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HISTORIORGAPHICAL INTERVENTION

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THE TOLERANT POPULISTS AND THE LEGACY OF WALTER NUGENT

Abstract

Published in 1963 and with a second edition in 2013, Walter Nugent's *The Tolerant Populists* challenged and overturned an interpretation of the American Populist movement, largely associated with Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, which portrayed the People's Party as backward looking, reactionary, irrational, antisemitic, and nativist. *The Tolerant Populists* demonstrated the Populist movement to be forward looking in its advocacy of statist economic reforms later adopted by progressives. In addition to this particular intervention in the literature, *The Tolerant Populists*, as it marked a turn in the 1960s to writing history from the bottom up, also more generally shaped the historiography of Populism by emphasizing the local social, cultural, and political roots of the movement; the movement's appeal to marginalized Americans in the 1890s; and the reasonableness of its policy measures to ease economic suffering. Moreover, the new edition critiques the continued use in popular media of lower-case "populism" to describe modern anti-statist movements that bear no resemblance to the movement of the 1890s. Finally, Walter Nugent forwarded the historiographical emphases in *The Tolerant Populists* to influence, in his later scholarship, the wider history of monetary policy, American demographic and social history, immigration, the American West, and American empire building.

The conflict marked one of the half-dozen or so most illuminating episodes in American historiography over the last fifty years. Along with the Salem witch trials, the sources of conflict in the American Revolution, the nature of the American slave system, and other sphinxian historiographical riddles, debating the nature of the People's Party of the 1890s has been grist for numerous dissertations and books of the "Problems-in-American-History" genre. At the center of the debate was an assistant professor at Kansas State University with a dissertation drawn from incontrovertible archival research that challenged—and leveled—the Eastern historical "consensus" establishment. This assistant professor was Walter Nugent; the dissertation-turned-monograph was *The Tolerant Populists* (1963).

Debate over the meaning of the People's Party launched Nugent's career, and, in an almost unprecedented move, the second edition of this landmark volume has now appeared fifty years later. This second edition speaks to the cogency and continued relevance of the work's argument, which, as Nugent insists, draws its enduring quality from

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the source evidence produced by the Populists themselves—their "own historical remains."[1] Nugent lets the Populists themselves speak; and they, like Nugent, still have much to say.

The aim here is to offer a retrospective on *The Tolerant Populists*. The context for this retrospective will be, first, the historiography on the People's Party and, second, the historiography of Walter Nugent. I will not only look at Nugent's debate with Hofstadter et al. but examine how *The Tolerant Populists* has helped shape the broader questions and contours of the historiography on Populism, stressing what has given the work its persistent relevance in that literature. Moreover, *The Tolerant Populists* contains many of the themes that appear in Nugent's subsequent and multifaceted work on money in the Gilded Age, demography, immigration, the history of the frontier and U.S. West, and diplomatic history that has appeared over his long career at Kansas State University, Indiana University, and the University of Notre Dame. While ranging widely, certain hallmarks emerge from Nugent's body of work: fidelity to sources, precision, capturing the voices of the voiceless, and eschewing simplistic or monocausal theoretical explanations. These hallmarks give *The Tolerant Populists*, as well as Nugent's books and critical essays, their continued intellectual power more than half a century later.

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When *The Tolerant Populists* appeared in 1963, it was neither the first nor the last to challenge an interpretation of the Populist Party associated most closely with Richard Hofstadter's Pulitzer-prize winning *The Age of Reform* (1955). But it was the most devastating. Although well known to readers of this journal, it is worth recalling the historiographical landscape of Populism in 1963. As they began to appear in the late 1910s and 1920s, histories of the People's Party were largely sympathetic. Epitomized by John Hicks's *The Populist Revolt* (1931) and C. Vann Woodward's *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938) and *Origins of the New South* (1951), "Populists"—members of the Farmers' Alliance and then People's Party—were honorable agrarian reformers, sometimes quixotic or a bit naïve, standing firm against the machinations of the "plutocrats," a combination of corrupt politicians, bankers, and railroad men who profited from Gilded Age commerce at the expense of farmers (and sometimes laborers).[2]

While Populists advocated a number of quasi-political strategies involving scientific farming or cooperative marketing and purchasing, of particular historical significance in this early writing was the way Populists advocated state intervention at the local, state, and eventually national level to even the playing field for farmers and other "producers of wealth." For Hicks, Woodward, and others, this statist approach was important because it anticipated the progressive reform policies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and especially the New Deal. The specific means of this state intervention for Populists included government-subsidized collective warehouses; regulation or ownership of transportation and communications; and public, legislative control over the money supply and system (as opposed to private control by the National Banking System or "Wall Street"). And while Populists in specific locations advocated any number of additional reforms ranging from ending alien land ownership and convict labor to regulating elections and oyster beds, their push for government intervention—that they understood to mean taking the levers of power from the plutocrats and placing them in

the hands of elected officials (that is, "the people")—marked them in this historiography as precursors to political progressives and, especially, the New Deal.

In the 1950s, social scientists such as Victor Ferkiss, Daniel Bell, Peter Viereck, Talcott Parsons, and Seymour Martin Lipset, and historians Oscar Handlin and Richard Hofstadter, revised this portrait of Populists, suggesting that Populism's family tree extended not to the New Deal but to Joseph McCarthy.[3] Although Hofstadter was careful not to overstate his case as had some others, his pen was nevertheless persuasive, and a new generation of historians understood Populists not as proto-New Dealers but as reactionary cranks, antisemites, and nativists motivated by their decline in social status—or "status anxiety"—in a modernizing economy. In other words, they were not advocating rational reforms that addressed actual economic conditions; they were instead reacting in an irrational manner to a sense that the economic playing field had shifted and they were no longer at its center. According to Hofstadter and his associates, members of the People's Party thus exhibited a "populist," anti-intellectual paranoid style or mood. Moreover, this populist mentality or mood reared its ugly head periodically through the twentieth century whenever certain groups felt "anxiety" about their status. These moments included the People's Party, progressivism, support for Rev. Charles Coughlin, and, most immediately, McCarthyism.

It did not take long for other historians, however, to revise the revisionists. Starting with C. Vann Woodward and then most stridently with Norman Pollack, historians aimed to set the record on Populism straight by emphasizing Populism's economic foundations.[4] Nugent's *Tolerant Populists*, however, was the most devastating critique, so that by the time Lawrence Goodwyn published *Democratic Promise* in 1976—the first attempt since Hicks's *The Populist Revolt* to tackle Populism as a national movement—it was clear that Hofstadter's interpretation of Populism was no longer accepted in the discipline. Recent essays by Alan Brinkley, Jeffrey Ostler, and Robert D. Johnston, along with treatments of the national movement by O. Gene Clanton, Robert McMath, and Charles Postel only reinforce this point.[5]

In *The Tolerant Populists*, Nugent did not attempt a comprehensive history of Kansas Populism (though the book in fact turns out to be largely that anyway); rather, he set out to examine Populism in Kansas as representative of the movement's "western phase" to determine whether Populists there were nativist and, if so, how.[6] In pursuing this question, Nugent did not begin his investigation to prove Hofstadter wrong, only to see if he was right. On this point, Nugent wastes no words: "He wasn't."[7] In short, the archival evidence demonstrated that the Populists were neither nativist nor antisemitic.

