their silver currency,” as this would “facilitate the absorption of the great amount of silver now on hand” and thereby “place the currency of the United States on a safer basis than the greenbacks.”¹⁷³

Reacting to these inaccuracies, Sherman’s associates complained of the “eminent ignorance” of those claiming to “*know* that the dropping of the old silver dollar from our coinage was actuated by sinister motives; that you [Sherman] were the passive tools in the hands of the great Rothschilds.”¹⁷⁴ Hardly obeying the demands of Eastern financiers, Republicans were claiming that since the Civil War monetary policy had been “made *in opposition* to the advice of the banking interest of the country.”¹⁷⁵ Others complained there was no “foundation for this absurd story . . . of the influence exerted by bankers and capitalists to control legislation at Washington . . . [and even though] it is still being repeated by greenback orators . . . stories . . . like this one, will vanish into thin air when examined by the lights of truth.”¹⁷⁶

However, the popularized depictions of silver’s demonetization were not completely fictitious: a banker had been involved in the Coinage Act, public officials had been bribed, and there had been a “Crime of ’73.” Yet since voters were relying upon newspaper editorials and politicians for information, and since the information revealed by these sources was inaccurate, none of this was

apparent and the public began blaming Eastern and European financiers for a scheme executed by a Western banker.

Although no one realized Western representatives had facilitated the measures' passage, this could have been little comfort to Ralston's legislative allies who were watching their constituents explode in outrage over silver's demonetization. Facing enraged voters, and knowing they bore responsibility for a measure that was being erroneously attributed to Eastern financiers, Ralston's congressional allies embarked upon a stunning, yet entirely comprehensible, course of action. Instead of attempting to correct the public's misconceptions, Ralston's legislative allies either denied anything conspiratorial had happened, or began *echoing* claims that the Coinage Act was a plot by Eastern plutocrats to impoverish Western producers.

Senator Thurman claimed he supported for the measure thinking it was "simply a bill to reform the mint, regulate coinage, and fix up one thing and another," and complained "there is not a single man in the Senate . . . who had the slightest idea that it was even a squint toward demonetization."¹⁷⁷ Thurman's claim may have been technically accurate, but he had not revealed all he knew, for he had been in contact with Linderman as the measure proceeded through Congress.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, William Kelly professed ignorance of the Coinage Act's demonetization of the silver dollar, claiming: "there is no mystery equal to the demonetization of the standard silver dollar of the United States. I have never found a man who could tell just how it came about or why."¹⁷⁹ These claims are incongruent with Linderman's conversations with Kelly, and the fact that Kelly's statements in congressional debate indicate that he understood the measure demonetized the silver dollar. Although Kelly would become a prominent bimetallist, as the Coinage Act was moving through Congress Linderman reported to Ralston that he had "a plain talk" where he had explained to Kelly "the advantages to be [had] by the passage of the Bill."¹⁸⁰ Linderman had reported: "the result of the

interview was that . . . [Kelly] agreed to call a meeting of the committee for Wednesday next and with me to be present to explain any points that may be raised.”¹⁸¹

Similarly although Linderman had urged Ralston to “write to all your members in the House particularly Sargent and Axtell” to support the Coinage Act, Sargent was now denying that anything underhanded had occurred.¹⁸² Although Sargent had assured Ralston that he was “watching for a chance to push the bill, believe I understand it, and will do all that I can,”¹⁸³ once the public was denouncing silver’s demonetization Sargent claimed:

I say there has been no fraud committed; I do not know of any fraud; and points are not gained by calling hard names. Fraud does not exist because a suspicion of it may exist in senator’s minds. Let those who talk fraud show fraud. I know of no fraud in former legislation, and I admit none so far as myself is concerned, and I do not believe there was any on the part of congress . . . and it is a shame, an appeal of demagoguism to talk about fraud in any such connection as this.¹⁸⁴

As his actions on Ralston’s behalf were unknown, Sargent soon “introduced a bill making silver coin a legal tender” to curry favor with public opinion.¹⁸⁵

Clearly some public officials were obfuscating. Yet officials such as Thurman and Sargent were simply denying any knowledge of the bill, Nevada Senator William Stewart took a different approach. Instead of simply denying knowledge of its passage, Stewart began claiming that silver’s demonetization was a criminal act executed by Eastern and European financiers. Relentlessly campaigning on free silver, editing free silver newspapers such as the *Silver Knight* and the *Silver Knight-Watchman*, helping create both the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party, contemporaries believed “*Stewart* was the original silver man,” for he was “the man who since ’73 has talked, slept, written, eaten, acted, voted and harangued the monstrous Crime of ‘73.”¹⁸⁶ As executive director of the American Bimetallic League, Stewart would help publish William H. Harvey’s *Coin’s Financial School*, the founding document of the free silver movement that presented “the unassailable logic of free silver and the conspiracy behind the gold standard,” and would do more than any single publication to

popularize the cause of free silver.¹⁸⁷ As Stewart assumed prominence in the free silver movement, Richard Hofstadter would subsequently label him “the silver Senator from Nevada.”¹⁸⁸

Denouncing the eastern “bondholding directory . . . [that had] deemed it necessary to demonetize the standard dollar and destroy its legal tender character,” Stewart transformed free silver into an issue of national political debate.¹⁸⁹ Stewart’s presentation of the silver issue became so effective that his close associates concluded he was a “stalwart champion of silver as a monetary metal.”¹⁹⁰

However, several facts were incongruent with Stewart’s position on the silver issue. Stewart had voted for an earlier draft of the Coinage Act that demonetized silver that passed the Senate on January 10, 1871, a vote consistent with the fact that he was “an uncompromising advocate of the gold standard until the close of his second term in the United States senate.”¹⁹¹ Nor was this vote lost on those political observers who complained that Stewart had “voted in favor of the bill [the Coinage Act], and thus became a principal in the ‘crime of 1873.’”¹⁹² However, Stewart’s subsequent adoption of the free silver issue was so ardent, and his denunciation of the Coinage Act became so prolific, that one of his biographers noted: “it seems almost ludicrous that this ardent partisan for the free coinage of silver and the promotion of bimetallism should have been charged with negligence, or even collusion, in the passage of the [Coinage Act] of 1873.”¹⁹³

