

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This dissertation was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

### **University Microfilms**

300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106  
A Xerox Education Company

72-23,109

REINHART, Cornel Justin, 1943-  
POPULISM AND THE BLACK: A STUDY IN  
IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL STRAINS.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1972  
History, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company , Ann Arbor, Michigan

© 1972

CORNEL JUSTIN REINHART

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

POPULISM AND THE BLACK: A STUDY  
IN IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL STRAINS

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
CORNEL JUSTIN REINHART  
Norman, Oklahoma

1972

POPULISM AND THE BLACK: A STUDY  
IN IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL STRAINS

APPROVED BY

Richard C. Dite

George W. Fenderson

Robert S. Shulke

William H. Nash

Norman L. Gockett

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

PLEASE NOTE:

Some pages may have

indistinct print.

Filmed as received.

University Microfilms, A Xerox Education Company

## PREFACE

Originally this study set out to explore some of the questions raised by historians about the Populist movement. Most immediately my intention was to examine Populist racial attitudes, as well as their political stance toward Blacks, in an effort to shed light on the degree of Populist tolerance or intolerance. Beyond that I further hoped to generalize from their racial views to the broader questions raised about the movement as a whole: were they proto-fascist or semi-marxian, middle or lower class, forward or backward looking? Unfortunately or, as it turned out, fortunately, I immediately encountered some difficulties.

The first and the most basic of these involved my findings in the area of racial attitudes. My research indicated that the southern Populist deviated little, if at all, from the racial mores held by the vast majority of Americans in the late nineteenth century. Specifically, I found very little support for the notion that the Populists rejected the idea of Black racial inferiority. Beyond that, it was also evident that the Populists were not even particularly interested in racial questions, at least to 1896. They seldom initiated debate in this area; indeed,

they avoided the topic whenever possible, arguing that it detracted from and obscured more important issues. The only radical feature of their relationship with Blacks was their willingness to use Black votes to carry out their programs. Yet even here Black voting was not a new thing--what made it disturbing was the very wide gulf which existed between the Populists and the two established parties.

Once these things were clear about the Populists, the question which naturally followed was what then did differentiate the Populists from the major political parties--or to put it differently--around what principles did they coalesce. The answer to this question, I believe, goes to the heart of the controversy over the character of the Populist movement--in effect, to the heart of Populism itself.

Three strands of continuity gradually emerged from the writings and material of the individuals I examined. The first of these was the content of their thought. Put most simply, Populism was deeply committed to the continuation of economic and social individualism in America. Populists saw themselves as part of a broad producing class--that is, all of those who in some way worked for a living as opposed to those involved in financial manipulation--and as such they believed themselves to be the backbone of the American Republic.<sup>1</sup> Their despair at finding themselves and America

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. the discussion of the term "producer" in Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1970), 15.

in a seemingly constant state of depression was directed at the forces they believed to be oppressing them and reducing individual economic opportunity--namely, the increasingly corporate character of the society itself and, worst of all, the rise of the "artificial" and specially privileged business corporation.

The second element of continuity was the Populists' exaggerated use of language characterized by the repeated use of symbolic figures and metaphorical expressions. This aspect of the Populist movement was first explored by the critics of Populism and was labeled by Richard Hofstadter as Populism's "soft" side.<sup>2</sup>

The third source of unity, closely related to the second, was the tendency in many of the individuals examined to be extremist (without a pejorative connotation) not only in purely political areas but, more basically, in their entire life style--a style best described as one of "patterned extremism." Thus Ignatius Donnelly, while certainly radical in political areas, also found himself in a constant struggle with authority--with the establishment--in every area which engaged his attention. For example, it was Francis Bacon, in Donnelly's view, and not William Shakespeare who wrote

---

<sup>2</sup>The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 64-65.



the plays experts attributed to Shakespeare; Louis Agassiz, likewise, was not correct about the origins of glacier "till;" and Plato's Atlantis had existed. Most radical of all, Blacks had the same feelings, the same sensitivity, and the same abilities as whites. In the same way, if we understand Tom Watson's early years--prior to 1896--as not only radical but also extremist, we can begin to dissolve the dichotomy projected into his life by so many historians. While his concerns shift to racial and ethnic questions, his manner of treating them remains consistent with his "Populist" years.

The key concept which unites these three elements of continuity and which provides the essential backdrop against which Populist racial attitudes must be evaluated is the role ideology plays in periods of social and cultural stress. For my understanding of ideology I have relied most heavily on the work of Clifford Geertz.<sup>3</sup> For Geertz, the presence of extreme ideological formulation is a vital clue that there are elements of severe personal and social disequilibrium present in a particular culture. There are several sources of disequilibrium but the most important are, first, personal and social strains caused by--among other things--role conflicts, the failure of the society to provide channels to achieve socially approved ends, and status changes.

---

<sup>3</sup>Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System" reprinted in D. E. Apter, Ideology and Discontent, (N.Y.: Free Press, 1964), 47-76.

A second major source of cultural disequilibrium results from a significant alteration in the essential structural guideposts in any society. For example, intense ideology is spawned during the French Revolution by the destruction of the central symbol and figure of political life, the Crown. The void left by the collapse of the monarchy is filled by ideology--ideology acting as a blueprint to explain and give guidance in a period and situation suddenly devoid of established modes of behavior.

Ideology also functions in relation to both of these sources of cultural strain as symbolic action. That is, the very process of articulating and expressing the emotions one subjectively feels becomes a method of relieving these feelings. Most simply stated, language or rhetoric becomes a substitute for direct action. Thus what Hofstadter calls irrational is indeed a distortion of reality but in no way a conscious one. In fact, the presence of ideological distortion is a clear signal--to borrow an older metaphor, "a warning bell"--that it is not the individuals but the society which has a "pathological" problem. It is crucial to our understanding of Populism then to re-emphasize that while the critics are right in noting evidences of "irrationality" in Populist ideology they are very mistaken in locating the sources of this problem in the Populists themselves.

To summarize, once it became clear that Populist racial attitudes could not be generalized to the rest of their

program, it became necessary to seek out the factors which did separate the Populists from others in the late nineteenth century. Following the lead of the critics of Populism, coupled with Geertz's analysis of ideology, it seemed clear that the Populists were reacting to a period of rather sharp cultural strain. Only by "listening" very closely to their ideological complaints would it be possible, however, to find out what specific problems were affecting them. What I found was that, prior to 1896, while rather undistinguished in their racial expressions, the Populists were very radical in their social and economic views. Basically, it was their hope to restore economic opportunities while at the same time avoiding the harshness of excessive competition and the privileged positions of "artificial" corporations--what they called monopolies.

After 1896 these "purer" Populist concerns were displaced by the emerging national concern over race relations--a concern intensified in the South. Populists like nearly everyone else were affected by this new social strain and reacted to it in an ideological fashion. Yet to draw too sharp a line of division between the two periods flanking 1896 seriously distorts historical reality. The elements most characteristic of the early years were also present later. While Tom Watson's pivotal role in this whole problem has perhaps been overstressed, nevertheless, Watson's life as it embodied both the older Populist years and the later

years of racial bigotry is critical to our understanding of these years.

Watson's principal biographer, C. Vann Woodward, initially popularized the idea that somehow Tom Watson lived two lives--a kind of political Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde--the liberal and tolerant Dr. Jekyll existing prior to 1896 followed by the evil, bigoted, and perhaps pathological Mr. Hyde after that date.<sup>4</sup> In truth, however, Watson, like other Populists--in the South at least--was racist both before and after 1896. He was also, however, economically radical before and after that date. What did change in Watson was a growing attention to racial matters which eventually became nearly all-consuming. Yet while his subject had changed his manner of dealing with it had not. Watson continued to manifest the same elements of symbolic formulation, rhetorical excesses, and personal non-conformity which had always been present. It is also important to note that even in content Watson's new concerns were not all that new. His virulent verbal attacks on minorities while directly expressing and relieving his feelings in regard to racial competition and the racial status quo also embodied his older "purer" Populist grievances about corporations and institutions.

An additional general comment remains. The persistent attempt to artificially divide the Populist movement at

---

<sup>4</sup>Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1963).

1896 is only one facet of a larger problem, namely, the continued tendency of observers to "lock in" on one element of the movement and from that single characteristic to categorize and generalize the entire movement. The refusal of most students of the subject to view Populism as an integrated whole is, I think, the major source of the continued historiographical impasse about the movement. This is, of course, precisely what I had initially intended to do with Populist racial attitudes. Perhaps it is a "natural" first assumption--but in retrospect any attempt to do so would have terribly distorted what was in reality a very complex and multifaceted movement. Thus, hopefully without being guilty of over-particularizing, I would argue that Populism can only accurately be labeled Populism--a peculiar configuration of political, social, economic, and racial views which were neither fascist nor liberal, marxian nor conservative. This is not to say, however, that a very similar cultural process was not present in Europe at nearly the same time. Very general observation suggests in fact that such may well have been the case. Be that as it may, our understanding of America's history is ill-served by distorting or squeezing Populist thought in an effort to make it fit a mid-twentieth century political or socio-economic category.

One further and rather specific comment in regard to chapter organization may also be helpful at this point. As already indicated while the primary focus of this study

has been on the Populists' attitude toward Blacks, this has not been the principal purpose of the work. Rather my aim has been to determine the overall character of the Populist movement. As I have already indicated that could not be done by examining the Populists' racial views apart from their total world view. Therefore, the reader will find that the first three chapters, while nearly devoid of any comment on race, nevertheless, possess introductory material absolutely essential to that topic as well as to any final understanding of the Populist movement's rather contradictory and often ambiguous character.

I wish to especially acknowledge and thank several people who have been kind enough to read and criticize portions or all of this work. Among these Gilbert C. Fite, my principal advisor, deserves special mention not only for his helpful criticism and advice in every stage of this dissertation but also for his enduring patience and kindness throughout my doctoral program. I expect that I speak for all of Dr. Fite's past students when I say that his decision to pursue primarily administrative duties leaves a very large and unfillable void in the teaching of Recent American history. To Robert E. Shalhope I owe a very deep debt for reorienting not only my research interests but also my most basic assumptions about history and historiography. I also wish to thank R. Alton Lee of the University of South Dakota for his unfailing willingness to give generously of

his time to one who was already deeply in his debt. Paul Travis, Philip Vaughan, James Storey, D. Jerome Tweton, Norman Crockett, and David Levy as well played a part in shaping any of the ideas that are worthwhile in this study. I would like also to thank the staff of the Southern Historical Collection in the University of North Carolina Library and the librarians on the fourth floor of the Library of the University of Oklahoma for their kind assistance.

For typing portions of the manuscript I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to Ms. Gayle Chick, Linda Graham and Bev Thorness, the very efficient secretarial staff at the University of North Dakota. Finally and especially to my wife, Judy, goes a measure of thanks that extends beyond her typing, editing, and patient listening. Without Judy, Thorin, and Dain it would not have been worth it.

The usual caveat one finds at the end of such acknowledgments that to no one but the author are mistakes to be attributed is here given as something more than customary usage. I feel especially conscious that the errors and faulty reasoning contained herein are mine alone.

## CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	iii
Chapter	
I.    TROPOLOGY AND NEUROSES OR "SYMBOLIC ACTION" AND "PROBLEMATIC SOCIAL REALITY": THE POPULISTS AND THE HISTORIANS. . . . .	1
II.   THE POPULIST MIND: "SPECIAL PRIVILEGES TO NONE; EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL". . . . .	33
III.  THE POPULIST STYLE: "I DON'T LIKE THE EXISTING ORDER.". . . . .	61
IV.   SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE BLACK: 1890-1892 .	84
V.    SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE BLACK: 1892-1896 .	104
VI.   SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE BLACK: 1896-1904 .	129
VII.  THE ENIGMA OF TOM WATSON. . . . .	155
VIII. EPILOGUE. . . . .	188
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	199



## CHAPTER I

### TROPOLOGY AND NEUROSES OR "SYMBOLIC ACTION" AND "PROBLEMATIC SOCIAL REALITY": THE POPULISTS AND THE HISTORIANS

Since 1931 and the appearance of John D. Hicks' excellent history of Populism in America, there has been remarkable agreement among historians relative to who the Populists were and what caused their revolt.<sup>1</sup> For Hicks, trained in the Progressive tradition and writing amid a devastating depression, the Populist was a farmer aggrieved by difficult economic times:

It was the grinding burden of debt . . . that aroused the farmers, both southern and western, to action. [As long as prices remained high grievances only smoldered, but] when the bottom dropped out of the cotton market and the western boom collapsed, then the weight of debt was keenly felt and frenzied agitation began.<sup>2</sup>

With minor variation, this has been the reigning consensus since the 1930's. The only really serious debate about the Populist movement has not focused as much on who or what, but rather, on the specific character of their response to these

---

<sup>1</sup>The Populist Revolt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 81.

conditions. The first serious questions concerning Populism arose during the McCarthy era, a time of popular frustration manifested in attacks on fundamental American liberties and also, most pertinently, in anti-Semitism. These initial doubts about Populism were raised by a number of historians and social scientists, men who had themselves come to entertain serious doubts about the wisdom of America's continued commitment to democracy and majority rule. The clearest statement of this "new conservatism" occurred in the writings of Peter Viereck. For Viereck an excess of direct democracy constituted the great American problem in the early 1950's: "Democracy is house broken, is tolerant, humane, civil libertarian, only after being filtered, traditionalized, constitutionalized through indirect representation."<sup>3</sup>

Viereck found the origins of these mass aberrations in a phenomenon which he loosely labeled "Populism" but which he often linked carelessly to Progressivism.<sup>4</sup> In his generally unsupported attack on Populism, Viereck leveled several serious charges against the movement which he summed up by saying: "Beneath the sane economic demands of the Populists

---

<sup>3</sup>The Unadjusted Man: A New Hero for Americans (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956), 134. For an excellent discussion of the shifting views on Populism see Walter T. K. Nugent, The Tolerant Populists (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Chapter I.

<sup>4</sup>The Unadjusted Man, 156. Indeed at one point Viereck calls the Progressive party "one specific Populist party." Ibid., 180.

of 1880-1900 seethed a mania of xenophobia, Jew-baiting, intellectual-baiting, and thought-controlling lynch-spirit."<sup>5</sup> To these he added the further labels of "proto-fascism and proto-McCarthyism."<sup>6</sup> In "The Revolt Against the Elite" Viereck further amplified his position by adding to this list the "sins" of isolationism, anglophobism, and Germanophiloism.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that beyond the failure to examine seriously Populism itself, Viereck also failed to define fascism. Instead he appears simply to find fascism present where intolerance, racism, direct democracy and/or attacks on civil liberties are present. A fascist economic philosophy is never mentioned.

Victor Ferkiss, a political scientist, joined Viereck in his sweeping attacks on Populism. He, like Viereck, began by analyzing the thought and attitudes of Ezra Pound whom he saw as a latter day Populist and a vital link between Populism and American fascism.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 201.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>7</sup>In Daniel Bell (ed.), The Radical Right (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 135-154, especially 138. See also his initial attack on Populism which occurred in "Pure Poetry, Impure Politics and Ezra Pound," Commentary, XI (April, 1951), 340-46.

<sup>8</sup>"Ezra Pound and American Fascism," The Journal of Politics, XVII (May, 1955), 196-97. For a short but useful criticism of this article, see William D. Tucker, "Ezra Pound, Fascism and Populism," The Journal of Politics, XVIII (February, 1956), 105-7.

Ferkiss finds certain ideas in Pound's writings which he traces directly to Populism. These include: Pound's opposition to usury; his commitment to monetary reform; his belief that liberal representative democracy is too easily manipulated by an economic plutocracy; his opposition to civil liberties which Pound saw as a shield for plutocracy and finally, a historical interpretation which holds that a dialectical struggle between the financier and the producer is the great causal engine of historical events.<sup>9</sup>

With the failure to achieve monetary reform, Ferkiss argues that Pound logically extended Populism in two vital ways. He first moved to support the suppression of liberal democratic methods. Secondly, he advocated the creation of an authoritarian corporate state as the best vehicle for achieving economic reform and a satisfactory economy.<sup>10</sup> Of all these charges the last--those alleged to be logical extensions of Populism--are perhaps the most important.

In an additional and more explicit indictment of Populism, Ferkiss expounded and elaborated his earlier remarks.<sup>11</sup> He

---

<sup>9</sup>Ferkiss, "Ezra Pound and American Fascism," 174.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 196-97. On the corporate state see especially p. 185.

<sup>11</sup>"Populist Influences on American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, X (June, 1957), 350-73.

began with a clear but undefended definition of fascism which included first, an economic program aimed at the small farmers and merchants who believe themselves caught between big business and the industrial working class; second, a nationalism expressed through isolationism rather than imperialism; third, a despair of liberal democratic institutions for which direct plebiscitary democracy is substituted; and last, history seen as the product of a great struggle between the producers and the international financiers. Ferkiss argued, moreover, that this creed arose logically from Populist doctrine and that American fascist leaders attracted the same social and sectional interests as did the Populists. In each case, Ferkiss finds Populism fitting his definition of American fascism.

Ferkiss omits, however, any mention or category for Ezra Pound's ideas about a corporate state and elitist society--two very significant aspects of European fascism. These significant categories would have to be mentioned to make his definition at all valid. As observed, he was also required to interpret Populist isolationism as somehow a distortion of aggressive nationalism.

Perhaps the difficulty is, as this work argues, that the Populist was the last person one would call an exponent of the corporate state. Indeed at its very core Populism was fundamentally alienated by the emerging corporate society.

Most importantly, it needs to be observed that Progressivism, not Populism, is seen by Robert Wiebe among others as attempting to create, and indeed achieving, a corporate economy and society.<sup>12</sup> One might also note that there is no need to distort the nationalism of those Progressives led by Theodore Roosevelt and aptly labeled "New Nationalists." For them the aggressive, expansionist corporate state was a vital necessity and one would be hard pressed to find an American movement which "fit" European fascism more closely.<sup>13</sup> The intention here is not to make the same mistakes as the critics of Populism, that is, to try and squeeze a specific American movement--Progressivism--into a political category like fascism, but rather to point up clearly the shortcomings in the Populist-fascist analysis. It also perhaps indicates the almost obsessive need of these critics and their followers to find in a rural mass movement some of the qualities they had come to dislike so intensely.

Another and most persistent charge against Populism has been that of anti-Semitism. Both Viereck and Perkiss suggested

---

<sup>12</sup>The Search for Order (N.Y.: Hill & Wang, 1967). See also Samuel P. Hayes, The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) and Gabriel Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916 (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967).

<sup>13</sup>William E. Leuchtenburg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1916," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (December, 1952), 483-504 is a good discussion of the convergence of these two movements.

this as did another early work by Oscar Handlin.<sup>14</sup> Professor Handlin, however, made an important distinction in this article between anti-Semitism before and after the decade of the 1890's. He finds anti-Semitism prior to these pivotal years but not the hostile, virulent variety he finds afterwards. For Handlin the major cause of this growing hatred in the decade of the nineties was the failure of reformers to achieve their aims; frustrated, they turned their misdirected anger on the Jew.<sup>15</sup>

The specific process involved in this scapegoating was the Populists' increasing reliance on monetary reform whose defeat was easily attributed to international bankers and from there to Jewish international bankers and financiers. Ignatius Donnelly's Caesar's Column becomes for Handlin the major repository of these ideas. He notes particularly the presence of two secret Jewish societies both working for Jewish ends. In an effort to account for the obviously genuine fear of conspiracy present in Donnelly's work, Handlin finds the cause in a changing America and a growing concern over the country's future. But these underlying concerns are most dramatically expressed by focusing on the city--a ready symbol of change. Moreover, the city is the great home of

---

<sup>14</sup>"How U.S. Anti-Semitism Really Began: Its Grass-Roots Source in the 90's," Commentary, XI (June, 1959), 541-48.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 541.

trade and the Jew, a fact, resulting in the iron linkage of the three symbolic evils into one fearful and conspiratorial figure--the Jew:

In those formative years of the 1890's, the injured groups of American society, in agony, had emitted the cries of an infant without words to express its pain. Searching vainly for the means of relief, they would somehow guess that the source of their trials was a change going on in the world in which they lived. And groping toward some understanding of that change, some perceived its instrument the Jew. If all trade was treachery and the city was Babylon, then the Jew stood ready to be assigned the role of arch conspirator.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, this article has often been misused to link the Populists with anti-Semitism and then jump from anti-Semitism to charges of fascism or proto-fascism.<sup>17</sup>

The value of Handlin's comments lies in his attempt to move beyond the rather simplistic economic or status anxiety approaches to Populism by suggesting that perhaps the movement and its attendant rhetoric was in some way related to social changes in the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, at another point in the same article, he directly attributes reform activities of the 1890's to the depression of those same years.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Handlin's article held the germ of an important advance in our understanding of the Populist

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 548.

<sup>17</sup>Max Lerner, America as a Civilization (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 141. A worse offender, however, is Peter Viereck especially The Unadjusted Man, 201-202.

<sup>18</sup>"How U.S. Anti-Semitism Really Began," 544-45.



movement and its exaggerated language and peculiar conception of "reality."

Richard Hofstadter has woven all of the foregoing views into an elaborate interpretation of Populism.<sup>19</sup> Hofstadter's work stands as the broadest and best developed criticism of Populism and the only one which has as its central concern Populism itself. Yet while far advanced in scholarship over the work of Viereck and Ferkiss, Hofstadter nevertheless shared deeply their suspicion of mass popular movements which he also directly associated with Populism:

Long before the rebellion of the 1890's one can observe a larger trend of thought, stemming from the time of Andrew Jackson, and crystallizing after the Civil War in the Greenback, Granger, and anti-monopoly movements, that expressed the discontents of a great many farmers and businessmen with the economic changes of the late nineteenth century. The Populist spirit captured the Democratic Party in 1896, and continued to play an important part in the politics of the Progressive era. While its special association with agrarian reforms has now become attenuated, I believe that Populist thinking has survived in our own time, partly as an undercurrent of provincial resentments, popular and "democratic" rebelliousness and suspiciousness, and nativism.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps in their own reactionary view of popular participation in democratic politics the "liberal" academic community

---

<sup>19</sup>The Age of Reform, 3-130. See also The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 3-40 and his The American Political Tradition (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1948), Chapter VIII: "William Jennings Bryan: The Democrat as Revivalist."

<sup>20</sup>The Age of Reform, 4-5.

of the early 1950's did not, in part at least, invite the political repression associated with Senator McCarthy. It is clear at any rate that Professor Hofstadter's dislike of certain unfortunate aspects of popular politics in the early 1950's led him to examine earlier reform movements for this same "strain" of thought.

The second concept underlying Hofstadter's analysis of Populism is the, by now, familiar idea of consensus in American history, of which Hofstadter was a major advocate.<sup>21</sup> For Hofstadter the Populists were a completely integral part of the American mainstream--that is, the American consensus--in two ways. They were first, middle class entrepreneurs and second, integral elements of a lengthy reform era beginning in the 1890's and ending with Franklin Roosevelt. The great problem with Populism and, for Hofstadter the cause of excessive Populist rhetoric, was that they held a body of beliefs, the so-called agrarian myth, which did not "square" with the reality of their position. Thus the "characteristic product of American rural society was not a yeoman or a villager, but a harrassed little country businessman who worked very hard, moved all too often, gambled with his land, and

---

<sup>21</sup>For two able critiques of Hofstadter and the consensus approach to Populism see Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, 21-25 and Norman Pollack, "Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of 'The Age of Reform,'" The Journal of Southern History, XXVI (November, 1960), 478-500.

made his way alone."<sup>22</sup>

The most important aspect of this dualism--what he calls the "hard" and "soft" sides of the farmer's existence--is Hofstadter's tendency to separate the thought of the Populist, expressed in his rhetoric, from the reality of his life and environment. This language--because it does not truly reflect the reality, that is, the small country businessman--must be false or "irrational."

Thus for Hofstadter, as Hicks, the real cause of Populism was economic grievances:

Populism can best be understood . . . not as a product of the frontier heritage, but as another episode in the well-established tradition of American entrepreneurial radicalism, which goes back at least to the Jacksonian era. It was an effort on the part of a few important segments of a highly heterogeneous capitalistic agriculture to restore profits in the face of much exploitation and under unfavorable market and price conditions.<sup>23</sup>

His only quarrel with Professor Hicks, then, is that Hicks assigned an undue importance to the frontier as a causal factor in the Populist movement. For Hofstadter neither the close of the frontier nor its alleged heritage of democracy and individualism played a significant part in shaping the agrarian revolt.<sup>24</sup>

Having established that the Populist was really only a small commercial farmer suffering from depression and perhaps

---

<sup>22</sup>Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, 46.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 46-56.

a measure of status anxiety, Hofstadter is able to explore more fully the Populist tropology or what he called the Populist folklore. Borrowing from or at least greatly influenced by the writings of Viereck, Ferkiss, and Handlin, the charges Hofstadter brings against the Populists are by now familiar. They include the myth of an agrarian past in which the good society existed only in the presence of a healthy agriculture and prior to the rise of industry and commercial farming. Moreover, the Populists adhered to a social dualism, that is, "although they knew perfectly well that society was composed of a number of classes," they insisted on seeing it divided between the producers and the parasites.<sup>25</sup> The Populists also persisted in their "irrational" attempts to coalesce with the urban laborer whose hard economic interests were "obviously" different from the rural farming Populist.<sup>26</sup>

This folklore included as well a vision of historical events motivated and controlled by conspiracies among "the interests" or the plutocrats aimed at the people. For Hofstadter this need to personalize impersonal forces resulted from the lack of a "well-developed tradition of intellectual complexity,"<sup>27</sup> a tradition which, according to an urban oriented historian, could only be found in the city.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 64-65. (italics mine)

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 70-73. It is noteworthy that Hofstadter's ideas, as those of Viereck and Ferkiss would seem to be well

Linked closely with a conspiratorial view of history, Hofstadter also discovered a significant strain of anti-Semitism. For Hofstadter this form of prejudice was entirely verbal and did not lead to pogroms or riots; but he did believe it was significant, for he emphasized:

It is not too much to say that the Greenback-Populist tradition activated most of what we have of modern popular anti-Semitism in the United States. From Thaddeus Stevens and Coin Harvey to Father Coughlin, and from Brooks and Henry Adams to Ezra Pound, there has been a curiously persistent linkage between anti-Semitism and money and credit obsessions.<sup>28</sup>

Finally in a quick outpouring of labels, Hofstadter adds anglo-phobia, a general xenophobia, and an intense nationalist jingoism to the Populist folklore.<sup>29</sup>

The real value in Hofstadter's work, as in the suggestions in Handlin's article on anti-Semitism, was his discovery of a serious flaw in the Populist's perception of his society. Hofstadter lays the blame for the distorted vision, however, not on the society but rather on the Populists. For him the

---

grounded in a series of theoretical studies in sociology which suggest an urban-rural dichotomy in which one finds xenophobia and provincialism as characteristic of the rural mind. See especially Georg Simmel, The Sociology of Georg Simmel, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (Chicago, Il.: The Free Press, 1950) and Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology, XLIV (July, 1938), 1-24 among numerous others. It needs to be noted that these ideal types are useful in the abstract but perhaps are valueless for any specific agrarian or urban political movement.

<sup>28</sup>The Age of Reform, 77-81.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 81-93.

Populists had a soft side, an illogical side, a paranoia--more precisely, a paranoid style. He means by this phrase, a certain rhetorical fashion, which includes "the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy. . . ." <sup>30</sup> Hofstadter finds this style in Populism and as a recurring theme in American history as well. But again, like his treatment of Populism, it is not the society that is pathological; on the contrary, the paranoia, the pathology, is rooted in the mass movement:

A distorted style is, then, a possible signal that may alert us to a distorted judgment, just as in art an ugly style is a cue to fundamental defects of taste. What interests me here is the possibility of using political rhetoric to get at political pathology. <sup>31</sup>

He adds that he finds this distorted style a constantly recurring phenomenon in American political life.

While there is little doubt about the recurrent nature of this extremism in American socio-political life, there is doubt as to the location or source of the pathology. Is it in the recurring movements themselves, as Hofstadter suggests, or in the American environment? It is one purpose of this study to show that the pathology, while existing in the movement, is in fact the product of persistent

---

<sup>30</sup>The Paranoid Style in American Politics, 3.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 6.

socio-economic conditions. Hopefully, it will also be possible, paraphrasing Professor Hofstadter, to use the Populists' rhetoric and style to discover those social and economic conditions.<sup>32</sup>

Before pursuing this question further, however, perhaps it is worthwhile to summarize the historians' views on this point and suggest some major themes. As to the causes of Populism, all of those from Hicks to Hofstadter agree that, in some sense, Populism was a result of economic grievances. Professor Hofstadter would only add the more sophisticated idea of status anxiety, which in fact only slightly alters the economic center of focus. The second theme involves the discovery of a certain "crankiness" or "sourness" in Populism--a condition which includes intolerance, anti-Semitism, a fear of conspiracies, strangers, and the mysterious evil city. It also includes a rejection of liberal democratic methods and on the international scene an isolationist jingoism. It must be remembered that this "sourness" is seen as various "illogical" responses to real conditions. It should be readily apparent that both of these themes can be viewed as one conceptual unit and, for purposes of analysis, conveniently included under the heading of a paranoid style.

---

<sup>32</sup>For an invaluable examination of this same exaggerated rhetoric and its treatment by other "consensus" historians see Gordon S. Wood's brilliant article "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, XXIII (1966), 3-32.

Contemporary with the critics of Populism, another smaller group of historians led by C. Vann Woodward, Norman Pollack and Walter Nugent have sought to defend Populism against its detractors. While superficially the writings of these men appear to be widely divergent from those of their opponents, a closer look offers some surprises. In all cases there is general agreement that Populism is the product of economic grievances. C. Vann Woodward, for example, while specifically rejecting the concept of status anxiety does attribute Populism to direct economic insecurity.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time the Populists' supporters accept portions of the list of charges contained in Hofstadter's label, the folklore of Populism. Woodward, again, while rejecting the charges of anti-Semitism and broadly praising the southern Populists for exceptional tolerance in relation to the Black,<sup>34</sup> also acknowledged the critics' assessment that the Populists were provincial, shared an agrarian myth, dreamed of an Utopian Golden Age, overemphasized the value of monetary reform,

---

<sup>33</sup>"The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," American Scholar, XXIX (Winter 1959-60), 62-63. Cf. as well, "Before the boom had busted for very long, the Kansas farmer, caught in a three-way squeeze by mortgages, tight money, and high transportation rates, was ready for a change." Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, 59. See also Norman Pollack, "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism and the Historian," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 59.

<sup>34</sup>"The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," 64-66.



and saw conspiracies rampant in their society. Moreover, Woodward agreed with Hofstadter that the Populists refused to accept the commercial nature of agriculture and attempted an impossible coalition between labor and the farmer on the basis of a non-existent harmony of interests. Woodward excused this last act by suggesting that the attempt at a farmer-labor coalition "was no more irrational in this respect than was the Whig coalition and many others, including the New Deal coalition."<sup>35</sup>

In effect, Woodward accepted Hofstadter's dualism concerning a "hard" and "soft" side of Populism and only rejected certain aspects of that "soft" side. This is true even to the point of suggesting that the farmer-labor coalition was really a "hard," pragmatic political maneuver. To shift the burden of guilt from the Populists for being at least partially illogical, Woodward also argues that the entire age is a little "soft" or irrational:

An intense study of the nineties can hardly fail to leave the impression that this decade had rather more than its share of zaniness and crankiness, and that these qualities were manifested in the higher and middling as well as the lower orders of American society.<sup>36</sup>

While this is an excellent insight into the period, it leaves one wondering if perhaps there is not another reason--something in the age itself--to explain why an entire society is "cranky"

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 69.

or worse "zany."

