supply, and make it easier for farmers to pay off the debts they had incurred in buying land, seed, and farm machines. The Populists also called for the direct election of U.S. senators, that is, ending the election of senators by state legislatures and allowing voters to elect them directly. Finally, other party planks included calls for restrictions on further immigration (since the influx of many unskilled workers from abroad depressed wages for those already on the job), government ownership of railroads and communication systems, a graduated income tax, and a shorter workweek for industrial laborers. Weaver lost the election to Democrat Grover Cleveland, who was returned to the Presidency in 1892.

In 1896, the Populists nominated William Jennings Bryan, the former Nebraska congressman and avid proponent of free silver. Because the Democratic party had also nominated Bryan, the Populists tried to show their independence by nominating Tom Watson, a former Democratic congressman from Georgia, for Vice President. Republican William McKinley won that election. In 1900, the Populists nominated Wharton Barker for president, and in 1904 and 1908, Tom Watson, but none of these candidates ever won many votes. Between 1891 and 1903, 50 Populist candidates won election to Congress.

SEE ALSO
Agriculture; Bryan, William Jennings; Farmers' Alliances; Monetary policies; Populism

FURTHER READING

Poverty

REAL WAGES—the amount people earn in relation to what they can buy—rose in the late 1800s, primarily as a result of industrialization. At the same time, however, during every decade of the latter 19th century, the American economy suffered setbacks. Depressions occurred in 1873, 1884, and 1893, with each one lasting from two to four years. During these events, which were followed by a “panic” in 1907, when many banks failed, as many as 40 percent of American wage earners lost their jobs. Despite the rise in real wages, then, many Americans experienced prolonged periods of poverty.

Certain groups of Americans most likely to be poor in this period included rural families, especially African Americans and Native Americans. Unskilled male and female immigrants, the elderly, the very young, and single-parent families were also likely to be poor. Denied funds after the Civil War to buy farmland, most southern blacks went to work for white landowners, signing labor contracts that kept them perpetually in debt. Job discrimination kept other African Americans in marginal occupations.

The government herded western Indians onto reservations and expected them to take up farming. As farming was an occupation with which most Indians had no experience, in the end they were forced to sell much of their remaining lands to white settlers. The increasing numbers of unskilled immigrants created a surplus of labor that allowed employers who hired them to cut wages to bare subsistence levels. Until the mid-1930s, the U.S. govern-
Children in a poor New York City neighborhood play next to a dead horse. Photographs depicting children amid urban squalor helped to spur social reform efforts in the early 20th century.

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ment offered no Social Security to the elderly and little aid to young children without means of support, unless their fathers had served in the military.

At the turn of the 20th century, impoverished families inhabited housing without indoor plumbing, gas, or electricity. They owned so little clothing that they could not keep it clean or make it fit well. Children wore hand-me-downs or worn-out adult clothing bought second-hand and cut down to fit their small sizes. The diets of the poor lacked variety and were low in protein, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Often forced to go hungry, the poor frequently fell ill with infectious diseases. Few could afford to seek medical aid.

American attitudes toward poverty varied. Many blamed poverty on the poor themselves and accepted the arguments of Social Darwinists. These theorists applied the findings of the English evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin to human society, and argued against government aid to the poor as it might allow the unfit to survive. Most states limited their aid to the poor for fear of causing them to become dependent on aid and irresponsible. In this era, then, only private charities, usually organized along religious and ethnic lines, provided substantial aid to the poor. Social settlement houses set up nurseries and kindergartens for working parents and medical clinics that helped the poor in particular neighborhoods. Founded in 1911, the National Urban League provided employment services to African Americans newly arrived in cities.

When all of these efforts proved inadequate, social reformers lobbied for new social policies to aid the poor. Investigative journalism and social science research provided convincing evidence of widespread poverty. Reporter and photographer Jacob Riis published several influential studies of slum life, including *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and *Children of the Poor* (1902). In 1904, settlement worker Robert Hunter wrote a widely read book on the poor called *Poverty*. Hunter estimated that in 1900 about 12 percent of the American population was poor, a number that historians now think was closer to 40 percent.

American social investigators began to make systematic neighborhood surveys to establish how people were living on a daily basis and what they needed to make ends meet. Several important books resulted, including studies commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor that surveyed the slums of major cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Investigators determined that at the turn of the 20th century, a family needed $800 a year to rise above poverty. Many American workers earned far below that. At the end of the 19th century, for example, 60 percent of eastern Pennsylvania’s adult coal miners were earning less than $450 a year.

In the early 20th century, some states did implement new social policies to help alleviate poverty. In 1911, on the basis that it was better to aid poor mothers than to remove their
children and put them in orphanages or foster homes, Illinois established the first mothers’ pensions. The U.S. Children’s Bureau was instrumental in spreading this idea to other states, so that by the end of World War I all industrialized states had adopted similar laws. In 1912, Massachusetts passed the first minimum wage law for women and children. Struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1923, minimum wages for both sexes would have to wait until the Great Depression of the 1930s to receive wider acceptance.

SEE ALSO
African Americans; Children’s Bureau, U.S.; Labor, U.S. Department of; National Urban League; Native Americans; Riis, Jacob; Settlement-house movement; Social Darwinism; Social sciences

FURTHER READING

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Contributions to North American Ethnology (1877), and Canyons of the Colorado (1895)

• Died: Sept. 23, 1902, Haven, Maine

AN EXPLORER, geologist, and anthropologist, John Wesley Powell grew up in the Midwest, worked on his family’s farm, and taught school. At the same time, he collected objects from nature, gradually building a reputation as an expert in natural history. While fighting for the Union in the Civil War at the Battle of Shiloh, he lost the lower half of his right arm.

After the war, he took up teaching posts in Illinois. Soon, he was leading expeditions to explore the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. His anthropological studies of the Ute Indians and explorations of the Green and Colorado rivers earned him a national reputation. In 1869, the U.S. Congress awarded him funds to map and study large parts of the West. That same year, Powell and a party of explorers became the first white men to navigate the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. His second Grand Canyon expedition produced hundreds of photos, bringing the wonder of the canyon to the attention of Americans everywhere.

Known among Native Americans in southern Utah as Kapurats (“Right-arm-off”), Powell received an appointment in 1872 as a special commissioner of Indian affairs. His assignment was to study the problems of Native Americans in Utah, Nevada, and northern Arizona. Thereafter he advised Congress and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) on policies concerning Indians, public land, federal science programs, and environmental issues. The authorities at first rejected his “Report on the Lands of the Arid