Given his prominence in the free silver movement, charging Stewart with responsibility for the Coinage Act does not just *seem* ludicrous, it *is* ludicrous, and yet this is exactly what happened, for Stewart had had “faithfully . . . listened to the supreme voice in San Francisco” and had “obeyed to the letter all behests” Ralston had made of him.¹⁹⁴ As Congress debated the Coinage Act, Stewart wrote to Ralston that “this bill in connection with existing laws makes San Francisco a city of exchange” for silver bullion, and assured him: “Linderman is at work on your matters in good earnest and I feel confident of results this session.”¹⁹⁵

Stewart's communications with Ralston indicate that he understood the measures' sectional ramifications and also understood that Linderman was working at Ralston's behest. This recognition, Stewart's expertise in mining law, and his role as Nevada's representative led his contemporaries to claim that it was "impossible that he did not thoroughly understand every provision of the said coinage act."¹⁹⁶ Some believed Stewart was "one of the best equipped men in the senate" to understand the measure, and "the probability of his being ignorant of any provision of it . . . is so slight as to render any claim to that effect incredible."¹⁹⁷

Yet while Stewart's relationship with Ralston remained unknown, somehow Eastern banker Henry Clews recognized what was occurring. Although exhibiting a number of inaccuracies, Clews argued Stewart was

[T]he principal author of the bill which is said to have demonetized silver . . . Senator Stewart [was] . . . chiefly instrumental in the passage of that bill, and has tried very hard to fasten the responsibility for it upon the wicked and avaricious gold monometallists . . . This is the history, in brief, of what is indignantly called the "crime of 1873" by the silverites . . . for which eminent silverites were themselves mainly responsible, being accessory to the "crime" both before and after the fact.¹⁹⁸

However, as Stewart "began associating the gold standard with rich and powerful commercial and industrial interests, and silver with the masses," these assertions simply did not have traction.¹⁹⁹ New York financiers could denounce him, but as Stewart worked to "establish himself as a leader of the silver forces,"²⁰⁰ he would justify his return to the Senate in 1887 claiming it was his duty to "rectify the crime which was clandestinely committed without my knowledge, or the knowledge of the American people."²⁰¹ Deeply implicated in a measure that had become widely unpopular, Stewart was popularizing these claims to mask his role in the Coinage Act's passage.

As few understood the connections between Ralston, Linderman, and certain Western representatives, officials such as Stewart could simply deny knowledge of the measure. Furthermore, by the time the silver issue became prominent, many of the key actors associated with the Coinage Act

were dead. Ralston died shortly following the collapse of the Bank of California in 1875, a year before the silver issue entered popular debate. Similarly, legislative inquiries into Linderman's manipulation of Comstock mining stock and the San Francisco mint hastened his fatal heart attack in 1879.²⁰²

With Linderman and Ralston dead, the only individuals who could have revealed Stewart's involvement in the Coinage Act were the other members of Ralston's legislative coalition. This left Stewart free to claim "there had been a conspiracy in the passage of the act which demonetized silver, and that its leader had been John Sherman," and assert that he "was compelled in self-defense to investigate and expose the manner of the demonetization of silver and the tricks employed for that purpose."²⁰³ Given Stewart's role in the Coinage Act, his claims that "the success of foreign bondholders in demonetizing silver by the Mint act of 1873 . . . has made the foreign gold kings believe they have a right to rule this country by divine prerogative," appear largely theatrical.²⁰⁴

However, Stewart was not Ralston's only associate who was more deeply involved in the Coinage Act than their public pronouncements indicated. For while John P. Jones chaired the legislative inquiry into silver's demonetization, Jones was probably far more aware of why silver had been demonetized than he ever revealed. Jones had been a superintendent for Ralston's Crown Point mine until 1871, and as the Coinage Act was proceeding through Congress, Jones had assured Ralston: "I fully believe that properly understood my interest in Nevada and those of my friends are of the same and real character with the interests of yourself and your friends and with those of the public at large."²⁰⁵

Aside from his relationship with Ralston, in 1875 Jones purchased a silver mine with William Stewart.²⁰⁶ In addition to his relationships with Ralston and Stewart, Jones was also closely acquainted with Linderman. In fact, Secretary of the Treasury Benjamin Bristow was making investments with Jones through Linderman.²⁰⁷ At one point Linderman apologized to Secretary Bristow for not having "control of the [amount] you gave our friend for investment as I could make an operation which would

give you a large profit.”²⁰⁸ The friend Linderman alluded to was John P. Jones, who wrote Bristow that he had been so “deeply immersed in business of various kinds, so that my attention has been almost entirely diverted from affairs of state,” and complained that “in regard to the matters in which you and I are interested I have to tell you that I lost a small amount but it will come out all right in the end.”²⁰⁹ Given Jones’ relationship with Linderman, and his joint ownership of silver interests with Stewart, it is unlikely that he was unaware of what had transpired.

The combination of inaccurate media coverage and politicians’ efforts to obscure their involvement in the Coinage Act led voters to blame the wrong individuals for silver’s demonetization. As no one recognized Ralston’s involvement in the Coinage Act, Stewart and others were free to popularize depictions of demonetization that masked their involvement in the measure and caused the public to adopt a fictitious account of what had occurred.²¹⁰ Yet since free silver was so widely debated in Congress and in the press, no one realized that public debate was based upon inaccurate and misleading assumptions, some of which had been disseminated by the officials responsible for silver’s demonetization.

