"A HOST OF STURDY PATRIOTS"
The Texas Populists

Gregg Cantrell

Despite claims to the contrary, it was really no coincidence that two separate conventions were being held on consecutive days in Dallas in August 1891. One was the annual gathering of the state Farmers' Alliance, the massively popular self-help organization that, although officially nonpartisan, had increasingly served as a political protest vehicle for struggling farmers over the previous several years. The other was the founding convention of the Texas People's (or Populist) Party. "I want to emphasize the fact that the alliance has nothing on earth to do with the people's party convention," declared Alliance leader Harry Tracy, "and is in nowise responsible for its being held in Dallas at the time of the meeting of the state alliance." Tracy was speaking a bit disingenuously, and former Alliance state lecturer William Lamb—now a Populist organizer—knew it. When a *Dallas Morning News* reporter pointed out to him that the Alliance had "adopted demands that can only be secured through legislative enactments," Lamb admitted that this was indeed the case. "Will those demands be granted by either of the old parties?" asked the reporter. "They will not," Lamb replied. "That being the case," continued the reporter, "what remains for the alliance as a non-partisan organization but to vote with your party?" "That's all that is left for it," Lamb forthrightly conceded.[1]

And so it was. Most of the founders of the Texas People's Party were indeed Alliancemen, and the platform they adopted incorporated all of the Alliance's political demands. It is an oversimplification, though, merely to say that the Alliance "went into politics" in 1891. The Popu-

list platforms of the 1890s may have been forged over the previous decade by the various state and national conventions of the Farmers' Alliance, but these in turn had borrowed heavily from the platforms of the Greenback, Independent, and Union Labor political insurgencies of the 1870s and 1880s, and also from the Knights of Labor. Not surprisingly, most Populist leaders had been active in the Alliance, the Knights, or in various third-party political campaigns. Many had been involved in more than one of these movements, and some in all of them. The birth of the Texas People's Party, then, was the culmination of a quarter-century of political insurgency in the Lone Star State.[2]

Nationally, the central document of the People's Party was the Omaha Platform, written in 1892 at the party's first national convention—a gathering in which Texan delegates played conspicuous roles. This brief but eloquent document called for sweeping reforms in three broad categories: finance, transportation, and land. Of these, the financial planks received the most attention. They demanded "a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government"—in other words, a system of paper (or "fiat") money, not redeemable in gold or silver. The platform also endorsed the controversial Subtreasury Plan (or "a better system") of the Farmers' Alliance, whereby farmers would store staple crops in government warehouses, use the crops as collateral for low-interest government loans, and then have the crops released onto the market in an orderly fashion when prices were best, thus relieving the yearly harvest-season price collapse. The platform called for the free and unlimited coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, economy in government, and the establishment of postal savings banks. By increasing the amount of money in circulation and thus causing inflation, these measures would provide relief to debt-strapped farmers who for years had been forced to repay loans in appreciated dollars at harvest time. These measures would also remove the country's financial system from the hands of private bankers and place it under the control of the government.[3]

Recognizing the monopolistic nature of the nation's railroad industry, the Populist transportation plank called for government ownership of the railroads, a measure backed by Texas Populists, who had witnessed the failure of mere government regulation to control predatory pricing and other unfair practices. Similarly, the plank called for government ownership of the telephone and telegraph systems, which by their very nature tended to be monopolistic.[4]

The land plank also echoed the antimonopoly theme of the financial and transportation planks, calling for a prohibition on alien landowning and demanding that all lands held for speculative purposes by railroads and other corporations be "reclaimed by the govern-

ment and held for actual settlers only." Commenting on the Omaha Platform, 1892 Texas Populist gubernatorial candidate Thomas L. Nugent declared it "a plain, simple enunciation of true democracy." The document became the bible of Texas Populism, the standard against which Populists were measured. If they stood by the Omaha Platform in full, they were said, in Populist parlance, to be "in the middle of the road."[5]

Populist platforms at the state level incorporated the major demands of the Omaha Platform, elaborating on some of those demands and adding others that were strictly of state interest. For example, a call for free public schools with a mandatory six-month term and free textbooks became a standard feature of the state platforms. Free and fair elections, featuring a secret ballot, likewise characterized the state documents. As we shall see later in this chapter, the state platforms prominently featured planks intended to address issues important to organized labor, and beginning in 1894 the party added demands of specific interest to African Americans.[6]

From our modern perspective, then, it is easy to see why Populists are considered "liberal," "progressive," or even "radical." The unprecedented willingness of Populists to embrace public (i.e., government) solutions to widely shared public problems clearly marks them as belonging to what we today call the political Left. Many of their policy positions indeed foreshadowed later liberal/progressive causes. The farm-loan and price-support components of the Subtreasury Plan, for instance, found expression in New Deal farm programs. The call for a nonmetallic-based paper currency issued and controlled by the federal government later came to fruition with the creation of the Federal Reserve system. While the federal government never nationalized U.S. railroads, the interstate highway system embodied much of the spirit of the Populist transportation plank. The income tax favored by the Populists became the law of the land with the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment in 1916. Populist electoral reforms, including the direct election of senators, voter registration, and the secret ballot, likewise gained widespread acceptance in the twentieth century. And two progressive causes that were championed by many individual Populists but that never became part of the party's official platform—woman suffrage and prohibition—also later became law, as did Populist labor demands, including the eight-hour workday and the right to strike. At the state and local level, Populist causes such as greater funding for public schools, free textbooks, and abolition of the notorious convict-lease system all eventually became the successful objects of liberal or progressive reform. And the Populists' efforts to reach out to African Americans and accord them a meaningful, dignified place in the party's

councils further cemented their reputation as forerunners of today's political Left.

