

A sad story wherein is detailed the fashionable abortion of a radical hope for change

Intellectuals and Populism

Janet Welt Smith

There are now two stylish things to say about Populism. One is that the Populists were bad guys, the other that the Populists are again among us in such figures as John Lindsay and George McGovern, on the one hand, and George Wallace on the other. Unfortunately, the intellectuals talking about Populism know very little about it. Even Jack Newfield and Jeff Greenfield, in their well-intentioned but superficial little book, *A Populist Manifesto*, shudder at the nineteenth-century Populist reality which, they say, was "afflicted" with "paranoia and racism."

The Populists, it will be remembered, were members of the People's Party, which existed from 1889 through the election of 1896. That point is important, for the intellectuals' inability to deal with the Populists as a specific political party, active at a specific time, has badly skewed the establishment judgments of Populism.

The Populists' program was best summarized by Ignatius Donnelly, a leader in the People's Party: "We propose to wipe the Mason and Dixon line out of our geography; to wipe the color line out of politics; to give Americans prosperity, that the man who creates shall own what he creates; to take the robber class from the throat of industry; to take possession of the government of the United States and put our nominee in the White House."

This was also, in substance, the program of William Jennings Bryan, Populist in all but name. "We put him to school," said Donnelly of Bryan, "and he wound up stealing the schoolbooks." Donnelly even declared himself willing to accept the Democratic Party "gilded by the genius of Bryan." The People's Party came to the same decision in 1896 and endorsed

Bryan for President. So did Eugene Debs. So did Governor Altgeld of Illinois.

The presidential campaign of 1896 was one of the few—I think the one above all others—which determined how this country was going to develop. Those who feel the country is developing nicely may rejoice that McKinley, backed by the concentrated muscle of the great corporations, defeated Bryan. For big business, wholly terrified of Bryan, taxed itself for that campaign as for no other before or since. All banks were assessed one quarter of one per cent of their capital to beat Bryan. Working people found notes in their pay envelopes informing them that the plant would close—if Bryan won. Orders for goods were made subject to cancellation—if Bryan won. Owners of mortgaged property were informed that their mortgages would not be renewed—if Bryan won. The Bryan campaign, on the other hand, was financed by small change from working people in the depths of a terrible depression. Even so, Bryan lost by such a small margin that, according to Louis Koenig, the most recent and thorough of his biographers, but for the election frauds he would have won.

The reform programs of the Populists, of the organized farmers who preceded them, and of William Jennings Bryan form a consecutive and coherent whole. They included a graduated income tax, the direct election of senators (previously selected by state legislatures), the right of labor to organize, opposition to injunctions for the purpose of strike breaking, the establishment of a Department of Labor, the right of all citizens to vote regardless of "color, race, former social condition, sex or nationality," liberal immigration policies, the settlement of international disputes by arbitration, antitrust legislation, initiative, referendum and recall, government ownership or control of public utilities, the prohibition of child labor and government guarantee of bank deposits. They also advocated an immediate ex-

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pansion of the currency, either by paper money or by coining silver at the rate of sixteen-to-one with gold.

Intellectuals and anti-Populist historians have long argued that the final demand was crackpotism. Scholars of Populism and many economists, including the conservative Milton Friedman, have disagreed. Western farmers were in debt to Eastern big business and, thanks to deflation, had to pay their debts in dollars worth far more in buying power than the dollars they had borrowed. The Populists are often called "conspiratorial" thinkers because they maintained that Eastern capitalists cooperated for their own interests in keeping the money scarce. But that, in fact, is what was happening.

During the 1896 campaign there was nothing too scurrilous for the Eastern press to say about Bryan. According to the *New York Tribune* he was a "wretched, rattled boy . . . posing in vapid vanity and mouthing resounding rottenness. . . ." The Reverend Thomas Dixon called him, from the pulpit, a "mouthing, slobbering demagogue whose patriotism is all in his jawbone." (Dixon authored some of the most viciously racist books ever presented to the general public. One, *The Clansman*, was translated into film as *The Birth of a Nation*.) The editor of *Harper's Weekly* wrote that the election was a fight to the finish between "the dreams and fantasies of Karl Marx" and the "true Americanism" of the Republican Party.

But the spokesmen for big business ceased these alarming noises once the election was over and the country safely back in their hands. (A few years later J. P. Morgan was to observe, "America is good enough for me." Bryan's answer made even some Wall Street tycoons smile. "Whenever he doesn't like it," said Bryan, "he can give it back to us.") It was the intellectuals who then took up the theme that Bryan—together with the people he came from and the religion he believed—were horrendously and dangerously vulgar.