Instead of realizing that popular discussion exhibited severe inaccuracies, the extensive attention the silver issue received created the appearance of a vibrant and open public debate, and political observers were mistakenly concluding: “there never was a time in the history of the country when the average voter was so thoroughly informed as to the financial situation.”²¹¹ However this impression was misleading. Stewart and others were arranging the “facts” in ways that were propelling the country toward the “battle of the standards,” an election that Stewart must have watched unfold with an unsettling combination of bemusement and discomfort. Although helping create a political movement that masked his responsibility for the “Crime of ’73,” Stewart was disseminating an interpretation of events that was only tangentially related to what had actually occurred.

Indeed, even some of Stewart's closest associates remained unaware of his role in silver's demonetization. When A. J. Warner, president of the American Bimetallic Party, claimed that the "if the money standard could be changed . . . and few people would find it out; even those who were robbed might not know by whom or how it was done in time to save themselves," he revealed how completely Stewart had deceived him.²¹² Despite claiming "a small, though strong, money hierarchy . . . has kept the masses in darkness and in bondage," it was Stewart, and Ralston's congressional allies, who were obscuring what had occurred.²¹³

Not that the silver issues' complexity was unrecognized. Some voters complained: "in the great diversity of opinion existing amongst minds, equally educated and equally having means of information, it is difficult to know where the right is."²¹⁴ Others observed that even after examining "the facts concerning coinage and monies . . . it seemed impossible to get any clear understanding of the subject."²¹⁵ Yet even those Western Senators who allied themselves with Stewart on the silver issue, such as Henry Moore Teller, and devoted considerable "care and industry . . . in becoming familiar with the question of money," remained unaware of Stewart's role in silver's demonetization.²¹⁶

The misunderstanding surrounding who facilitated the Coinage Act's passage paradoxically allowed some of those who were responsible for silver's demonetization to elude popular accountability, and in some instances, become prominent leaders of the free silver movement that was denouncing the very measure they had helped pass. Addressing the first National Silver Convention in 1889, Stewart proclaimed that the demonetization of the silver dollar was "the crime of the nineteenth century."²¹⁷ Yet when Stewart elaborated by noting: "how or when . . . the silver dollar was omitted from the Statute . . . must remain a mystery," he must have known he was hardly far from the truth.²¹⁸ Stewart's manipulation of information, the secrecy surrounding Ralston's influence, and the errors in newspaper

coverage left Ralston's allies free to assume prominent positions in a political movement that should have been denouncing them.

Nor was Stewart entirely comfortable with his actions. After being labeled "one of the most rabid advocates of free silver," Stewart wrote an editorial in the *Silver Knight-Watchman* that, in retrospect, reveals some uneasiness with what he had done.²¹⁹ After years of masking his role in silver's demonetization, after co-founding the American Bimetallic League and the American Bimetallic Party and watching the country convulsed by free silver in 1896, Stewart noted: "we presume the perpetrators of the crime of 1873 can never be brought to punishment, except the sort that rankles in the soul and keeps criminals awake o' nights."²²⁰ Although unrecognized by readers of the *Silver Knight Watchman*, or anyone unfamiliar with the Ralston manuscripts, it is likely that Stewart was speaking of himself.

Despite all the falsehoods that were influencing public opinion, it appeared that the supporters of inflationary greenback doctrines were now endorsing free silver. Republican supporters of the gold standard were complaining that "the feeling in the West and South, not long ago for greenbacks and [is] now for silver legal tender."²²¹ As publicists struggled to make sense of what had occurred, across the country it seemed that "the people want more silver," and those opposing these demands were warned that their "position on the silver question will injure you before the people."²²² Others similarly concluded: "since the country became fully informed of the effect of the coinage act of February 12, 1873 omitting the silver dollar as a legal tender from the coinage of the United States, there has been an unmistakable determination among the people that it should be restored."²²³

And yet few were truly informed of what had occurred. Americans either endorsed Weston and Stewart's interpretation of the Crime of '73, or they adopted the alternative view that nothing conspiratorial had occurred. Yet neither interpretation was accurate. Those who accepted the popularized depiction of the "Crime of 1873" were mistakenly concluding: "it is about time that the

American people of this country have put a stop to British rule in our money matters and were independent of any nation in regard to the question.”²²⁴ While correct in suspecting that economic elites had manipulated the coinage revisions, many voters were blaming the wrong bankers for silver’s demonetization.

However, the ideas of those who believed nothing manipulative had occurred were hardly more accurate. For they were erroneously concluding: “in spite of all proof to the contrary, the blatant advocates of silver monometallism continue to reiterate the falsehood that the act of 1873 was passed surreptitiously, [and] was the result of bribery and the greatest crime that ever disgraced a nation.”²²⁵ As no one outside of Ralston’s circle of conspirators knew of Ralston’s involvement in the Coinage Act, those denying that anything underhanded had occurred were mistakenly concluding that “the entire baselessness of . . . the ‘crime of 1873’ . . . has been demonstrated often enough and in convincing detail” that it no longer warranted serious consideration.²²⁶

Conclusion

Denigrated and dismissed, the Populists have been criticized for endorsing an inaccurate and conspiratorial account of American history. Exemplifying this view of the Populists, Richard Hofstadter concluded that they exhibited the “paranoid style” of American politics. But the Crime of ’73 was no delusion, and the Populists suspicions were not simply based upon paranoia.²²⁷ Indeed, the Populists erred, not because their paranoia led them to endorse a conspiracy theory, but because they were not paranoid enough to consider the possibility that leaders of the free silver movement were deeply implicated in silver’s demonetization. Although consensus historians believed the Populists were “obsessed with imaginary grievances,” the interpretations they developed were, ironically, more mythic than the Populists’.²²⁸

However, recognizing that a banker was involved in the Coinage Act should not obscure the fact that the Populists mistakenly attributed silver's demonetization to the wrong officials and bankers. This oversight was not a random mistake, it was a perception that Ralston's allies deliberately cultivated by popularizing the inaccuracies that were contained in the initial media coverage of the Coinage Act. By capitalizing on the public's widespread public ignorance of regulatory policy, by disseminating an explanation that played into popular stereotypes about bankers, and by taking leading positions in the free silver movement, Ralston's allies transformed a political issue that should have destroyed their careers into a source of popular adoration and power.