Interestingly, though, relatively few Populists thought of themselves as "liberals," much less as "radicals." Of course, the "liberal" label had not yet been applied generally to a political ideology in American politics; to most Americans in the 1890s the term simply suggested a certain broadness in outlook, a tolerant and generous spirit. Nor were the terms "progressive" or "Left" commonly used in Texas or Southern politics. "Radical" was somewhat better known, but most Populists eschewed the label. Indeed, the adjective that Populists most often applied to themselves was the word "conservative." When asked about the 1892 state platform, Thomas Nugent was quoted as saying "that the people's party state platform is in his opinion conservative enough to suit every man of whatever calling within the state" and that he was "confident of rallying the conservative element of the state to his support." During that same campaign, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that Nugent would prevail against incumbent Democrat James S. Hogg "because the conservative population is bound to vote for Nugent because of his recognized conservatism." When Nugent lay dying in late 1895, Populist leader Harry Tracy sang the praises of Jerome Kearby, Nugent's successor as the party's standard-bearer, declaring that Kearby's "well-known conservatism will bring thousands of wavering democrats to us." The *Morning News* likewise described an 1892 speech by the African American Populist orator John B. Rayner as being "conservative, sensible and logical." And at the start of the 1894 campaign, state party chairman H. S. P. "Stump" Ashby proudly announced "that our ranks are being rapidly filled with the conservative, justice-loving people of our State."[7]

Democrats and Republicans, of course, scoffed at the notion of Populists as conservatives. To old-party stalwarts, the Populists were indeed dangerous radicals, if not socialists, communists, or anarchists. African American Republican leader Norris Wright Cuney voiced a typical opposition opinion, charging that Thomas Nugent was but "a few steps removed toward socialism and communism" for his support of the Subtreasury Plan and government ownership of the railroads. In a similar vein, the Democratic editor of the *Kaufman Sun* denounced "populistic heresies" as "surely tending to socialism, confiscation of property, disorganization, political tyranny, social debasement, [and] commercial ruin." So common did these slurs become that Populists spent a significant amount of time and energy rebutting them. During the 1894 campaign, the *Texas Advance*, the People's party's state organ, dismissed "the silly and false cry that 'the people's party is a set of socialists, anarchists and revolutionists,'" calling all such charges

"bosh." To most Populists, opposing the monopolistic corporate combinations that had arisen since the Civil War was an eminently conservative policy.[8]

Instead, the Populists consistently portrayed themselves as champions of Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Lincolnian democracy, with occasional nods to Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster. Jefferson, of course, held a revered place in Populist thought because of his apotheosis of the independent, freeholding farmer, and his opposition to Alexander Hamilton's pro-bank, pro-business ideas. "The idea that Jefferson had of republican government," explained Alliance and Populist leader Evan Jones, "was a government in which the people ruled. Hamilton, on the other hand, believed in a centralized government." James H. "Cyclone" Davis, the most famous Texan in national Populist circles, typically mounted the campaign podium with ten volumes of the works of Jefferson, after which he proceeded to demonstrate how the Sage of Monticello held Populist views. "The republican and democratic parties to-day support Hamilton's policies, and the populists the true Jeffersonian party," Davis declared in a typical stump speech, whereas Hamiltonians said that "government should be taken from the masses and placed in the hands of classes and the Jeffersonian theory was that the people can be trusted with self-government, that they are the source of all political power, and the powers of government as now exercised should be wrested from the classes and restored to the masses."[9]

The other patron saint of Texas Populism was Andrew Jackson. Although Populists would not have agreed with the specifics of Jackson's hard-money policies, they viewed his battle against the Bank of the United States and his advocacy of the rights of the common man as the embodiment of Populist ideals. "[T]he industries of the country are growing under the iron heel of monopolies and the people need another such man as 'Old [H]ickory' Jackson to regulate our finances as he did in opposition to the United States banking system, for there is but little difference in the way our present banking system is oppressing the people and the system then proposed," Evan Jones contended. Or as prohibitionist-turned-Populist E. L. Dohoney put it, "We want a democratic party like that inspired by Jefferson and organized by Jackson, which will align itself on the anti-monopoly side of the branch and stand on the doctrine of 'equal rights to all; exclusive privileges to none,' and will fight the battle of the producing classes against monopoly in all its varied forms."[10]

Given the large number of Confederate veterans in their ranks, it is interesting that the third statesman whose political thought Texas Populists most admired was Abraham Lincoln. His name could be in-

voked in a number of ways. One was Lincoln's willingness to join a third-party movement (the antebellum Republicans) when he perceived that the established parties had abandoned their principles. "How long think you it would have taken Abraham Lincoln and his associates to have emancipated slavery and remain in the whig and democratic parties?" asked Jerome Kearby in 1896. "To reform a party and remain with it is a delusion and deceit, the seductive appeal of the demagogue." But Populists were also drawn to Lincoln because of his humble origins and his pro-labor ideology. "Abraham Lincoln said 'Labor is prior to and independent of capital,'" the *Southern Mercury* editorialized. "Labor is much more important than capital or capitalists." Populists seized upon an alleged 1864 quote from Lincoln in which Lincoln declared that "corporations have been enthroned" by the war and that "the money power" now threatened the survival of the republic.[11]

