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THE POPULIST ERA IN KANSAS:
A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

by

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ABSTRACT

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The discussion of the nature of Populism has centered to a
great extent on the question of the Populist's role in the develop-ment of a liberal tradition in America. There are, however, some histori ans, including the author of this paper, who would like
to study Populism outside the framework of this controversey. The first step in the new approach was the development of an alternate model of social action. The model chosen suggested that the simple relationship between economic and political behavior assumed by earlier historians of the Populist era was inadequate to explain all aspects of Populism.

In order to test these theoretical propositions, a detailed description of the Kansas economic and political systems was prepared from quantitative data on each county. This data supported the traditional concepts of Populism in some instances; but there were areas in which the older interpretations conflicted with the data. These conflicts arise primarily from the over-emphasis of the earlier historians on the revolutionary aspect of Populism. The data tended to show that the Populists caused only minor changes in the Kansas political structure and these changes were primarily
within the Democratic Party. These results are consistent with the social model developed earlier since it predicted that more than just economic considerations would determine the political behavior of the individual. The analysis shows that a complete picture of the Populists can be obtained only after these other factors have been determined.
For almost twenty years now the Populists have been the center of a heated historical controversy. Unfortunately today we are still far from a consensus among scholars as to the proper place of the Populists in American history. The controversy is primarily concerned with the question of whether the Populists were reactionary or liberal. The lines have been drawn and some historians appear more interested in defending their position than trying to study the Populists. However, there has developed recently among some historians a desire to study the Populists outside the context of liberal History. These historians have tried to ask new questions and have sought new types of data. My hope is that this paper will be a step in the direction of the establishment of a new historical approach which may eventually give us a more complete understanding of Populism.

More specifically I have presented a model of social action which I feel accurately describes American society. Using this social model I attempted to determine the most important factors in the relationship between voting behavior and economic conditions. This theoretical framework was then compared to the Populists' situation through the use of quantitative data. By explicitly developing a social model I hoped to remove myself, to some
degree, from the context established by the liberal historians. In addition to my desire to use a social model in a historical study, I felt that there was a need for someone to analyze the large amount of quantitative data that was available on Kansas. The Kansas Department of Agriculture had published comprehensive reports on the conditions of farming in each Kansas county, but in the past the amount of data has discouraged any detailed investigation. By using digital computers I was able to reduce this data to indexes that were more easily handled. Although I feel that both the model and the data are integral parts of my thesis, the presentation of the data itself in a compact form should help advance our understanding of the period and the people involved.
CHAPTER ONE

Historiography: The Populist Controversy

For many years the standard interpretation of the Populist movement was the one presented by John D. Hicks in The Populist Revolt. Hicks' view of the Populists involved three main ideas: 1.) The Populists consisted of "ordinary, honest, willing" workers who were not receiving a just reward for their work. 2.) The program which they advanced was rational if viewed in the proper context. 3.) They were, in a sense, victorious because most of their ideas ultimately became law. This interpretation clearly placed the Populists among the "good people" in American history.

Hicks felt that even though many of the radicals of his time, that is, the 1930's, rejected the Populist program of reform as being inadequate, it was progressive in its own context.¹

Hicks drew heavily from earlier monographs for his conception of Populism. One of the most influential of the monographs was a study of Kansas Populism by Raymond C. Miller. Populism, according to Miller, was entirely a response to economic conditions. He felt that the collapse of the economic boom of the 1880's was the most important factor in the rise of Populism. The

falling prices of farm products and the crop failures only intensified conditions. Because Miller concentrated on the problem of overextended credit following the boom, he was able to defend the Populist move to free silver as he felt it would have relieved their debt burdens.\textsuperscript{2} In general Hicks accepted Miller's thesis that the Populist program was a rational response to their problems.

The Populist Revolt, which was published in 1931, seemed to fit in with the events of that time. The country was again in the midst of a depression, and there was a definite need for a reform tradition to legitmatize the economic and social programs that were being suggested. As New Dealers looked around, they could see thousands of people willing to work, but unable to find jobs. Surely Americans of the 1930's felt a kinship with the Populists, as described by Hicks. In part because of these circumstances, Hicks' interpretation of the agrarian revolution was accepted\textsuperscript{3} and the belief in the continuity of the reform tradition was strengthened.

The liberal historian pictured the New Deal as the culmination of a long struggle to bring social justice to America. Charles M. Wiltse, for instance, observed that many of the New Deal programs

\textsuperscript{2}Raymond C. Miller, "The Background of Populism in Kansas," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 11, no. 4 (1925), pp. 469-489.

\textsuperscript{3}Supporting Hicks' view was Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party in Texas, A Study in Third Party Politics (Austin, Texas, 1938).
could trace their origin to Populist demands, and he went on to say that there was a sense of social-democratic liberalism that was present in the programs of the Populists, the Progressives, and New Dealers. Because of this pervasive liberalism, American democratic government had been successful.  

Then came the Second World War, the Cold War and finally the rise of Joe McCarthy. Mass support for dictators such as Hitler and Stalin had already begun to undermine the liberals' faith in the people. Until the rise of McCarthy, however, one could still interpret these events as products of a foreign society where, unlike America, the people had no tradition of democratic liberalism. It is not surprising that McCarthyism brought about a reexamination of the liberal ideology and its origins. The traditional liberal view of society glorified the masses. There was thought to be a folk wisdom that accounted for America's success with democracy. McCarthyism seemed to show, however, that the American public could be reactionary as well as progressive and such a development could not be accounted for within the existing liberal social framework. As the review of the liberal position progressed, the Populists emerged as the central topic. Superficially the Populists appeared similar

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to the McCarthyites in several respects. The Populists were
centered in the Mid-West as were the supporters of McCarthy.
They both attacked the eastern establishment and its basis in
intellectualism. Although these apparently similar characteristics
did not stand up under close examination, they were instrumental
in the early reevaluation of the liberal position. Some of those
who were reexamining the Populists concluded that they actually
formed the basis for the development of a radical right in America.
Peter Viereck saw a continuity from the Populists to the McCarthyites
in much the same way that liberals had described the continuity
from the Populists to the New Dealers. He attributed every trait
within the liberal ideology that he felt was undesirable to the
Populists and therefore his position can be said to mark one

Although Viereck's \textit{The Unadjusted Man} contained the darkest
portrayal of the Populists, the book that most influenced the
historical profession was \textit{The Age of Reform} by Richard Hofstadter.
Hofstadter viewed the Populists as having both a "hard" or economic
side and a "soft" or non-economic side. In both of these areas. Hofstadter's ideas conflicted with those of the standard interpretation presented by Hicks. Hofstadter saw the Populists not as farm workers but as capitalists who operated commercial farms and engaged in land speculation. While this was a new interpretation, it did not arouse very much antagonism since it only implied that the Populists were not completely aware of their position in society: a fault common to most groups. 6

The controversy arose when Hofstadter discussed the "soft" side of Populism. The Populists, according to Hofstadter, believed that history involved a conspiracy of the monied interests against the common man. The chief villains of this conspiracy were the English and Jewish bankers, and through the agrarian monetary program, the farmers were attempting to escape these villains and to reestablish the conditions of the past. These ideas had two ramifications. First, if the Populists were trying to reestablish the "good old days" then in modern liberal jargon, they were reactionary. Secondly, the idea of a conspiracy of English and Jewish bankers implies that the Populists were nativists and anti-Semitism, two terms usually reserved for opponents of liberalism. By applying these terms to the Populists, Hofstadter called

into question the position of the Populists in the liberal tradition.7

Although McCarthyism had disillusioned many historians, not all of them were ready to blame the Populists. One of the first to answer Hofstadter was C. Vann Woodward in his essay, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual." Woodward did not attempt to glorify the Populists. Instead, he accepted many of the arguments that the revisionists advanced, but he felt that certain qualifications needed to be added to get an accurate picture. He pointed out that the argument based on the geographical coincidence of the Populists and McCarthyites was not valid since Populism was strongest in the South while McCarthyism was centered in the Middle West. Woodward also claimed that concentration on money and banking, and fear of Jewish power were characteristics common to many Americans at that time, and therefore the Populists should neither be blamed nor excused for this aspect of their rhetoric.