In doing so, Ralston's allies managed to secure their immediate political objectives and deflected public outrage. However, in doing so they inadvertently wound up influencing the ideological development of the Democratic Party. Prior to the Civil War, the Democrats had opposed centralizing regulatory authority in the federal government. Influenced by the Jeffersonian ideas manifested in Jackson's opposition to the recharter of the Second Bank of the United States and his veto of the Maysfield road, many Democrats worried that any aggrandizement of federal authority could be used to threaten slavery. However, the Civil War had removed this justification for limiting federal authority, and the economic policies that Ralston's coalition popularized offered a model for a new kind of politics that had lasting implications for American politics.

This is not to deny the deep similarities between antebellum monetary conflicts and the free silver issue. In both cases popular outrage focused on the corrupting power of concentrated economic power, and both played upon American's populist sensibilities. However, the free silver movement introduced an innovation that has become so commonplace that its novelty has been largely overlooked. While Bryan retained continuity in the groups he denounced and in the interests he sought to protect, the means he adopted to achieve these objectives were novel. Instead of demanding devolution of banking

authority to the states, as Jackson had, he demanded federal regulation of banks and the free coinage of silver to aid the disadvantaged. However, these ideas, and the conspiratorial account that made them agreeable to the public, had been popularized to mask Ralston's allies from their role in the Coinage Act's passage. By supplying Bryan with the ideas that would dominate the election of 1896, Ralston's legislative coalition unintentionally influenced the Democrats' ideological transition toward contemporary economic liberalism. Instead of being seen as a threat to their independence and freedom, the federal government was increasingly seen as the public's ally in opposing special interests and powerful economic groups.

While this ideological transformation was influenced by ideas popularized by the free silver movement, the Coinage Act's passage provided the underlying condition that made such duplicity necessary in the first place. Although it is likely that other representatives from Nevada and California would have demanded free silver issue had it not been demanded by Ralston's allies, such mobilization would never have been necessary had Ralston's coalition never demonetized silver. Without the passage of the Coinage Act, silver currency would have entered circulation as its price declined. Had this occurred, silver would have acted as an inflationary monetary unit and there would have been no need to demand free silver or create organizations like the American Bimetallic League or the American Bimetallic Party.

In the absence of these pressures, organizations, and demands, free silver would never have emerged as a political issue. Had silver simply reentered circulation, Bryan would not have endorsed free silver in 1896 and there would have been no "Cross of Gold" speech. This would have either led the Democratic Party to delay their transition to contemporary liberalism, or it would have caused them to adopt different policies that would have caused this transition to occur along a different trajectory.

That Ralston's conspirators manufactured a conspiracy theory is merely an irony of history. But in masking their responsibility for demonetizing silver, the conspirators inadvertently tapped into what is more charitably understood as public confusion, not public paranoia. Americans were faced with new economic fluctuations that had no clear, comprehensible, or simple explanation. Newspapers had provided a personalized explanation for these fluctuations, an explanation adopted by the conspirators that targeted sinister special interests. If one adopted this explanation for the country's problems, the political solution was obvious: elect public-spirited men who would not accept bribes or be influenced by bankers. This political template remains in place to our day. Both political parties blame public problems on "special interests" and claim that if the self-interested backroom dealers could be thrown out of government and public officials rendered more responsive to popular demands, all would be well.

According to this conception of American politics, the responsiveness of elected officials to public opinion is critical. The principal challenge is to ensure that officials are not diverted from responding to public opinion by bribes or inducements from special interests. As with many of the Populists' ideas, there is a kernel of truth to this view of American politics. Yet even if politicians were responsive to public opinion, how can the public know which policies to endorse? And if government subservience to special interests is a problem, how can we know which politicians are serving special interests given our imperfect and indirect knowledge of politics?

Voters know little of what goes in Washington and they understand little of the complex legislation that is the principal subject of contemporary American politics—which even their elected representatives often do not read. Little surprise then that few were aware of the Coinage Act's introduction, or that elected officials do not appear to have understood its ramifications. And when the media produced a simple and personalized explanation for the country's economic problems, an explanation that played on popular preconceptions of bankers, it was adopted despite its inaccuracies.

The fact that this explanation happened to be generally accurate is unimportant except inasmuch as it helps us explain the epochal developments that followed.

For when Ralston's coalition popularized this account, they drew on the public's opposition to bankers and foreigners to generate public outrage that stimulated widespread political engagement. The resulting popular outcry carried through Populism to Bryan's nomination, and helped usher in a new style of politics, one demanding the application of the state to solve the problems of common Americans. This package of ideas drew on a long history of clashes between ill-intentioned special interests and public-spirited politicians, yet it introduced the idea that the federal government needed to act to aid the disadvantaged. This ideational synthesis was popularized by Ralston's allies' conspiracy theory, ideas that Bryan adopted and went on to animate the Progressive movement and the politics of the next hundred years.

While it has become commonplace to assume that the state should respond to public demands, the sources of the ideas that motivate mass politics are less self-evident than they appear.²²⁹ For it is clear that the American public, like most elected officials and public observers at the time, never understood the forces responsible for one of the most salient regulatory issues of the 19th century. Nor is this surprising. People know little and they are entertained by even less. Meanwhile, they have created in the modern state a mighty engine that caters to their petty whims as readily as does capitalism in the private sphere. The engine is, of necessity, run by thousands of officials who will forever remain nameless—as nameless as Henry Linderman and William Ralston would be to anyone who had not read these pages.