What motivated Nugent was the sense that Hofstadter did not capture the essence of who the Populists really were, and in failing to do so produced a bad history that presented a preposterous historical narrative and also abrogated a kind of moral imperative to accurately convey not only what the evidence suggests most likely happened but to capture, as best as one can, the motives and ideas of actual historical actors. Nugent captured these motives and ideals with the archival record the Populists left behind—a record that, as Nugent discovered, Hofstadter simply ignored. The resulting argument, though criticized at first by a few historians such as Oscar Handlin, turned out to be a withering assault on Hofstadter, because it did not challenge Hofstadter at the level of theory but at the level of evidence.[8]

Before looking at why Nugent's analysis was so critical to dismantling Hofstadter's view, we should, however, clarify—as Nugent did himself—important questions and insights that Hofstadter raised.[9] First, Hofstadter correctly noted that Populists were criticizing the American capitalist system not as members of a landless proletariat but as market-oriented, yeomen farmers wanting their fair share of Gilded Age profits. Nugent concurs, noting that they did not oppose commercial enterprise itself but rather wanted it to be equitable and humane.[10] Most commentators since have agreed, including Norman Pollack who has more recently argued in *The Humane Economy* that Populists did not challenge the basic ideals of liberal, free-market capitalism as he had earlier insisted.[11] This awareness of Populists' *participation in* the capitalist economy has led numerous scholars, including Nugent, to find connections between Populism and middle-class progressives, ranging from Nugent's own emphasis on their shared progressive, statist policy initiatives to Charles Postel's stress on the way Populists not only engaged in rationalized capitalism but displayed other progressive tendencies.[12]

In addition, Nugent noted that Hofstadter correctly identified the "backward look" that many Populists exhibited. Despite their forward-looking policy agenda, Nugent observed the way Populists drew on something Hofstadter identified as the "agrarian myth" that valorized yeomanry, producerism, and the superiority and independence of rural life and work. This emphasis on the agrarian myth has cast a long shadow on historians of Populism, such as Robert McMath, who have emphasized the cultural, intellectual, institutional, and religious sources that motivated and shaped the Populist movement.[13] Nugent also applauded the degree to which Hofstadter freed the Populists from Hicks's reliance on Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and checked the tendency of Hicks and others to idealize Populists as noble outcasts selflessly standing for justice and equality. There were, in a word, complications.[14]

Other scholars have also noted the important ways Hofstadter both shaped the terms of debate over Populism until the 1970s and enhanced our understanding of the movement. Jeffrey Ostler, in particular, has identified the centrality of conspiratorial thinking for some Populists, linking the party's rhetoric to a style epitomized by patriotic assaults on English tyranny and Northern worries about the slave power. But Ostler was careful not to equate these conspiracy theories with "status anxiety" or irrationality—ideas he believed rested on "flawed psychology"; rather, they demonstrated Populists' effective use of a tried and true rhetorical strategy.[15] Others, including Unger and Handlin, noted the degree to which Hofstadter raised the important issue of motivation—something most all works on Populism have in one way of another addressed.[16] Hofstadter suggested that something other than mere economic hard times must have motivated the Populists to embrace cooperative organization and third-party politics, since these same hard times affected everyone in a particular locale—Populists, Democrats, and Republicans alike. Virtually no works on Populism in the last fifty years have agreed with Hofstadter's argument that status anxiety motivated Populists, but historians have adopted his skepticism of simple, monocausal economic determinism, with most pointing to cultural or religious antecedents; prior regional political fault lines or arrangements; or, in the case of Goodwyn, causes best understood through social movement theory that complicates the primacy of economic factors.[17] For his part, Nugent answered the motivation question for Kansas in the 1966 essay, "Some Parameters of Populism,"

which demonstrated, based on analysis of state and county office holders, that, in Kansas, Populists did, in fact, have less available capital and a higher reliance on mortgages than did non-Populists, putting Kansas Populists in a far more precarious financial situation than their non-Populist neighbors. So while identifying a clear economic motivation that distinguished Populists from non-Populists in Kansas, Nugent was careful not to extend this interpretation to other locales where the evidence might not support it.[18]

While some of Hofstadter's questions and insights endure, Nugent eviscerated the core of Hofstadter's argument about nativism and antisemitism where it counted: the archives.[19] With extensive use of the Kansas Populists' "own historical remains," Nugent demonstrated that Kansas Populists were neither nativist nor antisemitic, that their policies were rational responses to real economic and political exigencies, and that instances of nativist or antisemitic rhetoric were exceptions to the rule. In fact, in comparison, the Republican Party displayed far more of the irrational and intolerant characteristics Hofstadter attributed to the Populists.

More specifically, Nugent demonstrated that Populists in Kansas understood that to enact reform through the state political system, they had to involve the numerous Germans, Swedes, and other foreign-born Kansans in their party. Foreign-born Kansans ran on Populist tickets, and foreign-language newspapers supported Populist candidates. Populists carefully avoided excluding Catholics and other non-Protestants, appealed to immigrant voters, and denounced the American Protective Association. Despite their reliance on American patriotic rhetoric, Populists offered the strengths of economic systems in other countries as good models for American policy. Regarding charges of antisemitism, Nugent argued that Populist denunciations of "Shylocks" or "Rothschilds" were, for Populists and like-minded reformers, references to bankers, not Jews (or the English). Nugent also pointed out that while some Populists—notably Mary Lease and Paul Vandervoort—did express nativist sentiments, these were exceptions to the rule (and Nugent argues that Lease was in many ways an atypical Populist). Where Hofstadter found nativism lurking behind Populist opposition to alien land ownership and advocacy of immigration restriction, Nugent explained that the former represented a long-standing Kansan opposition to landlords, not aliens, and that advocating—rightly or wrongly—immigration restriction was an economic, not racist, policy borrowed from the labor movement. Finally, as to the charge that Populists were jingoes, Nugent noted that while Populists supported American intervention in Cuba as part of a duty to fight for democracy, they opposed the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines.[20]

Perhaps most important, Nugent convinced us throughout *The Tolerant Populists* that the Populists, in their policies and political strategies, were rational. As he later noted in "Some Parameters of Populism," Kansas farmers suffered under genuine economic stress, and hence land reform, monetary reform, and transportation regulation were reasonable responses to their precarious economic situation. Even advocacy of Free Silver, which might have been bad political economics, was nevertheless a solid and nearly successful political strategy once Populists realized they needed national leverage to enact their reforms.[21]

In setting out to determine if Hofstadter was right, Nugent challenged Hofstadter's characterizations of nativism and antisemitism. He also pressed a more probing critique of Hofstadter's use of lower-case "populism" to describe a mood, spirit, "state of mind,"

or "mentality." This critique challenged, at a far more fundamental level, the nature of Hofstadter's, and especially social scientists', methodological and theoretical foundation. Though largely accepted in the historical literature, the critique has not, however, had a significant impact on popular usage, as Hofstadter's idea of lower-case populism has gained widespread use over the years.