The Populists' roots in the Farmers' Alliance, their admiration of, and advocacy for, the small producer, and their invocation of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln have led some scholars to see them not as forward-looking progressives but rather as rustic provincials yearning for an imagined agrarian past of sturdy, independent yeomen. It is but a short step from this image to a conclusion that Populists were hicks and hayseeds, or, at their worst, even bigots and reactionaries. In this view, Populists' narrow-minded nostalgia for an idealized bygone era led them to embrace anti-intellectualism, anti-Semitism, nativism, and Anglophobia. Cut off from the modernizing mainstream of American society, socially, economically, and geographically isolated farmers embraced first the Alliance and then Populism because they failed to understand the complexities of the modern world—a world that kept them marginalized and poor.[12]

There were certainly Texas Populists who fit this description, but on the whole it gives a distorted picture. In reality, at both the grassroots and the leadership levels, and in both geographic and economic terms, Populists were a remarkably diverse lot. In the Lone Star State, the People's Party did well in several of the poor, isolated, Piney Woods counties of deep East Texas and in the hardscrabble Cross Timbers region of West Central Texas—patterns that would seem to support the social-isolation/hayseed thesis. And it is true that they generally fared better in rural areas than in towns. But Populists also found significant support in many counties that were relatively prosperous, that boasted rich soil, and that were well connected to the outside world. And while Populists may have invoked the names of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln, and longed for a time of more principled politics, they did so not in an attempt to turn back the clock and recapture some idyllic

agrarian past, but rather they devised policies that they believed would curb the excesses of modern commercial and industrial capitalism and allow them a fair share in the bounty of modern America. As Evan Jones contended, "the present system of our government finances is divorcing capital and labor. . . . The question of finances is affecting all classes of our people—the man that wields the hoe, the business man and the professional man; it affects all alike." Harry Tracy likewise believed that "the people's party is not the enemy of any necessary industry or class, but that its object will prove to be the salvation of the commercial world, and we urge all classes to analyze the principles involved in our Omaha platform." Democrats, he explained, had "made it a point to endeavor to get merchants and manufacturers to believe that the people's party was their enemy, seeking to destroy their business." Not true, he claimed: "the people's party is the friend and not the enemy of legitimately invested capital."[13]

Even African American Populists in Texas, who might have been expected to be more radical than whites in their critiques of capitalism, agreed that Populism was not meant to interfere with the proper functioning of America's capitalist system. John B. Rayner, the foremost black leader of the party, argued that neither capitalism nor wealth were inherently evil. Rather, he suggested that the leaders of the major parties had pitted the classes against one another for their own corrupt purposes. In order "to carry out their fiendishness," Rayner stated, "the two old parties . . . will make the banker intimidate the merchant and manufacturer, and the merchant will intimidate the small farmer, and the farmer will bribe or intimidate the laborer and tenant farmer." The Populist program, then, aimed to restore each of these necessary groups to its proper relationship with the others. Corruption and monopoly, not capitalism per se, were the enemies of all.[14]

When couched in these terms, it becomes clear that Texas Populists were not pursuing radical goals such as overthrowing capitalism or abolishing private property; they simply wanted a system that would reward hard work and secure to each the deserved fruits of his or her labor. In short, they strove to create a fairer, more humane form of capitalism. Their experience in groups like the Alliance and the Knights of Labor had proven to them that self-help and collective bargaining would never secure to them the reformed capitalist system that they desired, so the rise of the People's party marked the next phase of their struggle. To win that struggle they would use the only power available to poor people in a democracy—the power of the ballot. They would take back their government from the corrupt, monopolistic powers that had controlled it for the previous twenty years, and then use the government to restore equity to an exploitative system.

The genius of Populism, then, lay not in any of its specific reforms but in the simple realization that widely shared public problems demanded public solutions. The *Dallas Morning News* captured the essence of the Populist worldview shortly after the party's first election, noting that the new party "is composed of those who cherish the general principles of democracy so far as they are applicable to present problems, but do not hesitate to ignore democratic traditions in seeking remedies for modern ills. . . . [T]hey take the ground that democracy is whatever the people will, and that it is part of democracy to solve present problems with present means. They measure public policies not by party standards, but by the people's needs. . . . They look for the accomplishment of reform and seek their object through whatever channel is more promising. . . . [T]hey marched to the polls a host of sturdy patriots, each resolved to cast his ballot in the best interests of his family and his country. Such a movement is a great moral influence, a threat to party power and a rebuke to party greed."[15] Armed with this worldview and an elaborate set of political demands for achieving their goals, the Populists set out to win elections. The move on the part of dissident Alliance men and their allies to found a third party the previous year had further complicated an already-chaotic political scene in the Lone Star State. As the dominant party in an essentially one-party state (the black-dominated Republican Party was never competitive), Texas Democrats had long been divided into a conservative wing and a more progressive faction. The incumbent governor, James Stephen Hogg, had won the office in 1890 with the support of Alliance men, who backed his promise to create a railroad commission. Despite his hostility to the Subtreasury Plan, which alienated the more doctrinaire Alliance men, Hogg's promise to regulate the railroads kept Alliance men in the party, but when the legislature failed to make the commission elective, and then Hogg refused to appoint an Alliance man to the agency, angry Alliance men rose in revolt and created the People's Party.[16]

If this were not trouble enough, Hogg faced yet another rebellion from the conservative wing of his own party. When the Democrats met in August to nominate their state ticket, the losing conservatives bolted the convention and nominated railroad attorney George W. Clark for governor. Republican leaders decided to endorse Clark rather than nominate their own ticket, meaning that there would be two Democratic tickets in the general election.[17]

