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After its startling success in the 1890's, why did the Populist Party quickly fade away? What impact did they have?

The Populist Party represents a unique time in our history. From humble beginnings amongst the sharecroppers and the Farmers Alliances 1868-1880s, to a place of national prominence, leaving a definite mark upon American politics.

- Beginning amongst poor farmers in the midwest and sharecroppers in the south who felt the economic cards were stacked against them (wall street), this group desired government intervention in the economy. To save Democracy from Wall Street.
"Raise more hell and less corn", Mary Lease -Kansas

They wanted;

- free coinage of silver
- a graduated income tax
- public ownership of the railroads
- direct election of Senators.
- gov't ownership of Telegraph/Telephone
- secret ballot

- Election of 1892 Candidate James Weaver received over 1 million votes. The party won control of some states –Illinois/Wisconsin
- Election of 1896 Democrat William Jennings Bryan and the free silver wing of the Dem. Party captured the Populist Party nomination. (Cross of Gold Speech)
Dem. Party dilemma – they could either campaign against Bryan a spokesman for one of their main issues (silver) or embrace him. The Democrats decided to nominate Bryan as their candidate. Thus the Populist Party was absorbed into the Dem. Party.

Bryan and the Democrats lost the election of 1896 and the Populist Party effectively absorbed were never resurrected. Mark Hanna, McKinley's campaign manager warned the nation that Bryan's election would mean loss of jobs and farms. However, the Populists were not dead, in 1913 the Democratic Party was successful in getting both direct election of senators and income tax into law. (Wilson administration on the Progressive Platform)

Thus the Populist Party made a remarkable impact upon the course of American politics even though an existing party was able to absorb its ideological thrust.

Thoughts to ponder: Could the Populist Movement form a seedbed for the Progressive Movement 1912 to 1920 ? Populism moves to city?

Source/Name drop: Mary Lease Kansas "Kansas needs to raise more Hell and less corn."