Their spokesman was H. L. Mencken—Mencken the sophisticate's golden boy, the warrior who gave vulgar Americans their lumps. Americans, according to Mencken, were "the most timorous, sniveling, poltroonish, ignominious mob of serfs and goose-steppers ever gathered under one flag in Christendom" (as quoted by Eric Goldman in *Rendezvous With History*). Mencken's heart was always half in Germany, the land of his forefathers. Carried away by that loyalty, and by his fanatical hatred of FDR, he was also to say that Hitler's New Deal worked better than Roosevelt's (see Stephen Longstreet's *We All Went to Paris*, 1972).

Having summarized what the Populists and Bryan stood for, it seems only fair to let Mencken declare his principles. In *The New Republic*, September 18, 1920:

I do not pretend to any pressing interest in the

welfare of any other man, whether material or spiritual; in particular, I do not pretend to any interest in the welfare of any man who belongs to a class that differs clearly from my own. . . . The class that I belong to is an interior subclass of the order of capitalism . . . if stocks and bonds become valueless tomorrow, I'd be forced to supplement my present agreeable work with a good deal of intensely disagreeable work. Hence I am in favor of laws protecting property and an admirer of the Constitution of the United States in its original form (without the Bill of Rights). If such laws can be enforced peacefully, i.e., by deluding and hornswoggling the classes whose interest they stand against, then I am in favor of so enforcing them; if not, then I am in favor of employing professional bullies, e.g., policemen, soldiers and Department of Justice thugs, to enforce them with a sword. . . .

But though I am thus in favor of property and would be quite content to see one mob of poor men (in uniform) set to gouging and ham-stringing another mob of poor men (in overalls) in order to protect it, it by no means follows that I am in favor of the wealthy bounders who run the United States or . . . their kept press.

The upper-class English reference to "bounders" exactly reflects Mencken's idealization of aristocracy, which was, he thought, the thing above all others sadly wanting in America. This attitude helps explain, I believe, his imperishable charm for intellectuals, whose traditions include an indestructible longing for an aristocracy and the equally hardy hope that they might belong to it.

Bryan, on the other hand, was fond of expressing, in political success or failure, his two religions—the secular and the other—with the words "The people gave, and the people hath taken away; blessed be the name of the people." But Bryan's most un-Mencken-like remark—which is to say his most profound, for Mencken, it must be admitted, was a very shallow man—was, "Every great political question has an economic bearing, and every economic question is at foundation a moral question." Bryan's words were relentlessly simple—plain to the point of drabness by today's standards of fashion—expressing nineteenth-century principles long since dismissed as dull. "Those who stand on the Chicago platform," Bryan said in 1896, "do not excuse petit larceny, but they declare that grand larceny is equally a crime; they do not defend . . . the highwayman . . . but they include among the transgressors those who, through the more polite and less hazardous means of legislation, appropriate to their own use the proceeds of the toil of others."

Mencken and Bryan represent, as no other two figures in American history, the intellectuals and the lower classes. As far as I know, Bryan never men-

tioned Mencken, but Mencken could never be done with castigating Bryan. Mencken's epitaph for Bryan, one day dead:

He was . . . a charlatan, a mountebank, a zany without sense or dignity. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses. It was hard to believe, watching him . . . that he had travelled, that he had been received in civilized societies, that he had been a high officer of state. He seemed only a poor clod like those around him, deluded by a childish theology, full of an almost pathological hatred of all learning, all human dignity, all beauty, all fine and noble things. He was a peasant come home to the barnyard. Imagine a gentleman, and you have imagined everything that he was not. What animated him from end to end of his grotesque career was simply ambition—the ambition of a common man to get his hand upon the collars of his superiors, or failing that, to get his thumb into their eyes. . . . His whole career was devoted to raising those half-wits against their betters. . . .

The most distinguished of the “first men of his time” with whom Bryan was friendly was Leo Tolstoy, another believing Christian in love with the common people; his weakness for the company of those “rustic ignoramuses,” the Russian peasantry, was notorious. Bryan traveled to Tolstoy's estate, spent long hours in happy conversation with him and kept up the friendship by correspondence. Tolstoy, he said, was “like an overflowing spring—asking nothing, but giving always.” The high office Bryan held was Secretary of State under Wilson, a post he resigned out of conscience when he decided that Wilson was leading America into war.