By the time the Democrats split, the Populists had already nominated Thomas L. Nugent, a lawyer and former state judge from Fort Worth, for governor. Nugent's nomination gave the Populists instant credibility, for he was almost universally respected. A former Con-

federate officer and delegate to the 1875 state constitutional convention, he had been a staunch Democrat until early 1892, when he concluded that a third-party movement finally had enough strength to win. The *Dallas Morning News* spoke for many Texans when it sized up the Populist candidate: "Judge Nugent for governor forms an eminently respectable head. A quiet, self-contained, intellectual and scholarly man, and an accomplished lawyer withal, his enthusiasm for his cause is not less because not boisterous and stormy. His presence at the front is certainly calculated to impart peculiar features of controversial dignity and moral elevation to the campaign." Populist papers quoted with glee an admiring Democratic editor's description of him as "the William Tell of Texas." The Fort Worth correspondent of the *Morning News* declared, "If elected governor he will probably be the most cultured man who has ever occupied that position in the state. He has the courage of a gentleman and is in perfect sympathy with the masses of the people, and all the material interests of the State can be safely trusted to his care."[18]

Despite Nugent's strength at the top of the ticket, the Populists realized that they faced daunting challenges. First there was the issue of financing the campaign. A party with struggling farmers as its core constituency could not hope to compete in the fundraising game with Hogg, who enjoyed the backing that comes with major-party incumbency, or Clark, with his strong ties to railroads and other corporate interests. The Populists counted on grassroots organization to spread the party gospel, and by September they boasted 2,800 Populist clubs statewide. It was not enough. When the campaign was over, they lamented that the recent contest had been conducted "literally without a campaign fund, save as one could be gathered during the canvass in penny contributions from a people already reduced to the extremities of poverty," and that the Democrats, by contrast, had been "sustained by all the wealth and social prestige of the state."[19]

If overcoming the Democrats' massive financial advantage were not obstacle enough, the Populists also had to battle against deeply entrenched Southern political traditions. While it is true that many of the party's leaders and voters came to the Populist revolt as veterans of earlier third-party and independent political movements, none of those movements had ever attracted the numbers needed to seriously threaten Democratic hegemony. Most white Texans, like most white Southerners, regarded the Democratic Party as the "party of the fathers," the party that had "redeemed" the South from the "evils" of Republican rule during Reconstruction, the sole repository of time-tested political principles, and the main bulwark against racial mixing and "social equality" of the races.[20]

The act of publicly leaving the Democratic Party clearly was not something undertaken lightly. Democrats abandoning their party for Populism often published solemn statements explaining how the Democratic Party had ceased to champion the principles of Jefferson and Jackson, how the party had fallen under the sway of corrupt party bosses, and how there had ceased to be any meaningful difference between Democrats and Republicans. Melvin Wade, one of Populism's most popular African American leaders, employed humor in his appeal to Democrats to abandon their party. "Young feller says he's a Democrat because his father was one," Wade joked. "According to him I ought to want to be a slave because my father was one." Wade's logic notwithstanding, Populists never succeeded in breaking the emotional attachment that many Texans felt toward the Democratic Party. After the downfall of Populism, black leader John B. Rayner bitterly noted that "the faith the South has in the Democratic party is stronger than the faith the South has in God."[21]

Even if the Populists could manage to finance their campaigns on a competitive basis and break the stranglehold of Democratic tradition, the party still had to broaden its appeal beyond its core constituency of white farmers and Alliancemen. Early on, the party identified two blocs of voters who might not be automatically drawn to Populism but whose votes were vital to its success. One of these was, as previously mentioned, African Americans.

Texas Populists could look at the political landscape in Texas and see the importance of the black vote; African Americans comprised about 22 percent of the state's population, which meant that if whites were ever less than united, blacks might hold the balance of power. It was not, however, a case of Populists simply deciding that they would invite African Americans to support the People's Party. A complex calculus of racially charged factors had to be taken into account. Would Populists appeal to blacks simply on the grounds of shared economic interest, or would the party include planks designed specifically to win over black voters? Would African Americans hold positions of authority in the party? Would the party welcome black candidates? Would it try to make "fusion" arrangements with the Republicans, whereby black Republicans could stay with their traditional party but agree to support Populist candidates as some sort of a quid pro quo bargain? In each case, white Populists had to conduct a delicate balancing act: if they appeared *too* friendly toward blacks, they exposed themselves to Democratic charges of racial treason and ran the risk of alienating white voters. If they kept African Americans at arm's length, ignoring specifically "black" issues and excluding blacks from positions of leadership within the party, they were unlikely to attract the num-

bers of votes needed to ensure victory. If they chose the fusion route and cut deals with the Republican Party, they became vulnerable to charges of crass political opportunism—the very lack of principle of which they accused the Democrats.[22]

Given these complexities, it comes as no surprise that the Populists sometimes took a tentative, halting approach to the problem of race. The 1892 governor's race exposed the problem in stark terms when incumbent progressive Democrat Jim Hogg denounced lynching, winning many black votes. The black-dominated Republican Party, meanwhile, cynically endorsed conservative Democrat George Clark. The Populists soon found that appeals to blacks' economic self-interest were not enough to offset these two factors, and the bulk of the African American vote went to the two Democrats. The Populists learned that they would have to do more to specifically address black interests if they were to win future elections. As a consequence, in 1894, with ex-slave John B. Rayner holding a position on the platform committee, the party added a plank demanding that "each race shall have its own [public school] trustees and control its own schools." Another plank that year called for the state to "provide sufficient accommodation for all its insane without discrimination in color."[23]