This anonymity, voters' reliance upon opinion leaders for information about politics, and public opinion's corresponding susceptibility to manipulation, indicates that democratic governments may enjoy a degree of autonomy from society even when they face elections and the

power of public opinion. Hardly a consequence of the institutional variables, such as their access to taxation revenue, standing armies, or loyal bureaucracies, typically believed to allow states to operate independently of societal demands, democratic states may enjoy autonomy from society simply due to widespread public ignorance and the difficulty of becoming informed of modern states' multitudinous regulatory decisions.²³⁰

Presumably opinion leaders and rival political parties have incentives to inform voters if officials pursue policies the public opposes. Yet even relatively informed political elites may not understand the forces responsible for regulatory decisions if the interests and causal relationships are complicated or masked. Furthermore, even if elites understand such relationships they may be too complicated to persuasively explain them to mass publics.²³¹ In the case of the silver issue other elites were deeply misled about the nature of the interests involved, and subsequent academic studies were hardly more accurate.

Given such difficulties, one can hardly blame 19th-century voters for misunderstanding the forces responsible for silver's demonetization. Nor should we be surprised if contemporary political events are prone to similar levels of misunderstanding and confusion. The complexity of politics, and the secrecy surrounding the calculations of the actors involved, indicates that even attentive political observers may face a chaotic set of existential judgments, poorly informed positions, and the distinct possibility that they have adopted fictitious ideas that mask complex processes and decisions in unexpected ways.

Figure 1, Ralston's Bribe.

*Delate
to H.K.K.
March 2, 1871*

THE BANK OF CALIFORNIA

San Francisco, *5th* 1871



At sight of this **ORDER OF EXCHANGE** *(original & duplicate)*
Pay to the order of *J. Linderman*
Thirty five hundred **Dollars**
Value received

In U. S. Gold Coin

To MESSRS. LEES & W.
NEW YORK

35247

By original in the Bancroft Library to
 be used only for reference. It may not be deposited in
 other libraries or institutions without express per-
 mission. Please refer to copies. The Bancroft Lib-
 rary Commission on your research. Permission
 to publish in full or in part must be obtained
 from the Director, The Bancroft Library, Un-
 iversity of California, Berkeley, California, 94720

Primary Sources

- Benjamin Butler Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Benjamin Bristow Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- William Jennings Bryan Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Ewing Family Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- William Fessenden Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- James Garfield Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Jones Family Papers. Charles E. Young Research Library, UC Los Angeles.
- Manton Marble Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- William Ralston Papers. Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.
- Samuel Ruggles Papers. New York Public Library, New York, NY.
- John Sherman Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Benjamin Wade Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Elihu Washburne Papers. Library of Congress, Washington DC.
- Record Group 56, Letters Sent to Individual Senators and Representatives (“E” Series), 1834-1874, National Archives College Park, MD.
- Record Group 104, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury, Letters Sent, 1836-1878, National Archives College Park, MD.

Newspapers

- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>Bankers Magazine</i> | <i>McKean County Miner</i> |
| <i>Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register</i> | <i>New York Daily Tribune</i> |
| <i>Bismarck Tri-Weekly Triune</i> | <i>New York Evening Sun</i> |
| <i>Boston Globe</i> | <i>The Ohio Democrat</i> |
| <i>Boston Commercial Bulletin</i> | <i>The San Francisco Daily Alta</i> |
| <i>Boston Herald</i> | <i>The Silver Knight-Watchman</i> |
| <i>Burlington Hawkeye</i> | <i>The Standard</i> |
| <i>The Chicago Tribune</i> | <i>Trenton Times</i> |
| <i>The Commercial and Financial Chronicle</i> | <i>Virginia Chronicle</i> |
| <i>Daily Nevada State Journal</i> | <i>Virginia City Territorial Enterprise</i> |

Indiana Progress
The Daily Independent
The Evening Gazette

The Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette
The Waterloo Daily Reporter
Idaho Statesman

¹ V. O. Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” *Journal of Politics* 17(1955): 3-18; Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971); Richard McCormick, “The Realignment Synthesis in American History,” in Richard McCormick ed., *The Party Period and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Edward Carmines and James Stimson, “The Dynamics of Issue Evolution: The United States,” 134-153, in *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Realignment or Dealignment?* Russell Dalton, Scott Flanagan and Paul Allen Beck eds., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For a critique see David Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of An American Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

² Philip Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” in David Apter Ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964); Scott James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State: a Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³ Richard Benschel, *Passion and Preferences: William Jennings Bryan and the 1896 Democratic National Convention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Paul Kleppner, *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893-1928* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

⁴ See Richard Timberlake, *Monetary Policy in the United States: An Intellectual and Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); William Gerald Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972); James Sharp, *The Jacksonians Versus the Banks: Politics in the States After the Panic of 1837*

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970).

⁵ For the concept of development see Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 4.

⁶ Alan Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

⁷ Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power, The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 116, 150, 170.

⁸ John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 189.

⁹ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 55-56.

¹⁰ Benjamin Parke De Witt, *The Progressive Movement, A Non-partisan, Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1915), 32; Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); Richard Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 116.

¹² Steven Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capabilities, 1877 to 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Daniel Carpenter, *The*

Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹³ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 410.

¹⁴ James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution), 155; Shigeo Hirano and James Snyder, "The Decline of Third-Party Voting in the United States," *Journal of Politics* 69: 1-16.

¹⁵ William Jennings Bryan. *The First Battle. A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1896), 154-155.

¹⁶ Bryan, *The First Battle*, 153-4.

¹⁷ Bryan, *The First Battle*, 71.

¹⁸ For analyses of the relationship between ideas and institutions see Robert Lieberman, "Ideas, Institutions, and Political Order: Explaining Political Change," *American Political Science Review* 96(4): 697-712; Rogers Smith, "Which Comes First, the Ideas or the Institutions?" 91-113, in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin eds., (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ See James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²⁰ For the Populists see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Bruce Palmer, “Man Over Money,” *The Southern Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (University Press of Kansas, 1995); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (Oxford University Press, 1983); James E. Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Robert Larson, *Populism in the Mountain West* (University of New Mexico Press, 1986); John Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis, 1931).