The critique, nonetheless, was straightforward. For Nugent, Hofstadter mischaracterized the Populists by attributing to them a paranoid, irrational "populist" mood. In doing so, Hofstadter was a poor, even fundamentally irresponsible, historian.[22] He was a poor historian because he proposed an ahistorical mood tied to status anxiety and questionable social psychological theories that defied the normative conventions of historical contingency and change over time. Nugent demonstrated that such a mood, even if it existed, was simply part of the general late nineteenth-century ether, and, since evidence of this mood was far less common among Populists than Republicans, it could and should not characterize the People's Party. Beyond that, Hofstadter was ultimately irresponsible, according to Nugent, because his characterization masked the rational, forward-looking statist policies advocated by Populists and thus distorted the way future historians would characterize genuine Populists. Even worse, Hofstadter's chimeric lower-case populism, when applied to McCarthyites and later (by others) to Reaganites and the post-2008 Tea Party, wrongly identified anti-statist, libertarian-leaning groups with the statist upper-case Populists.

As Nugent admits, however, and as C. Vann Woodward wrote to him in the early 1960s, this concept of a lower-case populism has entered the twentieth-century vocabulary, and thus the battle for semantic accuracy has largely been lost. The lower-case "populist" term has become ubiquitous—a surprising development given how widely Hofstadter's book has been discredited. While Nugent does not offer an explanation for the persistence of lower-case "populism" to describe right-wing, anti-statist movements, he offers his agreement, for the most part, with Michael Kazin's argument in his 1995 *The Populist Persuasion* that there is likely an identifiable rhetorical style or language in America that conveys the idea that "ordinary Americans" are "more virtuous or, at least, more significant" than cultural, intellectual, or political elites. Perhaps that explains, to a certain extent, the persistence of the term to describe this rhetorical phenomenon, but, again, even if such rhetoric exists, Nugent demonstrated that it was closer to characterizing those anti-statists *opposed* to Populism in Kansas, *not* the Populists themselves.[23]

This point is worth stressing. While *The Tolerant Populists* was first and foremost a careful, measured intervention in the historiography, the moral and political spirit that has animated both the first edition and the new preface to the second edition is just beneath the surface. In 1963, Nugent undercut an interpretation of Populism rooted in a top-down approach to history tied to a particular type of elite consensus and to an overzealous appropriation of pseudo-objective psychological theory. Nugent found this top-down approach not only bad history but condescending in the way it presented rural Kansans as paranoid and irrational. In letting these rural Populists speak for themselves through the archival evidence, Nugent echoed the political tones of the emerging historical left with its emphasis on social or "bottom-up" history. Nugent's intervention in the Populist historiography, then, also challenged a more general consensus outlook in the body politic that marginalized people such as rural Kansans who existed on the periphery

of the purview of urbane elites. Moreover, Nugent identified and criticized a consensus narrative that informed this marginalization by erroneously casting rural non-elites as historically responsible for American paranoia, nativism, and antisemitism. In penning the preface for the second edition, Nugent again assails the misappropriation of lower-case "populism," especially in popular media as, once again, helping to fabricate another imaginary narrative. In this case, the narrative purports that American independence (or freedom or democracy or autonomy), especially as championed by salt-of-the-earth Americans ("populists"), is always and everywhere opposed to state intervention in the political economy—that an activist state is incompatible with individual freedom, especially economic freedom. Such a narrative is simply not true, Nugent insists, as demonstrated by freedom-loving Kansas Populists who insisted that an activist state was absolutely necessary to preserve that beloved freedom. Misappropriating the term "populist" to describe the anti-statist right is, for Nugent, an error on par with Hofstadter's notion that Populists were nativists, since it obfuscates what the current "99%" might learn from the Populists in order to challenge the current plutocracy—the "1%"—of what Nugent understands to be a contemporary second coming of the Gilded Age.

Just as important as Nugent's scholarly and political critique of *The Age of Reform* has been the way *The Tolerant Populists* helped lay the framework for the next half-century of Populist writing. Nugent presented a set of questions, characterizations of Populism, and methods for studying the Populist movement that are still with us. These included an emphasis on the local cultural, social, economic, and political roots of Populist activity; the ultimate sensibility or rationality of Populism both as a response to economic pressures and as a political strategy; and an understanding of Populism as an episode in the struggle for democratic freedom. All three of these interpretive threads have also addressed the continued question of Populism's relationship to progressivism.

By focusing on Kansas Populists' local cultural, social, economic, and political rootedness, Nugent presented a microcosmic reconstruction of *Kansas* Populism as representative of Populism's western strain. Nugent was, in other words, largely uninterested in whether Populists were Marxist, reactionary, revolutionary, or beholden to any other interpretive category. Rather, he recovered the lives of the Populists themselves, often with detailed biographical information on low- and mid-level participants now mostly forgotten.[24]

With this attention to the thoughts and activities of Populists in a specific location, Nugent embedded the Populist movement in the economic, environmental, demographic, and political alignments of the everyday realities of Kansas, thus explaining the way geographical context shaped the Populist policy agenda and history. Of particular importance to Kansas Populists were alien landlordism, along with transportation, monetary, and mortgage reforms that addressed their particular economic concerns. The subtreasury plan, a key platform piece for the Farmers Alliance in areas of cotton cultivation, was of little interest to mortgage-strapped Kansans. Nugent also stressed the way in which local Kansas political alignments tied to third-party politics (Greenback and Union Labor), prohibition legislation, and ethnic identification rendered the "Alliance Yardstick"—an important Alliance political strategy in parts of the South to gain control of the regionally dominant Democratic Party—of little value where there was not a single, controlling party. Kansas political alignment was also connected to certain producerist intellectual and cultural factors expressed by Greenbackers, many of whom took early leadership

in the Alliance and thus eased the Alliance toward early third-party action. As a result, the Alliance in Kansas adopted a third-party strategy two years (1890) before southern Alliance activists.[25]

The point is that Kansas Populism was *Kansas Populism*. Taking shape within particular environmental and political boundaries, it reinforced the old adage that "all politics is local." This stress on place has been evident in the subsequent literature on Populism in at least two ways. First, most works on Populism—including many of the most significant interpretations—have emphasized a particular state, or sometimes a group of states.[26] Even the few books that have taken on the daunting task of narrating the national movement typically have emphasized one region: for Hicks (*The Populist Revolt*) and Clanton (*Populism: The Humane Preference in America*), the Midwest; for McMath (*American Populism*) and Goodwyn (*Democratic Promise*), Texas and the South; and for Postel (*The Populist Vision*), the West. State studies have predominated for the same reasons suggested by Nugent: local environments, modes of production, and political alignments shaped the reform agenda and political manifestations of Populism. If the politics of ethnic alignment, prohibition, women's suffrage, and third-party advocacy thus shaped political alignments in Kansas, similarly, for James Beeby (*Revolt of the Tar Heels*), long-standing battles between Democrats and Republicans over election law shaped political alignments in North Carolina; for Robert D. Johnston (*The Radical Middle Class*), Populism in Oregon was tied to direct democracy, and for Worth Robert Miller (*Oklahoma Populism*), migration patterns of Texans and Kansans, as well as territorial status, shaped the People's Party in Oklahoma.[27] Extraction industries and links to labor gave Mountain and Pacific Slope Populists the distinctive characteristics highlighted by Postel. Race particularly shaped political alignments in the Texas and the South.[28] Up-country and low-country geography and political tensions shaped Populism in Georgia and Alabama.[29] Local political contingencies also help explain the lack of Populism in such states as South Carolina (Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*), Tennessee (Roger Hart, in *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, and Connie Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell*), Louisiana (Donna A. Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement*), and Iowa (Ostler, *Prairie Populism*), where one of the two major parties became the main vehicle for Alliance legislation.[30]