In his conclusion, Woodward called on intellectuals to make a critical examination of the Populists but nevertheless to accept their heritage and, in general, the liberal position.8

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7 Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, pp. 63-93; in an earlier work, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York, 1954), Hofstadter expressed some of these ideas although not as explicitly. His description of Bryan was so caustic that it amounted to a condemnation of Bryan's followers.

In Norman Pollack's view, Woodward had made too many concessions to the revisionists. In *The Populist Response to Industrial America*, Pollack argues that the Populists were not only progressive in their own time but that even today the Populist program could form the basis for a liberal movement. The Populists were reacting not to industrialism itself but to the inhuman conditions that resulted from industrialism. Because the Populists appealed to the workers for help in reforming industrial society, Pollack found them to be the spearhead of a new class alliance.\(^9\)

In *The Populist Response*, Pollack was primarily interested in showing that the Populists constituted a progressive economic and political force in American history. In earlier articles he also rejected the idea that the Populists were anti-Semitic or nativists. Although several historians have pointed out that anti-Semitism was not a characteristic unique to the Populists,\(^10\) Pollack went further to say that the "incidence of Populist anti-Semitism was infinitesimal."\(^11\) This view was supported by Walter T. K. Nugent

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in his book, *The Tolerant Populists*. Nugent concluded that the Populists in Kansas had better relations with non-Americans and Jews than the non-Populists.\(^2\) This completed the case against Hofstadter; he had misunderstood both the "hard" side and the "soft" side of Populism.

Although there has been a considerable amount of discussion of the Populists, little progress has been made toward resolving the conflicting interpretations. Many historians feel that there is little to gain in continuing the present debate. For instance, both Pollack and Oscar Handlin, a revisionist, call for research and writing in a new direction. But, at the same time, they refuse to concede a single point to the other side.\(^3\) It seems obvious that further research along the same lines will be of little help. Both sides have well documented their positions and more "facts" will probably not settle the debate. Therefore, I suggest that what is needed is an examination of the methods instead of the results. Hicks, Pollack, Hofstadter, and Nugent, in the works discussed above, all use a similar method of research. If this method can be used to get such widely divergent views,


then perhaps we need to reexamine this technique itself and to approach the subject in a new way. In order to develop a starting point for the development of a different technique, it might be wise to first study some of the problems created by the traditional manner of conducting research.

The traditional method of writing American history involves—among other things—two important assumptions: 1.) that it is possible to write a history of the American people; 2.) that the structure of the problem will be defined, without any conscious effort on the part of the historian, by the facts that are discovered through research. Both of these assumptions are handed down from previous American historians. The size of the early United States, coupled with the influence of the national government, led to the view that the American people had a unified history. The second assumption resulted from the fact that most early historians wrote narrative histories. The goal of this type of history was an interesting chronology of events presented in good literary form. 14

As the American society expanded and became more complex, these assumptions introduced several problems. It had clearly become impossible for one man to discuss with authority all of

American history. Therefore the subject had to be divided into parts. Because one was still writing American history, the division was usually not along geographical lines. Instead, American history was divided into subject divisions and time periods. Thus one might write a political history of the colonial period, or an economic history of the ante-bellum days. The problem with this approach was that once these lines were established, even if they had been established for the most trivial case, they were seldom reviewed. This was a result of the assumption that facts, by themselves, determined these lines. We find that the traditional periods in American history are bounded by great events, such as, wars, elections, and depressions, while the subject categories were the "natural" divisions in the activities of men, i.e., economic, political, and social.

These subject areas gave the historian a model of the world in which various activities could be removed and studied with little regard to their context. There may be subjects and periods in which this approach to historical study leads to valid conclusions.

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15 One exception to this is the treatment of the South in discussing events related to the Civil War.

However, it should be clear today that the traditional model of political history is inadequate to explain such a complex development as Populism. This is true whether one accepts the revisionist position or not. The questions the revisionists have raised are simply too complex and variegated for the older framework. Some historians have recognized this, some have not. Apparently, Norman Pollack still thought that he could discuss intellectual history without explicitly considering its relationship to political or economic events.\footnote{Pollack, \textit{The Populist Response}, p. 10.} Hofstadter, on the other hand, recognized the complexity of the situation; but even Hofstadter had no framework by which he could clearly relate the economic, social, and political aspects of the agrarian movement. Other historians have tried to outline new ways of examining the Populists. These new methods generally make use of sociological ideas which cut across the traditional, historical categories. Like any new development, many of these attempts have been unsophisticated. The writers tended to use sociological phrases but not to relate these to any overall analytical structure. Also there seemed to be a confusion between quantitative techniques and sociological analysis. The two are usually used together but they are not the same thing. Quantitative analysis
presents a method of handling data while sociological approaches are concerned with the synthesis of ideas from the data.

One of the better early attempts at exploring a new method was Stanley B. Parsons' article, "Who Were the Nebraska Populists?". Parsons examined seven Nebraska counties in detail to determine the differences between Populists and other Nebraskans. He also used a multiple correlation analysis of all Nebraska counties, several quotes from newspapers which he said were "representative" of certain opinions, and various other forms of qualitative information. While Parsons' study is certainly interesting, the author fell short I think of solving the methodological problem I am considering. He never really explained how his conclusions from the seven-county study related to his correlation analysis or to his newspaper quotes. Parsons was obviously trying to develop a more meaningful approach to the study of this question, but his study needed, I think, an explicit model which would have enabled him to analyze more precisely the relationship he was describing.¹⁸

A more recent application of this method is found in "Some Parameters of Populism" by Walter Nugent. Unlike his earlier

book, this article very carefully examined the relationship between rhetoric and the political, social, and economic events of the day. Nugent selected a group of office holders and candidates and determined how their rhetoric related to their position in society. From my point of view, this approach represented a significant step forward in the study of Populism. By asking specific and detailed questions and by carefully outlining the methods that he used in answering these questions, Nugent was, in effect, moving toward the development of an alternative model of American society.\footnote{Walter T. K. Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism," \textit{Agricultural History}, vol. 40, no. 4 (1966), pp. 255-270.}

While Nugent's article clarified certain aspects of the Populist leadership in Kansas, no one has yet applied these new concepts to the entire Kansas society. In dealing with this larger and more complex problem it is imperative that we use a model that explicitly relates the various areas of human activity. However we are still in need of such an all inclusive model. The lack of this model prevents a better understanding of the Populists. Therefore our task here is to suggest some of the outlines of a preliminary model and to examine it in light of the conditions in Kansas in the 1890's.
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

I. Some considerations on a model of social action.

In the review of historical works on the Populists, we have seen that one obstacle to a better understanding of the period of agrarian unrest was the lack of an adequate social model. The traditional model which focuses on political, economic, and social events has not been able to explain the relationship between these activities. If we are to develop a new model, we must examine the total society in an effort to discern the underlying similarities in the traditional divisions of social action. Therefore the basic structure of the model must be based on general observations of man in society. Having established this structure, we can develop in more detail the aspects of the model that concern the relationship between economic and political events.

