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Rethinking the People's Party: An Examination of American Populism and Its Intersection with  
Race, Gender, and Religion  
By Harrison Zeiberg

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## Introduction

When the dust settled on the presidential election of 1896 William McKinley would be elected the 25th President of the United States, and the Republican Party would have control over both chambers of Congress, a rare occurrence in the divided political climate of Gilded Age America. On the losing side would be William Jennings Bryan, a two-term congressman from Nebraska who had captured the Democratic nomination with his "Cross of Gold" speech and who had traversed the country on the campaign trail unlike any other major candidate before him. This election loss would not be the end for Bryan, who would go on to run for president two more times and would serve as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. While Bryan would have a political life after the election of 1896, the People's Party that had endorsed him alongside the Democrats for the presidency that year would not. By 1898, the People's Party had fallen into political obscurity.

In the five brief years that the People's Party existed as a politically viable entity it won elections on the state and federal level and ran competitively in races across the South and the Midwest. Examples of the People's Party rise to power can be seen in states such as Kansas where they would elect a Populist governor, control one chamber of their state legislature, and send a Populist senator to Washington D.C. In other states such as Colorado the Populists would elect a governor. In North Carolina the Populists would send Marion Butler to Washington D.C. as a Senator. In Texas, Populists would be elected to serve in state government all throughout 1891-1896. Ultimately, thirty Populists, either through fusion or running on a Populist ticket, would become members of Congress. During the 1892 Presidential election, the only time that a Populist candidate would run independently in the 1891-1896 period, the Populist candidate received eleven electoral, and over a million individual votes, having a strong showing in the

Midwest and West. The quick rise to power of the People's Party to political relevance highlights how large of an impact this new political party had on the electoral landscape in the United States. The Republicans and the Democrats could not ignore the People's Party because the People's Party in the American South, Midwest, and West, was a threat to their two party supremacy.

The People's Party was created out of the previous activism of groups such as the Farmers Alliance, the Colored Farmers Alliance, the Knights of Labor, and the Agrarian Wheel, amongst others, in the decades following the Civil War and Reconstruction. All of these organizations were centered on reforming the American economic and political system, and all failed to establish themselves as long-lasting and viable pathways to enacting these reforms. The issues that these groups focused on were the issues of sharecropping, the prices of agricultural goods, the debt faced by farmers, corruption in politics, the crop-lien system, and the outsized power that the wealthy had on American governance. Many of these issues and the reforms these groups advocated for would later find their way into the political platform of the People's Party, as seen in the Omaha platform constructed at the July 1892 convention of the People's Party.<sup>1</sup> While these groups were part of the greater American Populist movement, there was hesitation among them to breaking with the two party system.<sup>2</sup> Rather, these groups worked to advocate for their reform causes within the structures of the two party system. Eventually these groups would fail to gain the passage of the reforms that they wanted to enact through the Democrats and Republicans, and this failure and the frustration these people faced would lead them to break off from the two parties and form the People's Party.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George B. Tindall, ed., *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders* (New York, The University Library, 1966): 90-96.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 155, 168.

While the People's Party was a political force for the first five years of its short existence usually it was only able to gain power by fusing with the minority party in whatever region they were in. In the South that meant the Republicans, in the Midwest and West the Democrats. The election of 1896 would split the party as those more dedicated to the independent existence of a third party feuded with those who wanted to fuse with Democrats on a mass scale. Eventually, the forces wishing to fuse won. The subsequent loss of William Jennings Bryan, who never truly embraced Populism and kept a distance between himself and the People's Party, was a political setback that the party was not able to recover from. The People's Party flame had burned brightly and briefly, and Populism as an independent political party was gone from the American political landscape.

### **Historiography**

Historians of Populism have made a wide range of arguments in regards to the failures and successes of the movement especially concerning issues surrounding race, gender, and religion. For example, the work of Walter T. K. Nugent with *The Tolerant Populists*, Richard Hofstadter in *The Age of Reform* and Lawrence Goodwyn in *The Populist Moment*, all offer drastically different interpretations for the rise and fall of the People's Party. These authors all wrote their descriptions of Populism closely following World War II, and their work has set the debate in which future historians have debated Populism. While Hofstadter did not solely focus on Populism, Nugent and Goodwyn did because in many ways they were responding to the claims that Hofstadter had made about Populism. These three interpretations have been a dominant force in how historians have viewed the People's Party. These authors differ over issues such as: whether the Populist movement was anti-Semitic, whether the movement was

nativist, whether the movement was jingoistic, the importance of free silver as an issue, and even why the movement failed.<sup>4</sup>

Hofstadter led the way for historians who view the Populist movement as a collection of misguided people who truly believed in the agrarian myth and tried to organize to reclaim a part of American history that largely had never existed.<sup>5</sup> The agrarian myth is the belief that farmers were the backbone of not only the American economy, but of the democratic foundations on which the United States was built and so their way of life was the ideal American way of life and must be preserved. Although the People's Party eventually failed and had deep and inherent flaws in its beliefs, Hofstadter places it as part of a chain that would eventually lead to the people who would create the New Deal.

On the other hand, historians like Nugent don't believe that Populists were misguided at all but rather that scholars like Hofstadter misunderstood them. Nugent argues that people have highlighted the flaws of the Populist movement, such as racism and anti-Semitism, and have ignored the context that they existed within and the real challenges the movement faced as it tried to set out and change society. Nugent specifically focuses on the Populist movement in Kansas to construct this more sympathetic viewpoint to the movement.<sup>6</sup>

Historians led by Goodwyn view the Populist movement as a politically complex and diverse group of people who fought over practical issues in an almost revolutionary cause that ultimately failed over relatively practical matters and political expediency.<sup>7</sup> Compared to Hofstadter, and Nugent, Goodwyn views the People's Party in the most progressive terms, and so

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955.); Walter T.K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas, Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).; Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas, Populism and Nativism*, 28-32.

<sup>7</sup> Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, xxii.

serves as a counter-example to what Hofstadter has stated about the movement. Goodwyn also examined the relationship between Populism and race. Goodwyn depicted the People's Party as progressive on issues regarding race, and saw its leadership as people truly trying to form a bi-racial coalition for the betterment of all farmers. The debate between Hofstadter's viewpoint and Goodwyn's has greatly influenced all academic debate regarding Populism after it and these two contradictory viewpoints have served as the boundaries most historians have operated within when analyzing American Populism.

A modern scholar on the People's Party, specifically in Texas, is Gregg Cantrell. Cantrell in his work *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists And The Roots of American Liberalism* focuses specifically on the People's Party of Texas. Cantrell, unlike earlier works on Populism, focuses specifically on issues of race, gender, and religion, and how these all intersected with the People's Party. Cantrell's work does give a narrow view of what Populism is by only focusing on the state of Texas, but the issues he discusses make this work incredibly important to our understanding of how the People's Party related to a majority of the people, and is a more expansive look into Populism in regards to the issues discussed, if not on the geographic scale in which these issues are discussed. Cantrell argues that while the People's Party would not hold up to today's standards of tolerance, for its time on issues regarding race, gender, and religion they were accepting of difference.<sup>8</sup>

Another modern scholar of American Populism is Charles Postel, who in his book *Populist Vision* does something similar to Cantrell by looking at matters of inclusivity and race. Postel focuses specifically on dispelling the "Hayseed" myth that Hofstadter argued described the People's Party. The "Hayseed" myth depicts the Populists as uneducated farmers who were racist,

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<sup>8</sup> Gregg Cantrell, *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020): 16-18.

sexist, and xenophobic, and were so for no other reason than their lack of education and the fact that they didn't know better. Postel rather argues that the People's Party was focused on education, and that there was a more inclusive nature to the movement than previously thought.<sup>9</sup> Postel leans more towards Goodwyn than Hofstadter but still does look at the People's Party critically when examining issues of race, gender, and religion. Postel dedicates space in his work to discussions on the role of women and the role of religion within the Populist movement, something that is different from the earlier works on Populism, but the majority of his work is not spent examining these issues.

Many scholars specifically focus on Populism from the perspective of the white majority that made up the People's Party, and so treat the Black people who were a part of the movement as minor figures. A historian who breaks from this path is Omar H. Ali. Through multiple works, particularly *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900*, Ali tells the story of American Populism and the People's Party centered on the Black people who were not only a part of the movement but were instrumental in it. Ali examines Populism and race, along with briefer examinations of Populism and its intersections with gender and religion. Specifically, Ali tries to understand Black Populism on its own terms separate from the white majority that most historians base their analysis on.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis steers a course between of the boundaries set up by Hofstadter and Goodwyn. While their analyses of Populism have influenced most future work on the subject, they both try to understand Populism within a preconceived political context. Hofstadter would depict Populists as xenophobes while Goodwyn would say that they were revolutionary reformers. This

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<sup>9</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Omar H. Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 16-18  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wheatonma-ebooks/reader.action?docID=619201>.

paper will argue that the reality of the movement is that it held elements of both. The movement was not just one thing or another, but incredibly internally diverse, and it is later work like Cantrell, Postel, and Ali speak to this internal diversity.

### **Methodology:**

Primary source research done for this thesis was primarily focused on newspapers, both from the Populist perspective and from opponents of the Populists. To a smaller extent, other printings of speeches and writings from Populists were used to better understand Populist perspectives on issues regarding race, gender, and religion, but the vast majority of research done was in newspapers. While newspapers offer a valuable source of information on the day-to-day actions of the People's Party from a national to local perspective, it also offers a biased retelling of what these actions were. The role of the Populist press was to promote the People's Party and their reform causes, and so I could not look to these newspapers to construct a totally accurate account of the history of the People's Party. Rather I relied on these sources to better understand the type of rhetoric and arguments that the Populists were using in regards to how they viewed and acted towards issues surrounding race, gender, and religion. I found in this research that it was less important to know whether or not what the Populists argued was factual, but rather it was more important to know how, what, and why they argued it. By examining how the Populists spoke and wrote of issues surrounding race, gender, and religion through newspapers I was better able to understand the varied and changing Populist perspective on these matters from a state by state perspective.

To better understand the political climate of Gilded Age America I also looked to oppositional newspapers to the People's Party. The Democratic and Republican newspapers that I examined let me understand the non-Populist perspective on the issues that the People's Party

debated. These sources, of course, were biased against the People's Party because they were from the perspective of their political rivals, but with this in mind these sources give a valuable addition to any understanding of American Populism. These outside newspaper sources help bring about a more holistic understanding of Populism because they allow for a better understanding of what those outside of the People's Party thought of it. This outside perspective makes it so that we are not only relying on the Populists to construct an understanding of the Populist movement. These newspaper sources also offer a useful tool in constructing a more holistic understanding of how issues of race, gender, and religion were thought of across the political spectrum, and not simply from the Populist perspective. This broader understanding allows for the construction of a better framework in which to place the People's Party and its beliefs in. For this thesis these Republican and Democratic newspaper sources were looked at in the same way and with the same scrutiny as were the Populist newspaper primary sources.

### **Chapter Outline:**

The first chapter of this thesis will specifically deal with how the People's Party and Populists related to the Black population of the United States. This chapter will examine how Populists in Kansas, Texas, and Georgia tailored rhetoric to gain Black voters without losing white votes, even though the People's Party was largely not interested in changing the structures of white supremacy within the United States. Specifically, this chapter will argue that while People's Party activists did make efforts to gain the support of non-white voters, in the end they were unable to expand enough beyond their core constituency of white farmers to form a viable bi-racial political party. This failure happened for three main reasons: the political liability of racial inclusivity limited the actions that could be taken to appeal to non-white voters; the political structure of post-Civil War America made it more difficult and politically

disadvantageous in certain cases to have a bi- or multi-racial political coalition; and a combination of both policy differences and the white supremacy that was rampant within the party deterred outside voting blocs from opting to join.

The second chapter will focus on how the People's Party related to women within the United States. Specifically, this chapter will look at the issue of women's suffrage and how Populists interacted with it in the states of Colorado, Kansas, and Texas. This chapter offers a look at Populism in the American West, something that the research for this thesis did not get to delve into deeply. This chapter will argue that the People's Party was more interested in reforming traditional roles for women in society than it was in revolutionizing them. This means that while many Populists were interested in a greater role for women in politics, especially in states like Kansas and Colorado, Populists were generally in favor of women continuing to fulfill their traditional gender roles. This chapter will specifically look at how the People's Party interacted with the issue of women's suffrage. This chapter will also argue that, as with Black voters, the People's Party valued political expediency and electoral success more than it valued issues such as women's suffrage.

Chapter Three will examine the relationship between the People's Party and Catholic and Jewish people. During the time that the People's Party operated most Americans were Protestants, and so by examining the relationship between Populism and non-Protestants we will better understand how the People's Party thought of those who often looked like the white male majority, but were still different. This chapter will look at Populists in Kansas, Texas, and Georgia. This chapter will argue that the tolerance and intolerance shown towards Catholic and Jewish people by the People's Party was not consistent across the United States, but had significant regional differences. This chapter will also argue that religious tolerance and religious

intolerance were often used as political tools to garner more electoral support against the People's Party's main political rivals, the Democrats and Republicans.

**Thesis:**

The overall argument of this thesis rests on the fact that the People's Party cannot be easily defined and was not homogeneous. The People's Party was not wholly racist or racially tolerant, but contained both and was an organization with great internal diversity of thought and perspective. This thesis argues that the People's Party and Populists were first and foremost reformers in the areas of race, gender, and religion rather than revolutionaries. While they wanted to change the economic and political structures of American society they also were unwilling to challenge things such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and anti-Semitism. Overall the People's Party valued political expediency and success over reform, and so acted as a political party does, primarily focused on electoral victory and the various pathways needed to get there, rather than a commitment to a specific set of principles.

*The Failures of a Movement: The People's Party and the Politics of Race in Gilded Age America*

American populism did not begin with the People's Party, but the People's Party was the most visible way that American populism manifested itself politically. American Populism was a movement that had been growing since the end of the Civil War and was largely, although not exclusively, made up of white Protestant men from lower-to-middle-class farming backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Beyond identity, what these men shared in common was an increasing sense of worry and frustration that they were losing their place in society. This movement was largely homogeneous, and yet truly thought of itself as a "people's movement" even though a vast majority of the people never found a home in it. African Americans, ethnic Mexican workers, and ethnically Chinese farmers and workers, all people who suffered under the same economic and political system that white Populists stated was oppressing them, were almost always on the outside of the movement, either by their own choice or because the movement rejected them.<sup>12</sup>

The political climate of the 1890s was not a time that greatly valued inclusivity, and yet it was also a known fact that the votes of non-white men were needed to win elections when the white voting bloc was closely divided. This basic fact affected how all political parties acted as they functioned in a society where white supremacy was largely unquestioned by those in power, but to stay in power one needed the support of non-white voters. While People's Party activists did make efforts to gain the support of non-white voters, in the end they were unable to expand beyond their core constituency of white farmers. This failure happened for three main reasons: the political liability of racial inclusivity limited the actions that could be taken to appeal to non-white voters; the political structure of post-Civil War America made it more difficult and

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<sup>11</sup> When the word "Populist" is capitalized it is referring to the People's Party. When it is lowercase than it is referring to other forms of populism.

<sup>12</sup> While there is academic debate on whether or not to capitalize the word "Black" when referring to race, in this paper I have decided to capitalize the word.

politically disadvantageous in certain cases to have a bi- or multi-racial political coalition; and a combination of policy differences and the white supremacy that was rampant within the party deterred outside voting blocs from opting to join.

The historian Charles Postel in *The Populist Vision* offers valuable insight into the relationship between the People's Party and Black people. While many early works on Populism do not engage with how Populism and race intersect with each other, Postel does. Postel argues that although the People's Party did find some common political ground between white and Black farmers, as a whole the People's Party was an active participant in shaping the racial order of exclusion and separation that was being constructed within the United States.<sup>13</sup> Postel mostly focuses on the work of white Populists, and so largely treats the Populist movement as the story of white men with Black people as supporting roles. This work will be used to contextualize my own research and to help build a more holistic understanding of the People's Party from a national perspective.

One of the most preeminent modern scholars of the People's Party and is Gregg Cantrell, specifically in his studies of Texas Populism. His work argues that although the People's Party was by no means perfect in its conduct when concerning things such as racism Populists were nonetheless reformers in these areas and in some ways ahead of their time.<sup>14</sup> Cantrell not only looks at the effects that Black people had on the People's Party in Texas, but gives attention to the work of Mexican and Mexican-American Populists as well. While this book proved to be useful for contextualization and furthering my understanding of Texas Populism, it itself was only focused on one state, and so offers a limited view of what Populism was, something this work hopes to rectify.

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 176.

<sup>14</sup> Gregg Cantrell, *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020): 16-17.

What all of the historians detailed above do is depict Populism from the perspective of the majority white organizations that had helped create the People's Party, and thus to varying extents treat the non-white people who helped build American Populism and the People's Party as marginal figures. In Omar H. Ali's, *In The Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900*, the work and experiences of Black Populists are placed in the center of the narrative. This book argues that American Populism and the People's Party always had a large African American element within it that greatly influenced and grew the movement, and that there were significant differences in how white Populists understood the movement, and how Black Populists thought of the movement. Ali examines the fact that white Populists had the ability to support the People's Party more out of belief, whereas Black Populists always had to balance political belief and pragmatism. Ali in his articles "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century: Black Populists and the Struggle Against the Southern Democracy" and in his article "Standing Guard at the Door of Liberty: Black Populism in South Carolina, 1889-1895" highlights the role of Black leaders and Black organizations in the People's Party, and shows them as autonomous individuals and political actors rather than as marginal figures in a larger white story.<sup>15</sup>

While the racial makeup of the United States during the Populist era went beyond a Black and white racial binary, my research could not find enough primary source evidence to examine American Populism and its connection to other people of color besides Black people. Chinese, Chinese-American, Mexican, and Mexican-American workers and farmers were major parts of

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<sup>15</sup> Omar H. Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 16-18 <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wheatonma-ebooks/reader.action?docID=619201>.; Omar H. Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century: Black Populists and the Struggle Against the Southern Democracy," *A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 7, no. 2 (2005).; Omar H. Ali, "Standing Guard at the Door of Liberty: Black Populism in South Carolina, 1889-1895," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107, no. 3 (Jul. 2006).

the economy during the time of the People's Party, and the relationship between these groups and Populism deserve greater examination. When this examination is done the end result will be a more holistic account of American racial politics in the Gilded Age. Jean Pfaelzer's book *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* can act as a starting point for further research to be taken on the topic of Chinese and Chinese-American workers and their relationship with Populism.<sup>16</sup> Gregg Cantrell's work on Mexican and Mexican-American workers and farmers and their interaction with Populism in Texas would also provide a useful starting point for those who wish to build off of his examination and try to better understand this relationship across racial lines and what if any affect it had on politics.

This thesis hopes to work alongside Postel and Cantrell, but focus on issues specifically concerning race, and using the analysis of Ali to try to center Black narratives. This paper does not set out to disprove anyone, but rather give a more holistic approach and understanding of the People's Party and how it dealt with issues surrounding race.