Second, this focus on individual states and locales has highlighted not only local social and political arrangements but the cultural antecedents of Populism. Where Nugent emphasized the ethnic, religious, and third-party/Greenback antecedents of Kansas Populism, Robert McMath, in particular, has stressed the degree to which Populism drew on intellectual and religious patterns of thought, as well as practices of association found in churches, secret societies, and other organizations.[31] Along this line, Joe Creech (*Righteous Indignation*), Jim Bissett (*Agrarian Socialism in America*), Peter Argersinger ("Pentecostal Politics"), Michael Kazin (*A Godly Hero*), Postel (*The Populist Vision*), and others have emphasized the important ways evangelicalism in Texas and the South, ethnic religious alignments in the Midwest, and more radical religion in the West have shaped Populism in those regions.[32] Similarly, Clanton (*Populism, The Humane Preference in America*), Miller (*Oklahoma Populism*), and Ostler (*Prairie Populism*) have highlighted the degree to which Jeffersonian and republican ideas shaped especially the antimonopoly discourse of Populism, and Omar Ali (*In the*

Lion's Mouth) noted how the black church and black secret societies shaped the Colored Alliance and black involvement in the People's Party.[33]

Nugent's second historiographical contribution on the ultimate sensibility or rationality of Populism both as a response to economic pressures and as a political strategy derived also from his emphasis on the local. As noted above, in *The Tolerant Populists* and especially in "Some Parameters of Populism," Nugent demonstrated that Populism's motive force in Kansas was largely economic even if Populists did not assault the fundamental bases of economic liberalism, but rather, as yeomen (or at least aspiring yeomen), wanted the economic system to work on a fair and equitable basis. Again, this view was inherently sensible, since, in fact, Kansas farmers lacked adequate currency, suffered under oppressive mortgages, and had little or no control over commodities markets or transportation costs. And while Populists in much of the South initially emphasized cooperative marketing and purchasing to solve these issues, Kansas Populists, dyed in Greenback and Union-Labor ideology, more rapidly embraced local and then national political strategies, including Free Silver, that made good political sense.[34]

With the partial exception of Hackney's work on Alabama Populism and James Turner's essay on Texas Populism that emphasized geographical causation, no other major works on Populism have questioned the general causal impact of economic suffering on Populism or the subsequent reasonableness of their legislative or political objectives to assuage that suffering save, for a few, the sensibility of Free Silver. Insofar as scholars can reach a consensus on any large question, then, Nugent's argument on these points, which followed Hicks and Woodward, avoided simple monocausal economic determinism and stressed populist policy as a reasonable attempt to ease economic suffering, receives confirmation.[35] The literature has, however, attempted to clarify two further questions regarding these economic factors of Populism. First, as McMath has observed, economic destitution, while being a necessary cause of Populism, is not a sufficient cause, since Democratic and Republican farmers were often suffering just as much.[36] As already noted, then, most works (especially Goodwyn) have looked to social movement or resource mobilization theory, geographical contingencies, or sociocultural antecedents to explain why some became Populists while others remained in the two old parties.

A second question, also noted briefly above, has involved the degree to which Populist reforms challenged the heart of liberal capitalism itself or simply aimed to reform capitalism to ensure it was fair for farmers, producers, and, in some places, labor. Again, Nugent argued the latter point, but Goodwyn and Hahn (*The Roots of Southern Populism*) have argued that Populism—at least in its truest form—proposed a more radical critique of capitalism. Bruce Palmer, in "Man Over Money," argued that Populists were split on this issue, with Populists from Greenback and Union-Labor backgrounds offering a more radical critique and southeastern Populists, such as Marion Butler of North Carolina, proposing softer, more middle-class critiques connected to Free Silver.[37] Along a similar line, most recent work on Populism has also followed Nugent in arguing, against Goodwyn and Bruce Palmer, that the Free Silver strategy was a logical, necessary, and even a savvy political move once Populists realized their reforms required a national presence and power.[38] Robert Durden's *The Climax of Populism* makes perhaps the strongest case for this position.[39]

Similarly, one lingering issue that Nugent brought to the fore is whether we should understand Populism primarily as an economic reform movement, like labor unions, or as a political movement aiming to elect representatives. Nugent explained that these purposes were often at odds, and that the tension led to fragmentation of the Party in Kansas. Nugent wrote that Kansas Populists stumbled as they attempted "[t]he process, sometimes a painful one, of transmuting logical ideology into manipulable, attainable policies."[40] Nevertheless, especially in their shift to a national strategy centered on Free Silver, the Populists must, for Nugent, be understood primarily as a political movement—that attaining national policies to ease their economic suffering was their ultimate aim.

Many works have followed Nugent's argument here, though not all. Robert Durden was, again, especially pointed in arguing that fusion between Populists and Democrats on the 1896 Bryan ticket made good political sense (and nearly succeeded), since the movement was focused on electing Populists to office.[41] Jeffery Ostler, in *Prairie Populism*, likewise argued that we must understand Populism primarily as a political movement to understand why Kansas and Nebraska, but not Iowa, fostered robust Populist movements. Since the 1980s, Norman Pollack has especially stressed this point.[42] The clearest diverging positions have come from Goodwyn and Hahn, who argued that Populism was fundamentally an economic movement and that political compromise—especially Free Silver and fusion—blunted Populists' radical critique of capitalism.[43]

As an aside, how writers have viewed the relationship between Populists' critique of capitalism (strong or weak) and their aspirations for national political power have shaped their narratives of Populist defeat (or stillbirth). Those who viewed Populism primarily as an economic social movement tended to see the defeat of Populism rooted in internal divisions between fusionists and mid-roaders or the dilution of a class- or cooperative-based critique. Certainly Goodwyn, Palmer, and Hahn argued this to be the main cause of Populist decline.[44] Nugent, too, narrated how tensions over fusion brought about the denouement of the movement but also noted the importance of anti-fusion legislation that helped eliminate third-party Populism as a political movement in Kansas.[45] In the South, as Woodward, J. Morgan Kousser, and many others have demonstrated, white supremacy-based voter restriction, far more than internal dissent, caused the movement's political demise.[46]

Moving to his final interpretative point, Nugent wrote that "Populists represent an instance of minority conflict, and their experience may reflect upon the question of the place of elites in a democratic society." Underscoring this point, Nugent writes in the new preface to the second edition, that the "common element" in Populist policy "measures was to use government as an instrument on the people's behalf, rather than on behalf of special interests, monopolies, unregulated banks and other corporations, and (to use today's term) the one percent."[47] In other words, Populist political action was an attempt by a particular group of people on the periphery of power to use the levers of democracy (party organization and voting) to enact laws intended to give itself fair and equal political access to economic prosperity. What emerged in *The Tolerant Populists*, then, was a narrative of democratic striving, expressed in both a faith in democratic processes and in the power of government to enhance the common good, over against

emerging political and corporate industrial players who attempted to throttle the regulatory power of the state.