While directly challenging Hofstadter's conclusions, Walter Nugent's work on Kansas Populism, nevertheless fully accepts his entire analytical framework; that is, there is always a hard reality to which groups respond either rationally or irrationally. For Hofstadter the Populists reacted irrationally. For Nugent it was rational. Thus:

They [the Populists] were bound together not by common neuroses but by common indebtedness, common price squeezes, common democratic and humanitarian ideals, and common wrath at the infringement of them. From this wrath rose the Farmers Alliance, and from the Alliance their ultimate instrument of protest, the People's Party. The Populists were far too concerned with land, money and transportation, and also, later on, with the mechanics of winning and holding public office, to have much time to worry about whether their ideals were mythical or their anxieties neurotic. Tight money and foreclosure sales were the products of nobody's imagination. Even in their rhetoric they were too busy preaching positive reforms in a depression to be concerned with racism or anti-Semitism or agrarian arcadias; and in their practical political activities, they took all the help they could get.<sup>37</sup>

This leaves a choice between two reputable observers and from within the exact same theoretical perspective.

The last, and in some ways most systematic and intense Populist defender is Norman Pollack. For Pollack, Populism was not a backward-looking or myth-ridden movement, nor did it indulge in the many irrational or intolerant activities attributed to it by its historian critics.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary,

---

<sup>37</sup>The Tolerant Populists, 242-43.

<sup>38</sup>Pollack has expressed his views in several places but see especially "Fear of Man," 59-61; The Populist Response to

Populism looked forward to a new America which accepted the reality of industrial development but rejected the specific shape of competitive capitalism. In examining the content of Populist thought, Pollack suggests further that it is "a mirror of America, and its criticism, a reflection of social conditions during the 1890's."<sup>39</sup> This is a very useful comment on the Populist mind. Moreover, Pollack also suggests that Populism, like Marxist socialism, was in some way sensing man's growing dehumanization and the trend toward man's alienation from his urban industrial life style.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Pollack sees Populism as a radical alternative to the three great pillars of late nineteenth century thought--individualism, competition, and progress. The Populists sought ways to reverse the popular perception of man's relationship to society by making the society responsible for the individual's fate.<sup>41</sup> These are valuable insights although

---

Industrial America (N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966), 1-12; "Handlin on Anti-Semitism: A Critique of 'American Views on the Jew,'" The Journal of American History, LI (December, 1964), 391-403; and also "The Myth of Populist Anti-Semitism," The American Historical Review, LXVIII (October, 1962), 76-80.

<sup>39</sup>Pollack, The Populist Response, 10.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. See also his comments on the urban bureaucratic historians who have criticized Populism. In Pollack's view their denigration of Populism rises out of an inability to accept the freedom of bureaucratic restraint manifested by Populism. In "Fear of Man," 62-67.

<sup>41</sup>The Populist Response, 23-24.

he may be mistaken about the Populist's conception of the individual's relation to society.

Pollack's discussion of the attempted "farmer-labor" coalition, specifically, his comment that labor, not the Populists, was the cause of the failure to coalesce is one of the most interesting aspects of his work. While this is a useful suggestion and correct as far as it goes, it does not go far enough.<sup>42</sup> Pollack, like most other historians dealing with this issue, fails to see that all farmers were not Populists nor were all laborers radical. The attempted coalition was between Populists and the Knights of Labor. As such, the coalition was often enough successful. The attempt to coalesce with a different, a more "modern" labor organization, Samuel Gompers' American Federation of Labor, was unsuccessful. The reasons for this latter failure are vital to the understanding of Populism and the Populist. They are also at the heart of Pollack's failure to move beyond his otherwise very perceptive discussion of Populism.

The real question posed rather peripherally by Pollack and the others is simply what made one man a Populist and not another. Because Populism has been considered an agrarian response to economic grievances, one would expect all depressed farmers to participate. In this way Pollack

---

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 61-64.

comes to share the familiar framework evidenced by critics as well as the other supporters of Populism. As observed, all see a hard reality--an industrial, capitalist America--and all see Populists responding to that development. On one side the critic sees an illogical, irrational even paranoid reaction--paranoid because there is really nothing wrong with that hard reality, with, that is, the American society. On the other side, the supporters, especially Woodward and Nugent, agree that there is no fundamental malaise in the society, only temporary depression. But unlike the critics, they find the Populists in varying degrees making pragmatic rational responses to this reality. Woodward even accepts a sizeable portion of the critics' argument that perhaps they were a bit "zany."

The only significant departure from this framework is that of Norman Pollack. He also sees a real industrial, capitalist world; but for him that world is not good but rather a deeply disturbing one--a world to which the Populist responded like a mirror image--directly reflecting its weaknesses. Thus the Populists' response is again pragmatic and rational but in this case to a severely pathological society.

From here it is possible to see basic similarities between Pollack, Hofstadter and Woodward in their treatment

of the attempted farmer-labor coalition. For all three, the key is the alignment of hard economic interests. For Hofstadter, by definition, there can be no such alignment because one is a capitalist and employer the other a worker and employee. For Woodward economically such a coalition might not have been feasible; but politically it was perfectly sane and initially practical. Pollack simply reverses the basic assumption: the Populists--at least some of them--were not capitalists but were indeed a laboring employee. Thus hard interests do align: "That agrarians were split should not therefore obscure the radical views of the poorer farmers."<sup>43</sup> This leaves, of course, the question of the relation of the prosperous farmers to Populism; that is, is Pollack suggesting that the wealthy farmer was not a Populist? In any case, it is clear that Pollack like the others sees the mind of the Populist as only a direct product of his "harder" economic situation; it is really not important in shaping Populism or the individual Populist.

The best analysis of the general framework within which both supporters and critics of Populism operate is that of Gene Wise. Wise has compared the work of two broad groups of historians whom he labels "Progressives" and "Symbolists." It seems clear from his comments that all the historians

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 62-63.

examined in the foregoing pages have been "Progressives."<sup>44</sup>

To help separate Progressives from Symbolists, Wise has created several categories by which it is possible to compare the responses of these two groups of historians. For Wise the vital category is their respective views of "reality." For the Progressive, there is a substantial objective hard reality, primarily political and economic. Psychology, philosophy, literature and ideology are unreal and at best only a direct reflection of this underlying reality. "The individual [for the Progressive] is either aware of reality or he is not. Departures from full awareness are interpreted as irrational, psychological and/or moral aberrations."<sup>45</sup> Thus for the Progressive substantial reality shapes the individual--the raw material. If the individual does not reflect or perceive this reality "correctly," the problem must lie with the individual.

For the Symbolists there is also a reality but a much broader cultural reality to which the individual responds

---

<sup>44</sup>"Political 'Reality' in Recent American Scholarship: Progressives versus Symbolists," American Quarterly, XIX (Summer 1967), 303-28. The most glaring error in this otherwise excellent article occurs in labeling Richard Hofstadter a Symbolist. He does this because Hofstadter uses sociological concepts; but it should be clear by now that Hofstadter also finds a hard reality to which the individual must respond rationally or irrationally, thus leaving no room for the reality of ideas themselves.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 322-23.

but only selectively. That is, the individual himself is expected to distort reality as a result of his own background and aspirations. The individual thus refracts rather than reflects reality and the "mind" or ideology of the individual is the product of this broadened total environment and the refraction of the individual perceiver. Most importantly then, the individual selectively shapes his environment not fully according to his own purposes, yet not entirely according to its, that is, the environment's either. He does so in order to understand, to communicate with, and to manipulate his world. Put another way, the individual is not a mirror image of his "reality" but rather a spectrum through which "reality" is refracted and the end product is an anticipated ideological distortion. A good example is the manner in which several witnesses of the same specific "real" event tend to have a different version of that event.

A second important category for Wise is the respective treatment of ideas themselves by the two groups. For the Progressive, because the world itself creates ideas, it is possible to find at any time certain categories of ideas such as conservatism, liberalism, fascism, Jacksonian democracy, and federalism which are "real," self-evident entities. For Symbolists, men--not the world--do the focusing and categorizing. Thus in a most important observation for the study of Populism, Wise finds the Progressive historian seeing



the human personality as integral and organic, but they seem implicitly to deny the distinctiveness of any individual, or historic, phenomenon. Rather, individuals appear to "lock in" on certain categories and are identified by them. And a locking in on a single category in a logical cluster--say anti-Semitism--seems to be a locking in on all the remainder--anti-Negro, anti-New Deal, anti-Russian, anti-labor<sup>46</sup> union, anti-science, anti-progressivism, anti-democracy.

One might also add as well anti-technological, and a certain proto-fascism.

It seems clear that this is precisely the failure of Viereck and Ferkiss. Both perceive a single characteristic, for example, anti-Semitism, and reason from that to their floating category fascism. Hofstadter also appears to do exactly the same thing and only stops short of the extreme denigration of Populism displayed by Viereck and Ferkiss.

The Symbolists on the other hand prefer to see the individual do the clustering; thus in this case anti-Semitism might conceivably exist side by side with a radical humanitarian view of the government and industrial capitalism. One might also find and indeed expect to find that the Populists themselves (as a political category) display a great variety of individual responses to their particular environment and yet still retain a common loyalty to the larger movement.

With this background, the great need for the study of Populism is not only more "objective" studies of tolerance, or

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 325-26.

intolerance, anti-Semitism, or radicalism but instead a decisive break with the progressive perceptual framework itself. Above all some willingness to confront, tolerate and analyze the "reality" of Populist rhetoric is in order. Already some new approaches along these lines have begun.

One of the earliest of these is found in an article by John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation."<sup>47</sup> Higham noted here that Populist anti-Semitism was not simply a Populist or even an American phenomenon. Rather, he sees all of western civilization passing through three phases of intense anti-Semitism: 1880 to 1890, the post World War I era, and the 1930's. These broad movements force Higham to an explanation which transcends ideas like the rural mind. He suggests that perhaps both Europe and America were suffering in these periods "a complex of social and economic dislocations."<sup>48</sup> Higham continues by noting that an intense nationalism coincided with these socio-economic dislocations and acted as a conduit to channel internal frustrations by focusing on foreign influences. He specifically argues that it is this jingoism rather than economic radicalism which carried Populists into anti-Semitism. While interesting, it might be useful to explore further the idea

---

<sup>47</sup>Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (March, 1957), 559-78.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 571.

that intense nationalism and economic radicalism are both products of the same social dislocations. In any event, the great value of Higham's work lies in his recognition of very wide spread, repetitive phases of anti-Semitism and his rooting of those currents in socio-economic dislocations.

Oscar Handlin, the often misquoted and ill-used initiator of the Populist debate, has recently revised and expanded his original ideas. Handlin's latest contribution is that in reality Populism is simply too diverse an ideology to categorize as tolerant or not. What Populists did share was not so much content as style, specifically an emotionally charged rhetoric. In addition, he finds a common element in the Populist propensity to replace social forces with real conspirators and conversely to believe in the ability of the lone individual to solve deeply-rooted social problems. Continuing, Handlin makes an extremely valuable observation, namely, that Populists seemed to be terribly fearful of most institutions, especially the corporation and the press.<sup>49</sup>

While Higham and Handlin have rather valuable suggestions, they stop short of an entirely new approach to the study of

---

<sup>49</sup>"Reconsidering the Populists," Agricultural History, XXXIX (October, 1965), 68-74. While a very perceptive article, Handlin is still not above taking a further swipe at the Populists. "The voice of the people [for the Populist] was the voice of God, even when it would, later, be sounded by a lynching mob." P. 72. That comment unfortunately mars an otherwise excellent discussion.

Populism. What is necessary is a thoroughgoing analysis of ideology and the role of ideology in social-political movements. This has been provided by the work of Clifford Geertz.<sup>50</sup>

Geertz sees two prevailing views of the origins of ideology. The first, interest theory, sees ideology as a mask and a weapon: a direct expression of hard interests and economic and political reality. This is essentially the view held by the historians of Populism. The second commonly sees ideology as a response to social strains. In this context, ideology is seen as an effort to correct socio-psychological disequilibrium. Such disequilibrium is seen as the product of functional contradictions which riddle all social arrangements, for example, the inherent clash between liberty and order and efficiency and humanity among others. Strains also appear on the personal level as role conflicts, to cite another example, being father, son, student, and husband all at one time. Because the society and personality are integrated wholes and systems rather than clusters of institutions or motives, the socio-psychological tensions produced by such contradictions and conflicts appear as a pattern of strains. And the response to these strains occurs, as well, in a patterned fashion, in our case, as ideology.<sup>51</sup> The question

---

<sup>50</sup>"Ideology as a Cultural System," 47-76. For introducing me to the entire study of ideology and social strains, I want to acknowledge and thank Professor Robert E. Shalhope.

<sup>51</sup>The clearest and most intelligible discussion of ideology and socio-psychological strains occurs in Frances X. Sutton,

which arises is just how does ideology act to relieve strain. The traditional answers have included four methods. The first involves the use of a scapegoat or symbolic enemy to help drain off emotional tensions. The second is called the "moral explanation," that is, ideology aids individuals by directly confronting strain and denying it outright or by legitimizing it in the terms of higher values. Ideology in the third view creates a feeling of solidarity among common groups thus helping to share tension. Lastly, ideology is helpful by simply articulating, however poorly, the strains producing them and thus allowing others to see the tension-creating problem. To Geertz these explanations do not go far enough. He notes, for example, that scapegoating may actually replace one tension with another tension-producing symbol.

In Geertz's view the key problem in the theoretical work on ideology has been a failure to understand the role of ideology as elaborate symbolic structures through which attitudes are finally made public. Put another way, Geertz compares ideology to metaphors and especially to the metaphor's ability, if effective, to convey a great number of complex meanings. For example, the comparison of the Taft-

---

Seymour E. Harris, Carl Kaysen and James Tobin, The American Business Creed (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), Chapter XV.

Hartley law to a Russian slave labor law while "wrong" was also extremely effective and meaningful to a great number of people. For Professor Geertz it is precisely this ability of a symbol to grasp, formulate and communicate social realities, an ability which eludes the tempered language of science, which gives to it its great power and effectiveness. But beyond this, such symbolic language performs another equally important function; that is, it "stands in" for--even takes the place of--overt behavior. Geertz calls this the "symbolic action" role of ideology. It is in this very important manner that ideology acts to drain off tensions and strains otherwise relieved only by action.

This only partially explains the role ideology plays in easing tension. Geertz continues by discussing a further function of ideology. He asks: when do ideologies flourish? and answers: when the guides to a society's political life have for some reason been called into question or destroyed. Thus ideologies spring up in situations marked by the loss of useable models to comprehend the political world of rights and responsibilities in which one finds himself. The French Revolution, for example, saw a great spawning of ideologies not simply because personal or social disequilibrium were greater than before, but rather because the central organizing concept in their political life--the divine right of Kings--was destroyed. Certainly such an upheaval also involved

personal insecurities and social distortions but these are not sufficient to explain the resulting intense ideological fervor:

It is a confluence of sociopsychological strain and, an absence of cultural resources by which to make [political, moral or economic] sense of that strain, each exacerbating the other, that sets the stage for the use of systematic [political, moral or economic] ideologies.<sup>52</sup>

Thus spawned by socio-psychological strain and a loss of cultural "bearings" ideologies become maps or blueprints to make the incomprehensible comprehensible. Yet because the situation cannot, by definition, be explained "scientifically," the ideological explanation is marked by a highly figurative language and a rhetoric often not "true" indeed appearing "irrational" to the unaffected observer. At the same time the ability of ideology to interpret and to give purpose to the participant's life also indicates why he clings to it with such intensity. In an excellent summation Geertz adds:

Whatever else ideologies may be--projections of unacknowledged fears, disguises for ulterior motives, frantic expressions of group solidarity--they are, most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of a collective conscience.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps now, with the aid of Wise and Geertz, it is possible to reconcile the views of the supporters and critics of Populism and move beyond the earlier limited debate.

Professor Hicks and all of those who have seen Populism as a response to direct economic grievances are correct; such

---

<sup>52</sup>Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," 64.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

was the case. At the same time the Populists may have also suffered severe personal anxiety about their status in an increasingly urban world. But their "paranoid" style and the "irrational" content of their ideology--which the critics are correct, at least in part, in seeing--are not just "masks" and "weapons" to be used against their fellow capitalists. On the contrary as Geertz has made clear, such a style relieves social and personal strains of various sorts; but equally important, it provides a badly needed "map" by which to guide oneself in a rapidly changing environment. A world undergoing transformations in every major area of life: intellectually, socially, politically and economically; and, as Higham noted, changes affecting not only America but also all of western civilization. What is needed now and what the students of ideology have provided is the opportunity to confront and analyze Populist ideology with a view to determining the strains, dislocations and cultural disturbances which have produced it.



## CHAPTER II

### THE POPULIST MIND: "SPECIAL PRIVILEGES TO NONE; EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL"

"With the same cement, ever sure to bind,  
We bring to one dead level every mind;  
Then take him to develop, if you can,  
And hew the block off and get out the man."<sup>1</sup>

The attempt to confront the Populist mind and, more importantly to look beneath it to the problems it "refracts" from a troubled environment is unquestionably a difficult undertaking. It is made more so by the numerous and obvious contradictions among Populist spokesmen. Indeed, the complexity of this problem has led Oscar Handlin to suggest that the Populists' exaggerated, emotional style was the only distinguishing characteristic they had in common.<sup>2</sup> While Handlin's insight is very interesting and will be explored further, the effort to separate the common elements of Populist thought from the peripheral, the "wheat from the chafe," might prove to be invaluable in the continuing effort to uncover "the real Populist." At the least, such an attempt might serve as an hypothesis to which others could react.

---

<sup>1</sup>From Alexander Pope's Dunciad quoted in Ignatius Donnelly's, Doctor Huguet (Chicago: P. J. Schulte & Co., 1891), 239.

<sup>2</sup>"Reconsidering the Populists," 71-72.

Perhaps the single most repeated slogan in the Populist catechism was that of "Special Privileges to None; Equal Opportunities for All." Endlessly repeated, this statement must have held a special meaning for Populists. The most readily apparent fact about this declaration is its positive affirmation of individualism. Indeed individualism, albeit a unique species of individualism, can be advanced as the single most important touchstone in the Populist ideology.

Ignatius Donnelly, Minnesota's baby-faced and rather pudgy Populist, for example, often declared his unwavering faith in individualism. Nowhere does he express this with more fervor than in his unique novel, Doctor Huguet. After praising the Age's great progress, its unequalled prosperity and power, he sounds a note of caution by hinting that "such things" might be accompanied by a corrosive materialist "wealth-grubbing" and "Mammon-worship" which would rot the inner timbers of progress. As a result great fortunes might be erected but not great men. Worse than this is the century's tendency to press men into a mold--to produce factory men "turned out after the same pattern--like ready-made clothing."<sup>3</sup>

Tom Watson, a key southern Populist from Georgia and the party's Vice Presidential nominee in 1896 is quoted by

---

<sup>3</sup>Donnelly, Doctor Huguet, 238-41.

his biographer, C. Vann Woodward, as expressing much the same sentiments--in this particular instance in connection with praise for Napoleon, Watson's historical idol:

There is not a railraod king of the present day, not a single self-made man who has risen from the ranks to become chief in the vast movement of capital and labor, who will not recognize in Napoleon traits of his own character; the same unflagging purpose, tireless persistance, silent plotting pitiless rush to victory. . . .

Woodward finds it incongruous that a Populist should be praising the self-made railroad king and the virtues of "capitalist acquisitiveness." He asks if the Populists were perhaps really only another group of capitalists angered by economic reverses.<sup>5</sup> Is it not possible, however, to praise the self-made man--even the railroad baron--without praising the system from which he rose? This is important as it is the system, more precisely, the specific character of the newly emerging corporate capitalism, which the Populists criticized.

Ignatius Donnelly again hints at the Populist's concerns when he argues that goodness is the natural product of the lone individual; evil, on the other hand, is the artificial result of the society's influence. This aversion to society is reflected in Donnelly's opposition to economic and social organizations--particularly those with political purposes and concerns. When Donnelly first entered the Grange in Minnesota in 1873, for example, the only question

---

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, Tom Watson, 342.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

which arose among supporters of the new group was whether such a body ought to become involved in politics. Donnelly said yes but with obvious reluctance and only because similar "interest" groups had already taken political positions. Writing much later in his most famous work, Caesar's Column, Donnelly's hero, Gabriel Weltstein, expressed concern about the Brotherhood of Destruction, a secret political organization created by the oppressed producer class of farmers and workingmen. Speaking to Maximillian, a leader of the Brotherhood, Gabriel says,

while I cannot approve of your terrible Brotherhood, nevertheless what I have seen and heard to-night [at the council of the plutocrats who are planning the workers' destruction] satisfies me that the Plutocrats<sup>6</sup> should no longer number the earth with their presence.

This apology and concern about being required to organize and enter politics became a constant refrain for Populist speakers. N. B. Ashby, long-time lecturer for the National Farmers Alliance and author of a widely read Alliance polemic, The Riddle of the Sphinx, expressed these thoughts quite succinctly: "Organized capitalism in its centralized form, forced the farmer into organization. The farmer as a capitalist is obliged to defend his property against the encroachments of capital monopoly."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>(Chicago: Syndicate Publishing Co., 1890), 167.

<sup>7</sup>(Des Moines, Iowa: Industrial Publishing Co., 1890), 393.

But what does Ashby mean by "capital monopoly." Is it possible that he is not using the term "monopoly" as it is used in the early 1970's; that is, signifying the total control of a market by one concern? Ashby's additional comments might be helpful. He urges farmers to organize in order to break up "the conditions which bear upon him unequally and give to monopoly its privileges." Then he repeated the Populist watchword: "Special Privileges to None; Equal Opportunities for All." Ashby appears to be saying that the act of organizing and centralizing capital is itself an unnatural development. Probably, he is referring to the rise of the corporation. But what is monopolistic about organizing a corporation? Again Ashby throws light on the subject when he concludes by asserting that the farm organization should keep firmly in mind that "it has been called into existence to stem the current of class privileges, class legislation and class dominance."<sup>8</sup> Monopoly then would seem to refer not simply to market control, but rather to the creation of a government-sanctioned corporation; that is, an "unnatural" combination of capital given legal recognition and thus "special privileges" in the form of a government corporate character.

In his broad and perceptive study of the farmer in American politics, Carl Taylor argues that this same concern

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

with regulation of corporations or monopoly was the basis of the Independent or Anti-Monopoly parties which spontaneously arose in the mid 1870's.<sup>9</sup> Taylor finds as well the later Greenback party borrowing the basic tenets of the Anti-Monopoly program.<sup>10</sup> The same theme is repeated, moreover, in the formation of the early Southern Alliance. Speaking to the Texas Annual Alliance Convention in 1887, C. W. Macune, its principal organizer, argued:

The peculiar relations of large organizations to their own members, to the government, and to other organizations, is a subject worthy of the most profound study by all who exercise the right of citizenship.

I hold that co-operation, properly understood and properly applied, will place a limit to the encroachments of organized monopoly, and will be the means by which the mortgage-burdened farmers can assert their freedom from the tyranny of organized capital. . . .<sup>11</sup>

This concern over combinations of capital and its peculiar relationship to government is continually repeated. The Brothers of Freedom, a group later absorbed by the Arkansas Wheel, protested in their Declaration of Purposes against "combinations of capital" which stripped the real producing class of its rightful earnings.<sup>12</sup> Their remedy, of course,

---

<sup>9</sup>The Farmers Movement, 1620-1920 (N.Y.: American Book Co., 1953), 175-78.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 184-92.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 198. (italics mine)

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 206.

was to organize the laboring class to stand against the parasites. The purpose of the National (or Northern) Farmers Alliance organized in 1880 was, as well, "to unite the farmers of the United States for their protection against class legislation, the encroachments of concentrated capital and the tyranny of monopoly, . . ."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most enflamed statement occurs in the constitutional preamble of the Arkansas Wheel which declared "that all monopolies are dangerous to the best interests of the country tending to finally enslave a free people and subvert and finally overthrow the great principles purchased by Washington and his glorious compatriots."<sup>14</sup>

Ignatius Donnelly's reaction on hearing that the Supreme Court had ruled that corporations had the rights of persons is equally instructive. To Donnelly, not only was such a ruling dangerous it was also ludicrous. "Consider," he wrote, "the Court will soon rule that corporations have the right to marry and rear children."<sup>15</sup>

For Donnelly the corporation, what he so bitterly called "gigantic abnormal selfishnesses," was at the very heart of America's inability to achieve universal justice. In the past, selfishness took the form of conquest, plunder,

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 214-15.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Ridge, Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 315.

even murder but by the 1890's selfishness, in the eyes of Gabriel

broke forth in the shape of subtle combinations, "rings," or "trusts," as they called them, corporations, and all the other cunning devices of the day, some of which transferred the substance of one man into the pockets of another, and reduced the people to slavery as completely and inevitably as ever the robber barons of old did the original owners of the soul of Europe.<sup>16</sup>

From here it is only a short step to Donnelly's radical proposal that corporations be abolished and their property be returned to individual owners, a proposal he advanced in his chapter entitled "Gabriel's Utopia."<sup>17</sup> At the heart of this utopia is the free individual unhampered and unaided in natural competition with his fellow men. The great evil in the world for Donnelly then was the creation of artificial distinctions among men. Chief among these producers of "distinctions" were the corporations paralleled by the grievous sin of excessive interest charges, assessed by the corporate money powers.<sup>18</sup>

North Carolina's Populist Senator and the Chairman of the party's National Committee, Marion Butler, echoed these concerns in his standard speech given repeatedly to his

---

<sup>16</sup>Donnelly, Caesar's Column, 114-15.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 116-18. For the appeal to destroy corporations and monopolies cf. as well Marion Butler's editorial views in his Populist newspaper, Caucasian, September 3, 1896.

<sup>18</sup>Donnelly, Caesar's Column, 118-22.



constituents in 1897. Arguing that the tariff and "nigger" issues had been used to divide the people, he asserted that such divisions had resulted in the granting of dangerous privileges "to individuals by which they grew into powerful corporations and powerful monopolies which have resulted in breeding trusts and combines, till to-day the industrial body politic is covered with eating cancers called trusts."<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps no one expressed these ideas with more conviction and fervor than Georgia's explosive Populist, Tom Watson. In a speech he used often and was continually rewriting and revising, Watson explored for his listeners the differences between democracy and imperialism. For Watson democracy meant the preservation of "individual opportunity, initiative, responsibility, freedom of thought, speech and conduct." Imperialism on the other hand meant "the concentration of power, privilege, wealth, intelligence, opportunity." Politically, imperialism could be found where "divine right selects the ruler and not the people;" religiously, where "Popes appoint Bishops and Bishops choose Popes;" where the great mass of followers have no voice and no vote; commercially, where "guilds and chartered monopolies destroy individual strength and opportunity." In a flourish he concluded that imperialism is found in every class-law, every grant of "Special-Privilege, and every

---

<sup>19</sup>Caucasian, December 2, 1897.

corporation whether of capital or labor."<sup>20</sup> Given this background, we can begin to see why the slogans of "anti-monopoly" and "special privileges to none" had such an appeal to so many in the late nineteenth century. Clearly, these statements, often couched in the "irrational" rhetoric of subversion, slavery and tyranny were being used like a metaphor to express deeply-felt opposition to the rise of interest groups and, most importantly, to the "unnatural" and "privileged" corporation.

Watson's association of imperialism with the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy suggests another institution which sorely grieved the Populists: organized religion. Tom Watson, of course, became one of the Catholic church's bitterest enemies in the years after 1896. But his fears about the Papal influence on American life have their origin much earlier in his career. A newspaper clipping dated May 23, 1878, which was cut out and carefully preserved by Watson, reflects his concern. In the eyes of its writer, the republic has been saved from the peril of slavery only to face a greater menace

---

<sup>20</sup>From fragments of a speech dated January, 1903, and titled "Imperialism and Democracy," Thomas Edward Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. Cf. copy of speech delivered August 18, 1904, and dated August 17 also in the Watson Papers, Chapel Hill. See, as well, Watson's life of Napoleon at the point where Watson discusses Napoleon's reasons for supporting Republican principles. Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, Character, Struggles, and Achievements (N.Y.: Macmillian Co., 1902), 48-49.

in the form of a "mortal conflict with Romanism." And by Romanism he meant "the hierarchy."<sup>21</sup>

Ignatius Donnelly, while deeply religious, was also a bitter opponent of organized religion. Unlike Watson, Donnelly had barbs enough for every denomination.<sup>22</sup> His most empassionate attack occurred in Caesar's Column after a cleric rose in the midst of a workingman's meeting and berated the collected throng for their moral failings. Infuriated, the masses shouted the clergyman down. With quiet restored, a spokesman for the people replied heatedly to the charges. Donnelly's mouthpiece is made to accuse organized religion of all ages of being "the moral police force of tyrants." Christianity itself with its doctrine of the brotherhood of man is still the great redeemer of mankind; but some of the churchmen have misconceived and perverted Christ-- often for their own base purposes.<sup>23</sup> Privately, Donnelly wrote with the same inflamed anger at the continued misery perpetuated by religion. Impoverished Ireland provided the classic example for Donnelly of a people devoted to the Church, but rewarded in return only with betrayal and

---

<sup>21</sup>From the Christian Advocate, May 23, 1878, found in the Watson Papers. Cf. Watson's own organ, People's Party Paper, September 15, 1893; January 26, 1894; February 8, 1895; September 27, 1895; November 15, 1895; June 12, 1896 and July 3, 1896.

<sup>22</sup>Ridge, Donnelly, 266.

<sup>23</sup>Caesar's Column, 190-200.

misery. Donnelly was certain that the Pope had traded off his loving Irish followers for the opportunity to return the Catholic Church to "Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral."<sup>24</sup>

Clergymen earned the ire of Marion Butler because they acted as the willing tools of the money power. There was little chance, in Butler's view of the clerics ever speaking against oppression and robbery as long as the churches were "built from blood money donated by monopolies and trusts and when the preacher's salaries came from the same source."<sup>25</sup>

Given this background it is possible to see that Populism, like Gabriel's Utopia, was deeply anti-institutional and just as firmly committed to a society of free, competing individuals. This suggests that the Populists would have been far more at home in the Jacksonian world of relatively weak institutions than amid the powerful and oppressive institutions of their own day. This is particularly true if the period commonly called the Age of Jackson is also labeled the Age of Individualism--a substitute used in contrast to the older less useful labels of the "Age of Democracy" or the "Age of the Common Man."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Ridge, Donnelly, 241 from diary dated July 15, 1888.

<sup>25</sup>Caucasian, July 22, 1897, also cf. August 19, 1897.

<sup>26</sup>For a discussion of the Age of Jackson as an Age of Individualism see John Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly, XVII (Winter 1965), 656-81; John William Ward, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (N.Y.:

Government was the only institution clearly favored by the Populists. But even here its purpose was strictly limited to re-establishing the conditions for natural competition among individuals. Specifically, the government would regulate corporations and attempt to redress the balance already shattered by the accumulation of great wealth in the hands of a few. This government, then, would be the government of King Andrew himself--the negative instrument used to attack and to destroy that most monstrous of all corporations and institutions, the Bank of the United States.<sup>27</sup>

Closely related to the Populists' concern about institutions was their broader vision of society itself. It is clear from the literature that the Populist, as Hofstadter and others have charged, saw society composed of two basic interests,

---

Oxford University Press, 1953); Major L. Wilson, "The Concept of Time and the Political Dialogue in the United States, 1828-1848," American Quarterly, XIX (Winter 1967), 619-44; and Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (N.Y.: Grosset & Dunlap, 1963). The Gilded Age--in sharp contrast to the Age of Jackson--is emerging in recent scholarship as an age in search of order, institutional structure and ultimately community itself. See especially George M. Frederickson, The Inner Civil War (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965); Wiebe, The Search for Order; Hays, The Response to Industrialism; and R. Jackson Wilson, In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920 (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1968).