If one were to read the September 9th, 1892, edition of *The Staunton Vindicator*, a Democratic-supporting newspaper from Virginia, two articles would indicate that the Democrats of the time feared the implementation of forced integrated schools, the existence of inter-racial couples, and Federal oversight of their election process.<sup>17</sup> When these Democrats made these statements they were not just idly expressing their fears in a theoretical sense devoid of context. Rather they were worried, or at least claimed to be worried, that if the Democratic Party's control

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> "To the Late Democrats of the People's Party," *Staunton Vindicator*, September 9, 1892, <https://virginiachronicle.com/?a=d&d=SV18920909.1.2&e=09-09-1892----189-en-20--1--txt-txIN-staunton+vindicator----1892--->; "Mixed Schools and Marriages Advocated by the Republicans," *Staunton Vindicator*, September 9, 1892, <https://virginiachronicle.com/?a=d&d=SV18920909.1.2&e=09-09-1892----189-en-20--1--txt-txIN-staunton+vindicator----1892--->.

over the South were to break because the Democrats lost an election, their way of life would become undone. Specifically some of these fears were grounded in the creation of a new political party, the People's Party, and the possibility that white Democrats would start supporting it. This newspaper would state that if white Democrats defected to the new People's Party, these former Democrats would help make a system where the Republican Party could pass legislation at a federal level that would allow Republicans to "go on in their reckless corruption... ." <sup>18</sup>

By the time these newspaper articles were written, the Democratic Party had had nearly total control of the South since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. But the Democratic hold on power was not as absolute as it seemed. Democrats could only be confident of winning elections if, and only if, the majority of white voters remained loyal. In normal times it was highly unlikely that white voters in the South would leave the Democratic Party, but the introduction of a third party into the political system changed this likelihood.

There were four outcomes possible when a third political party entered an electoral race. The first was that nothing changed substantially, and the political order was kept intact. The second was that voters defected to the third party from the majority party, and in doing so made the minority party competitive in elections. The third option was that the minority political party and the third party fused and ran a joint ticket, and in doing so possible increased their chances of electoral victory. The fourth was that the third party gained enough support outright to win electorally, and in doing so completely upset the political order.

The success of the People's Party through fusion and outright political success would upset the political order from 1891 to 1896, and in some areas across the country even beyond that time frame. Grimes County in East Texas serves as one such example. Democrats dominated Texas politics at the state level but Populists had come to political power in Grimes County in

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<sup>18</sup> "To the Late Democrats of the People's Party."

part because in East Texas, Democrats traditionally had less support.<sup>19</sup> The 1890 Census reported that Grimes County was roughly half Black and half white. According to Lawrence Goodwyn, "Populism in Grimes County is the story of a black-white coalition that had its genesis in Reconstruction and endured for more than a generation."<sup>20</sup> While a third party inherently upset the political order the fact that it was done so through the support of Black and white men was a challenge in itself to white supremacy. Populism in Grimes County outlived the People's Party as a national force. To gain control of the county the Democrats used organized violence to break the bi-racial coalition and destroy Populist support.<sup>21</sup>

To maintain political power Democrats had to ensure white solidarity, meaning that all or a vast majority of white men would have to support the Democratic Party. A commonly used Democratic tactic to accomplish this was to accuse third parties and the Republican Party of trying to bring about "negro domination."<sup>22</sup> References to "negro domination" came out of Reconstruction, or more appropriately, how many white Southerners chose to remember Reconstruction. During Reconstruction the beginnings of Black empowerment started to take place in the South with Black people being elected to office, and Black people being able to exercise their newly gained political rights. This ability for Black people to use their political rights in the South was mostly due to the federal occupation that took place during Reconstruction. After Reconstruction, Democrats gained back the power they had lost and rolled back the rights that Black people had gained. In response, "Between 1886 and 1898 southern

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence C. Goodwyn, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (Dec. 1971): 1436-1438  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1870515.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 1436-1437.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 1439.

<sup>22</sup> "To the Late Democrats of the People's Party.," C.W. Matthews, "Political Notes," *Staunton Vindicator*, September 9, 1892,  
<https://virginiachronicle.com/?a=d&d=SV118920909.1.2&e=09-09-1892----189-en-20--1--txt-tx|N-staunton+vindicator----1892--->.

African Americans-most of whom had been born into slavery...but were stripped of their newfound rights as citizens-organized an independent movement for economic and political reform: Black Populism."<sup>23</sup>

After Reconstruction ended, white Southerners would remember it as a time when outside political forces and 'illegitimate' Black rule led to the oppression of white people and the diminishing of the historic political power of white Southerners. So when *The Staunton Vindicator* warned against defection from the Democratic Party to the People's Party, it did so in a way that tried to make it seem that a vote for the People's Party was a vote in favor of the oppression of white people because to defect would mean that the Republican Party would gain power and could use its new power to "defy your votes."<sup>24</sup> If Democratic power was voided, Democrats feared that Black people would come to political power, and thus return white Democrats to their lives under Reconstruction.

In actuality Populists overall had little interest in restructuring race relations within the United States, but accusations stating that they did created a political liability for the People's Party, and for all of those who were seeking to challenge the current political order.<sup>25</sup> It is impossible to know whether the authors of the articles in the *Staunton Vindicator* or other Democratic writers truly believed in what they said, and feared that Populists and Republicans would bring about Black rule. Yet whether these Democratic authors believed in the arguments or not does not matter; what matters is that these arguments were made.

In the post-Reconstruction political climate it was politically dangerous to be seen as being allied too closely with Black voters. This exact political liability would be a point of

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<sup>23</sup> Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century," 4.

<sup>24</sup> "To the Late Democrats of the People's Party."

<sup>25</sup> Patrick J. Kelly, "The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory," *Civil War History* 49, no. 3 (Sep. 2003): 254.

contention in Texas Populism in 1894. While Texas Populists had often fused with Republicans at a local level, it became more difficult to fuse with Republicans at a statewide level because "the GOP was irrevocably fixed in the minds of most white southerners as the part of 'negro domination.'"<sup>26</sup> For Populist voters to be seen as being aligned too closely with Black voters, even if it led to political victory, was too high of a social barrier to cross, and this above statement was describing Texas, a state that had always had Black leadership in the Populist movement. The political climate of the time and the consistent element of fear and distrust of Black voters, along with not wanting to be associated with Black people personally, may have led some white voters who could have voted for the People's Party, to turn away.<sup>27</sup> While Black voters could potentially win an election for Populists, there was also the potential that their support could drive away white voters, and white voters made up the majority of the electorate almost everywhere.

The People's Party was not a revolutionary force in race relations and did not want to bring about "negro domination" like the Democrats accused them of. To better understand an aspect of the People's Party's attitude towards race we can examine Tom Watson. Tom Watson was a former Democratic Congressman from Georgia who turned Populist. He grew up in relative wealth in Georgia and would go on to become a major figure within the Populist movement, serving as the vice-presidential candidate in 1896. There were very few major white Populists, if any, who actively advocated for the social equality of Black and white people. In the minds of Populists and most people of the time, social equality meant racially integrated private and public spheres of life. Social equality was something that Tom Watson would actively

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<sup>26</sup> Gregg Cantrell and D. Scott Barton, "Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics," *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 4 (Nov. 1989): 673.

<sup>27</sup> Russell Korobkin, "The Politics of Disfranchisement in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 35.; Bruce E. Stewart, "The Urban-Rural Dynamic of the Southern Farmers' Alliance Relations Between Athens Merchants and Clarke County Farmers, 1888-1891," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 180.

denounce during the 1892 campaign season as he ran for Congress as a Populist. Watson would even state on the campaign trail that "They [the Democrats] say I am an advocate of social equality between the whites and the blacks. THAT IS AN ABSOLUTE FALSEHOOD, and the man who utter it, knows it."<sup>28</sup>

Most Populists like Watson supported an alliance with Black voters that was based on political equality and the idea that Black and white farmers had a shared economic plight rather than anything having to do with a merging of social spheres. Political equality and a shared economic plight combined both pragmatism and idealism surrounding issues of reform, because they not only spoke to various reform issues that were always at the heart of the movement, such as debt, sharecropping, and the crop-lien system, but also kept Black voters at a distance so that white voters, and Watson's own sensibilities, weren't violated. At the center of this appeal to a Black and white coalition of farmers was the idea, as expressed by Tom Watson in 1892, that Black and white people had both had promises made to them that were broken under their current economic and political system, and that in an economic sense they have more in common than not.<sup>29</sup> On the campaign trail Watson would state in regards to the separation of Black and white farmers when it came to economic issues,

You are kept apart so 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

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<sup>28</sup> J.L. Driscoll, "Watson At Sparta: A Great Crowd Remain To Hear His Defense-Despite Brass Bands, Rowdyism, Barbecue and Speeches, his Speech is Delivered.," *People's Party Paper*, September 2, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-09-02/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>29</sup> J. L. Driscoll, "Watson's Welcome Home: Account Of His Stewardship. 'Well Done, Good And Faithfully Servant.' Incidents Along the Line from Atlanta to Thompson-The People Turn Out En Masse. 'Good-Bye, Jimmie,' Is the Ralling Cry In The Tenth," *People's Party Paper*, August 12, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-08-12/ed-1/seq-1.pd>.

blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.<sup>30</sup>

While we do not know if it was Watson's appeals that brought Black voters into the People's Party, there were Black Populists in the state of Georgia. Black ministers campaigned for them; Rev. Henry S. Doyle would deliver over 60 speeches in support of Tom Watson in 1892 even when his own life was under risk.<sup>31</sup> According to Ali, in Georgia, "Black Populists such as Doyle not only campaigned for white Populist candidates, but were active in leadership positions."<sup>32</sup> After the 1894 elections, Black voters were credited with giving the People's Party its electoral victories in almost every county that the People's Party won, although overall statewide victory would elude the Populists of Georgia.<sup>33</sup> The example of Georgia and bi-racial politics helps highlight the fact that even though Populists did not want to appear as close to Black voters, Black voters supported the movement in substantial ways.

In an attempt to create white and Black solidarity, Populists would even allude to or state that the current economic oppression faced by white and Black farmers made them akin to slaves, or that their current economic position was worse than slavery.<sup>34</sup> An article in *The Southern Mercury*, a Texas Populist newspaper, in 1892 would state that "The last generation abolished chattel (negro) slavery. This generation should abolish industrial slavery of the whites and negro also."<sup>35</sup> The idea that white and Black farmers had the same economic conditions was largely not true because although they had some similar problems the nature of those problems

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<sup>30</sup> Tindall, *A Populist Reader*, 125-126.

<sup>31</sup> Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century," 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> A. Wardall, "Down in Georgia," *The Advocate*, November 6, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1895-11-06/ed-1/seq-13/>; "Weighted And Found Wanting," *The Southern Mercury*, May 5, 1892, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185463/m1/9/>.

<sup>35</sup> *The Southern Mercury*, June 16, 1892, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185469/m1/8/>.

was different. Black farmers not only had to contend with failed crops and debt, like white farmers, but had to do so in a society that valued them less than their white counterparts. Also, Black farmers tended to not own their land and were sharecroppers while white farmers, indebted, owned the land that they were on.<sup>36</sup> Still, the threat of debt forcing someone into sharecropping was a fear that many farmers experienced, and to speak to this shared plight was an attempt by Populists to create a coalition that, although it acknowledged race, tried to go beyond it or downplay it. While in Texas attempts to create a bi-racial coalition in 1892 would fail, it being estimated that almost no Black voters supported the People's Party in 1892, in other states like Georgia these coalitions would form. These coalitions would also form despite the fact that Populists such as Tom Watson had Black farmers working on land that he owned while at the same time he argued against sharecropping.<sup>37</sup>

While white Populists were willing to make appeals to Black and white solidarity when speaking to the idea of a shared economic plight they were largely unwilling to address or combat any of the institutions of white supremacy in the United States. In this we see the limitations of the movement and many of its members. When it came to issues particularly concerning the Black community, such as lynchings, the People's Party largely remained silent. This will be discussed in further detail later on but what must be remembered in this discussion on race and Populism are the limitations of the movement, and nothing more clearly shows the movement's limitations as its support of things such as social separation as exemplified by this quote from Watson:

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<sup>36</sup> Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> J.L. Driscoll, *The People's Party*, August 12, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-08-12/ed-1/seq-1.pdf>; Cantrell and Barton, "Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics," 663.

It is best for your race and my race that we dwell apart in our private affairs. [Many voices among the colored: 'That's so, boss.'] It is best for you to go to your churches, and I will go to mine; it is best that you send your children to your colored school, and I'll send my children to mine; you invite your colored friends to your home, and I'll invite my friends to mine. (A voice from a colored man: 'Now you're talking sense,' and murmurs of approval all through the audience.)<sup>38</sup>

In the above quote we not only see the clear distinctions Watson made on the 1892 campaign trail about the proper place of Black and white people, but also the inclusion of supposed interruptions of Black people during his speech. It is impossible to prove that these interruptions really happened or not, but the fact that they were included helps show that Populists such as Watson were trying to make it seem that both white and Black people could support the policy of social inequality. These interjections were included so that the People's Party could show voters that it had Black support while at the same time showing the social distance kept between the two groups of people. While it is important to note the belief in separation was espoused by white Populists, it is equally as important to understand that there were Black members of the Populist movement who also advocated for a separation of Black and white people. This helps show that the idea of segregation, at least socially, may have been more acceptable to the sensibilities of both Black and white people of the time than is usually thought.<sup>39</sup> With that being said the reasoning for the advocacy of separation may have been different for Black and white Populists. For white Populists segregation tended to be advocated

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<sup>38</sup> "Some Lively Lies.," *People's Party Paper*, September 9, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-09-09/ed-1/seq-4.pdf>.  
 "Watson At Cedartown.-What The Democrats Did When They Had A Chance.-The Seventh District Well Represented in the Audience, but no Democratic Speakers Present.," *People's Party Paper*, October 14, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-10-14/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>.  
 "The Negro's Destiny.-The Negro's Future Home the Southern Lowlands.," *Kansas Agitator*, July 14, 1891, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1891-07-14/ed-1/seq-6/>.; Driscoll, "Watson At Sparta: A Great Crowd Remain To Hear His Defense-Despite Brass Bands, Rowdyism, Barbecue and Speeches, his Speech is Delivered."

<sup>39</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 40.; Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 41.

for because they wanted to maintain the facade of white supremacy, and for Black Populists it was often advocated so that they could live in increased safety away from white people.

Efforts to reach out to people of a different race were almost always foiled or hampered by white Populists inability or unwillingness to challenge white supremacy in the United States. In part Populists would have known that challenging this white supremacist political structure and being inclusive in their politics would most likely lose them white voters and so ruin any chance of political victory. There is also the fact that most white Populists still heavily believed in white supremacy, and so were themselves not looking to challenge it. While bending racial barriers to gain Black voters was a necessity, it also could act as a political liability, and so white Populists did not bend far.

When Black people started to support the People's Party in greater numbers, and thus threaten white solidarity, violence against Black people increased.<sup>40</sup> Violence against the Black community and Black voters was not something new to the political landscape, southern Democrats often publicly boasted about suppressing the Black voter turnout.<sup>41</sup> This violence and oppression often led Black Populists, such as those in South Carolina in 1892, to organize secretly without the assistance of white Populists so risk of retaliation and violence could be minimized<sup>42</sup> Violence as a political tool was something that people in Gilded Age America were ready to use, and when it was used the Black community would often bear the brunt of it.

One of the clearest examples of violence being used as a political tool can be seen in the act of lynching. Lynching tended to be a racially motivated murder that was usually against a

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<sup>40</sup> James M. Inverarity, "Populism and Lynching in Louisiana, 1889-1896: A Test of Erikson's Theory of the Relationship between Boundary Crises and Repressive Justice," *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 2 (Apr. 1976): 267-268.; Jeffrey J. Crow, "'Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism' Schisms among Negro Republicans in the North Carolina Election of 1896," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 53, no. 4 (Oct. 1976): 143.; Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ali, "Standing Guard at the Door of Liberty," 199.

Black person. Lynchings took place when a white person accused a Black man of, amongst other things, the rape of a white woman, the assault of a white person, or when a Black man spoke out against the current societal and political structure.<sup>43</sup> Lynchings, or the expectation of a lynching to happen, were also not always spur-of-the-moment acts of mob violence, but rather sometimes planned out in newspapers, where the possibility of a lynching to occur was mentioned prominently. In a study of lynchings in Georgia during the Populist era sociologist Sarah Soule found that when Black people started to own their own land and compete for jobs with white people, lynchings of Black people increased.<sup>44</sup>

The Populist press often covered lynchings with little editorializing around them. In one issue of the Kansas based newspaper, the *Hutchinson Gazette*, there was the mention of the lynching and murder of three Black men in 1895.<sup>45</sup> In August 1895 there were two mentions of the murder of black men.<sup>46</sup> In the month of October for that newspaper there would be three more mentions of the murders of black men.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 6.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah A. Soule, "Populism and Black Lynching in Georgia, 1890-1900," *Social Forces* 71, no. 2 (Dec. 1992): 444.

<sup>45</sup> "Hanged By A Mob.-Take Two Colored Men Out of Jail and Hang Them in Arkansas.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, July 18, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-07-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.; "Ticks From The Wire," *Hutchinson Gazette*, July 18, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-07-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.; "Lynching in Kentucky," *Hutchinson Gazette*, July 18, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-07-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>46</sup> "Divers Lynched.-The Outrage and Murder of Mrs. Cain Awfully Avenged Near Fulton, Mo.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, August 22, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-08-22/ed-1/seq-6/>.; "Negro Lynched and Jailer Killed.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, August 22, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-08-22/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>47</sup> "A Terrible Vengeance.-A Georgia Negro Brute Maimed, Shot and Burned.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, October 10, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-10-10/ed-1/seq-6/>.; "Lynching At Jackson, MO.-Will Henderson, Colored, Strung Up With Little Excitement.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, October 17, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-10-17/ed-1/seq-6/>.; "Mob Violence Feared," *Hutchinson Gazette* originally published in Lexington, MO, October 31, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030687/1895-10-31/ed-1/seq-6/>.

Below are just a few examples of reported lynchings or potential lynchings from various newspapers:

Ollie Thixton, the negro assulter of Miss May Crews of Glasgow Mo., was lynched at 3 o'clock Thursday morning by a band of men who took him from the county jail at Fayette.<sup>48</sup>

Elrod Hudson and Jeff Dinsmore, colored, were lynched at Russellville Ala., for arson.<sup>49</sup>

Hon. J. A. Henneman, mayor of Spartanburg, S. C., was shot and killed by a negro whom he attempted to arrest. The negro is in jail, but will probably be lynched.<sup>50</sup>

Winston, N.C., Nov. 19.-Officers and a mob of citizens are to-night on the trail of a negro fiend, Bob Scales, who yesterday shot and fatally wounded the 12-year-old daughter of Thomas Beloton, white, near Madison. Scales is 16 years old. He will be lynched if caught.<sup>51</sup>

These mentions of lynchings would come from Kansas based Populist newspapers. As seen in these above quotes many of the times when Populists in Kansas reported on lynchings it was about what has happened in another state. Most lynchings happened in the South, and it appears that Southern Populists did not speak to this issue as much as Populists in Kansas had done. This comparative silence can speak to either complicity in the actions taken, or fear of upsetting white voters by seeing as coming to the defense of Black people who had upset the social order, which would serve as just another form of complicity, just with a different reasoning behind it.