This narrative arc has been evident in some of the most important works on Populism since 1963—so much so that one would be hard pressed to find a work that in some way did not fit. Certainly most prominent has been Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise*, which, along with numerous other works by McMath, Johnston, Miller, McMath, Hahn, Pollack, Palmer, and others, established this narrative as normative in the literature as well as in textbooks. A variation on this theme has been the argument by Ostler (*Prairie Populism*), Miller (*Oklahoma Populism*), Creech (*Righteous Indignation*), and especially Clanton (*Populism: The Humane Preference in America*) who, stressing the way Jeffersonianism or republicanism shaped Populism, saw Populism's demise as the death rattle of a particular kind of nineteenth-century participatory democracy.[48]

One book that departed from this narrative was Postel's substantial intervention in *The Populist Vision*. Postel's history of the national Populist movement was pathbreaking in the way it drew Pacific Slope and labor Populists into the story, tilting the Populist narrative west of Nebraska to broaden and complicate the "democracy versus plutocracy" story line in two ways. First, Postel downplayed the anti-centralization component of Populist anti-monopolism, an emphasis at the heart of works that look to Jeffersonian republicanism as a key antecedent of Populism. Second, for Postel, not only were Populists not looking back to a Jeffersonian republican Eden, they were not looking back at all. Postel argued that Populists, in their educational aspirations, scientific farming, and especially their statist regulatory policies, were forward-looking progressives. Postel's narrative saw Populist defeat in 1896 as a speed bump in the evolution of the American political economy toward rationalized capitalism, modern education, market-oriented and scientific farming, and a regulatory state. So while Postel did not follow Nugent (or Goodwyn et al.) in presenting a democracy vs. plutocracy narrative, he confirmed the statist bent of Nugent's Populists.[49] And though Nugent and most interpreters since have connected Populism to progressivism by showing continuities in policy, or (though less so) through the political careers of particular individuals, Postel more robustly connected Populism to progressivism by arguing that Populists *were* progressives. Postel's point is well taken, though most of the literature since Nugent has suggested that, even though the People's Party largely failed to enact its economic or political reforms in its lifetime, during the next political generations, via William Jennings Bryan and then especially Wilson and the New Deal, most of its statist policies were ultimately enacted.[50]

* * *

While *The Tolerant Populists* has had an enduring influence on Populist literature, its themes have also shaped the continuing work of Walter Nugent. Although Nugent writes that he has been a prospector, not a miner—moving from place to place panning for different subject matter rather than spending his career drilling down into one vein—he has never moved too far from the historiographical springs of his first book.[51] As he has moved from more general economic questions to demography, and immigration and migration to the U.S. West, and eventually American empire, his work has been marked by several features central to *The Tolerant Populists*. Most generally, these

have included fidelity to sources, precision, capturing the voices of the voiceless, and eschewing simplistic or monocausal theoretical explanations. More specifically, Nugent has focused on economic causation and motivation; on the importance of region in terms of environment, culture, and mode of production; and, increasingly, on an assault on American exceptionalism—which has often meant grappling in one way or another with Frederick Jackson Turner.

After *The Tolerant Populists* and "Some Parameters of Populism," Nugent expanded particular Populist concerns about monetary policy to broader questions about monetary reform between the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction. In *The Money Question During Reconstruction* and especially *Money and American Society, 1865–1880*, Nugent laid out a "social and intellectual history of the Money Question" in Gilded Age America.[52] Both were social histories because their arguments were based in policy questions and economic data, yet they were also intellectual histories that stressed the cultural elements that animated monetary issues. As he did with the Populists, by rooting these works on monetary policy in economics and culture, Nugent argued for the rationality of the Greenback, Free Silver, Goldbug, and other positions with precision and sympathy. Sympathy is critical, as Nugent wanted his readers to understand the forces that inflamed passions for ideas that today seem arcane or even ridiculous. *Money and American Society* continues, with Gretchen Ritter's *Goldbugs and Greenbacks*, to be the most exhaustive historical work on the subject (and perhaps also due a second edition).[53]

Nugent moved on in the 1970s and 1980s to demographic history. This shift made sense, as demographic history is, as Nugent has understood it, a way to give voice to historical actors who otherwise left none.[54] Additionally, demographic history marks Nugent's ongoing engagement with Frederick Jackson Turner. Nugent is no Turnerian, as he made clear in his critique of Hicks's reliance on Turner in *The Populist Revolt*. In the 1980s and 1990s, Nugent lent his voice to the New Western Historians who criticized Turner's ethnocentrism, limited geographical parameters, and other shortcomings. Nevertheless, Nugent found Turner's emphasis on the relationships among migration, settlement, and available (not "free") land a potentially compelling account of the push/pull features at work in the movements of people when one considers certain demographic and environmental features.[55]

This interest in demography produced three main bodies of work: first, a cluster of articles on the nature of frontiers; second, *Structures of American Social History* (1981); and, third, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (1992). Nugent engaged Turner most directly in "Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century" (1989), as he laid out a demographic understanding of the frontier in American history. Nugent outlined two types of frontiers in American history. The "Type I Frontier" or "settlement frontier" was typified by farming, a predominance of nuclear families, balanced sex ratios, high fertility rates, and a young median age (many children). These were farming or colonizing frontiers that represented the demographic advance of settlers who stayed long enough for offspring to migrate further. They were peaceful so long as governmental structures allowed for the tranquil and legal occupation of available land (often after the prior inhabitants had been removed by not-so-peaceful means). In contrast, the demographic profile of "Type II frontiers," based in extractive industries and ranching, was characterized by single individuals rather than families, a sex ratio

skewed male, few children, and low fertility rates. Populations in Type II frontiers were transient and tended to be violent. In American history, the nineteenth century witnessed both types of frontiers, though Type II frontiers predominated in cattle and mining towns west of the 100th meridian. Type I frontiers typified farm settlement through most of the eighteenth century until the 1920s. Outside the United States, and for the United States after the Spanish-American War, international "Empires" that imposed political or military rule but not demographic takeover functioned as a variant of the Type II frontier.[56]

The identification of Type I frontiers was a fundamental observation behind Nugent's *Structures of American Social History*, in which Nugent presented "a framework for social history based on demographic observation."[57] Based on "mass population data," and especially fertility and population growth rates, Nugent outlined three distinct demographic periods in American history between which growth rates decreased in dramatic fashion.[58] The first, from the 1790s–1850s, is a "frontier-rural mode," exemplified by the Type I frontier; the second, from roughly 1860–1915, is a transitional period of lower growth rates or "great conjecture"; and the third period, from 1920 to the present, is a "metropolitan mode" with the majority of Americans living in cities. For Nugent, these modes represented a social grounding for understanding political, economic, and cultural phenomena in these periods. In addition, Nugent argued that his work undercut modernization theory by rooting social history in identifiable demographic patterns rather than more nebulous theoretical constructions such as industrialization, secularization, or urbanization.[59]

In *Crossings*, Nugent moved from the United States to the Atlantic world in offering a "demographic mosaic of the transatlantic region from 1870 to 1914." Nugent drew on American patterns of demography outlined above and migration to understand the push/pull factors for international movements of people not just to America but from place to place in the Atlantic region. Nugent was also keen to assault modernization theory, noting that the relationship of fertility and mortality rates reflected in modernization theory did not hold for the period. For Nugent, this point challenged the narrative that nineteenth-century transatlantic migration marked the movement of people from traditional to modern societies. This challenge to the modernization narrative also blunted American exceptionalism—at least of the patriotic stripe—by demonstrating that the United States was not a "modern" society to which "pre-moderns" were moving and that the United States was only one player in these migrations, though it certainly received the largest number of migrants. Nugent stressed that America was different, but not better or more modern.[60]