Probably the most general statement that can be made about societies is that they do exist, and in fact many of them exist over a long period of time. While the observation that societies exist appears to be trivial, the explanation of why they exist is certainly not. Many philosophers and social scientists have offered explanations of how the first men established social relations. But even if we bypass the question of the origin of societies, we are still faced with the problem of explaining how such a large and complex organism as a modern society remains stable enough to at least exist. Since our primary interest here is in establishing a model of social action, we will attempt to
answer these questions through sociological considerations. Nevertheless there are certain philosophical assumptions upon which the analysis is based and these offer a convenient starting point for discussion of the model.

The most important philosophical assumption that will be used in developing a model is that the individual is the center of all action in society. This rules out such concepts as "group action" or "general will." In the present discussion all social events can be understood by taking the sum of the actions of the individuals involved.\footnote{Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shills, "Values, Motives, and Systems of Action," Toward a General Theory of Action (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), p. 235.} Furthermore man is a free agent in that his actions are not predetermined. Of course his actions are shaped by the context in which they occur, but he is still free to chose between alternative patterns of action within his social environment.

Although I have assumed that man is the center of society and that he has freedom of action, there is one aspect of his life in which he has no choice: survival. One may choose to die, but by such a choice he removes himself from society and from our consideration. Therefore we can assume that all of the people involved in a society are faced with the problem of survival. An individual has certain biological needs which he must satisfy in order to survive. Some of these
needs can be satisfied best by other people. Therefore man establishes social contacts in order to satisfy his biological needs. Moreover, the complex social relations that are characteristic of modern society are in the final analysis an extension of the process by which man satisfies his biological needs. This does not mean that all human behavior can be understood by biological considerations. Men have other needs, and, besides, we are more concerned with the process through which man establishes the necessary relationships to satisfy his needs than with the needs themselves.²¹

By considering an example, we can see how complex social relations develop. The simplest situation that involves social contact contains two people. Each has certain needs and each has the ability to fulfill some of the needs of the other. For this reason they are drawn together, and each establishes a behavior pattern that recognizes the special relationship between them. An example of a simple social system is that of a mother and her baby. The baby needs someone to feed and care for it; the mother does this in return for the satisfaction, among other things, of the baby's love. Each member of this system comes to expect certain behavior from the other in return for certain

²¹Parsons, *General Theory*, pp. 112-113; Parsons distinguishes between "drive" and "motivation." Drive refers to animal instincts while motivation refers to more sophisticated desires in which the individual considers the long-run effect of his actions. We will be interested in the second type of need satisfaction.
behavior on his own part.\textsuperscript{22}

In this model the impetus to social association and action comes from the needs of the individual. These needs may be biological necessities or they may be complex desires that arise from living in a modern society.\textsuperscript{23} Whatever their origin, these needs result in the establishment of interpersonal relations. These ideas supply a beginning for understanding the origin of societies, but that is not really our focal point here; we are more interested in the question of the permanence of these societies. If there is to be a degree of stability in society there must be some mechanism that regulates as well as encourages the action of individuals.

The necessity for a regulatory mechanism in society arises from the fact that several individuals may have conflicting desires and they may be willing to sacrifice the entire society in order to achieve their ends. In an established society regulation of the individual is accomplished, in large part, by the enforcement of institutionalized behavior patterns. If an individual follows these established patterns he will have the satisfaction of knowing that he is proceeding toward the fulfillment of his goals. On the other hand, if he does not conform


\textsuperscript{23}Parsons, General Theory, pp. 110-123.
to them, in most cases, his needs will not be satisfied. By enforcing
this conformity society achieves a sense of continuity as well as a
degree of predictability. Taken together these lead to a relatively
stable society.²⁴

It should be realized that a society whose stability is based on
this type of conformity may become unstable when the institutionalized
behavior patterns fail to satisfy the needs of the individual. If
this situation occurs, the individual will probably establish new
patterns that may or may not fundamentally change the structure of the
society.

At this point in the development of the model the idea of a
social system should be clarified. By social system I mean any group
of people in which there is an interdependence among the members.²⁵
This is still a rather broad definition, and therefore we will limit
our considerations to the larger social systems such as the economy
or the body politic. In fact the model as developed thus far has
already been applied to some of these larger social systems. Any
one familiar with traditional economic theory can see that this model is
a generalization of the economic model that describes the market mechanism

²⁴Parsons, General Theory, pp. 190-192.

²⁵William C. Mitchell, Sociological Analysis and Politics, The
Theories of Talcott Parsons (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967),
pp. 50-51.
and the division of labor. However in the development of the model we did not rely specifically on the economy or any other system and therefore our conclusions can be applied to social systems in general. Because of this generality we can use this form of model to establish the relationship between these various systems.

The key to understanding the relationship between the social systems that comprise a society is the proposition that the individual is the center of all social events. We can only understand social events by understanding the actions of the individuals involved. So far our model has only given us a way to examine the individual's action when he is involved in only one social system; however, this simple situation is usually complicated by the fact that the individual is normally involved in more than one such system. Complexity arises because the individual's action in one system is also an action in all the other systems in which he is involved. In planning a course of action the individual must take into account its ramification for all the systems in which he participates, not just in a particular one. Therefore in this model the various systems are linked through their common members.

The model that has been developed is certainly not a complete

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description of social action, however it does enable us to include
in this study the particular aspects of society in which we are
interested. Therefore we need not continue our general discussion.
But before examining more specific questions, let us summarize our
development thus far: We have seen that social systems are composed
of groups of people who mutually satisfy each others needs. In
each system the individual acts out certain behavior patterns for
which sanctions are imposed by the others in the social system.
Each system is complicated by the fact that most of its members are
also active in other social systems. Since action in any one social
system usually has ramifications in the other social systems, a
specific action cannot be understood without examining it in light
of its effect on all systems.\textsuperscript{27}

One of the more specific aspects of the social activities in which
we are interested is how changes in one system affect the other systems
in a society. As we have seen the individual establishes a certain
behavior pattern in order to proceed toward the achievement of his
goals. Now suppose that there was a change in the conditions of one
of the systems such that this behavior pattern no longer brought
satisfactory results. The individual would be faced with the possi-
bility of either changing his criteria for satisfaction or changing his
behavior. These two procedures are not mutually exclusive and normally

\textsuperscript{27}Parsons, \textit{General Theory}, p. 195.
we would expect there to be a mixture of the two in the readjustment.

The method chosen by the individual to cope with the social changes is determined by the effect that a change in action would have on the other systems. If a change in action would bring about unacceptable changes in the returns from the other systems, he may be forced to readjust his goals rather than his actions. Thus an individual has to consider his position in relation to the overall society and cannot merely react to the change itself. This procedure implies that the individual has some way in which to evaluate the "acceptability" of the changes in the different systems, since these changes may not be intrinsically comparable. This method is supplied by the cultural system.