<sup>27</sup>See especially Wilson, "The Concept of Time and the Political Dialogue in the United States, 1828-1848," 619-44 whose brilliant analysis of the period's conflicting views on the government's relationship to the society and the economy stresses the Jacksonian desire to maintain the internal present through the device of a powerful negative government. Cf. as well Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (Stanford, Calif.:

the producing class and the parasitic wealthy.<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to see how the Populist's supporters argue otherwise as Populist manuscripts and newspapers are permeated with this. Like their fear and hatred of institutions, especially corporations, this is a rather simplistic and distorted understanding of society; but it is not to be viewed as "irrational." On the contrary, it is clearly related to the Populist's essentially Enlightenment view of man and his social environment.<sup>29</sup> As long as one sees society composed of natural individuals not needing and even hampered by institutions, it is a relatively short and easy step to the vision of a world divided between the oppressors and the oppressed. Yet is this really so far from the "reality" of the 1890's? As the studies of associations makes clear the act of organizing a particular group for the purpose of better protecting its "interests" has the unintended side effect of further

---

Stanford University Press, 1957) for a discussion of Jackson and the monster Bank. David W. Noble, The Progressive Mind, 1890-1917 (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1970), 8-9 has already briefly called attention to the similarity of the Populists and the Jacksonians concerning the government's role in society. While I arrived at the same conclusion independently of Professor Noble, I wish to acknowledge his very fine work.

<sup>28</sup>This is too well known to document but it is worthwhile to note that Donnelly's Caesar's Column centers on the great struggle between these two great groups.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. David W. Noble's introduction to Ignatius Donnelly's The Golden Bottle (N.Y.: D. D. Merrill Co., 1892), v-x.

heightening and defining those interests.<sup>30</sup> The uniting of skilled workers, for example, in the American Federation of Labor, while further articulating their needs in relation to management, had the additional result of increasing the social and economic gap between skilled and unskilled labor. Robert Wiebe has argued in this context that the 1890's was the pivotal decade for the rise of the modern interest group created, in turn, by increasing economic specialization.<sup>31</sup> In this way perhaps it is possible to begin to understand how one farmer or even a rural lawyer, doctor or small businessman existing totally or partially outside of associations, could become a Populist and share with other farmer-Populists the belief that they were all producers, united by their labor and the oppression of America's artificially privileged parasitic class. Such a man might also, and just as easily, believe that he shared common interests with the urban laborer--that is, the urban producer. In the same way one can begin to understand how the urban member of the Knights of Labor--a union open, incidentally, to workers of all skills and crafts--could reciprocate in this belief. At the same time, one can also see how the new and more modern AF of L--strictly limited to skilled laborers only--would reject the idea of sharing common interests with the semi and unskilled "lower classes." Thus,

---

<sup>30</sup>V. O. Key, Jr., Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups, rev. (N.Y.: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1964), 44-49.

<sup>31</sup>The Search for Order, 111-32.

the division of the labor movement on the question of supporting the Populists in 1896, noted by Pollack, should not come as a surprise. On the contrary, the Populists' endorsement by the Knights and Gompers' public rejection is predictable.<sup>32</sup>

In these same critical years, while one farmer was coming to support the Populists, his neighbor--equally affected by low prices, high interest rates and all the other panoply of economic ills--turned his back on Populism and the Populist conception of social alignments. This farmer, perhaps involved in a newly-created association of wheat farmers or as in the South the Cotton Grower's Association, advanced to a different, more "rational" perception of his interests. Suddenly, for him the world is a place of small capitalists--he as much as they--all struggling against one another in an effort to further their own "hard" economic interests. In this same context, the absence of these modern associational ties and the security they provide perhaps explains the intensity and fervor in the farmer-Populist's espousal of his world view--that is, of a society divided between the producers and the parasites. Certainly one should expect this rather isolated individual confronted by a strange new world of gigantic combinations, rings, and trusts to cling with great intensity to his dated and maybe less "rational" but far more comforting and familiar world view oriented around individuals.

---

<sup>32</sup>Pollack, The Populist Response, 63-67.



Like their social perspective, the Populist explained his economic grievances in distorted terms. As the critics correctly perceived, the Populist answer to complex and deeply-rooted economic and social problems was to imagine that they were being conspired against by a small group of wealthy plutocrats. There can be little doubt of this. Donnelly, criticized most frequently in this context, unquestionably saw conspirators as the major cause of Populist problems. The chief conspirator was the Jewish Baron Rothschild, English member of the international financial House of Rothschild. Much was attributed to the Rothschild family; most infamous was the "conspiracy" to corrupt Congress in order to demonetize silver in 1873.

The demonetization of silver was the result of a carefully laid conspiracy between capitalists of the loaning class against the business and debtor classes. The United States government, as a debtor, and also the chief silver country allowed the European Rothschilds and their American allies, millionaire bankers, to over-reach her in dealing with the money question.<sup>33</sup>

Many Populists agreed that the Rothschilds--allied with Lombard and Wall Street bankers--were the great fountain head of evil in the world; evil which far exceeded just economic ills. Marion Butler, for example, clearly used the Jew

---

<sup>33</sup>Ashby, The Riddle of the Sphinx, 166. Cf. Donnelly's nearly identical interpretation in Ridge, Donnelly, 306 and also Marion Butler's Caucasian (May 23, 1895): "The Rothschilds are beginning to buy up silver. These money shark Jews are the individuals that caused the demonetization of silver in 1873."

as a symbol to refer to a whole group of problems. In his newspaper, Caucasian, and under the editorial lead: "THE PEOPLE VS. THE SHYLOCKS,": Butler asserted that the current senatorial race in North Carolina was "a battle royal between the agents and hirelings of the National Bank combine, the monopolies of greed, the corporations of extortion and oppression on one side and THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE on the other."<sup>34</sup> This use of the Jew--or more narrowly the Rothschild family--as a symbolic term has been observed before,<sup>35</sup> but primarily in the context of refuting the charge of Populist anti-Semitism. The Populists may or may not have been anti-Semitic, this will be further discussed below, but the important thing about this symbolic use of the Jew is that it is another good example of what Geertz calls language as symbolic action. Undoubtably the Jew, as well as the ideological terms conspiracy and monopoly, were being used by the Populist as a kind of shorthand--to express and make public ideas and problems they only partially understand and thereby symbolically relieve personal and social strains. While "irrational," such terminology clearly conveyed a great deal of meaning for the Populist leader and his followers. The real problem for the historian then is to recognize the language for what it really was and

---

<sup>34</sup>Caucasian, January 21, 1897. Also cf. November 1, 1894, May 23, 1895, June 4, 1895, and June 27, 1895.

<sup>35</sup>Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, 231-233.

identify the strains it sought to relieve. Here one can only speculate based on knowledge of the period and on the partially expressed hints refracted in the Populist rhetoric itself.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect about this entire problem is that, if the Populist accepted a vision of society as composed of individuals, then the only person to blame for economic failure or depression is oneself. This would be difficult to accept at anytime, but particularly so if one knows that he has been working hard and diligently. Directly related to this is the additional knowledge that the financier and the wealthy businessmen do not raise a hand to earn their own living; yet they not only prosper, they grow unbelievably rich. The most satisfactory answer to this contradiction, in the absence of the precise scientific conception of an intricate economy, is some kind of conspiracy. Specifically, a conspiracy among men who do nothing yet are wealthy beyond the remotest dreams of the hardest working farmer or lawyer or small businessman. Equally important, a conspiracy among men of real flesh and blood would satisfy the Populists' undoubted simplistic understanding of society. For the Populist, society was little more than the aggregate of numerous individuals. If society is only individuals--and not a complex web of institutions interwoven to comprise a sum greater than its parts--then social problems can only be attributed to individuals alone.

Yet care must still be taken in regard to Populist terminology. Like monopoly, it is quite plausible that the Populist did not mean exactly what one imagines he meant by conspiracy. Rather, it would appear that he considered the corporation itself to be a trade conspiracy. Thus, Ashby in The Riddle of the Sphinx sees one of the farmer's worst problems resulting from the rise of centralized markets which in turn have forced the "middlemen into combinations, until the country was honeycombed with trade conspiracies, from the country store keeper to the heads of the great wholesale houses."<sup>36</sup> Ashby is attempting here to explain logically what is happening to the economy in the late nineteenth century. In the absence of "scientific" economics and given his own background, he proceeds as far as he can and then lapses into trade conspiracies to express as best he can the rise of a new force in society which he obviously fears, distrusts and cannot fully comprehend.

In a lengthy but graphic verbal picture, Ashby describes this strange new economy as it was very probably perceived by many, particularly the Populist, in the Gilded Age:

Now we have the story in a nut-shell: centralization of capital that controls the transporting, directs the course of it, and levies brigand toll; centralization of capitalists and speculators at the great terminals of the transporting lines, who fix prices at these centers for products as they come into their resevoirs, and prices as they go out; centralization of capital in the factories,

---

<sup>36</sup> Ashby, The Riddle of the Sphinx, 83-84.

which controls output and regulates prices in the interest of excessive margins; then, again, combinations of dealers from the great wholesaler to the most petty retailer, for the purpose of each in turn adding his percentum of profit to the price of the product, . . . Centralization and its concomitants--the trust, the pool, the combine, and the trade conspiracy--are the deadly enemies which are crushing the industrial classes with the huge cost of interchange.<sup>37</sup>

From here one can begin to see that the core of the Populist concern over trade conspiracies is again, like their hatred of monopoly, a deep-seated aversion to centralization and the corporation itself. This is not to suggest, however, that the Populists did not see plutocrats and financiers conspiring against them; they certainly did. But by treating their conspiracy visions as a real, although refracted or distorted perception of their total environment, it is possible to begin to analyze and to define that environment. At the same time such an approach produces valuable information about the Populist "mind" which is doing the refracting.

Like the conspiracy interpretation for their problems, the solutions proposed by the Populists also took a rather twisted and less than scientific form. The Populist program was not limited to a single reform, but it is apparent that only a very few approaches appealed very strongly to them. Three of these stand out: monetary inflation, government regulation of corporations and the cooperative movement. In

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 229-30.

each case it would appear that the proposed solution was seen as aiding not only the economic status of the farmer but would greatly relieve a host of other ills.

Perhaps the best expression of the Populist's faith in a single panacea occurs in Ignatius Donnelly's The Golden Bottle. The hero of this utopian novel, written in the early 1890's, is a young man named Ephrain Benezet. Ephrain lives on the high plains of Kansas and like so many others he and his family are deeply in debt and on the verge of losing the farm. On the evening prior to that fateful day, Ephrain magically acquires a golden bottle through which base metals can be converted into gold. From here the remainder of Donnelly's tale is simply told; that is, the way in which sufficient money can ultimately solve nearly each and every one of the world's ills. The problems of poverty are dealt with, women's rights secured, international peace achieved and even the thorny issue of racial justice resolved. Nothing is incurable if the right medicine is administered.

Like Ephrain's golden bottle, the great slogan of "16 to 1" also carried implications for reform going far beyond monetary inflation. Only in this way can one begin to understand the heightened rhetoric and emotions displayed by all groups during the Populist era. Perhaps this also explains the great attractiveness of the cooperative movement in the late nineteenth century--an attractiveness which unquestionably exceeded the negligible rewards produced by most co-ops. In this context, Solon Buck observed, in his old but still

reliable study of the Granger movement, that the first attempt to establish cooperatives had an immediate positive effect in attracting new members to the Grange.<sup>38</sup> The Grange's founder, Oliver H. Kelly, also reportedly praised the popular watchwords "cooperation" and "Down with Monopolies" for these early successes.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Donnelly, while discussing a woman's cooperative association in The Golden Bottle, envisioned that beyond its direct economic benefits such an association would put an end to all the other varied and terrible ills traditionally seen as the woman's burden. Prostitution, divorce and the home wrecked by drink or infidelity would all cease as added benefits of Donnelly's Woman's Co-op.<sup>40</sup>

The Populists were not alone, however, in seeking panaceas in these years--Henry George's "Single Tax" and Edward Bellamy's "Nationalism" come easily to mind among others.<sup>41</sup> The panacea, as a reform method had its origins--like so much else about the Populists--in the Jacksonian period.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>Solon Buck, The Granger Movement, 1870-1880 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 46-47.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 53 and 240.

<sup>40</sup>Donnelly, The Golden Bottle, 95-107.

<sup>41</sup>Wilson, In Quest of Community, 166-169.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas, Romantic Reform in America, 656-81 and cf. Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1962), 46 and 166.

The almost incurable optimism the panacea reveals in its spokesmen is perhaps its most interesting aspect. All of those, from Romantic reformers in the 1830's to the Populists in 1890, in this genre seem genuinely convinced that, if only their approach is applied, the world's wrongs would be righted. Because this is not and cannot be the case, one viewing these reformers from the 1970's can only conclude that their social outlook was extremely naive. The social environment envisioned by Romantic reformers, Single Taxers and Populists certainly did not include the vast array of special interest groups, entrenched institutions and bulky governmental bureaucracies which characterize America in the mid, or even early, twentieth century. Moreover, in comparing the Populist program to the Progressive's the absence of a Progressive elixir is striking. One can only wonder if such a vacuum does not come close to revealing vital, even fundamental differences between the two movements.

Henry Demarest Lloyd, a very uncharacteristic Populist, was the only Populist to record philosophically and systematically his thoughts about society and the means necessary to reform it. Indeed, it might be safe to suggest that Lloyd was a Populist more because of an intellectual affinity with the movement than as a result of the immediatism of social and economic strains. Nevertheless, his commitment to the movement is undoubted. Such dedication perhaps makes his philosophical perspective even more useful.



Lloyd began his political life as a keen disciple of the Manchesterian school of economics which was essentially devoted to furthering economic laissez faire. For Lloyd--as for Ralph Waldo Emerson--the individual was all. Within each person there lay the potential for divinity. Lloyd, unfortunately, was not given the advantage of living in Emerson's age. Forced to grapple with the realities of life in the late nineteenth century, Lloyd sought a method of harmonizing individualism with the needs of the larger community. The resolution of his problem was found in the thought of T. H. Green--specifically, that the individual's fullest potential could only be realized within a social context. Lloyd was sufficiently worldly, however, to recognize that the most difficult task for the individual would be to act collectively. For Lloyd, then, the immediate task facing the reformer was to oppose capitalist combinations which produced poverty and social distinctions. Beyond this and over a longer period, it would be necessary to act collectively through association and Ruskinite cooperation to promote progress and civilization. Once abuses were corrected, however, the collective society must come to an end. Essentially, then, associated society was to alter or destroy institutions periodically in a continuing attempt to re-equalize all the "conditions of struggle."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Chester McArthur Destler, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Empire of Reform (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 183, also 171-187.

Yet this restored condition would not be the Darwinian or Ricardian contest of individuals but rather the struggle to realize one's individual potential guided by the goals of social justice and love. Significantly, Lloyd found his ideal community in a Shaker commune located in upstate New York. The achievement of this community reaffirmed, for Lloyd, the practicality of the altruist, equalitarian, ethical and cooperative concepts which formed the great pillars of his social philosophy. The Shakers provided living proof of the possibility of the "Cooperative Commonwealth."<sup>44</sup>

Lloyd's philosophy is the closest thing to a systematic Populist philosophy. In an age of increasing economic and social competitiveness, it seems certain that many people sought the ends that only Lloyd and a few others could effectively articulate.

The common elements of Populism, in summary, included first, and most importantly, a fundamental commitment to individualism. Indeed, one can add that the Populist vision of society differed little from that of the Enlightenment. Institutions in this framework were to be distrusted as creating artificial distinctions among natural men.<sup>45</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 274. For the direct ties between communalism and individualism see John Thomas' brilliant analysis of Jacksonian reform movements, "Romantic Reform in America," 656-81.

<sup>45</sup>This concern about "artificial distinctions" has recently been dated to at least the American Revolution and probably much earlier by Gordon S. Wood in his monumental work The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill:

society could be easily divided into two camps, those who produced real wealth and those parasites who were protected from natural competition by institutions or artificial monetary manipulation. The major deviation from a total commitment to individualism was the Populist desire to replace competitive individualism with a more cooperative variety using the government, if necessary, to enforce such cooperation.

This is precisely the point where Professor Pollack goes astray in his discussion of Populism and individualism. For Pollack, Populism rejected the late nineteenth century's devotion to individualism. This is correct, but only insofar as this repudiation related to the intense competitive emphasis placed on that individualism by popular and scientific thought. Pollack errs, however, in confusing verbal adherence to individualism with a real individualistic world view. It seems clear that, in direct contrast to the Jackson Era, the Gilded Age was both more institutional and more committed to an institutional and orderly community. Thus, the heightened emphasis on competitive individualism so apparent in Social Darwinism would seem to be explained best as little more than lip service to an unsatisfactory past. The Populist, however, was genuinely committed to individualism

---

University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 70-75. As Wood notes here and in an earlier article "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," 3-32, this radical tradition is only drawn on and made meaningful by periods of social tensions and strains. While this needs extensive exploration if we are to apply it to the Populists, it is possible to tentatively suggest that in their "time of crisis," they also borrowed heavily from this ideological heritage.

but not to a destructive competitive variety. On the contrary, he sought a method, as Lloyd and the cooperative movement so clearly indicated, to allow the fullest realization of the individual's potential without harming his fellow man.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE POPULIST STYLE: "I DON'T LIKE THE EXISTING ORDER."

While the Populists found common ground in their thoroughgoing commitment to individualism, they also seemed to share an emotion-laden style often marked by an adherence to extremist positions on many social and political questions of the day. Perhaps in explaining this style, clues might be found to the conditions causing it and gain from it a greater knowledge of the social and economic world of late nineteenth century America.

In many ways the most well known and oft cited Populist has been Ignatius Donnelly. Yet despite this surface familiarity with the man and his works, the fact is that few historians have explored much beyond his most popular novel, Caesar's Column. Yet Donnelly wrote eight other novels or semi-scientific treatises.

By any standard Ignatius Donnelly was a most interesting personality. By 1890 after years of struggle in the political and economic arena rewarded more often by failure than success, Donnelly had become a very intense individual possessed of extreme jealousy concerning his personal prerogatives and

supremely assured of his righteousness. Admirable from a distance, Donnelly proved to be tedious and very difficult to work with in a close relationship. When baited or criticized, he was easily provoked and prone to fly into angry harangues.<sup>1</sup>

Donnelly began his adult life as a lawyer but shortly deserted this unsuccessful endeavor for the lores of town building. At a place called Ninninger City, Minnesota, Donnelly expected to establish the New Chicago of the far Midwest. Like his legal aspirations, this town also failed, falling prey to the depression of 1857. As a last resort Donnelly turned to a professional political career. Characteristically, he began as a Democrat but changed ranks; his first successes occurred as a Radical Republican. Indeed Donnelly's biographer asserts that he was the most extreme Radical Republican in the state, and as a partial result he was defeated for the Governorship in 1866. His vigorous stand in favor of black education and suffrage probably cost him dearly in that campaign.<sup>2</sup>

After further rebuffs in the GOP Donnelly moved out of that party--he was to desert and rejoin parties all his life--

---

<sup>1</sup>Ridge, Ignatius Donnelly, 280-81.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 104.

and again ran for Congress in 1870 as an Independent. Defeated, he returned to the Republican party as a liberal. His return, however, was short-lived as he quickly turned to the newly organized Grange. From its political extension, the Anti-Monopoly party, he launched a successful campaign to become United States Senator from Minnesota in 1873.

From these early years one can begin to discern the glimmer of a pattern which was to become bolder and more pronounced as Donnelly aged. Ambition, numerous personal setbacks, a willingness to support extreme positions and a clear disloyalty to organizations form Donnelly's stylized way of life.

After years of striving for wealth and power--always seemingly just beyond his grasp--Donnelly entered a period of terrible crisis and stress enveloping the years 1878 to 1880. Suffering political defeat and facing bankruptcy, Donnelly was forced to give up his newspaper, The Anti-Monopolist, and turned to alcohol for escape.<sup>3</sup> Typically he reserved his deepest anguish for his diary. In June, 1880, he wrote "I have the most unconscionable run of miserable fortune, everything goes wrong with me. Only death spares me and mine."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 186-95.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in ibid., 194.

By early November things had not improved. In deepening despair made worse by reaching middle age, he wrote: "This is my 49th birthday, and a sad day it is. . . . All my hopes are gone, and the future settles down upon me dark and gloomy indeed." He concluded in a passage of gaunt hopelessness and defeat: "My life has been a failure and a mistake. My hopes so often come to naught that I cease to hope. . . . Well, all I can do is to face the music & take my damnable future as it comes."<sup>5</sup>

At this point, the nadir of his life, facing bankruptcy, having already experienced political eclipse, with no professional prospects nor associational ties, Donnelly turned to writing as a means of escape and perhaps financial salvation. His first venture was entitled Atlantis: The Ante-diluvian World.<sup>6</sup> Following the pattern already established in his political life, Donnelly's purposes, recorded in the first several pages, were as bold and extreme as one could possible imagine. With no apparent hesitancy or ambivalence he asserted that Plato's fable of a lost Atlantic Island was not myth but true. Atlantis existed and was, indeed, the "true ante-diluvian world; the Garden of Eden; the Gardens of the Hesperides. . . ." Accordingly, on Atlantis men first achieved civilization and carried its torch to the shores of North and South America,

---

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in ibid., 195.

<sup>6</sup>(N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1882).



Europe and Africa, the Baltic, the Black and the Caspian Seas. More wonderful, the Egyptian civilization was a reproduction of Atlantis from where it had been colonized; bronze and iron were first manufactured in Atlantis; the Phoenician alphabet, parent of all European alphabets, was derived from an Atlantis model; and finally that Atlantis disappeared beneath the sea in a "terrible convulsion of nature."<sup>7</sup> Despite the sweeping nature of his claims for Atlantis, it is somewhat disconcerting to find that Donnelly consulted no established authorities and indeed rejected the prevailing view in every area he explored.<sup>8</sup>

Encouraged by the public reception of Atlantis, Donnelly followed up this first novel with a second--equally daring and extreme. Writing in Ragnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel only a year later, Donnelly again challenged established scientific thought--this time in the person of the late nineteenth century's reigning scientist, Louis Agassiz.<sup>9</sup> Rejecting Agassiz's thesis that Earth's surface deposits of clay and gravel resulted from earthquakes, Donnelly argued that a comet passing near Earth produced the debris which many other scientists had also observed. The most interesting aspect

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>8</sup>Ridge, Donnelly, 197-98.

<sup>9</sup>(N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co., 1883).

of these works is their similar extremism and sweeping assertions about things which Donnelly could really have known very little.

This tendency to take advanced positions is characteristic not only of other aspects of Donnelly's life but also of a basic theme in the Populist movement itself. Why this is true and what role it played in the movement is more difficult to determine. A recent study of the English mid-Victorian mind has observed that one feature of that mind was a persistent dogmatism. Dogmatism rooted not in certainty, however, but in an intense will to believe.<sup>10</sup>

While it is perhaps a mistake to attempt to directly compare American Populism to the general English public, nevertheless, knowledge of the intellectual currents of late nineteenth century America must cause us to suspect a similar response. Morton White has characterized this era as undergoing a major revolt against the Enlightenment's formalism or absolutism.<sup>11</sup> Thus while the intellectual elite, if not a majority of the population, were moving to accept a greater relativism in all aspects of life, one might expect to find a large remnant still clinging to the certainties of the past or, as in Donnelly's case, to certainty itself

---

<sup>10</sup>Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 154-55.

<sup>11</sup>Morton G. White, Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism (N.Y.: Viking, 1949), in general.

in an age of change. Put differently, the very lack of doubt, the total commitment to his thesis, the unwillingness to consult established authorities, even perhaps the feeling of the experts' irrelevance, suggests that Donnelly was deeply affected by doubt and needed the security of certainty and the positive assertion.

Another facet of Donnelly's character revealed by these works and his earlier life as well is a strong reliance on himself and a decided anti-institutional outlook. This is most apparent in his refusal to accept established opinion and, of course, in his political meanderings. These same themes are repeated in Donnelly's later novels and political activities.

Having revived his personal fortunes and perhaps found relief of various sorts in writing his novels, Donnelly returned to politics in 1884 but this time as a Democrat. Almost predictably, he was again defeated. Coinciding with this renewed political energy, Donnelly turned his attentions to a project which thereafter seldom left his thoughts.

This undertaking was an attempt to find the cipher or code which would prove that Francis Bacon and not William Shakespeare was the author of the so-called Shakespearean plays. Donnelly was initially drawn to this subject as early as 1873 but was forced to suppress his interests due to the demands of his political affairs; with the enforced

pause in that tempo during the late 1870's, his interest resurfaced. Following publication of Atlantis and Ragnarok, it became an all-encompassing passion, as he recorded in his diary: "I think about it all day and dream about it all night. . . ." <sup>12</sup>

The work which finally resulted from his near-feverish determination to decipher the Baconian code was The Great Cryptogram (1887). <sup>13</sup> Like its predecessors, it too was boldly anti-establishment. In over a thousand pages of text, Donnelly attempted to find mathematically the code which he was so fervently, even pathetically, convinced was somehow written into the Shakespearean plays. Late in life, still committed to proving Bacon's authorship, Donnelly published a second work on the same subject; this one titled The Cipher In the Plays And On the Tombstone. In The Cipher he carried his claims for Bacon even further. He argued that Bacon had incorporated his code on Shakespeare's tombstone and that he had also discovered it in the writings of an obscure playwright, Robert Greene, and the better known, Christopher Marlowe. <sup>14</sup> To understand fully Donnelly's involvement in

---

<sup>12</sup>Quoted from his diary dated December 14, 1882, in Ridge, Donnelly, 229.

<sup>13</sup>(Chicago: Peale Pub. Co., 1887).

<sup>14</sup>(Minneapolis: Verulam Pub. Co., 1899), 46-61, 63, and 66-73

this unbelievable project, one must become aware of the nearly infinite numbering of words and the seemingly unlimited juggling of figures which was required. Perhaps a minute example chosen at random is more instructive than any attempt at description:

Let us take 257 again, and, instead of adding the modifier 253 to it, deduct 253. This leaves 4; add 532, the number of words on page 74, and we have 536, deduct the modifier 50 and we have 486; carry this through page 73 (406 words) and we have 80 left; add 167 and it gives us 247; add 29 and we have 276,<sup>15</sup> which on the next column (2, 72), is the word "I."

The effort involved in this task is staggering to contemplate.

But far more important than simply the obsession with Bacon and Shakespeare is that the political life of Ignatius Donnelly cannot be separated from his various other activities. The pattern of every project Donnelly touched from Populism itself through the study of ancient history to Atlantis and Ragnarok and the stupendous effort to unravel the Baconian code is one of a reoccurring maintenance of extremist anti-establishment positions. Moreover, it is a pattern found repeated again and again in examining Populist figures; content is the variable from individual to individual--the common elements are extremism and the set of core beliefs centering on individualism. This is also true of each individual. Like Donnelly most Populists seemed to move from

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 194.

one area of near obsession to another often displaying contradictions in their thought as they shifted.

Perhaps another of Donnelly's books further illustrates these observations. In the initial phases of the Populist movement, Donnelly published a work entitled Doctor Huguet.<sup>16</sup> With a seemingly total disregard for public opinion and his own political future, Donnelly used this novel as a vehicle for an attack on the evils of racial discrimination. Doctor Huguet was a South Carolina planter who was visited by God and subsequently awoke to find himself in the body of a dirty, ignorant, and poverty-stricken Black. Despite his erudition, manners, and breeding, all of which he retained, Dr. Huguet could never escape the stigma of color. Like few white men in the late nineteenth century or for that matter in the whole of American history, Donnelly imagined and expressed the horror of such a fate. Because of his generally guilty appearance, Dr. Huguet in the Black body of Sam Johnsing attempts to prove that he is Huguet. But his knowledge of Greek and Latin fall on deaf ears; the jailer and the growing crowd are only mildly amused by his crazy behavior. Lapsing into stunned silence, he reflects on his new existence:

I lay there paralyzed. It had been taught me that the mind is the man; but now I perceived that the body is the man. I was unquestionably Doctor Anthony Huguet. My intellect, my modes of thought, my acquired knowledge,

---

<sup>16</sup>(Chicago: F. J. Schulte & Co., 1891).

my disposition, my feelings, my affections, everything belonged to Doctor Huguet. It seemed to me that all these should shine through the apparel of the flesh, like a light through a porcelain shade. But no; the world saw no further than the skin; men judged their fellows by their appearance. . . . And then I thought, why did not God place the character and mold of the mind on the outside of the head, so that men could recognize the intellects of their fellows, when they pass them in the street, as they now recognize the shape of their noses or chins. . . . But the human spirit dwells, unhappily for itself, behind a mask--an impenetrable mask.<sup>17</sup>

Doctor Huguet, then, like Donnelly's other writings and political activities, reflects certain extremist styles which provides a thread of continuity to a life of otherwise widely diverging interests. The remainder of Donnelly's days reveal the continuance of the pattern so firmly established by 1891. Politically he remained a maverick--outside both major parties and suffering continued defeat as a consequence. Following his second rebuff in the race for the Minnesota Governor's chair, he bitterly observed in his diary: "Beaten! Shipped! Smashed! Got but 40,000 votes when I looked for 100,000. Another of a long series of disappointments."<sup>18</sup>

Following the debacle of 1896, the majority of defeated Populists "rationally" sought to fuse with the Minnesota Democrats; Donnelly, on the other hand, characteristically bolted his

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 100. We might also observe that these comments could equally serve as a firm commitment to individualism.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in an otherwise lackluster article by Humphrey Doermann, "All My Immense Labor For Nothing . . .," American Heritage, XII (June, 1961), 106. Cf. Ridge, Donnelly, 360.

party for the last time. He joined the so-called middle-of-the-road Populists, a group predictably composed of the oldest and most radical Populists. These were men who, like Donnelly, had first entered the fray against "monopoly" and privilege in the earliest Granger and Greenback days.<sup>19</sup>

While Donnelly is perhaps the most interesting and well known Populist leader, there were others who displayed the same style as he. Frank Doster, an important Kansas Populist, is one such man. Doster like Donnelly and so many Populists, had rural beginnings but by the 1890's was living in town and earned his living as a lawyer. But again--in a typical move--he turned to politics in an effort to supplement his legal income. From his earliest speeches, Doster displayed a characteristic tendency toward extremist language. His biographer calls him an ideologue whose radicalism was more in the manner than the substance of his words. Whether this is correct or not, it is certain that Doster served radical causes from the late 1870's to nearly the day of his death in 1933.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps his most radical and famous--or infamous--statement occurred in a speech in Marion, Kansas, presented May 14, 1891. Speaking in the Marion Opera House to a throng of local alliance members he attacked that most sacred of late

---

<sup>19</sup>Ridge, Donnelly, 386-89.

<sup>20</sup>Michael J. Brodhead, The Preserving Populist: The Life of Frank Doster (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1969), 24.



nineteenth century beliefs, the inviolate rights of private property. Typically, he began with a bold affirmation that the rights of users were paramount to the rights of owners. He continued by arguing that this position was the real basis of the Populist platform. In particular, he said it was the foundation for the demand to scale down interest payments to the point of the user's ability to meet them. The demand to end pools and trusts was also rooted, in his view, in the fact that the user of a product had a greater interest in it than the owner.<sup>21</sup> William Allen White in his widely read attack on Kansas Populism, "What's the Matter with Kansas," described Doster, probably with some fair accuracy, as "another shabby, wild-eyed rattle-brained fanatic who has said openly in a dozen speeches that 'the rights of the user are paramount to the rights of the owner,' . . ."<sup>22</sup>

Despite this apparent dangerous streak or maybe because of it, Doster was elected to the Kansas Supreme Court. Once on the bench, however, he proved to be anything but radical. In a seeming major contradiction to all that went before, Doster declared himself a judicial conservative. The philosophy he espoused was that of legal absolutism; he rejected the validity of relativism and the necessity to interpret the law.

