In 1872, Republicans calling for an end to Reconstruction split and ran Horace Greeley for President on the Liberal Republican ticket. Democrats also nominated Greeley.

In 1876, election results in three southern states were contested. Congressional Democrats agreed not to let Hayes have the Presidency in exchange for an end to Reconstruction.

In 1896, William Jennings Bryan's supporters took control of the national Democratic Party. Bryan argued that farmers and workers would be crucified on a "cross of gold" by conservative bankers and businessmen who insisted on a tight money supply. He lost the election, but the Democratic Party increasingly backed his populist principles.

By the mid-1890s, the Democrats' northern coalition of farmers, immigrants, and businessmen was breaking up. In the Congressional elections of 1894, Republicans nearly swept the northern states.

In the 1880s, Republicans "waved the bloody shirt," gaining support by reminding northern voters that they had won the Civil War.

The Greenback Party supported government issue of paper money to help farmers and businessmen. By 1884, it also advocated an income tax, the eight-hour work day, and women's right to vote, and the party spoke up for support.

The Populists opposed the gold standard and supported a free money supply. More generally, they advocated for farmers and industrial workers and a stronger government to work for their interests rather than those of the parties.

The Prohibition Party organized around a single issue: the banning of alcoholic beverages. They received a small percentage of the vote in each election until 1920.

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In 1896, Republicans led by William McKinley argued that Bryan's liberal economic policies would make everyone poor. McKinley also reassured immigrants, especially Germans, that he welcomed them as Americans. His campaign manager, Mark Hanna, raised millions of dollars and used new techniques of advertising. The result was a Republican landslide. The new Republican coalition would dominate national politics for another 36 years.