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| **American History II** | **Unit 1 – The Great West and the Gilded Age** |
| **What Does the Omaha Platform Show about the Populists?** | |

**Background Information**

The Populist Party of the 1890s was made up of farmers. It first ran candidates for president and other national offices in the Election of 1892.

In order to organize for an election and in order to nominate (chose) candidates to run for office, political parties hold conventions. Conventions also write party platforms which state the party’s positions on a number of issues. For example, in a platform a party might state that it:

* Opposes gun control;
* Favors a new tax law to reduce taxes;
* Favors putting more United States troops into a certain country;
* Opposes arms talks with our enemies;
* Favors more government help for business.

A party platform can tell us something about the party and its positions. Read the Omaha Platform written by the Populists at their convention in Omaha, Nebraska in 1892 and then answer the questions.

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| **The Omaha Platform** – 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, robbery). 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,   1. Labor forces are hereby united to uplift mankind. 2. Wealth belongs to him who creates it (the workers, not the owner). 3. The industrial worker and the farmer have the same interests and the same enemies. 4. The people should own the railroads through the government. 5. The government alone, not the bankers, should control the money supply. 6. There should be free and unlimited coinage of silver in a ratio of 16 to 1 compared to gold. (Gold would be worth 16 times what silver is worth.) 7. There should be a graduate income tax. (As income goes up, the tax rate goes up. For example, if you make $10,000 you might by 5%, or $500; if you make $20,000 you might pay 10%, or $2,000. You pay a larger share of a larger income.) 8. The government should own and operate the telephone and telegraph (the carriers of information) in the interests of the people. 9. 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 (non-citizen foreigners) should not be able to own it. Land owned by aliens and railroads should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual sellers. 10. The government should limit immigration into the United States. 11. There should be a shorter work week for laborers. 12. The secret ballot should be used in all elections. 13. The people should be able to use the initiative (by which private individuals could propose laws) and referendum (on which citizens could express an opinion on an issue by voting on it). 14. Senators should be elected directly by the people. (At this time, U.S. Senators were elected by state legislatures, not by citizens directly.) 15. The President of the United States should be able to serve one four-year term only. |

**Relevant Information**

1. 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), unless the supply of goods and services increased as much.
2. Farmers had tried several times to use the government to regulate (control) the railroads in the interest of the farmers.
3. 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 income from selling goods or services generally rises with inflation (let’s say from $150 in the first year to $160 in the second year).
4. 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.
5. Most Populists were farmers.
6. Many industrial unions opposed immigration into the United States.

**Part A**  
Based on the Omaha Platform, put an **S** next to the statements with which the Populists in 1892 would likely have *agreed*. Write the reason you believe the Populists would have *supported* the statement. Put an **O** next to the statements with which the Populists in 1892 would likely have *disagreed*. Write the reason you believe the Populists would have *opposed* the statement. Include the location of supporting statements from the Omaha Platform (statement number(s) or introduction) in your explanation. For example, “Statement 3 shows the Populists were opposed to this idea because…”

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| \_\_\_\_\_1. | Rich people deserve to keep the money they have. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_2. | Immigration is bad for the country. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_3. | Speculators hurt other people, such as farmers. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_4. | Business owners make an important contribution to creating wealth through the production of goods and services. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_5. | There is fraud or intimidation of voters in elections. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_6. | Wealth should be more equally divided. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_7. | Society can be improved through reform. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_8. | The people should have more say in government. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_9. | Reform can be achieved through the Democratic and Republican Parties. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_10. | Freedom is more important than equality. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_11. | An important aspect of history is the struggle between the rich and the poor. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_12. | The state legislatures are controlled by the rich people. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_13. | It is possible for a conspiracy of a small number of people to control the history of a country for a time. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_14. | The government is controlled by the rich –it must be reformed. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_15. | Bankers have too much power. |
|  | Reason: |

**Part B**  
Based on the Omaha Platform and relevant information, put a check next to the statements which you think are *probably* true. Write the reason you checked the statement. Put an X next to the statements which you think are *probably* false. Write the reason you put an X by the statement. Include the location of supporting statements from the Omaha Platform (statement number(s) or introduction) and from the relevant information in your explanation.

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| \_\_\_\_\_16. | Many famers were debtors (they owed money on loans). |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_17. | Farmers felt railroads were hurting them. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_18. | The Populists were trying to gain the support of industrial workers. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_19. | Bankers supported the idea of free coinage of silver. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_20. | Populists were conservative – that is, they wanted to go back to earlier days. They were not pushing for innovation and change. |
|  | Reason: |
| \_\_\_\_\_21. | Populists were radical – they were suggesting radical change in our society. |
|  | Reason: |

**Part C**  
The Populists never elected a candidate to the presidency. Why do you suppose they did not win?