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in ibid., 96.

Even for Kansas such a position at the turn of the century was not just conservative but radically reactionary. In direct opposition to the emerging attack on eighteenth and early nineteenth century formalism, Doster was adhering to the Enlightenment view that the social world, like the physical, was controlled by absolute laws which could be discovered and understood: a fact which perhaps explains an otherwise difficult contradiction.<sup>23</sup>

After the Populist years became only a faint memory of revolt and agitation, Frank Doster remained firmly dedicated to reform causes and ultra political positions. In the 1920's Doster spoke out for internationalism, Russian communism and renounced with equal passion prohibition, fundamentalism and the continued use of child labor. In a period of increasing attacks on minorities, he also had the courage to speak out against nativism and in defense of foreigners.

Good citizenship [he asserted] doesn't consist in meaningless hot air mouthing about "one hundred per cent Americanism," nor in servile pretensions of obedience to law merely because it is a law, but as a lesson it consists in the knowledge that constitutions are not made for the benefit of majorities, but are made as well, if not primarily, for the protection of minorities.<sup>24</sup>

In 1931 speaking to the Unitarians of Topeka, Doster began his address "I am a communist in economic beliefs."

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 113-16. Cf. William Jennings Bryan's related and extremist attempt to defend an absolute interpretation of the Bible in the Scopes Trial.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in ibid., 157-58.

Typically, he aimed to shock his audience and concluded by softening his stance by defining communism as a system "where men do not live by economic warfare with one another, but by mutual helpfulness, to one another. It means God's plan of living with one another instead of off one another;" a definition which was certainly reminiscent of Henry Demarest Lloyd's ideas and of the entire Populist vision of a utopian cooperative commonwealth.<sup>25</sup>

Doster died shortly after this speech in February, 1933, but his death found him as deeply involved in reform as when he first entered politics a half century earlier. His last efforts were aimed at improving tenant conditions in Kansas during the depression.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps nothing sums up Doster's life and the lives of numerous other Populists as well as his own comments about himself and his relationship to society: "I don't like the existing order. Give me the raw material to work with and I can make a great deal better world than this." The content of their thought might vary but it seems probable that few Populists would have dissented from Doster's additional remark that "I am not satisfied with things. I don't like the existing order."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in ibid., 166.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 170-71.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in ibid., 127.

It seems certain that W. H. Skaggs, born and raised in Alabama and Populist Party State Chairman in the mid 1890's, would have agreed. While Skaggs' life has not found a biographer, fortunately he recorded his view of society and politics in a book revealingly titled, The Southern Oligarchy. Skaggs' purpose in writing this volume was to make public the "corrupt practices and criminal lawlessness of a provincial Oligarchy" and to appeal to the American people on behalf of the great mass of "white and colored" citizenry of the South who are "held in political subjection and economic serfdom."<sup>28</sup> Given the conservatism of the 1920's, it is doubtful that Skaggs' appeal fell on receptive ears; but the fact of his continued radicalism is in itself significant.

While the central focus of Skaggs' attacks were on the South, he was not above directing his barbs at a wider target. For Skaggs Woodrow Wilson's national administration was controlled by southerners and was, as a consequence, extremely reactionary. Moreover, during these years he also found Congress dominated by a small group of powerful southern committee chairmen.<sup>29</sup> But his criticism extended far beyond politics. The nation for Skaggs was suffering from a fundamental malaise which would require thoroughgoing reform to correct:

---

<sup>28</sup>(N.Y.: The Devin-Adair Co., 1924), vii.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 2 and 4.

The United States is a republic only in name; our democratic principles exist only in theory. In the treatment of vital civic and economic questions we are falling behind other democracies of the world. We were the last, except Brazil to abolish slavery; in our failure to recognize civic and political equality of citizens we are behind other advanced democracies; we are behind other democracies in recognizing the rights of labor; . . . We give less protection to the exercise of the right of suffrage, and we give more protection to peonage than is given by any other democracy. America is the only country in the world where the percentage of homeowners is steadily decreasing and the passive indifference to the free exercise<sup>30</sup> of the elective franchise is rapidly increasing.

H. L. Mencken's satirical analysis of America's coarseness appears mild next to Skaggs' thoroughgoing radicalism. It was in his treatment of the "Negro Question," however, that Skaggs revealed how completely out of step he was with America and, more significantly, with his own region--the South. Violating every convention, Skaggs argued that the Black made remarkable strides during and after slavery. In a very sophisticated statement, he even contrasted the Black's progress with the American Indian's failure to adjust to involuntary servitude.<sup>31</sup> He rejected as well the widely accepted view that Radical Republican rule during Reconstruction led to an orgy of vice and corruption:

It has been asserted time and time again that the deplorable situation in the South is the result of corruption and lawlessness during the reconstruction period for which the carpet baggers were responsible.

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 53-55.

But neither the end of Republican rule and carpetbag rule, nor the disfranchisement of Negroes improved the criminal record very much. There is no more civil or political liberty, no higher regard for the moral standards of civic responsibilities, than there was when the negroes had the ballot.<sup>32</sup>

After criticizing the South for the continuing barbaric practice of lynching, he concluded his discussion of the Black with a poeon of praise for the Black's racial progress against formidable barriers.<sup>33</sup> Like Donnelly and Doster, then, W. H. Skaggs lived a life of patterned extremism right to its end--this despite social currents running strongly counter to his beliefs.

To this triumvirate of radical extremists can be added the name of Milford W. Howard whose life and surface ultru-ism also suggests a deep underlying desperation. Born and raised in Georgia during the Civil War, Howard passed the state bar examinations in 1880. Shortly thereafter he achieved some prominence on becoming Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee in DeKalb County. Dissatisfied, however, for reasons known only to himself, Howard deserted his important post and joined the Alabama Populist Party in the early 1890's. In the election of 1894 Howard was elected as a Populist to the first of two successive terms to the United States House of Representatives. In these

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 291. Cf. as well 223.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 421.

same years Howard published a scathing attack on America's rich upper class entitled The American Plutocracy (1896). With the demise of the Populist movement Howard at the end of his second term refused to stand for re-election. Shortly thereafter he dropped out of politics and left Alabama for a new life in the Far West. Pursuing his earlier literary interests, late in life Howard published Fascism: A Challenge to Democracy, a very interesting and controversial work by any standards.

In direct contrast to Donnelly, Doster, and Skaggs, in this work Howard repudiated the basic tenet of Populism: equality of opportunity for each individual. But Howard's importance lies more in his continued extremism than in the content of his new ideology: fascism.

The challenge Howard saw posed to democracy was, of course, the appearance in the post World War I period of a group of American "pragmatists" who raised fundamental questions about democratic dogma. Clearly, Howard considered himself one of those pragmatic questioners. Significantly, their central question concerned the ancient dictum that all men were created equal.<sup>34</sup> Like the radicalism of Doster and Skaggs, Howard's reactionary views were total and thorough.

---

<sup>34</sup>Milford W. Howard, Fascism: A Challenge to Democracy N.Y.: Fleming H. Revel, Co., 1928), 10-11.

Whatever influences effected Howard's complete reversal of outlook from the 1890's to the late 1920's, the final impulse to publish his conversion appears to have resulted from a trip to Europe. Visiting Italy, Howard was tremendously impressed by that nation's new dictator, Mussolini, whom Howard repeatedly compared to Napoleon. For Howard only a great man such as this could save the masses from their own excesses. Rhetorically he asked "Should it [the fate of Italy] be the wild orgy of the proletariat or the well-reasoned rule of the aristocracy of brains and character."<sup>35</sup> There is little doubt as to Howard's answer. Fascism, for Howard, contained three fundamental aspects. The first was that all men are not created biologically equal. Second, that the state is supreme; and the individual exists to serve the state and not the reverse. Lastly, fascism challenges the idea of labor's superiority. On the contrary, capital and labor are complimentary forces both directed and controlled by the corporate state.<sup>36</sup> The last principle of these three is in Howard's view the most important. It replaces the need for organization in the name of class defense with the far superior concept of state justice. Equally important, social strife is eliminated. Italy, as the embodiment of

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 153-65, cf. 53-55.



this "co-operative" state is thus

a country where labour and capital stand on the same footing of dignity and worth, and are working harmoniously to maintain and increase the productive capacity of their country, [fascism is] a system that coordinates both capital and labour to the welfare of the State, and makes strikes and lockouts impossible bringing<sup>37</sup> about harmony and unity in every part of the body.

If this interpretation of the central concepts of fascism is correct, it is readily apparent why certain aspects of fascism were so appealing to Howard. The Populists always regretted class conflict and the attendant need to organize in self-defense. They also saw the government as a necessary, although unfortunate, arbiter of class struggle. But just as clearly, the Populist resisted the debasement of the individual and certainly would have despised the idea of an elitist society.

All that can be concluded about Howard, then, is that as a Populist he probably held a cluster of beliefs which were later reorganized and altered by the circumstances of three decades. Howard's support of fascism in the 1920's is not prima facie evidence that Populism is its direct antecedent. The radicalism of Doster and Skaggs suggests, on the contrary, that Populist ideas could provide a wide base for the launching of a variety of future responses to America's specific cultural configuration in the twenties.

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 108, also 65, 116, and 123-24.

The single most reliable fact about these four very diverse Populist individuals is that each, despite a great diversity in their thought, led a life of patterned extremism; that is, a life of unconscious or conscious rejection of the established views in a great variety of areas: from science to history; from literature to politics. Such lives cannot be understood as isolated incidents or peculiar, but strictly coincidental personal aberrations. On the contrary, they can only be explained and interpreted as related surface manifestations of various severe underlying social strains and/or facets of problematic social reality.

Important among these problems on the individual level would appear to be economic insecurity and a closely related anxiety about status. On a wider social level several related concerns can be suggested. Perhaps the most obvious, if not the most significant, would seem to be the Populist's awareness of a fundamental change in his society; an alteration toward complexity and social organization--toward bureaucracies and interest groups--toward corporations, rings, and trusts--all alien and strange to the Populist's essentially Enlightenment world view. This leads logically to the second strain; that is, the Populist's difficulty in adjusting to the newly emerging relativism in all aspects of life in the late nineteenth century. This relativism was aptly labeled by Morton White as "the revolt against formalism." There are, certainly,

other problems and strains which need attention, but these would seem to be basic and widely felt by Populist leaders as well as followers. Only by exploring the Populist's economic and social attitudes and the personal and cultural strains attendant is it possible to arrive at some conclusions about the Populist's rather complex racial views.

CHAPTER IV  
SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE  
BLACK: 1890-1892

While Populism has long been of critical historical concern, Populist racial attitudes have not. Only in the last twenty-five years has this situation been corrected. Beginning with the revisionist studies of Handlin, Ferkiss, Hofstadter, and others, all students of the subject have found it necessary to explore this question. While this trend is praiseworthy, it has at times had some rather unhappy consequences. The worst of these resulted from the manner in which the conclusions reached in this critical area have been insistently and indiscriminately applied to the Populists' entire cause. Thus, one finds political categories established on the basis of the mid-twentieth century's political spectrum used to measure the extent of Populist radicalism. If, for example, the findings suggest that Populists were intolerant, then, of course, the entire movement must have been conservative.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The most recent offender in this context is Charles Crowe, who generalizes from the racial attitudes of one individual, Tom Watson, to the entire movement--racial as well as social and economic. "Tom Watson, Populists and Blacks Reconsidered," Journal of Negro History, LV (April, 1970), 99-116.

In rather sharp contrast, early twentieth-century studies of southern Populism, in particular, generally treated the Populists' racial perspective as an important but peripheral aspect of their protest. While these early state studies are often flawed by a class conflict interpretation and by their authors' own racism, nevertheless, their treatment of race on occasion seemed far superior to that of more recent observers.<sup>2</sup>

Central to these works is the view that the Populists, like their Democratic opponents, approached the Black voter and the related issue of white supremacy from within an entirely political context.<sup>3</sup> Because race was not a vital Populist concern, it was treated as expediency, personal background, and other related influencing factors might

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. William D. Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1935); Daniel M. Robison, Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Helen G. Edmunds, The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina: 1894-1901 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1951); John B. Clark, Populism in Alabama (Auburn, Ala.: Auburn Printing Co., 1927); Alex M. Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1922); Albert D. Kirwan, Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics 1876-1925 (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1951); Melvin T. White, "Populism in Louisiana During the Nineties," MVHR, V (January, 1918), 2-19. Less direct but just as useful see Nelson M. Blake, William Mahone of Virginia (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, 1935); Francis B. Simkins, The Tillman Movement in South Carolina (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1926); and Francis B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1944).

<sup>3</sup>This perspective is largely shared by two other recent works: Sheldon Hackney, Populism to Progressivism in Alabama (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 32, 45-47 and William Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest:

dictate. Thus from Populist to Populist, from state to state, and lastly, from region to region, one finds a bewildering variety of individual responses to the Black question.

An early indication, if only that, of Populist racial views is provided by examining the responses of the Southern Farmers Alliance and Industrial Union to Blacks. While the white Alliance seemed genuinely interested in achieving economic and political gains for all farmers, they also remained devoted to southern racial mores. This is best illustrated by their separate organizational structures segregating Blacks in the Colored Farmers Alliance and Cooperative Union, organized in 1888. Generally this was also the pattern followed by state and local chapters. In Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana, for example, Blacks were unquestionably excluded from membership in the white Alliance.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the President of the State Union (Alliance) in Louisiana selected the Shreveport Weekly Caucasian as the group's official organ. It is also revealing that in 1890 the majority

---

Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 192-97, 218-19 and 222-23. It is worth observing that Hackney has also recognized the equal opportunity and negative government aspects of Populist thought. His discussion of Populist ideology--particularly the use of conspiracy and symbols--is very poor. His assertion that Populists were only interested in power and not change is also incorrect.

<sup>4</sup>Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion, 35-36; Edmunds, The Negro and Fusion Politics, 24; and Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, 142-48.

of Alliance members in that state's legislature voted to segregate railroad coaches.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Marion Butler, the very young and able Alliance leader in North Carolina, also edited a paper called the Clinton Caucasian. Flying from the masthead of this Alliance organ was the motto "Pure Democracy and White Supremacy."<sup>6</sup> There is also little doubt regarding Butler's dedication to both aspects of this slogan. In late 1889 he made his attitude crystal clear. Arguing that slavery had elevated the American Black above his African brother, Butler asserted that emancipation and, subsequently, citizenship had caused the American Negro to regress. Turning to science for support, Butler cited a Professor Shaler of Cambridge as author of

the new and probably correct theory for explaining the unprogressiveness of the negro, namely that his animal nature so predominates over his intellectual and moral natures, that at the age of puberty, when the animal nature develops, the moral and intellectual qualities are clouded by the animal instincts and not only cease to develop but really retrograde.<sup>7</sup>

Butler was equally outspoken in his support of segregated railroad cars.<sup>8</sup> Despite his racism, Butler was still capable,

---

<sup>5</sup>Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, 142-48.

<sup>6</sup>See the Caucasian during 1889, 1890, 1891 and part of 1892 while Butler is both editor and State Alliance President.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., September 26, 1889.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., October 17, 1889; December 5, 1889; and January 9, 1890.

however, of expressing concern about Blacks. Upset about several recent lynchings, in late 1899 Butler deplored "this barbarous manner" of taking human life and urged that "it be put down."<sup>9</sup> Similar opposition to the use of violence against Blacks was expressed by other Alliance leaders. Aurel Arnard, a Louisiana state representative and active Alliance figure, often publically deplored acts of white terrorism. Arnard also urged white laborers to recognize the Black's economic status as equal to their own. This call for Black-white labor unity was echoed by statements of John Teets and Thomas Gruce, two other leaders of the radical wing of Louisiana's Farmers Union.<sup>10</sup>

In Alabama the Alliance Gubernatorial candidate and later Populist leader R. F. Kolb saw the Black vote as vital to his election hopes in 1892 and consequently repeatedly urged Blacks to vote. Naturally, he also opposed any attempt to restrict Black political participation in Alabama as a direct threat not only to Blacks but to all the laboring poor.<sup>11</sup>

In many ways Kolb struck the dominant attitude displayed by most southern Populists on the Black question. His central concern was with the white man or more precisely with the

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., October 31, 1889.

<sup>10</sup>Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, 192-95.

<sup>11</sup>Clark, Populism in Alabama, 135.



larger white society. For the Populist, the problems facing the poor--whether farmer or laborer, Black or white--were the issues generated by the concentration of wealth and special privileges granted to the rich by corrupt politicians and a corrupt government; the correction of these evils would create a better world for all--regardless of color. To achieve this utopia, however, required political allies. If this backing could be obtained from Blacks, then the Black farmer and voter would be wooed. If, however, for whatever reason, the Black became a greater liability than an asset in the quest for radical reform, he would then be deserted. Late in 1891 an incident occurred which further exposed the nature of this relationship between Blacks and whites in their respective Alliances.

Behind their leader, R. H. Humphrey, a white man, the Colored Alliance voted to support Black cotton pickers striking white growers. The direct financial question of higher wages was at stake. For the first time the white southern Alliance found itself opposed by its erstwhile ally, the Colored Alliance. Marion Butler bitterly denounced the strike as

unjust to the cotton planters who this year can scarcely meet expenses if they pay only 40 cents per hundred [pounds]. Unjust because it is a strike at those who have been the best friends to the Negro; unwise because the Negro Alliance can never succeed in its demands by fighting the white Alliance, unwise because the Colored laborers have a common grievance and should stand together for a common remedy, for the

repeal of unjust laws and the enactment of remedial legislation.<sup>12</sup>

This statement points unmistakably to the grounds upon which Butler and the Alliances--both Black and white--had sought to coalesce, namely, against legislative inequities and for equal rights. Certainly, the Black and white farmers in the South were not on an equal economic basis, nor did they share common economic interests. Yet they did work together for a time suggesting again the extent of the non-economic grievances and strains experienced by a wide range of differing economic groups in the late nineteenth century. The incident also re-emphasizes the strength of ideological commitment of both groups to their status as producers.

Turning from the Alliance to the early Populist years, Tom Watson's initial attitude toward the Black is also very revealing. Like Kolb of Alabama, Watson moved early to take advantage of the Black's potentially decisive vote. There was little revolutionary about that as the Black had never ceased playing an important political role in the South after the end of Reconstruction.<sup>13</sup>

While constantly urging his readers to support independent

---

<sup>12</sup>Caucasian, September 17, 1891.

<sup>13</sup>This is well known but for a useful discussion of the exploitation of the Black voter by all factions see C. Vann Woodward, The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), Chapter IX, 235-263.

political action, in late 1891 and early 1892 Watson remained mute about his own plans for the Black vote. But indirect evidence of his thinking can perhaps be gleaned from the things he allowed to appear in his frankly political organ. Among these was an interview with Watson's confidant, State Senator C. H. Ellington, which explored the question of party membership. Ellington asserted that anyone could be a member but emphasized that "Of course, we rely upon the negroes to some extent, for they will go with us, as they always do, for independent candidates."<sup>14</sup>

Letters to the editor were also significant. The constant theme threading through most was that southern Blacks ought to stand shoulder to shoulder with their white brothers, who, like them, were equally oppressed by the plutocrats; this appeal, however, was usually followed by a disclaimer of any interest in upsetting the racial status quo or in advocating social equality. John Sibley of Marietta, Georgia, for example, denounced the Atlanta Journal's insulting suggestion that the Populist party posed a threat to white supremacy. Sibley believed any such inference was degrading to all thinking Georgians; everyone knew that few, if any, Blacks wanted social equality. Sibley also asserted that the great majority of Blacks were decent individuals, unlike many white men he knew. He concluded that only the

---

<sup>14</sup>People's Party Paper, November 26, 1891.

"Saxon race" could give the Black man social equality--it could not be taken by him. The South's real problem then was not the Black but rather that both the southern white and Black

have been the tools of the Eastern democrat and the Eastern republican for twenty-five years. The Eastern democrat has professed friendship and acquiescence in democratic principles in order to control the Southern democratic vote. The Eastern republicans has [sic] done likewise by the negro in order that the Solid South would be confronted by the Solid North. The actual difference between an Eastern democrat and an Eastern republican is [that] one is out and the other is in.<sup>15</sup>

Addressing the people of Georgia, the citizens of Watkinsville echoed Sibley's comments by urging "all classes and colors" to come together and act in concerted action to "throw off the yoke of oppression and plutocratic rule." They especially exhorted Blacks to recognize their common interests with Populists against "the money-lords of Wall Street."<sup>16</sup>

Closely linked to this call for unity on the part of the producing classes of both races was the recognition that the race question would be used by their opponents to stifle reform. Indeed, it was viewed as the principal weapon against reform; and in these early years of the movement there was a good deal of concern about the harmful effects

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., April 28, 1892.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Also cf. the letters published June 10, July 8, July 15, and September 9, 1892.

it could have. H. C. Maxham spoke for many when he alleged that both old parties were desperate and that Wall Street's monopoly was in danger. As a result, however, he saw both turning their guns "upon us" with the ammunition coming from the same wagon:

The democratic party takes from the wagon a little scare devil, wraps the bloody shirt around it, points their big political cannon to the south and then comes screaming through our ranks Negro Supremacy! The republican party takes the same little scare devil, wraps him in the bloody shirt, rams him down the other end, too, and it goes through the north and west howling, "The Nigger is Abused!"<sup>17</sup>

Watson also reprinted an editorial from the Cincinnati Herald accusing both old plutocratic parties of using the race issue to maintain their political dominance. The Herald likewise saw the issue's revival as "the last card left to plutocracy's despairing minions." If the politicians would only let the question alone, the Herald believed, both races would eventually adjust and settle to their natural level. But they knew that this would not be. With excellent prescience, the writer asserted that ultimately exploiting racial fears could only result in "a struggle for race supremacy."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., June 24, 1892. Cf. the lengthy letter from H. C. Fairman casting the political history of the South for the previous thirty years around the "fatal word--NIGGER." Looking ahead, Fairman sees the southerner being rejected at the gates of heaven by St. Peter who says "You can't come in." The southerner inquired "Why" and is answered in a word: "NIGGER." Ibid., August 26, 1892.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., June 24, 1892.

Watson spoke out directly on the Black issue for the first time in a campaign address in August, 1892. In a struggle for re-election to the Congressional Seat in Georgia's Tenth District, Watson needed all the votes he could muster. Like Senator Ellington, Watson knew the importance of the Black vote. Speaking to an audience of mixed Blacks and whites, Watson declared his willingness to speak forthrightly before both races. Urging the Blacks to "draw nearer," he pledged to them on his honor as a man and as a representative "that if you stand shoulder to shoulder with us in this fight you shall have fair play and fair treatment as men and as citizens, irrespective of your color." Returning to this theme at the speech's end, he declared further:

My friends, this campaign will decide many things, and one of the things it will decide is whether or not your people and ours can daily meet in harmony and work for law and order, and morality, and wipe out the color line, and put every man on his citizenship irrespective of color.<sup>19</sup>

A month later he expanded these views in his paper and in The Arena, a national journal. Entitled "The Negro Question in the South," the article accurately summed up Populist hopes and fears for the Black vote and the Black in late 1892. The problem facing the South, for Watson, was a double-edged one. First, the white and the Black man had for too long been oppressed by the different but related cries of "Negro Supremacy" and "Republican protection."

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1892.

Rising from the hatred generated by these bitter slogans and their corresponding tactics were racial voting blocs which served only to divide further the two races, allowing both to be oppressed separately. He expressed this idea best in a now justly famous passage:

Now the People's party says to these two men, "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."

Watson's solution to the first part of the South's dilemma, like that of his followers, was to urge both Blacks and whites to recognize their common interests and enemy and then join ranks to bring their oppression to an end. Naturally, the old parties could not be expected to aid in that process. Instead, resorting to either old party could only rekindle the suspicions of one or the other race. Thus, through a recognition of mutual interests and the reliance on the Populist party, the oppression of both races in the South could be halted.

An awareness of shared oppression, however, could not solve the second aspect of the South's Negro problem, namely, the reality of a biracial society with the attendant fear that perhaps Blacks and whites could never live together in peace and harmony. Here the South could only find peace by accepting the reality of white superiority. Watson had only

contempt for the "Anglo-Saxon who knock their knees together, and through their chattering teeth and pale lips admit they are afraid the Negroes will 'dominate us.'"<sup>20</sup>

This article has been heavily relied on by Woodward and others to support their view that Populism was a movement committed to racial justice and tolerance.<sup>21</sup> Such a view ignores, however, Watson's clear commitment to white supremacy expressed not only within this article but elsewhere as well. This is not to argue that Watson is insincere about his concern for the Black producer in 1892. All the evidence points to his genuine conviction, probably shared by the majority of white Populists, that their program could significantly alter the adverse economic and social conditions affecting both Blacks and whites in the South. Yet, it should be apparent that such sincerity might be easily shaken in the face of adverse election returns or a stepped-up campaign to discredit their alliance with the Black voter.

Watson's search for Black votes took other forms than speeches and articles. He also relied on Black campaigners--

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1892. See also The Arena, VI (October, 1892), 540-50.

<sup>21</sup>"Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," Journal of Southern History, IV (February, 1938). Also cf. Norman Pollack (ed.), The Populist Mind (N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967), 360-61.



the Reverend H. S. Doyle being the most notable. It is in connection with Doyle's activities that yet another story of Populist racial radicalism was spawned. Doyle's job was to stump the Tenth District in search of Black votes for Watson. His efforts, however, generated a good deal of hostility from local Democrats. Late in the campaign a climax was reached when Doyle's life was threatened by a white mob in Thompson, Watson's home town. Hastily retreating to the Colonel's home, Doyle was quickly placed under the protection of two thousand white Populists. Recounting this affair, Professor Woodward left the reader with the image of white southerners risking their lives in order to protect the safety of a single Black. Unfortunately, all the details of this encounter were not told. While Doyle was an important factor in Watson's plans to capture the Black vote, he was also Black. As such, he deserved and got Populist protection from white Democratic threats and violence--but was never accorded social equality. Re-examining Woodward's account of the affair, one reads that after reaching Watson's home, "Watson installed him on his private grounds . . ."<sup>22</sup> Woodward meant, of course, that Doyle was sent to the Negro quarters as Watson himself related in his own account of the incident.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Woodward, Tom Watson, 239 and 240.

<sup>23</sup>People's Party Paper, October 26, 1892.

Again, however, it must be said that Watson's willingness to defend his Black political spokesman was important, as were all his efforts aimed at creating a biracial voting coalition. This does not mean, though, that the other facets of his racial attitude ought to be ignored or distorted. On the contrary, if Populism is ever to be understood, it is imperative to know all there is to know about their views--racial as well as economic and political.

Despite the best efforts of both his Black and white supporters, Tom Watson, their diminutive but fiery leader, was defeated in the general election. More than the fate of one man, however, was determined that day. Had Watson been successful in building a Black-white coalition, perhaps America's terrible future of race relations might have been averted or significantly altered.

Like Tom Watson, Marion Butler also faced a difficult political struggle in North Carolina. Also like Watson, Butler responded to the Black issue in a political manner. Yet while Butler and Watson shared some common attitudes toward the Black, they also differed widely in others. Most importantly, Butler seemed far less committed ideologically to Populism. His initial reluctance to join the third party's crusade reflected this lack of zeal. Prior to his switch to Populism, Butler also displayed all the characteristics of a typical southern Democrat, particularly on the Black issue. When the Black politicians of Sampson County--Butler's home

county--denounced the Republican party "bosses" for withholding national patronage, Butler praised these men for at last becoming sensitive to their real interests and perceiving "the fact that the white men of the Democratic party are and have been their best friends."<sup>24</sup>

In an editorial plea closely resembling the familiar shibboleths about the "White Man's Burden," Butler called on whites to give doubly to the church because of the special need to educate Negro preachers. The urgency, of course, was because the "ignorant, ambitious and autocratic" Negro is so greatly influenced by the Negro preachers.<sup>25</sup>

With the election of 1892 rapidly approaching, Butler, still very much a Democrat, urged his readers to oppose the Populist candidates in North Carolina. For Butler there was simply little need on the state level for a third party: "Whatever differences may exist among North Carolinians over questions of national policy," he asserted, "there should be none in the State where Anglo-Saxon rule and good government is the paramount issue."<sup>26</sup> Thus for Butler, far more than for Watson, race and his own political advantage united to dissuade him from leaving the Democratic party even to achieve more "Populist" aims. Watson, the unquestioned ideologist,

---

<sup>24</sup>Caucasian, September 18, 1890.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., April 2, 1891.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., July 14, 1892.

let neither political expediency nor peripheral issues detract him from pursuing Populist economic and political goals.

Yet shortly thereafter Marion Butler left the Democratic fold. He did so, however, only after the party insisted that all Democrats commit themselves without qualification to the entire national ticket.<sup>27</sup> Butler did not remain long in the political wilds, though, as he was quickly elected Populist Party State Chairman. Along with his bewildering change in loyalties went an even more radical shift in outlook. In late August, just a month and a half after dedicating himself to the preservation of Anglo-Saxon rule, he asked editorially why men get so "worked up" over the race question just prior to elections. Doing so, he asserted, can only result in voting against one's best judgments and principles. He saw the same process at work again in 1892 and deplored it; but added that, so long as the Negro remained in the South, the problem would not disappear. He concluded: "The politician has killed every reform by crying Negro. Will you allow him to do the same with this reform. The Negro question and the demagogues who use it must be crushed before there is any hope for the people."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., July 14 and August 11, 1892.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., August 25, 1892.

In the same issue Butler also discussed two Blacks placed on the Populist ticket in Edgecombe County where the Negro population had a several hundred vote majority. Reacting to the hue and cry alleging that Populists favored Negro domination, Butler explained that the only way to keep Blacks from winning all the seats would be by corruption or by a compromise which would allow some Blacks on the white ticket. "We are in favor of white supremacy," he continued, "but we are not in favor of cheating and fraud to get it. . . . It is better for a few negroes to hold office than for us to corrupt the fountain springs of republican government." Yet Butler was still unsure that even this arrangement was correct. Perhaps it would have been better, he mused, to have stood on principles and lose the race, especially as it gave demagogues a tremendous opportunity to blind others and--much worse--to distort "the great economic questions, the real issues involved in this fight."<sup>29</sup>

This statement expresses better than any other the Populist attitude toward the Black and the obvious dilemma he faced in the South on the race question. For the Populist, race was a peripheral question; yet victory required that the Black vote be utilized and the spurious cry of Negro domination somehow be nullified. Their success in handling the complex

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

race question would determine to a great extent whether or not they could achieve their more important political and economic goals.

One other facet of the Populists' difficulties was that the Democrats could also be expected in a crisis to turn to the Black voters for salvation. Before the election, Butler indicated he was quite aware of this danger; and immediately after the balloting, he complained that his worst fears had been realized. Bitterly recalling the Democrats' long-time cry of Negro dominance, Butler asserted that, in facing defeat, the Democrats turned to the Black to be saved "and strange to say the colored men saved them."<sup>30</sup>

In many ways 1892 was the high-water mark in the Populist attempt to create a biracial voting bloc.<sup>31</sup> The reasons for their failure are many and vary from state to state. Certain common features, however, emerge. The first is that the Black did not respond as favorably as the Populists hoped. This was due, at least in part, to the Populists' failure to gauge correctly the Black's unique economic and political interests. While many Blacks apparently accepted the Populist

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., September 22 and November 17, 1892.

<sup>31</sup>See Hair's entire discussion of this question in Louisiana, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, 218-41. Sheldon Hackney's discussion of Alabama Populism and the race issue is, unfortunately, rather poorly developed. Nevertheless,

argument that they--like white producers--were oppressed by a moneyed aristocracy, probably just as many could not or would not distinguish between one white plantation owner and another--both paying the same wages. At the same time the adherence of the Populists themselves to the racial status quo, at least in the area of social relations, must have helped vitiate their appeal to their Black "brothers."