The cultural system deserves closer examination due to the special role it plays in relating the various values in each social system. One important characteristic of a cultural system is that there is no exchange between the members as in a social system. Instead, the membership of a cultural system is composed of individuals who share similar value orientations. In general these value orientations are adopted by the individual during childhood. The adoption of the cultural system is facilitated by such institutions as schools, clubs, etc. Because of the formal and informal pressure on an individual to adopt a certain cultural system, he usually internalizes it to the point that he is unable to understand alternative systems. But whether
or not the individual's values are internalized to that degree, the cultural system helps him to resolve complex problems that involve the evaluation of the effect of a change in his behavior on each system in which he is a part. 

Because the cultural system is so important in understanding the relationship between the various systems, it will play an important part in our discussion of the Populists. However we must first determine the social structure of Kansas in the 1890's. We must know more about the nature of the economy and the political system at that time and about what changes were taking place in these systems. After defining the structure of Kansas society, we can examine some other explanations of the rise of the Populists as well as the one developed in this model.

II. Quantitative Techniques

The social model that has been developed leaves us with several questions to be answered but it does not specify how we are to answer them. In other words, we must decide whether to employ qualitative or quantitative techniques in describing the political, economic, and cultural systems of the state. Qualitative techniques would involve describing the situation on the basis of the views and comments presented by contemporaries through letters, newspaper articles and other public documents. While for certain types

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28Parsons, General Theory, p. 16.
of history these techniques may be adequate, for our purposes they are not. We would like to define to some degree of accuracy the economic system and political system of an entire state over a ten-year period; few if any contemporaries would be in a position to make accurate comments on such a large and complex problem. Therefore one reason to employ quantitative techniques is to give a more complete picture than can be gained from contemporary accounts. Also, we are looking at social conditions over several years instead of at one particular point of time and quantitative data will make comparisons from year to year easier. In comparing changes in different variables, quantitative data can be analyzed in more meaningful ways. Although I feel that in our application quantitative analysis offers the most fruitful means, it is not a panacea. The historian is still faced with the problem of verifying the accuracy of his data and of selecting the significant variables to study. Nevertheless, in the case of this project, quantification is preferable to the qualitative approach.

The specific techniques used here do not represent a radical departure from those traditionally used by the historian interested in quantitative data. An attempt was made to find the variables, such as percentages and averages, that best reflected the nature of a particular aspect of the society under question. The reasons for selecting certain quantities will be discussed in the following chapters, but there were a few guidelines that I followed throughout
the analysis. I always tried to answer a question using two different approaches. If both methods produced similar results, I used the one that was easiest to handle. Because of the use of a digital computer, I was able to examine several different indexes for political strength, crop importance, ethnic background, and other potentially important factors.

Another guideline that I used in the analysis was to avoid basing a conclusion on a very small difference between counties. For instance, I did not explain a variance in political behavior between two counties on the basis of a very small economic difference. There were two reasons for this. First, although every effort was made to verify the raw data, in reality it is probably not accurate enough to withstand a very close investigation. Secondly, I felt that the interpretations presented could be adequately supported without making such fine distinctions. In places where the data was inadequate to draw firm conclusions, this was indicated and suggestions were made as to what data would be needed to verify the point.

Even with these restraints on the data I felt that a much better understanding of the nature of Populism could be gained through this analysis. There was one problem with using this type of data, however that should be mentioned. The problem related to the fact that our model focused on the individual while the data was based on the county. Thus if half the people in a
county are wealthy and half are Republican we really have no way of knowing that the wealthy people are all Republicans. Some historians have attempted to solve this problem using sophisticated mathematical techniques, but these have not been employed here. One reason for not using these techniques was that they required extremely accurate data. Also the nature of the systems being studied did not require it. Because of the geographical specialization of the Kansas economy, the analysis could reasonably assume that the people within the various regions were dependent on the same crop. The homogeneity of these crop regions make the problem of using ecological data less acute. While the exact mathematical basis may not be as sound, the conclusions are, I think, still valid.  

I have tried to outline here some of the advantages in using quantitative data as well as some of the problems encountered. Above all it must be remembered that quantitative analysis is just a tool like any other research technique. It cannot ask questions or synthesize ideas. These functions are performed by the historian's view of society. By explicitly developing a

^Unpublished lecture notes given to the participants in a seminar on historical analysis of quantitative data. This seminar was given by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research in the summer of 1965. The notes for the eleventh day deal with the special problems presented by ecological data.

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social model I have tried to present systematically my own views.
Quantitative data will be used to examine the validity of these ideas.
CHAPTER THREE

The Kansas Political System

The primary goal of this paper is to examine the relationship between the rise of Populism and the changing economic conditions in Kansas at that time. One of our most important tasks, then, is to determine just what strength the Populists did have in Kansas and how their strength varied over the period in question. Since election results were recorded on the precinct level, it would be possible to map the Populist strength using these precinct voting returns. However, the economic and social data that will be introduced later is based on the county divisions, and therefore no accuracy would be gained in our analysis by using the precincts as the basic political unit instead of the counties. In fact, we would still have to group the precinct voting results to compare them to the economic and social data. Therefore the voting analysis is conducted on the county level.\(^{30}\)

Having settled on the county as the basic political sub-division
for our discussion, we are faced with the problem of deciding which counties were Populist and which were not. If we were only considering one year and one election, there would be no problem in classifying a county as Populist or non-Populist; however, this is not the case here. We are examining voting patterns for several different elective offices over a ten-year period of time. In order to handle this large body of data in a meaningful way, we must establish some criteria for the political classification of each county.

The first step in the simplification of the election data is to reduce the number of elective offices that we are studying. In doing this three considerations should be made: 1) The election that is chosen should reflect the voting attitude of the populace and not be a special case that diverges radically from the results in the races for other offices; 2) The elections used must allow us to compare the results from counties in all sections of the state; 3) The election should occur every two years since our economic data is based on a biennial report. The last consideration excludes the use of the Presidential elections since they occur every four years. The second consideration rules out use of the races for the lower state offices and for the United States representatives. In these elections candidates from several parties as well as independents were listed on the ballot, and in some cases two or more candidates from the same party opposed each other. Usually these diverse
elements did not carry over from one county to another and therefore it would be difficult if not impossible to compare the political atmosphere of two counties on the basis of the election returns for these offices. One election that does satisfy our conditions is that of governor. These elections were held every two years and both the Republican and Populist parties ran state-wide candidates. Also, the returns from these elections closely parallel the results in the elections for other offices and therefore they represent a fairly accurate picture of the political mood of the voters. We will concentrate our attention on the gubernatorial races in the rest of the paper.

Even though we have reduced the number of elections to only those for one office, we still have the problem of deciding the primary political party of each county. Since few counties voted for the same party's gubernatorial candidate in every election from 1890-1900, we have to establish some index of their Populist strength. In order to guard against a methodological bias, I used two approaches to arrive at a classification of a county's political views. The first classification was based on the percentage of the vote received by the Populist candidate for governor over the entire ten-year period. The values that were obtained appear in the map in Figure 1. This method

31 The Consortium data listed seventeen different parties plus all the independents.
Figure 1: Average percentage of Populist vote for Governor, 1890-1900.
had one drawback: In a state where there might be several candidates in one race, it is difficult to impute a meaning to a certain percentage. In a two candidate race, fifty percent marks the dividing line between victory and defeat, but this is not true in a multi-candidate election. Because of this ambiguity, another method was employed. This second method consisted in counting the elections in which the Populist candidate received a plurality of the votes. From this count we have an index of a county's Populism that runs from zero to six. Six would be a very Populist county while zero would be a non-Populist county. For the purpose of obtaining a more graphic view of the Populist area, I have shaded the counties in Figure 2 in which the Populists received the plurality in three or more elections. While Figure 1 and 2 are both valid descriptions of the voting patterns, Figure 2 will be much easier to work with in our discussion.

