

A Centennial Historiography of American Populism

by Worth Robert Miller

In the vast procession of American history, the People's party of the 1890s appeared and then passed into oblivion in the winking of an eye. The third party's heyday stretched from its victory in the Kansas legislative races of 1890 to the party's becoming an annex to Bryan Democracy in 1896. In those very few years, however, Populism permanently touched the soul of American politics by agitating issues that have never lost their vitality; namely who should rule and who should benefit from the fruits of modernization.¹

Populists claimed that "vicious" legislation had allowed exploiters to rob farmers and other workers of the value of their labor. This had led to manifold economic, political, and social problems, including the decline of agriculture after the Civil War. In the early 1890s members of the Southern Farmers' Alliance, and several like-minded organizations, signified their frustration with lobbying for relief by founding the People's party. This committed them to replacing the political elite with true representatives of the people and enacting legislation to take control of government policy away from the "interests."

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1. Populists carried 96 of 125 seats in the Kansas legislature and won five of Kansas' seven U.S. congressional races in 1890. Because the author wished to provide readers with an essay on easily obtained works of historiographic importance, this article does not refer to a number of fine dissertations, nor to books and articles that normally might be found in a bibliographic essay. Those interested in pursuing this subject further should consult Henry Clay Dethloff and Worth Robert Miller, eds., *A List of References for the History of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party* (Davis, Calif.: Agricultural History Center, 1989). Portions of this article first appeared in the bibliographical essay in Worth Robert Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

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**"Hayseed Socialism" on the Hill:
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GENE CLANTON

The party's first opportunity to effect change nationally came in 1892; Populists assembled in Omaha, Nebraska, for their first presidential nominating convention and selected a national ticket. Perhaps, of even greater import, delegates adopted a party platform. This bible of Populism championed reform in three major areas: land, transportation, and money. Populists demanded that public land be set aside for actual settlers, not held for speculative purposes. Because railroads, telephones, and telegraphs were natural monopolies, Populists demanded that they be owned by the government and operated in the interests of the people. On finance, Populists demanded that the contemporary banking system, which northeastern financial interests dominated, be replaced by a system directly responsible to elected officials. Because Populists lived in a period of massive deflation, they also demanded a flexible currency that could be inflated up to and maintained at \$50 per capita. This meant issuing paper money (greenbacks) and the free coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one with gold (free silver). Populists also endorsed the subtreasury plan, a farm commodity price support program originated by the Southern Farmers' Alliance. In addition, the platform contained an expression of sentiments sympathetic to labor, in favor of democratization of politics, and endorsing a graduated income tax. Except for the subtreasury plan, reformers had agitated all of these issues for years.

In the subsequent election, Populist presidential candidate James B. Weaver won only twenty-two electoral votes, but third-party candidates won numerous state and local offices in 1892.

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Frequently, Populist successes came by way of "fusion"—uniting with the weaker mainstream party in the region (Democrats in the West and Republicans in the South). Although the Populist vote doubled in 1894, the failure to secure fusion agreements with Democrats in the West caused many Populists to be turned out of office. Still, the third party became one of the major contenders for power throughout the South and West. In 1896 Democrats startlingly endorsed a major Populist issue, the free coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one with gold (which would have reversed deflation) and nominated William Jennings Bryan, who was quite close to Populists in his native Nebraska, for president. After a highly acrimonious debate, Populists likewise nominated Bryan, and in effect hitched their fortunes to his star. Afterward, the People's party collapsed as a significant political force, although the middle-of-the-road (antifusion) faction nominated a separate national ticket as late as 1908.

Historians have a wide variety of sources to draw from in reconstructing the past. They also are products of the environment in which they live and wish to make the study of history relevant to the contemporary world. This frequently leads them to conclude that the information best serving to enlighten a current issue is the most important in understanding the essence of the subject being studied. Because such concerns change over time, the interpretation of controversial subjects like Populism have also changed, and to some degree reflect the environment that produced them.

A look at how scholars have viewed the Populist Revolt over the past one hundred years can provide insight into both the craft of writing history and the course of the American republic in the twentieth century. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have produced a broad range of literature on the Populist Revolt. Still, controversies about the movement have rarely abated since the party's inception. Were Populists forward-looking liberal reformers embracing the twentieth century before its time? Were they hick farmers wishing to turn the clock back to some pre-industrial agrarian utopia? Or were they a truly radical force seeking to restructure American society along more humanitarian lines? Was the Populist Revolt the product of economic desperation or commitment to ideology? Was the People's party a unique phenomenon or one of several related reform movements?

During the 1890s eastern-oriented scholars were usually condescending or openly hostile toward agrarian movements. Frank L. McVey penned the first

scholarly work on Populism in 1896. He presented the third party as a response to the problems of industrialization. McVey openly disapproved of nine planks in the third-party's platform, which he labeled "socialistic," and contended that Populism was rooted in the past. He did acknowledge, however, that it was the American past from which Populists drew their inspiration.²

At the time Populism focused attention on the American West, a young scholar from the affected region, Frederick Jackson Turner, emerged as one of the more notable historians of the Progressive generation. Very much in the mode of the Populists, Progressive historians tended to cast American history in a series of dualisms roughly paralleling the "people" versus the "interests" struggle of their own era.

Turner argued that the continual advance of settlement across the American landscape had established a series of frontier situations that provided opportunities for the dispossessed of the East, rejuvenated American society along egalitarian lines, and accounted for the continuing uniqueness of American democracy. He presented Populism as the backwash of egalitarian traditions when the frontier closed and ended this process.³

Because frontier conditions periodically reappeared as the nation expanded westward, Progressive historians uncovered a series of historical conflicts that pitted a regenerate West against the entrenched economic privi-

lege of the East. Such clashes produced a rough association in their minds between reform movements of the past and Progressivism. Near the end of the Progressive Era, Solon Buck proclaimed the Populists pioneers in the field of social politics and direct precursors to Progressivism.⁴

