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E. J. Hindman

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A MIRROR'S IMAGE:
ANTI-POPULIST SENTIMENT IN TEXAS—
A SAMPLING OF BUSINESS ATTITUDES

by E. James Hindman

"Raise less corn and more *Hell*." So exhorted Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Lease. Not only did many farmers do so, but a later generation of writers, investigating the meaning of Populism, found less consensus and more disagreement over their findings than previous scholars thought the Populist movement capable of producing.

The historiography of Populism is, by now, well-advanced. Even at the undergraduate level many students are quite familiar with the debates which raged over this subject in the last two decades.¹ In these exchanges, a pattern developed. Accusations levied at the Populists engendered a defense—challenge-response, action-reaction. Either the Populists were guilty, or they were innocent of multitudinous charges. In the course of these intellectual jousts, little attention has been devoted to an analysis of anti-Populist views, although the political opposition to Populism has been discussed in several state studies.

This inquiry presents a partial, preliminary discussion of the thoughts, feelings, responses, and emotions of anti-Populist businessmen in Texas. In doing this, a fuller understanding of the period can be obtained. The Hill and Webb Land and Cattle Company of Albany, Texas, is used as the control, with suggestive evidence offered from other Texas businessmen to indicate that the Albany firm's partners did not reflect isolated, crankish attitudes, but rather represented a cross-section of conservative business sentiment. This study casts light on the following facets of the historiographical debate: Those aspects of the Omaha Platform dealing with land and currency reform, the practical implementation of the Platform's principles, the acknowledged radicalism of the Populists by their opponents, the abandonment of political party allegiances, the desperate search for panaceas, and the myth-holding of the anti-Populists.

Louis H. Hill and Sam Webb, owners of the Albany Company, left extensive business records (1883-1945), dealing with a wide range of topics. This investigation focuses on the 1890-96 period. Webb handled the majority of the correspondence; and, because of his intense interest in politics—he was a delegate to the State Democratic Convention and a member of the Texas Legislature—the Hill and Webb papers comment fully on the political and economic issues of the day. Webb communicated frequently with such important Texans as Richard Coke, former governor and senator, Colonel Edward M. House, a childhood friend, campaign manager for Texas gubernatorial candidates, and later presidential confidant, W. L. McGaughy, member of the Texas Legislature and Commissioner of the General Land Office, and Charles A. Culberson, destined to serve as governor and senator.

A backdrop of acute economic upheaval accounted for the Populist revolt in Texas. Several factors explain the agrarian distress—drought, poor crops, low prices, and tight money. A chronic problem facing Texans—both large and small enterprises, farmer and non-farmer—was the scarcity of money. This partially explains the Populist demand for the free coinage of silver, although not all

E. James Hindman is Director of the Division of Social Sciences, Sul Ross State University, Alpine.

Texans suffering from currency shortages joined the People's Party.

The monetary crisis severely affected Hill and Webb's business. Hill wrote:

it will be impossible to make a loan on your property here. Money is tighter here than it has ever been known before and it is impossible to borrow a dollar on any kind of security. Loan and mortgage companies will not loan on town property, so the only kind of money that can be borrowed on this kind of collateral would be from private individuals, and at present, we know of no one . . . who has \$400.00 they could spare. Our bank is not loaning a dollar now.²

With increased currency constriction, new pressures bore on Hill and Webb. Acting as agents for out-of-state banks, mortgage, and loan companies, the situation caused land sales to decline drastically, spawning inquiries into why one or another company's land was stagnant. Writing the Louisville Banking Company, Webb blamed the financial crisis. He maintained that "very little property had changed hands anywhere in Texas. No money, cotton low. Stock worth hardly nothing."³ By the following summer, matters had worsened prompting Webb to despair:

We have never seen anything like it here or anywhere else, and when we tell you that a man cannot raise a dollar on Cattle, Horses, Sheep, Land, Personal Security, or on United States Bonds, you will understand the true situation. We have \$50,000.00 in United States Bonds that we want to pledge for \$250.00—can you let us have it? There is not a man, woman, or child in this country that can raise \$100.00 today, and all have taken a back seat, and are now discussing the millenium—and free silver.⁴

To Judge J. R. Fleming of San Antonio, Webb decried that "never in my life have I seen anything like it—the panic of 1873 was a pic-nic compared to it."⁵ If the money situation affected the large operators so critically, is it surprising that the "little people" suffered so drastically?

Consequently, more and more Texans could not pay their lease charges, which disturbed the Albany firm. Webb frequently attempted to intervene and prevent foreclosures, appealing to other companies to join him. He believed that survival required "Debtor and Creditor to bear with each other until the mist is raised, which will certainly be to the best interest to both."⁶

Notwithstanding the complexity of the financial crisis, Hill and Webb supported a simplistic explanation for the depression in Texas. To them, the culprit was Governor James Hogg. Hogg, while not a Populist, had been elected with strong agrarian support. Webb asserted that "Hog" lay at the foot of the problem, and that if he won the election (1892) "the future is just as gloomy as the past two years."⁷ Blaming Hogg for the economic dislocation is commonplace in Hill and Webb's correspondence.⁸

By the summer of 1892, Texas Populists began implementing certain aspects of their program. By examining their actions, one can understand how parts of the Third Party platform came to affect citizens in their everyday living; it removes the Populist credo from a theoretical and abstract analysis and places it into the realm of practical experience. By so doing, it is possible to explain and demonstrate the bitter reaction to Populism and the development of an anti-People's Party faction. This is what happened in the case of Hill and Webb.