Despite these gaps in the Populist approach to the Black voter, perhaps their tactics might still have worked if the Democrats had not played on white fears while eagerly soliciting and manipulating Black votes. Having failed once, however, the Populist efforts to build a voting coalition were made even more difficult.

---

his recognition of the general political stance of both Populists and Democrats toward the Black does help in our understanding of southern Populism. He also sees that the differences dividing these two parties were on other questions; Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, 34-47. Also see Sheldon's Populism in the Old Dominion, 92-102, for a similar discussion of the role of the Negro vote in Virginia. Perhaps in this way we can also begin to understand the early appearance in Ben Tillman of the classic "demagogue." By maintaining his ties to the Democratic party, Tillman is able to use the Negro issue to his own advantage without sacrificing essential Populist beliefs or principles. See Simkin's Pitchfork Ben Tillman, in general.

## CHAPTER V

### SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE

BLACK: 1892-1896

Despite his bitter disappointment over defeat in 1892, Watson remained firmly determined to capture the Black vote. Indeed, noting an increase in Black subscribers to his paper, Watson attributed it to the "great work" the People's Party had done for the Black. Moreover, in his view the

party says to the world in the plainest terms that the time has come to give the negro fair play. It means to stand by him in what is just under the law. It means to appeal to him as a voter and as a citizen on all public issues. The question of color will not keep us from giving him a free ballot and a fair count, just as we claim it for ourselves.

Despite this optimism, however, Watson now evidenced a greater awareness of the difficulties in attaining those idealistic ends: "It was for this policy of equal political rights to the negro that [I] was most bitterly opposed." Nevertheless, he reaffirmed his commitment to this policy and said it would continue.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>People's Party Paper, December 23, 1892.



The new year opened, however, on a note more suggestive of concern than hopeful optimism. On January 12, Watson published a letter from Clarence A. Goffert, the party's Fourth Ward Club Secretary. Goffert was extremely annoyed about the numerous voting irregularities which occurred in the last election--particularly with the problem of voters "repeating." While criticizing whites for manipulating votes, Goffert severely faulted the Blacks for failing to respect the "sacredness" of their ballots--some of which he reported being bought for as little as fifteen cents.<sup>2</sup> The following week a Black Populist wrote with a similar complaint. Watson's editorial echoed these criticisms and shared their misgivings.<sup>3</sup>

On Independence Day Watson delivered a long speech at Douglasville, Georgia, primarily devoted to Populist economic and political goals. Typically the speech returned to the great battles waged by Thomas Jefferson on behalf of democracy and against "moneyed aristocracy." At the end of this exposition, however, Watson felt compelled to discuss race, which was threatening to destroy the Populists' hopes of ever enacting their "Jeffersonian Creed." He began by

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1893.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., January 20, 1893. Cf. as well the letter of yet another Black Populist on March 24, 1893.

reaffirming his opposition to the color line--this despite the slander and misrepresentation he had had to endure on the question. Having said this, however, Watson hastened to clarify his attitude. He asserted that he would yield to no man in his pride of race. Moreover, he added:

I believe the Anglo-Saxon is stronger in the glorious strength of conception and achievement than any race of created men; but from my very pride of race springs my intense scorn of that phantasm manufactured by the political bosses and called "negro domination!"

Socially I want no mixing of races. It is best that both should preserve the race integrity by staying apart. But when it comes to matters of law and justice, I despise the Anglo-Saxon who is such an infernal coward as to deny legal rights to any man on account of his color for fear of "negro domination."

Watson further scorned the stupidity and illogic of such fears. Urging his listeners to open their eyes, he sketched the vast array of economic and political power concentrated in the white man's hands. In contrast, he conjured up the verbal picture of the "ignorant helpless, poverty-cursed negro in whose ears the clank of chains have scarcely ceased to sound . . ." He pleaded finally with all whites to reject the stupid cry of "negro domination" and get on with the work of achieving equal justice for all.<sup>4</sup> While Watson remained dedicated to political rights for Blacks, it was obvious by mid-1893 that this issue threatened to destroy all his patient labor in pursuit of the Populists'

---

<sup>4</sup>Thomas E. Watson, The Life and Speeches of Thomas E. Watson (Nashville, Tenn., 1908), 126-65. Also see People's Party Paper, July 7, 1893.

more important goals of economic and political equality for all--but especially whites.

Several months later the People's Party Paper evidenced the first signs of this growing anxiety. Turning his guns on the Democrats, Watson attacked their leaders for hypocrisy on the race issue. While they complained about "negro dominance," Watson charged that the Democrats themselves had appointed numerous Blacks to political office. The worst of these was the assignment of a Black ambassador to Bolivia--a white country--while a white man went to Haiti. For Watson these were not just political appointments or even the exercise of Black political rights but, instead, posed directly the specter of racial mixing. Rhetorically he asked "Isn't this 'Social Equality?'"<sup>5</sup> Stung by Watson's charges, the state's Democratic papers, the Atlanta Constitution and the Atlanta Journal, reacted angrily indicating their own sensitivity on the question. Sensing his opportunity, Watson republished the charges the following week.<sup>6</sup> Letters from his readers urging him to "hit 'em" harder reinforced his campaign's effectiveness.<sup>7</sup>

Greatly encouraged, Watson followed with yet another

---

<sup>5</sup>People's Party Paper, September 29, 1893.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., October 6, 1893.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., October 13, 1893.

blast aimed at Cleveland and the Democratic party in general. Noting that the Journal had accused him of seeing a "burly negro" while campaigning the previous summer, he reversed the slur and accused the Democrats of appointing "burly negroes" to ambassadorships in Bolivia and Spain. After this heated exchange of charges, Watson again lapsed into silence on the Black issue until the summer of the following year.

With a major election approaching once more, Watson's attention again reverted to finding some means of evading or resolving his dilemma over the Black issue. As in 1892, he hoped initially to enlist Black voters to the Populist party. To this end Watson's nominating convention held in the state's Tenth Congressional District was composed of nearly thirty percent Black delegates. On the state level the party also seated twenty-four Blacks out of approximately five hundred delegates. With Watson in the vanguard, the Georgia Populist party went further than any of the neighboring state organizations in encouraging Black political participation.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Saunders, "Southern Populism and the Negro, 1893-1905," Journal of Negro History, LIV (July, 1969), 240-42. Cf. Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," 45-47; Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia is very poor on this subject.

In May Watson also seconded the nomination of the Reverend Ephrain White, a Black, to the party's State Executive Committee. In his supporting speech, Watson argued:

These colored people were our friends in the times when we needed friends two years ago. They stood by us through thick and thin. They stood by us when they knew their pockets could be lined with money by going with the Democratic party, and if they profess fondness for me today it is because they knew that I never went back upon a friend in my life.<sup>10</sup>

Later in the same month Watson spoke at Degive's Opera House in Atlanta. Speaking directly to the Blacks in his audience, Watson urged them to vote for Populist candidates on the basis of their shared self-interest. Again, however, he asserted that the Populists did not stand for social equality or racial mixing; specifically, he rejected integration of public facilities and urged instead equal division of public moneys for teachers and schools.<sup>11</sup>

By mid-1894 the outlines of the Populists' evolving treatment of the Black issue was becoming clear. In 1892 the party had simply asked the Black voter to recognize his real economic and political interests and vote the Populist ticket. With that failure and experience behind them, the

---

<sup>10</sup>People's Party Paper, May 25, 1894.

<sup>11</sup>Watson, Life and Speeches, 166-180.

Populists were determined to handle the question with greater care in 1894. What emerged was a two pronged attack of seeking Black votes while, at the same time, attacking the Democrats for posing a threat to racial integrity and white superiority.

Watson's public speeches as well as his editorial columns conveyed this new approach. Speaking on the Fourth of July Watson appealed for continued Black support while once more repudiating racial amalgamation. Turning to the Democrats' record, he heaped abuse on Grover Cleveland for signing, while Governor of New York, a bill integrating that state's public education system; a charge endlessly repeated in the remainder of the congressional campaign.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time he also accused the Democrats of using Blacks to solicit the votes of other Blacks. His editorial cartoon pictured a New York Black named Ross engaged in an intimate conversation with the Chairman of the Georgia State Democratic Convention. Ross was depicted with exaggerated Black features and sporting a high hat, spats, a loud tie and an equally offensive coat. A cane and a large cigar were nearby and both men were drinking whiskey.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>People's Party Paper, July 13, August 24, September 7, and September 28, 1894.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., September 21, 1894.

The earliest rewards of this dual approach to the race question occurred when the People's party was endorsed by an Atlanta Black paper, the People's Advocate. For the editor of this paper, the Democratic party only offered the Negro voter "abuse, suppression and humiliation."<sup>14</sup> The final harvest was reaped, however, when the Populists succeeded in capturing the Georgia Governor's chair. Tom Watson was certain that the Black vote played a crucial role in the victory. Asking "Did the Negroes Do It?", he asserted that their votes were decisive in several counties.<sup>15</sup> The Democratic Atlanta Journal confirmed Watson's opinion when it analyzed the results and reported "The chief Populist gains are due to negro accessions."<sup>16</sup> Northern papers as well carried items on the Black voters' importance in Georgia. The New York Outlook, for example, remarked on Watson's ability to command Black enthusiasm and Black loyalty. Pleased with the article, Watson reprinted it in his own paper:

In the district where he [Watson] is a candidate for Congress they pray for him in their churches shout his name and sing his praises. He has aroused the Negro

---

<sup>14</sup>Reprinted in ibid., September 28, 1894.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., October 12, 1894.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted from the Atlanta Journal, October 5, 1894, in Jack Abramowitz, "The Negro in the Populist Movement," Journal of Negro History, XXXVIII (July, 1953), 276.

to a pitch of religious political enthusiasm where arguments cannot touch him and from which money cannot budge him.<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite all of this clamor, something went wrong as Watson himself was defeated for Congress by his opponent, J. C. Black. Immediately after, a great hue and cry was raised claiming that wholesale election frauds and voter manipulation were perpetrated in the district--especially in the corrupt city of Augusta.<sup>18</sup>

Watson accused his opponent of controlling the Black vote and, even worse, of making "unfair" campaign promises to Blacks. He singled out as particularly deplorable the right to a seat on juries, the promise of state jobs, and lastly, a free ride to the polls on election day. In Watson's view these enticements were "not, strictly speaking, arcadian."<sup>19</sup> Precisely why Watson found these practices offensive is difficult to imagine, unless they suggest how little Watson himself had envisioned granting Blacks for their support. One can only conclude that Watson never intended to make a direct appeal to Black voters--rather his hopes for the Black votes were based simply on what the

---

<sup>17</sup>Reprinted from the New York Outlook (date unknown) in People's Party Paper, October 10, 1894.

<sup>18</sup>See for examples letters to the editor in the November 9, 1894, edition of ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1894.



Populist program itself had to offer Blacks that is, most importantly, a fair ballot and a fair count and an economic environment freed of the corrupting influence of government-aided corporate monopolies.

Responding to the cries of fraud and the blatant irregularities in the election, Black resigned his congressional seat and returned to Georgia for a second election. Despite this gesture, there was little doubt about the failure of Watson's approach to the Negro question. Significantly, following the election returns in late November, the People's Party Paper carried a news item with the headline "Burly Negro Wields an Ugly Razor." This is the first such use of the adjective "burly" or its synonym "brute," but it was not to be the last.<sup>20</sup> In the succeeding month Watson's paper was filled with features and news items on murders and threats of murders--usually involving Blacks.<sup>21</sup> By early 1895 it was apparent that Watson was once more revising his tactics. Twice defeated by the cries of "negro domination" coupled with fraud and even some legitimate Black opposition, Watson knew the Black vote could no longer be relied on to provide the margin of victory. Increasingly

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1894.

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, several items in ibid., December 2, 1894.

after 1894 his principal tactic was simply to reverse the Democratic cries of "negro domination" and thereby hopefully capture the white vote previously lost to Democratic threats and appeals. There was little really new about this; it simply marked an extension of the older policy.

The first direct indication of Watson's changing emphasis appeared in March, 1895. In a lengthy editorial entitled "The Color Line in a Kink," Watson accused Virginia's Democratic Governor Charles T. O'Ferrall of dining with a Negro. The fact that the Black was an official member of the Massachusetts legislative delegation invited by O'Ferrall to the Governor's mansion was no excuse. Nothing could remove the damage such social mingling did to the color line. For Watson the line was nearly as tangled "as when Cleveland appointed Taylor, the Negro as minister to a white country, Bolivia." Returning to the political implications, Watson summarized the situation:

fact is fact, you know, and we guess that the truth about the case will have to be that O'Ferrall has invited a negro into his house, dined with him at his table, bestowed upon him the usual courtesies of Southern hospitality, and sent him forth to herald to the world the great discovery that "white supremacy," like all the balance of Democratic campaign goods has a wonderful knack of changing color after the election.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., March 22, 1895.

The following week Watson again returned to this theme. Accusing the Democrats of using the great "bug-a-boo" of Negro domination and white supremacy for too long, he reversed the issue by listing Democratic racial "slips," including Cleveland's invitation to Frederick Douglass to the White House, his appointment of a Black to Bolivia, the use of New York's Mr. Ross to aid Georgia Democrats, and finally, Governor O'Ferrall's invitation to a Black to eat and drink with the Governor and his wife, "just as natural as if he was a human being." Watson warned in conclusion that no longer would the Democrats be allowed to use this issue with impunity and those who try "will be split into kindling wood to light fires under wash pots."<sup>23</sup> Watson also printed on his front page the story of Frederick Douglass' attendance at Cleveland's marriage ceremony. The headline blared the details, "His White Wife and Black Daughter Attend." The wedding, however, occurred in 1886--a fact only re-emphasizing the growing intensity of Watson's hostility and anger on this subject.<sup>24</sup>

Following several more months of excessive attention to the Black question, Watson abruptly dropped it and

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., March 29, 1895.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1895. Also see April 19, 1895, for another attack on the Democrats as a "mongrel crew." Hoke Smith, a future Governor of Georgia and later ally of Watson, is labeled a "negro miscegenationist."

returned to economic and political questions of a more "Populist" character. Recognizing his inevitable defeat, the Black was totally ignored until after the contested election was decided. Duly defeated, Watson lashed out bitterly at election irregularities in Augusta--emphasizing especially Black culpability. For several months nearly every edition of Watson's newspaper was devoted to the problem of election fraud and the Populist campaign to achieve a free ballot and a fair count. And increasingly, it was the Black voter who was most often singled out as the principal cause--whether directly or indirectly--of voting frauds.<sup>25</sup> His bitterness and anger were evident in every word he wrote. Recognizing that the recent Democratic registration law had cost many Blacks the franchise, he still believed that far too many had voted for his Democratic opponent, Major Black. He also resented the fact that many Negro leaders had been involved in urging their followers to vote Democratic.<sup>26</sup> Despite his disillusionment, Watson still opposed Black disfranchisement at least as it was accomplished in Mississippi and Arkansas. Partly, he was concerned because he saw disfranchisement as a direct threat to the poor white as

---

<sup>25</sup>Cf. ibid., August 23, August 30, September 27, and October 4, 1895, also January 3, January 10, February 7, March 13, and March 20, 1896.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1895.

well as Black:

Now, bear in mind that the same laws which shut out the uneducated negro who is poor, also shut out the uneducated white man who is poor,--and if you can't see an oligarchy of wealth just ahead, you are blind indeed.<sup>27</sup>

But what if victory for the Populist cause came to depend wholly on Black disfranchisement? What then would Colonel Watson do? And what if this was true not only because of white Democratic manipulation of the Black but also simply because the Negro vote went against Watson? In February with all the election results in, Watson printed a disturbing editorial: "It now appears, from the evidence given by Democratic witnesses in the Black-Watson Contest Case, that Mr. Watson lost his election because the negroes and the Republicans were against him."<sup>28</sup> His statement received reinforcement from the testimony given by Populist supporters during the hearings conducted on Watson's allegations of election fraud.<sup>29</sup> Following this last spate of articles, the Black question was largely dropped; at the end of 1896 Watson's organ, the People's Party Paper, also died.

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., October 25, 1895.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1896.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., especially March 20, 1896.

The major theme emerging from these years is that for Tom Watson as for southern Populism in general, the race question was more a matter of political expediency than ideology. Prominent during the several months before an election, almost invariably the issue was dropped shortly after and was not revived until forced to the fore again by the next election. In the interim, the pages of Watson's newspaper are filled with column after column of material devoted to the direct "Populist" concerns of money, political and economic privilege, and the concentration of wealth.

A similar pattern of responses can be seen after 1892 in the writings and actions of Marion Butler. With elections approaching, in late 1893 Butler turned his attention more and more frequently to the Black issue. Like Watson, Butler deplored Cleveland's appointment of a Black ambassador to Bolivia as a very irresponsible action.<sup>30</sup> Butler reserved much of his verbal abuse, however, for the Democratic leadership in the state of Virginia where an especially important race was being contested. He was particularly incensed about their importing Black spokesmen to try and sway Black voters while they continued hypocritically to employ the tired shibboleth of "Negro domination."<sup>31</sup> When

---

<sup>30</sup>Caucasian, September 28 and October 19, 1893.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., October 19, 1893.

John Henry Langston, Virginia's Black Republican leader, turned coat and joined the Democrats, Butler's comments reached a temporary zenith in Populist appeals to white hatreds. Thundering that Langston would doubtless make a good Democrat, "though he is the blackest negro in his party, blacker than the ace of spades, blacker than beelzebub, as black as anything in the boss ridden state of Virginia." He feared, in conclusion, that the "bottom rail is getting on top."<sup>32</sup>

Following the election, Butler assured his readers that the Populists' gains in Virginia were not attributable to Black votes. On the contrary, he charged the Democrats with manipulating the Black vote entirely to its advantages, thereby preserving a Democratic victory. Like Watson, Butler was deeply angered by election frauds and demanded the introduction of the Australian ballot in the immediate future.<sup>33</sup> With the election behind him, Butler's paper ignored the Black question entirely until April, 1894--another important election year. What appeared then was a very familiar Populist refrain. Butler's editorial complained of Cleveland's appointment of two Blacks to offices--appointments which he saw as flying full in the

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., November 2, November 16, November 23, and November 30, 1893.

face of Democratic slogans to the contrary.<sup>34</sup> By August it was abundantly manifest that the Black vote and related issues could prove decisive. The first round of the contest opened in Alabama and the Populists were once again found wanting. For Butler the Black vote had been the deciding factor; he accused the Democrats of using irregular tactics to capture it. Of greater moment he predicted that the Alabama victory would cue the North Carolina Democrats to the utility of fraud and corruption and provide a rationalization for the presence of Black votes in the Democratic column.<sup>35</sup>

Significantly, Butler reprinted a statement by Alabama Populist leaders to the people of Alabama charging widespread election frauds. Indeed, the irregularities were so great the Alabama leadership alleged that their margin in forty-two white counties had been easily overcome by the votes cast in only fifteen Black (plantation) counties. Equally interesting, the Alabama Populists, anticipating such an outcome, had offered the Democrats a white primary but were refused.<sup>36</sup>

Despite Butler's fears, North Carolina Populists--allied with the state's Republicans--forged a major victory

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1894 and compare a similar criticism in the issue of May 31, 1894.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., August 9 and August 16, 1894.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., August 16, 1894.



in 1894. Electing a governor and numerous state representatives, the party appeared very healthy indeed. Butler attributed the victory, at least partially, to the fact that the Negro voters "could not be bribed or frightened into voting the democratic ticket, except in favored localities."<sup>37</sup> In other states where the successes had been less or none at all, the Black voter was not so warmly applauded. H. E. Taubeneck, Populist Party National Chairman, went so far as to label the Democratic party of the South a Negro party and attributed to the Black vote the slim margin which gave the Democrats victory in several close races.<sup>38</sup>

Reflecting the many expressions of concern about electoral practices, the North Carolina legislature--now controlled by the Fusion Populist-Republican forces--passed a series of reforms designed to purify future election contests. The laws' secondary purpose was to take the county election machinery out of the power of any specific party and place it into the hands of the "people." To the Fusionists' credit, these latter changes created the real possibility of Black's dominating the counties in which they had a majority. At the same time, however, while beneficial to Blacks, such steps were also of decided

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., November 22, 1894.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., December 6, 1894.

political advantage of the Fusionists.<sup>39</sup>

Following the Fusionist victory, Marion Butler displayed an abundant confidence that the major obstacle to reform had been finally overcome. In early January of the new year, he criticized Josephus Daniels, the editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, for arousing racial passions in Daniels' story of a Black replacing a white on the legislative staff. In his exuberance, Butler defended the legislature's act as only giving to Negroes the "honest fruits" of their achievements as citizens. Regardless of alleged Black racial inferiority, Butler concluded that as a citizen the Negro must be granted the rewards he earned.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly thereafter the legislature nominated Butler to serve as North Carolina's junior United States Senator. Flushed with victory and still optimistic about the future, Butler once more attacked the Democrat's continued use

---

<sup>39</sup> Apparently some 15,000 more votes were cast in the 1896 election in sixteen Black counties than in 1892--certainly an important factor in the successful campaign of a Black, George H. White, for the seat in North Carolina's Second Congressional District. White was elected in 1896 and re-elected in the notorious white supremacist campaign of 1898. His district was also not entirely Black as it included four "white" counties. At the same time in several of these "Black" counties, the new laws had the effect in 1896 of turning previous Democratic majorities into Fusionist ones; Edmunds, The Negro and Fusion Politics, 67-87.

<sup>40</sup> Caucasian, January 10, 1895.

the "Negro Scarecrow" as a device to retard reform. Focusing on the Black's deplorable economic position and his "docility and harmlessness," Butler asserted that the attempt to use the Black as a figure of evil was absurd. Looking ahead, he added: "Thank God, the farce is nearly ended."<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately for Butler and the Populists, events were moving in precisely the opposite direction. Following the death of Frederick Douglass, the North Carolina House of Representatives passed a resolution honoring the old Negro Republican leader. Unwisely they also chose to couple their Douglass resolution with ones for Washington and Jefferson, whose birthdays also fell in February. The fact that Douglass had been married to a white woman, directly violating the most serious of racial taboos, only compounded their mistake in the eyes of most citizens.

Butler reacted to the ensuing outburst by dismissing the entire incident as just another Democratic contrivance designed to save themselves.<sup>42</sup> As the public din over the affair grew, however, Butler quickly realized the weakness of his position and typically replied to the Democrats in kind. Under the editorial lead, "Committed to Miscegenation," he denounced Grover Cleveland for inviting Douglass to the White House where white wives and daughters were

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1895.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., March 21, 1895.

present. Cleveland's appointment of Blacks to diplomatic positions in white countries was also revived. In the same column he again reminded his readers of the Blacks who dined with Democratic Governor O'Ferrall of Virginia. Adding a new twist to this old slur, he asserted that Governor O'Ferrall "is having quite a spat with his Darling about a colored man."<sup>43</sup> Succeeding issues of the paper pursued the same topics.<sup>44</sup>

The Frederick Douglass incident re-emphasized the political character of the Populists' reaction to race. Unquestionably, Marion Butler, like Tom Watson and other southern Populists, would have liked the race question simply to vanish as a political issue; for them it was not of primary concern. On the contrary, it served as the major barrier to achieving their principal aims of a white-Black coalition which could bring about genuine economic reform. But when the race issue was forced upon them in the political arena they had to respond; and being in a predominantly racist society, they had to respond in the same vein as their opponents. This is not to argue that they were not racists or did not believe in Black inferiority--as observed, most were and did. But unlike the Democrats, they never set out to exploit racial fears and resisted doing so until their hopes for a white-Black voting

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., March 28, 1895.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., April 4 and April 18, 1895.

coalition were shattered by the force of events.<sup>45</sup> The Douglass incident also suggests that directly contrary to Butler's hopes, the Black issue was not dying; it was apparently becoming more explosive.

In late 1895 a further indication of heightened racial tension surfaced with increased reports of Black lynchings not only in North Carolina but throughout the South. Under a banner headline, on November 7 the Caucasian carried the story of a particularly gruesome lynching in Texas in which a young Black was burned alive. Butler, genuinely anguished, pleaded with his readers: "In the name of God and justice let justice be properly meted out."<sup>46</sup> Such appeals, however, had little effect. Publishing the lynching statistics for 1895, Butler labeled them "A Gruesome Record." In particular, he observed that more lynchings (171) had occurred that year than lawful public executions (132).<sup>47</sup>

Against this backdrop of growing racial strife, the election of 1896 was contested in North Carolina. At first, Butler

---

<sup>45</sup>These generalizations are partially confirmed in another way by the praise for North Carolina and Senator Butler contained in speeches presented at the National Colored Conference held in Washington, D.C. in the last week of October, 1895. Calling the election of 1892 in North Carolina a "political revolution," these Black spokesmen anticipated the fate of Black voters in Mississippi and South Carolina, that is, disfranchisement if the Democrats were to regain power in North Carolina. The conference was reported in the Caucasian, November 7, 1895.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1896.

and the Populists sought to divorce themselves from their former allies, the Republicans. Butler's reason for not re-fusing was that the G.O.P. national ticket was headed by a Goldbug.<sup>48</sup> It seems as likely, however, that realignment with the Republican party was just too great a liability as race became the paramount political issue. Whatever the reason, Butler's editorials revealed a deepening anxiety that the racial "bug-a-boo" would dominate the election. Once more Butler returned to the theme of white-Black commonality of interests and urged both groups to use their good reason and support each other against their common oppressor.<sup>49</sup> In this area at least they were successful. The Black voters seemed convinced of the Populists sincerity. When the Republican State Convention nominated Daniel L. Russell for Governor, the Black Republicans revolted against his racial views; meeting in Raleigh shortly after, they endorsed the Populist, William A. Guthrie of Durham, for Governor. In turn the Populist party nominated Guthrie as their candidate and, as in the past, actively solicited Black votes. With the election approaching, however, the Populists came to the belated conclusion that victory demanded realigning with the Republicans. Both Gubernatorial candidates remained in the field, however, and while the Populists were moderately successful, the G.O.P. was more so as Russell defeated both Guthrie and his Democratic

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., February 20, 1896.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., March 19, 1896.

opponent. Marion Butler's attention to the election in North Carolina in the interim had been greatly diverted by the national contest and his duties as National Party Chairman. Hal Ayer, the Caucasian's new managing editor, wrote most of the editorials in 1896--which largely avoided the race question. For the remaining southern Populists, 1896 was a disastrous year which marked not only their political demise but also the end of their attempt to forge an effective bi-racial voting coalition.

To risk repeating the most important generalizations about this effort, it must first be observed that the Populists' treatment of race was most often a matter determined by individual and situational needs. This was primarily because Populists were not ideologically committed to race as they were to those questions of economic and political privilege, which alone can be labeled pure Populism. Only on these questions can historical judgments about the radical character of Populism be based. To measure Populism by its racist or non-racist content is to commit an error both in logic and in historical methodology. For to do so is to read the past from a contemporary and an anachronistic perspective. Only when this is understood is it possible to make further judgments about the southern Populist-Black relationship.

The most significant of these is that, like the vast majority of Americans, the Populists were racists; that is, they shared a body of beliefs which held that Blacks

were inherently inferior to whites. In that context, Watson, Butler, and other southern Populists experienced the same aversion to social "mixing" and social equality as other whites of the region. Yet despite these attitudes, the Populists were also just as sincere in their conviction that the Black shared a common economic interest with their fellow white "producers" and as such could benefit from the general Populist program. At the same time they also--at least for a short while--went further in the pursuit of Black votes and the enlargement of Black political opportunities than the white Democratic party had ever gone. Indeed, the Populists appear to have driven the Democrats to important concessions to the Black--most prominently in Georgia and North Carolina.<sup>50</sup> Thus, if only to 1896, the Populist party had the effect of broadening the color line and enlarging opportunities for Blacks--most significantly in the areas of politics and economics.

---

<sup>50</sup>On this specific point cf. the conclusions in Saunders, "Southern Populism and the Negro, 1893-1905," 253-55.



## CHAPTER VI

### SOUTHERN POPULISM AND THE

BLACK: 1896-1904

Populism as a set of ideas and beliefs lived on after the national defeat of 1896 but never again possessed the energy it had prior to that fateful year. The explanations given for its decline are many and largely unsatisfactory. Because some students of Populism have viewed its causes as rooted in some form of economic or status anxiety, they have naturally also accepted a similar hypothesis for its abrupt demise. Without pausing to explore the difficulties in the economic interpretation at this point, it is suffice to say, at least in the South, that Populism did not so much decline or wane as it was brushed aside by a new social strain. After 1896 race simply became so paramount an issue that it eliminated all others. The Populists themselves, of course, were partially responsible for this. By broadening the Blacks' political alternatives, the Populists unquestionably placed Blacks and whites in a competitive political position--an intolerable circumstance for a region with a vast Black populace. Several other factors also contributed to this situation. The first was the maturing of the Black populace itself.

Having endured several decades of political vassalage, by 1890 the Black community was much more alert to its political potential and as a consequence was also more influential.

Booker T. Washington serves well as a symbol of this increasing political development. While remaining subservient in many ways, Washington was still an indigenous Black southern political leader with exceptional political skills and, more importantly, a national reputation.<sup>1</sup> The number of other Black figures elected to national and state posts suggests that Booker Washington was not an isolated exception. The growing furor over Black political appointments provides another measure of the increasing Black political impact--an impact significantly raising racial tensions and aggravating white fears.

A third factor tending to transform race from one of several into the major political issue was the anxiety generated by continuing uncertainty surrounding racial interaction and relationships. The historical controversy associated with this problem largely pivots on the questions of when and why segregation emerged.<sup>2</sup> C. Vann Woodward initiated the debate with his assertion that race relations

---

<sup>1</sup>August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1966), 114.

<sup>2</sup>See the introduction to Joel Williamson's edited work, The Origins of Segregation (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1968), v-ix for a succinct summary of the major questions and leading protagonists.

remained fluid until passage of the so-called Jim Crow legislation in the 1890's.<sup>3</sup> Woodward's principal opponent in this discussion, Joel Williamson, has argued that segregation--albeit de facto--was as rigid and clearly defined in 1868 as in 1898.<sup>4</sup> While the present study is not primarily interested in the origins of segregation, it is necessary in order to understand post-1896 Populism to reach some conclusions about this problem. Perhaps the most useful point to begin is Williamson's distinction between de facto and de jure segregation. The question which immediately arises is why, if segregation was crystallized and complete in 1868, was it necessary to reinforce such de facto customs with the force of law. Apparently something was at work in the society driving the entire region toward the creation of a much firmer and more sharply defined "color line."

Perhaps these difficulties can be resolved by borrowing from Pierre Van Der Berghe's fine theoretical work which posits two different kinds of race relations: paternal and competitive.<sup>5</sup> The first of these two types--paternal--is

---

<sup>3</sup>The Strange Career of Jim Crow (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1955), 13-26.

<sup>4</sup>After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 298-99.

<sup>5</sup>"The Dynamics of Racial Prejudice: An Ideal-Type Dichotomy," Social Forces, XXXVIII (December, 1958), 138-41.

characterized by Berge as flourishing in a relatively undifferentiated and fairly stable social world typical of an agricultural or plantation economy. Equally important is the corollary that the dominant majority population in such a society is not itself fragmented and divided by serious internal conflicts. The last characteristic of a paternal racial pattern is that relations between the majority and minority populations are relatively peaceful; with few exceptions, pogroms, race riots, and lynchings do not occur. This description would seem to describe, with excellent fidelity, the South's social and racial environment from 1865 to approximately 1885-1890. This paternalistic racial pattern, of course, supports Professor Williamson's conclusion that as early as 1868 southern race relations were already well defined and fully accepted by both races. It also supports, however, the more fluid racial environment projected by C. Vann Woodward if that racial world is understood to be more relaxed as a result of the certainty and acceptance of everyone's racial roles.