In the 1920s Vernon Louis Parrington validated Populism's links to previous reform movements in the unfinished, third volume of *Main Currents in American Thought*. Parrington saw the battle of the 1890s as one of ideals. Populists were drenched in the egalitarian sentiments of Jeffersonian democracy, and consciously sought to create a democratic response to the exploitations of Gilded Age capitalism. Parrington freely acknowledged that Populists spoke for an older America. Their inspiration, he argued, was the Declaration of Independence. They consciously placed human rights above those of property.⁵

The Progressive historian's magnum opus on Populism came in 1931 with John D. Hicks's *The Populist Revolt*. Writing as the nation sank into the Great Depression, Hicks emphasized economic pragmatism over ideals and presented Populism as interest group politics, with have-nots demanding their fair share of the nation's bounty. Hicks argued that financial manipulations, deflation, high interest rates, mortgage foreclosures, unfair railroad practices, and a high protective tariff

unjustly impoverished farmers. Corruption accounted for such outrages and Populists presented popular control of government as the solution.⁶

Like Turner his mentor, Hicks was a midwesterner and tended to overstress the role of his section. When the Depression finally undermined the promises of New South boosters, young scholars from this region also began domesticating the Progressive interpretation of American history for their own region. C. Vann Woodward presented the first Progressive interpretation of southern Populism. His earliest work focused on Georgia Populist Tom Watson who had resisted the racism of his era and attempted to unite blacks and poor whites in an economic-interest political coalition. Woodward documented the corruption and demagoguery that had defeated southern Populism in the 1890s. Then, he recounted how the disillusioned Watson turned the "Negro question" on his enemies with a virulent race baiting that catapulted him to political prominence and success in the twentieth century. The consequences for southern race relations, however, were disastrous, and clearly revealed the unsavory foundations upon which contemporary southern society rested.⁷

With the economic collapse of the 1930s, the spirit of reform finally infiltrated academic circles

2. Frank L. McVey, "The Populist Movement," *American Economic Association: Economic Studies* 1 (August 1896): 131-209.

3. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Problem of the West," *Atlantic Monthly* 78 (September 1896): 289-97.

4. Solon Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920).

5. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Beginning of Critical Realism in America: 1860-1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1930).

6. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931). An excellent retrospective on this work can be found in Martin Ridge, "Populism Redux: John D. Hicks and *The Populist Revolt*," *Reviews in American History* 13 (March 1985): 142-54.

7. C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1938); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

in the Northeast. Concurrently, the role of ideology in mobilizing the masses gained importance with the rise of Adolf Hitler. Chester McArthur Destler discovered radical eastern urban roots going back to the Age of Jackson, for supposedly western agrarian hostilities toward monopoly, chartered corporations, banks, and the "money power." He proclaimed Populism a radical synthesis of eastern and western ideas that emphasized natural rights.⁸

While the United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II, American Communist party ideologist Anna Rochester proclaimed Populism the earliest attempt by farmers, small producers, and the beginnings of the industrial working class to protect themselves against monopoly capitalism. Like other doctrinaire Marxists, however, Rochester found Populists to be inadequately radical in not calling for outright socialism. Frederick Engels had expressed the same opinion in the 1890s.⁹

Although the turbulent 1930s reminded scholars of the essential divisions in America's past, World War II and the 1950s did just the opposite. After Pearl Harbor, Americans pulled together as never before, and the Cold War kept this syndrome alive for more than a decade thereafter. The massive government spending of the 1940s and

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1950s likewise spread industry to the South and West producing the greatest redistribution of wealth in American history. The result was a more homogeneous and truly middle-class nation. As perceived foreign threats and the forces of economic change produced greater national unity, consensus or revisionist historians discovered substantial agreement among major elements of American society on fundamental institutions such as capitalism and democracy.

Consensus historians reduced the importance of traditional turning points in American history and emphasized the basic stability of American institutions. They either denied previous conflicts or trivialized them as unnecessary. The relatively new use of psychoanalysis in social science, which had its roots in wartime concerns about Hitler's behavior, helped explain conflict as irrational.

The best and most influential revisionist interpretation of Populism was Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform*, which set

the terms of the debate over the nature of Populism for at least a decade. Hofstadter discounted third party links to Progressivism and argued that Populists were nostalgic, backward-looking petty capitalists. He claimed that they were provincial, conspiracy-minded, and had a tendency toward scapegoatism that manifested itself as nativism, anti-Semitism, anti-intellectualism, and Anglophobia. Hofstadter had already written off "agrarian" opposition to industrial capitalism as theoretically impotent. Populists, he claimed, were harassed country businessmen, insecure about their declining status in an industrializing America.¹⁰

With the McCarthy scare in the 1950s, less careful scholars (usually not historians) produced more severe critiques of the agrarian movement. Perhaps the most bizarre was Victor Ferkiss' "Populist Influences on American Fascism." Ferkiss provided a highly questionable definition of fascism that included middle-class economic programs, Anglophobia, anti-Semitism, plebiscitary democracy, and conspiracy theories about the "money power." Certainly Populists believed that bankers and financiers had manipulated the nation's monetary system to their own advantage. But Ferkiss' loose application of this definition to Populism suffered from its equal applicability to previous Amer-

8. Chester McArthur Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901* (New London: Connecticut College Press, 1946).

9. Anna Rochester, *The Populist Movement in the United States: The Growth and Decline of the People's Party—A Social and Economic Interpretation* (New York: International Publishers, 1943); Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Letters to Americans, 1848-1895: A Selection* (New York: International Publishers, 1953), 239, 248-49, 257.

10. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); "Parrington and the Jeffersonian Tradition," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (October 1941): 391-400. For a recent analysis of Hofstadter on Populism, see Richard M. Collins, "The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism," *Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989): 150-67.

ican egalitarian figures, such as Jefferson and Jackson.¹¹

Allan Bogue's examination of the mortgage issue in several middle-border states proved to be one of the few well-researched efforts of the revisionist school. He studied both eastern mortgage companies and local mortgage brokers like the J. B. Watkins Company of Lawrence, Kansas. Despite the claims of Populists and Progressive historians, Bogue found interest rates to have been reasonable and contended that mortgage companies generally foreclosed only as a last resort. He also concluded that nonresident mortgages were more available and cheaper than local ones. As the Plains economy turned down in the late 1880s, most mortgage companies operating on the middle border, including Watkins, found their capital tied up with depreciating land values and failed to meet their financial obligations. Thus, farmers were not the only victims of the farm crisis of the late 1880s. Bogue also challenged Populist claims that a highly organized "money power" of bankers, mortgage companies, and other financial interests reaped windfall profits from the sweat of farmers' brows. It was the Jacksonian antibank bias of former subsistence farmers, Bogue claimed, that accounted for Populists' animosity toward the financial community. Bogue concluded that there was more misunderstanding than malice in the mortgage relationship.