²¹ Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 331; Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Milton Friedman, “The Crime of 1873,” *Journal of Political Economy* 98 (1990): 1159-1194; Lawrence Laughlin, *The History of Bimetallism in the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). See generally Angela Redish, *Bimetallism: An Economic and Historical Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 7.

²² Unger, *Greenback Era*, 331; Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style*, 255.

²³ Allen Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism: Origins of the Silver Issue, 1867-1878* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 14; Paul O’Leary, “The Scene of the Crime of 1873 Revisited: A Note,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 68 (1960): 1159-1194; Allen Weinstein, “Was There a ‘Crime of 1873’?: The Case of the Demonetized Dollar,” *The Journal of American History* 54

(1967): 307-326; Walter Nugent, *Money and American Society 1865-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

²⁴ Walter Nugent, *The Money Question During Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton Co, 1967), 146.

²⁵ Peter Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite," 94, in Daniel Bell ed., *The New American Right* (New York: Criterion Books, 1955); Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

²⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Weinstein, "Was There a 'Crime of 1873'?", 325.

²⁷ Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1865-1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies During the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²⁸ J. Medill to E. Washburne, Chicago, IL, May 1, 1868, Washburne MSS; Jay Cooke to B. Butler, November 5, 1867, Philadelphia, PA, Butler MSS; M. Pomeroy to M. Marble, La Cross, WI, January 3, 1868, Marble MSS; A. Denny to J. Sherman, October 14, 1867, Sherman MSS.

²⁹ Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 116.

³⁰ *Annual Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1867, 326.

³¹ Marc Flandreau, "The Economics and Politics of Monetary Unions: A Reassessment of the Latin Monetary Union, 1865-1871," *Financial History Review* 7 (2000): 25-41.

-
- ³² S. Ruggles to J. Sherman, Paris, France, May 17, 1867, Ruggles MSS.
- ³³ See David Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible: William C. Ralston and Early San Francisco* (Palo Alto: American West Publishing Company, 1975); George D. Lyman, *Ralston's Ring: California Plunders the Comstock Lode* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937); Cecil Tilton, *William Chapman Ralston, Courageous Builder* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1935).
- ³⁴ S. Hooper to W. Ralston, September 5, 1869, Boston MA, Ralston MSS.
- ³⁵ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, May 19, 1872, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ³⁶ F. Barsalou, "The Concentration of Banking Power in Nevada: An Historical Analysis," *The Business History Review*, 29 (1955): 352.
- ³⁷ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 321.
- ³⁸ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 332. See John Willem, *The United States Trade Dollar: America's Only Unwanted, Unhonored Coin* (New York: The Marchbanks Press, 1959).
- ³⁹ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 16-17
- ⁴⁰ J. Knox to W. Ralston, Washington DC, November 16, 1869, Ralston MSS.
- ⁴¹ Wells Drury, *An Editor on the Comstock Lode*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1936), 22.
- ⁴² W. Stewart to A. Bull and W. Ralston, April 30, 1867, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁴³ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 324.
- ⁴⁴ Ruth Hermann, *Gold and Silver Colossus: William Morris Stewart and his Southern Bride* (Sparks: Dave's Printing and Publishing, 1975), 200.
- ⁴⁵ W. Stewart and E. Casserly to W. Ralston, April 22, 1869, Ralston MSS.
- ⁴⁶ John Sherman, *Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate and Cabinet* (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1895), 389-90.
- ⁴⁷ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 280-81.

-
- ⁴⁸ Willem, *The United States Trade Dollar*, 61.
- ⁴⁹ Weinstein, "Crime of 1873," 322.
- ⁵⁰ G. Boutwell to H. Linderman, Washington DC, October 27, 1869, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury, Letters Sent, 1836-1878, Record Group 104, NA. National Archives sources are subsequently identified by their record group (RG) number.
- ⁵¹ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 331; Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 16.
- ⁵² J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁵³ J. Knox to W. Ralston, November 16, 1869, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁵⁴ J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁵⁵ J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁵⁶ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 331; Willem, *The United States Trade Dollar*, 58.
- ⁵⁷ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 326.
- ⁵⁸ H. Linderman quoted in J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁵⁹ H. Linderman quoted in J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁶⁰ Porter Garnett, "The History of the Trade Dollar," *American Economic Review* 7 (1917): 91-97.
- ⁶¹ J. Knox to G. Boutwell, April 25, 1870, Washington DC, RG 104.
- ⁶² "Guyescutes" to W. Ralston, January 14, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶³ "Guyescutes" to W. Ralston, January 14, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶⁴ W. Stewart to W. Ralston, February 10, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶⁵ R. Stevens to W. Ralston, December 11, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶⁶ W. Stewart to W. Ralston, February 10, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶⁷ F. Smith to W. Ralston, June 2, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁶⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., pg. 3051.

-
- ⁶⁹ R. Stevens to W. Ralston, December 11, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁷⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 368.
- ⁷¹ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 368-9.
- ⁷² *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 369.
- ⁷³ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 369.
- ⁷⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 370.
- ⁷⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 370.
- ⁷⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 376-7.
- ⁷⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 370.
- ⁷⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 376.
- ⁷⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 376.
- ⁸⁰ W. Huntington to W. Ralston, January 11, 1871, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ⁸¹ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, February 3, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸² H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸³ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, February 3, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁴ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁵ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 9, 1873, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁶ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, February 3, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁷ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁸ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁸⁹ E. Casserly to W. Ralston, December 23, 1872, Washington DC; W. Huntington to W. Ralston, January 25, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁹⁰ G. Williams to W. Ralston, January 11, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.