An example of Populism-in-action had to do with the plank in the Omaha Platform dealing with land. Accordingly:

The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens, should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.⁹

Populists viewed the contemporary system of land ownership as inequitable, believing that each individual had, as a natural right, claim to enough land to make a sufficient living. Furthermore, the Government's duty lay in assuring the farmer's right to purchase necessary land at a reasonable price. In Texas the Populists argued that the remaining public lands, and any that could be recovered, be reserved as homesteads; that grantees not complying with the terms of their state grant forfeit their holdings for homestead purposes; that corporations be allowed to own only as much land as required to pursue their business; and that alien land ownership be banned.¹⁰

One example of the practical implementation of this plank occurred in the actions of the Populist Party in Shackelford County, Texas. Prior to the Populist passage of a land program, Hill and Webb had demonstrated no antipathy towards the People's Party movement. However, their Albany firm acted as middleman for many non-resident land owners, people who appeared as alien speculators to agrarian-minded Texans.

In an attempt to force non-resident land holders to pay their share of the taxes, the Board of Equalization in Shackelford County raised the assessment of land valuations. This maneuver affected the Phillips Investment Company of Kansas City, one of Hill and Webb's clients. The President of the company wanted his land assessment lowered.¹¹ A similar situation faced a Louisville, Kentucky, client. Hill and Webb succeeded in lowering the rates for all of their clients and in the Kentucky case specifically, had the assessment reduced from almost \$5.00 per acre to \$3.50.¹² Such developments, added to the fact that non-residents thought to be land speculators owned much of this land, caused growing animosities.

The strained feelings over land disputes intensified by December 1892. Webb wrote to Texas Land Commissioner, W. L. McGaughey, complaining of "Land Aggitators" attempting "to jump" his clients' land. Webb declared that the property had been purchased correctly under the Land Board Act of 1883, and that there had been no previous questioning of the land title's validity. The "Schemers," Webb asserted, maintained that the Texas Land Office had ruled that proper title had never been gained. Webb appealed to McGaughey, fearing that an error had been made, informing him that the "Schemers" were the

'Great Third Party Leaders' in this country, and they were very *eager* in their efforts to destroy the present Administration, and now since they have been so badly beaten, and have no chance to parade their views before the public, they have 'switched off' on something else, and they are airing themselves on the Land Title question.

Webb named the chief instigator of the trouble as the *Third Party* leader in this county [W. H. Pritchard] . . . He is *continually doing* all in his power to make the *Poor* man think that the man who has a little more of this world's goods than he has should divide with him, and he is doing all in his power, at all times, to make trouble in the community, backed by designing parties here.¹³

The controversy spread to other land titles. Webb identified the leaders of this "designing" group as W. H. Pritchard and J. M. Elliott, members of the Shackelford County People's Party.¹⁴

Next, Webb protested to Charles A. Culberson, the Texas Attorney General. He accused the culprits, having been defeated at the polls, of simply attempting to remain in the spotlight. Furthermore, according to Webb, those people intended to cause trouble for the "good Citizens" of the community, "who by hard and *industrious* work have accumulated a little more of this world's goods than the Communistic Element believe they should."¹⁵ Webb submitted that, in reality, Pritchard was a land speculator and ought not be given a chance to purchase the property in question. In fact, Webb's displeasure with Texas Populists over land problems led him into a general condemnation of Pritchard, who, Webb claimed, had

branched out as a great Farmer's alliance Leader, and he went about the country preaching the 'rich man against the poor.' Very soon the Third Party doctrine struck him as amazingly deep and worthy of his great brain, and he was the 'great Mogul' in this country during the last election in trying to defeat Governor Hogg, and the rest of the State ticket.¹⁶

Before the emergence of the Populist Party, previous examples of equating the agrarian movement with "Communists," similar to Webb's statements, had existed. In 1884 a state senator from South Texas wrote a friend that "nothing could surprise a man of your conservative mind, more than to see the communistic and agrarian feeling that prevails here in Legislative circles." During the 1890 election, Houston District Court Judge Gustave Cook decried of "communistic and agrarian rapacity . . ."¹⁷ B. B. Paddock—banker, former mayor of Fort Worth, editor of the *Fort Worth Gazette*, and life-long Democrat—commenting on the 1892 election, wrote "the present is the death struggle in Texas between the people and the communists represented by Hogg."¹⁸

Webb again complained to W. L. McGaughey of the "AGGITATORS." Questioning of land titles, he asserted, represented a device to keep the third party leaders in the public's eye until the next election.¹⁹ Webb echoed those sentiments to John F. Sedwick, ably demonstrating his attitude toward the Populists. Webb reported that "the Rev. Mr. Fife Squatted on one of Reynold Bros. Surveys. All of them are Third Party Anarchists, and they are a *curse* to any community." Reynolds was "having the Preacher put off his land," according to Webb, "and the property owners are working hand in hand in putting down the Communistic element . . . No man is safe as long as such *darned scoundrels* are among us."²⁰