11. Victor Ferkiss, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," *Western Political Quarterly* 10 (June 1957): 350-57. For more on the negative critics of Populism, see Theodore Saloutos, *Populism: Reaction or Reform?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); Sheldon Hackney, *Populism: The Critical Issues* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971).

Without the underpinning of legitimate economic grievances, farmer complaints appeared less rational.¹²

The revisionist analysis of Populism did not remain unchallenged for long. In the late 1950s C. Vann Woodward presented most of the criticisms future scholars would level against the consensus school. Woodward acknowledged that previous works had been too uncritical, but noted that Populists' opponents usually were worse offenders and asked if it was fair to emphasize traits not primarily associated with the movement and ignore the more egregious failings of their adversaries.¹³

Because Hofstadter's analysis was more of a think piece than a well-researched interpretation of Populism, shooting holes in *The Age of Reform* launched several scholarly careers. Paul W. Glad used the "agrarian" and "self made man" myths to explain the essential conservatism of both 1896 presidential candidates. But he found Populists more innovative and realistic despite their commitment to the agrarian myth. Walter T. K. Nugent examined the attitudes of Kansas Populists and exonerated them of bigotry and irrationality. Instead he found a pragmatic farmer movement that widened its appeal through tolerance of religion and nationality. Nugent also absolved Populists of being anti-industry and anti-urban.

12. Allan Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955).

13. C. Vann Woodward, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," *American Scholar* 28 (Winter 1959): 55-72. Woodward reprinted this article in *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960; rev. ed., 1968).

They only opposed the abuses that came with such developments. Martin Ridge's biography of Ignatius Donnelly showed the Populist writer deploring the wave of bigotry that spread over the nation toward the end of the century. Hofstadter had cited Donnelly as an example of Populist anti-Semitism. Likewise, Robert Durden found the controversial 1896 Populist nomination of Democrat William Jennings Bryan to have been logical, consistent with Populist principles, and essential to the continued existence of the People's party as a force in national affairs.¹⁴

Norman Pollack went further than Hofstadter's other critics and argued that Populists had put forth a coherent and radical critique of industrializing America, similar to Marxism, and valid for contemporary America. Pollack found the movement forward-looking, accepting of industrialization, and class oriented. Critics of his link to Marxism emphasized Pollack's reliance upon correspondences in verbiage scattered over place and time, but an element within the People's party certainly thought of itself as socialist. Most, however, were followers of the American utopian novelist Edward Bellamy, not Karl Marx.¹⁵

14. Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1964); Walter T. K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: Portrait of A Politician* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Robert Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966).

15. Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962); Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 5-6. Bellamy organized "Nationalist Clubs" to promote the socialist ideas that he had popularized in his 1888 novel, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*.

While anticonsensus efforts revived the economic rationalism interpretation and illuminated the study of the agrarian crusade in the decade after Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* appeared, the light turned to heat in the mid-1960s, mirroring the growing convulsions in American society. *Agricultural History* provided a forum for debate on the nature of Populism in 1965. In this discussion, Norman Pollack attributed the denigration of Populism to elitist historians' fears of the masses in light of the careers of Hitler and Stalin. Irwin Unger denied Pollack's charges and emphasized Hofstadter's theme of Populists being naive, simplistic, and essentially retrograde. Oscar Handlin, on the other hand, argued that the third party had such a diverse following that they could unite only on their complaints against contemporary capitalism, not in their views of the future. He also repeated his 1951 charge that Populists "provided materials which anti-Semites would use after 1910" and Hofstadter had incorporated in *Age of Reform*. Handlin did, however, admit that Populists "shared the attitudes of most other Americans before 1900" on this issue.¹⁶

Hofstadter's major defender in recent years, Karel D. Bicha, who concluded that Republicans had a better reform record than Populists during the 1890s, has received a rather cool reception.

16. Norman Pollack, "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism and the Historian," *Agricultural History* 39 (April 1965): 59-67; Irwin Unger, "Critique of Norman Pollack's 'Fear of Man,'" *Agricultural History* 39 (April 1965): 75-80; Oscar Handlin, "Reconsidering the Populists," *Agricultural History* 39 (April 1965): 68-74, and "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 40 (June 1951): 323-44.

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Peter Argersinger labeled Bicha's explanation of legislative dynamics illogical. In the 1891 Kansas legislature, for instance, the Republican senate killed all reform measures proposed by Populists and then substituted milder reform measures, which Populists were forced to accept. Reform legislation, thus, became what Republicans would allow. In the 1897 Kansas legislature, which Populists controlled and Bicha labeled a conspicuous failure, Argersinger found Populists twice as likely to vote for reform measures as Republicans. He further argued that this legislature produced a wide range of significant reform legislation. Bicha's transparent animus against Populism has obscured some valuable perceptions also included in his work. He frequently has overplayed his hand with these; for instance, comparing the third party's concern for economy in government to using a meat-ax. Gene Clanton effectively refuted Bicha's assertions about Populist conservatism in the national Congress. They were openly pro-

labor and voted for spending on education, the destitute, and public improvements. Congressional opponents of Populism labeled their positions "socialistic" throughout the 1890s.¹⁷

In the same edition of *Agricultural History* that contained the Pollack-Unger-Handlin exchange, J. Rogers Hollingsworth called for a better social history of the third-party movement to determine exactly who constituted the average Populist. Hollingsworth alluded to a newly developing field of historical research pioneered by Samuel P. Hays and Allan Bogue. They criticized the narrative approach to writing history for its preoccupation with prominent individuals, dramatic episodes, and ideological combat over national issues, a point of view consistent with the consensus school of interpretation.¹⁸

Instead of focusing on the rhetoric of leaders, Hays argued that historians should delve into structures, systems, and local relations to discover the social context in which the masses of people actually lived. Changing the focus of political research from the elite to the people reflected the growing remoteness many in the 1960s felt toward a

17. Karel D. Bicha, *Western Populism: Studies in an Ambivalent Conservatism* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1976); Peter H. Argersinger, "Ideology and Behavior: Legislative Policy and Western Populism," *Agricultural History* 58 (January 1984): 45-69; Gene Clanton, "'Hayseed Socialism' on the Hill: Congressional Populism, 1891-1895," *Western Historical Quarterly* 15 (April 1984): 139-62.