Other intellectuals go out of style, but never Mencken. Year after year intellectuals lament that we shall not look upon his like again. Even his contempt for the lower-class Protestant denominations has endured. On April 20, 1972, *The Village Voice*, published for the New York Upper-Class Left, referred casually to George Wallace and his “Baptist bombast.” Now let us imagine—well, let us at least try to imagine—the same publication referring to Catholic claptrap or rabbinical rubbish. The inevitable response from the forces of “enlightened tolerance” is not hard to predict. And yet since the day when Mencken packed his prose with such gems as the “Methodist-Baptist bloc of moron churches” (this in *The American Mercury* of November, 1924), intellectuals have placidly insulted the faith of lower-class Protestants, whom they have yet to conceive of as belonging to that canonized category, a “minority.” The intellectuals' attachment to what they call minorities (I myself have spent a lifetime thinking of blacks as the most oppressed part of the American

majority) is wholly consistent with their distaste, fear and contempt for the American majority.

Majority rule is distinctly in bad taste. According to the current Upper-Class Left, majority rule is what the young French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, said it was: a form of tyranny. The majority has been further decimated by the growing influence of bragging, self-conscious, aggressive, élite-sponsored “minorities.” The Upper-Class Left instructs its lessers to think of themselves in terms of skin color, religion, country of origin or ethnic grouping—indeed in any terms except their humanity, their nationality and their class. The Populists took the opposite tack. They thought of themselves as working people; although many were farmers, they thought of industrial workers as natural allies and thus supported labor, not only with very moving rhetoric but with contributions to strike funds (often they could contribute only food) as well as by initiating and supporting pro-labor legislation. The Populists also loved their country, not only because it was theirs—and the many immigrants among them felt that as strongly as the native born—but because it was the only country on earth where, at least by promise, the majority was to rule. This American promise is, of course, part of the reason for the American intellectual's special distaste for the United States.

Finally, the Populists were the most bookish and best-educated working people that this country—per-



haps any country—has produced. Decades before the Midwestern farmers became Populists, they had turned that whole area into a vast schoolhouse where prayers were read and points debated and everything from government ownership of transportation in Switzerland to the plight of the Irish tenant farmer was discussed. Above all, these raggedy farmers looked for, and found, the economic facts responsible for their own poverty and that of the industrial workers. Their reform proposals were always specific. Two of them have been imbedded in constitutional amendments providing for an income tax (which the Supreme Court had declared unconstitutional) and for the direct election of senators. Many others are so much a part of our heritage that we never think how they came about; yet others have yet to be enacted into law.

The more recent attack on the Populists came, in the 1950's, from a small but highly respected group of social scientists and historians—intellectuals all, by their own definitions. The late Richard Hofstadter and Jacques Barzun have made clear that intellect is not to be confused with intelligence, nor intellectuals with scholars. Intelligence, said Hofstadter, is merely "one of the most . . . endearing of the animal virtues" while intellect is a "unique manifestation of human dignity." "We know," Hofstadter wrote in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, that "all academic men are not intellectuals; we often lament this fact." I do not lament it.

The opening gun in the fifties' attack against the Populists was fired by Oscar Handlin, who charged that they were the source of anti-Semitism in the United States. At the time, no charge could have been safer or more stylish. The intellectuals at that period had three favored minorities: the Jews, the Catholics and the Negroes. Of these, the Jews were easily the most stylish; any words, whether or not based on fact, which purported to defend or praise the Jews were, in intellectual discussions, exempt from critical analysis. Today, of course, the top exemption belongs to any statements favorable to blacks. One should not have to note that such intellectual fads are destructive alike to scholarship, to the minority thus indulged and to the country as a whole. Nor should it be necessary to point out the dramatic dissimilarities between the history of the blacks and the oppression experienced by Jewish immigrants, or, for that matter, any other "minority." But then, so many things should not be necessary.

In any case, Handlin's article was a rambling and contradictory piece, declaring that there was virtually no anti-Semitism—indeed there was philo-Semitism—during the 1890's when the People's Party was active. Yet he concludes that anti-Semitism began with the Populists. Space does not permit an analysis of the contortions by which Handlin arrived

at this conclusion; I can only refer readers to his work and to Norman Pollack's critique of it.* Pollack—now our foremost living authority on Populism—examines the 112 footnotes with which Handlin embellished his piece. Of these, Pollack found, "106 are totally irrelevant to the discussion, five are barely relevant but do not support his thesis, and only one—Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890)—has any bearing. Yet it too has been oversimplified and misinterpreted. This is the key work in the subsequent reinterpretation of Populism."