A more detailed analysis of the data presented in Figure 2 will be made in later sections of this paper, however, there are several important aspects that should be pointed out at this time. Probably the most important point is that the Populists had a statewide appeal. In only twenty-six counties, or one-fourth of the state, did the Populists fail to carry their gubernatorial nominee at least once in this period. The Republican strongholds were concentrated in two regions, the extreme northeast corner and the southwest corner of the state. With a few exceptions the rest of the state was strongly
Figure 2: Number of years Populist candidate for Governor received the plurality.
contested by the Populists.

Five counties that are of special note are Scott and Stevens in the West, Russell in the central area, and Crawford and Cherokee in the East. Scott and Stevens were Populist islands in the middle of a Republican area; Russell on the contrary never voted for the Populist candidate for governor although the counties around it were strongly Populist. The counties bordering Crawford and Cherokee usually supported the Republican candidate; however, Crawford and Cherokee themselves went down the line for the Populists. An attempt will be made to explain these anomalies in a later section in which I examine the general political pattern of the state.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Kansas Economic System

The Kansas economy was dominated by its agricultural sector during the 1890's. Ninety-two of the one hundred and four counties had over fifty percent of their workers engaged in agriculture, according to the State Census of 1895. The remainder of the economy was largely based on activities that supported farming, such as transportation and professional services. We would have an incomplete picture of the state, however, if we neglected the non-agricultural economic activities entirely. Therefore we will look first at the mining, manufacturing and service elements of the economy before turning our attention to the more important functions of farming.

I. Non-Agricultural Economic Activities

A. Mining

Although Kansas contained significant quantities of salt, gypsum, cement, and clay, coal was the only mineral being mined in appreciable quantities in the 1890's. The coal that underlay much of eastern Kansas was mined for local use in several counties. The only two areas that were of significant commercial value however were the Osage field and the Cherokee-Crawford field. The

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mining activity in Cherokee and Crawford counties accounted for about ninety percent of the coal produced in Kansas, with most of the remaining coal production coming from Osage County.33

In general mining was not very important in the Kansas economy during the 1890's. Only slightly more than two percent of the workers were employed in mining activity throughout the state and most of these were located in the coal mining counties.34

B. Trade, Transportation, Professional Services.

Any agricultural economy must have some method to send its goods to market, and in Kansas this need was satisfied by the railroads. The towns that existed at junctions of two railroad lines or at important locations along the lines in the west accounted for most of those workers engaged in trade, transportation, and professional services in Kansas. Of course every county had a few people engaged in this type of work, but only those with railroad centers had significant members. Wyandotte County, Shawnee County, and Sedgewick County were, in fact, the only counties to rely heavily on these pursuits for income. In the west, Ford County, home of the legendary Dodge City, was the largest center of commercial activity. On a state-wide basis, however, these activities took a distant

33Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Underground Resources of Kansas (Topeka, Kansas, 1927), pp. 45-51.

34Kansas Census of 1895, pp. 545-550.
second place to agriculture. Furthermore in most counties the success of these undertakings was very closely tied to the success of the agricultural sector.\(^35\)

C. Manufacturing and Industry.

The description of industrial activities in Kansas is an important part of this paper since at least one prominent historian has speculated that Populism was a response to industrialism.\(^36\) We cannot answer this question for the rest of the United States, but in Kansas if Populism was a response to industrialism then it must have been to industries outside of the state; for in Kansas only nine counties had any significant number of workers engaged in industrial occupations. Only the counties that contained the three largest towns had over twenty percent of their workers in manufacturing. Wyandotte County had twenty-five percent, for the state high.\(^37\)

The industry that did exist in Kansas at this time relied heavily on agriculture for its livelihood. Far and away the leading industry was slaughtering and meat packing, followed by flour milling. Thus the two major industries in the state were directly dependent on the

\(^{35}\)For maps showing the railroad development in Kansas see Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas in Maps* (Topeka, Kansas, 1961), pp. 92-93; for percentages of people engaged in those industries see *Kansas Census of 1895*, pp. 545-550.

\(^{36}\)Pollack, *Response to Industrialism*.

\(^{37}\)Kansas Census of 1895, pp. 545-550.
two major agricultural products of the state. Third place in terms of capital investment was a virtual tie between foundries, machine shops, and newspapers.38

The remainder of the industries in Kansas were engaged in supplying the needs of an agricultural economy. Carpentering, blacksmithing, wheelwrighting, and other such crafts accounted for the overwhelming majority of the industrial activity. The producers were spread out over the state in small establishments close to the consumer.39

The non-agricultural sector of the Kansas economy played a distinctly secondary role during the closing decade of the nineteenth century. Those people that did not engage directly in agriculture were for the most part either supplying the needs of the farmer or transporting and processing his product for use by the rest of the world. It is to the agricultural sector that one must look in order to understand the Kansas economy in the 1890's.

II. Agricultural Economic Activities

Even in the counties in which agriculture did not engage the


39 Eleventh Census: 1890, part 3, pp. 742-745.
majority of the workers there was no dominant industry that replaced it. With the possible exception of the miners, everyone in Kansas was more or less dependent on agriculture for their living.

The Kansas economy was dominated by the agricultural sector, and farming was, in turn, dominated by two types of production: wheat farming and corn and hog production. In order to correlate these products to the political events of the day, we must know the areas in which they were grown. As in the case of the voting data, however, we have to develop some criteria by which to compare widely differing counties. We shall establish these criteria first and then apply them to the major crops.40

The problem of establishing the dominant crop in a particular county and relating one county's production to another's requires some consideration of the nature of agriculture. For one thing we cannot merely examine production in one particular year, especially in the period under question, since crops were liable to failure.

40 The agricultural data presented in this chapter were compiled from the following sources: Seventh Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture (hereafter this series is referred to as Biennial Report) (Topeka, Kansas, 1891), pp. 1-277; Eighth Biennial Report (Topeka, Kansas, 1893), pp. 1-284; Ninth Biennial Report (Topeka, Kansas, 1895), pp. 9-225; Tenth Biennial Report (Topeka, Kansas, 1897), pp. 565-846; Eleventh Biennial Report (Topeka, Kansas, 1899), pp. 555-833; Twelfth Biennial Report (Topeka, Kansas, 1901), pp. 671-948; Although no other comprehensive collection of data was available, these statistics were checked as closely as possible with the averages and totals presented in the Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1900 (Washington, D. C., 1901), pp. 756-772.
Figure 3: Percent of work force employed in agriculture, 1895-41.
and the results from one year might be misleading. A county that was dependent on wheat may have had a crop failure that year and therefore it might have ranked below a county that was not dependent on wheat but which had a good crop in that same year. For purposes of establishing a ranking of the counties in regard to their dependence on a particular crop, I computed the average production over the ten-year period, 1890-1900. It might be argued that a county could have had crop failure for ten consecutive years, however, when this occurred, the farmers usually turned to another crop or moved to a more suitable location on a permanent or semi-permanent basis.