The other bloc of voters that Populists sought to win over was the urban labor vote. By the 1890s, with the rapid growth of towns and cities and the ongoing diversification of the Texas economy, that vote was growing increasingly important. In 1886 the Farmers' Alliance had supported the Knights of Labor in its bitter strike against the Jay Gould railroad lines in Texas, and relations between the two groups had remained warm, even after the strike was crushed. The problem was that the interests of farmers were not always identical to those of laborers. Populist monetary policy, with its emphasis on increasing the supply of circulating currency and thus creating inflation, offered little to urban laborers who would have to pay higher prices for food and other necessities. Populist land reforms, such as the prohibition on alien ownership, likewise held little appeal for workers, and it was difficult for many laborers to evaluate how government ownership of the railroads might affect them. The 1892 Omaha Platform, in its "Expression of Sentiments" section, did denounce the use of Pinkerton strikebreakers, vaguely "sympathize[ed] with the efforts of organized workingmen to shorten the hours of labor," and expressed support for the Knights of Labor in its dispute with the clothing manufacturers of Rochester, but it was short on specific pro-labor planks.[24]

With so little in their national platform to help them woo the labor vote, Texas Populists determined that they would remedy the situation in their state platform. All of the party's platforms included

calls for an eight-hour workday, a fairer mechanics' lien law, reform of the convict-lease system in order to take convict labor out of competition with free labor, and a demand that railroads pay employees promptly and in "the lawful money of the country." The 1892 platform added a plank calling for a state bureau of labor statistics and a state board of arbitration "to adjust all differences between corporations and employees." These demands remained mainstays of Texas Populist platforms for the remainder of the party's existence, and their inclusion helped the party win urban votes.[25]

The Populists lost the 1892 election, running third in the three-man race for governor. Still, having polled 108,483 votes their first time out and electing scores of officials at the local level, party leaders were little short of jubilant. During the critical period between the 1892 and 1894 elections, Texas Populists honed their message and mounted a massive organizing campaign confidently looking forward to victory in 1894. It was during these two years that Populism in Texas emerged as more than just a political movement; it began to take on the dimensions of a religious crusade.[26]

Populism in Texas and elsewhere was thoroughly imbued with an evangelical zeal and sense of mission, not merely bordering on the religious but with Protestant religious ideas actually at its very core. Populists exhibited no shyness in their conspicuous mixing of politics and religion. Ministers played prominent roles in the party and the Populist press. H. S. P. "Stump" Ashby, for example, who chaired the state executive committee and ran for lieutenant governor in 1896, was a former Methodist minister who frequently invoked the Bible in his speeches. John B. Rayner came to Populism from a background as a Baptist preacher. Reddin Andrews, a prominent Baptist minister and former president of Baylor University, likewise converted to Populism. "Politically I am a populist," Andrews explained. "In fact, I am a Jeffersonian, Madisonian, Jacksonian democrat." When asked why he had become a Populist, he replied, "I vote as I pray." He went on to state that being "a Baptist after the Pauline type," he would not worship his denomination "with a Big D," just as he refused blindly to follow any political party. "I wear no political nor ecclesiastical collar," he stated. In virtually the same breath that he denounced the "monopolists" and "money lords" he likewise castigated the "ecclesiastical corruptions, corners, cliques, combines and machines" which "curse the world to-day." Clearly he saw Populism and Christianity as intimately related. Andrews received the Populist nomination for Congress in the Ninth District in 1896, finishing a distant third in the race, but in 1910 he reappeared on the political scene as the Socialist Party nominee for governor.[27]

Although Ashby was a Methodist, and Andrews and Rayner Baptists, Populism appears to have appealed most strongly to adherents of "restorationist" denominations such as the Primitive Baptists, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Disciples of Christ, all of which had broken away from larger denominations, much as Texas Populists had broken off from the Democrats. Restorationists saw themselves as reformers, struggling to restore the ancient purity of the first-century church. Generally rejecting creeds and narrow sectarianism, they valued freedom of conscience and distrusted anything that tended toward hierarchy. They looked at the state of religion in America and saw it as decadent and corrupt, bringing American society itself ever closer to the brink of calamity. Believing as they did that religion could not be separated from the broader society, it was logical that religious restorationists would also be political restorationists. Just as Christianity had fallen away from the purity of the early church, so had American politics fallen away from the alleged purity of the Jacksonian era, an era when the virtuous common people, through their tribune Old Hickory, had kept monopolists at bay and ensured (as the Jacksonian slogan went) "equal rights for all and special privileges for none." In both their political and religious views, then, Populists could be conservative and countercultural at the same time—conservative in the sense that they sought to restore "pure" religious and political values of a bygone era, and countercultural in the sense that their efforts to do so ran counter to the corruption of the dominant culture of the late nineteenth century.[28]

In Texas the most prominent restorationist denomination was the Disciples of Christ, and Disciples played highly visible roles in the People's Party. North Texas in particular was a hotbed of Disciple Populists. Elder W. L. Thurman, a Disciples minister who stumped the county for the Populists, found himself the target of malicious falsehoods spread by Democrats, who claimed he had been kicked out of the church. The Populist press exulted when a local Democratic paper apologized for repeating the charges and retracted its critical statements. In the same county, Elder J. C. Lowry, a Disciples minister, ran for the state legislature in 1896. The local paper described him as "a very successful preacher" and "one of the 'Old Guard' of greenbackers" dating back to 1876. But most noteworthy was the nomination by North Texas Populists of U. M. Browder, minister of the Disciples of Christ congregation in Gainesville, who ran for congress against the charismatic incumbent Democrat Joseph Weldon Bailey. Despite their conspicuous ideological mixing of religion and politics, Populists strenuously supported the constitutional separation of church and state, and Browder resigned his pulpit when he accepted

the nomination. In one of the dirtiest campaigns of the entire Populist era in Texas, Bailey won handily, but Browder remained a hero for local Populists. After the election he left Texas for a pastorate in Indiana, but local papers continued to follow his career, publishing one sermon that summarized his—and the religious Populists'—attitude toward religion and politics: "If my pulpit is not for the uplifting of poor, distressed and suffering humanity, it's good for nothing and has no right to the respect of an oppressed people." Texas Populists would have heartily agreed with this Social Gospel position, and moreover, they would have added that politics served the same purpose.[29]