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<sup>48</sup> *Kansas Agitator*, April 3, 1896,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1896-04-03/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>49</sup> *Kansas Agitator*, April 21, 1891,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1891-04-21/ed-1/seq-3/>.

<sup>50</sup> "General News.-The Happenings of a Week-Domestic", *Kansas Agitator*, October 13, 1891,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1891-10-13/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>51</sup> "Mob After A Colored Youth.," *Hutchinson Gazette*, November 21, 1895,  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85030687/1895-11-21/ed-1/?sp=6>.

While there was a great amount of silence on the issue of lynching for Populists in the South, Populists would comment in cases where it was a Black Populist who was threatened. Reverend Doyle, a Black Populist from Georgia would have his life threatened on the campaign trail, and Tom Watson would call on 2,000 Populists to defend him.<sup>52</sup> This defense of a Black man in the face of a potential lynching helps show that Populists did not totally ignore this societal problem, especially when it was happening to a fellow Populist. Still even when Watson was trying to defend Rev. Doyle, he did so in a way that reaffirmed his own viewpoint on the proper racial structure of society. According to the historian Charles Crowe, Watson made Rev. Doyle hide in the living quarters where the other Black people on Watson's property lived, not hide in Watson's house.<sup>53</sup> For men like Watson it appears that only Black men who were Populists were worthy of protection, and still only if the proper societal order was maintained while doing so.

When Democrats would use violence against Black Populist voters outrage and indignation would be expressed would be expressed in the Populist press, such as in the 1892 Georgia elections when multiple specific mentions of attacks on Black Populists can be found printed. The *People's Party Paper* would print in October 14th, 1892, in regards to violence enacted against a Black man who tried to vote, "This is the justice, this is fairness of the Democratic sort. It is enough to make the cheeks of every man with one iota of self-respect mantle with shame. It should be the rallying cry of all colored men as they sound the clarion call for People's party men."<sup>54</sup> In that same issue of the *People's Party Paper* a Populist writer in explaining the People's Party election loss would state that "The colored voter, whose every

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<sup>52</sup> Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century," 11.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," *The Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 2 (Apr. 1970): 107.

<sup>54</sup> "Echoes From the Election," *People's Party Paper*, October 14, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-10-14/ed-1/seq-5.pdf>

interest is with that of the laboring white man, was bulldozed, intimidated, driven from the polls, and in some instances shot for attempting to exercise the rights of citizenship and vote as they pleased. By intimidation, by bribery, by the use of whisky, by force, the larger part of the colored vote was either cast for the Democratic ticket or kept from the poll."<sup>55</sup> Georgia Populists were trying to explain to their voters why they had lost, and why Black support had not given them the edge over the Democrats that they needed. The way in which they chose to explain this loss was by highlighting the violence done against Black voters who they said were going to support them, and by pointing to Democratic corruption. This corruption and violence did take place, so much so that in 1894 when Tom Watson ran for re-election and lost, fraud was considered to be so rampant in that campaign that Watson's Democratic opposition had to resign the seat that he had "won" in Congress and participate in a second election.<sup>56</sup>

Another issue where white Populists did not support a measure that would have helped the Black community was the so-called "Force Bill" or, known by its formal name the "Federal Elections Bill."<sup>57</sup> The Federal Elections Bill was a piece of legislation that, if passed, would have increased federal power to oversee elections at the state-level and so in principle would have helped Black voters safely exercise their franchise across the country, but particularly in the South.<sup>58</sup> According to some historians, Black Populists were generally more in favor of this bill than their white counterparts, who mostly opposed it.<sup>59</sup> This most likely took place because Black voters had seen their votes not only used as a political bargaining chip but had also seen their votes stolen and manipulated, whereas white voters especially in the South did not support

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<sup>55</sup> "To the People of Georgia," *People's Party Paper*, October 14, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-10-14/ed-1/seq-4.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century," 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Richard E. Welch, Jr, "The Federal Elections Bill of 1890: Postscripts and Prelude," *The Journal of American History* 52, no. 3 (Dec. 1965): 514.

<sup>59</sup> Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 70.

this bill because they feared a return to the type of federal involvement in their state governments and elections like they had seen during Reconstruction.

Although Populists would belittle the idea that "negro domination" could ever be brought about, they would not support a measure that would bring their elections under the purview of the federal government and help ensure that Black voters could actually vote and have a say in their electoral system fairly and freely.<sup>60</sup> The Federal Election Bill was viewed as "despotic" by some Populists who did not want the federal government involved in local and statewide politics.<sup>61</sup> Texas Populists in 1892 would use the threat of Democrats winning election to hint that suppression or disenfranchisement of Black voters would increase and might necessitate a Federal Election Bill.<sup>62</sup> Populists in Georgia such as Watson would try to paint the Federal Elections Bill in the same light as the "bloody shirt," as political rhetoric by others to keep Black and white people apart.<sup>63</sup> Once again, when white Populists were forced to make a choice on an issue that specifically concerned race they were more interested in maintaining the current political system rather than making a reform that could potentially help people who were not necessarily voting for them.

When Black voters could vote freely in elections the majority historically went to the Republican Party, although by no means were Black voters monolithic in whom they decided to

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<sup>60</sup> "Machine Politics," *The Southern Mercury* originally published in the St. Louis New Forum, June 16, 1892, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht185469/m1/2/>; Tindall, *A Populist Reader*, 127-128.

<sup>61</sup> "Wasted at Once," *The Southern Mercury*, September 1, 1892, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht185480/m1/5/>.

<sup>62</sup> L. H. B., *The Southern Mercury*, August 12, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-08-12/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> J.C. Blanton, "Harris Country," *People's Party Paper*, August 19, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-08-19/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>; G.T. Rhodes, "From the Lone Star State," *People's Party Paper*, <https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-gildedage%3A24417>.

<sup>64</sup> The "bloody shirt" was a campaign tool often used by Republicans to remind voters from the North that the South was connected to the Democrats who supported the Confederacy, and were thus the reason so many Northerners had died.

vote for or in their reasons for doing so. After Reconstruction ended, Black voters could no longer win elections for Republicans in the South beyond a few small pockets. Meanwhile the North had largely lost interest in protecting Black civil rights. With this transformation there were no places where Black voters could go if they were seeking total political, social, and economic equality, and so while white voters had the opportunity to use their vote to advocate for economic and political reasons, Black voters, especially Black Populists, focused on life and death issues and pragmatism.<sup>65</sup>

The political pragmatism of Black Populist leaders offers an excellent way into understanding the political pragmatism expressed by many members of the Black community. Melvin Wade, who the newspaper *The Galveston Daily News* described in September of 1892 as the "leading colored Republican of Dallas," would be an early defector from the Republican Party into the People's Party camp.<sup>66</sup> Why would a man like Wade who held a respected position within the Republican Party of Texas, leave to join a new political movement? Why would Wade not only leave the Republican Party but go on to become a well-known Populist political operative who, as reported in *The Southern Mercury*, would sometimes give up to thirteen speeches in sixteen days leading up to the 1896 elections in support of the People's Party?<sup>67</sup>

The answer to these questions is largely based on a mix of pragmatism and idealism. The Republican Party had not been a viable political force in the South since the end of Reconstruction, and while minor patronage may be gained from association with this party in the event of a Presidential election victory, this patronage was not going to lift up the entire Black community. As reported in the *Fort Worth Gazette*, Wade supported the People's Party because

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<sup>65</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 174.

<sup>66</sup> "PEDDLING EMPTY CHESTNUTS IN TEXAS.," *The Galveston Daily News*, September 3, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth465433/m1/2/>.

<sup>67</sup> "Melvin Wade.," *The Southern Mercury*, October 8, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185680/m1/11/>.

there were tangible things that could be gained from association with this new political movement, such as having Black men act as co-chairmen of local party organizations, making Black men at least nominally politically equal to white men.<sup>68</sup> The People's Party represented a pathway forward not only for men like Wade who could hope for political advancement, but also for Black people who had found that the two major political parties did not have a place for them. Also the Republican Party, to escape the association it had gained as being the pro-Black party, started to become "Lily-White," meaning that factions of it purposefully started to exclude Black people from their ranks.<sup>69</sup> So while there were factors drawing men like Wade out from the Republican Party, they were also substantial efforts made by the Republicans to push men like Wade out.

Still, for Black people in Texas it would take time for the People's Party to gain their support. From the 1892 gubernatorial elections to the 1896 gubernatorial elections in Texas, Black support increased from roughly 0% in 1892, to 42% in 1896.<sup>70</sup> This is a tremendous increase in support in just four years, but in reality the People's Party was only able to gain 42% of the Black vote in 1896 because the Republican Party did not run a candidate for Governor. In 1894 when all three parties ran candidates the People's Party gained 17% of the Black vote.<sup>71</sup> While the People's Party in Texas would always have support from Black people, even having two Black men elected to be on their executive committee, it would never be enough to gain them outright political success.<sup>72</sup> The reasoning for why Black voters did not join the People's Party in Texas can be linked to a fear of violence from Democrats, Democratic manipulation, and a belief in the Republican Party which had been Black voters' home for close to thirty years.

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<sup>68</sup> "Guarantees of Chicken Pie.," *Fort Worth Gazette*, September 3, 1891, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth90481/m1/2/>.

<sup>69</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 190.

<sup>70</sup> Cantrell and Barton, "Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics," 663.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 663.

<sup>72</sup> Ali, "Independent Black Voices from the Late 19th Century," 8.

While the People's Party and the Democratic Party were rivals in the South, many former Democrats actually made up the People's Party. This was in part because one of the main reform organizations that had led to the People's Party, was the Farmers' Alliance. The Farmers' Alliance was not a political party but an advocacy group and so was made up of Democrats in large numbers, many of which would leave the Democratic Party to join the People's Party, but more who did not. The Farmers' Alliance was completely white, and the Colored Farmer's Alliance was formed in the late 1880s to represent the interests of Black farmers, and both would lead to the creation of the People's Party. While many Democrats had chosen to stay with their political party, there were those who felt that the People's Party would best serve their interests, and so left their traditional political home. These Democrats were people like Tom Watson from Georgia, Marion Butler who would go on to be a Senator under the People's Party banner from North Carolina, and Leonidas L. Polk, who was instrumental in the formation of the People's Party and even chaired the convention that created the party was. This also meant that many of the Populists who spoke of the dangers of Democratic rule and warned about how Democrats treated Black people were themselves formerly the people who were helping in the oppression of Black people, or were as Populists still continuing to oppress Black people.<sup>73</sup>

While the People's Party tried to bridge sectional differences and heal the wounds that stretched back to the Civil War, Populists would prove incapable of completely shaking away the past and the political baggage that came with it. Georgia Populists in 1892 called on African American farmers to realize that they were being oppressed and ally themselves with white men, but at the same time they also stated that they needed to work with former Confederates against

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<sup>73</sup> William H. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study," *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 3 (Aug. 1968), 408.; Korobkin, "The Politics of Disfranchisement in Georgia," 32.; Crow, "Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism," 367-368.; Robert C. McMath Jr, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 174  
<https://archive.org/details/americanpopulism0000mcma/page/n9/mode/2up>.

their common oppressors who were controlling the economic system that was subjugating them both.<sup>74</sup> Populists were not looking to adapt themselves to gain Black voters, but telling Black voters that they needed to adapt and join them for everyone's benefit, even if that meant allying with the people who had fought to keep them and their families enslaved.

Since Republicans in states such as Kansas tended to have closer historical ties to the Union, during election time Republicans would often bring out the "bloody shirt," to remind voters to support them. Populists would state that the "bloody shirt" needed to be put away and that the nation must move on. Yet while the Populists of the Midwest would state that the country needed to move away from the conflicts of the past they would also include military imagery in their campaigns. Union soldiers would be present at Populist conventions, and James B. Weaver a former Union brigadier general from the Midwest, headed the 1892 Populist presidential ticket. What must be noted is that on that same party ticket as the vice-presidential candidate in 1892 would be James G. Field, a former Confederate Major. While the Populists would claim to be moving past the Civil War and Reconstruction and in doing so moving past the racial climate that those events had created, they also would reach back and use their heritage to give themselves political legitimacy, both Populists who had historic Union ties, and those who had ties to the Confederacy. This meant that their actions did not always match their rhetoric, and could have helped perpetuate the sectional and divisive political climate that was already present at that time, and kept marginalized people on the outskirts of politics. With that being said, the fact that soldiers from both sides were present at the People's Party conventions, does show that the Populists were interested in getting as many voters from as many backgrounds as possible, regardless of previous divisions. Having both former Union and Confederate soldiers present

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<sup>74</sup> Peeping Tom, "Over the Country," *People's Party Paper*, September 9, 1892, <https://gahistoricnewspapers-files.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn83016235/1892-09-09/ed-1/seq-5.pdf>

could have been an attempt to position the People's Party as the party of reconciliation, a new party that can speak to both Northerners and Southerners, former Republicans and former Democrats.

While Black Populists viewed the People's Party as the best step forward into enacting needed reforms that would help their community, they also viewed the party and this movement as the best path forward to undermining Democratic power in the South.<sup>75</sup> This helps explain the resistance that Black Populists would have towards fusion with the Democratic Party in 1896 and the nomination of Democrat William Jennings Bryan by the People's Party. Black Populists such as Melvin Wade and John Rayer would speak out against fusion because they saw it as working with the very people who had been actively oppressing them and their people for years.

Black Populists and white Populists would both speak about the need for Black voters to realize that the current two party system was not benefiting them in any material way.<sup>76</sup> The rhetoric of Black Populists would also speak about leaving the past in the past, and moving towards a new future for the Black community, bereft of all previous political ties. One article written by a Black Populist in Kansas in 1890 even stated, "We are not waving the bloody shirt. The war is past. We are no longer slaves in its original form. We are supposed to be free. [T]hen let us think and act as free people."<sup>77</sup> The rhetoric used by Black Populists and white Populists were similar in many instances because for those within the movement there was space where an agreement across racial lines could be had when concerning substantive political issues. The call to break with the Republican Party by the author of this article is a call for Black people to truly

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<sup>75</sup> Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth*, 127.

<sup>76</sup> Driscoll, "Watson's Welcome Home: Account Of His Stewardship. 'Well Done, Good And Faithfully Servant.' Incidents Along the Line from Atlanta to Thompson-The People Turn Out En Masse. 'Good-Bye, Jimmie,' Is the Rallying Cry In The Tenth."

<sup>77</sup> Berry C. Duke, *The Advocate*, October 8, 1890, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029079/1890-10-08/ed-1/seq-9/>.

claim the freedom that had been won in the Civil War and after, and the writer of this article believed that the People's Party was the place where this freedom can be expressed.

The People's Party did not offer a perfect solution to all of the problems faced by the Black community in America, but no political parties did this. For the Black people who joined the People's Party and became leaders in it, such as John Rayner and Melvin Wade, the reforms proposed were enough to interest them, and offered a viable enough political alternative that justified the political risk of leaving the two parties and fighting for something different.

To understand the effects of Black Populists on the People's Party it is important to examine the work of John Rayner, perhaps the most famous Black Populist. Rayner was born into slavery, the son of a white man and an enslaved woman. Rayner's father was a politician, and Rayner himself would enter politics after the Civil War. When he became a political operative for the People's Party in 1894 his contributions were described as having great importance to the electoral success of the People's Party because of his ability to get Black people to vote for Populists. In September 1896 *The Southern Mercury*, stated that a pamphlet that Rayner wrote could do the work of ten speakers in converting Black voters to the People's Party.<sup>78</sup> As stated before Black voters could provide the winning votes that would bring about electoral success, and so a person who could gain these votes would be incredibly political important in their own right.

Rayner traveled so extensively for the People's Party in the state of Texas that there are various accounts of him giving nine speeches in nine different cities in almost as many days to

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<sup>78</sup> "The Best Convert Maker," *The Southern Mercury*, September 24, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185678/m1/3/>.

advocate for the Populist cause.<sup>79</sup> His prowess as a speaker would be expounded upon in the pages of *The Southern Mercury*:

What crowds of people, what throngs of people, by fours, by dozens, on foot, on horses, in buggies, in wagons, above the roars of applause and clapping of hands, you hear the sweet music of the voice of the illustrious Rayner. Now like wild tornado, now like a summer evening breeze, pointed, logical, severe, yet soft and gentle, the spirit of God is plainly mirrored from his heart, carrying conviction at every breath. God speed his good work!<sup>80</sup>

Rayner would not have been used as a political operative as much as he was, and his work and speaking arrangements would not be as advertised as they were in *The Southern Mercury*, if he was not an incredibly important political operative. Various times he was also referred to as "Our Colored Speaker" showing not only his political prowess, but that his name did not even have to be used for people to know who was being spoken about. Still, Rayner being referred to as "Our Colored Speaker" shows that while there was space for a Black man in the People's Party, there was not space for many Black men.

Examining why Rayner supported the People's Party helps to further explain why Black people would support the Populist movement, even when the Populist movement did not explicitly support policies that would only help Black people. Unlike many Black people within the Populist movement, some of the words of Rayner were recorded and a sense of why he supported Populism can be gathered. In a description of a speech given by Rayner in 1895 it is stated that he said:

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<sup>79</sup> "OUR COLORED SPEAKER.," *The Southern Mercury*, May 21, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185660/m1/12/>.

<sup>80</sup> James McCaa, "Notes From The People," *The Southern Mercury*, June 25, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185665/m1/14/>.

'The only rights we negroes will ever enjoy will be the right the southern white man gives us. Vote the people's party ticket; we will get better wages for our work and we will have better times in the south.'<sup>81</sup>

What this shows us in Rayner's reasoning for supporting the People's Party is that there was an element of pragmatism to it. Rayner acknowledges that for Black people to gain any political rights they will have to do so through white men. The Republican Party had failed to provide these rights for years, and the Democratic Party was the party of white supremacy, and so could not be looked to. So, the only option left was the People's Party. The argument made by Rayner in the article above is not an argument based on principle but rather an understanding of pragmatism and what Black people's position in American society was.