18. J. Rogers Hollingsworth, "Commentary, Populism: The Problem of Rhetoric and Reality," *Agricultural History* 39 (April 1965): 81-85; Samuel P. Hays, "New Possibilities for American Political History: The Social Analysis of Political Life," in Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History as Social Analysis* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980).

government (and institutions in general) that seemed insulated from popular influence.

At roughly the same time, the national emphasis on science and technology that came in the wake of Sputnik spawned a confidence that scientific methods could solve all problems. Historical inquiry, thus, entered the age of the computer where census materials and election returns became tools for reconstructing the social bases of political behavior.

Some of the early social science efforts focused primarily on the background of party leaders. Walter T. K. Nugent examined mortgage data on county-level political leaders in Kansas and concluded that third-party representatives were less speculative than their mainstream party counterparts, which matched their rhetoric. They were not as well capitalized and exhibited more of a yeomen-like tenacity in clinging to the land than did Democrats or Republicans. Populist mortgages more often came during prosperous times for the purpose of improvements, rather than to alleviate distress. They were also more likely to be engaged in the corn-hog cycle, which required less capital than wheat farming. Gene Clanton found most Kansas Populist leaders to have been reformers before the economic collapse of the late 1880s and alienated from established churches. They were a highly moralistic rural middle class who believed in the efficacy of government intervention, rejected social Darwinism, viewed the Gospel of Wealth as a perversion of Christianity, and attacked capitalism for its selfishness.¹⁹

19. Walter T. K. Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism," *Agricultural History* 40 (October 1966): 255-70; O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Men and Ideas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1969).

A more recent quantitative study of Populism was able to analyze the social circumstances of rank-and-file farmers. John Dibbern examined Alliance roll books and census manuscripts to discover who the Farmers' Alliance, and by implication Populist party, attracted in Marshall County, South Dakota. He discovered that the Alliance failed to attract the most economically disadvantaged or financially overextended. Instead, underfinanced family farmers threatened with loss of property just as they were getting started showed an affinity for the Alliance movement. Still, Dibbern concluded, Alliance and non-Alliance farmers had so much in common that conversion to Populism was largely a matter of intellectual choice.²⁰

Rural isolation has become the organizing theme of some historians investigating the social bases of Populism. In Nebraska, Stanley Parsons found an acrimonious county-level tug-of-war between farmers and village elites. He argued that Populists were small-time rural businessmen reacting to economic circumstances through interest group politics; they simply wanted better entry into the existing system. James Turner and Sheldon Hackney largely echoed Parsons' views for Texas and Alabama.²¹ Turner claimed that economic and social isolation

20. John Dibbern, "Who Were the Populists?: A Study of Grass-Roots Alliancemen in Dakota," *Agricultural History* 54 (October 1982): 677-91.

21. Stanley B. Parsons, *The Populist Context: Rural Versus Urban Power on a Great Plains Frontier* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), and James Turner,

from the mainstream made Populists a fringe element that failed to understand the complexities of the modern world. Hackney also emphasized rural isolation and portrayed Populists as outsiders only seeking entry into the contemporary system.

One specific type of potential Populist that has received a good deal of specialized attention in the historical literature are blacks. In 1953 Jack Abramowitz found C. Vann Woodward's view that Populists behaved well on the race issue to be correct. Populism, he claimed, was the last great dissent from the conservative, racist vision that dominated the early twentieth-century South. In a study of Kansas Populism, William H. Chafe found that whites joined the party for economic reasons while blacks were more interested in protection and recognition, which frequently meant patronage jobs or election to office. Because capital generally treated blacks better than labor, Chafe contended that most blacks opposed attacks on the rich, and thus were ideologically anti-Populist. Blacks in Kansas, however, were unusually urban, and this alone made them poor candidates for Populist recruitment.²²

In the disillusionment that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Saunders found an essential similarity between Democrats and

"Understanding the Populists," *Journal of American History* 67 (September 1980): 354-73. Although Hackney's book appeared before Parsons', the latter's work was based upon his 1964 University of Iowa dissertation.

22. Jack Abramowitz, "The Negro In the Populist Movement," *Journal of Negro History* 38 (July 1953): 257-89; William H. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study," *Journal of Southern History* 34 (August 1968): 402-19.

Populists on the race issue. William F. Holmes noted that black and white Alliancemen had divergent economic interests because whites frequently were farm owners while large numbers of blacks served as farm laborers. In the late 1970s, however, Gerald H. Gaither discovered a meaningful biracial Populist coalition based upon self-interest that degenerated into interracial discord as white Populists realized they would not receive the bulk of black votes. Still, Lawrence Goodwyn found a vital interracial coalition in Grimes County, Texas, where strong Populist officeholders protected blacks as late as 1900. It took assassination and a Democratic party reign of terror to destroy this alliance. Other black-white coalitions also met violent ends elsewhere in Texas about 1900.²³

On the question of black disfranchisement, C. Vann Woodward noted a connection between eliminating black voters, the adoption of the direct primary, and the appearance of Progressivism in several southern states. Adopting disfranchisement and primaries, he claimed, constituted an invitation for white Populists to return to the Democratic party. In the 1970s J. Morgan Kousser argued that disfranchisement was a delib-

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erate conservative plot designed to suppress Populism throughout the South. Thus, blacks and poor whites both were the targets of voting restrictions. Kousser, however, misidentified the politics of those responsible for excluding black voters in at least one southern state. Progressives controlled disfranchisement in Texas and aimed it specifically at blacks to eliminate their only potential rival for coalition with white Populists. In "A Place on the Ballot," Peter H. Argersinger presented the case for legal restrictions in the form of antifusion laws helping to destroy the People's party in the West.²⁴