As one of its principal campaign devices, the Populists adopted an institution borrowed from evangelical Protestant culture and from Alliance practice: the camp meeting. These gatherings, which attracted thousands of Populist families, were particularly popular during the summers between election years, and they combined politics, entertainment, and the opportunity for isolated farm families to socialize during the slack times between planting and harvesting. Democrats marveled at the elaborate preparations for the camp meetings and immense crowds that they drew, and Democratic politicians usually felt compelled to accept Populists invitations to participate in the joint debates that were the highlight of the meetings.[30]

As the 1894 elections drew nearer, the Populists felt certain that they would finally wrest control of the state from the Democrats. At their state convention in Waco in June, some twelve hundred delegates converged upon a large tent erected in the Waco city park to nominate candidates, write a state platform, and plan for the upcoming campaign. The convention was a virtual love feast, as Nugent was renominated for governor by acclamation and the platform was adopted with little dissent. As previously noted, the party made much more concerted efforts to woo the votes of organized labor and of African Americans. "[T]he colored brother was a conspicuous figure," reported the *Waco Evening News*, noting that "a hearty welcome was accorded him." The Democrats, now genuinely fearful of losing power, papered over their internal differences, agreeing upon the nondescript "harmony" candidate Charles Culberson for governor and adopting a platform that straddled on the issue of silver coinage.[31]

When the votes were counted in November, the Populists again fell short of victory statewide, but their gains were apparent for all to see. Even though the Republicans fielded a ticket, Nugent polled 159,676 votes to Culberson's 216,373. The Republicans and Prohibitionists combined for 83,746 votes. Nugent's vote had increased by over fifty thousand since 1892. Clearly, if the party continued to grow at its present rate, and if all anti-Democratic votes could be combined

on the Populist ticket, the Democrats would be ousted in 1896. Even more cheering for the party faithful was the fact that Populists won hundreds of local offices and elected twenty-four members of the state legislature.[32]

The upcoming 1896 election cycle, however, presented new challenges for Texas Populists. In the United States, state and local party politics cannot be separated easily from national politics, and developments on the national stage were troubling. Despite party leaders' attempts to appeal to urban voters, Populism had failed to gain much of a foothold outside the party's agrarian strongholds in the South, the Mountain West, and the Great Plains states. And even in many of these states, Populists had sought power—often successfully—through the expedient of fusion. In Kansas, for example, Populists formed a winning coalition with Democrats at the state level. In North Carolina, they fused with Republicans to capture the state. Those who opposed fusion, including a large majority of Texas Populists, believed that such combinations constituted a betrayal of Populist principles. For several years Populists had watched the growing rift in the national Democratic Party over the monetary issue. The dominant wing of the national party followed the lead of President Grover Cleveland and endorsed the gold standard, a position that was anathema to "middle of the road" (anti-fusion) Populists. Still, many national leaders of the People's Party from states that had experienced electoral success with fusion believed that if the Democrats were to embrace free silver and abandon the gold standard, the Populists would be justified in joining forces with the Democrats. By early 1896 it was becoming more apparent that members of the Populist national executive committee were seeking, as one Texas Populist put it, "to lead the Populist party, bag and baggage into the camp of the enemy" when the party's national convention met in July 1896. "Is it possible," he asked, "that they can succeed in carrying out their treasonable design?"[33]

Not only was it possible, it is exactly what happened. Middle-of-the-road Populists had made a fatal miscalculation. Believing that the Democrats would nominate another conservative, gold-standard candidate, they were banking on the defection of the pro-silver, "reform" wing of the Democratic Party into the ranks of the Populists. But when the Democrats met in Chicago for their national convention, the silver faction of the party engineered the surprise nomination of Nebraska's William Jennings Bryan, whose famous "Cross of Gold" speech had captivated the assembled delegates.

Now the stage was set for the fusionist Populists to execute their plan. Depicting Bryan as a Populist in everything but the name, Populist leaders placed his name in nomination at the St. Louis conven-

tion, eliciting howls of protest from the Texas delegates. The best the Texans and other mid-roaders could do was to reverse the normal order of nominations and engineer the nomination of Georgia Populist Tom Watson for vice president, hoping that it would force Bryan to repudiate the nomination. Bryan cleverly remained quiet, and the Texan delegation, now dubbed the "Immortal 103" by the Populist press, returned home in bitter disappointment. Facing the impossible task of explaining to Texas Populists how their national party could have nominated a hated Democrat who supported only one minor plank in the Populist platform, the Texans now had to devise a way to win the upcoming state elections.[34]