Examining some of the statements Rayner made, it can be questioned whether he himself believed in some tenets of white supremacy, or rather and more probably knew what he must say so that Black people would be accepted into the Populist movement. In a speech given at the Texas state convention in 1894 in regards to who was going to be the gubernatorial candidate, it was reported that Rayer stated that, "...he came from a race which had endured 4000 years of savagery and 285 years of slavery, only to find that the white man of the South is the negroes' first, best and firmest friend. Nominate Nugent and the negro will be as faithful to your flag as he was to your wives and children when you were fighting the battles of your country."<sup>82</sup> As we have already seen, Rayner stated that there are no rights that a Black person can have in the South that does not come from a white man. White men controlled the political fate of Black people, and so it is possible that the statement made above was done so to gain the political trust of white people so that they could work with Black people without feeling threatened. We of

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<sup>81</sup> J.B. Rayner, "From our Colored Speaker.," *The Southern Mercury*, March 16, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185652/m1/13/>.

<sup>82</sup> "STATE CONVENTION AT WACO.," *The Southern Mercury*, June 28, 1894, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185567/m1/4/>.

course cannot know for sure what Rayner was thinking as he made this statement, but it does allow for a more nuanced understanding of not only why Black Populists supported the movement, but how they did so.

Leading up to the 1896 People's Party convention in Texas, tensions were high as delegates tried to decide their stance on the People's Party and its fusion with Democratic Party at the national level. Fusion with Democrats, especially for Black Populists in Southern states, meant an alliance with the political party that was seen by Black people as their largest political obstacle. Both Rayner and Wade were publicly against fusion, it being reported that Rayner stated at the People's Party convention:

'I called you here for consultation, and it's not treating me right that there should be such insinuations that I have tried to lead you astray-that I am trying to sell you to the enemy. (Cries of 'No, No; nothing of the kind meant') What my object in this is I will tell you plainly: I want the negro populists to get together and agree, that we may show that we do not intend to support any democrat so that that fact may be very apparent. We want a straight populist and don't want anything to do with anything else-that's what I want to show."<sup>83</sup>

Rayner was not the only Black Populist of Texas to speak out against fusion at the national level. It was reported that Melvin Wade stated at the same convention that he did not support fusion with Democrats because he did not trust Democrats and did not want to help them electorally.<sup>84</sup> While both Rayner and Wade spoke out against fusion with the Democrats, lesser

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<sup>83</sup> "THEY GOT TOGETHER-THE COLORED POPULIST DELEGATES ARE IN FAVOR OF FUSION-UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS-One of Which Is in Case a Straight Populist Ticket is Not Put Out by Their Party.," *The Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth466048/m1/12/>.

<sup>84</sup> "POPULIST CONVENTION.-Permanenet Organiation Was Effectd Yesterday.-THREE CONTENTING ELEMENTS.-An earnest, BRave Body of Men, Whose LEaers Are Trained Politicians.-IDEA OF FUSION APPEARS HOPELESS.-The Platform Prepared by the Committee Proposes Several Innovations in the Conduct of the State's Affairs.," *The Galveston Daily News*, August 6, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth465433/m1/2/>.

known Black voices would be recorded in *The Galveston Daily News*, a non-Populist newspaper, as having stated at the People's Party convention:

We are here for the purpose of making the best of the situation. The views so far expressed seem to me to be far-fetched. It is claimed Bryan is a populist; then why did he send a telegram to St. Louis not to nominate him on the same platform with Watson? Bryan is no more a populist than the devil is an angel. He isn't sincere. We are negroes and live in the south and we want no democrats. If you sleep with a dog you are going to get fleas on you. Democrats have had many opportunities to give us free silver. Did they do it? No. The democrats has been the Pharaoh of the negroes and the republican party was the Moses; but Moses is dead now. We are here to save Texas. Bryan will never be president-I know what I am talking about.<sup>85</sup>

This Black Populist shows obvious disdain both for fusion and the other two political parties. By describing the Democrats as the "Pharaoh" meant that the Democratic Party was being depicted as the enslavers of Black people, and while Black people had viewed Republicans as their Moses, as their savior that would lead them out of slavery, this savior was not going to show up. All Black people could do know is fight for themselves, and as this Black Populist states the best way to do that is to stay away from the parties that have not been able to help them in the past.

Another Black Populist at the same convention stated:

I left the republican party and joined the populist party because I believed that the populist party is the one for the negroes. I canvassed my county before I came here, and if the populists stick to the democratic nominee, there are many there who are not going to vote for him. I don't say, mind you, that I'm going to vote for McKinley, but never will I vote for Bryan. We want a straight populist, but if I can't get him I am going to do the very best I can, but I am not going to vote for Bryan. I don't believe in fusion because I don't believe it's right in principle; if defeat awaits us, let us take it like men and count the living after the battle, not the

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<sup>85</sup> "THEY GOT TOGETHER-THE COLORED POPULIST DELEGATES ARE IN FAVOR OF FUSION-UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS-One of Which Is in Case a Straight Populist Ticket is Not Put Out by Their Party.," *The Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth466048/m1/12/>.

dead. I am going to vote the populist ticket from constable up to Mr. Kearby, but right there I am going to stop unless there are populists at the head of the ticket.<sup>86</sup>

Here again we see a Black Populist who is opposed to fusion. Many Black Populists, such as the one who made the above statement, viewed fusion as wrong on principle, but there was also a pragmatic element to this stance. Black Populists knew that the other two parties had failed them in the past. To ally themselves with those two parties now would be going against everything they stood for, to join hands with the very same people who had abandoned them, such as the Republicans when they became Lily-White, or the Democrats who had always excluded and oppressed them. This stance was both pragmatic, because any alliance made between Populists and another party would most likely diminish the role of Black people, and also idealistic because it wanted to preserve the principles that had first drawn Black people to Populism.

As seen in the words and actions of John B. Rayner, and how he was described by other Populists, Black people were a substantial part of the People's Party in places like Texas, especially in East Texas. They would not only travel the state and lecture as Rayner and Wade did, but newspapers would also state that Black voters held the balance of power in deciding elections.<sup>87</sup> Yet, the People's Party as a national organization was willing to risk the allies it had made within the Black community by fusing with the Democrats at a national level. Black Populists like Rayner and Wade believed in the People's Party both because they believed in the principles it stood by, but also because it was the pragmatic thing to do. When the People's Party did fuse with the Democrats there was the belief that more voters would be gained through this

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<sup>86</sup> "THEY GOT TOGETHER-THE COLORED POPULIST DELEGATES ARE IN FAVOR OF FUSION-UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS-One of Which Is in Case a Straight Populist Ticket is Not Put Out by Their Party.," *The Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth466048/m1/12/>.

<sup>87</sup> "NACOGDOCHES COUNTY.," *The Galveston Daily News*, July 11, 1894, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth467575/m1/6/>.

measure then there would be lost due to it, and this would place a Populist aligned politician in the White House. In the end, this did not happen, and the People's Party would fall from political relevance after the 1896 Presidential election.

After the People's Party disbanded there was no clear path forward for the people who had formerly made up the party. Many Populists went back to their previous political parties, some found another reform movement to dedicate their time to, and others dropped out of political activity completely. Yet while the Party itself had fallen the people who made up the party did not. Reform Democrats and former Populists such as Tom Watson would lead the charge to disenfranchise the Black voters that they at one point had so wanted to vote for them.<sup>88</sup> Watson came to believe that the manipulation of Black voters by the Bourbon Democrats had caused the Populists to lose and so as a reform effort he and others supported disenfranchisement laws that would eventually help lead to the almost complete disenfranchisement of the Black population in the South.<sup>89</sup> The actions of former Populists helped bring to an end one of the final remnants of Reconstruction, and in doing so helped fully place the South within the rule of Jim Crow.

While the later actions of Populists may distort the legacy of the party, it cannot be ignored that the People's Party did try to make efforts to expand its voting base, and include people who were traditionally left out of the political system. Non-white members of the People's Party and the Populist movement at-large made contributions great and small to this reform effort from the very beginning and were instrumental in the development of the movement, and these cannot be ignored if a truthful analysis of American Populism can be undertaken. The

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<sup>88</sup> Korobkin, "The Politics of Disfranchisement in Georgia," 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21.; The term "Bourbon Democrat" referred to conservative Democrats who were part of the establishments of political power.

People's Party was deeply flawed by any modern standards of how race is thought of, yet for its time it was a majority white organization that did offer a place for some marginalized people to express their political voices, albeit in a limited capacity.

When it came to racial politics Populists, both Black and white, were pragmatists before they were idealists. They never went so far as to overtly anger their white base by being inclusive, while they also never completely cut themselves off from a group of voters until it became the best political decision to do so. In the end the People's Party own pragmatism in matters of race and its ideological allegiance to white supremacy would keep many, although not all, non-white voters away and make the party incapable of appealing to a wider range of people beyond their core base of white farmers. The political climate during the party's existence, the white Populist belief in white supremacy, and the political liability of inclusivity, kept the People's Party from ever truly living up to its name.

*The People's Party, Women, and Suffrage: How the People's Party Rethought and Failed to Rethink Women's Role in Society*

There were not many places for women in Gilded Age America to express their political beliefs. Straying from the proper roles of womanhood, the role of mother and keeper of house, was viewed with scorn by most men and women. Yet, while there were not many places that women could turn to if they wanted to be public political actors, the People's Party and the Populist movement was such a place. Women were not only integral parts of the People's Party, but were prominent within the Populist movement well before the movement formed its own political party.<sup>90</sup>

Before the People's Party formed the Populist movement was made up of various reform organizations, one of the largest being the Farmers' Alliance, and unlike many other organizations of its time women within the Alliance had extensive rights.<sup>91</sup> Any position within the alliance was open to women, women had the same membership rights as men did, and to encourage female participation, women did not have to pay any dues.<sup>92</sup> When the People's Party formed women filled many roles within it. Women served as lectures, as newspaper editors, and were instrumental in running local organizations. This is not to say that there were no problems concerning gender roles within the People's Party, and the Populist movement, there were many, but the Populist movement and the People's Party did offer a space for women to be politically active, and to be politically active with a certain amount of equality in regards to their relationship with men.

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<sup>90</sup> Lawrence E. Roberts, "Women In Populism, 1888-1892," 23, no. 3: 15, <https://dspace01.emporia.edu/bitstream/handle/123456789/881/Roberts%20Vol%2023%20num%203.pdf?sequence=1>.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 70.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

One of the most famous women within the Populist movement was Mary Lease. Lease was a mother, a failed farmer, a racist, a political activist, an author, a lawyer, an anti-Semite, and a suffragist. A March 1894 article in the Populist newspaper the *Kansas Agitator* called her, "The queen of the Kansas plains..."<sup>93</sup> As a political operative Lease traveled the country advocating for Populism and worked with the highest ranks of Populists. Lease was a national Populist figure, and was mentioned widely in newspapers across the United States, such as *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, a newspaper from Hawaii in a February 11, 1896 article, in two articles in the November 24, 1892 edition of *The Stark County Democrat* of Iowa, and in the August 27, 1892 edition of *The New York Times*.<sup>94</sup> Lease would lecture in "Iowa, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas" promoting the Populist cause, and would travel with the People's Party first Presidential candidate, James B. Weaver, on the campaign trail.<sup>95</sup> Lease was also appointed to and served as the head of the Kansas State Board of Charities, serving as an official in the Kansas state government.<sup>96</sup> It can be argued that Lease was one of the most famous Populists in the United States during the era of the People's Party. While not many women reached the fame that Lease would, she serves as an example of how far a woman could advance within the People's Party.

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<sup>93</sup> Geo A. Hunter, *Kansas Agitator*, March 8, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-03-08/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>94</sup> *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 11, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1896-02-11/ed-1/seq-4/>; *The Stark County Democrat*, November 24, 1892, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028490/1892-11-24/ed-1/seq-4/>; From the *Chicago Herald* and republished in *The Stark County Democrat*, "MRS. MARY LEASE, POLITICIAN.," June 29, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028490/1892-11-24/ed-1/seq-4/>; *The New York Times*, August 27, 1892, <https://www-proquest-com.wheatonma.idm.oclc.org/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/94894774/66E1F3242B714D80PQ/3?accountid=15020>.

<sup>95</sup> "RETURNING PRODIGALS.-The Letter Writing Conspiracy Not Confied to Kansas.," *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, October 26, 1892, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1892-10-26/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>96</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 93.

While women such as Lease entered politics and became famous for it, the predominant societal viewpoint of the 1890s was that a woman's proper role in society was in the private sphere, meaning the home.<sup>97</sup> For a woman, to enter the public sphere was improper because it would dirty them with the business of elections and governmental work, the work that men had been dirtying themselves with for generations. By societal standards women were supposed to be pious, pure, to control the domestic sphere, and to be submissive to male authority.<sup>98</sup> Women were not supposed to be lecturing men on political issues, or what was deemed even more outrageous, legislating for men. While according to these standards the ideal woman was to stay home and rule the household, most women could not live up to this role. Poor women would almost always have to find work outside of the home to support themselves and their families, and so the ideal womanhood was reserved for a select few. This select few tended to be white women who were middle to upper class.

In Gilded Age society, it was seen as a man's place to rule and decide the future of the family and the country, and it was seen as the woman's role to follow and support. While women were supposed to be the nurturers of society, men were meant to be the ones who ruled. Men were aggressive, commanding, and unlike women they lacked the moral center that was needed to run the private sphere. To cross this boundary was to challenge the very definitions of what it meant to be a man and a woman, something that a Populist woman like Mary Lease would do.<sup>99</sup>

Populist women had suffered under the same system that had oppressed male farmers, and they were using the Populist movement as a platform to express themselves. Yet, while women had suffered under the same economic and political system, theirs was a different form

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<sup>97</sup> Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics In Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *A Journal of Women Studies*, 7, no. 3 (1984): 1.

<sup>99</sup> Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 177-178.

of oppression. Men had the vote, and so could express themselves in the political institutions of the United States. They were also seen as the leaders of households and so could make decisions that had ramifications for everyone within the family structure, something women seldom were able to do. Even the drive out west to Kansas that many families took was an example of this power dynamic within the home, because men were the main drivers on the journeys out West and they often brought the rest of their family along with them whether they wanted to go or not.<sup>100</sup> Women were suffering under the same economic and political conditions as men, but their voices on these matters were not as respected as the voices of men were.

The People's Party did offer women a place to express their political voices but as an organization the People's Party was far from attaining gender equality. As the historian Lawrence E. Roberts would state, even though the Populist movement had always involved women, it was not a women's movement.<sup>101</sup> Policies such as women's suffrage, that if enacted would greatly expand the formal role of women in the public sphere of life, were dropped out of the People's Party national platform when it was deemed too controversial of a topic for electoral success. This was done even when the decision to drop this reform was controversial within the Populist movement itself.<sup>102</sup>

At the St. Louis convention in February 1892, Populist delegate Ben Terrell of Texas argued that the Populist movement should limit its demands to material issues like land, money, and transportation, and leave out moral reform questions, such as prohibition and women's suffrage.<sup>103</sup> After controversy over whether or not a suffrage plank should have been adopted into the platform, the opposing sides on the issues of suffrage came together and chose to move the

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<sup>100</sup> Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 20-21.

<sup>101</sup> Roberts, "Women In Populism, 1888-1892," 16.

<sup>102</sup> Jack S. Blocker Jr. "The Politics of Reform: Populists, Prohibition, and Woman Suffrage, 1891-1892" *The Historian* 34, no. 4 (August, 1972): 629, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24442960.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 626.

decision on what policy to adopt in regards to suffrage to a later convention.<sup>104</sup> It has been stated by historians such as Jack S. Blocker Jr. that "moral reforms" were often put to the side in favor of political unity between the various wings of the Populist movement, such as the conservative Southern-wing and the more Progressive Western wing.<sup>105</sup> Along with the dropping of such issues as women's suffrage for the sake of expediency the work that women of less fame than Mary Lease often found themselves doing in the Populist movement was work that was closely related to their roles in the private sphere.<sup>106</sup>

This chapter argues that the People's Party was more interested in reforming traditional roles for women in society than it was in revolutionizing them. This means that while many Populists were interested in a greater role for women in politics, especially in states like Kansas and Colorado, Populists were generally in favor of women continuing to fulfill their traditional gender roles. This chapter focuses on how the People's Party interacted with the issue of women's suffrage. This chapter will look at the relationship between suffrage and the People's Party in Kansas, Colorado, and the American South, specifically Texas. Kansas and Colorado offer unique examples in the overlap of the People's Party and the suffrage movement because they both had a Populist administration in office during the time that a suffrage referendum took place. While these two states offer two different stories as to the outcomes of the suffrage movement, it is important to analyze both and view the varied ways in how Populists from across the country interacted with the idea of women having a more formal role in American electoral politics.

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 629.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 631.

<sup>106</sup> Robert C. McMath Jr, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877–1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 126, <https://archive.org/details/americanpopulism0000mcma/page/126/mode/1up>.

Modern examinations of the People's Party have focused more on the role of women within the Party than earlier works have done. Charles Postel and Gregg Cantrell in *The Populist Vision* and *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* respectively have dedicated chapters in their analysis of Populism to how women were not only involved within the movement but were instrumental in its development from its beginning. Their work provides the framework that this analysis will operate within.<sup>107</sup>

Omar H. Ali's, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* offers useful contextualization between the relationship of gender, suffrage, and race, that will be useful in this chapter.<sup>108</sup> While this book mostly focuses on the role of Black men in Populism, it does offer useful although brief information on the role of Black women within the movement. The overall lack of scholarship on Black women in the People's Party is quite glaring, and it is not something that this chapter will be able to rectify. A work that specifically has to do with African American women and the suffrage movement is *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, and this work serves as a useful starting point for further research to take place.<sup>109</sup> While this book does not speak to the role of the People's Party and suffrage, it does offer a detailed overview of how the suffrage movement interacted with Black women. The analysis done in this book, combined with Ali's work, can serve as a basis for future research into this important topic.

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<sup>107</sup> Gregg Cantrell, "Women, Gender, and Populism" in *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 257-291.; Charles Postel, "A Better Woman: Independence of Thought and Action" in *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69-101.

<sup>108</sup> Omar H. Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wheatonma-ebooks/reader.action?docID=619201>.

<sup>109</sup> Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women In The Struggle For The Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, [https://archive.org/details/isbn\\_9780253211767](https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780253211767)).

An important book to this chapter's analysis is *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* by Michael Lewis Goldberg.<sup>110</sup> This book gives an expansive and detailed overview in gender dynamics and politics within Kansas during the era of Populism. This book was not only useful for contextualization of the suffrage movement in Kansas, but offered important insight into the inner-workings of Kansas politics and how Kansas politics interacted with traditional gender roles and women's suffrage. This chapter hopes to build off of the work done in this book, and place it within a wider national context.

In this chapter, various books specifically examining the campaigns for women's suffrage were consulted to provide a broader context in which the People's Party had its own debates on the suffrage question. Books such as *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the United States* by Rebecca J. Mead and *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Women Suffrage Question* by Elna C. Green were both useful in providing context around the suffrage question and how it connected to the People's Party.<sup>111</sup> While these books may not focus on the People's Party specifically, they do offer a broader context in which this chapter will conduct its own analysis.

