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Preface

I first came into extensive contact with Populist cartoons while researching my dissertation on the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory. Very few Populists left relevant materials to elite institutions like university archives; therefore, newspapers on microfilm and quantification proved to be the best primary resources for that, and almost any other, project on Populism. When it came time to select illustrations for my Oklahoma Populism manuscript for publication, I decided illustrations from Populist newspapers would be far more interesting and entertaining than the usual photographs of stodgy, bearded old politicians. The reviewers agreed. Unfortunately, only a few of the cartoons I had collected were presentable enough to be used in that book; computer technology has now advanced to the point where the scratch marks, grit, and distortions that inevitably mar microfilmed newspapers can be eliminated.

State press associations founded the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1893 and the Kansas Historical Society in 1875. Almost every newspaper published in those states afterward placed its historical society on their exchange lists, resulting in two of the most complete state newspaper collections in existence. Most of the cartoons in this book are from Kansas, Colorado, and Texas. The Kansas Historical Society also has the most complete edition of the Southern Mercury (Dallas), the most important Populist newspaper in Texas.

In 1997, Missouri State University’s chapter of Phi Alpha Theta national honor society asked me to speak at their annual initiation dinner. I decided the occasion warranted something both scholarly and entertaining, so I put together a presentation explaining American Populism through cartoons drawn from third-party newspapers. The response was so positive that I decided to pursue the project further. The encouragement of my friend and colleague William G. Piston was crucial at this point. My student Mathew F. Vaughn introduced me to a graphics program that could be used to clean up the illustrations. During the 2000/2001 academic year, I spent a sabbatical year creating a Populism website, which can be found at http://history.missouristate.edu/wrmiller/Populism/texts/populism.htm. While the extensive bibliography has been the most used portion of this website, I also included a forty-cartoon presentation on Populism.
Over the years I have gathered more than one thousand cartoons from Populist newspapers and employed Matt and several other students, most importantly Mariya C. Adams, to help clean them up. I am grateful for their efforts and also thank Dean Victor H. Matthews for providing an incentives grant to finance Mariya’s work. I likewise thank another friend and colleague, James N. Giglio, for his encouragement and advice; I adopted the format he used in his *Truman in Cartoon and Caricature*. I also wish to thank Missouri State University for granting me a sabbatical leave for the 2008/2009 academic year to work on this project. Three other friends—Gregg Cantrell of Texas Christian University, Virgil Dean, editor of *Kansas History*, and James M. Beeby of Southern Indiana University—provided encouragement and invaluable information on anti-Populist cartoons. I also wish to thank staff at the Kansas Historical Society for permission to reprint cartoons they scanned from *Puck* and *Judge*.

Some of the ideas and phrases in this book appeared in some of my earlier publications. I thank Susan-Mary Grant, editor of *American Nineteenth Century History*, for permission to reproduce portions of “Educating the Masses: Cartoons from the Populist Press of the 1890s,” which appeared in the summer 2003 issue, and Rowman & Littlefield Inc., for permission to reproduce portions of “Farmers and Third-Party Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” which appeared in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, edited by Charles W. Calhoun. Neither text is reproduced in its entirety, but in this book I have drawn liberally from both at various places.

This book aims to tell the story of the Populist Revolt through illustrations drawn from the Populist press of the 1890s. Because the object of cartoons is to evoke both an emotional and intellectual response, they frequently capture the spirit of their time better than written commentaries or historical essays, offering a window into the aspirations and concerns of both the illustrators and their readers. Thus, cartoons represent a valuable primary source from which we can gain insight into the world of the Populist Revolt a century ago. The cartoons presented in this book are from Populist newspapers of the 1890s, or in a few cases, from late 1880s newspapers committed to the proto-Populist Union Labor Party. Most were drawn originally for Populist publications; a few, however, first appeared in major daily newspapers and then were reprinted by Populist editors because they spoke to themes Populists could appreciate. Cross-pollination, of course, worked both ways. “The English Octopus: It Feeds on Nothing but Gold” (cartoon 4.26 in this book), for instance, appeared in the Populist-oriented *Republic County Freeman* on June 16, 1892. William H. “Coin” Harvey, a Democrat who was very popular among Populists, had the cartoon reprinted in his famous book, *Coin’s Financial School*, which appeared in 1894. I have also included a few anti-Populist cartoons to give the reader some idea of how Populists fared in the
mainstream press. Otherwise, all of the cartoons in this work came from newspapers committed to the People’s Party.

Many of the cartoons in this book are from syndication pages that would have appeared in a number of newspapers at approximately the same date. Also, some Populist newspapers that regularly carried cartoons, such as the American Nonconformist (Winfield, KS, and Indianapolis, IN), Representative (St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN), and Southern Mercury (Dallas, TX), had regional and even national circulations; thus, their influence far exceeded the geographic scope of the newspaper’s name. Although the cartoons in this book are mostly from Southwest, Plains, and Rocky Mountain states, they are broadly representative of Populist thinking as a whole. Examining the ideas emanating from Populist cartoons can provide insight into the course of the American republic in the late nineteenth century, in addition to illuminating some of the age-old concerns Americans have struggled with throughout our nation’s history. My hope is that the illustrations will catch the eye of scholars and non-scholars alike, and that each will find the book both educational and entertaining.
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