By the 1990s, Nugent had moved to U.S. western and environmental history, producing, in 2000, *Into the West*, a demographic and environmental history of the peopling of the United States west of the 100th meridian. Demographic themes as well as the power of economic motivation and an engagement with Turner persisted. At its heart, though, were the voices of people whose historical records, along with gripping photographs throughout, were their demographic indicators. Using the Type I/Type II frontiers as an interpretive tool, Nugent outlined the settlement of the American West in several distinct periods: the "settlement era" from 1848 to 1889 characterized by Type I/Type II frontiers (especially farming, ranching, and mining); a second settlement period from 1901 to 1913 marked by industrial extraction and the peak period of homesteading, especially on the high plains; a period from 1914–1929 in which tourism and nostalgia

drew people west and especially to California; a period from 1929–1941 that witnessed the dust bowl migration, and the post-1941 period that saw the influx of people into the West associated with defense jobs, farming on the Ogallala aquifer, and other factors both economic and mythical. Always balancing the social and demographic with the geographic and cultural, Nugent stressed the mythical West of the Gold Rush and cattle drives as a key motivator for migration. Other factors included the Turnerian hunger for available land, natural resources, and the drive for material and spiritual self-improvement.[61]

Much in the way *Crossings* extended *Structures* into an international setting, Nugent's latest work, *Habits of Empire* (2008), expanded the demographic observations in *Structures* and *Into the West* to U.S. imperial aspirations from Jefferson to Obama. *Habits of Empire* retained many of the same themes as these other works, emphasizing the acquisition of land; legal apparati that enable such acquisition and migration to occur; and economic, cultural, and demographic push/pull forces. A key focus for Nugent was a critique of the insidious way American exceptionalism had justified U.S. imperial expansion. Once again, Nugent offered a typology of three periods. First was the "settlement period" from 1782 to 1850, in which American imperialism primarily expanded through Type I frontiers to the Pacific, with the acquisition of land through the Louisiana Purchase, Indian removal, international negotiation, and war with Mexico. Second, the period from 1850 to 1945 saw the Type II frontier develop in the United States and expand overseas primarily, though not exclusively, after the Spanish-American War. The third period, from 1945 to the present, saw the emergence of America's virtual empire through U.S. military and economic presence in the Cold War and War on Terror. Behind all three periods was an "ideology of expansion" rooted in American exceptionalism. Succinctly stated, this ideology posited the moral exceptionalism of the United States and thus justified expansion and often the deceptive acquisition of territory as inevitable or divinely ordained. His argument, again, blended social and cultural historical features.[62]

With *Habits of Empire*, we come full circle to the concerns that prompted Nugent to produce a second edition of *The Tolerant Populists*. In both works, Nugent urges us not to fall into the kind of intellectual trap that Hofstadter did. In both cases, Nugent identifies and complicates overarching, problematic myths by listening to historical actors themselves. In *The Tolerant Populists*, he assaults the myth that salt-of-the-earth Americans have always and inherently regarded the federal government as unfriendly—an entity to ignore or resist as an intrusive threat to individual or local liberty. In fact, 130 years ago, ordinary, hardscrabble Kansans—farmers, immigrants, and a few laborers—realized that the federal government was, indeed, a good friend to have, and their Populist movement gave way to progressive legislation and a New Deal that improved their lives. They speak, still, today, despite the tragic irony that their name is attached to groups who support positions that brought about their political demise. And, so, too, does Nugent seek to deflate the myth of American moral exceptionalism that undergirds U.S. international adventurism. Both myths are rooted in a Turnerian idea that expansion and democracy—meaning in this case resistance to centralized authority—are somehow intrinsic to American greatness.

The Populists, and Walter Nugent, still have much to say to the contrary.

NOTES

[1]Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago, 1963, 2013), 25. All references are from the second edition, which has a different pagination from the first edition. The second edition is mostly a reprint of the first edition but with a new preface. This essay does not present a complete historiography of Populism; neither does it offer a comprehensive treatment of the works cited. Works are cited as exemplary or representative of certain tendencies or arguments. Perhaps the most complete historiographical essay circa 1993 is Worth Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," *Kansas History* 16 (Spring 1993): 54–69. There are excellent bibliographical essays at the end of a number of works on Populism, including Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877–1898* (New York, 1993); and O. Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890–1900* (Boston, 1991). Recent historiography is covered well in Worth Robert Miller, ed., "*The Populist Vision*: A Roundtable Discussion," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 32 (Spring 2009): 18–45, and "Agricultural History Roundtable on Populism' with Robert C. McMath, Jr., Peter H. Argersinger, Connie L. Lester, Michael F. Magliari, and Walter Nugent," *Agricultural History* 82 (Winter 2008): 1–35. Also of note is Henry Clay Dethloff and Worth Robert Miller, eds., *A List of References for the History of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party* (Davis, CA, 1989). I would like to thank Robert McMath and Thomas Alter for their generous comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

[2]Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955); Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1931); Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938); Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1951). See also Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955). On Hicks's importance in the Populist historiography, see Martin Ridge, "Populism Redux: John D. Hicks and *The Populist Revolt*," *Reviews in American History* 13 (Mar. 1985): 142–54.

[3]Victor C. Ferkiss, "Ezra Pound and American Fascism," *The Journal of Politics* 17 (May, 1955): 173–97; essays by Bell, Viereck, Parsons, and Lipset in *The New American Right*, ed. Daniel Bell (New York, 1955) and *The Radical Right* (Garden City, NY, 1963).

[4]C. Vann Woodward, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual" in Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History,* 3rd. ed. (Baton Rouge, 1993), 141–66; Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (New York, 1962); and Norman Pollack, "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism, and the Historian," *Agricultural History* 39 (Apr. 1965): 59–67.

[5]Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976); Brinkley, "Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*: A Reconsideration," *Reviews in American History* 13 (Sept. 1985): 462–80; Ostler, "The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism," *Agricultural History* 69 (Winter 1995): 1–27; Johnston, "*The Age of Reform*: A Defense of Richard Hofstadter Fifty Years On," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 6 (Apr. 2007): 125–38; Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York, 2007); Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America*, and McMath, *American Populism*. I would not want to suggest that Nugent's was the only work during the period between Hofstadter and Goodwyn that kept the Hicks/Woodward themes alive. Theodore Saloutos, for example, maintained these emphases in a number of works including *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865–1933* (Berkeley, CA, 1960), as did a number of early state-based studies.

[6]*Tolerant Populists*, xvii. See also ix–x. Works focusing on Kansas Populism that followed *The Tolerant Populists* include O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS, 1969); Peter Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington, KY, 1974); and Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880–1892* (Lawrence, KS, 1993). These works confirm most of Nugent's emphases in *The Tolerant Populists*, including the economic sources of Populist action, the rational nature of Populist reforms, Populist political savvy, and Populist toleration.

[7]*Tolerant Populists*, x; see also xvii.

[8]See responses by Irwin Unger and Oscar Handlin in "Roundtable on Populism" in *Agricultural History* 39 (Mar. 1965): 59–85. Unger and Handlin focused on Pollack, though Handlin also accused Nugent of overstating his case against Hofstadter in his zeal to defend the Populists. Sheldon Hackney also criticized Woodward and Nugent for ignoring Populism's dark side in *Populism: The Critical Issues* (Boston, 1971), viii–xxii, 79. On Nugent's motives for writing, see *Tolerant Populists, x*, Nugent, "'Where Have All the Flowers Gone… When Will They Ever Learn?'" *Reviews in American History* 39 (Mar. 2011), 206; and Nugent, *Making Our Way: A Family History of Nugents, Kings, and Others* (Notre Dame, IN, 2003), 202–3.