The attitude of the Albany partners towards the alleged Populist disrespect for law and order found comparable sentiments voiced at a Democratic rally speech by Henry M. Furman:

The Populists, with few exceptions, are the same old crowd, from Weaver down, who have been abusing and fighting Democracy, under first one name and then another . . . for the last fifteen years . . . Call the roll and you will see that this is the same old crowd who constituted the Greenback Party. They were just as loud mouthed then as they are now. They were just as sure then that they had a patent cure for public ills as they are now . . . They never stop to discuss the constitutionality of any of their proposed measures. A little thing like the constitution is nothing to them.²¹

The supposed Populist disregard for land titles and other statutes did not comprise the entire controversy. Further friction arose when Shackelford County built roads through property owned by clients of Hill and Webb. The Albany firm, after completion of the roads, submitted claims for damages. What transpired reinforced the Albany partners' fears. Webb explained:

We put in a claim for damages for a first class road running over your survey No. 3021, for \$600.00, and the *magnanimous* Jury of View allowed the sum of \$50.00 which is an outrage and shame. Some of the Communistic Element seem to think that it is right to confiscate the land of the non-resident owners of land, and that they have no rights whatever. There were several 'Third Party' men on the Jury, and we know their sentiments.²²

The executor of the T. E. Wilson Estate in Louisville, Kentucky, received a similar letter. In his case, Webb had asked for \$400 in damages, but the Jury refused any compensation. Again, he described this action as the result of the "Communistic Element" of the "Third Party."²³ Likewise, he wrote to Nancy H. Kendrick of Mississippi that the "Communistic Element" had awarded her only \$200 of a requested \$600.²⁴ Finally, Webb submitted \$250 for another client, but received nothing.²⁵ Did the Populists become scapegoats to explain Hill and Webb's lack of success in representing some out-of-state land owners?

This litigation suggests a further indication of the desire and intention of Texas Populists to enforce the Omaha plank dealing with alien land ownership—alien meaning non-Texas residents. The People's Party of Shackelford County polled a greater number of votes than their opponents in the 1896 election.²⁶ Therefore, the Jury of View probably did contain Populists. Several other incidents contributed to the bitterness harbored by conservatives.

Another antagonizing factor arose in late 1895, when the Grand Jury charged Milford Durham with illegally cutting timber on someone else's land. Protesting to the Land Commissioner, Webb asserted that Durham's deeds fit into a larger movement which was "simply trying, through some one or two Populists (Communists) here, to over run law, order, and the rights of others, and if this thing is allowed to proceed [sic], where will it end? Anarchy will be the result."²⁷

Having formed concrete opinions about the People's Party and demonstrating an outspoken opposition to its beliefs, the partners commented to an Austin firm:

We have some of the best people in the world—some of the best farmers, but we also have a 'Communistic Element,' that want to tear down and do nothing but 'damn the monied men' all the time!! They seem to think that the world was created for their special benefit alone, and they are a curse to any community, and ought to be banished.²⁸

Webb resumed his attack by writing that the Populists firmly believed

or pretend to believe, that the rich man—the man who has worked hard with his brain to accumulate some of this world's goods, should divide up with those who are enemies to society—those who believe in getting something for nothing—who believe that the world owes them a living.²⁹

This statement represents an interesting reversal of Populist views about capitalists.

Although the land controversies represented the prime divisive factor

between these Texas Democrats and Populists, it did not comprise the sole reason for antipathy. The silver question created a second issue of contention. As the Panic of 1893 deepened, the silver debate came increasingly to the forefront. Hill and Webb desired the Sherman Silver Act's repeal. With Grover Cleveland, they firmly believed that the single obstacle standing between America and prosperity was that hated piece of legislation. Vividly describing their feelings, they predicted that the "financial flurry would soon be over, and as the feeling is almost universal that Congress will right matters, better times will be certain to come, if they repeal the Sherman Act."³⁰ The Albany partners lectured:

[We] are glad to note that you [an Alabama acquaintance] are on the right side—opposed to the free Silver craze. We are satisfied that you are too good a Democrat to be otherwise than with Cleveland—the grandest man of the 19th Century. We are all crawling here, and when the Sherman Act is repealed without a crazy silver runner attached to same, we expect to see prosperous times.³¹

Although Hill and Webb bitterly opposed the Sherman Act, many Shackelford County residents did not. People interested in saving the Act met at the Albany Courthouse on August 19, 1893, agreeing to instruct their congressmen to vote against repeal. Hill and Webb, on behalf of numerous other gold-Democrats, sent letters to Representative J. V. Cockrell and to Senator Roger Q. Mills, attempting to persuade Cockrell and Mills to ignore the Albany proceedings. In fact, Webb despaired that "there was no question but that a large number of them are members of the Third Party, and some of the Democrats say that it is a regular Third Party Meeting." He asserted that the meeting did not represent a true cross-section of the county's feelings.³² In increasing apprehension over growing third party influence, Webb wrote the editor of the *Dallas Morning News* saying:

Permit us to say that a MAJORITY of this place are much pleased with the stand you have taken in the support of Cleveland and his financial policy, and you can hear praises on all sides. Only a very few DEMOCRATS have joined the Third Party in their efforts to break Cleveland down. We predict that within the next two years that the 'Free Silver Craze' will take its place along with the 'Greenback Craze.'³³

Congress' repeal of the Sherman Act relieved the Albany partners, allowing them to believe that prosperity would quickly return, and that the silver question had been buried.³⁴ When this did not occur, Webb's attacks intensified. Writing Land Commissioner A. J. Baker, he said, "the Silver Crazes carried this county today, by a large majority!! All the candidates for the Lunatic Asylum have not yet been received at Austin—another Asylum will have to be established here!! God save the country!"³⁵ And, to another correspondent, Webb wrote, "say, are you not on the wrong track on Silver? We hear that you are one of the poor Silver Crazes—one of those *deluded pitiful specimens of humanity* that should receive the sympathy of all!"³⁶

By late 1894, Webb's disenchantment with his life-long political party—the Democracy—seemed complete. He explained that the Democrats had a "bad case of *cramp colic*." He would not "cry if the Republican party went into power . . . When the communistic element—the Populist Party—attempt to gain control, then we think it time for all good Democrats and Republicans to combine and put them down." Webb found some solace, however, in his

optimistic conclusion: "Such an element should NEVER be allowed to gain control of any Government and this grand Country will never permit it."³⁷ Webb believed that many Texas Democrats felt similarly. He asserted, "we are Democrats, but are *Cleveland* Democrats, and you would be surprised at the large number of Democrats who are going to vote for McKinley this fall in this State—they are legion!!"³⁸ Webb's prediction had some validity. Other Texas Democratic businessmen found themselves reaching identical conclusions. Democrat Alexander Gilmer, an East Texas lumberman, urged his acquaintances to campaign unstintingly if they expected to elect McKinley. Gilmer promised to do everything he could for the Republican candidate and declared that "it stands in hand for every man to be a committee of one to make converts."³⁹

Even though Webb and some of his associates contemplated leaving the Democratic Party on the national level, and voting for McKinley, they entertained no such considerations at the state level. Several reasons explain this. As a delegate to the Texas Democratic Convention, Webb did not want to forfeit his position. Concern with maintaining the one-party system in tact comprised another factor.⁴⁰ Also, Webb hoped to prevent the Populists from controlling the Texas Democratic Party. In February 1896 Webb informed Governor Charles A. Culberson that he had the Albany firm's support for re-election "first, last and all the time." Webb preferred the Governor, even though he and Culberson held "radically" different views on the silver question. In describing the political atmosphere in the Albany area, Webb wrote:

There is going to be quite a contest between the 'Communitistic element' and those who believe in law and order—between Populists and Democrats, with the latter in the lead. The subject uppermost in the minds of the Populists is OFFICE. I think that very nearly every 'Pop' in the country wants an office . . .⁴¹

Again, the quote represents a reversal of Populist views of their political foes. At the State Convention, demonstrating his loyalty, Webb voted for the Democratic candidate for State Treasurer, W. B. Wortham. Webb asserted to Wortham that he would "not permit himself to take a stand against such as YOU [Wortham], even if you are a *poor deluded* Silver Crazer!"⁴²

Hill and Webb remained firm in their decision to support William McKinley in 1896, as did many other sound-money Democrats, when the Democratic National Convention nominated William Jennings Bryan and fusion resulted with the Populists. Webb decried to a friend that "Populist Bryan, has hypnotized a *few* of you . . . as he did in the Convention, but mark the prediction the American people are too intelligent to permit the Anarchist element to rule their great country."⁴³ When asked to describe the political situation in Texas, Webb lamented that "of course in this southern country Bryan and Anarchism are in the majority. . . ."⁴⁴ In making the preceding statement, Webb voiced no isolated belief. The *El Paso Tribune* editorialized similar thoughts:

The people of the United States will not permit an upstart like Bryan to become President . . . Neither anarchy nor communism are sufficiently strong enough . . . to carry the day, and hence there will be no danger of that populist, that enemy to a staunch and stable government ever getting into the presidential chair. The people are too wise and love their country too ardently to permit such a thing.⁴⁵

Alexander Gilmer espoused similar beliefs. "I have left the democrat [*sic*] party," Gilmer asserted, "as the [*sic*] want to bring down our glorious country on a level [*sic*] with Mexico and instead of being a progressive Nation we will be a nation of Tramps . . . I see no hope for the country without McKinley & Hobart is [*sic*] elected."⁴⁸

Webb believed that traditional Democratic values had been subverted. The Chicago Platform did not represent "true Democracy." The Silver panacea, occupying so prominent a position in that platform, would "curse" the country, damaging both commerce and labor. Still, Webb believed that Texas would go for Bryan "beyond a doubt,"—a fact so sobering as to cause this respected businessman to declare that "we have too many elections—they are a curse to the country. We ought to have an election every TEN years—not oftener!"⁴⁷