Other problems that arise in trying to relate production of the various counties are the size of the county, the number of people and acres engaged in growing that particular crop, and the productivity of the land. A large county that had only a small portion of its resources employed in the production of wheat, might, in terms of the number of bushels produced, surpass a smaller county whose total effort was devoted to the production of wheat. What was needed here was a variable that took all of these aspects into account (automatically, if possible). I chose for this indicator of crop importance the percentage of the total value of agricultural production that was accounted for by a particular crop. This percentage takes into account all of the above factors, and it also offers a very convenient way to compare the importance of a crop
in the various counties. Using this variable we can map out the different crop areas in the state.

After determining the location of the wheat and corn areas in the above manner, we will want to know how the crops varied from year to year. We will use the crop value as the indicator. This variable is a function of both the total harvest and the market price of the product, the most important quantities to the farmer. A bad year could be compensated for by high prices or vice versa. This implies that the farmer was more affected by the money he received than by why he received it, which is a valid implication, I believe.

We are now in a position to examine the crops using the two variables developed above.

A. Wheat

Central Kansas was the heart of wheat farming in the state. In sixteen counties in this area, wheat production accounted for over forty percent of the total agricultural output. Surrounding this core were twenty-five counties that had wheat production totalling over twenty percent of their total agricultural output. Only three counties in the eastern part of the state ranked among the leading wheat producers. The map in Figure 4 shows those counties in which wheat was the major crop.

With the exception of the eastern wheat counties, it can
Figure 4: Wheat counties, 1890-1900.
be said that the wheat farmers suffered heavily during this decade. It is difficult to apply a simple numeric index to the decrease in crop value because of the number of people that were leaving the counties and because of the changing acreage planted in wheat. Therefore we will examine several representative counties to get a picture of what was happening to the wheat farmer.

Russell County was one of the more important of the wheat counties. Fifty-four percent of its agricultural production was accounted for by wheat during the ten-year period from 1890-1900. Since about seventy percent of its workers were engaged in agricultural pursuits, one can see the importance of the wheat crop to the people of this county. Table I shows the acreage and the production of wheat for Russell County during this decade. The 1894 production of only two bushels per acre was disastrous; the value of the crop dropped to less than twenty-five percent of the 1892 crop.

**TABLE 1.** Wheat Production in Russell County, Kansas, 1890-1900.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Bushels</th>
<th>Bushels/Acre</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>40,712</td>
<td>337,095</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>269,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>77,696</td>
<td>1,631,616</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>115,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>108,600</td>
<td>179,190</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>77,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>94,477</td>
<td>661,339</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>297,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>117,397</td>
<td>1,878,352</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>939,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>129,836</td>
<td>1,168,524</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1,361,098</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the farmers in Russell County were having bad times, they were not the worst case, for in Edwards County, the 1894 bushel/acre ratio dropped to below one. From Table 2 we can see that this compares with a ratio of over fifteen bushels per acre in 1890 and 1892. Coupled with low prices, this drop in productivity brought the value of the crop to less than one percent of the 1892 crop. This meant total failure for the wheat farmers there.

**TABLE 2.** Wheat Production in Edwards County, Kansas, 1890-1900.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Bushels</th>
<th>Bushels/Acre</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>9,291</td>
<td>167,694</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>145,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>29,923</td>
<td>478,768</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>248,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>45,415</td>
<td>4,430</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>1,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>40,024</td>
<td>120,072</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>55,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>47,916</td>
<td>431,244</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>219,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>47,644</td>
<td>258,864</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>369,092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary reason for this crop failure was repeated years of drought in the western part of the state. Donnifhan County, one of the few eastern wheat counties, held production steady during these years largely because it escaped the drought that plagued the west.⁴² In general, however, we can say that the wheat counties were experiencing severe economic difficulty which reached the

⁴²For a discussion of the weather conditions during this period see *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1900*, pp. 325-336.
crisis level in the mid part of the decade.

B. Corn and Hogs

The corn and hog section of the state laid to the east and north of the wheat area. As Figure 5 shows these counties made up most of the remainder of the state. As in the case of wheat, the western corn counties suffered more heavily from drought than did the eastern ones. However, no corn county suffered as badly as the wheat counties. Phillips County, one of the more western corn counties, dropped from a bushel-per-acre-ratio of over twenty to about three. It should be pointed out however that they were able to lessen the impact of this loss by increasing the number of animals sold for slaughter and thus stabilizing, to some extent, the total value of their agricultural products.

On the other hand, Linn County, which was located in the eastern part of the state, never dropped below twenty bushels per acre production. In this county we can see how lower prices affected the farmer. In the wheat areas the crop failures were so overwhelming that price changes in either direction were of little consequence, but this was not the case in corn areas where production remained stable or only dropped slightly. Table 3 shows that although the bushel output in 1896 in Linn County surpassed that of 1894, the value of the crop was cut in half. The effect of these low prices, however, was cushioned by storage. This
Figure 5: Corn/hog counties, 1890-1900.
is reflected in the fact that the corn on hand as of March 1, 1897 was almost four times as much as that of two years earlier.

**TABLE 3.** Corn Production in Linn County, Kansas, 1890-1896.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Bushels</th>
<th>Bu/acre</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Storage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>74,840</td>
<td>993,872</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>417,426</td>
<td>641,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>82,751</td>
<td>1,903,273</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>570,981</td>
<td>139,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>80,763</td>
<td>1,696,023</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>610,568</td>
<td>243,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>104,402</td>
<td>1,879,236</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>319,470</td>
<td>932,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>96,666</td>
<td>2,513,316</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>603,195</td>
<td>325,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>104,931</td>
<td>2,728,206</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>891,179</td>
<td>465,469</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As these examples illustrate, the corn and hog counties did suffer setbacks during this decade, although they were not nearly as severe as those of the wheat counties. The corn farmers were able to protect themselves by holding crops in storage and by selling animals.

One of the purposes in examining the economic data on a county basis was to obtain a more accurate picture of the state's economy. Any generalization made now would tend to defeat this purpose. There are a few points, however, that I would like to emphasize here before moving on to examine the relationship between the political and economic systems. Firstly, Kansas was overwhelmingly an agricultural state. A vast majority of the people were directly engaged in farming and most of the others relied on it in a secondary
manner through transportation or processing industries. Another important point is the division of the state into wheat counties and corn-hog counties. Because of climatic and soil conditions we were able to lay out two distinct areas in which each of these crops was predominant. This division should greatly simplify our subsequent discussion of the economy.

Finally, we have seen that the majority of Kansas was in the grips of a depression resulting from the fall in farm prices as well as repeated crop failures. The exact nature and extent of the depression varied from county to county, but within a crop area the effect was about the same. This similarity of economic conditions in adjoining counties could have important ramifications in our discussion of the political events. While these points will aid our understanding of the problem, we will still want to refer to the maps and more specific data as we turn our attention to the relationship between the economic and political systems.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Relationship between the Economic Conditions and the Voting Pattern

Thus far we have presented some economic and political data without any attempt to link the two. The social model developed earlier in this paper suggested that the cultural system of an individual would "mediate" in the process by which he determines his response to a change in economic conditions. We will eventually want to discuss the cultural system of Kansas, but before doing so there are several other explanations of the Populist movement that have been suggested, and these ideas should be examined in light of the data that has been presented here. There are three interpretations which I feel are representative of the positions taken by historians in the discussion of the Populists: 1.) John D. Hicks' and Raymond Miller's view that Populism was simply a response to economic conditions; 2.) Richard Hofstadter's introduction of non-economic factors; 3.) Norman Pollack's view that Populism was primarily a response to industrialism. The purpose of examining these alternatives is not necessarily to refute them but to point up the places where they do and do not explain the data.