After 1885 or thereabouts, as a consequence of changes occurring in the southern society, a new social situation began to emerge--creating a racial configuration Berge labels competitive. This competitive phase is characterized, first by a dominant majority which is itself greatly stratified into conflicting interests. Second, the society itself is typically urban and industrial and undergoing rapid change. Third, racial roles are ill-defined and the divisions between the

racess are blurred, particularly in the areas of education and economics. From this criterion flows the next which posits a greatly heightened tension between the groups manifested in outbursts of periodic violence including inter-racial riots, pogroms, and lynchings. Berge also notes that in sharp contrast to the paternal situation, miscegenation is severely disapproved and expressions of prejudice are often laden with sexual allusions; typically condemnations of immoral or lascivious sexual behavior. This "competitive" stage of racial relationships would appear to mirror with great accuracy the southern--and even northern--inter-racial environments of the 1890's.

Applying Berge's analysis to the controversy over the genesis of segregation, it is obvious, to reiterate, that Williamson is correct about the existence of a relatively well defined pattern of racial roles in the South after 1865. What occurred was simply the transference of the paternalistic racial order of the pre-war South. Under the pressure of rapid, indeed revolutionary, change generated from within and imposed from without, the economic, social, and political foundation of this ante-bellum paternalistic world came to an end--creating in its turn a much more competitive situation. This pressure for change was enhanced by the transformations occurring simultaneously in the Black community, especially a rising educational level and an increasingly independent political influence. A further result of these

several developments was an increasing racial competitiveness marked by a rising incidence of violence and the attendant need for legislation to legally fortify the eroding paternalistic social patterns. Thus Woodward, seeking an answer for the changes toward more rigid segregation in the 1890's, is also correct. He does fail, however, to see what Williamson pointed out: the paternalistic racial pattern of the 1860's and 1870's, while having the appearance of greater freedom and more interracial contacts, is nevertheless just as rigid in its definition of the color lines and its debilitating effect on the Black minority.

The Populists, of course, played a vital role in this entire area as both a force hastening the South's movement toward the competitive phase and at the same time reflecting in their own attitudes this monumental shift in racial relationships from paternalism to competition. To 1895 or 1896 the Populists and the South as a region were able to engage in an economic, social, and political debate about the nature and character of the emerging capitalist South. The principal thrust of this debate was whether the South and the nation was to be an organized, anti-individualist, and corporate society or whether it was to remain a much more individualist-oriented society. Race in this context was only a peripheral issue, important as a political lever to effect other more important changes or--as in the case of

the Democrats--to protect and defend the already established corporate thrust of the society. As this struggle further divided the majority population, however, and as Black attitudes and influences also changed, the racial question itself began to push other problems into the background. While lesser issues would continue to be discussed, race as a new and pervasive social strain simply came to occupy the center of the political arena and obscured all else.

The "white supremacy" election of 1898 in North Carolina aptly illustrates this interpretation. One of the earliest indications of the changing racial climate was the increasing number of lynchings occurring in the South during 1895 and 1896. By June, 1897, the reports of such horrors had grown to flood proportions. Succeeding issues of the Caucasian were filled with blaring headlines accompanied by lurid details of brutal mob assaults on individual Black men.<sup>6</sup> In a very interesting transference of aggression, the Populists found themselves accused not only of fostering "Negro equality" but now directly responsible for the raping of white women.<sup>7</sup>

Marion Butler, whose writing had long been absent from the paper, responded to this problem in a very revealing editorial. The specific purpose of his comments was to

---

<sup>6</sup>Caucasian, June 17, July 8, July 22, July 29 and August 26, 1897.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1897.

reject the recent allegations of the Wilmington Democratic paper, the Messenger, that the presence of Blacks on juries made conviction of Black rapists difficult. For Butler such charges were only designed to further racial tension in order "to call attention from great economic questions which have frightened the monopolies and their tools, the machine politicians."<sup>8</sup>

By September the Populists were under severe attack for seeking to erode white supremacy and nearly every issue of Butler's paper was devoted to countering the growing force of this attack. The most persistent charge was that the Populists were seeking to destroy white unity by attacking the white man's party. Butler's response was simply that he too favored a white man's party but not one run by Goldbugs and monopolists.<sup>9</sup> Yet, this argument as well as his continued call for economic reform was obviously having far less effect than before. Marion Butler, the Caucasian, and the Populist party were unquestionably on the defensive by late 1897; not because they had deserted their goals of economic and political equality but rather because these goals were no longer as meaningful to the great mass of people.

Reflecting the Populists' bewilderment at these swiftly changing currents, Butler desperately pleaded with his

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., September 9, 1897.



followers at one point not to be deceived by the cry of Negro dominance "as everybody" is in favor of white supremacy.<sup>10</sup> His constant refrain was that the monopolists were using this old bug-a-boo to obscure the real issues of finance and politics.<sup>11</sup>

By late 1897 and early 1898 it was apparent that race rather than economics would be the focus of the approaching election and on that basis the Populists would be terribly disadvantaged.<sup>12</sup> The most immediate problem facing Butler and the party was how to deal with this question which they still saw as a smokescreen. One suggestion came from W. E. Fountain, a very active Populist living in Tarboro, North Carolina. For Fountain the only way to end the use of the Negro "scarecrow" was to disfranchise him. Moreover, the Negro

is a factor in our politics, and has been under Democratic rule, and I firmly believe was kept so by Democrats for the sole purpose of demoralizing them and corrupting them and to use as a bug bear to scare white ignorant men,

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1897.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., September 23, October 7, October 21, November 11, and November 25, 1897.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. the similar prediction of Thomas H. Sutton in a letter to Marion Butler dated January 31, 1898, Marion Butler Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. Also compare the lengthy statement issued by the Populist party quoted in Edmunds, The Negro and Fusion Politics, 143, denouncing the cry of "Negro supremacy" as absurd and charging the Democrats with political motivations for raising the issue.

thereby solidifying them in the perpetuation of Democratic machine rule.<sup>13</sup>

Still other Populists believed the best tactic was precisely the opposite: counting on the Black vote to provide the margin of victory.<sup>14</sup>

Adding to their already sufficient difficulties, the increasingly independent Black leadership began to act in ways as annoying to the Populists as to the already incensed general white population. Responding to white demands for the lynching of any alleged Black rapist, Alex Manly, the editor of the Black Wilmington Daily Record, had the courage to say that, perhaps, many of these poor white girls were interested in Negro men and even enjoyed their "clandestine" meetings with Blacks. Even more offensive to whites, Manly hinted that even women of refinement found Black men attractive. In a final warning to Caucasian males, he threatened: "Don't ever think that your women will remain pure while you are debauching ours."<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, Manly's article only added fuel to white hatreds and reinforced the growing conviction that Blacks were no longer willing to stay in their "place." As perfect

---

<sup>13</sup>W. E. Fountain to Marion Butler, August 9, 1898, Butler Papers.

<sup>14</sup>James H. Sherrill to Marion Butler in ibid., dated September 26, 1898.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Donna J. Paoli, "Marion Butler's View of the Negro, 1889-1901" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1969), 62-63.

evidence of the earlier Democratic warnings, the Manly editorial was picked up and reprinted in nearly every Democratic paper in the state.

Faced with the impossible task of doing battle on completely foreign and undesirable grounds, the Populists resorted to their familiar tactic of reversing the Democratic slings and arrows. This was most notable when, with the election approaching, the Caucasian published an eight page supplement attacking the Democrats for promoting social intimacy and miscegenation. Democratic support for Black elected officials and Democratic appointments of Blacks were also sharply denounced.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these last minute attempts to stave off defeat, the Populists were overwhelmed in the returns. Totally reversing 1896, when the Fusions captured control of the General Assembly, 1898 saw the Democrats occupying one hundred and thirty-four seats to thirty for the Republicans and a disastrous and humiliating six for the Populists. Without the slightest doubt, the overwhelming importance of the Black issue explains this stunning reversal. James Sherrill, a frequent correspondent of Butler's, analyzed the returns:

Well, we have met a greater Waterloo than I had expected. . . . The nigger racket had its influence on our people and many of them did not go to the polls and the Republicans in various parts of the country openly advocated the Democratic ticket.

---

<sup>16</sup>Caucasian, October 20, 1898.

[In a later paragraph he added] I hope the Democrats will pass such legislation as will forever eliminate the nigger question, but fear they are a little too shrewd for that.<sup>17</sup>

Butler's own view of the returns was that "the Democrats won by the most contemptible and infamous methods that a party ever resorted to. . . ." He was also half convinced that, after the Democrats had made it clear they would not drop the "nigger" issue, the Populists should have resorted to a straight fight; but his hesitation sprang from the fear that ignoring the Black issue would have split the party.<sup>18</sup>

Closely following the election, Wilmington erupted in a violent race riot as political passions and severe social strains exceeded the bounds of rhetoric. In its wake the riot left three whites and eleven Blacks killed and twenty-five assorted wounded. Alex Manly's paper, the Record, was a principal target of the white rioters and Marion Butler's life was also threatened.<sup>19</sup>

The logical result of the political and social turbulence generated by the racial strain was the effort to disfranchise the Black voter, thereby further narrowing and defining the "color line." The standard view of the Populists' role in

---

<sup>17</sup>Letter from Sherrill to Butler dated November 11, 1898, Butler Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from Butler to J. S. Mitchell dated November 15, 1898, ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Edmunds, The Negro and Fusion Politics, 158-74 and Paoli, "Marion Butler's View of the Negro," 70.

Black disfranchisement has held that the former allies of the Black suddenly reversed their position and turned on the Black--partially as a psychological release for the frustration of having failed to achieve their economic and political reforms and partly as a means of ensuring for themselves a social status significantly above Blacks.<sup>20</sup>

The major flaw in this scenario, of course, is the dichotomy drawn between the Populists' views and actions before and after 1896. As this study has shown, the "racial tolerance" seen by many on the part of the Populists before 1896 was, in reality, very narrow and wholly dependent on political exigencies. It seems obvious that as early as 1894 political currents were threatening the Populist-Black alliance, but not for the reasons of status or because a psychological scapegoat for other frustrations was needed; on the contrary, politics still largely controlled their new relationship. Some Populists simply found it necessary in an effort to protect purely Populist goals, to support disfranchisement--others, like Marion Butler, with the same goals, rejected and opposed disfranchisement.

Another but related aspect of the discussion of disfranchisement suggests that the Populist movement itself, by splitting the white vote, was the major cause of Black disfranchisement. To eliminate the possibility of this

---

<sup>20</sup>See for example Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 62-66.

ever happening again, conservatives subsequently deprived the Black of his voting rights.<sup>21</sup> While partially true, this explanation also does not proceed far enough.

What it ignores first is the entire regional movement toward competitive race relations in the South--a competitiveness spurred by the changes in the southern society toward capitalism and industrialization and by the economic, political, and educational achievements of the Black population. The fact that this process was well underway by 1890--before the Populist revolt posed any serious threat to white solidarity--suggests the need to find a much more general explanation.<sup>22</sup> The movement for disfranchisement, for example, was underway as early as 1888 in Louisiana and Alabama. In expressing his support for such legislation, United States Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama provides a good insight into the entire character of the disfranchisement movement.

It is a question of race conflict. In whatever connection it is considered, whether in church or social relations, in business, professional or industrial employments, or in politics, it is a matter of race. Every result that we have reached, or that we can reach,

---

<sup>21</sup>Cf. the account in John Hope Franklin's popular textbook, From Slavery to Freedom (3rd Rev. Ed.; N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 338.

<sup>22</sup>See the dated but still useful discussion of disfranchisement in Mississippi by William A. Mabry, "Disfranchisement of the Negro in Mississippi," Journal of Southern History, IV (August, 1938), 318-33. Mabry sees the movement beginning in the early 1880's and led by white planters in the so-called Black counties--which suggests their increasing fears of the Black population.

whether it has been worked out by the Negroes in their natural progress or by the whites in their endeavors to elevate the Negroes, is a consequence of race conflict. Neither race is responsible for the conditions that made this conflict instinctive and irreconcilable, and neither can avoid the issue or its consequences under the circumstances in which both are placed.<sup>23</sup>

It is also instructive to observe that disfranchisement was carried out in four states--Alabama, Virginia, Texas, and Georgia--long after any possible Populist threat had disappeared.<sup>24</sup>

The second fact overlooked by the argument that Populism was the sole catalyst for disfranchisement is the very broad national support the movement received. Concerning the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890 the Nation, an important liberal journal, expressed its hope that the future would see a change, but "until that time comes it is the opinion of the wisest Republicans in Mississippi of both races that it is best for the State that the Negroes should not vote, and outsiders may well accept their judgments as to the matter."<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in an editorial by John L. Minor, Black editor of the New Orleans Weekly Pelican, February 16, 1889. Also see the earlier articles discussing white support for disfranchisement in Louisiana and the South, December 29, 1888, February 2, March 30 and May 4, 1889.

<sup>24</sup>Frederic D. Ogden, The Poll Tax in the South (Tuscalousa, Ala.: University of Alabama, 1958), 4-31. This work includes a very good discussion of the whole question of disfranchisement. It also sees the much more general force of the movement to disfranchise Blacks--and poor whites.

<sup>25</sup>"The Ballot in Mississippi," Nation, XXXXXV (August 25, 1892), 139-40.

In a rather direct slap at the principles of majority rule and democracy, the Nation's editor on yet another occasion asserted that the truth is

the problem is a most perplexing one, and the situation calls for the sympathy of outsiders. It is obvious that the negroes cannot be allowed the power in government to which their numerical preponderance would entitle them, but it is hard to see a method of restricting their votes which will not be objectionable to some element among the whites. The only hopeful feature of the situation is the evident anxiety of the best men in the state to find a solution which will be fair to all concerned.<sup>26</sup>

These early editorials in the Nation established the tone for most of those that followed both in that journal and elsewhere. Perhaps the most extreme position expressed appeared in the Forum which advocated the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>27</sup> Despite the apparent ultraism of this stance, as late as 1903 Harper's Weekly still favored repeal and suggested that public opinion in support of such a measure had made "considerable progress."<sup>28</sup>

The general line followed by most northern supporters of disfranchisement, however, was that as long as the method was constitutional and not solely applied to Blacks, they would approve it. The Nation was especially pleased when

---

<sup>26</sup>"Mississippi's Problem," ibid., XXXXXI (July 31, 1890), 86-87.

<sup>27</sup>Joseph C. Wickliffe, "Negro Suffrage a Failure: Shall We Abolish It," Forum, XIV (February, 1893), 797-804.

<sup>28</sup>"Recent Discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment," Harper's Weekly, XXXXVII (July 11, 1903), 1144.



Mississippi's poll tax and property qualifications were upheld in the United States Supreme Court, as they then might also be applied to the new "races" coming to America.<sup>29</sup> This same view seemed to hold for "ignorant" and "corrupt" whites. Numerous articles were in favor of applying qualifications to these voters as well as to Blacks and foreigners. The editor of the Outlook expressed this most vigorously:

We think the suffrage is not a natural right to be exercised by everyone who has come to years of distinction, but an acquired prerogative to be conferred upon those who have established, as a condition precedent, the ability to exercise it honestly and intelligently.<sup>30</sup>

In criticizing southern laws for their unequal application to Blacks, the Atlantic Monthly re-emphasized that the "most pitiable and most dangerous element in our composite national life" is the "hoard of ignorant 'poor whites' mostly of pure 'Anglo-Saxon' stock, who are being outstripped in the march of civilization even by the negroes." Of greater interest perhaps, the Atlantic also observed that the lack of desire or feeling in the North to save the Negro vote could be attributed to "that world-wide reaction against democracy which has been

---

<sup>29</sup>"Disfranchising a Race," Nation, LXVI (May 26, 1898), 398-99. Also compare "The Alabama Case," Outlook, LXXIV (May 9, 1903), 95-96 and "The Caste Notion of Suffrage," Nation, LXXVII (September 3, 1903), 182 which argued that if disfranchisement were applied unequally, it could result in a caste nation and ultimately destroy the Republic. The Nation moved in this direction in later articles but never dropped support of equally applied suffrage qualifications.

<sup>30</sup>"Reduction of Southern Representation in Congress," Outlook, LXXIX (January 7, 1905), 11.

noted by many recent Atlantic writers."<sup>31</sup> As the Atlantic intimated, there were, indeed, very few voices raised in defence of the Black voter and those that were were conspicuous by their presence.<sup>32</sup>

It is in this national atmosphere and amidst these much larger forces that the general movement toward disfranchisement--ostensibly of the Black voter--occurred in the South. In North Carolina a disfranchisement plan was introduced to the state legislature by the victorious Democratic party immediately after that body convened following the election of 1898. Copied largely from the Louisiana law, the North Carolina plan included three devices to limit the vote--a literary test, a poll tax, and the well known Grandfather clause. This latter feature was the key to the bill, as it was designed to allow the white to vote while specifically excluding Blacks. The clause gave the ballot to anyone whose ancestor had been a registered voter before 1860--thereby excluding Blacks whose grandfathers were slaves.

The Populists initially reacted by supporting the amendment as a way to allow the white electorate to vote their

---

<sup>31</sup>"Reconstruction and Disfranchisement," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXVIII (October, 1901), 434-35.

<sup>32</sup>Among the most forceful advocates of Black rights were Charles Henry Grosvenor, "The Negro Problem in the South," Forum, XXIX (August 16, 1900), 720-25; "Government by Terrorism," Independent, LII (August 16, 1900), 1997-98; and Archibald H. Grimke, "Why Disfranchisement is Bad," Atlantic Monthly, XCIV (July, 1904), 72-81.

principles and not their fears.<sup>33</sup> Immediately, however, Butler and others began to express concern about the amendment which would indeed strengthen the hand of the party in power if that party chose to manipulate the vote. By early March, 1899, this concern had turned to bitter opposition:

The election law is plain humbug. . . . When a political party gets up such a law, it shows it's afraid of an honest election and fair count. The law is made in the interest of the Democratic Bourbon machine, and your right to vote depends on whether they will let you vote or not. It disfranchises more whites than the Amendment will negroes. No difference between a negro and a white man with an office-hunting Democrat.<sup>34</sup>

Butler also polled his leadership regarding their reaction to his stand and was encouraged by their favorable response.<sup>35</sup>

The election of 1900 provided the battleground for the clash over disfranchisement, as the Democrats' constitutional amendment was submitted for the people's approval in that year. In a series of pronouncements, Butler clarified his views. In so doing he also further exposed the underlying reasons for both disfranchisement and the steadily increasing conflict so apparent between whites and Blacks in the South.

In a letter to George Wilcox of Carbondon, North

---

<sup>33</sup>Caucasian, February 23, 1899.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1899.

<sup>35</sup>Letter from Butler to Populist party leaders dated November 23, 1899, and responses especially T. L. Copeland to Butler, December 19, 1899, and W. B. York to Butler, December 11, 1899, Butler Papers. Also see the discussion of this entire point in Paoli, "Marion Butler's View of the Negro," 77-80.

Carolina, he repeated his well-worn condemnation of the Democrats for exploiting the Negro issue in order to get elected in 1898. He added further that the machine politicians never intended to keep their campaign promise of not disqualifying the illiterate white voter. But of even greater moment, he denounced the Grandfather clause for only providing the vote to the "trifling town negro who walks the streets of our town with eyeglasses and white hat cocked on the side of his head, who talks loud and takes up all the sidewalk." Butler added that this type of Black was offensive and he believed that it was individuals like this who provided the Democrats with a race issue. Whether true or not there is little doubt that Butler himself was beginning to transfer his pent up hostility over economic and political questions as well as his frustration over repeated defeats to the "trifling town negro." He reasoned that the Grandfather clause would provide the suffrage to town Blacks because it was scheduled to expire in 1908 leaving thereafter only the literacy tests and poll tax as obstacles to the poor and illiterate of both races. He also feared--with justice--that the United States Supreme Court would declare the Grandfather clause unconstitutional; leaving the other objectionable tests valid.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Marion Butler to George Wilcox dated January 1, 1900, Butler Papers. Butler also expressed his concern with the constitutionality of the clause in his article "Election in North Carolina" published in the Independent, LII (August 16, 1900), 1953-55.

Perhaps as significant as Butler's letter was the Populist Party's Executive State Committee's action endorsing the Wilcox letter as official policy. Shortly thereafter, however, the party split on this issue, although not as badly as the Republicans. In the aftermath, Marion Butler assumed the leadership of the Populist-G.O.P. anti-disfranchisement elements.<sup>37</sup>

Speaking to the United States Senate, Butler renewed his attack on the Grandfather clause calling it unconstitutional and designed to disqualify the socially neglected of both races. He especially deplored the fact that the Negro disfranchised

would be the good old country darky who was as faithful and true as steel to our mothers, wives and sisters during the late great war, and who is a good citizen and good laborer, who has never been offensive in politics nor in other ways. [The type of Negro remaining as voters would be those] active and offensive in politics; the trifling Negro<sup>38</sup> dude, who talks loud and takes up all the sidewalk.

Echoing Butler's comments, the Populist platform of 1900 scorned the proposed amendment for leaving the "most vicious, troublesome and obnoxious class of negroes" with the vote.<sup>39</sup> Despite stiff Populist opposition, the election

---

<sup>37</sup>Paoli, "Marion Butler's View of the Negro," 80-84.

<sup>38</sup>Congressional Record, 56 Cong., 1 Sess., Feb. 6, 1900, p. 1553. Also cf. his private correspondence with Furnifold M. Simmons repeating the same theme of "town negroes" left to vote while illiterates would be disqualified. Marion Butler to Furnifold M. Simmons, dated April 30, 1900, in Butler Papers.

<sup>39</sup>Caucasian, May 3, 1900.

returns showed a decisive majority in favor of disfranchisement. With a renewed majority in the legislature, the Democrats had broken forever the threat of a Populist revival in North Carolina. Marion Butler himself was subsequently replaced in the United States Senate by his Democratic rival Furnifold Simmons. Continuing as Populist Party National Chairman for a time, Butler made the final leap from Democratic white supremacist to Black Republican in 1904.

In Georgia, Tom Watson, like Marion Butler, faced the same disfranchisement question. In 1895, while still an active Populist, he totally rejected the idea. Attacking Ben Tillman's disfranchisement scheme in South Carolina, Watson asserted:

All this re-actionary legislation is wrong.

There can be no sound principle, consistent with our democratic theory of government, which says a negro worth \$300 is a better citizen than one worth \$200. . . .

The whole scheme of the Democrats of South Carolina is to perpetuate the rule of their party. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Also, like Butler, Watson continually charged the Democrats with using the Black issue as a "bug-a-boo" to frighten whites and to obscure the more important financial issues.<sup>41</sup>

Returning to political life in 1904 after a lengthy interlude of writing and farming, Watson faced an entirely new political situation. Long opposed to social intercourse,

---

<sup>40</sup>People's Party Paper, November 8, 1895. Also cf. Woodward, Tom Watson, 371.

<sup>41</sup>People's Party Paper, November 8, 1895.

Watson's first tentative reinvolvement with politics and the dangerous race issue came in an article he published in the Augusta Chronicle of April 11, 1904, which repeated his rather dated attack on Grover Cleveland for dining with Blacks.<sup>42</sup> Watson was also corresponding at this time with J. Max Barber, the editor of the Black newspaper, The Voice of the Negro, hoping to find out what whites had recently dined with Washington. Barber, whose newspaper's masthead held the name of Emmett J. Scott, Booker T. Washington's personal secretary, told Watson that "both Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland have dined with Mr. Washington this past year."<sup>43</sup>

Another suggestive glimpse into Watson's changing attitude is provided by a letter from John S. Cohen, managing editor of the Atlanta Journal, who sought to gain Watson's support for the Democrats on the state level in 1904. Cohen wrote: "more dear to us all than 'silver or gold,' is the preservation of racial integrity; and while I know how deeply you feel on the question of finance, I know that nearer to

---

<sup>42</sup>See in this connection the undated notes for a speech or article attacking Cleveland for dining with Frederick Douglass. This item was misfiled in the Watson Papers because of the appearance in it of several dates in 1886. Clearly, however, these dates were in reference to the time such damaging information about Cleveland was being published and not when Watson prepared the notes. It is my opinion that this item filed in Box 1 File 1 for January, 1886, should appear with the material for April, 1904.

<sup>43</sup>J. Max Barber to Tom Watson, April 11, 1904, ibid. Also see Barber to Watson, May 26, 1904, asking for his \$25.00 for providing the information on Washington.

your heart is the question of white supremacy."<sup>44</sup>

The occasion for Watson's renewed political activity was his nomination by the Populist party to the Presidency of the United States. Speaking to several audiences in various parts of the country in September, Watson hammered on the theme that his Republican and Democratic opponents had engaged in social mixing with Negroes. If Judge Parker, the Democratic nominee, had not directly, certainly Cleveland had; and everyone knew of Roosevelt's dining with Booker Washington.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to recognize, however, that little about these charges and allegations were new. Indeed, the berating of Grover Cleveland for appointing Blacks to socially sensitive posts and dining with Frederick Douglass or others was an old familiar Populist refrain. The only difference now was the heightened importance of the race issue and Watson's corresponding increased discussion of it. Moreover, the old "Populist" demands were still repeated. For example, in Nashville right beside his allegation about Roosevelt and Parker, he blistered Parker for being supported by "the great corporations, with Belmont to represent them--Belmont

<sup>44</sup>John S. Cohen to Tom Watson, July 21, 1904, ibid.

<sup>45</sup>See speech in ibid. given at St. Louis on September 6, 1904. Also compare speech given in Nashville, Tenn., in September, 1904, in Watson, The Life and Speeches, 265-68.



the American agent of the Rothschilds, and the Standard Oil crowd."<sup>46</sup>

Thus, in 1904 confronted by the reality of a race issue far exceeding in emotional intensity that of the early 1890's, Watson responded by supporting disfranchisement. His doing so, however, does not indicate any terribly dramatic switch in attitude from humane and tolerant radical to reactionary bigot but is rather only a response to changing social conditions in full accord with his earlier expressed attitude toward Blacks. Just as clearly, Watson also hoped that Black disfranchisement would remove the last major obstacle to genuine reform--the "bug-a-boo" of negro supremacy.<sup>47</sup>

Watson was crushed again in 1904. Yet, despite his continued rhetorical attacks on corporations, August Belmont, and the Rothschilds, it was obvious that something beside Tom Watson had been defeated. Populism itself--at least pure Populism--was dead; and its demise was not attributable to the return of prosperity. Certainly that may have helped--but as depression only aggravated much deeper concerns, so prosperity only soothed the surface irritation. What had happened to southern Populism was that the underlying social and economic changes in favor of corporations, machines, and capitalists which

---

<sup>46</sup>Watson, Life and Speeches, 268-69.

<sup>47</sup>For his conversion to support of disfranchisement see Woodward, Tom Watson, 370-72.

originally spawned Populism had now created a new, more immediate manifestation of their disturbing presence. Competitive race relations with its attendant explosive violence and virulent white supremacy, churned up by emerging capitalism, a fragmented white majority, and a changing Black population, dramatically--and with abrupt suddenness--replaced Populist ideology as the best vehicle to relieve the almost overwhelming configuration of social and cultural strains. This is not to argue, however, that the strains that produced Populism disappeared; on the contrary, they continued and were felt by many, but for a time at least race hatred acted in such a way as to relieve both the strains producing and supporting Populism while also encompassing the newly emergent tension generated by racial competition. No single figure better demonstrates the truth of this observation than the contradictory and passionate Populist leader, Tom Watson.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ENIGMA OF TOM WATSON

Tom Watson's career embodied both the older purely Populist concerns and the newer racial strains so manifest in the "Progressive" South. As such, Watson's life spanned the years between Populist "radicalism" and the racial "demagoguery" of the Vardamans, the Bilbos, and the Huey Longs.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the greatest injury done to the understanding of Populism, and indirectly, America in this period has revolved around the dichotomy projected by so many into the life of Tom Watson. Divided by the several years of quiet withdrawal encompassing the period 1896 to 1904, Watson's early Populist activities are usually depicted as liberal, compassionate, and tolerant. The period after 1904, in stark contrast is most

---

<sup>1</sup>This whole period of southern radicalism while unquestionably laced with severe racial bigotry needs further exploration in light of the evident "categorizing" done by mid-twentieth century liberals. While racial slurs were a way of life for many of these men, this does not erase their reform accomplishments nor does it indicate how the southern racial and social climate would have been improved with "conservatives" doing the racial baiting. For the more worthy features of these men see Kirwan's Revolt of the Rednecks and the very good recent biography of Huey Long by T. Harry Williams, Huey Long (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

often viewed as a long, sickening plunge into the dark abyss of racial hatred and bigotry extending to his death in 1922. The source of this concept is unquestionably C. Vann Woodward's very influential biography of Watson.<sup>2</sup> In a critical passage, Woodward wrote: "His life was a paradox. This is especially true when the two parts of his career, divided by the interval of eight years that began in 1896, are contrasted."<sup>3</sup> With almost undue circumspection, however, Woodward refused to hypothesize what caused this dichotomy. He does hint that frustration might have played a role.<sup>4</sup>

In an article written much later, Woodward went a great deal further in his analysis. Agreeing with Richard Hofstadter, Woodward said that many Populists did tend to become "cranky, illiberal and sour." He added that Tom Watson was perhaps the classic example: "When Watson soured he went all the way." Woodward is still not quite sure why, but he is willing to guess that in some cases, reform movements seem to appeal to personalities with unstable psychological traits. In the specific case of the Populists, however, Woodward credited a

---

<sup>2</sup>In all fairness it ought to be observed, however, that even Watson's contemporaries were confused by the apparently abrupt transitions in Watson's rather checkered career. Cf., for example, "The Passing of Tom Watson," Outlook, CXXXII (October 11, 1922), 228-29.

<sup>3</sup>Tom Watson, preface.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 331.

large part of the explanation to embittered frustration-- "repeated and tormenting frustration of both leaders and the led."<sup>5</sup> The reader is left with the decided impression that, if no one else, Watson at least was mentally ill. This interpretation, of course, is very close to Hofstadter's contention that the Populists as a body were paranoid or pathological.

The complexity of Watson's political career and thought have thus made Watson a useful source for various interpretations of Populism. Woodward emphasized the liberal Populist "phase" of his career and only regretted the later excesses. The critics of Populism find his bigoted "phase" a useful piece of evidence to support their charges of proto-fascism or irrationality in the movement. A recent critic, Professor Charles Crowe, has suggested that the years of liberalism have been underplayed and that, in reality, Watson's entire political career was characterized by a commitment to white supremacy and "authentic fanaticism." Based on these observations, Professor Crowe concluded that Populism itself was firmly committed to white superiority and, indeed, that most Populists would have rather foregone social and economic reforms than suffer change in the racial status quo. Despite Crowe's general tone of certitude he concludes on a note of hesitancy:

---

<sup>5</sup>"The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," 70.

If anyone wishes to insist that an element of mystery remains when all the factors have been taken into account, it still seems reasonably safe to say that only an extremely precise and thorough modern biographer could hope to provide the answers. Meanwhile it is necessary to recognize the fact that Watson and his movement had little to do with radicalism or with the fate and aspirations of Black people.<sup>6</sup>

The most interesting feature of all these works is the evident need to put Watson in some sort of category. It would not be possible, apparently, for one to be both racist and economically radical. Watson must be either thoroughly bigoted with some eccentric radicalism or he must be a liberal whose frustrations drive him into mental illness. This leads to another observation, namely, the common assumption, almost an axiom, that the holding of racist beliefs is by definition pathological, or at the very least, irrational and, certainly, deplorable. Perhaps what is needed for Watson and the Populists is not another "extremely precise" and more modern biographical study but simply a different--perhaps even radical--approach.