In explaining his opposition to Bryan, Webb used tactics somewhat similar to employers who coerced their employees into voting for McKinley. Although, it must be asserted, Webb's efforts were far less ruthless than some industrialists'.⁴⁸ Webb told his clients that prosperity and economic well-being depended upon Bryan's defeat. To Webb, McKinley's election became a panacea, guaranteeing instant prosperity. He repeated those feelings frequently. In one note, he maintained that "if the country elects Bryan, you need not expect to get ONE cent an acre for the lease of your lands, and all will be thrown up!"⁴⁹ In letters to the Louisville Trust Company, Thomas A. Lewis of Los Angeles, and the Franco-Texas Land Company, Webb reported "good rains, and now if the free silver heresy is snowed under, the country will be safe."⁵⁰ Another letter predicted that Bryan's defeat would make 1897 the most prosperous year in almost two decades, but, it forecast ominously, if "free silver predominates, we do not believe lands in this country will sell for twenty-five cents an acre in the next ten years."⁵¹ Similarly, a McKinley defeat, in the midst of the depression, meant that "the country would go to HELL!!!"⁵² Finally, corresponding with Colonel A. V. Carter, the Albany businessman explained that "cattle are fine this year, and as soon as McKinley is elected, 10,000 pound steers will sell for 4½ cents—mark it!! . . . We are no silver 16 to 1 *Damn Fools*—are you?"⁵³

Describing what McKinley's election would mean, Webb forecast that "if sound money prevails, we will begin to regain our lost ground immediately after the election."⁵⁴ To another associate, he predicted an upswing and the beginnings of better times the very minute news arrived of McKinley's victory.⁵⁵

Webb did not stand alone in such beliefs. The vision of an economic panacea had other Texas adherents. The *Beeville Bee*, an anti-Populist newspaper, printed the following:

. . . When this agitation . . . dies out, business will be better and we will see every state west of the Mississippi prosper as never before, and this prosperity is going to be on a better and stronger basis . . . When I look back over the experiences of the last seven years, I shudder and my hair stands on end, yet I never forget the fact that the future is going to bring us a better condition of things . . .⁵⁶

Likewise, Alexander Gilmer wrote to a Louisiana acquaintance that "if Bryan is elected I do not think it would pay you to run your timber as their [*sic*] would be hard times until [*sic*] the money question is settled . . . every civilized country would point the finger of scorn at us and call us a nation of thieves traiters [*sic*] and repudiators . . ."⁵⁷ Consequently, Gilmer wrote:

. . . I have shut down my mill to protect those I am owing [*sic*] if McKinley is elected times will change right away as the [*sic*] will raze [*sic*] revenue to run the government . . . When McKinley is elected I expect to be able to pay you . . .⁵⁸

Finally, Gilmer predicted harder times, panic, and revolution, if Bryan won.⁵⁹ Did Gilmer intend this as election coercion, or was he seeking a scapegoat, not being able to pay his debts?

As November approached, a similarity in thinking emerged between Webb and Populist critics in other states. When William Allen White's tract, "What's the Matter with Kansas," appeared in 1896, it represented a bitter attack upon the People's Party.⁶⁰ Reprinted widely, it became effective propaganda for the McKinley forces. Webb applauded the essay in a letter to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News*:

Quite a number of Sound Money Democrats were in consultation this morning . . . and one of them . . . exhibited the enclosed circular styled,—'What's Wrong with Kansas?' And as the same is very expressive and to the point—is applicable to Texas . . . we ask that you publish same. We believe that it will do good.⁶¹

Webb's elation proved boundless with McKinley's victory. It represented, Webb remarked, the "grandest victory for Honesty and Integrity—the upholding of a Nation's Honor, that has ever been known in the History of this great country." It proved that the American people possessed too much intelligence to be tricked by "a set of Politicians and their poor dupes, to fasten upon them shackles worse than the most abject slavery."⁶² He compared the triumph with that of the American Revolution. Bryan and his anarchist colleagues, such as John Peter Altgeld, should never again have any hand in shaping the political policy of America. In the flush of success, Webb exclaimed, "Down with such men, say we!!!"⁶³

The *Dallas Morning News*, wholeheartedly agreeing with Webb's interpretation of McKinley's election, editorialized:

It means law, order, and peace . . . It is the death blow to the riotous scheme of conquest and spoliation upon which the desperate politicians decided at Chicago to go before the country. The credit and honor of the country must be protected. Property rights and contract rights must be respected. The laws must be obeyed.⁶⁴

In retrospect, it is evident that Hill and Webb did not oppose all farmers. They spent time and money in saving some from foreclosure. They demonstrated, however, bitter opposition toward agrarians who joined the People's Party—a party which they believed threatened society. Another apparent characteristic is that contemporaries believed the Populists radical and dangerous. Terms such as "communists," "anarchists," and "radicals," permeated the anti-Populist rhetoric. Furthermore, the Albany partners' sentiment evinced traces of viewing the Populists as representing a conspiracy. They alluded to "designing parties," intent upon destroying the government and out to expropriate the property and goods of the "monied men." The conspiratorial theme is present in many of the attacks upon the People's Party. As early as July 1893, the anti-Populist *Beeville Bee* editorialized:

Populist orators and lecturers seem about as active now as during the campaign. With banks breaking and a general confusion in finances they are creating sentiment in favor of paternalism and communism. No

better time could be selected for the promulgation of heresy among a democratic people. *To offset the influence of these professional agitators, under the pay of a secret organization, there are no democratic speakers . . . When false doctrine stalks abroad, unrebuked it is only natural it will gain adherents . . .*⁶⁵

Likewise, Johnathan Lane, a Cleveland-Democrat, complained to the *Dallas Morning News* that "professional agitators have attempted and to some extent have succeeded in arraying the masses against the classes, the poor against the rich, the laborer against his employer, the country against the town . . ." ⁶⁶

Finally, Alexander Gilmer demonstrated that the "Goldbugs" could be just as conspiratorial-minded as the "Silverites." He complained:

We have too much class legislation . . . It would be class legislation if silver was made payable for all debts, in favor of the Mine Owners of the world, especially the English mine owners, as they hold a large stock of the mines in this country, Mexico, South America and Australia; they own over half the silver mines in the world.

Bryan is hoodwinking the dear people that he is going to down England; she can pay him big to down her that way; there is always a wheel within a wheel. The Demagogue is working for his own interest at the expense of the dear people . . .

We have too many agitators; too much corruption; too many changes from bad to worse . . .

A change from a gold to a silver basis would prolong the present hard times, keep the laborer out of employment, ruin our manufacturing industries and injure all kind of business, create a panic and possibly a revolution . . .⁶⁷

The anti-Populists believed that the People's Party was initiating class warfare in American society—that the "poor people" were being encouraged to take from those who had more than they deserved.

What conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of anti-Populist views? The conservative nature of the anti-Populist sentiment emerged in viewing Populism as an assault upon law, order, and the rights of others. And, to Third Party foes, Populism represented an attempt by a few deluded politicians to gain office.

The economic aspects of the anti-Populist attitude are clearly identifiable. Populism's opponents accused the party of kinship to the Greenback Party, or in other words, of grasping for economic panaceas. However, conservative, gold-Democrats believed in economic panaceas themselves—repeal of the Sherman Silver Act and William McKinley's election, among others.⁶⁸ Therefore, was it surprising or unusual that the most severely depressed economic segment of the population—the Populists—should search for economic palliatives? Also, the land controversy caused by the Omaha Platform, and particularly the efforts of some Texas Populists to implement it, clearly illustrates the economic antipathy that developed among opponents to the People's Party.

The Populists have been belittled for believing in myths—particularly the agrarian myth or myth of the "happy yeoman." Whether or not the Populists were guilty of these charges is irrelevant to this paper. What does seem pertinent, however, is the myth-holding of the anti-Populists. For, after all, this element described certain "designing" factions intent upon robbing the

"monied men" of their just rewards. When Webb and others related how the monied men had achieved success—through the hard wark of their brain—they, too, relied upon a myth. In this case, the myth of the self-made man, an idea as ubiquitous in American history as any other.⁶⁹

Several other points can be raised. First, the Populist movement's radicalism generated real fear on the local level — leading to speculation of impending revolution. These findings contradict those writers who have denigrated Populist radicalism. The anti-Populists believed their foes radical and acted upon those fears. The belief, rather than reality, is all important. Also, Walter LaFeber's arguments in *The New Empire*⁷⁰ positing the theory that the threat of domestic violence led American businessmen to look outward, is substantiated to the point that Texas businessmen did discern revolutionary feeling in America's domestic turmoil.

Also, this essay contradicts those writers who have downgraded Populism's radicalism by arguing that the Populist Party was synonymous with free silver—How could a movement truly be radical if that represented the extent of its goals? Clearly, by examining Populism at the local level, one sees that there was much more to it than the silver issue. The fact that Webb supported silver-Democrats suggests the presence of something about Populism other than the silver issue that he hated and feared.

One of the most surprising results of this research was the absence of reference to race. Probably, the Populists investigated here did not ally themselves with blacks, since few blacks lived in West Texas. In fact, they had been forced out or excluded from some counties in the area. However, this should not have prevented the anti-Populists from using the racial issue against their opponents. Is this explained by ignorance of Tom Watson's Georgia efforts and other similar activities?⁷¹

Finally, from the perspective of today's troubled world—a world of Watergate, oil crises and unemployment—a society in which devil theories, conspiratorial explanations, economic panaceas and other cure-alls abound, is it not possible to understand better the anxieties of the participants in the upheaval of the 1890s? Are there not lessons there?

NOTES

¹The historiographical literature, stated briefly, includes the following: In 1951, Oscar Handlin's article, "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XL (1951), was interpreted as suggesting that the Populist Movement had stimulated American anti-Semitism. His article acted as a catalyst in the ensuing debate. Richard Hofstadter's, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 1-130, appeared four years later. Hofstadter charged the Populists with being unable to cope with modern industrial America, causing them to look to a golden age in the past—or, of believing in an agrarian myth. Other assertions by Hofstadter indicated that the Populists held irrational solutions to their problems; subscribed to conspiratorial theories; supported anti-Semitism; were not truly radical; believed times harder than they really were; and should not be taken seriously. In general, Hofstadter saw the Populists as nothing more than free-silver (economic panacea) supporters. In the same year, Daniel Bell edited, *The New American Right* (New York: Criterion Books Inc., 1955), which reflected a similar attitude. Two years later, Victor C. Ferkiss, in "Populist Influences on American Fascism," *The Western Political Quarterly* (June, 1957), 350-373, interpreted the Populists as the precursors of American fascism (McCarthyism). These works elicited responses. John Higham's, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (March, 1957), 599-578, and C. Vann Woodward's, *The Burden of Southern History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 141-166, urged caution interpreting the Populist era. Next, Norman Pollack emerged as the staunchest Populist defender. His most important work, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), rebutted many of the earlier charges. Also, see Pollack's edited work, *The Populist Mind* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), xix-xxvii. *The Tolerant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), by Walter T. K. Nugent added to the defense. Many other writings have appeared, but these set the context for the battle.