For "reinterpretation" read "slander." *Caesar's Column*, a bestseller in its day, is a fantasy laid in the twentieth century, when conditions obtaining in the 1890's have reached their logical conclusion: working people have become dehumanized monsters thirsting for revenge, and the rich, believing in nothing but their own comfort, are, in another way, at least as dehumanized. The country is finally laid waste by a battle between rich and poor. Donnelly is guilty, first, of having created a brilliant Jew on both sides of the war. This is "anti-Semitism." He is also guilty of making Caesar, a terrible creature whose "column" is constructed of the bodies of dead rich people, an Italian-American. If, some day, the Italian-American Civil Rights League also discovers *Caesar's Column*, the Populists may be found the source of "anti-Italianism" in America.

Handlin supports his slander mainly by quoting, with deletions, one passage from Donnelly. The passage, in context, suggests that, like the working class, the Jews have been dehumanized by harsh treatment, and this explains in part why many of them thrived (for the Jews are heavily represented among the rich in Donnelly's civil war). This is the passage:

Christianity fell upon the Jews, originally a race of agriculturists and shepherds, and forced them, for many centuries, through the most terrible ordeal of persecution the history of mankind bears any record of. Only the strong of body, the cunning of brain, the long-headed, the men with capacity to live where a dog would starve, survived the awful trial. Like breeds like: and now the Christian world is paying, in tears and blood, for the sufferings inflicted by their bigoted and ignorant ancestors upon a noble race. When the time came for liberty and fair play the Jew was master in the contest with the Gentile, who hated and feared him.

They are the great money getters of the world. They rose from dealers in old clothes and peddlers

*See Handlin's "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," publication of the Jewish Historical Society, June, 1951, and Pollack's "Handlin on Anti-Semitism: A Critique of 'American Views of the Jew,'" *Journal of American History*, December, 1964.

“A lie told well is immortal”

of hats to merchants, to bankers, to princes. They were as merciless to the Christian as the Christian had been to them.

In *The Golden Bottle*, a later novel, Donnelly also mentions Jews. In this one, a young Kansas farmer named Benezet discovers a magic bottle (it turns out that this and the rest of the book is a dream) which will turn everything into gold. With its help he becomes President of the United States and enacts the Populist program: poverty is eliminated and men cooperate rather than preying upon one another. Benezet then successfully encourages other nations of the world to throw off their oppressors, with similar happy results. One thing he insists upon is universal religious tolerance. As for the Jews, he says: “It seems to me that this great race, the Israelites, from whom we had derived our religion and so much of our literature, should have some share in the awakening of the world.” Accordingly, he sets up a Jewish state:

I gave orders that all Jewish emigrants to the Holy Land should be carried free, with their effects, over the government railroads; that the land should be divided among them; houses built; railroads and ships constructed; a national convention held at Jerusalem. . . . And out from all the lands of hatred and persecution the poor afflicted Hebrews, with their wives and little ones, poured in a steady stream into the old lands of their race; wealthy Israelites helped them, and natural leaders sprang up among them; and it will be but a short time until the Jews, too, shall have a nation and a flag, illustrious and honored in the world. . . .

Donnelly is the closest thing to a Populist anti-Semite the intellectuals have been able to dig up. But he was enough. In 1955, four years after Handlin, Richard Hofstadter proclaimed in *The Age of Reform*: “It is not too much to say that Greenback-Populist tradition activated most of what we have of modern popular anti-Semitism in the United States.” Hofstadter documents this large statement with a reference to Handlin. Otherwise, writes Pollack, “He relies on very few items, some misinterpreted, and on an extremely weak master’s thesis. The latter yields two concrete instances of anti-Semitic statements (both by Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Lease) and nothing else whatever that documents Hofstadter’s case.” (Mrs. Lease was an eccentric who had withdrawn from the Populist Party and was reviling its leaders by 1896; see Pollack’s “Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of ‘The Age of Reform,’” in the *Journal of Southern History*, November, 1960.)