With the cultural awakening of minority groups in the 1960s and 1970s, an ethno-cultural interpretation of Gilded Age politics soon emerged. Paul Kleppner and Richard Jensen argued that political affiliation during the Gilded Age rested primarily upon commitment to "pietist" and "liturgist" religious categories. This served to downplay the importance of the economic conflict and dramatic turning points that Progressive historians found so important, while acknowledging the existence of significant conflict, which consensus historians had denied or trivialized.²⁵

In the decade after Kleppner and Jensen's works appeared, three major state studies of Populism addressed the ethno-cultural theme. Peter H. Argersinger examined the Populist movement in Kansas and strongly rejected ethno-cultural considerations. He noted that the third party was strongest in the middle portion of the state where mortgage pressure was greatest and concluded that Kansas Populism grew from real economic grievances. Like Gene Clanton, Argersinger also contended that Populists were more likely to grow corn, which took less capitalization, than wheat. James Edward Wright discovered both economic and ethnic rivalries in late nineteenth-century Colorado, but contended that farmer and laborer demands made economic considerations paramount during the Populist period. Robert W. Cherny likewise found cultural

23. Robert Saunders, "Southern Populists and the Negro, 1893-1895," *Journal of Negro History* 54 (July 1969): 240-61; William F. Holmes, "The Demise of the Colored Farmers' Alliance," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975): 187-200; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Lawrence C. Goodwyn, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study," *American Historical Review* 76 (December 1971): 1435-56; Roscoe C. Martin, *The People's Party in Texas: A Study in Third-Party Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1933).

24. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Worth Robert Miller, "Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist-Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900-1907," *Journal of Southern History* 52 (May 1986): 163-82; Peter H. Argersinger, "'A Place on the Ballot,' Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws," *American Historical Review* 85 (April 1980): 287-306.

25. Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970); Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

politics important in Nebraska before 1890, but argued that Populism cut across ethnic and cultural lines. One of the fathers of the ethno-cultural interpretation, Paul Kleppner, has acknowledged that ethno-religious factors were weak or nonexistent in the American West. He argued that this resulted in weakened party loyalties, which, he claimed, was a prerequisite for the Populist Revolt.²⁶

In finding the People's party to be more than just a "silver" movement in Colorado, James Wright's analysis generally supported the conclusions of other scholars studying Populism in the mountain states. Thomas A. Clinch, for instance, found the People's party to be a labor movement in Montana. In Idaho, Joseph Gaboury found a third-party coalition of underprivileged farmers and laborers. Robert W. Larson presented the People's party in New Mexico and other mountain states as a pragmatic, multi-issue movement that represented a reaction against the remotely wielded corporate power of mine owners, railroads, irrigation companies, and large cattle combines.²⁷

26. Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974); James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); Paul Kleppner, "Voters and Parties in the Western States, 1876-1900," *Western Historical Quarterly* 14 (January 1983): 49-68.

27. Thomas A. Clinch, *Urban Populism and Free Silver in Montana* (Helena: University of Montana Press, 1970); William Joseph Gaboury, *Dissent in the Rockies: A History of Idaho Populism* (New York: Garland, 1988); Robert W. Larson, *New Mexico Populism* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1974); *Populism in the Mountain West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

At approximately the same time that social science historians emerged, another group of scholars who drew their inspiration from the civil rights, the War on Poverty, and the antiwar movements of the 1960s emerged in response to the intrinsically conservative message of consensus historians. Both of the newer groups claimed to write social history, or history "from the bottom up." While radical, or New Left, historians agreed that numeric analysis was valid for description, they denied that quantification could explain causes. Instead they looked to popular mentalities, folk rituals, and class consciousness for insights into behavior.

For many consensus historians, radicalism had been un-American. Because the New Left objected to the growth of corporate power, rise of the military-industrial complex and many other mid-twentieth-century American institutional arrangements, they took up the challenge of discovering a truly radical American past. In essence, the New Left criticized the contemporary system through comparison with past arrangements which would reveal that it was their opponents who had broken with American traditions, not radicals.

Norman Pollack, who found a radical critique of Gilded Age America in Populism similar to Marxism, offered an early effort in the radical vein. Likewise, Michael Rogin contended that Populism was an American equivalent of Marxism and showed that the roots of the McCarthy scare were conservative and elitist, not Populistic as consensus historians had suggested. James Youngsdales subsequently rescued Populists from Hofstadter's Freudian charges of irrationality through the application of

Adlerian psychology, which explained protest as logical.²⁸

Robert McMath employed concepts from sociology to show that the Southern Farmers' Alliance grew best in unsettled, frontier-like conditions which encouraged new forms of organization. The Alliance's ability to socialize its adherents made it analogous to a church, providing explanations for events and direction to people experiencing the tensions of commercialization. This helped to explain the development of the Populists' collective mentality and the near-religious fervor of the third-party movement. The presence of such a widespread rural socioeconomic network brings into question James Turner's contention that Populists were socially isolated and ignorant of the modern world. Earlier, Peter Argersinger had argued that Populism actually was a religious movement. As denominations withdrew support from rural churches during the financial stringency of the late 1880s, Alliance speakers filled the void by presenting Christian fraternity as an alternative to exploitative capitalism. According to Leland L. Lengel, Populists charged mainstream churches with hypocrisy in neglecting the glaring evils of this world, particularly usury. He argued that "to many Populists 'true Christianity' appeared as nothing less than Christian socialism."²⁹

28. Pollack, *The Populist Response*; Michael Rogin, *McCarthy and the Intellectuals: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967); James M. Youngsdales, *Populism: A Psychohistorical Perspective* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1975).

29. Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Peter H. Argersinger, "Pentecostal Politics in Kansas: Religion, the Farmers' Alliance, and the Gospel of Populism," *Kansas Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1981): 24-35; Leland L. Lengel, "Radical Crusaders and a Conservative Church: Attitudes of Populists toward Contemporary Protestantism," *American Studies* 13 (Fall 1972): 49-59.