This chapter will build off of the analysis done by all of the previously mentioned work in the effort to build a cross-state analysis of the People's Party and the women's suffrage question. The cross-state analysis that is at the center of this chapter hopes to build a more holistic understanding of the People's Party and women's suffrage, and look at how this relationship did and did not change over time. Through an analysis of specific states this chapter will build a national understanding of Populism and women's suffrage, and as Populism was a

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<sup>110</sup> Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics In Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>111</sup> Rebecca J Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004).; Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women And the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

national movement and those within it were national figures, this type of analysis is not only justified but needed to truly understand the movement.

By the 1890's it was largely only third parties in American politics that supported women's suffrage.<sup>112</sup> While the Republican Party had been more open to women's suffrage in the years immediately after the Civil War, it had since distanced themselves from this and many other reforms in the years following Reconstruction because these reforms became politically disadvantageous to support. The People's Party as a whole found itself in a unique position in regards to its relationship to women for two main reasons: women had made up a large portion of the agrarian movement; and women of course could not vote, and proposals to change this were not only controversial but had previously failed to pass in states such as Kansas in 1867 and Colorado in 1877. This meant that the People's Party leaders had a choice before it. If they were to endorse women's suffrage, they could potentially gain thousands of new voters who were already supporting them. On the other hand, if they supported women's suffrage they could also potentially alienate the conservative voters that they sometimes relied on to win elections.

The political circumstances in which the People's Party operated within demanded that it fuse with other political parties, meaning that it had to cooperate with the Republicans or the Democrats in order to maximize odds of defeating the party that was in power. In states that had a Republican majority, like Kansas and Colorado, Populists looked to fuse with the Democrats to put together a winning electoral slate. In places where there was a Democratic majority, such as Texas, Populists would often fuse with the Republicans. This meant that the People's Party did not always put forth or support candidates that completely believed in the People's Party

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<sup>112</sup> Mead, *How the Vote was Won*, 2.

platform or principles. This sometimes led the People's Party to deny support to politically controversial issues such as women's suffrage.

It must be noted that many people who advocated for women's suffrage did so with the idea that women would do more than just be voters, but that through their vote they would clean up the political landscape. As stated previously women were seen as the moral centers of the home and society at-large, and so their voting was not always simply seen as an expression of their opinion, but rather a moral act to clean up the mess that men had made in politics.<sup>113</sup>

### **Colorado:**

The presence that the People's Party had in the West is an often overlooked aspect of the party's history, even though it was a source of major electoral support in the 1892 national elections. Populism in the American West, unlike in the South and Midwest, had a substantial following in labor and in general had a greater reputation for and acceptance of radical politics.<sup>114</sup> The American West also had a traditionally greater role for women in society and in politics. Wyoming became the first territory and state to fully enfranchise women when as a territory it enfranchised women in 1869 and in 1889 when it became a state. As the Populist newspaper *The Goodland Republic* in Kansas would state in a December 15, 1893 article, it was, "the tendency in the east and the south is to keep woman in a restricted sphere, while in the west it is just the reverse..."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Michael L. Goldberg, "Non-Partisan and All-Partisan: Rethinking Woman Suffrage and Party Politics in Gilded Age Kansas," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 25.

<sup>114</sup> McMath Jr., *American Populism*, 116.; Mead, *How the Vote Was Won*, 60.

<sup>115</sup> "WHAT IS HER SPHERE-The States Seem to think That the Place for Woman is at the Fireside.-THE WESTERN STATES FAVOR HER MOST-Woman's Rights Not recognized Except in a Few States of the West Where Plenty of Scope is Given Them." *The Goodland Republic*, December 15, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030821/1893-12-15/ed-1/seq-3/>.

Yet, just as in other states, Colorado was not a land of perfect gender equality. Rather, while they were more open than other states, people within Colorado still generally saw women and their role in society within the traditional gender constraints of Gilded Age America. Populist women would be a major part of the Populist movement in Colorado, as in other states, from its inception, and they like other Populist women, saw their roles diminished when the movement moved from reform organizations to electoral politics and more focus was put on gaining male voters.<sup>116</sup> While Colorado offered a more open space for women in Gilded Age America than other states would, it was still confined by the gender roles of the time.

In 1893, a referendum on women's suffrage was held in Colorado. This was not the first time the issue of women's suffrage surfaced in Colorado elections. A previous referendum in 1876 had failed by a significant margin of 14,053 votes to 6,612. As historian Rebecca Mead would state in explaining this failure to pass suffrage by referendum, "Most suffragists blamed Mexicans, miners, African Americans, Germans, former southerners, and the 'saloon element'..."<sup>117</sup> Mead argues that in reality the referendum failed because of the actions of suffragists who came from outside of Colorado to campaign, and did so without understanding the political and racial context within which Colorado operated.

In the lead up to the 1893 referendum, the People's Party in Colorado supported women's suffrage, and in doing so supported a greater role for women in politics. Yet, support for women's suffrage was not just something that the People's Party could claim for itself. In 1893 the Republicans and Democrats of Colorado also officially supported women's suffrage, meaning that the debate over suffrage did not take a partisan tone, as seen in a article that appeared in the

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<sup>116</sup> McMath Jr., *American Populism*, 127.

<sup>117</sup> Mead, *How the Vote Was Won*, 58.; *Ibid*, 58-59.

*Rocky Ford Enterprise* which states "Equal suffrage seems to have but little opposition and promises to carry on Nov. 7..."<sup>118</sup>

Populist newspapers from Colorado could not be found in this research, but Populists newspapers from outside of Colorado, and other partisan newspapers from within Colorado, were able to show how Populists thought of the referendum. While women's suffrage was still a radical reform within the broader American political context it appears that there was less debate over the matter as there would be in other states such as Kansas. Many Colorado newspaper articles spoke of suffrage with little editorializing on the topic and made such statements as:

The voters of Colorado will be called upon next November to vote on the question of woman suffrage and, if the ninth general assembly correctly represented the position of their constituents upon this question, a large majority of the voters will say by their ballots that the women of our state shall have an equal voice with the men in making laws of the state.<sup>119</sup>

At the time of the referendum, a Populist administration led by Governor Davis Waites was in power. Waites had been first elected in 1892, and historians such as K.D. Bicha and Leon W. Fuller have described him as a radical political figure within the Populist movement.<sup>120</sup> Waites publicly supported women's suffrage before the referendum vote and reminded voters of his position in 1894 when he ran for re-election. In *The North American Review*, Waites wrote that on the principle of fairness he supported suffrage for women because they were not only taxed as men were, but that women were intelligent enough to vote because "If a woman has the mental ability to protest against unjust laws, and to demand enactments calculated to promote the

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<sup>118</sup> *Rocky Ford Enterprise*, October 26, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90051265/1893-10-26/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>119</sup> *The State Herald*, June 30, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90051167/1893-06-30/ed-1/seq-4/>.

<sup>120</sup> K.D. Bicha, "The Conservative Populists: A Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 47, no. 1 (Jan., 1973): 15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3741258.pdf>; Leon W. Fuller, "Colorado's Revolt Against Capitalism," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 21, no. 3 (Dec., 1934): 350, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1897379.pdf>.

general welfare, why should not her wishes, and most especially when taxed as a citizen, be consulted in the exercise of the powers of the government."<sup>121</sup> This line of argument helps highlight the idea of fairness as not only being a core tenet of Populist political ideology, but of how Populists argued for women's suffrage.

The 1893 women's suffrage referendum passed in Colorado by a clear majority, a little over 6,000 votes. Although a Populist administration was in power when women's suffrage was passed and Populists within the legislature had voted to send women's suffrage to a referendum vote in the first place, the People's Party could not accurately claim sole credit for the passage of women's suffrage.<sup>122</sup> Each party had supported the reform officially, and so there was a shared credit. Yet, this did not stop the People's Party from claiming credit for women's suffrage in Colorado as seen in these newspaper articles from Kansas and Texas:

THE Road, of Denver, says: 'The Demorepublicatic party voted (when they thought of it) almost solidify against women suffrage. The women owe their good luck in the fight to Populists.'<sup>123</sup>

The populists have taken the initiative in equal rights. Toat (sic) party favors not only reform, but equal rights to all, In Colorado the populists party conferred suffrage upon women...<sup>124</sup>

Although in 1893 women's suffrage passed in Colorado, in 1894 the People's Party went to the polls and lost in the Silver State. The reaction of many of the Colorado Populists to the election results is not known, but the reaction of both Governor Waites and Populists from states such as Texas are, and these Populists felt betrayed by newly enfranchised female voters. The

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<sup>121</sup> Davis H. Waites and Lorenzo Crouse, *Women Suffrage in Practice*, from the University of Northern Iowa, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25103351.pdf>.

<sup>122</sup> Mead, *How the Vote Was Won*, 63.

<sup>123</sup> *Kansas Agitator* November 16, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1893-11-16/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>124</sup> "WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN COLORADO." *The Southern Mercury*, November 22, 1894, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185588/m1/7/>.

People's Party felt that they deserved the votes of women because of the work that it had done to enfranchise said women, and the fact that women voters did not feel the same way sent Populists like Waites reeling. It appears that Populists did not seem to consider the fact that women would vote their own political conscience, or that their political conscience could possibly lay with another political party, or that with all three political parties endorsing suffrage there was no reason that women would feel any special affinity for the People's Party.

Governor Waites, the supporter of women's suffrage, would come out against the reform after he lost re-election in 1894. As reported in various newspapers across the United States, Waites and others argued that it was the new women voters that had led to the defeat of the People's Party and Waites at the polls.<sup>125</sup> This would even be stated in an anti-Waites, and pro-Populist article:

Good women worked like beavers to wrest Colorado from Populism, and to them is due the defeat of the unspeakable Waites. They had nothing to do with the nominations, accepting men's assurances that the candidates were worthy. Experience has taught Colorado women such a lesson that henceforth they say they will go to the primaries and judge candidates for themselves. If they do, a revolution is not far off.<sup>126</sup>

Historians have discussed the reasons behind the losses the People's Party faced in 1894 in Colorado, and have not deemed women's suffrage as being solely responsible, but both Populists and others at the time of this loss did think so, and this shaped how the reform would be viewed by Populists. Waites began to condemn women's suffrage, and promised to campaign against it in other states. A Colorado newspaper opposed to the People's Party reported that, "...if

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<sup>125</sup> *The Meeker Herald*, December 5, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90051081/1896-12-05/ed-1/seq-1/>; *The Lamar Register*, November 17, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063147/1894-11-17/ed-1/seq-4/>; "Mrs. Waite Is Huff: Because the Women Voted Against Her Husband", *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89053706/1894-11-19/ed-1/seq-8/>.

<sup>126</sup> Kate Field, "SUFFRAGE IN COLORADO.," *Kansas Agitator*, October 25, 1895, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1895-10-25/ed-1/seq-2/>.

the Kansas legislature submits a suffrage amendment to the people, as it is expected it will do, he [Waites] will go to the state and fight it."<sup>127</sup> Another opposition Colorado newspaper claimed that Governor Waites and his wife, "...agree that woman suffrage is a failure. They say that Colorado women have not been educated up to the 'high ideal' yet."<sup>128</sup> This radical politician completely changed his position on women's suffrage when he himself did not benefit from it.

The reaction to the passage of women's suffrage helps show that although the Populists were willing to change the electoral system they operated within to include women, they also were focused on their own electoral success. Even advocates of reform measures would distance themselves from said measures when it was deemed politically expedient to do so.

## **Kansas**

After the 1892 elections the People's Party controlled the Governorship of Kansas and the Kansas House of Representatives, but overall control of the government still eluded them. After a long legal battle over the State Senate election returns, a Republican dominated State Supreme Court decided that the Republicans would maintain control over the State Senate. On one side of the political debate were the Republicans who had almost always controlled the state government, and on the other were the Populists with their Democratic allies. The People's Party alliance with the Democrats would often further complicate its hold on power and its efforts to pass reform legislation, as many Democrats who were allied with the Populists were only doing so to defeat the Republicans.<sup>129</sup> The 1894 elections would not only be a chance for the People's

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<sup>127</sup> *The Meeker Herald*, December 5, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90051081/1896-12-05/ed-1/seq-1/>; *The Lamar Register*, November 17, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063147/1894-11-17/ed-1/seq-4/>.

<sup>128</sup> *The Lamar Register*, November 17, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063147/1894-11-17/ed-1/seq-4/>.

<sup>129</sup> Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 189.; Mead, *How the Vote Was Won*, 84.; "Future of Female Suffrage.," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, September 25, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1896-09-25/ed-1/seq-4/>.

Party to gain complete control over Kansas and so put forth its reform agenda, but would also be a referendum on two years of Populist leadership over the executive branch and one house of state government. It is at this political moment that the juncture of the People's Party and the women's suffrage movement in Kansas garners examination.

One of the main reasons stated for why Kansas Populists supported women's equal suffrage in newspapers such as *The Advocate* from Topeka and the *Goodland Republic* is that it fell in line with the Populist principle of "Equal Rights for All, Special Privileges to None."<sup>130</sup> In Kansas women already had the right to vote in school board elections, and so the term "equal suffrage" meant having the same voting rights as men did, and so being allowed to vote in all elections in Kansas. The principle of "fairness" was something that was at the center of the Populist way of viewing the world, and was at the center of many of their reforms. As Postel observes in his examination of women's involvement in the Farmers' Alliance, Populists had often argued for political equality and so in this way women's suffrage was not incredibly different from other reforms that they had pursued.<sup>131</sup> The linkage of women's suffrage to "fairness" meant that for these Populists, women's suffrage was not a niche reform that they were claiming for electoral support, but rather that it was a necessary reform that was in line with their principled view of the world. As Populists would state in the Populist newspaper the *Kansas Agitator* in an 1894 article, "If the female is hung for murder under our penal code, why deny her the right to the ballot that authorizes the legislature to enact such a law? Is it just? Is it fair? Is it honorable, from any point of view you wish to inspect it?"<sup>132</sup> This is a clear and vivid argument

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<sup>130</sup> D.R. Kinsey, "Our Political Creed." *The Advocate*, May 30, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-05-30/ed-1/seq-5/>; "Universal Suffrage," *The Goodland Republic*, March 25, 1892, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030821/1892-03-25/ed-1/seq-4/>.

<sup>131</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 70.

<sup>132</sup> Geo. W. Cooper, M.D. "Woman Suffrage--No. 3." *Kansas Agitator*, April 26, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-04-26/ed-1/seq-8/>;

in favor of suffrage on the basis of fairness. It is clearly stating that if women are going to be subject to the law, just as men are, then they should have a say in it as well.

While the Populists were actively arguing for women's suffrage in their own newspapers in Kansas, they were also criticizing the Republicans for their lack of support of the measure, and so by extension Republicans' lack of principle.<sup>133</sup> In a June 13, 1894 article from the *Topeka State Journal*, which was not a Populist newspaper but did support women's suffrage, there is a mention of suffrage activist Susan B. Anthony calling a Republican politician a coward for not placing a suffrage plank in his 1894 platform.<sup>134</sup> Populist newspapers levied similar attacks, and when Populists and other suffrage advocates were calling Republican politicians cowards, they were in effect challenging Republican masculinity, and so challenging their fitness to govern.

When Populists and other pro-suffrage advocates called the Republicans cowards for not supporting suffrage, they were stating that Republicans were not masculine enough to be placed in elected office. Men were supposed to be brave, especially brave enough to stand by a principle and a reform that was deemed as just and fair. Populists were stating that Republicans were not masculine enough to do so.<sup>135</sup> In an article appearing in May 1893 in *The Advocate and Topeka*

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<sup>133</sup> "The Liquor Vote vs. Republican Women," *The Advocate*, June 13, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-06-13/ed-1/seq-9/>; "Brave Men And True,-And some Brave Women, Too, in State Convention, Representing-THE PEOPLE'S PARTY OF KANSAS.-They Say What They Mean and Nominate an Invincible Ticket to Continue the Only People's Party Government on Earth." *The Advocate*, June 20, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-06-20/ed-1/seq-1/>; Alla B. Stryker, "From Chicago" *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, May 17, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-05-17/ed-1/seq-12/>.

<sup>134</sup> "Morrill's Promise," *Topeka State Journal*, June 13, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1894-06-13/ed-1/seq-8/>.

<sup>135</sup> D.R. Kinsey, "Our Political Creed.," *The Advocate*, May 30, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-05-30/ed-1/seq-5/>; "Morrill's Promise," *Topeka State Journal*, June 13, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1894-06-13/ed-1/seq-8/>; "SHOW YOUR FAITH BY YOUR WORKS.," *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, April 12, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-04-12/ed-1/seq-8/>; "AS A MATTER OF EDUCATION.," *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, May 17, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-05-17/ed-1/seq-5/>; "IT IS VERY TIRESOME.," *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, June 7, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-06-07/ed-1/seq-6/>.

*Tribune* the Populists stated that Republicans were trying to fool women into thinking that they were going to support women's suffrage so that they could "restrain them [women] from the withdrawal of their influence from the party."<sup>136</sup> In this instance we see the People's Party portraying the Republicans as weak because it cannot even tell the truth, to stand on their principle, but rather have to lie to women to keep these women Republicans.

In opposition to the weak Republican Party were the Populists, those who were brave and masculine enough to support women's suffrage. Within the campaign for suffrage were hidden attacks against the character of those who opposed the Populists, and these attacks often conformed to and relied on the use of traditional gender roles to convince the voting public that to vote for the Populists would be to vote for a principled and manly party, whereas to vote for Republicans would be to do the opposite.

While the arguments against the Republicans relied on ideas of traditional gender norms, when the People's Party's leaders defended themselves against anti-suffrage attacks, it also often relied on these same norms. An anti-suffragist argument stated that to have women vote would eventually make them manly, and in doing so would take away all of their features of womanhood.<sup>137</sup> In Kansas the People's Party needed to maintain conservative Democratic voters if it was to win the 1894 elections since without them Republicans would easily win back control of the state. So to temper criticisms of anti-suffragists, Populists in their arguments for women's suffrage tried to show that women could be politically active, and maintain their feminine qualities at the same time. In various articles about the political doings of women activists would be statements such as, "Mrs. Chapman is a beautiful woman with a voice of great power and

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<sup>136</sup> "AS A MATTER OF EDUCATION." *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, May 17, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-05-17/ed-1/seq-5/>.

<sup>137</sup> E. Nesmith, *The Southern Mercury*, "FROM THE PEOPLE.", February 21, 1895, [https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht185600/m1/14/?q=%22equal+suffrage%23](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht185600/m1/14/?q=%22equal+suffrage%23;).; Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 177.

sweetness."<sup>138</sup> This statement was made to both show that women were politically active and so were deserving of suffrage, but also that women were still the embodiments of traditional gender roles, and so served no threat to ideas surrounding femininity.