²Hill to J. L. Barnes, Cameron, Texas March 30, 1892, in Louis Hamilton Hill Papers, 1883-1945, (Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas). Over the last several years, the author has conducted a wide, but rather disappointing search for additional business papers containing Populist materials.

³Webb to Theodore Harris, President of the Louisville Banking Company, Louisville, Kentucky, May 17, 1892, in Hill Papers.

⁴Webb to T. M. Richardson, Oklahoma, O. T., August 28, 1893, in Hill Papers.

⁵Webb to Judge J. R. Fleming, San Antonio, Texas, September 4, 1893, in Hill Papers.

⁶Webb to Jarvis Conklin Company, Kansas City, Missouri, July 25, 1893, in Hill Papers.

⁷Webb to A. Butler Duncan, New York, N. Y., June 18, 1892, in Hill Papers.

⁸Webb and Hill to Mrs. Alice Lobban, October 6, 1892; Webb to J. L. Barnes, Cameron, Texas, September 8, 1892, in Hill Papers.

⁹Quoted in Richard Hofstadter (ed.), *Great Issues in American History: A Documentary Record*, Vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 151-152.

¹⁰Roscoe C. Martin, *The People's Party in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1933), 47. A similar attitude appeared on a note left by a group of fence cutters: "Down with monopolies! They can't exist in Texas and especially in Coleman County. Away with your foreign capitalists! The range and soil of Texas belong to the heroes of the South. No monopolies . . ." quoted in Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 81.

¹⁴Webb and Hill to Paul Phillips, President of Phillips Investment Co., Kansas City, Mo., May 14, 1892, in Hill Papers.

¹²Webb and Hill to Mr. Morton, Louisville, Kentucky, July 6, 1892, in Hill Papers.

¹³Webb to W. L. McGaughey, Commissioner of General Land Office, Austin, Texas, December 16, 1892, in Hill Papers. The following editorial, "The 'Third Party' Flies," explained the origin of the Party's name: "There is much complaint among the local stockman on account of these new pests. They are different from other flies in their mode of attack. They collect about the roots of steer's horns and ears and feed upon his flesh causing the hair to fall off at the location of their attack. They are very numerous dividing up into colonies and attacking a herd.

It is singular the name 'third party' should be given to these pests. It seems to have been applied by the stockmen of Colorado county, where they originally appeared, about the time the third party was so active in that section, and has spread with the flies until it has become the accepted name for them. It was not, we suppose, bestowed in the sense of derision, but rather as an acknowledgement of the activity of the populists. Not all the populists, however seem to relish the appropriation of their party name to designate a new pest. A democrat and a populist engaged in fistcuff at Blanconia a few days ago on account of it." *The Beeville Bee*, April 28, 1893, 2, Beeville, Texas.

¹⁴Webb to Louis Hill, December 17, 1892, in Hill Papers.

¹⁵Webb to C. A. Culberson, Austin, Texas, December 18, 1892, in Hill Papers.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform . . .*, 82, 119.

¹⁸Buckley B. Paddock to H. C. Rouse, New York City, September 8, 1892, Buckley B. Paddock Papers (The University of Texas Archives, Austin, Texas). Hogg received some agrarian support in 1892. Paddock George Clark, a conservative Democrat.

¹⁹Webb to W. L. McGaughey, Austin, Texas, December 27, 1892, in Hill Papers.

²⁰Webb to John F. Sedwick, Waco, Texas, March 28, 1893, in Hill Papers. The likelihood of Fife being a minister is reinforced by Barr, who states that many Populists were evangelical farmers and some were preachers, Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform . . .*, 148.

²¹Quoted in *The Fort Worth Gazette*, September 7, 1894, 1.

²²Webb to Colby H. Taylor, Richmond, Kentucky, Kentucky, January 16, 1894, in Hill Papers.

²³Webb to G. H. Cochran, Louisville, Kentucky, January 16, 1894, in Hill Papers.

²⁴Webb to Mrs. Nancy H. Kendrick, Kendrick, Mississippi, January 16, 1894, in Hill Papers.

²⁵Webb to J. P. Marshall, Louisville, Kentucky, January 16, 1894, in Hill Papers.

²⁶Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform . . .*, map facing 130.

²⁷Webb to A. J. Baker, Austin, Texas, November 14, 1895, in Hill Papers.

²⁸Webb and Hill to Thomon & Donnan, Austin, Texas, August 29, 1896, in Hill Papers.

²⁹Webb to Major John F. Weston, New York, N.Y., October 17, 1896, in Hill Papers.

