Name: _____ Date: _____



Recognizing Ideologies: The Omaha Platform





Directions: In this worksheet you will examine the ideology of the Populist party.

The Populist Party Platform was written in 1892 at Omaha, Nebraska. What follows is a summary of the original platform.

We meet [in Omaha] as our nation is on the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. The rich and the bankers control the money in the country for their own greed. Our present system has led to two classes—tramps and millionaires.

We have seen for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties [the Democrats and Republicans] for power and plunder [theft]. Meanwhile terrible wrongs have been inflicted on the suffering people. Both parties have allowed these dreadful wrongs to develop without any effort to prevent them. The two major parties are dominated by greed, corruption, and rich people.

We declare therefore,

I. Labor forces are hereby united to uplift mankind.
II. Wealth belongs to him who creates it [the workers, not the owner].
III. The industrial worker and the farmer have the same interests and the same enemies.
IV. The people should own the railroads through the government.
V. The government alone should control the money supply, and not the bankers.
VI. There should be free and unlimited coinage of silver in a ratio of 16 to 1 compared to gold.
VII. There should be a graduated income tax. [As income goes up, the tax rate goes up. For example, if you make $10,000 you might pay 5 percent, or $500; if you make $20,000 you might pay 10 percent, or $2,000.]
VIII. The government should own and operate the telephone and telegraph [the carriers of information] in the interests of the people.
IX. The land, including the natural resources in the land, belongs to the people. It should not be controlled by speculators [people who buy something expecting to sell it at an unusually large profit], and aliens [foreigners who are not citizens] should not be able to own it. Land owned by aliens and railroads should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers.
X. The government should limit immigration into the United States.
XI. There should be a shorter work week for laborers.
XII. The secret ballot should be used in all elections.
XIII. The people should be able to use the initiative [by which private citizens could propose laws] and referendum [by which citizens could express an opinion on an issue by voting on it].
XIV. Senators should be elected directly by the people. [At this time, U.S. Senators were elected by state legislatures, not by citizens directly.]
XV. The president of the United States should be able to serve one four-year term only.

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Relevant Information

A. Free coinage of silver would have increased the supply of money. An increase in the supply of money would generally lead to inflation (higher prices than there would have been if the money supply did not increase), unless the supply of goods and services increased by at least as much.

B. Farmers had tried several times to use the government to regulate (control) the railroads in the interest of the farmers.

C. People who owe money (debtors) generally benefit from inflation. This is because the amount of money they have to repay remains fixed (let's say $100 per year) while their incomes from selling goods or services generally rise with inflation (let's say from $150 in the first year to $160 in the second year).

D. People who are owed money (creditors—often banks) generally dislike inflation. This is because they will be paid back a fixed amount of money that will buy fewer goods and services as prices increase.

E. Most Populists were farmers.

F. Many industrial unions opposed immigration into the United States.

Put a check next to the statements with which you think the Populists would have agreed, based on the Omaha Platform of 1892. Then write the reason you checked or did not check each statement, citing passages from the platform by number.

Statement	*Reasons*
_____ 1. Rich people deserve to keep the money they have.	_____
_____ 2. Immigration is bad for the country.	_____
_____ 3. Wealth should be more equally divided.	_____
_____ 4. Society can be improved through reform.	_____
_____ 5. Reform can be achieved through the Democratic and Republican parties.	_____
_____ 6. Freedom is more important than equality.	_____
_____ 7. The government is controlled by the rich—it must be reformed.	_____

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Put a check next to the statements you think are true, based on the Omaha Platform and the relevant information. Then write the reasons for your choices, citing passages from the platform by number and items of relevant information by letter.

Statement *Reasons*

_____ **8.** Farmers felt railroads were hurting them. _____

_____ **9.** Many farmers were debtors (they owed money on loans). _____

_____ **10.** The Populists were trying to gain the support of industrial workers. _____

_____ **11.** Bankers supported the idea of free coinage of silver. _____

_____ **12.** Populists were conservative—that is, they wanted to go back to earlier days. They were not pushing for innovation and change. _____

_____ **13.** Populists were radical—they were suggesting radical change in our society. _____