As 1894 elections approached, activism within the state of Kansas increased on the issue of women's suffrage. Eventually, famed suffrage activist Susan B. Anthony came to Kansas and it was reported that she stated that she would actively support the People's Party if it included a suffrage plank in their platform.<sup>139</sup> While there were some Populists who opposed the reform measure at the 1894 state convention, the press largely deemed their speeches against it to be ineffectual and that the anti-suffragists overall made a bad showing, as the *Kansas Agitator* reported in a June 21, 1894 article describing the convention:

The opponents of the suffrage plank were led by P. P. Elder and W.J. Costigan (of the Ottawa Topeka Journal). Elder fought quite bravely at the beginning, but he was unable to parry all the sharp thrusts sent home by the noble women who were battling for their rights, and he finally surrendered and fell into his chair. Immediately he was surrounded by a number of his fair foes. Susan B. Anthony patted him on the back, while the others fanned him vigorously.<sup>140</sup>

In this instance we not only see an anti-suffrage Populist be made a fool of as he tried to defend his stance and could not, but we also see how unmasculine he was described as in the Populist press. He was not standing there bravely on the field of political battle, but rather had to

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<sup>138</sup> Annie L. Diggs, "Woman's Campaign.", *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, September 6, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-09-06/ed-1/seq-5/>.

<sup>139</sup> "The Populist Convention.-The Women Win.-Great Enthusiasm.-Lewelling Renomiated", *Kansas Agitator*, June 14, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-06-14/ed-1/seq-3/>; "Brave Men And True,-And some Brave Women, Too, in State Convention, Representing-THE PEOPLE'S PARTY OF KANSAS.-They Say What They Mean and Nominate an Invincible Ticket to Continue the Only People's Party Government on Earth.", *The Advocate*, June 20, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-06-20/ed-1/seq-1/>; "Women In Congress.", *Barbour County Index*, June 20, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015080/1894-06-20/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>140</sup> "MORE OF THE CONVENTION.", *Kansas Agitator*, June 21, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-06-21/ed-1/seq-4/>.

be patted on the back and cooled down by Susan B. Anthony and others. This highlights once again how the masculinity of anti-suffragists was being called into question by pro-suffragists.

During the 1894 People's Party convention there was a fight between those who wanted to ally themselves with the Democrats and those who refused.<sup>141</sup> To ally themselves with the Democrats, fusionists hoped to stay away from supporting planks that would alienate Democratic voters, such as suffrage. With that being stated there were also those Populists that did not support suffrage as a plank because they believed that this would make their electoral chances weaker in the upcoming elections.<sup>142</sup> Others outside of the People's Party argued that the adoption of this plank made this reform a partisan issue, and so made it less likely to pass. *The Iola Register* asked; "Do they want to make the amendment a party issue, a *Populist* issue, to go down or up with that party?"<sup>143</sup> Others wrote how it was simply not the right time for the issue to come to a vote.<sup>144</sup> While there were many Populists in Kansas who supported women's suffrage, there were also many that viewed this reform with skepticism, and did so for a variety of reasons.

When the votes were counted in the 1894 Kansas elections, both the People's Party and women's suffrage failed at the polls. The Populist governor of Kansas, Governor Lewelling, lost re-election by over 30,000 votes. Women's suffrage in the state would fail by a little less than 35,000 votes. There were some benefits for the People's Party for its support of women's suffrage, but these benefits were contingent on the success of the passage of women's suffrage. There were few immediate benefits for the People's Party support of this measure electorally, showing that there was some form of principled stance taken by the Populists when they

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<sup>141</sup> Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 237.

<sup>142</sup> Golberg, *An Army of Women* 237-238.; G.T. Pierce, "Do Not Overload", *The Advocate*, May 30, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-05-30/ed-1/seq-12/>.

<sup>143</sup> "What About Suffrage Now?", (emphasis in original) *The Iola Register*, June 22, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040340/1894-06-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>144</sup> "Partisanship and Equal Suffrage," *The Advocate*, June 20, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-06-20/ed-1/seq-4/>.; *The Advocate*, June 20, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-06-20/ed-1/seq-4/>.

endorsed this measure. There would only be a few more years of political relevance for the People's Party in Kansas, and it would take until the Nineteenth Amendment for full and equal suffrage for women to be brought to the state. While Kansas already had suffrage for women at a local level, the people of Kansas would be willing to extend this suffrage any further. The work of women like Mary Lease with all of her fame would not be enough to push the suffrage issue forward and gain its acceptance by the people of Kansas. The failure of both referendum and Party to gain popular support helps highlight the radical stance the Populists of Kansas took when they officially endorsed women's suffrage, and the entrenched institutional powers that the Populists were up against when challenged by the Republicans and Democrats.

### **Texas**

State-level organizations of the People's Party seldom expressed support for women's suffrage in the South. Women having the vote was viewed as undermining white supremacy something that people within the South did not challenge. People argued that if women could vote then the ideas of what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be a woman, a core tenant of the patriarchal ideology of white supremacy, would be called into question.<sup>145</sup> Some in the South also opposed women's suffrage because they thought that it might give Black women the right to vote and presumably create a voting bloc that was hostile to white supremacist rule.<sup>146</sup> In the South hostility towards equal suffrage would always contain an explicit racialized element. This racialized element was also something that suffragists were aware of, and they tailored their arguments accordingly.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Green, *Southern Strategies*, xv.

<sup>146</sup> Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, 65.; Green, *Southern Strategies*, 86.

<sup>147</sup> David Morgan, *Suffragists And Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1972), 15.

Many white suffragists based their own claim to the vote on the fact that their votes could be used to counter those of Black men. Suffragists across the country also demeaned the intelligence of Black men to argue that they deserved the right to vote. This was seen in an April 26, 1894 article in the *Kansas Agitator*:

Then, again, you gave the untutored African the ballot for political purposes, who was wholly unfitted to intelligently exercise that right in any sense but that which is found in the political interest of ward tough and 'bum' furnishing for ammunition for political charlatans and gamblers. When you did this, you sunk women in the United States, politically, below the unlettered African. Was this just? Ask yourself the question, and reason it out. You not only did this, but you gave her a place among the idiots and imbeciles of the country. Was this right?<sup>148</sup>

White women suffragists were setting themselves up as the counterweight to the potential perceived dangers of a Black voting populace. Still, even specific appeals to racial fears were unable to convince southern Democrats or southern Populists that women having the right to vote was a necessary political reform. No People's Party organization in the South ever endorsed women's suffrage.

An examination of the People's Party in Texas offers a more thorough look at Populism and women's suffrage in the South. One of the most popular Populist newspapers in Texas was *The Southern Mercury*, and it often expressed hostility towards women's suffrage. Many articles that appeared in *The Southern Mercury* that mentioned women's suffrage used Colorado as an example of the dangers of women voting. The Populists of Texas argued that to enfranchise women would be to welcome political defeat, and so it was against their best interests to support such a measure.<sup>149</sup> This particular argument against suffrage was not based on a principle that connected to the Populist platform, as pro-suffrage arguments were often framed as, but rather

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<sup>148</sup> Geo. W. Cooper, M.D. "Woman Suffrage--No. 3." *Kansas Agitator*, April 2, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-04-26/ed-1/seq-8/>.

<sup>149</sup> *The Southern Mercury*.; "GREATER RIGHTS THAN 'EQUAL RIGHTS.," *The Southern Mercury*, December 20, 1894, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185592/m1/5/>.

was based on political expediency. The lessons of Colorado were something that the Texas Populists learned as was stated in a May 23, 1895 article in *The Southern Mercury* when discussing the governor in Colorado that was elected after Waites:

THE women of Colorado are up in rebellion against the corrupt methods of redeemer governor, McIntyre. The Colorado women can kick now the election is over, but at the very next campaign they will humbly fall in line for the same corrupt party. Thus the beauties of women suffrage are illustrated!<sup>150</sup>

The Populists of Texas would go on to state that women had been forced to vote in Colorado against their will, that women were not ready to vote, didn't want to vote, should remain in their sphere, and that they were not educated enough to vote.<sup>151</sup> In this instance we see the desperate claims being made by Populists to try to dissuade their own party from supporting women's suffrage. In Colorado women were not being forced to vote but were doing so of their own volition, but this is something that the People's Party could not admit because if it did it would be admitting its own electoral weaknesses. These arguments were very much in line with what anti-suffrage arguments had stated before about why women should not vote. The People's Party of Texas was not only relying on politically expedient reasons for why women should not have the vote, but was relying on ideas of what a proper woman was, and how voting violated what was proper.

While historians have found that there was considerable support among Texas Populists for women's suffrage, such support never translated into an endorsement from the party's state leaders. Postel argues that Texas was the only Southern state where the People's Party was in

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<sup>150</sup> *The Southern Mercury*, May 23, 1895, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185612/m1/7/>.

<sup>151</sup> S.F. Stovall, "From The People," *The Southern Mercury*, May 9, 1895, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185611/m1/14/>; "A Model Old Party Election," *The Southern Mercury*, April 18, 1895, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185608/m1/6/>; "WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN COLORADO."; "WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN COLORADO.," *The Southern Mercury*, December 6, 1894, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185590/m1/5/>.

support of women's suffrage.<sup>152</sup> Cantrell argues that there were many local People's Party chapters that were supportive of women's suffrage, pointing towards a more accepting trend than was seen in the research for this chapter.<sup>153</sup> Both Postel and Cantrell also point to the various Texas women within the People's Party to highlight women's involvement and support of the party. This chapter does not state that what Postel and Cantrell have found is false. Rather it points to the fact that at a state-level, unlike in Colorado and Kansas, the People's Party was not supportive of women's suffrage, and often used many of the same arguments that anti-suffragists used to justify this stance. While there were Texas women who were part of the People's Party and the Populist movement, and while there may have been local variations in support for women's suffrage just as there were state differences in Populist support, this does not negate the fact that at a state-level the Texas People's Party would never officially support suffrage.

The Populists of Texas as seen in the pages of *The Southern Mercury* viewed the women voters of Colorado as a break in the traditional femininity that was a part of their worldview. According to the Populists of Texas, women were no better in the political system than male voters were. For these reasons along with political expediency and the white supremacy as discussed in Chapter One that the People's Party did not want to challenge, the Populists of Texas at large did not support women's suffrage.

At the People's Party 1896 national convention in St. Louis mid-roaders and the fusionists battled over the future of the party. While before fusion had only occurred at the state and local level, this time it was being proposed at the national level. If fusion were to prevail

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<sup>152</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 70.

<sup>153</sup> Cantrell, *The People's Revolt*, 74.

then the People's Party would not run its own candidate for the Presidency but would endorse the Democratic candidate for President, William Jennings Bryan. An alliance with the Democrats, even with one who was considered to be a liberal Democrat such as Bryan, would greatly diminish the chances of reforms such as women's suffrage from being included in the platform. And still, even if the People's Party and the Democrats had not fused in 1896 the chance of women's suffrage being included in the 1896 People's Party platform were very low.

While women's suffrage had passed as a measure in Colorado it was of no electoral benefit to the Populists in the state, and the failure of the referendum in Kansas showed that it was not a winning political issue. Many Populists individually may have supported this measure, but state organizations had been cautious to do so and the voting populace at large did not support this particular "moral reform." The 1896 People's Party convention may have been the last chance that the People's Party as a politically viable entity had to endorse women's suffrage, but the road that led to the convention showed the failures of the intersection of the People's Party and women's suffrage beforehand.

Eventually, the People's Party decided to endorse William Jennings Bryan for President, and although it nominated a separate Vice-Presidential candidate, the People's Party had nationally fused with the Democrats. The 1896 People's Party platform included no plank on women's suffrage. As the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, a Kansas Republican newspaper, would state in their criticism of the People's Party and their alliance with the Democrats:

The Democratic party of the country has been conspicuously the anti-suffrage party of the country. To have made its candidate stand upon a female suffrage plank would have been ruinous to him than any of the planks he is defending today. Consequently the Populists dropped female suffrage.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> "Future of Female Suffrage.," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, September 25, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1896-09-25/ed-1/seq-4/>.

Just as the Populists of Kansas had criticized the Republicans for not standing on principle and endorsing women's suffrage in 1894, the Republicans would criticize the People's Party for doing the same two years later.

While as a national organization the People's Party would never formally endorse women's suffrage, the radical stance that various state organizations took on this policy cannot be ignored. Although the policy stance that the Populists of Kansas and Colorado took itself was radical and would have greatly changed the political system in which they operated, the People's Party and Populists were still operating within a set of ideas that confined men and women to particular and traditional roles. While the People's Party may have endorsed women's suffrage in some places they did not view this reform as a way to greatly change the gender dynamics of their time. Just as Populists were reformers when it came to racial relations as discussed in Chapter One, they were also reformers in gender relations. They were willing to push the boundaries of society, especially but not always when a political gain could be had from it, but they balked and usually did not even consider the idea of trying to revolutionize the gender dynamics of Gilded Age America.

*The Fear of Religious "Other": The relationship between the People's Party and Non-Protestants*

In a lecture given by the California Populist Carl Brown the aspirations of the People's Party and its hopes for the United States are described in great detail. Along with these descriptions are accounts of the obstacles that stand in the People's Party way. One of the largest of these obstacles as described by Brown would be the "Shylocks," and the "Rothschilds." Brown places the blame for many of the economic and political faults within the United States on these groups of people, and states that before the Civil War people were equal, and that "[t]here were none extremely rich and none extremely poor, but since the war, as a result of the two parties' rule in the interest of Shylock..." such a divide between people was created.<sup>155</sup> The terms "Shylock" and "Rothschilds" that Brown used are anti-Semitic slurs, meaning that when Brown used them to describe the obstacles that the People's Party faced, he was actually saying that Jewish people stood in the way of the People's Party.

The list of the crimes that Brown accuses Jewish people of committing against the United States and its people is long and varied. Amongst other things, Brown accuses Jewish people of starting the Civil War, stating that "I maintain that the terrible conflict of the brothers North and South would never have been necessary had not the brood of financiers from the Rothschildian nest in England fanned the flames of civil war, for the very purpose of putting the chains of bond slavery upon us."<sup>156</sup> While this claim ignores the role of slavery in starting the Civil War for the purposes of this thesis it more importantly echoes views of other Populists who were influential throughout the movement, such as Sarah Emery in *Seven Financial Conspiracies*.<sup>157</sup> Brown also

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<sup>155</sup> Carl Brown, "Carl Brown's vote maker, or, Platform & principles of the People's party.," 1892, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175035166548&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021>.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 151.

states that Jewish people are in control of the Republican and the Democratic parties and are using the two political parties for their own nefarious purposes.<sup>158</sup>

While what Brown stated in this speech is important in our understanding of the People's Party and how it related to religious minorities, what is more important is that these types of claims were not uncommon amongst Populists. Populists from across the United States would make such claims as Brown did, and not only towards Jewish people but towards other non-Protestants. The People's Party as a whole would generally express hostility towards Jewish people. The hostility that Populists expressed did not always reach the extremes that Brown used, but Populists still blamed Jewish people for many of the political and economic woes that they faced.

One of the most heavily debated questions concerning American Populism and the People's Party was whether or not Populists were in fact hostile to those who were outside the Protestant religious mainstream. In the United States during the era of Populism most people were members of various Protestant sects. In his examination of Populism in *Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter would state that American Populism at-large was anti-Semitic. While Hofstadter clarified that anti-Semitism within the Populist movement never manifested itself into action, he also states that this does not mean that it was insignificant, both because it tells us how the Populist thought process worked and because there is the potential that it helped lead to future anti-Semitism.<sup>159</sup> Hofstadter based his argument namely on the usage and references to such words as "Rothschild," and other traditional stereotypes that were associated with Jewish people. This type of rhetoric can be seen in how Carl Brown describes the influence of "Shylock" and "Rothschilds" on the American people. Hofstadter's viewpoint as a whole would become

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<sup>158</sup> Brown, "Carl Brown's vote maker, or, Platform & principles of the People's party."

<sup>159</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955): 94.

heavily critiqued by other historians of Populism who viewed the Populists in a more accepting light in regards to how they thought of religious minorities.

A historian who disagreed with Hofstadter would be Walter T.K. Nugent who argued in *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas, Populism, and Nativism* that the anti-Semitism expressed by the People's Party was not actually anti-Semitism but rather spoke to a general mistrust of large corporations and those in business and positions of power. Nugent does not necessarily disagree with the fact that Populists used terms that are often deemed anti-Semitic but rather that this language was not anti-Semitic because when the Populists used it they did not have Jewish people in mind.<sup>160</sup>

Unlike Hofstadter and Nugent, the work of Charles Postel in *The Populist Vision* and Gregg Cantrell in *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* speak to the relationship between the People's Party's and what would be considered people who held unconventional beliefs. Postel bases much of his work and analysis of the relationship between the People's Party and religion on the relationship between the People's Party and non-religious people. Postel argues that the People's Party was more open than historians such as Hofstadter contended because of the large number of non-religious or non-traditional religious thinkers that were within their ranks.<sup>161</sup> Postel is stating that Populists' willingness to accept those who did not hold mainstream Protestant beliefs, shows that they themselves were out of the mainstream. While this book does speak to an aspect of the People's Party that has to do with tolerance of those who did not believe in a Protestant religion, something that is important to highlight, this work does leave out important aspects of how the People's Party related towards those people who believed in a religion that was not Protestant. For this reason this book will

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<sup>160</sup> Walter T.K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas, Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): 130.

<sup>161</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 20-21.

mostly be used to contextualize discussions in this chapter. This chapter fills in some of the gaps in the analysis done by Postel in regards to the relationship between the People's Party and Catholics and Jewish people. The work of Gregg Cantrell will be used much in the same way as Charles Postel because his work has some of the same gaps in analysis. Cantrell specifically focuses on Texas Populism in his book and argues in a similar way to Postel, stating that the People's Party was accepting of non-religious people, and so do not deserve the reputation that Hofstadter argues they do.<sup>162</sup> While this book offers important contextualization for the analysis done in this chapter, especially in regards to Texas, the lack of analysis on the relationship between Populism, Catholics, and Jewish people will be something that this chapter hopes to rectify.

This chapter will further the discussion in modern scholarship concerning the relationship between the People's Party and religious minorities by speaking to the relationship of the People's Party to those who have been left out of recent analysis, namely Jewish people and Catholics. While the work of people such as Hofstadter and Nugent serve as early examples of the relation between the People's Party and religious minorities their discussions often do not take into account important regional differences within the People's Party. Understanding the People's Party at a regional level and understanding the differences between state organizations is important if a holistic understanding of American Populism is to be had. In comparison to issues surrounding race and women's suffrage as discussed in the previous chapters, there was less variation in how Populists thought of Jewish people across state lines, whereas for Catholics the variation levels were similar. In the hopes to garner a more holistic viewpoint on the People's Party this chapter will focus its research primarily on Kansas, Texas, and Georgia. This chapter

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<sup>162</sup> Gregg Cantrell, *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020): 18.

will argue that the analysis done by Hofstadter is closer to the truth of how the People's Party related to non-Protestants, than the analysis of Nugent. This chapter will also argue that religious tolerance and religious intolerance were often used as political tools to garner more electoral support against the People's Party main political rivals, the Democrats and Republicans.