The Populists held their state convention in Galveston the following month. Now that fusion with the Democrats had been perpetrated at the national level, many Populists believed that they owed no further allegiance to their national party. Desperate to salvage the statewide election, they entered into secret negotiations with Texas Republicans for a fusion deal that would trade Populist votes for the Republican national ticket in exchange for Republican support for the state candidates of the People's Party. They faced two problems. First, they opened themselves up to charges of hypocrisy, having so staunchly opposed fusion with the Democrats as being a sacrifice of principle. Second, they knew they would run headlong into the thorny issue of race. The Republican Party in Texas was overwhelmingly African American, and to openly advocate supporting Republican William McKinley for president exposed Populists to charges of racial treason. Memories of Reconstruction still burned strong in the minds of white Texans, and any vote for a Republican conjured up the old bugaboo of "negro domination." In the end, the Texas Republicans acceded to the informal deal and did not place a state ticket in the field, and both Populists and Republicans quietly sought to convince their voters to cast ballots for the Republican national ticket and the Populist state ticket.[35]

It was not to be. In a campaign marked by bitter demagoguery, race-baiting, voter intimidation, and outright violence, the Populist state ticket, now headed by the charismatic Dallas lawyer Jerome Kearby, managed only 44 percent of the vote. Worse still, Populist candidates at the local level suffered widespread defeats, as white Populist voters expressed disgust with their leaders' actions at both the state and national levels. For a movement that had been based on religious zeal and idealistic devotion to principle, enough Texas Populists now believed that their party had succumbed to the same corrupt machine politics that had led to the Populist revolt in the first place.[36]

After the debacle of 1896, the People's Party rapidly withered away in Texas and elsewhere. Many disillusioned Populists simply dropped out of politics, although some of the more radical party members who could not stomach a return to the Democrats joined the Socialist Party, which before World War I outpolled the Republicans in Texas. Most eventually returned to the Democratic Party, contributing to the rise of the progressive wing of that party in the early years of the 1900s. Ironically, it was the progressive Democrats, including ex-Populists, who succeeded in enacting the state's poll-tax amendment and other "clean government" election reforms, thus disfranchising thousands of the poorest ex-Populists, especially African Americans. Progressivism in Texas may have drawn some of its reform impulse from Populism, but it was a distinctly white, moderate, business-friendly variety of reform.[37]

With the hindsight of a century's time, certain perspectives on Populism in Texas emerge. Far from being a backward-looking last gasp of rustic agrarians longing for an imagined preindustrial utopia, the People's Party was a remarkably modern and innovative reform movement seeking to rein in the excesses of a social, political, and economic system that had trampled on the rights and aspirations of thousands of Texans. Populists employed the language of Jacksonian, Jeffersonian, and Lincolnian democracy in their crusade to empower ordinary citizens, but in doing so they were only drawing upon an American political tradition that recognized the incompatibility of monopoly with true democracy. Few Populists ever advocated overthrowing capitalism, but they recognized the corrosive toll that that concentrated wealth had taken on the nation's political system. They understood that in a modern industrial democracy, the ballot—wielded in the hands of an informed electorate—furnished the only effective check on the corrupting influence of monopoly. "I have never been frightened by that scarecrow, strong government," Texas Populist Charles Jenkins wrote at the zenith of the movement in 1894. "I believe in a government strong enough to protect the lives, liberty and property of its citizens." Jenkins recognized that in a society where great disparities of wealth and power exist, government was the only weapon that could counterbalance private, corporate influence. And while Jenkins and his fellow Texas Populists would have deprecated the role played by money and corporate interests, and bemoaned the lack of grassroots participation in modern liberal politics, their recognition that public problems demand public solutions links them with the political Left of our own time.[38]

NOTES

1. *Dallas Morning News,* August 17, 18, July 19, 1891 (first and second quotations); July 2, 1891 (subsequent quotations).
2. The two principal monographs on Texas Populism are Roscoe Martin, *The People's Party in Texas: A Study in Third Party Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1933), and Donna A. Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers Alliance and People's Party in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984). Although it is a study of national Populism, Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) heavily emphasizes the Texas roots of the agrarian revolt. For the influence of previous labor and third-party movements on Populism, see Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Laborer Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). The 1891 state platform can be found in Ernest Willim Winkler, ed., *Platforms of the Political Parties of Texas* (Austin: Bulletin of the University of Texas, 1916), 293–99.
3. The Omaha Platform can be found in Sheldon Hackney, ed., *Populism: The Critical Issues* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); 1–6.
4. Ibid., 4–5.
5. Ibid., 5 (first quotation); Dallas *Southern Mercury,* June 23, 1892.
6. For the Populist state platforms of 1891, 1892, 1894, and 1896, see Winkler, *Platforms,* 293–99, 314–16, 332–35, 379–84.
7. *Dallas Morning News,* August 6, 1892 (first and second quotations), August 9, 1892 (third quotation), December 5, 1895 (fourth quotation), August 27, 1892 (fifth quotation); *Houston Post,* January 19, 1894 (sixth quotation).
8. *Dallas Morning News,* October 5, 1892 (first quotation); *Kaufman Sun,* quoted in *McKinney Democrat,* February 27, 1896 (second and third quotations); *Texas Advance* [Dallas], February 24, 1894 (fourth quotation).
9. *Dallas Morning News,* September 7, 1892 (first and second quotations), October 29, 1893 (third and fourth quotations). For Populist invocations of Franklin, Madison, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, see *Dallas Morning News,* September 7, 1892; *Dublin Progress,* February 7, 1891; *McKinney Democrat,* June 2, 1892; *Southern Mercury*[Dallas], October 30, 1888, March 13, 1890, April 14, October 27, 1892; *Texas Advance* [Dallas], April 28, December 2, 1894.
10. *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], November 13, 1888 (first quotation); July 16, 1891 (second quotation). For other examples of Populists' use of Jackson, see *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], November 28, 1889, June 18,

1891; *Dallas Morning News,* September 7, 1892; *McKinney Democrat,* August 8, 1895.

