

## Populism: Failed Promise or Delayed Results?

- **The populists become a political party, a.k.a. "the People's party"**

Lower class

Farming

There were those that hoped the populists could join forces with the industrial working class, but that never really panned out

They formed to try to solve what they assumed to be the most problematic factors for farming

Industrializing-->economics of making a living on the farm are changing

- **Debt cycle in the late 19th century**

farmers are able to produce more because of modern technology

when supply increases and demand remains the same, the price goes down b/c its a buyers market

expansion of the country westward + modern technology=debt cycle

pretty significant decline in earnings; not surprising that farmers are looking for some sort of solution--their way of earning a living no longer works

- **Poor farmers, those who do not own land:**

Tenant farmers

- elite of the poor farmers, if possible
- most well-off, poor non land owning farmers
- own their supplies (e.g., a plow, a mule, bring something to the equation)

Sharecroppers

- own *nothing*
  - Tenant farmers make more \$ than sharecroppers

- **Farmers had to go into debt every year to get the seeds/supplies they needed to begin each year**

only one place to shop in small, rural areas like this

going to pay incredibly inflated prices for the supplies they need

minimal diets

- At the end of the year, did not get their earnings off the top--had to pay off their debts (supplies, doctor bills, other reasons) for purchasing supplies
  - e.g., any bill incurred (like a wife who had a bad pregnancy needing a doctors visit) would add to the debt they already had-->farmers find themselves in debt without any way of changing their situation
  - bad weather, bugs that ate up the crops.... further and further into debt

- **1892, time to elect new members of Congress** (summer, not general election time, south=primary election time--democratic party ruled south @ this time)

**Tom Watson** who was richer than god was also sympathetic to the plight of the farmers

typical political events during his campaign: he gives a long speech (no tv at this time, this was a form of entertainment); music; food

- He was running as a *populist*, not a democrat, so he's running on a shoestring budget--the crowd was hearing Tom Watson despite those other factors because what he was saying was very very valuable to them

Atypical for rural GA in 1892: Tom Watson's audience=African American, sharecroppers, and poor whites

- **Tom Watson's audience was biracial--pretty unexpected thing at this time and in this area**
  - He speaks to the economic poor versus any race; "you are made to hate each other because that hatred is based on skin color...but what you're missing here, is that that hatred becomes the keystone of the financial despotism that plagues you both"
  - Sooner they can come together politically in the South, the sooner the white northern wealthy conservative Republicans can be put out of power (?)

- **Big question when it comes to populists: Are they radicals trying to change the structure, or are they conservatives trying to protect the status quo?**

Populists demanded that the federal gov't be more active-->regulate the railroads (high railroad rates were a challenge farmers faced), regulate telephones and telegraphs--think that things like this should *not* be operated for profit but for the benefit of *the people*. (sounds little bit like socialism since they are arguing for the government to regulate and sometimes even own institutions such as the railroad, but they're not socialists)

Want fed. gov't to take a more active hand in the distribution of land

- All sounds pretty radical, because they are certainly advocating that the government take on new roles--for the federal gov't to become more powerful, a much more statist/active fed. gov't

But why do they want this much more active fed gov't? so they can keep the way they live currently the exact same while making more money

- Begs the question, are they radical or conservative? no clear cut answer (politics-radical; way they live

their lives-conservative)