### **The People's Party and Its Relationship with Jewish People**

If we are to understand the People's Party relationship with Jewish people we must understand the terminology that Populists used to describe Jewish people, and where this terminology originated. A term used by Populists to reference Jewish people was "Shylock." This word comes from Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* and the character Shylock, who was notable for being one of the only Jewish characters in Shakespeare's work.<sup>163</sup> The depiction of Jewish people in *The Merchant of Venice* did not create the stereotypes that were often associated with Jewish people, but it did make it so that calling someone a "Shylock" was not only a direct reference to someone's Jewish identity, but also to the various stereotypes that were often associated with that identity. As the Populists used the term, "Shylock" meant to call someone greedy, money-hungry, selfish, and Jewish.

Nugent argued that the term "Shylock" and other anti-Semitic terms as used by the Populists were not meant to be anti-Semitic, but rather were used as a general catch-all term to describe a person, real or imagined, who was conspiring to further impoverish farmers for their own economic and political advantage.<sup>164</sup> This argument was furthered by the fact that the Jewish populations where Populism emerged was relatively low, and so Nugent argues that mentions of "Shylock" in the Populist press were not often connected to actual Jewish people, but rather a

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<sup>163</sup> In reference to the character Shylock, there will be no quotation marks. When reference the use of the word "Shylock" as used by the Populists, there will be quotation marks.

<sup>164</sup> Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists*, 130.

more general "other" that could actually be used in as a stand-in for large corporations and businessmen.<sup>165</sup> Taking this argument into account this chapter will examine the use of the word "Shylock" and whether or not it was used in connection to Jewish identity within Populist newspapers.

Some specific stereotypes about Jewish people that circulated during the Gilded Age, according to the historian Naomi W. Cohen, were the images of "Jew as Christ-killer, the Jew as Shylock, and the Jew as eternal alien."<sup>166</sup> These depictions collectively saw Jewish people as perpetual outsiders in the United States and in opposition to the Christian values that many Americans saw at the center of their society. A commonly held stereotype about Jewish people, that business elites and Populists both held, was that Jewish people played an outsized role in the economy of the United States.<sup>167</sup> It is important to note that it has been argued that there was nothing unique about the People's Party's anti-Semitism, but rather that it engaged with the common tropes that other anti-Semitic people did.<sup>168</sup> Even so, that does not mean that the People's Party was not anti-Semitic, but rather that it was no more anti-Semitic than most people were at the time.

The standard that money was going to be based on in the United States was an issue that Populists cared about deeply, and how Populists spoke of this topic often involved the use of anti-Semitic terminology. During the Populist era the United States was on the gold standard, having briefly moved away from the short-lived use of paper money during the Civil War. A newspaper article published in October 1894 made a direct connection between Jewish identity,

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

<sup>166</sup> Naomi W. Cohen, "Antisemitic Imagery: The Nineteenth Century Background," *Jewish Social Studies* 47, no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1985): 308.

<sup>167</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 152.

<sup>168</sup> Naomi W. Cohen, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: The Jewish View," *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1979): 198, 191-192.

the usage of the term "Shylock" and the supposed connection "Shylock" had to the gold standard.<sup>169</sup> This article claims that the United States went back to the gold standard after the Civil War because the government wanted "Shylock" to be able to increase their wealth, which the article stated was connected to the usage of gold.<sup>170</sup> This argument falls in line with the long held stereotype that Jewish people were manipulating the economy for their own benefit, and that this manipulation was happening to the detriment of the American people.<sup>171</sup> This article goes even further to connect the argument it is making about the effects of "Shylock" to a Jewish identity when it makes the statement, "So we find out that Shylock is not much different now from what he was then, or when Christ kicked him out of the temple."<sup>172</sup> The mention of Jesus Christ is a reference to a Biblical passage where Jesus throws money-changers out of the temple in Jerusalem. The appearance of a reference to this Biblical passage in a Populist newspaper and its connection to the term "Shylock" show that the Populists were making a direct connection to Jewish people when they spoke about the supposed corrupt ways in which the government and economy were being manipulated.

Even clearer still in this article there is a direct reference to "...the gold gamblers and the Jews from Wall street and London who combined to force gold up...".<sup>173</sup> The direct usage of the word "Jews" makes it so that it is increasingly difficult to argue that the anti-Semitic remarks that were made were devoid of any actual connection to Jewish people in the minds of Populist writers.

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<sup>169</sup> J.A. McCreary, "THE PERIODICAL LOVE-Which Politicians Have for the Old Solider Voters.," *The Advocate*, October 31, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-10-31/ed-1/seq-11/>.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Naomi W. Cohen, "Antisemitic Imagery: The Nineteenth Century Background," *Jewish Social Studies* 47, no. ¾ (Summer-Autumn 1985): 309-310.

<sup>172</sup> McCreary, "THE PERIODICAL LOVE-Which Politicians Have for the Old Solider Voters."

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

The above article was not the only or first Kansas Populist reference to "Shylock" that had a direct connection to Judaism. In a March 1891 article in *The Advocate* there is a reference to "Shylock" and to the character Shylock and the actions he takes in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. In *The Merchant of Venice* the character Shylock makes a wager that if he wins he will be able to claim a pound of flesh from his Christian rival's body. The term "pound of flesh" became associated with Jewish people and their supposed ruthlessness towards Christians and their focus on acquiring money. This article refers directly to the pound of flesh that "Shylock" is claiming, but now instead of it being taken from one man in Venice, it is being taken from "the people," which presumably means the American people, and so "Shylock" is "...sending forth their decree, claiming the pound of flesh..."<sup>174</sup>

A reference being made to the "pound of flesh" means that the Populist author had an awareness of who the character of Shylock was. If the author had an awareness of the character of Shylock then the author knew the character was Jewish, since this is a central aspect of his identity and his role in *The Merchant of Venice*. This means that the attack against "Shylock" was not simply an attack against wealthy people who were seen as being a corrupt influence over the American economy, but was an attack against Jewish people who were thought to be controlling the economy to the detriment of the farmers. This would not be the only reference to the "pound of flesh" that "Shylock" was now taking from the American people, reference to this specific action would be found in at least three other articles in Populist newspapers from 1891 to 1896.<sup>175</sup> While during the Populist era the popularity of Shakespeare among all Americans had

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<sup>174</sup> BILLY, THE FARMER'S BOY, "Monopolies And Their Oppression.," *The Advocate*, March 25, 1891, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029079/1891-03-25/ed-1/seq-2>.

<sup>175</sup> John Jones, *The Advocate* originally published in the Kansas Commoner, October 28, 1891, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029079/1891-10-28/ed-1/seq-3/>.; *Kansas Agitator*, March 16, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1893-03-16/ed-1/seq-1/>.; R.R. Times, *The Southern Mercury*, "A SHIRTLESS NATION.-John Sherman, His Peculations and Speculations.," August 27, 1896, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185674/m1/3/>.

decreased, historian Lawrence W. Levine has argued that "[n]ineteenth-century America swallowed Shakespeare, digest[ed] him and his plays, and made them part of the cultural body."<sup>176</sup> This lends credence to the idea that Populists would have at least some knowledge of Shakespeare, his plays, and the characters within them.

References to traditional Jewish stereotypes help solidify the argument being made in this chapter that the anti-Semitic terms being used by the Populists were in fact deliberately anti-Semitic. One of the clearest examples of this comes from the Georgia Populist newspaper, the *People's Party Paper*, in an article titled "An Open Letter" from July 10, 1896.<sup>177</sup> This article shows that the Populists believed that "Shylock" was one of the main reasons why the country was currently on the gold standard, and not using paper money. The use of paper money was something that many Populists advocated for because they believed that this would help reduce the debt many farmers were in. During the Populist era the American economy was deflationary, which lead to people being less able to pay their bills and pay off their debt. Populists believed that if they switched to paper money or used silver as money that this would increase the money supply, increase inflation, and make it easier to pay off their debts.<sup>178</sup> "An Open Letter" states that:

These men have no God but gold the people's cry for redress meets with no responsive echo in their sordid hearts, gold, gold, is their only ambition, patriotism is meaningless twaddle to these Shylocks, gold is master and by its control they are fixing the destiny of our Republic, a destiny which means a tenantry system like that which has degraded Ireland for more than 400 years.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (Feb. 1984): 42.

<sup>177</sup> W.A. Poe, *People's Party Paper*, "An Open Letter.," July 10, 1896, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016235/1896-07-10/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>178</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 150-153, 269-271.

<sup>179</sup> Poe, "An Open Letter."

This statement shows that there were Populists who believed that "Shylocks" were actively working to oppress the farming communities of the United States by their manipulation of the economy and their want of gold, the only thing this author believes "Shylock's" worship. Once again this helps further dispel the idea that the Populists were using anti-Semitic terms that were devoid of a connection to how they thought of Jewish people. Populists used anti-Semitic terms alongside anti-Semitic stereotypes, showing that when these terms were used it was in connection to Jewish identity.

The use of "Shylock" brings up an important question in regards to the People's Party and its relationship to those outside of the Protestant religious mainstream: Why, if there were not many Jewish people in areas where Populism flourished, were these anti-Semitic remarks being used? What political purpose did these remarks serve? The answer to this question points to the electoral success that the People's Party constantly sought against its two main political rivals: the Democrats and the Republicans.

References to "Shylock's" control of the economy and the political system of the United States was often paired with the accusation that "Shylock" controlled the two main political parties. In the previously mentioned article that appeared in the *People's Party Paper*, the term "Shylock" was not just used to express the love of gold that "Shylocks" had above all else, but also to accuse the Democratic Party of only being interested in gold, and so by extension only being interested in the impoverishment of farmers.

If the People's Party was able to connect its main political rivals in the minds of voters to the idea of "Shylock" then they would be connecting the Republicans and Democrats not only to corruption but also would be portraying them as the willful participants in a conspiracy where the few profited by the exploitation of millions. This would also by extension expose the fact that

those who voted for Democrats or Republicans had been participants in their own subjugation. If this connection could be made then the Populists would have also potentially convinced voters that they were the only political party that had not been corrupted by "Shylocks" and so were the only political party that was safe to vote for if people wanted to end their own exploitation.

A clear example of how the Populists were arguing that Democrats and Republicans were in league with "Shylock" can be found in the Populist newspaper the *Kansas Agitator*. An 1893 article in this newspaper states that:

For twenty-five years the money changers have at all times had the ear and audience of the president. The "common herd" have had no voice nor lot when Shylock demanded an inning. Whether Democrat or Republican president, the result was the same. In 1896 neither of the old prostitutes will preside.<sup>180</sup>

The use of the word "prostitutes" to describe the Presidents' relationship with "Shylock" implies that the President and by extension the American people no matter what party they belonged to were being bought and used and manipulated by Jewish people. This use of the word "prostitute" also implies that the relationship is illicit and that Jewish people were in control of the United States. The argument that the People's Party is trying to make is clear, to vote for the Democrats or Republicans is immoral, because if you do so then your vote will be supporting the subjection of the Presidency to nefarious outside forces. To vote for the Democrats and Republicans would be to let the American people be used by outsiders. This Populist writer is then also stating implicitly that the only way to save the Presidency, and by extension the United States, is to vote for the only party that is not currently selling itself to "Shylock." That party was the People's Party.

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<sup>180</sup> *Kansas Agitator*, May 18, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1893-05-18/ed-1/seq-1/>.; The usage of the word "inning" in this above quote is most likely being used as is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary: A chance or opportunity for action or accomplishment.

While most of the articles mentioned so far have been from Kansas and Georgia, articles also appeared in Texas in *The Southern Mercury* that spoke to the supposed relationship between "Shylock" and the Republicans and Democrats. An article that appeared in the February 4th, 1892 edition of *The Southern Mercury*, and was said to be written by a former Democratic voter, told the reasons for why this voter had left his original party to join the People's Party. The voter claimed that he could no longer be a part of a party that was being controlled by "Shylock," and so the only party he could turn to was the People's Party.<sup>181</sup> The connection between "Shylock" and the Democrats would have been especially pertinent in Texas because the Democrats were the main political opponent to the People's Party in this state, just as they were in Georgia. This means that any argument that the People's Party could make that took away support from the Democrats was one that helped the People's Party who were actively challenging the Democrat's supremacy in the state.

While the research done in this chapter does point to the fact the anti-Semitic rhetoric and thought was a major aspect of the People's Party there are reservations to this claim that must be noted. The regional differences of the People's Party showed that there was wider usage of anti-Semitic terms in Kansas than there was in Texas or Georgia. This is most likely due to the fact that there was also a wider range of newspapers available from the state of Kansas, and so a greater array of perspectives could be examined from this state than others. It is also the case that even though there was more anti-Semitic sources from Kansas, the type of anti-Semitic rhetoric used was largely similar across state lines. The largest difference is that in the research for this chapter it was found that there were more direct references to words such as "Jews" from the state of Kansas than there were from other states. This shows that while Populists across various

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<sup>181</sup> J.D. Jackson, *The Southern Mercury*, "Threading the Win Press Under Shylock's Wrath.," February 4, 1892, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185450/m1/2/>.

states were anti-Semitic, Populists from Kansas were more direct with their anti-Semitism. The relationship between Populists in Kansas with Jewish people stands in contrast to their more open relationship they had with Black people and women, as seen in the first two chapters of this thesis.

### **The People's Party and Its Relationship to Catholics**

One of the largest non-Protestant religious groups within the United States during the Gilded Age were Catholics. While there were many Catholics within the United States they were often viewed as outsiders by Protestants within the religious mainstream. Some of the stigma surrounding Catholicism came from anti-immigrant sentiment towards Irish immigrants who were often Catholic.<sup>182</sup> While some Catholic stereotypes would find their way into the Populist press, such as their supposed desire to have the Pope rule in the United States, the research done for this chapter has found that unlike the general hostility that was expressed towards Jewish people by the People's Party, Populists were generally more tolerant of Catholicism.

Kansas Populist newspapers often referred to the American Protective Association, also known as the A.P.A., when discussing Catholics. The A.P.A. was an anti-Catholic organization founded in the aftermath of an 1887 election loss that some people blamed on the influence of Catholic voters.<sup>183</sup> The A.P.A. grew to be a large organizations although exact numbers are not known and as the historian John Higham would state in his study of nativism, "Until 1893 the A.P.A. grew steadily but unspectacularly in the upper Mississippi Valley from eastern Nebraska to Michigan, taking root in larger towns and cities where Catholics were rising in political and

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<sup>182</sup> Kyle E. Haden, "Anti-Catholicism in U.S. History: A Proposal for a New Methodology," *American Catholic Studies* 124, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 33.

<sup>183</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1998): 62-63.

social status."<sup>184</sup> The A.P.A. usually supported the Republican Party in its campaigns, meaning that Democrats often advocated against it.<sup>185</sup> The A.P.A. also came into conflict with important members of the People's Party because the A.P.A. claimed that all unions were being controlled by Catholics and that industrial unrest was due to the interference of the Pope, something not in line with the message the People's Party was putting forth in regards to the economic exploitation of workers.<sup>186</sup>

The Populist press in Kansas spoke out against the A.P.A. frequently in newspapers like the *Barbour County Index*, which in an August 1893 article heavily criticized the religious conflict that it accused the A.P.A. of trying to create stating that: "Christ came down on earth to bring peace to men and good will, and the A.P.A. has come among us to destroy that peace and substitute hatred and lying."<sup>187</sup> While this article was not necessarily pro-Catholic in its viewpoint, in its denunciation of the conflict its author accused the A.P.A. of creating, it can be seen that the People's Party was also not anti-Catholic, and so showed some level of tolerance.

Of course it must be understood that there is a large difference between the promotion of Catholicism, and the toleration of Catholicism. The People's Party would never promote Catholicism, or for that matter any particular religion besides a general promotion of "Christian" values.<sup>188</sup> The most that the People's Party would do is tolerate Catholicism, and in doing so not inherently view Catholics as a threat, something that political parties like the Republicans, who had A.P.A. allies, may have been unwilling to do. In a 1893 article in *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune* the tolerance the Kansas Populists exhibited towards Catholicism can be clearly seen when the article stated:

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 80, 81.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>187</sup> S. Kociell, *Barbour County Index*, "The A, P. A's,." August 2, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015080/1893-08-02/ed-1/seq-3/>.

<sup>188</sup> Cantrell, *The People's Revolt*, 18.

While we have no sympathy whatever for the Catholic religion we believe that members of the Catholic church are just as good and patriotic citizens as are members of Protestant churches, and we believe they are recognized as such by those who live beside them and mingle with them from day to day.<sup>189</sup>

When the Populist writer stated that the People's Party had "no sympathy" for the Catholic religion the writer was stating that the most that the People's Party would do is tolerate Catholicism. Thus they were showing that they were both tolerant of Catholics as Americans and as voters, but refused to endorse the religion. Politically Populists did not have anything to gain from endorsing Catholicism, but they could gain Catholic voters if they could show that the Republicans and the A.P.A. were in league, and that the People's Party was the best way to defeat this alliance. This article points to the important distinction between how the People's Party viewed Catholicism and how it viewed Catholics. Catholicism itself could sometimes be seen as a threat because of the supposed dangers it could have towards the separation of Church and State and other American institutions. Catholics themselves, on the other hand, could be good citizens just as anyone else, and so could become Populist voters.

The People's Party would often write about how the A.P.A. and the actions it took stood against Populist principle. The principle that the People's Party would point to as being violated by the A.P.A. was that of political equality, a major aspect of the Populist platform and ideology. To Populist political equality meant that each man would be treated the same under the law. The right of political equality was something that the People's Party would argue was inherently American, and so by linking the A.P.A. to this anti-American stance the Populists were saying that the true defender of American identity was the People's Party.

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<sup>189</sup> *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune*, "THE REPUBLICAN SCHEME UNFOLDS," September 27, 1893, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85031982/1893-09-27/ed-1/>.

In the People's Party's efforts to gain more votes, Kansas Populists tried to link the A.P.A. and its anti-American beliefs to the Republican Party. The attempt at linking these two organizations can be seen in an October 17th, 1894, article in *The Advocate*:

In view of the avowed purpose of the American Protective association, to deprive one class of American citizens of equal rights of citizenship with every other class, it is both natural and fitting that the organization should identify itself with a party whose ultimate purpose is to concentrate all power in the hands of a favored few and subject the many to a condition of absolute vassalage. Such a party can never achieve lasting success in this country.<sup>190</sup>

The type of argument that the People's Party made in its effort to gain more votes and increase anti-Republican sentiment is stating that the Republicans were the party that was opposed to political equality, whereas the People's Party in their condemnation of the Republicans was the exact opposite. This type of argument highlights a connection to the arguments made by Populists against "Shylock" and its supposed control over the Republicans and Democrats. The People's Party was trying to make itself appear as the only defender of what it considered to be a core American principle, and thus the only sensible choice when it came time to vote.