Sociologist Michael Schwartz applied collective-behavior theories from his discipline to validate agrarian actions as sensible. Schwartz provided an economic explanation for the rise of the Farmers' Alliance in the South, but then indicted its leaders for leading the movement into politics. He claimed that the Alliance fell into the hands of the planter class who diverted resources that could have been better employed in economic conflict.³⁰

Sociologist Donna A. Barnes employed a variation of Marxist mobilization theory to Populism in Texas. Protest leaders, she claimed, presented a counter-ideology that undermined the dominant capitalist class's orthodoxy and generated a class consciousness that produced the agrarian revolt. She attributed the party's slow growth in Texas to selective issue endorsement by Democrats and ascribed the opposition of Texas Populists to the 1896 nomination of William Jennings Bryan to their better indoctrination in Alliance principles. Theodore Mitchell, however, claimed that the Southern Alliance's educational program had not been completed before the founding of the People's party; likewise, Scott G. McNall attributed the failure of the third-party movement in Kansas to an incomplete educational program. It had the potential to develop into a class movement, he contended, but did not produce a strong enough organization for the long haul. Because of this, the Kansas wing of the party adopted fusion with Democrats as their electoral strategy, which

Kansas Populism had the potential to develop into a class movement, McNall contended, but did not produce a strong enough organization for the long haul.

sent former Republicans back to their old party.³¹

The most ambitious product of New Left scholarship on Populism was Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*. Goodwyn argued that a mass-based "movement culture" emerged out of the Alliance's unsuccessful experiments in cooperative buying and selling. The failure of economic cooperation drove Alliancemen to political action in order to obtain government-sponsored cooperatives with the Alliance's subtreasury plan. Such a program would have generated warehouse receipts for farm products held in government storage facilities that could be

used as circulating currency. Goodwyn contended that the subtreasury agitation implied greenbackism, participatory democracy, and replacing capitalism with a cooperative commonwealth. The leadership of Texas Alliancemen in this movement placed them on the cutting edge of Populism and, according to Goodwyn, made southern Populism more radical than its western counterpart.³²

Earlier treatments of Populism, most notably that of Hicks, found the silver issue crucial to making the Democratic party Populistic. Goodwyn, however, defined true Populism as commitment to the subtreasury plan and argued that a "shadow movement" of free silverites subverted the promising radical thrust of Populism. He identified the center of the "shadow movement" in Nebraska, where, Goodwyn claimed, a "virtually issueless" movement produced fusion with Democrats under the leadership of William Jennings Bryan. Robert W. Cherny countered that Nebraska Alliancemen produced a far more radical platform before their Texas counterparts, remained consistently in the advance of the Populist movement on a broad range of issues, and did not retreat from the Omaha Platform's land, transportation or money planks, as Goodwyn had contended. Goodwyn had unfairly read Nebraska Populists out of the party, Cherny claimed, because they "did not focus solely or even primarily on coopera-

30. Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

31. Donna A. Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers Alliance and People's Party in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Theodore Mitchell, *Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance, 1887-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Scott G. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also Charles W. Macune, Jr., "The Wellsprings of Populism: Dr. C. W. Macune before 1886," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 90 (October 1986): 139-58.

32. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) is an abridgement of *Democratic Promise*.

tives as the *raison d'être* of their organization."³³

Stanley B. Parsons et. al., raised questions about Goodwyn's claim that Populism resulted from the economic setbacks of the Alliance's cooperative experiments. They contended that the decline of cooperatives and the rise of the People's party correlated only in Texas. In a parting shot, they noted that Populists did not need a "movement culture" significantly different from the inherited traditions of the greenback, anti-monopoly, and labor organizations of previous decades to produce the Populist Revolt.³⁴

Robert C. McMath agreed with Goodwyn about the presence of a movement culture, but also disagreed about it being new. In the west-central Texas area where the Southern Farmers' Alliance originated, he found that settlers shared a set of values derived from the frontier rhythms of work and patterns of community life that mandated communal solidarity and egalitarianism before the Alliance turned to cooperative enterprise. Alliancemen, thus, built their cooperative crusade upon these established traditions.³⁵

In recent years Norman Pollack has drawn back from his contention that the Populists were proto-socialist and argued

that their commitment to the concept of private property placed them within the capitalist spectrum. Because Populists placed human and community rights above those of property, however, he believed that they distanced themselves enough from capitalist thought to allow a meaningful critique of the Gilded Age economic system. Populists recognized the subversive potential of monopoly power, wished to restore competition, rejected socialism, and called upon an alert citizenry to revitalize America's democratic institutions and destroy the link between corporate power and politics. The presence of such noted socialists as Eugene V. Debs and Julius Wayland in Populist ranks, however, suggests that the People's party was diverse enough to contain a significant socialist wing, which helps explain Pollack's earlier findings. Pollack also took issue with Goodwyn's claim that southern Populism was more radical than the western variety. Southerners, Pollack wrote, were primarily monetary reformers who feared an activist government because of its implications for the race issue.³⁶

With the consolidation of the military-industrial complex, rise of the imperial presidency and Watergate, scholars began to focus on the Founding Fathers' warnings about the effects of concentrated wealth and power upon American institutions. In the mid-1960s Bernard Bailyn developed the concept that American colonists had con-

sciously revolted against British rule in 1776 to establish a republic. Creating a republic in a world of monarchies clearly committed the new nation to maintaining an egalitarian society. Republicanism mandated an opposition to monopoly and the corruption that established privilege through favoritism (which in its consolidated form became aristocracy).³⁷

America's Revolutionary leaders considered an uncorrupted, independent citizenry devoted to the public good the backbone of republicanism. Property holding was essential to individual liberty. But narrow, individual selfishness, they believed, would destroy the republic by widening the gap between rich and poor and driving many into a dependent subservience reminiscent of European peasantry. America's vast land reserves, coupled with the commitment to a balance between equality and liberty, promised to establish personal independence as a permanent facet of American life.

Various scholars have traced the progress of the American commitment to republicanism from the American Revolutionary period through the nineteenth century. When applied to Populism, the republicanism model seems to revive the work of those historians who had emphasized Populism's debt to the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian traditions, namely Parrington and Destler. In the late 1960s Christopher Lasch likewise tied Populism to the democracy of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln, while Carl N. Degler labeled southern Populism as the culmination of the antislavery move-

33. Robert W. Cherny, "Lawrence Goodwyn and Nebraska Populism: A Review Essay," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (Summer 1981): 181-94.