-
- ⁹¹ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁹² H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁹³ Grant Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode, 1850-1920* (Reno: Nevada State Bureau of Mines, 1943): 186; Friedman, “The Crime of 1873,” 1165.
- ⁹⁴ Weinstein, “Was there a ‘Crime of 1873,’” 325.
- ⁹⁵ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ⁹⁶ W. Ralston to H. Linderman, April 5, 1871, San Francisco, CA, Ralston MSS.
- ⁹⁷ Willem, *The United States Trade Dollar*, 61.
- ⁹⁸ W. Huntington to W. Ralston, October 14, 1870, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ⁹⁹ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁰⁰ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁰¹ J. Henston Jr. to W. Ralston, June 25, 1868, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁰² *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., pg. 338. After the House passed the measure Garfield noted he had merely had “considered a few odds and ends of appropriations.” Garfield Diary, May 27, 1872, Garfield MSS.
- ¹⁰³ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., pgs. 322-3.
- ¹⁰⁴ Weinstein, “Crime of 1873,” 324.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., pg. 322.
- ¹⁰⁶ Weinstein, “Crime of 1873,” 319.
- ¹⁰⁷ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, May 19, 1872, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁰⁸ W. Ralston to G. Williams, June 7, 1872, San Francisco, CA, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁰⁹ W. Ralston to G. Williams, June 7, 1872, San Francisco, CA, Ralston MSS.
- ¹¹⁰ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, May 19, 1872, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.

-
- ¹¹¹ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, May 19, 1872, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹¹² Eugene Kelly quoted in the San Francisco *Daily Alta*, May 5, 1872.
- ¹¹³ San Francisco *Daily Alta*, May 11, 1872.
- ¹¹⁴ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, May 19, 1872, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹¹⁵ J. Pollock to G. Boutwell, December 6, 1872, Philadelphia PA, RG 104, NA.
- ¹¹⁶ Linderman quoted in *Banker's Magazine*, VII, March 1873, 710.
- ¹¹⁷ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 20.
- ¹¹⁸ Nugent, *The Money Question*, 158.
- ¹¹⁹ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 21.
- ¹²⁰ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 19.
- ¹²¹ Quoted in the *Bankers Magazine*, March 1873, 710.
- ¹²² Henry Linderman, *Money and Legal Tender in the United States* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1878), 45.
- ¹²³ H. Linderman to W. Richardson, August 18, 1873, Philadelphia PA, Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury, Letters Received from the Director of the Bureau of the Mint, 1873-1910, National Archives, College Park, MD, Entry 168, Box 1.
- ¹²⁴ Linderman as quoted in the *Banker's Magazine*, March 1873, 711.
- ¹²⁵ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 9, 1873, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ¹²⁶ H. Linderman and J. Torrey, "The Production of Gold and Silver," printed in *Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register*, March 1873.
- ¹²⁷ *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, February 4, 1873.
- ¹²⁸ *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, March 28, 1876.
- ¹²⁹ Weinstein, "Crime of 1873," 317, 311-312.

-
- ¹³⁰ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 25.
- ¹³¹ See J. Knox to J. Sherman, December 14, 1872, Washington DC, RG 104, NA.
- ¹³² *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 672.
- ¹³³ Weinstein, "Crime of 1873," 323.
- ¹³⁴ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 14.
- ¹³⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 672.
- ¹³⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pg. 672.
- ¹³⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., pgs. 668-672.
- ¹³⁸ Van Ryzin, *Crime of 1873*, 97.
- ¹³⁹ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 9, 1873, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁴⁰ W. Ralston to B. Bristow, April 13, 1875, San Francisco, CA, Bristow MSS.
- ¹⁴¹ *Annual Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1873, 477; H. Linderman to J. Floyd, August 7, 1873, RG 104, NA.
- ¹⁴² *Annual Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1874, 198-9; H. Linderman to S. Ruggles, January 22, 1873, Philadelphia, PA, Ruggles MSS.
- ¹⁴³ J. Simonton to J. Sherman, December 29, 1877, New York, NY, Sherman MSS. See generally Oscar Lewis, *Silver Kings: The lives and Times of Mackay, Fair, Flood, and O'Brien, Lords of the Nevada Comstock Lode* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1947).
- ¹⁴⁴ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 269-270.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, December 30, 1876.
- ¹⁴⁶ *The Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette*, June 20, 1885.
- ¹⁴⁷ *The Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette*, June 20, 1885.
- ¹⁴⁸ W. Ralston to H. Linderman, San Francisco, CA, May 18, 1875, Garfield MSS.

-
- ¹⁴⁹ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 336.
- ¹⁵⁰ Lavender, *Nothing Seemed Impossible*, 334.
- ¹⁵¹ *Annual Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1873, 477.
- ¹⁵² H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁵³ A. Belmont to T. Bayard, November 18, 1877, New York, NY, Sherman MSS.
- ¹⁵⁴ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 9, 1873, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁵⁵ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 9, 1873, n.p., Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁵⁶ Nugent, *Money Question*, 140; Weston, *The Silver Question*, 54.
- ¹⁵⁷ Weston, *The Silver Question*, 558-59.
- ¹⁵⁸ Weston, *The Silver Question*, 61; William Peffer, *The Farmer's Side: His Troubles and their Remedy* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 116.
- ¹⁵⁹ Mary E. Glass, *Silver and Politics in Nevada: 1892-1902* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1969), 13.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Daily Nevada State Journal*, April 26, 1876.
- ¹⁶¹ Nugent, *Money Question*, 144; Weston, *The Silver Question*, 54.
- ¹⁶² Weston in the *Chicago Tribune*, September 9, 1876.
- ¹⁶³ Weston in the *Chicago Tribune*, September 9, 1876.
- ¹⁶⁴ Weston in the *Chicago Tribune*, September 9, 1876.
- ¹⁶⁵ Weston in the *Washington National Republican*, January 22, 1878; Unger, *Greenback Era*, 336.
- ¹⁶⁶ John P. Jones, *Resumption and the Double Standard* (Washington DC, 1876), 3; *Trenton Times*, May 13, 1890; *Daily Nevada State Journal*, April 26, 1876.
- ¹⁶⁷ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 78.
- ¹⁶⁸ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 78.