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44 Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, pp. 63-93.
45 Pollack, Response to Industrialism.
Hicks' and Miller's interpretation of Kansas Populism linked economic conditions and voting behavior in two ways. The primary linkage was through the credit structure which, according to their analysis, was the root of the economic hardships being experienced in Kansas. They also felt that Populism was connected to wheat farming. According to their analysis wheat farmers tended to be closer to financial failure and thus they would be more sensitive to economic set-backs. Most historians of Populism accept these two propositions. Other interpretations introduce some new aspects of Populism but they do not refute these basic conclusions. I feel that my data strictly limits the applicability for Kansas of Hicks' interpretation.

If the Populists were more heavily mortgaged than their Republican neighbors, we would expect them to be more sensitive to a decline in production since they would be the first ones who would fail to meet their financial obligations. In order to test this hypothesis I calculated for each county a coefficient of correlation between the value of the agricultural product and the percent of the vote received by the Populist gubernatorial candidate over the entire ten-year period. This correlation coefficient is a measure of how closely two variables change together in both direction and magnitude. For example, if the Populist strength increased as

the value of the agricultural product increased, then we would have a positive correlation coefficient. In general a positive coefficient indicates a direct relationship while a negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship.\footnote{For a non-technical discussion of correlation analysis see Wayne McMillen, \textit{Statistical Methods for Social Workers} (Chicago, 1952), pp. 372-404.}

The results of this correlation analysis were not surprising. In all but a few counties the correlation coefficient was significantly negative. This meant that as the value of the farm product dropped the Populists gained votes. What was surprising was that the coefficients for the Populist counties did not differ significantly from those for the Republican counties. In other words, the Republican counties were as sensitive to economic changes as their Populist counterparts.

In order to understand the significance of these results for Miller's thesis, let us examine in more detail the mechanism that he suggested produced Populists. In any county we would expect there to have been certain people that were close to the point of failure. According to Miller there would be more of these marginal producers in Populist counties, and as conditions became worse, these people would fail, thereby becoming Populists.\footnote{Miller, "Populism in Kansas," p. 489.} However, our analysis does not support these conclusions. It
appears that a given reduction in the value of the farm products brought about the same voting shift in Populist counties as in Republican counties. Therefore we can conclude that the Populist counties were no more sensitive to economic changes than their Republican counterparts.

Since the correlation coefficient did show a significant relationship between the economic conditions and the change in the voting patterns over the entire state, we cannot rule out the importance of the depression especially for those counties in which the elections were very close. The overall pattern of voting cannot be explained, however, solely on the basis of these economic considerations. In most of these counties we are talking about a shift away from Republicanism of less than five percent. Even if this shift was entirely a result of the economic changes, we would still not be able to account for the total distribution of Populist strength.

Another aspect of Miller's analysis that we can examine here: is the idea that wheat farmers tended to be more radical than corn farmers. He based this conclusion on two assumptions: 1.) that Populism was strongest in the central third of the state; and 2.) that the central third of the state was predominantly a wheat area. Although these statements cannot be classified

as false, they do fail to account for several significant exceptions. In the first place, the northern tier of counties in the central part of the state were primarily corn and hog counties, but their votes usually went to the Populist candidates. Another exception to Miller's generalization is provided by the group of counties running from Butler to Osage. Although these counties were in the center of the corn and hog area, they went to the Populist gubernatorial candidate in three out of six elections. The exceptions presented here cast serious doubt on the proposition that corn and hog farmers were more likely to vote Republican just because of the type of crops they grew.

The data on the wheat counties do not really support Miller's thesis either. Russell, Ellsworth, and Rice counties were in the heart of the wheat area but they were definitely not Populist. In fact Russell never gave a plurality to the Populist candidate for governor. The wheat counties were all suffering from disastrous crop failures during this period. Since the same economic pressures were operative in the Populist and Republican wheat counties, we cannot interpret the voting behavior simply on the basis of the general economic conditions that they were experiencing.

Miller's interpretation runs into serious trouble when applied to the western counties. His claim was that so many people were leaving the area that the only ones remaining were the cattle
ranchers who had been there prior to the boom of the 1880's.\textsuperscript{50}

It is true that people were leaving this region in very large numbers. The average population decrease from 1890-1900 was about one third. My data indicate, however, that this area was not that dependent on ranching. In fact some of the counties in the west accounted for a significant portion of their agricultural product through wheat farming. Greely County is a good example of a western county that remained Republican throughout this period even though it was placed among the wheat counties in our economic analysis. Greely suffered several years of crop failure, yet the area planted in wheat remained fairly constant during this decade. Greely definitely did not fit into the pattern that Miller postulated.

The voting data for the western area also throws doubt on the idea that it was the radicals who were leaving. If this had been the case we would expect the Republican majority to increase as the counties lost residents. On the contrary, later elections often showed a gain in Populist strength in these counties. This seems to indicate that both Populists and Republicans were affected by the depression and that they were both leaving the area to find more productive homes.

\textsuperscript{50}Miller, "Populism in Kansas," pp. 487-488.
I feel that the data presented here seriously question the validity of Miller's generalizations. While the interpretation which he bases on these generalizations cannot be entirely rejected, we can conclude that he does not give us a clear picture of what was happening in Kansas.

A refinement of Hicks' and Miller's economic interpretation was given by Richard Hofstadter when he introduced a non-economic side of Populism. His analysis attempted to take into account the farmer's belief in the myth of the superiority of the agrarian way of life. According to Hofstadter the Populists were concerned with the decline of the farmer's place in American society. The Populists tended to consider this decline a result of a conspiracy rather than just a natural phenomenon. Although these non-economic factors may have been important to the Populists, it is doubtful that they were any less important to the Republicans. In fact, counties that had similar agricultural structures often voted for opposing candidates in the elections for governor. Although this data do not refute the importance of the agrarian myth to the Populists, it is difficult to understand why farmers who were similar in most other respects would disagree on the role of farming in the American way of life.

51 Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 70.
Hofstadter's statement that the Populists were members of a declining group in a declining region is supported by my data.\textsuperscript{52} The Kansas population did decrease during the 1890's. The Republicans were, however, also a part of this declining area. A comparison of Figure 6 with a map of Populist strength (Figure 2) will show that the population decrease was no larger in the Populist counties than in the Republican counties. On the contrary, the western counties which lost more people than any other part of the state, were in general Republican. My data suggest that if what Hofstadter said about the Populists was true, it should have applied to all Kansans, Populists and Republican, and therefore we cannot explain the differences in voting behavior on the basis of these particular non-economic factors.

The interpretations considered so far have been primarily focused on the individual voter. These historians have tried to determine the causes behind a man's decision to become Populist. Norman Pollack, on the other hand, was interested in the intellectual background of the movement. He wanted to determine what the Populists who made speeches and published newspapers thought about the problems of the farmers.\textsuperscript{53} Although our data are really not concerned with these aspects of Populism, we can make some state-

\textsuperscript{52}Hofstadter, \textit{The Age of Reform}, pp. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{53}Pollack, \textit{Response to Industrialism}, pp. 11-12.
Figure 6: Percent of population change, 1890-1900.
ments about the relationship of this rhetoric to actual conditions in Kansas. In the first place there was no substantial industry in Kansas at this time. What industry there was certainly did not present the "sweat-shop" conditions that eastern labor was fighting. Therefore if the Kansas Populist had an interest in improving the lot of the industrial worker, it must have been based on industrial practices outside of the state.