Any student of Tom Watson's life must inevitably ask why he was a Populist. Poverty is not a very satisfactory answer. Like so many other Populists, particularly in the South, Watson had a very respectable family heritage and he himself was the undoubted social and political leader in and around

---

<sup>6</sup>Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists and Blacks Reconsidered," 111, and Saunders, "Southern Populism and the Negro," 240-61, also emphasizes this element of ambiguity in both Watson and the movement.

Thompson, Georgia, his home town. Watson's father owned an estate worth \$55,000 in 1860--including forty-five slaves--an estate which placed Squire Watson at the very top of Georgia's social and economic hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> Years later, during and after the Populist years, the Squire's son--by then sporting the honorable title of Colonel--was to become one of Georgia's largest landholders. Indeed, eventually Colonel Watson would have more tenants on his "farm" than his father had slaves on the plantation.<sup>8</sup> A photograph taken in later years and proudly published in his Jeffersonian Magazine pictures the Colonel, in the foreground, astride a large white stallion. In the rear of the picture the family home with its large white columns provides the setting for an idealic southern family portrait replete with numerous Black servants in close attendance.<sup>9</sup> As Professor Woodward has noted, Watson clearly clung to his memories of the good life in the old South. His novel, Bethany, published in 1904, vividly expressed his yearning for the long dead epoch:

That old Southern homestead was a little kingdom, a complete social and industrial organism, almost wholly sufficient unto itself, asking less of the outer world than it gave. How sound, sane, healthy it appears,

---

<sup>7</sup>Woodward, Tom Watson, 4.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>9</sup>Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, I (February, 1907), no page number.

even now, when<sup>10</sup> compared to certain phases of certain other systems!

Indeed, his frustration at not being able to return to the older paternalist social world of the ante-bellum South is perhaps a far more significant source of Populist revolt than economic grievances.

Watson's background, however, is only a tentative step forward in understanding the man and his motivations. Of equal importance is the recognition in Watson's life of the patterned extremism so similar to that evidenced by numerous other Populists. It is this extremism which provides one clear thread of continuity in Watson's life. Like Ignatius Donnelly, whom he so greatly resembled, Watson acted, for most of his career, like a great prism, refracting with remarkable fidelity the major social transformation the South experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus Watson's exaggerated language and symbolic formulations so characteristic of the Populist years were also present later--only his concerns change reflecting the altering social configurations around him. Yet having said this it is necessary to observe that even the content of his thought does not undergo the drastic changes so often suggested. On the contrary, it is quite possible to delineate clear lines of continuity, both before and after 1896, even in this important area.

---

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Woodward, Tom Watson, 6. Cf. ibid., 135, 347-51.



In the early 1890's Watson devoted his life and nearly all his energies to Populism; that is, to the social, political, and economic ideology which espoused the reassertation of individualism within the framework of the Cooperative Commonwealth. Certainly, one would have to characterize this phase of his career radical and humanitarian, as it aimed at achieving some amelioration of economic competition and a larger role for the individual within the boundaries of the corporate state emerging in America. In these years, 1890-1896, the other questions which came to obsess him later were present but largely peripheral. Like the several other Populists examined earlier, Watson tended to take up one extremist position after another--but clearly only had the time or energy to devote to one at a time. The first, to reiterate, was pure Populism. The second was his unceasing preoccupation and concern about race--an anxiety which Watson shared with the majority of the southern populace and with many others in the nation at large.

Watson's conversion to racial bigotry after 1904 is not particularly surprising nor is it, as Woodward suggests, a radical departure from his past attitudes and action. What was different about the years after 1904 was his tendency to fixate on race.

In June, 1905 Watson's most revealing statement relative to his changing concern about the racial question appeared in his latest publication, Tom Watson's Magazine. The title of his article, "Is the Black Man Superior to the White?,"

suggested a theme which was to reappear again and again. The article's subject was Booker T. Washington's assertion that the Black race "had developed more rapidly in the thirty years of its freedom than the Latin race has in one thousand years of freedom." Watson, reacting sharply to this claim, attacked Washington personally and also sought to demonstrate the absurdity of Washington's comments. Reminding the Black leader of his many northern benefactors, he wondered if they "will like you better when they hear you putting forth a claim to race superiority. . . . Whenever the North wakes to that fact you are going to feel the east wind." Turning to the alleged Black superiority, he reminded Washington of several "facts." First, he noted that not all Blacks are Americans--meaning that the "Doctor" had left Africa, Santo Domingo, and Haiti out of his computations. Naturally, none of these other spots had ever achieved anything approaching "civilization." In the realms of science, in the domains of sculpture, literature, and the fine arts, the Black had never tread: "No word has ever fallen from his lips that was not the echo of what some white man had already said." Turning from the dirth of Black achievements, Watson contrasted page after page of the "great" accomplishments of the Anglo-Saxon and Latin "races." Shakespeare and the Renaissance--among much else--were hustled forward to speak for the white race and the civilization it created. Concluding, he asked "what does civilization owe to the negro? The answer, Nothing!

Nothing! Nothing!"<sup>11</sup>

The most striking thing about this long diatribe is, of course, Watson's evident insecurity. Indeed, the very fact that he felt impelled to spend pages "proving" the superiority of the white man only reinforces the suspicion that he is deeply anxious about the relative status of Blacks and whites--an anxiety evidently shared by his readers. Predictably, his correspondence following this editorial is heavily weighted with letters from readers approving of his stance--often going beyond Watson to reject Washington's assertions about Black progress even in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Another revealing aspect of Watson's attack was his choice of targets. Certainly Booker T. Washington, while admired by many whites, must also have generated much anger and envy as his words and advice received the close and respectful attention of Presidents and other notables. His dinner engagement with President Roosevelt also made him a national focus of indignant whites. Thus, Washington himself, as much as his remarks, served Watson as an effective symbol of the increasing Black threat to the racial status quo. One is reminded, of course, of the similar role played by Baron Rothschild in earlier years.

In the months following the appearance of the Washington editorial, Watson's caustic comments turned more and more to

---

<sup>11</sup>"Is the Black Man Superior to the White," Tom Watson's Magazine, I (June, 1905), 392-98.

<sup>12</sup>See numerous letters to Watson in mid-1905, Watson Papers.

the subject of Blacks and particularly Blacks who did not know their "place." In April, 1906, Bishop H. M. Turner was described as an "ungrateful Negro" for criticizing the United States and calling its flag a "contemptible rag." Using Turner as a strawman, Watson again assailed Blacks and their African heritage:

The African negro has always been a distinct type, an unknown type, a savage type, a non-progressive type. Left to himself, he wore no clothing, built no houses, had no commerce, systematized no production of any sort and never had the faintest conception of doing anything to improve himself or his condition.

Thus, the benighted savage in Africa, Haiti, or Santo Domingo had little or nothing to offer the civilized world. Only in America could the Black achieve even a "semi-civilized" status.

Returning to his central target, he found Turner's insults only "nonsense and self-assertive insolence. . . ." Linking Turner to an older symbol, Watson marveled "that Doctor Washington, Judson Lyons, [Black Register of the Treasury] Bishop Turner 'and others among 'em' do not pack up and go straight back to dear old Africa."<sup>13</sup>

At the height of Watson's increasingly vitriolic racial attacks, Atlanta experienced a tragic race riot similar to that which racked Wilmington, North Carolina, earlier and numerous other American cities then and later. Unlike the

---

<sup>13</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "The Ungrateful Negro," Watson's Magazine, IV (April, 1906), 165-74. Also compare the similar theme in Watson, "Free Lectures for Washington Negroes," Watson's Magazine, V (July, 1906), 15-19.

disturbances experienced in the Black communities in the mid-1960's--which were essentially self-destructive--these "riots" were largely white rampages in Black areas followed by interracial conflict; the Blacks always sustaining by far the greater damage. The Atlanta riot, like the others, was a violent symbol of the increasingly competitive character of interracial relations. Tom Watson's editorials provide other evidence of the same social illness.<sup>14</sup>

The Atlanta riot provided no catharsis for Watson, however, as his rhetoric in 1907 was even more enflamed than in the two previous years. In February he published an editorial which allows a glimpse into the nature of the problem as Tom Watson experienced it. Like Butler, Watson felt compelled to distinguish between and among Blacks. Attacking Negro secret societies--a familiar theme--Watson argued that Blacks were ahead of whites in organizing and as a result younger Blacks were expressing "greater hostility toward whites." Such Blacks were, in a word, "less respectful." Moving from the ills resulting from secret societies, he castigated the excesses of "idle negroes" and "surly blacks elbowing white girls and ladies to one side on the sidewalks." He cautioned his readers, however, to discriminate carefully between good and bad Blacks and show favor to the good. Indeed, for Tom Watson the bad Black was "the key to the negro problem

---

<sup>14</sup>A useful discussion of the riot and the mounting social tension is found in Woodward, Tom Watson, 378-79.

in the South."<sup>15</sup> Watson elaborated on these views in late 1907. Recounting his early life, he described with genuine affection the long lost world of paternalist race relations:

As a playmate in those days, as a companion on the hunt for coons and 'possums, who gave greater satisfaction than the negro? Who was so congenial when it came to fishing in the creek or lagoon, night or day? And why? He was jolly, he had a passion for the frolic, he would take orders from the 'little boss,' he would tote the torch, cut the tree where the 'possum clung, would pull seine through the lagoon, would 'wait on' the white boy-- who so dearly loved to be 'waited on.' Thus I came to know the negro nature well in slavery days, and it never occurred to me then that the black race was a menace to the white.

Watson also recalled a similar post-Reconstruction world.

Radical Reconstruction itself had been horrible, but it had passed and the Blacks had "dropped back to their old places . . . " not voting or, if they did, "they did it with a humility which seemed to realize that such ballots would not essentially vary the count." At least this was his recollection of life in the country--he hesitated, however, to speak for the city. Thus, flat on his back politically, the Negro did not dare to kick:

He fell back into his position as a laborer; his 'yee-haw' encouraged the sturdy mule in every cotton field; you could lure his wife or daughter to cock; you could get his boy to curry your horse, hoe the garden, and do general lot-work around the house. The negro of the secret society had not been evolved. The eighteen year old strumpet was not tramping to school; and the sixteen year old buck was not dozing in a back street by day as a preparation for a marauding expedition by night.

How then did the Black become the "monster" that he did?

---

<sup>15</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "Negro Secret Societies," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, I (February, 1907), 166-69.

Watson's answer illuminates many of the seeming enigmas of his life, of Populism, and of late nineteenth century southern history. The southern white, of course, revived this sleeping "monster"--with hopes of political advantage to be gained but "God! What a blunder it was." By the 1890's this new Black voter posed a major problem to the Populists and, according to Watson, left them bewildered.

If we ignored him entirely, he would become a balance of power to destroy us. Neither of the opposing parties would hesitate to use him to defeat us. Would it not be best to invite him to our meetings, give him political education, take his guidance into Southern hands, and cultivate his confidence?

All this was done--the Negro was mustered to meetings, was educated in political principles, and was drawn by the thousands from the Republican ranks. All were Populists--not Republicans nor Democrats. "Principles took the place of names." As Populists the Negro gave us no trouble whatever. They were "docile" and made no demands. "And with the negroes all in our ranks, the Republicans eliminated, and the Democrats defeated, we saw no danger, no general menace, in the colored race. We had him under complete control and meant to keep him so."<sup>16</sup> There is really remarkably little the historian can add to elucidate further the Populists' intentions and attitude toward the Black in the years prior to 1896. Having failed, however, Watson, Populism and the

---

<sup>16</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "The Negro Question," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, I (November, 1907), 1032-40.  
(Watson's italics)

South entered a period of intense racial competition to which Watson responded with rhetoric. The South as a whole responded with de jure segregation, disfranchisement, and with frequent outbursts of bloody violence.

Following the publication of this editorial, Watson's attention to the Negro problem rapidly waned and from November, 1907, to August, 1908, not a single item on Blacks appeared in his magazine. Appropriately, in August Watson republished his Booker Washington editorial which opened his "Black phase." After 1908 the Black was seldom mentioned again in any of Watson's publications.<sup>17</sup>

The Roman Catholic hierarchy replaced the Black as the focal point of Watson's jibes and verbal blasts. Like his racial comments, Watson's criticisms of the Catholic church have been largely dismissed as another example of bigotry and further evidence of mental instability.<sup>18</sup>

C. Vann Woodward especially tends to treat his preoccupation with Catholicism as less than rational. He particularly emphasizes Watson's attacks on individuals notably Cardinal James Gibbons and Bishop Dennis J. O'Connell. He also deplores the "lurid revelations" about the convent and the confessional

---

<sup>17</sup>One of the rare items appeared in 1914 which coupled the Black and the Catholic priest--another of his symbolic figures of evil. "The Sinister Portent of the Negro Priest," Watson's Magazine, XIX (June, 1914), 88-93.

<sup>18</sup>Woodward, Tom Watson, 420.



to which Watson unquestionably devoted much space and time.<sup>19</sup> Rereading these dusty pages of the Jeffersonian, one is tempted to agree that Watson is simply deranged and that any need for further consideration is at an end. There are difficulties, however, which refuse to be explained so easily.

The most important of these is the larger framework within which the more sensational and extreme statements are couched. Despite his attacks on some individuals, Watson's basic concern is with the institutional Church and with the doctrine and dogma which emanate from it. While Watson unquestionably emphasized these fears in the period after 1907, nevertheless, they can still be found even in the first years of Watson's political career. As early as 1878 Watson was sufficiently interested in the subject to clip an item from a newspaper which depicted the Roman Catholic hierarchy as a direct and mortal threat to the Republic.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 1912 Watson also mentioned that twenty years before he had written an article entitled "A Good Catholic" which elaborated his concern about the Roman Catholic menace.<sup>21</sup>

During the Populist years, Watson devoted little attention

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 420-22.

<sup>20</sup>Item from the Christian Advocate dated May 23, 1878. Also cited in Chapter II.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "The Roman Catholic Hierarchy: The Deadliest Menace to Our Liberties and Our Civilization," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, XIV (February, 1912), 775.

to anything but the questions of money and economic privilege. The few items which are recorded in his paper, however, directly reflect his deep-seated anxiety about organized religion of every kind. Following a vote on Irish Home Rule in the British House of Lords, Watson bitterly attacked the Anglican Bishops who voted against the measure for their generally reactionary position and because they were always found allied with the "established princes of the State." Because the aristocracy supported the Church, Watson believed that one should not be surprised "that the Bishops should blindly follow the English aristocracy and vote against the people."<sup>22</sup>

Early in the following year Watson wrote the first criticism of what would later become a refrain--namely, that the Pope and the papal hierarchy lived far beyond their needs and at the people's expense. Interestingly, directly adjacent to this discussion was a probing examination of the new "Palace" erected by Cornelius Vanderbilt.<sup>23</sup>

Like Donnelly's criticism of the Church's influence on Ireland, Watson deplored the poverty rampant in Italy--in his view another result of the excessive taxation of the poor used to support the "sinful wastefulness of church and state. . . ."<sup>24</sup> Watson was also convinced that the Catholic

---

<sup>22</sup>People's Party Paper, September 15, 1893.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1894.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1896.

hierarchy was seeking to control politics and ultimately the government itself in America. He saw the evil hand of the Church involved in the Republican National Convention's rejection of a resolution advocating the separation of public funds from sectarian causes. He believed the Church objected because of the immense funds they received from the United States Treasury.<sup>25</sup>

It is most important to see that Watson's criticism in these early years was not directed solely at the Catholic Church. For Watson, as for many others, the union of Church and State was a grave danger to both individuals and to reform:

Whenever a Church unites with a State and gets its hands into the public treasury, it invariably becomes corrupt and un-Christian. Its interests being the same as those of the ruling powers of the State, it becomes a partner with the State in oppressing the masses and opposing reform.<sup>26</sup>

These fears were also found in the writings of other Americans, a fact reflected in the front page article reprinted by Watson from the Literary Digest entitled the "Menace of Romanism." The writer concluded that the papacy in 1895 was as interested in "universal jurisdiction" as it had ever been in the dim past.<sup>27</sup> Watson was also writing against a background of Anglican opposition to Irish Home Rule and the deep hostility

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. Also compare April 3, 1896, and September 27, 1895.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1896.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., November 15, 1895.

of English liberals to the continued union of Church and State in Great Britain.

Like so many other Populists, Watson also drew a strong distinction between God and the Church. In a lengthy signed editorial, Watson explored an astonishingly modern subject. He asked "Where is God?" In light of devouring floods, destructive fires, pestilence, war, successful crime, the triumph of wrong and the suffering of innocence, Watson believed that no question could be more apt. He urged his readers not to look for God among those prostitutes of their high calling in both the Church and the State, nor to blame the General of an army for the wrongs of his Lieutenants. Rather if one was to find God, he must look beyond the small and often terrible events of a day to the sweep of man's progress, to the ultimate triumph of good men and women, to the best in human aspirations, and to those voices lifted in the search for right and justice. There, for Tom Watson, God could be found.<sup>28</sup>

Following his defeat in 1896 Watson turned his attentions from politics to historical writing. As his biographer has observed, the change was abrupt. Watson who had devoted most of his waking hours and probably his dreams to Populism for six years suddenly turned his back on those years. The void left in his life was filled with the writing of history but of a sort which could not be characterized as detached or

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1895.

unemotional. For Tom Watson, as Ignatius Donnelly, writing was simply another vehicle to relieve the same social strains affecting him and so many others. His history, of course, was Populist history; it was also passionate and emotion laden.<sup>29</sup> On one Sunday morning he wrote six thousand words and yet he could still say that the pen frequently moved "all too slow to follow the burning thought"--equally often his pages were "blotted with tears."<sup>30</sup> Writing The Story of France and a life of Napoleon, his central theme was the oppression and "the corrupting influence of the union between Church and State. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

Watson also continually returned to his major charge that the Church and its officials were given special privileges and shared a uniquely beneficial relationship with the State. Employing Napoleon as a vehicle to express these ideas, Watson had him say that he is a Republican because he hated "the Old Order . . . ." The Old Order, of course, included the Crown, the aristocracy and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Why does Napoleon hate the "Old Order"? It is because "the privileged have combined, have closed avenues of progress for the lower

---

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Woodward, Tom Watson, 335-42.

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in ibid., 336.

<sup>31</sup>From the preface to The Story of France: From the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte (2 vol.; N.Y.: Macmillan, 1899), v.

classes, have taken for a few what is the common heritage of all."<sup>32</sup> In a ringing tribute to the ill-fated Emperor, Watson reveals more about the Populist mind and his reasons for hating the Catholic Church than he does about Napoleon.

As long as time shall last his name will inspire not only the individual, but the masses also. Wherever people have heard enough, read enough, thought enough to feel that absolutism in king or priest is wrong; that special privilege in clan or clique is wrong; that monopoly of power, patronage, wealth, or opportunity is wrong, there the name of Napoleon will be spoken with reverence, despot though he became for in his innermost fiber he was a man of the people, crushing to atoms feudalism, caste, divine right, and hereditary imposture.<sup>33</sup>

Returning to politics after these years of writing, Watson took up the editorial reins of Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine. His first mention of the Catholic Church occurs in a familiar context. Exploring its relation to French society prior to the Revolution, Watson asserted that it was too powerful and as a result "the higher priesthood became an aristocracy, imitating in every respect the feudal aristocracy which was rich, idle and licentious."<sup>34</sup> Watson returned to this theme again in June, 1908. In a very lucid article marked by none of his later excesses in language or style, he fully explored the grounds for his opposition to the Church

---

<sup>32</sup>Watson, Napoleon, 48-49.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas E. Watson, Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, I (February, 1907), 173.

Like his earlier attacks, Watson's criticism focused on the Papal hierarchy and not on the individual Catholic. Napoleon was censured for the Concordat of 1801 which "virtually chained France once more to Superstition, Idolatry, and Priest-rule;" and taxes were imposed on every Frenchman--regardless of faith--to support "a specially favored priesthood."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the phrase "special privilege" became a haunting refrain. Turning to the United States, Watson accused the Church of drawing vast sums from the public treasury and for insidiously corrupting national, state, and local politics. Watson's criticisms also reached to the Church's imposition of dogma on its members and for isolating them "from hearing, reading or thinking anything which might encourage doubt." He coupled these comments with a scathing attack on the Church's generally reactionary social and political perspective; freedom of worship, of thought, of labor, of the vote were all, in Watson's view, threatened by the Church. Papal support of Spanish arms in Cuba prior to 1898 was also deplored. Concluding, Watson rejected the charges of religious bigotry raised against him and repudiated as well the suggestion that his comments were directed at the individual Catholic.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "The Catholic Hierarchy and Politics," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, II (June, 1908), 295.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 298.

This is the last article to appear on this subject until early 1910. From 1904, when Watson returned to active political life, until 1910, Watson's interests were only sporadically engaged by the Catholic question. Indeed, this is on the whole true for the entire period 1890-1910. Yet, what he did write in these years displayed a clear continuity of thought. There is certainly little evidence to support the picture of a pre-1896 liberal stance and a post-1896 period of frustrated bigotry.

In early 1910, however, one can discern the outlines of a new pattern emerging. In that year Watson's attentions came to rivet almost exclusively on the Catholic Church and built to a peak of emotional intensity by 1914.

In August, 1910, the first of a series of articles appeared under the general title "The Roman Catholic Hierarchy: The Deadliest Menace to Our Liberties and Our Civilization." The editorials written under this heading have become Tom Watson's most famous or infamous. The series ran through October, 1912, and were augmented by two shorter groups--one on Cardinal Gibbons and the other on "The Secret Instructions of the Jesuits." While the "Hierarchy" series ended in 1912, Watson's preoccupation with Catholicism did not. Indeed, at times in 1913 and 1914 entire issues of his magazine were devoted to nothing else. With one exception--June, 1914--the "Negro problem" which so preoccupied Watson from 1904 until 1908 is not mentioned. The same waning of interest is also observed



in his discussion of the more "Populist" subjects such as plutocrats and big business.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest articles in 1910 still reveal the same sort of concerns that had always been present. In April, for example, Watson accused William Randolph Hearst of "kowtowing to the Pope."<sup>38</sup>

The first several issues of the "Hierarchy" series also seem well reasoned and at times extremely erudite. Their principal target is the Church's unfortunate influence on American life--again a very familiar theme. Special privileges, censorship, superstition, undue political influence, the "leeching" of public funds are all discussed and deplored. As before, the focus of his assault is the hierarchy.<sup>39</sup>

For the first time, however, the reader is exposed to several new subjects. Most important is Watson's allusions to sexual license on the part of priests: "We listen as the bull-necked brute in the Confessional turns a woman wrongside-outwards, plying her with one obscene question after another, until her whole consciousness has been sown

---

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Woodward, Tom Watson, 418.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas E. Watson, "Kowtowing to the Pope," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, IV (April, 1910), 277-82. Cf. Watson, "Is It Nothing to You That This Country Is Becoming a Papal Fief?," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, IV (May, 1910), 367-70.

<sup>39</sup>See for example Thomas E. Watson, "The Roman Catholic Hierarchy," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, V (August, 1910), 621, 623, 628. Also Watson, "Hierarchy," ibid., V (September, 1910), 709-18.

with impure suggestions."<sup>40</sup> This exaggerated concern over the "licentious priest" gradually came to dominate--although it never completely replaced Watson's more temperate and reasoned approach. It is possible, of course, to dismiss these more wildly distorted articles as simply the ravings of a madman but to do so one must ignore certain difficulties. Perhaps most important is Watson's couching of his concern in the context of sexual themes; the most basic, used repeatedly, involves the violation of some fragile innocent young woman by the brute priest. At times this lustful priest is even given a persona and identified with a few specific individuals. Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, Arch-Bishop Farley of New York, and Bishop O'Connell of Boston are singled out for special attention:

But look at the faces of the priests of modern Rome! Study the lustful mouths, bulging eyes, dew-lapped necks, and plethoric physical robustness of those Irish O'Donahues and Cronins, and Phelans, O'Connells, and O'Briens!

We present to you the faces of certain well-known American prelates--among them, that of Boston's new Cardinal, O'Connell. Look upon those faces, carefully. FOLLOW THE SENSUAL LINES OF THOSE PICTURED COUNTENANCES!

Please study O'Connell's face. Did you ever see such pride, arrogance and lust? . . . Just use your common sense, when you study that arrogant, haughty, voluptuous countenance!<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Watson, "Hierarchy," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, V (August, 1910), 623. Cf. 626.

<sup>41</sup>Watson, "Hierarchy," Watson's Magazine, XIV (April, 1912), 944-45. Indeed, this entire issue is characterized by a total devotion to the theme of the lustful priest. Cf. as well Watson's "A Series of Open Letters to His Eminence, Cardinal James Gibbons," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, especially XV (May, 1912), 36-41. Also cf. Woodward, Tom Watson, 420-22.

While Watson's fears here are clearly "irrational," they nevertheless have had a long and persistent history in America. This same refrain alluding to the sexual deviations of priests has been present in America from the early 1830's and the rise of the Know Nothing Party to the very present.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, the wide-ranging appeal of such themes can only be understood as the product of deeply rooted social anxieties. The use of the bull-necked priest, the Confessional or Convent and the innocent woman unquestionably act as an elaborate symbolic expression of these anxieties and strains. In the case of Tom Watson certainly something of the sort is involved. Only after years of sporadic concern over the relationship of the Church to the State, does he turn his full attention to the "problem." When he does only sexual deviance is sufficiently expressive to convey the great depth of his anxiety and concern about the organized Church.

Even in doing so, however, the reader is still struck by the lucid and reasonable quality of his writing--at least for many months. Only occasionally do these extremely exaggerated fears intrude. It should also be mentioned that his reactions are also fueled by the Catholic church's response to his writings. In New York, for example, his magazine was successfully boycotted beginning with the earliest of the

---

<sup>42</sup>Cf. David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," MVHR, XLVII (September, 1960), 205-24.

"Hierarchy" issues.<sup>43</sup>

In mid-June, 1912, Watson was finally arrested for sending obscene literature through the mails. He complained, of course, that the Romanists had instigated the charge. While eventually acquitted, this public censure served to enrage further an already intensely bitter and emotionally excited individual.<sup>44</sup>

Adding to the plausibility of the sexual theme as an elaborate metaphor, we find the same kind of framework expressed in much the same language in the other area of Watson's alleged bigotry--the Leo Frank case. The case of Leo Frank remains to this day the blackest mark against Watson's reputation. Little sympathy is wasted on the man who so aroused the mass of Georgians with his enflamed rhetoric that they eventually lynched the ill-fated, youthful Leo Frank. Certainly, Watson deserves no sympathy; but perhaps it is now possible to attempt to understand what relation this blatant act of anti-Semitism had to Watson's earlier "liberal" Populist years.

Leo Frank was a rather young and apparently sensitive superintendent of a pencil factory in Atlanta. Unfortunately, he also happened to be in his factory at the moment one of his female workers--Mary Phagan--was sexually molested and

---

<sup>43</sup>Watson, "Hierarchy," Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine, V (September, 1910), 711 and Woodward, Tom Watson, 424.

<sup>44</sup>Woodward, Tom Watson, 424-25.

murdered.<sup>45</sup> Tom Watson reacted to the brutal strangulation of Mary Phagan--only fourteen when she died--with the same kind of emotional intensity he had always displayed. From near total devotion to "Populism" to his concern about Blacks and later the Catholic Church, Watson had always been deeply committed to his causes. Like earlier switches in Watson's concerns, the transition from anti-Catholic to anti-Leo Frank and anti-Jew was abrupt and thorough. In January, 1915, Leo Frank was mentioned in his magazine for the first time. Hardly missing an issue thereafter, the Leo Frank case quickly became an all-encompassing fixation. Page after page of his magazine was devoted to the task of proving Frank's guilt. Watson endlessly poured over the evidence with the same gruesome details being repeated time and time again.<sup>46</sup> The intensity of Watson's efforts are overwhelming and are only comparable to Ignatius Donnelly's heartbreaking search for the Baconian code.

In addition to the continuity reflected in his extremism, the entire framework in which the articles were presented was that of the vast and corrupting influence of the rich Jews--

---

<sup>45</sup>By this, of course, I do not intend to suggest that Frank himself did not commit the crime of which he was convicted. I remain uncertain about the guilt or innocence of Frank; but in any case his lynching after his sentence was commuted is too regrettable to require further comment.

<sup>46</sup>See especially, the three issues of August, September, and October, 1915, which are almost completely devoted to the Frank case. A total of 139 pages out of approximately 155 pages are given over to the Frank affair. Thomas E. Watson,

a very typical Populist charge. Indeed, it seems quite probable that the role played by Frank's Jewish defenders precipitated Watson's initial involvement in the case. Mary Phagan was found murdered April 27, 1913, and the case of Leo Frank filled the state and national papers for the remainder of the year and most of 1914. Watson's journals remained largely aloof until January, 1915, when he responded to the nationwide criticisms of Georgia's judicial process. Watson angrily denounced these attacks on Georgia as the products of "what Big Money can do, when it has a fixed purpose to gull the public, influence the authorities, and use the newspapers to defeat Justice."<sup>47</sup> This charge was endlessly replayed with multiple variations: "If Big Money can hire Hessians enough to fight Frank's way out of the consequences of his awful crime what is it that Big Money cannot do?"<sup>48</sup> Another and more direct tie to his Populist years, however, was the charge that rich Jews in particular orchestrated the chorus of public criticism and later effected Governor John M. Slaton's decision to commute Frank's sentence.

---

"The Celebrated Case of the State of Georgia vs. Leo Frank," Watson's Magazine, XXI (August, 1915), 182-235; Watson, "The Official Record in the Case of Leo Frank, A Jew Pervert," Watson's Magazine, XXI (September, 1915), 251-97; Watson, "The Rich Jews Indict a State! The Whole South Traduced," Watson's Magazine, XXI (October, 1915), 301-41.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas E. Watson, "The Leo Frank Case," Watson's Magazine, XX (January, 1915), 140.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas E. Watson, "A Full Review of the Leo Frank Case," Watson's Magazine, XX (March, 1915), 237.

Nowhere was this better expressed than in this very familiar statement:

When, before, did the Jew papers, the L. & N. Railroad papers, and the Hearst papers arrogate to themselves the right to treat a carefully adjudicated case, as if it had never been legally decided?

(The Louisville & Nashville Railroad belongs to the Rothschilds, of whom the New York Jew, August Belmont, is the American agent. It was the baleful influence of this L. & N. system that debauched Kentucky and Tennessee politics, . . . and is now the power behind the throne in Georgia.)<sup>49</sup>

Leo Frank, of course, was in Watson's eyes an integral part of this Jewish conspiracy: "Frank belonged to the Jewish aristocracy, and it was determined by the rich Jews that no aristocrat of their race should die for the death of a working-class Gentile--'nothing but a factory girl'."<sup>50</sup> Frank and "the rich Jews" were also tied to another of Watson's hated enemies--the Catholic hierarchy: "There is no longer any doubt that the Roman priests and the opulent Jews are allies."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it is this "queer combination of Jew financier and Roman priest . . ." plus the equally detested Hearst papers which almost saved Frank from his just punishment, according to Watson.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Frank became the ultimate personification of so many things hated by Watson and his followers. Northern

---

<sup>49</sup>Watson, "The Celebrated Case of the State of Georgia vs. Leo Frank," 222 (Watson's italics)

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Watson, "The Rich Jews Indict a State!," 303.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 305, 306, 336-37.

criticism and condescension, ostentatious wealth, special privileges and organized wealth and lastly, the increasing influence and power of the urban-industrial establishment are all present in the symbolic person of Leo Frank. Mary Phagan, of course, was cast in the role of outraged virtue--especially white southern womanhood; all greatly aided by her lowly economic status. Watson's description of Mary on the day preceding her death is certainly designed to evoke an emotional reaction from his readers and serves as well to elevate Mary to the level of symbol:

Mary Phagan, not quite 14 years old, [was] ironing the white dress she meant to wear to the Bible school, next day. The First Christian Church stands near the morgue, and as she daydreamed of the morrow, and the contest in her class, she saw the temple, and the white-dressed girls who would be her companions: she did not see the morgue.