-
- ¹⁶⁹ Weinstein, *Prelude to Populism*, 80.
- ¹⁷⁰ Thomas Ewing quoted in *The Ohio Democrat*, September 6, 1877.
- ¹⁷¹ Thomas Ewing quoted in *The Defiance Democrat*, September 6, 1877.
- ¹⁷² Ernst Seyd, *Bullion and Foreign Exchanges Theoretically and Practically Considered* (London: E. Wilson, 1868).
- ¹⁷³ Edmond de Rothschild to B. Bristow, March 6, 1876, Paris, France, Bristow MSS.
- ¹⁷⁴ B. Durfee to J. Sherman, February 15, 1877, Washington DC, Sherman MSS.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Burlington Hawkeye*, July 27, 1878.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Burlington Hawkeye*, July 27, 1878.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Congressional Record*, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., pg. 1064.
- ¹⁷⁸ H. Linderman to W. Ralston, March 26, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 1st Sess., pg. 1231.
- ¹⁸⁰ “Guyescutes” to W. Ralston, January 14, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁸¹ “Guyescutes” to W. Ralston, January 14, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁸² “Guyescutes” to W. Ralston, January 14, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁸³ A. Sargent to W. Ralston, January 31, 1871, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁸⁴ Jones in the *Congressional Record*, Vol. 7, Part 2, February 15, 1878.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Idaho Statesman*, February 15, 1876.
- ¹⁸⁶ *New York Evening Sun*, August 28, 1899, as quoted in Herman, *Gold and Silver Colossus*, 267.
- ¹⁸⁷ Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang), 200.
- ¹⁸⁸ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 89.
- ¹⁸⁹ Stewart, *The Silver Question*, 17.

-
- ¹⁹⁰ Wells Drury, *An Editor on the Comstock Lode* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), 22-23.
- ¹⁹¹ *The Waterloo Daily Reporter*, August 18, 1896.
- ¹⁹² *New York Times*, August 15, 1895.
- ¹⁹³ Herman, *Gold and Silver Colossus*, 265.
- ¹⁹⁴ Laymen, *Ralston's Ring*, 253.
- ¹⁹⁵ W. Stewart to W. Ralston, February 10, 1870, Washington DC, Ralston MSS.
- ¹⁹⁶ *The Waterloo Daily Reporter*, August 18, 1896.
- ¹⁹⁷ *The Waterloo Daily Reporter*, August 18, 1896.
- ¹⁹⁸ Henry Clews, *The Wall Street Point of View* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Co, 1900), 184.
- ¹⁹⁹ Elliot, *Servant of Power*, 121.
- ²⁰⁰ Elliot, *Servant of Power*, 120.
- ²⁰¹ William M. Stewart, *Reminiscences of Senator William M. Stewart of Nevada* (New York: George Rothwell Brown, 1908), 277.
- ²⁰² *Indiana Progress*, June 27, 1878; *Bismarck Tri-Weekly Tribune*, March 7, 1878.
- ²⁰³ Elliott, *Servant of Power*, 165; Stewart, *Reminiscences*, 317.
- ²⁰⁴ *New York Times*, June 8, 1892.
- ²⁰⁵ J. Jones to W. Ralston, San Francisco, CA, August 18, 1872, Ralston MSS.
- ²⁰⁶ Herman, *Gold and Silver Colossus*, 248.
- ²⁰⁷ J. Jones to B. Bristow, August 14, 1875, San Francisco, CA, Bristow MSS.
- ²⁰⁸ H. Linderman to B. Bristow, July 25, 1875, San Francisco, CA, Bristow MSS.
- ²⁰⁹ J. Jones to B. Bristow, July 24, 1875, San Francisco, CA, Bristow MSS.
- ²¹⁰ Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 302.

-
- ²¹¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 1, 1893.
- ²¹² A. J. Warner, *The Silver Question. How the Measure of Value is Changed* (Washington DC: Geo. R. Gray, Printer, 1890), 8.
- ²¹³ *The Silver Knight-Watchman*, January 13, 1898.
- ²¹⁴ B. Wright to J. Sherman, n.p., January 19, 1878, Sherman MSS.
- ²¹⁵ A. Tressel to W. J. Bryan, Allegheny PA, November 9, 1896, William Jennings Bryan Papers.
- ²¹⁶ Elmer Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller: Defender of the West* (Caldwell: Caxton Printers, 1941), 184.
- ²¹⁷ *Proceedings of the First National Silver Convention, St. Louis November 26, 27, 28, 1889* (St. Louis: Buxton & Skinner Stationary Co., 1889), 111.
- ²¹⁸ *Proceedings of the First National Silver Convention*, 112.
- ²¹⁹ *The Daily News*, August 3, 1896.
- ²²⁰ *The Silver Knight-Watchman*, January 6, 1898.
- ²²¹ D. McClung to J. Sherman, February 20, 1877, Woodsdale, OH, Sherman MSS.
- ²²² B. Nourse to J. Sherman, January 25, 1877, Boston, MA; W. Bateman to J. Sherman, Cincinnati, OH, February 14, 1877, Sherman MSS.
- ²²³ *Congressional Record*, 44th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 171.
- ²²⁴ J. Tait to W. Bryan, October 25, 1896, Santa Cruz, CA, William Jennings Bryan Papers.
- ²²⁵ *New York Times*, August 16, 1895.
- ²²⁶ Alexander Noyes, *Forty Years of American Finance* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1909), 35.
- ²²⁷ Hofstadter's oversights were, in part, a result of his bizarre unwillingness to examine primary sources. See David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²²⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 337.

²²⁹ Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

²³⁰ Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," in *Bringing the State Back In*, Peter Evans et al. eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For studies documenting widespread voter ignorance see Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Ilya Somin, "Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal," *Critical Review* 12(4): 413-458; Martin Gilens, "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(5): 778-796; Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); James Kuklinski and Paul Quirk, "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion," 174, in *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, Arthur Lupia et al. eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²³¹ Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).