Many people considered the election of 1896 the most important election since Lincoln’s election in 1860 because once again the nation was deeply divided.

The American people were divided over the nation’s money system, questioning whether U.S. currency should be backed with gold or silver.

An economic depression that occurred in 1893 and brought the currency issue to the forefront of political debate.

At this time the U.S. supported is money with gold. Those who supported the gold standard believed it would keep the value of the dollar high.

Most who supported the gold standard were businessmen, bankers and investors.

Those who supported the silver standard believed the value of the dollar was too high and that a high dollar drove down the prices of agricultural products.

Most who supported the silver standard were farmers, laborers and small business owners.

The Republicans chose William McKinley as their presidential candidate and the democrats nominated Congressman William Jennings Bryan.

America’s third party, The People’s Party (the Populists) united with the democrats to support Bryan because they too supported the silver standard.

The two candidates campaigned very differently. Bryan traveled the country visiting 27 states spending only $650,000.00 on his campaign. McKinley adopted the front porch campaign strategy inviting people to his home in Ohio to hear him speak. He spend around $3, 500,000.00

McKinley won the election by less than 600,000 votes.