34. Stanley B. Parsons et. al., "The Role of Cooperatives in the Development of the Movement Culture of Populism," *Journal of American History* 69 (March 1983): 866-85.

35. Robert C. McMath, Jr., "Sandy Land and Hogs in the Timber: (Agri)cultural Origins of the Farmers' Alliance in Texas," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

36. Norman Pollack, *The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Norman Pollack, *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

37. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

ment, unionism, Reconstruction republicanism, and Virginia Readjusters.³⁸

In "Populism in the Palouse," Thomas W. Riddle attributed the more cautious commercialism of early Whitman County, Washington, Populists to the inherited values of Jeffersonian republicanism. Riddle's mentor, Gene Clanton, argued that Kansas Populists had waged an unapologetic fight on behalf of a radical interpretation of the Declaration of Independence's claim that "all men are created equal," while Progressivism (in the Republican party, at least) was an elitist middle-class reform movement.³⁹

In 1977 Dorothy Ross rekindled the Progressive historian's idea of a dualistic Gilded Age intellectual tradition. Adherents of republicanism, she claimed, directly rejected the more exploitative panaceas of unqualified laissez-faire capitalism and social Darwinism. John L. Thomas subsequently placed the political economy of writers Henry George, Edward Bellamy, and Henry Demarest Lloyd (Bellamy and Lloyd were Populists) firmly within the republicanism model. Kenneth Roemer likewise revealed the connection between Populism and most of the two hundred or so apocalyptic and utopian novels to appear during the late nineteenth century.⁴⁰

38. Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Vintage, 1969); Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

39. Thomas W. Riddle, "Populism in the Palouse: Old Ideals and New Realities," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 65 (July 1974): 97-109; Gene Clanton, "Populism, Progressivism, and Equality: The Kansas Paradigm," *Agricultural History* 51 (July 1977): 559-81.

40. Dorothy Ross, "The Liberal Tradition Revisited and the Republican Tradition

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Close examination of the political economy of Populism accelerated as businessmen scoundrels developed into heroes during our recent age of narcissism. Bruce Palmer contended that Populists desired a simple market economy that made goods and services, but not labor, legitimate products of trade. Without being able to profit from the labor of others, the gap between rich and poor would be minimal and producers would thus avoid economic dependency.⁴¹

Stephen Hahn presented the agrarian movement as a typical peasant response to the transformation from self-sufficient yeoman farming to commercial agri-

Addressed," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); John L. Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Kenneth M. Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writing, 1888-1900* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1976).

41. Bruce Palmer, "Man Over Money": *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

culture. Prior to the Populist Revolt, the republican sensibilities of yeomen had engaged them in a bitter defensive struggle with the commercial world over grazing rights in northern Georgia. The open range had meant communal use of the land in the backcountry. Yeomen came to view the indebtedness, foreclosures, tenancy, and middleman profits of the commercial world as placing them in the position of working for others. The Southern Farmers' Alliance then tailored this popular republicanism to meet the challenges of modernization and committed yeomen to a producer's commonwealth of cooperative enterprise and public regulation of exchange. Populism, thus, was a revolt of smallholders (and those recently driven into tenancy) against proletarianization.⁴²

Barton C. Shaw also found Georgia Populism rooted in a previous tradition. He noted that Georgia Populism's greatest stronghold, the "terrible tenth" congressional district, had a dissenter tradition that stretched back to the antebellum Whig and Unionist movements. After the Civil War, nominal Democrats (ex-Whigs) Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens carried on this antimonopoly tradition, making independent movements such as the Greenback party unnecessary until they passed from the scene in the mid-1880s. Shaw likewise pointed to the producer-oriented yeoman values of those involved in the Populist movement.⁴³

42. Stephen Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

43. Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

In Oklahoma Territory, this writer directly linked the People's party to several late-nineteenth-century egalitarian movements, namely the Greenback party, Knights of Labor, and Union Labor party which shared a common critique of Gilded Age development based upon republican sentiments. Both the Farmers' Alliance and Populist party were imported into Oklahoma from Kansas. Populists viewed Gilded Age dislocations as the degeneration into "European conditions" that the Founding Fathers had warned would mark an end to America's republican experiment. They responded by adapting republican ideals to the modern setting.⁴⁴

In *Populism: The Humane Preference*, Gene Clanton likewise contended that the third-party movement emphasized human rights over the cash nexus. It was "the last significant expression of an old radical tradition that derived from Enlightenment sources that had been filtered through a political tradition that bore the distinct imprint of Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Lincolnian democracy."⁴⁵ Clanton consciously emphasized the Kansas experience in this work, and he also linked Populism to previous third-party movements.

In *American Populism: A Social History*, Robert C. McMath has tied the recent work on the social history of rural America to the story of Populism to show how the Alliance, and later Populist party, tapped into the already existing social and economic networks of rural America. McMath

notes that the Southern Alliance primarily sent its recruiters into their native areas to more effectively secure entrance into such informal communities of farmers. He also notes that the transition from farm order to third party was most effective where the mainstream party response to farmer problems was intransigence and ridicule, as in Kansas. Where established political leaders were conciliatory and sincerely reformist, the third party usually was stillborn.⁴⁶

According to McMath, those most likely to become Populists had come into contact with the national market economy via the expansion of railroads during the late nineteenth century. Railroads also brought farmers into contact with a labor radicalism derived from antebellum artisan and farmers movements. Thus, McMath contends that Goodwyn's movement culture had identifiable antecedents, namely antimonopoly, producerism, and republicanism.

The major criticism of the republicanism model for Populism to date is that the mainstream parties of Gilded Age America could also lay claim to having their roots imbedded in the nation's ambiguous republican past. The dominant culture had been so heavily infiltrated by the alien and more exploitative ideologies of social Darwinism, the Gospel of Wealth, and unqualified laissez-faire capitalism, however, that what remained of republicanism in the mainstream parties would have been hardly recognizable to the Founding

Fathers. Populism was a truly American radical movement primarily because of its far greater commitment to the original meaning of America. When the People's party died, a major portion of the nation's commitment to republicanism passed from the scene of American politics.