The divisions that the People's Party accused the A.P.A. of trying to create did not stop at religion but were also part of a larger effort to divide the working class in hopes of benefitting the rich. In this way, the A.P.A. was once again being depicted by the Populists in a similar way to how the Populists depicted "Shylock." Both Jewish people and the A.P.A. were being accused of trying to divide the working class for the benefit of corrupt influences within the American political system. In the case of "Shylock," the corrupt influences they were trying to benefit were themselves, sometimes expressed in the form of the Republican and the Democratic parties. In

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<sup>190</sup> *The Advocate*, "THE A. P. A. PATRIOTS.," October 17, 1894, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032018/1894-10-17/ed-1/seq-5/>.

the case of the A.P.A. the corrupt influences were the Republican Party and its immoral attempts to stay in power. This type of anti-A.P.A. sentiment is expressed in an article from the *Kansas Agitator* published on June 11, 1894 which states:

The A.P.A., in its spirit, is proscriptive, and breathes the spirit of hate and religious war, and is believed to have originated in the higher circles of plutocracy. It falsely claims that the American free school and other American institutions are menaced by a church that, in numbers, constitutes only a small minority of the population of our nation. But, if even the design existed, there are no means of carrying out so improbable a scheme and, since there is no real danger, we are forced to the conclusion that the men who started the A. P. A. did so to divide the people into warring factions in order that plutocracy may carry on its hellish schemes of despoiling the working classes.<sup>191</sup>

The Populists in Kansas were in effect trying to warn other Kansans that even though the A.P.A. would try to paint itself as the defender of Protestantism and American values, it was in effect a direct threat to those values. In this way we once again see the Kansas Populists trying to link the A.P.A. to the Republican Party. The connections that the People's Party claimed existed between the A.P.A. and the Republicans were stated directly such as in song as seen in the Populist newspaper the *People's Voice*:

The children of Republican parents are being taught to sing:  
 'Ta-rah-rah-boom-de-aye!  
 My father is an A. P. A.  
 He kills a Catholic every day  
 Ta-rah-rah-boom-de-aye.<sup>192</sup>

If the People's Party of Kansas was able to link the Republican Party of Kansas to the A.P.A. it would have linked the Republicans to not only anti-Catholic sentiment, something that

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<sup>191</sup> *Kansas Agitator*, "A.P.A. Plank.," June 11, 1894,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040052/1894-06-21/ed-1/seq-5/>.

<sup>192</sup> *People's Voice*, April 20, 1894,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032801/1894-04-20/ed-1/seq-10/>.

may have influenced who the immigrant and Catholic population of the state voted for, but also to the effort of dividing the working-class vote for the benefit of the rich. Much as the People's Party tried to link their rivals to the "Shylocks" that were supposedly controlling the United States, the Populists of Kansas were trying to link the Republicans to organizations and ideologies that they were actively working against working-class Americans. While the Populists of Kansas may have truly believed that the Republicans and the A.P.A. were working closely together to do everything that they were accused of, there was also a potential electoral advantage to their public criticism of the A.P.A., just as there was a potential political advantage of linking the Republicans and the Democrats to "Shylock."

What can also be seen in the Kansas Populist rhetoric in regards to the A.P.A. is that the threat of the A.P.A. was seen as an internal threat posed by fellow Americans and Protestants. The Populists thought that what the A.P.A. was doing was dangerous but was being done by Americans. The threat of "Shylock" as expressed in the previous section was always viewed as an outside threat. This fits into the understanding of anti-Semitic rhetoric that depicted Jewish people as constant outsiders to American society, and unable to assimilate. Jewish people were seen as foreign-born, different, and not caring about American values, whereas the A.P.A. was an internal threat, and so was violating and undermining American values from within American society.

The regionalized nature of the People's Party meant that there were large differences in how different state organizations thought of and acted towards Catholics. Articles in *The Southern Mercury* indicate that Texas Populists expressed general hostility towards Catholicism. The hostility Texas Populists expressed towards Catholics was often done by commenting on the connection between Catholic voters and the Democratic Party. While many Catholic voters were

Democrats the Populists of Texas viewed this connection with general distrust. *The Southern Mercury* warned that, "...the liberty loving people of America would do well to keep an eye on Cleveland and Catholicism."<sup>193</sup>

The Populists of Texas in this above quote are speaking against Catholics because they saw them as supporting Grover Cleveland who was a Democrat, the People's Party main political rival in the state. Unlike the Populists of Kansas who were generally tolerant of Catholics, the Populists of Texas viewed Catholics as enemies to the people of the United States, much as "Shylock" was. It was not simply that Catholics were dangerous because they were voting for Democrats, but that Catholics were using Democrats to try and bring about Catholic supremacy in the United States. The People's Party in Texas specifically accused Catholics of voting for Cleveland "as a stepping stone to accomplish Papal supremacy in the United States. A Catholic has no other object in view by voting except to advance the cause of his cherished religion, a counterfeit of true Christianity."<sup>194</sup> In this way the rhetoric of the Populists in Texas matched that of the A.P.A. in Kansas. In effect the People's Party was stating that the Democrats were being used by a group of voters who wanted to turn their backs on the true values of what it meant to be an American.

The Texas Populists would further state that Catholics and the institutions and core beliefs of the United States were not compatible. In September 1893, *The Southern Mercury* in September described this belief in great detail:

Catholicism and the constitution will make strange bed fellows, indeed! The papacy contemplates nothing less than the union of church and state, and this would mean the repetition of its terrible history. Americans should thoroughly oppose the slightest intimation of Catholic ascendancy in America. The fundamental principle of our government is that all power is derived from the

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<sup>193</sup> J. H. Smith, *The Southern Mercury*, "CLEVELAND AND CATHOLICISM.," November 9, 1893, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph185538/m1/3/?q=%20date:1891-1896%20>.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

consent of the governed. The pope is the viceregent of God, so said, consequently the genius of Catholicism and the spirit of American institutions stand in invincible antipathy to each other. They can never coalesce, not even co-exist. Thus a non-resistance to Catholic aggression is fraught with most dangerous possibilities to American freedom. It belongs to an effete and despotic past. It has served its purpose in the development of men, and must be relegated to the rubbish of the race.<sup>195</sup>

The difference in attitudes towards Catholics that Populists in Texas and Kansas expressed can possibly be explained by the different political geographies in which they operated. The Republican Party was the main rival of the Populists in Kansas, and across the United States the Republicans had in the past used anti-Catholic rhetoric.<sup>196</sup> To mobilize Catholic voters to support the People's Party the Populists were trying to link one of the most openly anti-Catholic organizations to the Republicans, and thus hopefully ruin the Republican chances of electoral success. On the other hand, Populists in Texas faced the Democrats who had traditionally supported Catholic voters. So, to try to delegitimize the Catholic voting bloc and the Democratic Party the Texas Populists tried to link the Democrats and Catholics to corruption and to a conspiracy to undermine American values. The People's Party tolerance or intolerance of Catholics was often influenced by the political climate within which each state organization of the People's Party operated.

Something to note is that while Texas Populists were overall hostile towards Catholicism, there was an article that appeared in *The Southern Mercury* in March 1895 that did call for religious tolerance, something very much in opposition to earlier Texas Populist remarks. This article stood in stark contrast to all others found during the research for this chapter. What is unique about this article is not just that it called for religious tolerance, but that it was one of the

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<sup>195</sup> *The Southern Mercury*, "IS THERE ANY DANGER?," September 14, 1893, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185532/m1/8/>.

<sup>196</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 28-29.

only major articles found in the research for this chapter from Texas to not oppose Catholicism outright. This article states:

Dark lantern religion is no better than dark lantern politics. A light placed under a bushel is not the sort that sheds its rays for the benefit of the people. Truth is mighty, and will prevail, and no amount of bigotry or dark age methods can ward off the waves of free thought that have come upon the world to stay. Turn on light! Let the broad rays of the noon-day sun shine, and if the plant withers it is not of this age, and should pass away. The religion of the future is the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and the politics of the future is government for the masses. Thought is free, and it will refuse to be manacled.<sup>197198</sup>

While overall the viewpoint that the People's Party in Texas had towards Catholicism was hostile, this article is important to mention because it reemphasizes and highlights the internal diversity of thought that existed within the People's Party. While majority attitudes and trends can be found in how the People's Party related to various groups that made up the American political community, it must always be remembered the Populists were not monolithic and there were always those who dissented against the majority viewpoint.

While research was done into how Georgia Populists viewed Catholics, there were no major primary sources found that spoke to this relationship. Academics have written on Tom Watson's anti-Catholic stance after the People's Party, but for this chapter there was nothing found to indicate what this relationship may have been from 1891 to 1896. For this reason we can not know how Georgia Populists thought of or related to Catholics, meaning that this specific area must further be researched so that a more holistic understanding of Populism and its relationship towards religion can be gained.

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<sup>197</sup> *The Southern Mercury*, "IS A SECOND DARK AGE COMING?," March 7, 1895, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth185602/m1/5/>.

<sup>198</sup> While in the research for this chapter it could not be conclusively proven, it is believed that the term "dark lantern" refers to secret societies or other organizations that are known to be secretive in their actions and conduct.

To better understand Populism and how it related to religious minorities, it may be of benefit to examine what happened after the People's Party stopped being a politically viable entity. The case of Leo Frank gives us that opportunity. Leo Frank was a Jewish man and pencil manufacturer who operated a factory in Atlanta, Georgia in 1913. He was only twenty-three years old when he was charged with the rape and murder of a young Christian girl named Mary Phagan who worked in his factory. While the evidence used to prosecute Frank was limited and often contradictory, the Georgia press turned public sentiment against Frank. Eventually Frank was convicted of murder and sentenced to be hanged. An outgoing governor commuted his sentence but a lynch mob seized him from prison and murdered him. At the time the Frank case took place it was controversial both within and outside of Georgia, and it would be used to both make and break political careers within the state.<sup>199</sup> The Frank case involved both legal and illegal injustice and was the first major example of violent anti-Semitism in Georgia.<sup>200</sup> This miscarriage of justice took place well after the People's Party was a viable political entity in American politics, yet one of those at the center of this tragedy was former Populist vice-presidential candidate, Tom Watson.

Watson's role in the Frank case was not an official one. He was not any part of the legal system that prosecuted Frank and convicted him of murder. Rather he used his influence in the state of Georgia and the newspapers he operated to increase public fervor against Frank. Both contemporaries of Watson and historians who wrote of this event have stated that the anti-Semitic language used by Watson was instrumental in inciting the lynch mob that would kill Frank.<sup>201</sup> The role of Watson in this case helps highlight both the anti-Semitism that was a part of

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<sup>199</sup> Clement Charlton Moseley, "The Case of Leo M. Frank," *The Georgia History Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (March 1967): 58-59.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

the Southern political landscape, but also the relationship between what had been one of the most influential Populists, and who continued to be one of the most influential political figures in Georgia, with Jewish people.

A lesser known case that involved a murder charge and a Jewish man that happened well before the Frank case in the state of Georgia was that of Sigmund Lichtenstein and John Welch. Lichtenstein was a Jewish man and shopkeeper and was accused of murdering John Welch during an altercation following a disagreement over whether or not returned goods would be accepted at Lichtenstein's store.<sup>202</sup> In this case there were those who sided with the prosecution who tried to increase public support for them by relying on the use of anti-Semitic sentiment to increase the chances of a guilty verdict.<sup>203</sup> A central figure in this case would also be former Populist Tom Watson. Whereas in the Frank case he was leading the charge against the Jewish man, in this case he was a lawyer for the defense. In the closing arguments of the case Watson would expound on the proud Jewish heritage that Lichtenstein came from, and would make the statement that "No Jew can murder."<sup>204</sup> This statement helped gain an acquittal.

Watson's actions after the fall of the People's Party helps highlight the fact that there was never one attitude that the People's Party had towards those who found themselves outside of the religious Protestant mainstream. In general, there was always at least some level of intolerance towards religious non-Protestants, although there were differences across state lines. The intolerance found in this chapter is not echoed within the work of Gregg Cantrell and Charles Postel on the People's Party, but this is because Cantrell and Postel focused much of their work on the People's Party's relationship with people who would not be considered traditionally

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<sup>202</sup> Louis E. Schmier, "'No Jew Can Murder': Memories of Tom Watson and the Lichtenstein Murder Case of 1901," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 438-439.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 443.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 453-454.

religious. Cantrell and Postel do show that the People's Party was accepting of those who did not fit within a traditional religious mold or were not religious at all, and so they do show that the People's Party was not completely intolerant to those who were not Protestants. While the People's Party may not have been hostile to those who were not traditionally religious, there was always some level of hostility expressed towards people who were religious but not Protestant.

In the research and analysis done for this chapter it was shown that the attitude expressed by Populists towards Jewish people and Catholics has earned them a reputation close to the one Hofstadter gave them. While there were some variations in general Populists used Catholics and Jewish people as scapegoats to explain the current economic and political conditions that so many Americans suffered under, and did so in a way to better their own electoral chances. Much as the previous chapters have shown, political expediency and the search for electoral success were never very far from any of the attacks or pleas that the People's Party made towards voters to gain support for itself and decrease support for other political parties. While many Populists may have had varied viewpoints on people who followed different religions as a whole, Populists did use rhetoric and arguments that would blame religious outsiders for the problems in American society. This was at least in part done in the hopes that this would increase their own electoral success.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Many aspects of the People's Party and American Populism have been studied, examined, and analyzed by historians, but still there are major areas that have been left out of this analysis that require further examination. In this thesis it was my hope to bring a greater, more nuanced, and national understanding of the People's Party and how it interacted with Black people, women, and non-Protestants, and give particular consideration to the state by state differences in these interactions. Still, the work done in this thesis is just a drop in the bucket of what can be analyzed as our understanding of identity grows and we are constantly being made aware of new relationships to examine. As we conclude this thesis it is my hope to offer some prospective avenues for further research.

One of the first areas that I would argue needs further examination is how the People's Party interacted with Black women. While more recent academic work has put more focus on the work on Black men in the People's Party than previous work had done, politically active Black women are often not mentioned at all. There are various reasons for why this could be. One reason is that the efforts of Black women have often been left out of the historical narrative due to racism and the oversight of the authors who are writing said narratives. Another reason specifically in regards to Populism is that there is a lack of primary sources that recount how Black women interacted with the People's Party.<sup>205</sup> While the exact reason for this lack of primary sources is unknown, it does leave a serious gap in the academic work of the People's Party. Examining how the People's Party thought of and treated Black women would not only examine the nuances of race and Populism but would also bring into the discussion analysis concerning gender. This combination would be a perspective not often shown in current

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<sup>205</sup> Omar H. Ali, *In The Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 145-146, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wheatonma-ebooks/reader.action?docID=619201>.

academic work. To begin this research it may be best to start with the Colored Farmer's Alliance, the mostly all-Black independent Populist organization.

An even wider gap of study is the People's Party's relationship with women in general. While women such as Mary Lease have been studied, it is usually only the most famous of Populist women who make their way into the historical narrative. There were many women who filled small and large roles within the movement, and they deserve their own analysis if a holistic understanding of Populism is to be constructed. A way to start this research would be by looking at the staff and writers of various Populist newspapers. Newspapers were often a place where women would work both as editors and writers to support the Populist cause. There is also a lack of women representation among the authors who write about Populism, and hopefully if this changes so will the groups of people who are focused on in studies of Populism.

Another area of research that would greatly enhance our understanding of Populism would be research into how the People's Party thought of and acted towards Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Gregg Cantrell has done work on this already and has found that while the People's Party in Texas did try to gain Mexican and Mexican-American voters, their relationship with this community was soured by controversy surrounding potential voter fraud and Democratic corruption. Still, there is large room for growth in this area of scholarship. It was originally my goal to include a section in Chapter One of this thesis about the relationship between the People's Party and Mexican and Mexican-Americans, but a lack of available primary sources and a lack of knowledge of the Spanish language made this proposed section impractical. A place to start this research would be the San Antonio newspaper, which also at one time supported Populism, *El Regidor*. While the obstacles stated previously stopped me from writing a section on this relationship, a Master's or Doctoral candidate would hopefully have the

available resources so that these obstacles could be overcome. Understanding the relationship between the People's Party and Mexican and Mexican-Americans would do the important work of breaking our analysis of Populism out of the Black and white racial binary, and would greatly add nuance to our current understanding of race and Populism.<sup>206</sup>

Much in the same vein as the previous paragraph, an understanding of the relationship between Chinese and Chinese-Americans and the People's Party would greatly enhance our understanding of Populism and race. This analysis would in effect also be an analysis of Populism in the American West, as that is where most Chinese and Chinese-Americans were. While it was the hopes to write a section in Chapter Three on this topic and focus on the use of racialized anti-immigrant sentiment a lack of primary source evidence both from the Populist and Chinese and Chinese-American perspectives did not make this practical. It is my hopes that further research will be done into this relationship, and not be treated as the side-issue that it usually is.

A fourth area that deserves more and fuller research would examine the existence of the People's Party in the American West. Populism is often treated as if it only happened in the American South and Midwest, when in actuality it had a large powerbase in the American West. Further researching this topic will create a better understanding of the internal diversity that was within the People's Party, something that is not always highlighted in academic work. While this thesis tried to mention of Populism in the American West as much as applicable, namely in the Second Chapter on the discussion of women's suffrage and Populism in Colorado, it is my hope that further research can be done so that a more holistic understanding of the People's Party from a truly national perspective can be formed.

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<sup>206</sup> Gregg Cantrell, "The Problem Of The Border," in *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists And The Roots Of American Liberalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 323-344.

While there are many more areas of research that can be done into Populism the areas detailed above are those that I could identify that require the most immediate further research. If we are to truly understand how the People's Party functioned in regards to identity and how it thought of and acted towards the American people these are the areas that should first be explored. These areas of study offer a cross-section both of the American people and the groups of people that are often left out of the discussion on Populism. The best place to start much of this research is with Populist organizations such as the Farmer's Alliance. Organizations like the Farmer's Alliance were organizing and making people into Populists well before the People's Party came into being. So to fully understand the story of American Populism and how it interacted with various identity groups it is important to consider what came before the People's Party.

It was the goal of this thesis to construct a wider understanding of Populism and how it related to the American people, and still, there are many more areas that can be looked into to better this understanding. While this thesis does focus on the issues of race, gender, and religion, a similarly lengthened paper could have focused on any number of different topics and would have added equally to our understanding of Populism in American society.

It is my hope that research continues into the People's Party especially as more and more focus is put on the growth of modern populism within the United States. While this thesis did not want to focus on or discuss modern populism in the United States, the recurrence of this element in American politics does call upon historians to study both the potential historical roots of this modern movement, but also to draw comparisons between these two elements and understand how they are both similar and different. While I will not make a comment on modern populism,

it is my hope that the search to understand the present political situation will send people looking backward to the first rise of organized Populism within the United States.

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I, Harrison Zeiberg, have abided by the Wheaton Honor Code