More relevant to the situation of the Kansas farmer was the politicians' attack on the railroads and crop storage systems. During the period of economic decline, any measures that would have reduced production costs would have been welcome to the farmer. But again, as in the case of Hofstadter, we would like to know why the rhetoric apparently appealed to the residents of some counties and not to the residents of other counties that were in similar economic difficulty. Pollack's analysis of Populism's intellectual aspects may have been accurate, but it is not clear that this rhetoric had a basis in the farmer's immediate economic situation.

Thus far I have examined the relevance of my data to some of the standard interpretations of Populism. Now I would like to see if the social model developed earlier is really a helpful description of Kansas society in the 1890's. According to that model, the cultural system was the primary linkage between actions
in different social systems. Therefore we must look more closely at the cultural system in Kansas at that time.

Any attempt to describe in detail the cultural system of a large group of people in the United States is complicated by several factors. Because of the influx of immigrants and the mobility of the population within the county there were of course a variety of cultural systems in one area. Unlike our analysis of farming where we were able to define distinct crop areas, no such cultural areas exist. There are a few counties in Kansas which display some unique characteristics but in general the cultural variations are not directly distinguishable on the county level. For this reason, we will need to develop some indirect way to examine the cultural system of Kansas. First, however, let us look at those counties in which we can discern a distinguishing cultural pattern.

As was the case with the political and economic systems, we must choose meaningful variables in order to discuss the cultural system. I felt that religion and place of birth were the two most important cultural variables with regard to the voting systems. The Civil War had been over for less than thirty years and the "bloody shirt" was still a salient factor in many political campaigns. Naturally we would expect Southerners to vote against the Republicans and Northerners to support the G.O.P.
Religion was chosen as the other cultural variable because of the political importance of prohibition at this time. The Republican Party, in general, favored prohibition. Therefore Catholics, who usually were against prohibition, voted for the anti-Republican party. What we will be looking for here is the Catholic-Protestant split rather than any division along denominational lines.

There were only a few counties in which the origin of the populace differed significantly from the norm. These were Crawford, Cherokee, and Labette in the southeast and Stevens County in the southwest. All four of these counties contained a larger percentage of people from the South than the neighboring counties. As we would expect, they all were strongly Populist even though the counties surrounding them were usually controlled by the Republicans. These four counties support my thesis that the place of birth was important as to how one voted. This analysis cannot be extended on the basis of this data since the rest of the Kansas counties were consistently composed of native Kansans and other Midwesterners.

One area in which the economic data conspicuously failed to explain the voting patterns was in the central wheat counties of Russell, Ellis, Ellsworth, and Barton. All of these counties were experiencing similar economic hardships but Ellis and Barton
supported the Populists while Russell and Ellsworth went Republican. This area did contain large German settlements but the concentration of Germans was about the same in each of the four counties. The primary difference between these counties was the religious affiliation of the Germans. Those in Ellis and Barton were predominantly Catholic while the Germans in Russell and Ellsworth were Mennonite and Lutheran. It appears that the Protestants were supporting Republicanism and the Catholics were supporting Populism. As indicated earlier this was probably because of the Republican support of prohibition.

The areas in which we could directly study the cultural system on the basis of county data have been limited. However we may be able to see the affect of the cultural system on voting behavior without explicitly describing it. For one thing the small variance from year to year in the percentage of votes received by the Republicans in each county during this period make it likely that the party divisions may have been more closely tied to the long run political structure than to a short run fluctuation in economic conditions. Any discussion of the Kansas political structure at this time is complicated by the fact that the western third of the state was not organized into political units until after 1886. In the eastern two thirds of the state, however, a definite pattern emerges. Those counties in which
Republicans had an overwhelming majority stayed Republican through the 1890's. On the other hand those counties in which the Republican majority was less dominant and those few Democratic counties were more likely to shift into the Populist camp. What I am suggesting here is that prior to the depression there was an established political system in Kansas. When hard times came, two political shifts occurred. The primary shift was from the Democratic to the Populist Party. A smaller change of allegiance occurred among the traditional Republican supporters. Thus the normal political structure of Kansas was preserved with the only major changes coming in the form of a leadership change in one faction.

These conclusions tend to support the concept of a cultural system as described in the model. We would expect a change in the economic conditions to bring about some change in the voting pattern but because of commitments in other social systems, the changes in the voting behavior would not be as great as they might if behavior was only governed by economic considerations. In fact I must conclude that in Kansas the established behavior patterns remained dominant throughout this period.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Historians using the traditional approach to studying Populism have failed to reach a consensus on the nature of the movement. This failure resulted primarily from an inadequate view of the social structure of the period. Both the "liberal" and "revisionist" views of the Populists are based on essentially the same misconceptions. They both assume that Populism was in fact a radical departure from the status quo and that this departure can be understood almost entirely in economic or quasi-economic terms. These misconceptions arise out of a general belief in a social model that concentrated on leaders and institutions. Because of the interest in these public figures most historians relied on public documents for data. It is certainly true that the rhetoric of Populism can be used to support the earlier interpretations.

However, I have attempted to show here that these interpretations cannot always be extended to the general voter. For one thing the rise of Populism did not mark the beginning of a revolution. The Populist strength came almost entirely from voters who had previously been Democrats. Less than five percent of the voters actually left the Republican Party during these years. A five percent shift is significant but not by any means revolutionary. In general the voters continued to vote in the established patterns, only the anti-Republican vote was now going
to the Populist Party.

The importance of the economic conditions was also overemphasized by earlier historians. The falling farm prices and crop failures did, in fact, lead to the discontent represented by the Populists. However, these economic events cannot be used to explain entirely the distribution of the Populist strength in Kansas. In counties that were experiencing essentially the same economic hardships, the voters often supported opposite parties. Thus while the economic problems may have initiated the Populist rise in some counties it did not in others. This leads us to the conclusion that there must have been other factors that entered into political decisions of the individual.

The social model that was developed suggests that in fact many other factors probably entered into these decisions. A political party represents not only an economic viewpoint but also religious, moral, and social standards. Thus prohibition and "the bloody shirt" were issues that to some voters overrode any economic considerations. In general the same reasons for voting Democrat or Republican still faced the voter at this time. For this reason we find the Populists were strongest in the areas where the Democrats had been most successful. Populist rhetoric may have concentrated on economic conditions, but there were obviously other factors involved in the decision of the voter.
At this point one might well ask if the Populists were of any importance at all. We have seen that in Kansas they achieved no permanent shift in party allegiance and left the scene about as it had been. However we cannot assume that the Democratic Party was unchanged. While it still drew support from the same people, it is certainly possible that it underwent some metamorphosis. This is a problem for the institutional historians. So far they have concentrated on the difference between Populist and Republican leaders and policy. If we are to find any lasting effects of the Populist movement in Kansas we must examine the contrast between the Democratic Party before 1890 and after 1900. If there were changes, did they result from the pressure applied by the Populists? Only after these questions are answered, will we have a complete picture of Populism. Whatever the outcome of this further study, we can now say that the relationship between economic and political behavior was much more complex in the case of the Populists than earlier historians had concluded.
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