### The Farmers' Alliance

- The Farmers' Alliance is the most important antecedent to the populist party
  - "we are not about party politics"; but they were about ideas, and making life better for farmers
  - colorful orators
  - saying they were slaves to Wall Street and that government was for Wall Street by Wall Street versus for the people by the people
  - big idea that comes out of the Farmers Alliance that populists pick up on: develop this idea for a "subtreasury system" (best example of them wanting a more active federal government)
    - **Subtreasury System**
      - growers to be able to park their crops in these subtreasury warehouses that the gov't would have around the country; and wait until prices went up.
      - Alliance is arguing that the farmers need to start manipulating the market versus having the market manipulate them
      - **argument:** sub-treasury--farmers should be able to get 80% of the value of the crop as soon as they placed it in the warehouse, with the money coming from the federal gov't, then when they sell the crop, have 20% more coming to them...good deal for the farms; why they start to get more politically active
        - Going to need to have a voice in Washington that isn't just a lobbyist but an active member of policy making
          - **Start shifting from the alliance to a political party**
            - Faced many issues, though, in doing this
- Corn and wheat=midwest
- south=cotton
  - the interests of both of these areas of farmers are not exactly the same--different alliances

### Race and Populism

- Tom Watson quote that is saying nice things but in a paternalistic way-->problematic
  - loses his race for Congress in 1892, he discovers his internal racist and quits his 'lets come together' approach and gives into the racism within himself--blames his loss on the fact that the Democratic Party stuffed the ballot box
    - African Americans brought in to vote against Watson, not even citizens of Georgia but b/c of threats put over them to vote for Watson's appointment--threat of being lynched)
- Huge challenge to bring the different parts of the farmers' alliance together
- Workers do not want to pay more for the food and clothing; farmers want to be paid more; a challenge
  - Price structure divides them

### Populism and the Omaha Platform, 1892

(Assigned reading for class on Wednesday, "January 29 reading")

- **big argument**=farmers are getting squeezed out by monopolies (banks and other industrial monopolies) and that a variety of mechanisms need to be employed--want the federal government to regulate the monopolies out of existence
  - gravitate to the subtreasury plan pretty quickly because it would be one way to regulate monopolies

### Panic of 1893: "The Silver Dog with the Golden Tail"

#### **pic on slideshow**

- dark areas=agrarian areas; advocated silver
- grey areas north east and Ohio=industrial areas; "gold tail to the silver dog"
- Arguments on whether the monetary system should include silver in addition to gold
  - 1890: senators and reps in Congress, after the discoveries of Silver, have already pushed through acts wanting to include silver in the monetary system instead of solely backing money on gold
  - Others blame silver for the depression
- Expanding silver coinage makes more sense than the subtreasury plan--just putting more money into the system
  - Silver coinage eventually takes over and becomes THE ISSUE that populist's run on; quit making complicated arguments about the subtreasury system, but those issues reduce in importance and the silver issue increases in importance to the populists
- **1896:** the Democrats realize that the Populists are trying to get rid of one of the political parties
  - So Democrats nominate **William Jennings Bryan**, a firm advocate of the silver coinage system
    - "Cross of Gold" very famous speech
      - makes religious imagery in giving this speech
      - compares the gold standard to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (if you don't hate the gold system,

you're probably not going to have a problem, but sacrilegious to others)

The populists in 1896 are in serious trouble; the Democrats went first and Bryan already took the lead on the silver shit--so they nominate Bryan too.

Running against a very smart Republican named William McKinley

- Economy is picking up in 1896 (not that great for farmers, but economy is getting better)
- So who are you going to vote for? the person advocating silver which some people blamed as the reason for the panic of 1897 or for this dude? Gonna vote for McKinley.
  - Industrial north east (with a lot more electoral college votes) is voting for McKinley
- The country is voting in 1896 for prosperity--for being an industrial nation; to close their eyes to the populists/the farmers
  - However, the populists do not go away, their ideas play a role in the progressive era and the New Deal
  - **Populist purpose dies, but the populist ideas live on to shape American politics**

## FIRST UNIT ASSIGNMENT

- due a week from today
- straightforward stuff
- 600-900/ 2-3 pages typed; directions on the assignment itself
- DUE AT THE START OF CLASS NEXT MONDAY
- hard copy turned in at beginning of class as well as the **TURN IT IN LINK ON BLACKBOARD**
- separate cover page, no name on the pages that have your writing on it--so that TA's can grade blindly.