[9]*Tolerant Populists*, 14–15. Nugent was careful in *The Tolerant Populists* and elsewhere to distinguish the work of Handlin and Hofstadter from Ferkiss, Viereck, and Parsons, regarding the former as typically careful historians (*Tolerant Populists*, 11–15). In the new edition, however, he has somewhat stronger words for Hofstadter, calling his work "irresponsible," see *Tolerant Populists*, x. For recent assessments of the impact of *Age of Reform*, see Robert M. Collins, "The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism," *Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989): 150–67; Brinkley, "Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*: A Reconsideration," and Johnston, "*The Age of Reform*." Collins (154) notes the degree to which Nugent is fair in his assessment of Hofstadter.

[10]*Tolerant Populists*, 14, 71–73.

[11]Pollack, *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990), xii–ix. Early in his career, Pollack (*Populist Response to Industrial America* and "Fear of Man") argued that Populists mounted a radical critique of capitalism that resembled Marxism.

[12]Postel, *Populist Vision*. Populists' views on education were likewise often progressive, especially in North Carolina and the Midwest, where they fought for land-grant institutions, industrial and agricultural education, and access to higher education. See Scott M. Gelber, *The University and the People: Envisioning American Higher Education* (Madison, WI, 2011).

[13]McMath, "Agrarian Protest at the Forks of the Creek: Three Subordinate Farmers' Alliances in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 51 (1974): 41–63; McMath, *Populist Vanguard* (New York, 1977); McMath, "Populist Base Communities: The Evangelical Roots of Farm Protest In Texas," *Locus* 1 (1988): 56–60, and McMath, *American Populism*. Nugent and McMath's use of antecedents like the "agrarian myth" was far more nuanced than Hofstadter's.

[14]*Tolerant Populists*, 14–15. Hicks was a student of Turner.

[15]Ostler, "The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism."

[16]Unger and Handlin in "Roundtable on Populism" in *Agricultural History* (1965). See, for example, James Turner, "Understanding the Populists," *Journal of American History* 67 (Sept. 1980): 354–73, and John Dibbern, "Who Were the Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliancemen in Dakota," *Agricultural History* 56 (Oct. 1982): 677–91, who take up this issue of motivation. On this point, see also Peter Argersinger, "Agricultural History Roundtable on Populism," 8.

[17]Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*. Goodwyn was the most hesitant to draw on cultural antecedents, stressing instead the immediate impact of Alliance movement culture. Sheldon Hackney, in *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969) and *Populism: The Critical Issues*, cut a middle path between Nugent (*Tolerant Populists*) and Hofstadter (*Age of Reform*), suggesting that something like "status anxiety" was at work among North Alabama Populists who insisted on getting their fair share of the market.

[18]Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism," *Agricultural History* 40 (Oct. 1966): 255–70.

[19]Brinkley ("Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*," 463) and Collins ("The Originality Trap," 162) have noted that Hofstadter did not do adequate archival work for *The Age of Reform*.

[20]*Tolerant Populists*, especially 57, 62–63, 82–94, 119–36, 144–45, 155–83. While Nugent's characterization of Populist tolerance in Kansas and similar western states was no doubt true, tolerance took on a more complex timbre in the South and Southwest, especially in terms of racial complications and more frequent use of anti-Catholic rhetoric. As I sought to demonstrate, such anti-Catholic rhetoric, like anti-Shylock rhetoric, was neither racist nor nativist but drew on traditional Protestant patriotic tropes comparing the Catholic hierarchy to monarchical tyranny. See Creech, *Righteous Indignation* (Urbana, IL, 2006), 33, 36, 99, 127–28, 147–50. On Texas, see also, and especially Gregg Cantrell, "'Our Very Pronounced Theory of Equal Rights to All': Race, Citizenship, and Populism in the South Texas Borderlands," *Journal of American History* 100, No. 3 (Dec. 2013): 663–90.

[21]Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism." Nugent pointed out that allegiance to either form of metallic specie was bad economics; see *Money and American Society, 1865–1880* (New York, 1968), especially 263–75.

[22]*Tolerant Populists*, x.

[23]*Tolerant Populists*, xi–xiii, xvii–xviii; Nugent, "Agricultural History Roundtable on Populism," 22; Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York, 1995), 1, 5. Another explanation might be the use of the term "populist" to describe European right-wing and even fascist movements.

[24]For example, *Tolerant Populists*, 63–66 and 104–7.

[25]*Tolerant Populists*, see especially 29–59. On the Alliance Yardstick, see 47–49.

[26]On this point see Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 5, as well as comments by Robert McMath in the "*The Populist Vision*: A Roundtable Discussion," 29–33.

[27]Beeby, *Revolt of the Tar Heels: The North Carolina Populist Movement, 1890–1901* (Jackson, MS, 2008); Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton, 2003); Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman, OK, 1987).

[28]On the West see Postel, *Populist Mind*. Books on race and southern Populism are legion, starting with the seminal works by Woodward (*Tom Watson, Origins of the New South, Strange Career of Jim Crow*). Perhaps most important have been J Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics* (New Haven, 1974), Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York, 1992), Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race* (New York, 1984), and Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill, 2001). The recent article by Cantrell ("'Our Very Pronounced Theory of Equal Rights to All'") on black and Mexican American voters in Texas is also important.

[29]On Alabama, see Sheldon Hackney, *Populism and Progressivism in Alabama*; on Georgia, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of Georgia's Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983), and Barton Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge, 1984).

[30]Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870–1896* (Baton Rouge, 1975); Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1970–1915* (Athens, GA, 2006); Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement* (Baton Rouge, 2011); and Ostler, *Prairie Populism*.

[31]McMath makes this a key emphasis in *Populist Vanguard* and *American Populism*.

[32]McMath was one of the first to take evangelical antecedents, in particular, seriously; see "Agrarian Protest at the Forks of the Creek," *Populist Vanguard*, "Populist Base Communities," and *American Populism*; Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside* (Norman, OK, 1999); Argersinger, "Pentecostal Politics in Kansas: Religion, The Farmers' Alliance, and the Gospel of Populism," *Kansas Quarterly* 1 (1969): 24–35; Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 2006), and Postel, *Populist Vision*. Postel tended to downplay antecedents and saw western Populists' tendency to embrace nontraditional religion as a symptom, not an antecedent, of their Populism.

[33]Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America*; Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*, esp. 3–27; Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, and Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886–1900* (Jackson, MS: 2010), esp. xiii–xv, 5, 7–9.

[34]*Tolerant Populists*, 41–43, 69, 174. The tension between tactical and ideological political independence was especially acute in Texas.

[35]Turner, "Understanding the Populists"; Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama*. Neither Turner nor Hackney denied the Populists' material destitution, but both downplayed it in favor of the anxiety produced by rural isolation or town/country tension.

[36]McMath, *American Populism*, 14. See also Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 6. In some states, such as North Carolina, scholars have not been able to demonstrate that Populists suffered economic deprivation distinguishable from Democrats or Republicans. See, for example, Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 187 n11. John Dibbern, on the other hand, found a positive correlation between economic disadvantage and Populist voting in Marshall County, South Dakota; see "Who Were the Populists?"

