

**Third years**

**Module: (ETC)**

**Mr. Selmi**

### **Populism (5)**

Populism is the belief that the will of ordinary citizens should prevail over that of a privileged elite. In politics; it is an ideology which presents "the people" as a morally good force and contrasts them against "the elite", who are portrayed as corrupt and self-serving.

Populism came into use in the American politics in the late of 19<sup>th</sup> century after the emergence of the Populist (or People's) party<sup>1</sup>. The Populists called for a radical reordering of the American society. They demanded a new monetary policy to protect citizens from deflated<sup>2</sup> currency and called also for a state control of the railroads and shortened work days. Women played a large role in the Populist Party, doing everything from organizing meetings to speaking at rallies and writing articles about the party platform in newspapers.

The Populists focused on anti-corruption efforts and economic issues rather than racial issues, assuring white supporters that they were not calling for equality between blacks and whites. Some in the party were known to support Jim Crow laws and white supremacy.

In the elections of 1892, Populist candidate for president James B. Weaver, did not win the election, he received over one million votes.

#### **The Elections of 1896**

In 1896, the Populists joined forces with the Democrats and nominated William Jennings Bryan for president. His oratory gifts won him wider attention. In his stirring "Cross of Gold" speech, he called for a loose monetary policy to relieve farm debt through the issuing of silver and gold, rather than just gold coins. Despite his great efforts to defend the lower class, he lost that election. Populists had not gained urban worker support. The party began a rapid decline and was finished by 1908.

#### **From Bryan's "Cross of Gold" Speech (1896)**

*You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns,*

*You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.*

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<sup>1</sup> in U.S. history, politically oriented coalition of agrarian reformers in the Midwest and South that advocated a wide range of economic and political reforms in the late 19th century.

<sup>2</sup> Deflation is a reduction of the supply of money in an economy, and therefore a reduction of economic activity, that is often part of an intentional government plan to reduce prices. Compare *inflation*.

#### **Sources:**

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