The pity of it! The garment which she washed and ironed became her shroud, after she had been to the morgue, instead of to the Church! Surely, fate has seldom been more cruel to a perfectly innocent child.<sup>53</sup>

Watson's heart rending paeon to this "perfectly innocent child" is written and often reiterated despite evidence in the transcript--which he himself published--strongly suggesting that Mary had been previously intimate not only with Frank but with other men at the factory.<sup>54</sup> Watson's enflamed

---

<sup>53</sup>Watson, *The Official Record in the Case of Leo Frank*, "256. Also see the lengthy statement in Watson, *"The Celebrated Case of the State of Georgia vs. Leo Frank,"* 185-86 and Watson, *"A Full Review of the Leo Frank Case,"* 256-57. (Watson's italics)

<sup>54</sup>Watson, *"The Official Record in the Case of Leo Frank,"* 265. From the testimony of Harry Scott, Superintendent of the local branch of the Pinkerton Detective Agency and a witness for the prosecution.



discussion of Leo Frank is also characterized by the same use of sexual allusions which mark the most vitriolic of his assaults on Blacks and the several Roman Catholic priests singled out for special attention.

Thus, Leo Frank served the same purpose as Cardinal O'Connell and Booker Washington--to act as a symbolic figure of evil to which the worst kind of behavior could be attributed. Leo Frank's alleged "unnatural acts" and "desires," for example, are repeatedly generalized to encompass all Jews: "Leo Frank was a typical young Jewish man of business who loves pleasure, and runs after Gentile girls. Every student of Sociology knows that the black man's lust after the white woman is not much fiercer than the lust of the licentious Jew for the Gentile."<sup>55</sup>

The coupling of Frank with sexual perversions as an elaborate metaphor suggesting the corruption of vast segments of the society is nowhere better stated, however, than in the concluding paragraphs of Watson's very first editorial on Leo Frank:

All over this great Republic lawlessness is raging like the wild waves of a stormy sea. All over this Christian land the crimes against women are taking wider range, vaster proportions, and more fiendish. The white-slaver stands almost openly in crowded streets, in waiting rooms, and at factory doors, with his net in his hands, ready to cast it over some innocent, unsuspecting girl. The lascivious employer--from the highest to the lowest, from the lawyer and politician who advertise for typewriters and stenographers, down to the department stores, the small factories, the laundries and the sweetshops--are

---

<sup>55</sup>Watson, "The Leo Frank Case," 142. (Watson's italics)

on the look out for poor girls and young women who will exchange virtue for "a good time."<sup>56</sup>

It is possible to pursue this analysis further by recalling Pierre Van Der Bergh's discussion of the competitive phase of race relations. One important characteristic was the tendency for the majority population to couch racial slurs in the context of sexual deviance. It will also be remembered that competitive race relations themselves are the product of a fragmenting and changing social environment and the attendant rise of conflicting interests within the dominant majority population.

Applied to the period after 1896, it is readily apparent that Watson's concern with Blacks, the Catholic hierarchy, and Leo Frank needs to be considered as a whole--united by Watson's exaggerated rhetoric and his repeated allusions to sexual deviance. Thus, not Blacks alone but Catholicism and the Leo Frank case as well can be viewed as manifestations of a competitive racial environment. As such, and this is most important, these several symbolic antagonists taken together act as the logical precursors to the Populists' deep and genuine anxiety and confusion about the shape of the emerging social, industrial, and political world at the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus, after 1896 and as a further product of their own divisive impact, some Populists--led by Tom Watson--turn

---

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 162. See Woodward, Tom Watson, 490-91, for the changes in the titles to Watson's magazines.

to the denigration of racial minorities as a natural release for the various social and personal strains building explosively within themselves. Without a doubt, Watson's frustration and disillusionment after his repeated defeats also played a role in this process. But in no way is it useful to consider frustration as the most important force moving Watson in the directions he pursued. Moreover, it should also be obvious that, while Watson's language was often "irrational," it was certainly not the ramblings of a raving mind. On the contrary, it is quite possible, even probable, that only such language--understood as symbolic action and as explanations for a dimly understood social reality--kept Watson from insanity. This leads logically to the final observation, namely, that perceived in this fashion, the dichotomy in Watson's career is dissolved. The Tom Watson who emerges can best be perceived as an individual caught up in a life-long process of adjusting to rapid and often bewildering social, economic, political, and intellectual conditions--especially in the South but in the nation at large as well.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EPILOGUE

Four decades have elapsed since John Hicks' excellent synthesis of the Populist movement appeared. What Professor Hicks envisioned as a definitive study of the subject has become, in fact, only the starting point for this most complex and intriguing phenomena. The intervening years have seen the eruption of a swirling controversy reaching to the very heart of the Populist movement. In the wake of this debate, any general conceptual framework for Populism has been lost. Yet much light has been shed on the subject exposing numerous and previously unexplored facets. Perhaps the time is again ripe to resynthesize these new as well as the older views of Populism.

The one feature on which nearly all of the students of Populism have agreed has been the importance of economic grievances as the most significant factor in causing the Populist revolt. There has been remarkably little dissent from Hicks' view that the Populist was simply a hard-pressed farmer whose debts and general economic situation drove him to political protest. The difficulties with this view ought to be obvious. Most importantly, it avoids the hard question of why only some farmers and not all felt the same burden of

high interests, oppressive mortgage payments, and low market prices. This discrepancy is especially obvious when the farmer of the Northeast is compared to his counterparts in the South and far Middle West. But even in Kansas, an overwhelmingly rural state, the Populist cause was not embraced by everyone or even a majority.

A recent study of Populism in California has additionally suggested that the movement thrived in that state not on a diet of debt and hardship but on prosperity and ease. Professor Ralph J. Kane has observed that, while the depression of the 1890's struck elsewhere, it did not do so in California. Nevertheless, that state supported approximately thirty Populist newspapers. "Any attempt to explain California Populism solely in terms of hardship" concludes Kane, "courts frustration." He added, "It might help to remember that man first rebelled in Paradise."<sup>1</sup> This very suggestive article is echoed by the work of Sheldon Hackney in his study of Alabama Populism. While continuing to assert that the Populists were either of the lower class or were suffering downward social mobility, he, nevertheless, notes that the Populist movement did not decline as a result of returning prosperity; when cotton prices turned upward in late 1898, Populism had already collapsed.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Paradox of California Populism," in Robert P. Wilkins (ed.), Essays on Western History (Grand Forks, N.D.: University of North Dakota, 1970), 38-50.

<sup>2</sup>Populism to Progressivism in Alabama, 26-27 and 108.

The third difficulty with the economic or class interpretation of Populism involves the composition of the movement itself. It has become increasingly evident that farmers were not the only individuals in "revolt"; small tradesmen, numerous professionals--most notably, lawyers--and other urban or small town dwellers were also deeply committed to the cause. The career backgrounds of Tom Watson, Marion Butler, Ignatius Donnelly, and Frank Doster provide only a few extreme examples of that fact.

Thus, like its Democratic and Republican counterparts, the Populist party encompassed a much broader cross section of economic occupations and interests than previously supposed. In addition, recent studies of the party's leadership suggest that the movement tended also to draw support from a cross section of economic "classes"; that Tom Watson was among the largest landowners in the state of Georgia is only partial confirmation of that view. Professor Kirwan in his fine study of Populism in Mississippi found a "surprising number of large landowners" in the movement.<sup>3</sup> Likewise in his exploration of Louisiana Populists, Professor Hair concluded that the membership of the Louisiana Farmers Alliance was composed mostly of landowners engaged in commercial agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Revolt of the Rednecks, 94.

<sup>4</sup>While it is dangerous to rely on the Alliance membership to draw conclusions about the Populists, nevertheless, it is clear that the Alliance was the movement's most immediate

It is in Virginia, however, that students of the subject have been given the most detailed examination of Populist leaders. According to Professor Sheldon, in nearly every case the Populist cause and its forerunner, the Farmers Alliance, was led by individuals from old established families, all of whom possessed considerable wealth. The party's congressional candidates, for example, Colonel J. R. C. Lewis, Captain Oris A. Brown, and J. Thomas Goode are each labeled "gentlemen" by Sheldon. While Goode, the last named, does not carry the honorable title of the others, he is singled out as a great landowner whose fortune resided in blooded horses and cattle. The presence of men like Colonel Robert Beverly, President of the Virginia Agricultural Society, principal figure in organizing the State Alliance, and later a Populist, is of even greater significance. Beverly dated his family in Virginia to the very first settlers and particularly to the chronicler of Virginian Colonial society, the first Robert Beverly. Likewise, Colonel Beverly's sons took an active part in the Alliance and the Populist movement. The Populists' gubernatorial candidate in 1894, Edmund R. Cocke, also came from a distinguished family, being the grandson of Virginia's former Governor, Edmund Randolph. Predictably, Cocke was also one of the state's wealthiest individuals. Another famous Virginian family, the Ruffins of Hanover supplied

---

forerunner and greatest contributor of members. Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, 156-57.

the movement with several other distinguished leaders. Summing up these men, Professor Sheldon concluded that in every case "their enthusiasm surpassed any personal pecuniary promptings. To some extent theirs was an intellectual and social zeal."<sup>5</sup>

While this evidence is not conclusive and cannot be until additional studies are undertaken, it is highly suggestive that Populism was not the direct product of economic burdens nor was its membership exclusively of a lower or lower-middle class character. Like its major party rivals, the Populist organization apparently drew support from a variety of economic occupations and from every level of income and social standing. W. H. Skaggs, the old Alabama Populist discussed earlier, perhaps came closest when he observed, in reminiscing about the movement in the South, that it included "hill-billies," poor whites, "well-to-do farmers," and "a large number of the better and more intelligent class of the old aristocracy."<sup>6</sup>

This is not intended to suggest that personal economic hardship or varying degrees of status anxiety did not play a formulative role in creating the Populist outburst of the 1890's. The steady decline in commodity prices, the equally

---

<sup>5</sup>Populism in the Old Dominion, 35. Also cf. 22-25, 33-35, 90 and 95.

<sup>6</sup>The Southern Oligarchy, 127.



steady rise in interest rates, and the burden of debt unquestionably acted to fan the long smoldering discontent of many people--farmers and others--into the fierce blaze which became politically manifest in the late 1880's and the 1890's. But just as clearly, economic discontent was not the single or even the most important cause of Populism--neither was it the most significant factor in the decline--and this is certainly true in the South. Of greater importance in explaining Populism was the long-term anguish experienced by so many and which, at its most extreme, had its roots in the Jacksonian period. From the 1830's to the turn of the century, the American culture underwent several deep and pervasive shifts whose tremors were felt by everyone in the society. These alterations in the cultural geology included the increasingly corporate configuration of the economy and society, a widespread revolt against intellectual and moral absolutes and a disturbing movement toward urbanization and urban values. In the South these cultural "quakes" were aggravated and intensified by the abrupt and forced transition from a paternal, semi-feudal society to one of a competitive, deeply capitalistic character.<sup>7</sup> This explains why southern Populism always seemed more

---

<sup>7</sup>On the character of the ante-bellum South cf. Eugene Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery (N.Y.: Random House, 1967), Chapter I and with caution U. B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), in general. As Genovese correctly perceived, Phillips' discussion of the paternalist and deference aspects of the old South goes to the heart of that society.

radical than its western variety to earlier students; a fact not easily explained solely in terms of a greater increment of economic burden.

The vital clue linking the Populists with these several disturbing processes operating in the nineteenth century--depression, status anxiety, and various social and intellectual dislocations--is, of course, their peculiar use of language, the exaggerated character of their rhetoric and, to a certain extent, their lives.

Hofstadter and the other critics of Populism performed a most valuable service in delineating the strange quality of the Populist tropology. Unfortunately, committed to the idea that the Populists' grievances were neither more nor less than that experienced by other agrarians in the late nineteenth century--namely, economic--they could only conceive of this language as illogical or irrational. On one level, of course, they were quite correct. The use of symbolic figures and conspiracy interpretations abound in Populist rhetoric. Those who have sought to defend Populism from their critics by ignoring this "irrationality" have not served the Populists well. The language existed; what was missing was a satisfactory explanation of the Populists' rhetoric. As this study has sought to demonstrate, such exaggerated language on any but the most superficial level is deeply meaningful to both those who use it and to those to whom it is addressed. Understood as symbolic action, as a device to relieve social and personal strains, and as a blueprint to

express otherwise poorly conceptualized cultural changes, Populist rhetoric was anything but irrational. Such language, even at its most violent--its most irrational--plays a crucial role in the maintenance of both individual as well as social sanity.

The critics of Populism fail in another fashion as well. Not content to point out the "irrational strains" in Populist language, they hastened to conclude that such ideological myopia and astigmatism--often admittedly tinged with a strong hint of anti-Semitism--must have led to American fascism. Without discussing the merits of labeling the "demagogues" of the 1930's and 1940's fascists, perhaps this charge as it relates to the Populists can be laid to rest.

While anti-Semitism and racism are undoubtedly a major component of fascism, it is just as clearly not the most important facet of that movement. As the twentieth century has aptly demonstrated, racism is endemic to industrial, urban societies and it can be found in political movements of every sort. Of greater significance in delineating among political movements is the economic and social program espoused by that group. The corporate character of the society, envisioned by Mussolini and Hitler, and embodied in the State is unquestionably the key element in any definition of fascism. Not only do the Populists fail to measure up to this standard, their very existence is predicated on a deep and continuing hostility to the emerging corporate character of the American society; Populism was firmly committed to

individualism albeit a non-competitive variety. A world view such as this, while conceivably allowing some individuals to turn to the corporate state as the only solution to capitalist competitiveness--which was certainly the case with Milford W. Howard--could also, and far more probably, act as a foundation for later political careers much more to the Left than Right. Such was the case with Frank Doster and W. H. Skaggs. In the few studies which explore what happened to other Populists, predictably some drifted back to the political center as Democrats and Republicans; many others, however, joined the ranks of the Socialist party.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even in the absence of such studies, it must be emphasized that the attempt to categorize Populism on the basis of mid-twentieth century political labels is simply ahistorical and illogical. Populism was a unique configuration of social and political attitudes which can only be called Populism; fascism, marxism, progressivism, or liberalism are all simply inadequate to describe the social and political movement which racked America in the 1890's.

While the same danger exists in discussing America's Progressive movement, nevertheless, Progressivism is, in one vital area, far more deserving of the fascist label than is

---

<sup>8</sup>Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion, 149 reports on several Populists most notably Adolph Miller, Secretary of the Populist Executive Committee, who became a perennial candidate of the Socialist-Labor party and C. H. Pierson, editor of the Virginia Sun, a key Populist paper, who died a Debsian Socialist.

Populism. Progressivism, like post-World War I German and Italian fascism, was bureaucratically orientated and existed primarily to bring corporate order out of individual competitive chaos. All three--and Russian communism might also be added--moved aggressively to end laissez faire capitalism; and all found their solution in a tightly organized corporate economy watched over and controlled by a positive, immensely powerful State-government apparatus. By failing to delineate clearly the differences existing between Populists and Progressives on their economic and social views, a serious blurring and confusion of the two movements has been allowed to continue. Thus, Populism and Progressivism are usually referred to in the same breath as if they were only rural-urban facets of the same reforming impulse. In reality the two were diametrically opposed: Populists were deeply hostile to the Progressives' corporate world and Progressivism was given a significant impetus by the social conflict and disorder inherent in the Populists' anti-institutional impulse.

In one area only did the Populists and Progressives share like attitudes, namely, in their racial perceptions. As this study has shown, the Populists were racists, but to think that they could reject a set of ideas espoused by all of western civilization at this time is simply inane. While saying this, however, it must be noted that they were genuinely concerned about Blacks as fellow toilers equally oppressed with themselves by plutocracy. While they exploited Black votes--as did their opponents--they also went further

than any other party, except the Republicans, in expanding Black political opportunities. Unfortunately, by quickening both racial and class competition, the southern Populist movement was destroyed by the very seeds it planted. By using Blacks against the other major faction of the white majority, Populism hastened the creation of a fragmented competitive southern society and forced white supremacy to the fore as an all-encompassing political concern. In this new atmosphere Populism--largely uninterested in race--simply expired. Yet just as certainly as it died, Populism lived on in the person of Tom Watson and later southern demagogues who used race to express not only older Populist themes but the crucial additional problem of race relations in the South's newly competitive social environment.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscripts

Marion Butler Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

Ignatius Donnelly Papers, Dakota Room, University of North Dakota Library, Microfilm of Original in Minnesota State Historical Society, Minneapolis.

Leonidas Lafayette Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

Thomas Edward Watson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

### Public Documents

Congressional Record, 56 Cong., 1 Sess., 1900.

### Contemporary Periodicals

The following list omits the numerous specific articles taken from Tom Watson's magazine.

"The Alabama Case," Outlook, LXXIV (May 9, 1903), 95-96.

"The Alabama Decision," Nation, LXXVI (April 30, 1903), 346.

Allen, William V. "The Populist Program," Independent, LII (February 22, 1900), 475-76.

"The Ballot in Mississippi," Nation, LV (August 25, 1892), 139-40.

Butler, Marion. "Election in North Carolina," Independent, LII (August 16, 1900), 1953-55.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The People's Party," Forum, XXVIII (February, 1900), 658-62.

- "The Caste Notion of Suffrage," Nation, LXXVII (September 3, 1903), 132.
- Diggs, Annie L. "The Woman in the Alliance Movement," Arena, VI (July, 1892), 161-79.
- "Disfranchising a Race," Nation, LXVI (May 26, 1898), 398-99.
- "Disfranchising the Negro," Nation, LXIX (November 23, 1899), 384-85.
- "Government by Terrorism," Independent, LII (August 16, 1900), 1997-98.
- Grimke, Archibald H. "Why Disfranchisement is Bad," Atlantic Monthly, XCIV (July, 1904), 72-81.
- Grosvenor, Charles Henry. "The Negro Problem in the South," Forum, XXIX (August, 1900), 720-25.
- Hamm, Walter C. "Three Phases of Colored Suffrage," North American Review, CLXVIII (March, 1899), 285-96.
- "Reduction of Representation in the South," Outlook, LXXIX (January 21, 1905), 169-71.
- Lloyd, Henry D. "The Populists at St. Louis," Review of Reviews, XIV (September, 1896), 293-303.
- McKelway, A. J. Rev. "The North Carolina Suffrage Amendment," Independent, LII (August 16, 1900), 1955-57.
- McLaughlin, Andrew C. "Mississippi and the Negro Question," Atlantic Monthly, LXX (December, 1892), 828-37.
- "Mississippi's Problem," Nation, LI (July 31, 1890), 86-87.
- "Mr. Bryan on the Race Problem," Independent, LV (August 27, 1903), 2071.
- "Mr. Washington and the Negro Problem," Harper's Weekly, XLVII (August 15, 1903), 1324-25.
- "Negro Disfranchisement in Maryland," Nation, LXXVIII (January 7, 1904), 6-7.
- "Negro Suffrage in the South," Outlook, LXXIV (June 13, 1903), 399-403.
- "A Page of History," Outlook, LXXIV (May 30, 1903), 264-66.
- "The Passing of Tom Watson," Outlook, CXXVI (October 11, 1922), 228-29.



- Peffer, William A. "The Mission of the Populist Party," North American Review, CLVII (December, 1893), 665-78.
- Poe, Clarence H. "Suffrage Restriction in the South; Its Causes and Consequences," North American Review, CLXXV (October, 1902), 534-43.
- Polk, Leonidas L. "The Farmers Discontent," North American Review, CLIII (July, 1891), 6-12.
- "Reaction Toward Slavery," Nation, LXXVI (February 19, 1903), 144.
- "Recent Discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment," Harper's Weekly, XLVII (July 11, 1903), 1144.
- "Reconstruction and Disfranchisement," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXVIII (October, 1901), 433-37.
- "Reduction of Southern Representation in Congress," Outlook, LXXIX (January 7, 1905), 11-15.
- "Restricted Suffrage on Trial," Outlook, LXXIII (April 11, 1903), 847.
- "Senator Watson's Serious Charges," Literary Digest, LXXI (November 26, 1921), 16.
- "South Carolina's Problem," Nation, LXI (September 19, 1895), 199.
- Sweeny, C. P. "Bigotry in the South: Anti-Catholic Prejudice," Nation, CXI (November 4, 1920), 585-86.
- Thrasher, Max B. "The Alabama Constitutional Convention," Outlook, LXVIII (June 22, 1901), 437-39.
- Underwood, Oscar W. "The Negro Problem in the South," Forum, XXX (September, 1900), 215-19.
- "A Voice from the Past," Outlook, LXXIV (May 2, 1903), 13-14.
- Watson, Thomas E. "The People's Party Appeal," Independent, LVIII (October 13, 1904), 829.
- Wickliffe, Joseph C. "Negro Suffrage a Failure: Shall We Abolish It?," Forum, XIV (February, 1893), 797-804.

### Secondary Periodicals

- Abramowitz, Jack. "The Negro in the Agrarian Revolt," Agricultural History, XXIV (January, 1950), 89-95.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Negro in the Populist Movement," Journal of Negro History, XXXVIII (July, 1953), 257-89.
- Burbank, Garin. "Agrarian Radicals and their Opponents: Political Conflict in Southern Oklahoma," Journal of American History, LVIII (June, 1971), 5-23.
- Crowe, Charles. "Tom Watson, Populists and Blacks Reconsidered," Journal of Negro History, LV (April, 1970), 99-116.
- Davis, David Brion. "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVII (September, 1960), 205-24.
- DeCamp, L. Sprague. "Lost Continents," Natural History, LV (May, 1946), 209.
- Doermann, Humphrey. "All my immense labor for nothing. . . ," American Heritage, XII (June, 1961), 60.
- Ferkiss, Victor C. "Ezra Pound and American Fascism," Journal of Politics, XVII (May, 1955), 173-97.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Populism: Myth, Reality, Current Danger," Western Political Quarterly, XIV (September, 1961), 737-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Populist Influences on American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, X (June, 1957), 350-73.
- Handlin, Oscar. "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society, XL (June, 1951), 323-44.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "How U.S. Anti-Semitism Really Began: Its Grass-Roots Source in the 90's," Commentary, XI (June, 1951), 541-48.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reconsidering the Populists," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 68-74.
- Harmon, Ralph L. "Ignatius Donnelly and His Faded Metropolis," Minnesota History, XVII (September, 1936), 262-75.
- Hicks, John D. "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VIII (June, 1928), 80-132.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Sub-treasury: A Forgotten Plan for the Relief of Agriculture," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XV (December, 1928), 355-73.

- Higham, John. "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (March, 1957), 559-78.
- Holbo, Paul S. "Wheat or What? Populism and American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, XIV (September, 1961), 727-36.
- Holbrook, Stewart. "Ignatius Donnelly: Apostle of Protest," New Republic, December 22, 1947, pp. 20-24.
- Hollingsworth, J. Rogers. "Populism: The Problem of Rhetoric and Reality," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 81-85.
- Leuchtenburg, William E. "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1916," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (December, 1952), 483-504.
- Mabry, William A. "Disfranchisement of the Negro in Mississippi," Journal of Southern History, IX (August, 1938), 318-33.
- McGill, Ralph. "Tom Watson: The People's Man," New Republic, August 23, 1948, pp. 16-20.
- Pollack, Norman. "Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of 'The Age of Reform'," Journal of Southern History, XXVI (November, 1960), 478-500.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism and the Historian," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 59-67.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Handlin on Anti-Semitism: A Critique of 'American Views of the Jew'," Journal of American History, LI (December, 1964), 391-403.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Myth of Populist Anti-Semitism," American Historical Review, LXVIII (October, 1962), 76-80.
- Rogers, William W. "The Negro Alliance in Alabama," Journal of Negro History, XLV (January, 1960), 38-44.
- Saunders, Robert. "Southern Populism and the Negro, 1893-1905," Journal of Negro History, LIV (July, 1969), 240-61.
- Shugg, Roger W. "Survival of the Plantation System in Louisiana," Journal of Southern History, III (August, 1937), 311-25.

- Thomas, John L. "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly, XVII (Winter 1965), 656-81.
- Tucker, William P. "Ezra Pound, Fascism, and Populism," Journal of Politics, XVIII (February, 1956), 105-7.
- Unger, Irwin. "Critique of Norman Pollack's 'Fear of Man'," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 75-80.
- Van Der Berghe, Pierre L. "The Dynamics of Racial Prejudice: An Ideal-Type Dichotomy," Social Forces, XXXVIII (December, 1958), 138-41.
- Viereck, Peter. "Pure Poetry, Impure Politics, and Ezra Pound," Commentary, XI (April, 1951), 340-46.
- White, Melvin J. "Populism in Louisiana During the Nineties," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, V (January, 1918), 3-19.
- Wilson, Major L. "The Concept of Time and the Political Dialogue in the United States, 1828-1848," American Quarterly, XIX (Winter 1967), 619-44.
- Wirth, Louis. "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology, XLIV (July, 1938), 1-24.
- Wise, Gene. "Political 'Reality' in Recent American Scholarship: Progressives versus Symbolists," American Quarterly, XIX (Summer 1967), 303-28.
- Wood, Gordon S. "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd. Series, XXIII (1966), 3-32.
- Woodward, C. Vann. "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," American Scholar, XXIX (Winter 1959), 55-72.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," Journal of Southern History, IV (February, 1938), 14-33.

#### Contemporary Books

- Ashby, N. B. The Riddle of the Sphinx. Des Moines, Iowa: Industrial Publishing Co., 1890.
- Donnelly, Ignatius. Atlantis: The Antediluvian World. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Caesar's Column: A Story of the Future. Chicago: Syndicate Publishing Co., 1890.

- \_\_\_\_\_. The Cipher. Minneapolis: Verulam, 1899.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Doctor Huguet. Chicago: F. J. Schulte & Co., 1891.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Golden Bottle. New York: D. D. Merrill Co., 1892.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Great Cryptogram. Chicago: Peale, 1887.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ragnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1883.
- Harris, Nathaniel E. Autobiography. Macon, Georgia: J. W. Brock Co., 1925.
- Howard, Milford W. Fascism: A Challenge to Democracy. New York: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1928.
- Skaggs, William H. The Southern Oligarchy. New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1924.
- Smith, Stephen. Grains for the Grangers; Discussing all Points Bearing upon the Farmer Movement for the Emancipation of White Slaves from the Slave Power of Monopoly. New York: United States Book Co., 1873.
- Watson, Thomas E. The Life and Speeches of Thomas E. Watson. Nashville, Tenn., 1908.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Napoleon: A Sketch of His Life, Character, Struggles, and Achievements. New York, London: Macmillan Co., 1902.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Story of France; From the Earliest Times to the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte. New York: Macmillan Co., 1899. 2 vols.

#### Secondary Books

- Arnett, Alex M. The Populist Movement in Georgia. New York: Columbia University Press, 1922.
- Blake, Nelson M. William Mahone of Virginia. Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, 1935.
- Brodhead, Michael J. Persevering Populist: The Life of Frank Doster. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1969.
- Buck, Salon J. The Granger Movement, 1870-1880. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933.

- Burke, Kenneth. The Philosophy of Literary Form. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1941.
- Clark, John B. Populism in Alabama. Auburn, Alabama: Auburn Printing Co., 1927.
- Destler, Chester M. Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Empire of Reform. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963.
- Durden, Robert F. The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966.
- Edmunds, Helen G. The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951.
- Elkins, Stanley. Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1963.
- Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans. 3rd. ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967.
- Frederickson, George M. The Inner Civil War. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Genovese, Eugene. The Political Economy of Slavery. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Ideology as a Cultural System." Ideology and Discontent. Edited by D. E. Apter. Chicago: Free Press, 1964.
- Hackney, Sheldon. Populism to Progressivism in Alabama. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Hair, William Ivy. Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest in Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1969.
- Hays, Samuel P. The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Hicks, John D. The Populist Revolt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931.
- Hofstadter, Richard. The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Paranoid Style in American History and Other Essays. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.

- \_\_\_\_\_. The American Political Tradition. New York: Vintage Books, 1948.
- Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Kane, Ralph J. "The Paradox of California Populism," Essays in Western History. Edited by Robert P. Wilkins. Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1970.
- Key, V. O., Jr. Southern Politics in State and Nation. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.
- Kirwan, Albert D. Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951.
- Kolko, Gabriel. The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967.
- Lerner, Max. America As a Civilization. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.
- Lewinson, Paul. Race, Class and Party: A History of Negro Suffrage and White Politics in the South. New York: Oxford University Press, 1932.
- Martin, R. C. The People's Party in Texas. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1933.
- Massing, Paul W. Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.
- Meyers, Marvin. The Jacksonian Persuasion. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.
- Noble, David W. The Progressive Mind. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1970.
- Noblin, Stuart. Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949.
- Nugent, Walter T. K. The Tolerant Populists. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Ogden, Frederick D. The Poll Tax in the South. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1958.
- Paine, Arthur C. The Granger Movement in Illinois. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1904.

- Phillips, U. B. Life and Labor in the Old South. Boston: Little, Brown, 1929.
- Pollack, Norman, ed. The Populist Mind. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Populist Response to Industrial America. New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1966.
- Ridge, Martin. Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Robison, Daniel M. Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935.
- Scott, Roy U. The Agrarian Movement in Illinois, 1880-1896. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962.
- Sheldon, William D. Populism in the Old Dominion. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935.
- Shils, Edward A. The Torment of Secrecy. Chicago: Free Press, 1956.
- Simkins, Francis B. Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Tillman Movement in South Carolina. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1926.
- Simmel, Georg. The Sociology of Georg Simmel. Translated by Kurt H. Wolff. Chicago: The Free Press, 1950.
- Shugg, Roger W. Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939.
- Sutton, Frances X.; Harris, Seymour E.; Kaysen, Carl; and Tobin, James. The American Business Creed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.
- Taylor, Carl C. The Farmers Movement, 1620-1920. New York: American Book Co., 1953.
- Tindall, George B. South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952.
- Tyler, Alice Felt. Freedom's Ferment. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.



Viereck, Peter. "The Revolt of the Elites--1955," The Radical Right. Edited by Daniel Bell. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Unadjusted Man. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956.

Ward, John W. Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953.

White, Morton G. Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism. New York: Viking, 1949.

White, Walter. A Man Called White. New York: Viking, 1948.

Wiebe, Robert H. The Search For Order, 1877-1920. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

Williams, T. Harry. Huey Long. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969.

Wilson, R. Jackson. In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968.

Wood, Gordon S. The Creation of the American Republic. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969.

Woodward, C. Vann. The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1951.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Strange Career of Jim Crow. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

\_\_\_\_\_. Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Wynes, Charles E. Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961.

### Newspapers

Atlanta People's Party Paper, 1891-1896.

Clinton Caucasian, 1889-1898. (Successively published in Goldsboro and Raleigh, North Carolina).

New Orleans Weekly Pelican, 1888-1889.

Ocala, Florida Banner, 1888-1890.

Unpublished Materials

Brittain, Joseph M. "Negro Suffrage and Politics in Alabama Since 1870," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana Universtiy, 1958.

Paoli, Donna J. "Marion Butler's View of the Negro, 1889-1901," M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1969.

Sallis, William C. "The Color Line in Mississippi Politics, 1865-1915," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1967.

Saunders, Robert M. "The Ideology of Southern Populism, 1892-1895," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1967.