11. *McKinney Democrat,* July 2, 1896 (first and second quotations); *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], Oct. 27, 1892 (third and fourth quotations), August 23, 1894 (fifth and sixth quotations). While the 1864 quote was a favorite of Populists and of liberal bloggers since (a quick Internet search uncovers hundreds of hits for the quotation), experts seriously question its authenticity; see Thomas F. Schwartz, "Lincoln Never Said That," *For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 4–6.
12. The classic expression of the Populists-as-reactionaries view is Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955). For an interpretation that stresses the social, economic, and geographical isolation of Populists, see James Turner, "Understanding the Populists, "*Journal of American History* 67 (September 1980): 354–73.
13. *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], November 13, 1888 (first quotation); *Dallas Morning News,* November 22, 1894 (subsequent quotations). Martin emphasizes the farmer-laborer base of Populist support, and finds Populism strongest in the poorer rural areas, but he concludes that the party "rested on divers social and economic bases" and that "it welcomed and to some extent received the support of other classes." See Martin, *People's Party in Texas,* 58–88 (quotes on p. 87).
14. *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], April 9, 1896 (quotations).
15. *Dallas Morning News,* December 1, 1892.
16. Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876–1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 116–30; Martin, *People's Party in Texas,* 36–41; Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion,* 120–35; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise,* 234–43.
17. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform,* 125–38.
18. Martin, *People's Party,* 115–17; *Dallas Morning News,* quoted in *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], July 7, 1892 (first and third quotations); *Palestine Times,* quoted in *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], Decenber 1, 1892 (second quotation).
19. *Dallas Morning News,* September 12, 1892; *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], December 22, 1892 (quotation).
20. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise,* 8–9; *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], December 6, 1894.
21. *Waco Evening News,* June 21, 1894 (first and second quotations); "Wise Sayings of J. B. Rayner," undated item in Rayner Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (third quotation). For representative statements illustrating the hold that the Democratic Party had on white Southerners and the ways in

which Populists justified their abandonment of the old party, see *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], October 20, 1892, December 6, 1894; *Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 1892, October 28, 1894; *McKinney Democrat*, October 17, 1895, May 7, 1896.

22. Gregg Cantrell and D. Scott Barton, "Texas Populists and the Failure of Biracial Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 60 (November 1989), 659–92.
23. Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 205–15; Winkler, *Platforms*, 333 (first quotation), 334 (second quotation).
24. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 52–65; Martin, *People's Party*, 53, 67–69; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens, Ga., University of Georgia Press, 2007), 66–78; Ruth Allen, *The Great Southwest Strike* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1942); Hackney, *Populism: The Critical Issues*, 5 (quotation).
25. Winkler, *Platforms*, 297 (first quotation), 315 (second quotation).
26. Barnes, *Farmers in Revolt*, 142; Martin, *People's Party*, 222; *Dallas Morning News*, November 28, 1892; *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], December 22, 1892.
27. *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 1894 (quotations); *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Texas, 1896* (Austin: Ben C. Jones & Co., 1897), 62.
28. Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), xxii–xxiv, 10–13, 20–21, 100–102, 128–29,144–45, and passim. This work focuses on North Carolina but its interpretation applies well to Texas. Thomas Nugent's Swedenborgian religious beliefs subjected him to a great deal of criticism, and his responses reinforce the notion of Populists holding countercultural religious opinions; see *Dallas Morning News*, November 5, 12, 1892, March 14, 1894; *Dublin Progress*, June 8, 1894.
29. *McKinney Democrat*, May 31, July 26, November 1, 1894, October 22, 1895 (first and second quotations), September 19, 1895 (third quotation); *Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1894.
30. Martin, *People's Party*, 134, 168–72. For examples of press coverage of Populist camp meetings, see *Dallas Morning News*, July 22, August 7, September 3, 1892, July 30, 1893, July 13, 31, 1894, June 20, August 17, 18, 1895; *McKinney Democrat*, August 8, 1895, August 20, 1896.
31. *Waco Evening News*, June 20 (quotation), 21, 1894; *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], June 28, 1894; *Dallas Morning News*, June 20, 1894; Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 154–60.

32. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 157; Martin, *People's Party*, 210–11.
33. *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], April 16, 1896 (quotations). All major national-level studies of Populism have dealt with the crucial 1896 campaign and the politics of fusion, although they provide widely differing interpretations as to the motives of the fusionist and middle-of-the-road factions; see for example John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 340–79; Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 426–514; Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Human Preference in America, 1890–1900* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 148–61; Robert C. McMath Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877–1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 193–205. For a perceptive recent explanation of the 1896 Populist-Democratic fusion, see Peter H. Argersinger, "Taubeneck's Laws: Third Parties in American Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century," *American Nineteenth Century History* 3 (Summer 2002), 93–116.
34. Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner*, 225–26.
35. Cantrell and Barton, "Texas Populists," 673–85.
36. Ibid., 685–90. On Kearby, see Gregg Cantrell and Kristopher B. Paschal, "Texas Populism at High Tide: Jerome C. Kearby and the Case of the Sixth Congressional District, 1894," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 109 (July 2005), 30–70.
37. Cantrell and Barton, "Texas Populists," 690–92; Worth Robert Miller, "Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist-Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900–1907," *Journal of Southern History* 52 (May 1986), 163–82.
38. *Southern Mercury* [Dallas], August 9, 1894.