[37]Goodwyn (*Democratic Promise*, especially xi, xiv, xvii, 110–53) saw Populism mounting a radical critique through its cooperative assault on capitalist individualism. Steven Hahn argued similarly in *Roots of Southern Populism*, especially 3–10, 276–85, that this critique was rooted in antebellum labor producerism and republicanism that informed local tensions in the Georgia upcountry between farmers and merchants. On Palmer, see *"Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, 1980), passim, but especially xvii. Though neither Goodwyn nor Hahn saw the Populist critique to be as radical as Debs's Socialism, it nevertheless fundamentally challenged the industrial capitalist assumptions of the late nineteenth century. Pollack (*Humane Economy*, xii–ix) and most other works cited in this essay have concurred with Nugent that the Populists were solidly petit bourgeois and accepted as normative the basics of liberal, free-market capitalism. It is important to note that many Populists in Texas and Oklahoma transitioned to Socialism after the People's Party collapsed.

[38]Goodwyn and Palmer argued that Free Silver was a "shadow movement" that undercut the radical communitarian edge of Populism; see Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, especially xiv; Palmer, "*Man over Money*," passim. Hahn (*Roots of Southern Populism*) tended to agree with the shadow movement narrative, but in his emphasis on Populism as an economic movement, he also stressed how elite economic actors, more than political ones, stifled the movement (with racism also contributing substantially). Goodwyn, Palmer, and Hahn were certainly correct to point out that Free Silver was not a radical policy. Critics have argued that Goodwyn, in particular, placed too much emphasis on the role of cooperation in Texas, setting up Texas Populism as a model for judging other Populist strategies. It is important to note, however, that Free Silver did, indeed, play a significant role in fracturing the People's Party in Texas. See Goodwyn, especially xi, xviii, and xix; Palmer, especially xiii–xviii; McMath, *American Populism*, 15; and Stanley B. Parsons, Karen Toombs Parsons, Walter Killilae, and Beverly Borgers, "The Role of the Cooperatives in the Development of the Movement Culture of Populism," *Journal of American History* 69 (Mar. 1983): 868–78.

[39]Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington, KY, 1965), especially 1–22. James L. Hunt presented a very strong case for Marion Butler's political savvy in *Marion Butler and American Populism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003). Butler was the chief architect of fusion with the Bryan ticket over Free Silver. Durden, like Nugent (*Tolerant Populists*), would agree with Goodwyn (*Democratic Promise*), Palmer ("*Man over Money*") and Hahn (*Roots of Southern Populism*) that Free Silver was not a radical strategy. But Nugent understood the axis of disagreement between mid-roaders and fusionists over Free Silver to be local versus national policy strategies rather than a radical versus conservative outlook.

[40]*Tolerant Populists*, xvii.

[41]Durden, especially 1–22. Others who view Populism primarily as a political movement have been Ayers (*Promise of the New South*); Hart (*Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*); McMath, *American Populism*, Ostler, *Prairie Populism*; and Eric Anderson, "The Populists in Capitalist America" in *Race, Class, and Politics in Southern History*, eds. Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, and Charles Flynn, Jr. (Baton Rouge, LA, 1989).

[42]Pollack, *Humane Economy*.

[43]Goodwyn, in *Democratic Promise*, wrote, "The agrarian revolt cannot be understood outside the framework of the economic crusade that not only was its source but also created the culture of the movement itself," xviii. See also, Goodwyn, especially xi, xiv, xvii–xviii, and Hahn (*Roots of Southern Populism*), especially 1–3. Palmer ("*Man over Money*") mostly concurred with Goodwyn, and Hahn drew on both Goodwyn and Palmer.

[44]*Tolerant Populists*, 112–40, 164–72. Goodwyn (*Democratic Promise*); Hahn (*Roots of Southern Populism*); Palmer ("*Man over Money*"); Miller, (*Oklahoma Populism*), 156; and Postel (*Populist Vision*), 270–75, also argued this point, though they did not follow Goodwyn, Hahn, and Palmer in casting Populism primarily as an economic movement. Hahn also stressed racism as a cause of Populist demise.

[45]*Tolerant Populists*, especially chs. 7 and 9.

[46]Woodward, especially *Strange Career of Jim Crow*; Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics*. See also Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*.

[47]*Tolerant Populists*, xviii, xiii.

[48]Palmer wrote, for example, that Populism was the "last major mainstream attack on capitalism and its business culture in America," xviii. Also, see especially Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America*, xi–xviii. Clanton stressed the degree to which Vernon Parrington, a Kansas Populist himself, captured this narrative in in his multivolume *Main Currents in American Thought*. See Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*; Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, especially 177–83. See also Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*; Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism*; and Palmer, "*Man over Money*," especially, along with McMath, *Populist Vanguard* and *American Populism*, Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class*; Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*; and Pollack, *Humane Economy*.

[49]For an excellent forum on Postel's *Populist Vision*, see Miller, "*The Populist Vision*: A Roundtable Discussion."

[50]*Tolerant Populists*, ix, xi–xv, ch. 9, on connection to progressivism. See also, Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2010), ch. 2. For a powerful statement of the connection between agrarian statism and progressive policies, see Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago, 1999).

[51]Walter Nugent, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone,'" 208–9. As with my review of the Populist literature, this overview of Nugent's work is not intended to be exhaustive; Nugent has especially written articles too numerous and varied in content to cover in full here; also, he has written a number of textbooks and edited volumes that I mention only in passing.

[52]*Money and American Society*, 4, and *The Money Question During Reconstruction* (New York, 1967). Nugent also published the textbook, *Creative History: An Introduction to Historical Study* (Philadelphia, 1967). Nugent's other textbook is *From Centennial to World War: American Society, 1876–1917* (New York, 1985).

[53]Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865–1896* (Cambridge, UK, 1997). See also Nugent's "Comments on Wyatt Wells, 'Rhetoric of the Standards: The Debate over Gold and Silver,'" *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (Jan. 2015): 69–76.

[54]Nugent, *Structures of American History* (Bloomington, IN, 1981), xi–xii.

[55]On the "New Western History," see Nugent, "Western History, New and Not So New," *OAH Magazine of History* (Fall, 1994): 5–9. Nugent's introductory materials and editorial choices in *The American West: The Reader*, eds. Nugent and Martin Ridge (Bloomington, IN, 1999), marked his appreciation of the "New Western History," as did his emphases in *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (New York, 1999). For Nugent's thoughts on Turner, see, Nugent, "Happy Birthday, Western History," *Journal of the West* 32 (July, 1993): 3–4; *Into the West*, 97–98; *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (Bloomington, IN, 1992), 161; and especially *Structures of American Social History* (Bloomington, IN, 1981), xii; 12–17, 32–33, and 163 n34.

[56]Nugent, "Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Western Historical Quarterly* 20 (Nov. 1989): 393–408. See also *Into the West*, ch. 3.

[57]Nugent, *Structures in American Social History*, xi. See also 25, 32.

[58]Nugent, *Structures in American Social History*, 25.

[59]On modernization theory, see *Structures in American Social History*, 4–12. Nugent reflected further on many of the themes in *Structures* in "Tocqueville, Marx, and American Class Structure," *Social Science History* 12 (Winter 1988): 327–47.

[60]*Crossings*, xv, 5–10, and passim.

[61]Nugent, *Into the West*, passim. For further reflections by Nugent on the West as place and myth, see "Where is the American West?," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 42 (Summer 1992): 2–23.

[62]Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York, 2008). Nugent addressed many of these themes in his presidential address to the Western Historical Association, "The American Habit of Empire," *Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Spring 2007): 5–24.