³⁰Webb and Hill to H. Crosby, LaCross, Wisconsin, July 10, 1893, in Hill Papers.

³¹Webb and Hill to J. L. Buford, Birmingham, Alabama, August 24, 1893, in Hill Papers.

³²Webb and Hill to Hon. J. V. Cockrell, United States Congress; to R. Q. Mills. U. S. Senate. August 19, 1893, in Hill Papers.

³³Letter-to-the-editor, *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, 1893, in Hill Papers.

³⁴Webb and Hill to John T. Hargrove, Sulphur Springs, Texas, August 30, 1893, in Hill Papers.

³⁵Webb to A. J. Baker, Commissioner General Land Office, Austin, Texas, June 6, 1896, in Hill Papers.

³⁵Webb to A. J. Baker, Commissioner General Land Office, Austin, Texas, June 6, 1896, in Hill Papers.

³⁶Webb to W. P. Sebastian, Breckenridge, Texas, June 25, 1896, in Hill Papers.

³⁷Webb to S. M. Swenson, New York, N. Y., November 20, 1894, in Hill Papers.

³⁸Webb to J. S. Bell, Louisville, Kentucky, June 22, 1896, in Hill Papers.

³⁹Alexander Gilmer to Clark Bros., Belmont, N. Y., September 30, 1896 (Alexander Gilmer Papers, The University of Texas Archives, Austin, Texas).

⁴⁰Meno, August 9, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴¹Webb to Governor Charles A. Culberson, Austin, Texas, February 8, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴²Webb to W. B. Wortham, State Treasurer, Austin, Texas, June 23, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴³Webb to Miss S. G. Stewart, Tuxedo Park, N. Y., August 27, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴⁴Webb to G. W. Adams, Walnut, Iowa, August 28, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴⁵Quoted in *Dallas Morning News*, September 6, 1896, 10.

⁴⁶Alexander Gilmer to W. H. Nash, Longstreet, Louisiana, October 9, 1896, in Gilmer Papers.

⁴⁷Webb to Mrs. S. E. Buchanan, Ashville, N. C., October 17, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁴⁸Some conducted campaigns of intimidation: a few bankers inserted gold clauses into loans; orders were placed with industrialists contingent upon McKinley's election; employers told their employees that a Bryan victory meant half time, reduced wages, or loss of a job, Harold U. Faulkner, *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 208-209.

⁴⁹Webb to J. P. and W. S. Marshall, Louisville, Kentucky, July 15, 1896, in the Hill Papers.

⁵⁰Webb to Louisville Trust Co., July 14, 1896; Thomas A. Lewis, Los Angeles, California, July 14, 1896; George P. Levy, Weatherford, Texas, July 14, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵¹Webb to W. W. and A. R. Hite, Louisville, Kentucky, July 18, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵²Webb to George Wilhelm, Fort Griffin, Texas, July 20, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵³Webb to Colonel A. V. Carter, Colorado Springs, Colorado, July 23, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵⁴Webb to Major John F. Weston, New York, N. Y., September 25, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵⁵Memo, September 28, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁵⁶*The Beeville Bee* (Beeville, Texas), April 21, 1893, 2.

⁵⁷Alexander Gilmer to W. H. Nash, Longstreet, Louisiana, October 9, 1896, in Gilmer Papers.

⁵⁸Alexander Gilmer to New York Lather Belting Co., September 5, 1896, in Gilmer Papers.

⁵⁹Alexander Gilmer to George Cross, Minneapolis, Minn., September 24, 1896, in Gilmer Papers. Gilmer's financial difficulties resulted from the general economic situation with banks refusing to discount his paper; therefore, in the fall of 1896, he could not meet his obligations.

⁶⁰See Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History* . . . , Vol. 2, 173-177.

⁶¹Webb to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, October 22, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁶²Webb to C. H. Jones, Galveston, Texas, November 5, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁶³Webb to Colonel W. H. Abrams, Dallas, Texas, November 6, 1896, in Hill Papers.

⁶⁴*Dallas Morning News*, November 4, 1896, 4.

⁶⁵*The Beeville Bee*, July 28, 1893, 2. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁶*Dallas Morning News*, September 24, 1895, 6. (William B. Teagarden Papers, The University of Texas Archives, Austin, Texas). Teagarden was a Democratic lawyer.

⁶⁷Alexander Gilmer to the editor of the *Baumont Journal*, September 14, 1896, in Gilmer Papers.

⁶⁸Another economic cure-all supported by Hill and Webb was railroad construction in the Albany area. See Memo, March 19, 1892; Webb to Alexander Coghill, Houston, Texas, May 14, 1892; and Webb to Colonel Charles Hamilton, Tax Agent, Local Attorney, and Minister Plenipotentiary for the Texas Central Railway, Waco, Texas, January 10, 1894, in Hill Papers. A reading of these papers illuminates many of the Populists' grievances held toward the railroads.

⁶⁹See Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964). The success and popularity of the one hundred-odd Horatio Alger stories indicates the widespread acceptance of the myth of the self-made man, also.

⁷⁰Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

⁷¹See particularly C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), and Charles E. Wynes (ed.), *The Negro in the South Since 1865* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965), pp. 39-61.