In contrast to the economic explanation of older Progressive historians for the decline of Populism, most recent studies agree with Goodwyn that it was not an overdose of prosperity, but the Jekyll and Hyde nature of fusion that compromised the moral imperatives of Populism and caused the third party's demise. Progressive historians' emphasis upon Populists' economic pragmatism generally led them to view fusion favorably. Goodwyn, on the other hand, drew a strong distinction between middle-of-the-roads who he claimed were socialized into the greenback-cooperative-subtreasury ideology, and fusionists. Where Goodwyn credited fusion to a conspiracy of office seekers, however, most scholars portray fusion as a bad decision made by honest party leaders, or still contend it was necessary to further Populist goals. In Oklahoma, where the proportion of western- to southern-born voters was narrow, few ideological differences existed between fusionists and middle-of-the-roads. Westerners generally cooperated with Democrats while southerners viewed the party of Bryan as the major enemy. Goodwyn's work is best viewed as a modern-day exposition of the Texas middle-of-the-road position of 1896. Ironically, Gregg Cantrell and D. Scott Barton have shown that the so-called Texas middle-of-the-roads actually engaged in fusion

44. Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*.

45. Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), xvi.

46. Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1989* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

with Republicans, both formally in several local races in 1894 and informally for statewide offices in 1896.⁴⁷

Aside from the western-southern cleavage within Populism, other divisions made the third party far more diverse than earlier suspected. The works of James Edward Wright and Robert W. Larson show mountain Populism to have contained significant farmer and laborer (primarily miners) components. Obviously Populism contained a socialist element, although most Populists were not socialists. Populist Sen. William A. Pepper of Kansas noted a fault line along former party allegiances. Ex-Republicans, he claimed, favored active governmental intervention to promote the general welfare, while ex-Democrats feared big government. Pepper's biographer, Peter H. Argersinger has emphasized the same schism in his work, defining true Populism as the ex-Republican version of Pepper. According to D. Scott Barton, however, both Pepper and Argersinger significantly overestimated the proportion of ex-Republicans joining the Kansas People's party. This paucity of ex-Republicans in Populist ranks would appear to reduce (but not eliminate) the importance of Pepper and Argersinger's emphasis. Argersinger has also found a significant rural-urban division among Populists in the 1897 Kansas legislature. Farmer producerism promoted regulatory efforts that Populist merchants and lawyers feared would discourage economic development.⁴⁸

47. Gregg Cantrell and D. Scott Barton, "Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 55 (November 1989): 659-92.

48. Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado*; Larson, *Populism in the*

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During this one hundredth anniversary decade of the People's party, the scholarly literature on American Populism seems to be moving toward a recognition of the republican roots of the Populist critique of American capitalism. Although Goodwyn, Palmer, and Pollack declined to explicitly adopt the republicanism paradigm, each identified modes of thought in Populism inherited from previous egalitarian movements. Goodwyn's focus on the subtreasury plan, for instance, caused him to emphasize the uniqueness of Populism despite numerous references to greenback ideology. Certainly the organizational efforts of the Southern Farmers' Alliance were a major factor in the People's party becoming the most important Gilded Age third-party movement, but its

Mountain West; William A. Pepper, *Populism, Its Rise and Fall*, ed. Peter H. Argersinger (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*; D. Scott Barton, "Party Switching and Kansas Populism," *The Historian* 52 (May 1990): 453-67. Pepper's book was originally published as a series of newspaper articles in 1899.

links to previous reform movements and republicanism were obvious.

Was the Populist Revolt the product of economic desperation or a commitment to ideology? Clearly both were involved. The rhetoric of common citizens is almost always rooted in reality. Their circumstances inform them when something is amiss. But poverty has been the plight of the vast majority of all who have lived. Ideology informs them whether their circumstances are just or not.

A number of scholars have noted a rural-urban cleavage between Populists and mainstream party voters. Railroads not only carried passengers and goods but also ideas during the Gilded Age. The exploitative ideologies of laissez-faire capitalism, social Darwinism, and the Gospel of Wealth were strongest in railhead towns where the most aggressive entrepreneurs were directly linked to the national economy and the ideas of national opinion makers. Robert McMath has suggested that kinship, community, and organizational ties created a counter culture in the hinterland. Because it only took about \$150 to establish a newspaper in the 1890s, a widespread and independent reform press also provided an alternative viewpoint that hindered indoctrination by these more exploitative ideologies. Egalitarian republicanism more clearly addressed the concerns of those in the hinterland, particularly those being driven into dependency. This left them enough intellectual distance from the prevailing system to develop a critical analysis of its workings. Economic convulsions, in turn, gave third-party spokesmen a significant hearing outside hinterland areas during the depres-

sion of the 1890s. Successful appeals to laborers in the West and South, plus fusion, carried some urban areas for Populism, making small towns the mainstream parties' strongholds.

Were Populists reactionary hicks, liberal reformers, or radicals? Hofstadter's case for nostalgic bumpkins clearly has the least support among Populist scholars today. Early twentieth-century liberals did pass some of Populism's demands into law. Progressive historians likewise adopted much of their critique of American development. These form part of the Populist legacy. But such liberals largely accommodated the new capitalist/corporate order that Populists attacked.

If Populism does not fit neatly into the capitalist camp, nei-

ther does it find a secure home in the socialist one. Although most American socialists were involved with the People's party in the 1890s, most Populists did not wish to destroy property rights, just limit them. Populist links to the republican tradition probably make them something other than capitalist or socialist. It was a thoroughly American, largely nonsocialist, anticapitalist movement that called for enough change in the institutions of land, transportation, and money to be considered moderately radical. Because Populists called for specific governmental interventions on behalf of those who actually needed it, their movement can logically be designated the lost cause of the American left.

If, in fact, there were two late-nineteenth-century American minds, one republican and the other capitalist, Progressive historians such as Hicks and Woodward may not have been too far off base in seeing a dualistic society. One of the earliest proponents of this view, Vernon L. Parrington, probably knew of what he wrote. He was active in the Kansas Populist movement during the 1890s." [KH]

49. Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 368-70.