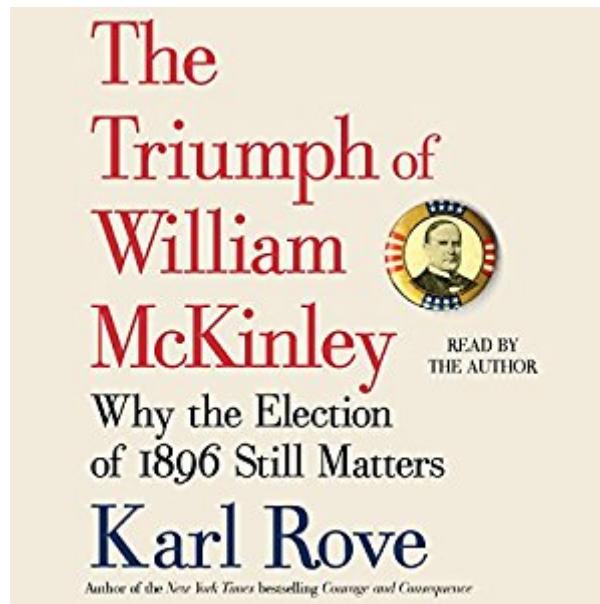


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# The Triumph Of William McKinley: Why The Election Of 1896 Still Matters



## Synopsis

From New York Times best-selling author and political mastermind Karl Rove comes a fresh look at President William McKinley, who found a message that healed his nation, pried his party away from its bosses, and extended its reach to forge a governing majority that lasted 30 years. Many of the changes that the country experienced in 1896 match those of today: A rising immigrant population made traditional white Protestants a shrinking share of the electorate, an economic upheaval led to rising inequality, and there was little common ground between the two parties. McKinley's campaign found answers to many of these challenges, which is why it is so relevant to what ails our politics now. A talented politician and reserved Ohioan, McKinley (called "The Major") changed the arc of American history by running the first truly modern presidential campaign. Knowing he didn't stand a chance with the GOP's traditional base of supporters, he did the unthinkable and reached out to diverse ethnic groups, including openly seeking the endorsement of Catholic Church leaders. Running on the slogan "The Man Against the Bosses", McKinley also took on the money men who controlled the party by doling out favors. He even deployed what we would consider modern tactics, including microtargeting voters with the use of the latest technology. Above all, he offered bold and controversial answers to the nation's most pressing challenge: how to make a new, more global economy work for everyone. And although he alienated factions within his party and longtime allies, he won the White House. The 1896 election is a compelling drama in its own right, but McKinley's brilliant strategies offer important and powerful lessons for both political parties today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

William McKinley is an underrated president who is unknown to many more than a century after his tenure in the White House. The presidential election of 1896 is one of the more noteworthy of the nineteenth century, but when people speak of that contest, a majority of the observations concern the defeated candidate, William Jennings Bryan, due to his charisma and famous "Cross of Gold" speech. In "The Triumph of William McKinley," political strategist and author Karl Rove chronicles our 25th president's path to the Oval Office and successfully argues McKinley's case as not just the eventual winner over Bryan in 1896, but the better politician and greater man as well. Rove begins by recalling McKinley's life leading up to his nomination and election, including his brave service in the Civil War, his time in Ohio Republican politics as a congressman and then governor, his family life, and some of the adversity and setbacks he had to surmount during his rise. In 1896 neither party had the system of presidential primaries that we know today, but then as now, money and organization were paramount for any candidate who hoped to win his party's nomination. Rove discusses how McKinley and his campaign advisors at the state and congressional district levels outworked and out-organized the party bosses who had controlled the nomination process for decades and how McKinley emerged as the nominee at the Republican National Convention in St. Louis. The great issue of the time was currency. Today, most of the South, Plains, and Mountain West is Republican and decries the "quantitative easing" (i.e., money printing) of recent years, while the Northeast is Democratic and takes a more cavalier attitude toward easy money.

The election of 1896 was the pivot point of a cataclysm that was soon forgotten. The economy had failed in 1894 for the same reasons it failed in 1929 and 2008 --- overexpansion of the business cycle, reckless speculation with borrowed money, and maldistribution of income that left the working class with too little purchasing power to sustain the demand side of the economy. By the end of 1894 the United States was paralyzed by depression. Millions were unemployed, and the wages of those who still held jobs were slashed. As wages were cut and layoffs mounted, violent strikes erupted in the industrial cities. Railroads in twenty-seven states were shut down by the strike of the American Railway Union. Chicago, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh were under military occupation by state militias and federal troops. Armed clashes broke out between soldiers and rioters, and newspaper accounts described a "reign of terror" created by mob rule. "I am not a pessimist," declared Secretary of State Walter Gresham, "but what is transpiring in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and

Illinois, and in regions west of there may fairly be viewed as symptoms of revolution.â •The country seemed to be on the knife-edge of class warfare of the kind that had roiled Europe with revolutions and repression for generations. Then in 1896 William McKinley, an affable small-town businessman backed by industrial conglomerates, was elected President. Almost instantly the cataclysm ended. Prosperity was restored across the land. The rioting Communist-inspired workers who had been burning down their corporate employersâ™ railroad yards and throwing brickbats at soldiers and police were happily back at work, earning bigger paychecks than ever. And they were voting Republican.

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