Nevertheless, in the 1950’s the anti-Semitic story traveled from one intellectual to another, growing with each telling. Peter Viereck, in an essay contributed to *The Radical Right* in 1955, announced that “[Father] Coughlin’s right-wing fascist anti-Semitism sounds word for word the same as the vile tirades against ‘Jewish international bankers’ by the left-wing egalitarian Populist, Ignatius Donnelly.” Of course, Donnelly never mentioned “Jewish international bankers.” All the Populists did mention Anglo-American bankers—the Rothschilds in England and the Morgans in this country—who cooperated to keep the gold standard and the contracted currency supply. Bryan realized the danger of even mentioning the Rothschilds, for the Republicans might make capital out of the Jewish name. In his 1896 campaign, when the “Hebrew Democrats” of Chicago presented him with a badge, he said:

I appreciate the kindly feeling which has prompted the presentation of this badge by the Hebrew Democrats. Our opponents have sometimes tried to make it appear that we are attacking a race when we denounce the financial policy advocated by the Rothschilds. But we are not; we are as much opposed to the financial policy of J. Pierpont Morgan as we are to the financial policy of the Rothschilds. We are not attacking a race; we are attacking greed and avarice, which knows neither race nor religion. I do not know any class of our people who, by reason of their history, can better sympathize with the struggling masses in this campaign than can the Hebrew race.

It is much harder to nail down lies than to tell them. It was not until 1964—thirteen years after Handlin’s article—that Norman Pollack dissected it. Pollack’s article brought a furious note from Handlin, which appeared in the March, 1965, issue, blaming the board of editors of the *Journal of American History* for publishing Pollack, denouncing Pollack’s “misstatements” without mentioning any, and announcing that his own article “did not deal with Populists or Populism.” Pollack replied, mentioning that Handlin’s article had been published simultaneously in *Commentary* under the title “How U.S. Anti-Semitism Really Began: Its Grass Roots Source in the 90’s.” Pollack added: “Virtually every critic of Populism, and indeed the critics of the critics, interpreted the article as a statement on Populist anti-Semitism. Supporters and critics alike agree it is the standard source on the topic. . . . During the period which witnessed the denigration of Populism [Handlin] never once objected to this interpretation of his

views. If all of us have been misled, my critique still serves its purpose: in the future, writers will not simply cite his article and proceed to link the American reform movement with nativism, proto-fascism, etc."

Thanks to Pollack and Walter Nugent, and to a lesser degree, John Higham and C. Vann Woodward, the anti-Populist intellectuals who, except for Hofstadter, had done scarcely any research on Populism, fell silent in the 1960's. But the harm had been done. "A lie told well," said Mark Twain, "is immortal." On May 2, 1972, one Jeffry St. John, a right-wing polemicist, contributed to the *New York Times* an article which summarized all the falsehoods that the intellectuals had invented and repeated. The "new Populism," St. John said, was relying on "scapegoats" just as the old one had. The old Populism had "degenerated into virulent racial and religious hatred. The Old Populism was founded on the false belief that the economic woes of the post-Civil War period were products of Jewish bankers, newly enfranchised blacks, and the rise of Catholicism. . . . In short the old populism was united by an explosive combination of economic envy, race and religious bigotry."

Oscar Handlin is not the villain of this piece. It just happened that Handlin gave the anti-Populist intellectuals a place to take off from. The real villain was the atmosphere of the 1950's and the will-based deep in our intellectual

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community's sense of values—to denigrate Populism. Intellectual trend-setters are not attracted to laborious research but trust their own emotions to a dangerous degree. So deep and consistent has been their distaste for all Lower-Class Lefts that they simply are not qualified to discriminate among them—that is, to notice which have been constructive and which have not. At any rate, overnight Populism became the precursor not only of anti-Semitism but of American "fascism"—in addition to being nativist, anti-Catholic, irrational and "paranoid."

Victor Ferkiss, in "Populist Influences on American Fascism" (*Western Political Quarterly*, June, 1957), took up one of these themes: The Populists, he contended, were the source for some movements during New Deal days, which he called "fascist" and which I should call destructive Lower-Class Lefts. Such movements as those led by Huey Long, Father Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith, Ferkiss said, "were not the result of temporary psychological aberrations on the part of the masses but were, instead, the culmination of an ideological development stemming from such . . . movements as Populism and 'agrarian democracy.'"

In the course of developing his thesis, Ferkiss stumbled on an extremely promising idea: that the Populists had been anti-Catholic. It happened, almost accidentally, this way: In a gentle disagreement with Ferkiss, Professor Paul Holbo corrected some of Ferkiss's facts—among other things, Holbo pointed out that Congressman Charles Lindbergh, Sr., a member of the Minnesota Nonpartisan League (and hence, according to Ferkiss, "the most radical of the Populist survivors") was not an anti-Semite. Holbo added: "The elder Lindbergh was an outspoken critic of American Catholicism, however. . . . Historians and social scientists might find study of anti-Catholicism more fruitful than study of anti-Semitism among the Populists and their successors."

It was no sooner said than done—only the study was omitted. In the same issue of *The Western Political Quarterly* Ferkiss replied, saying: "Anti-Catholicism was an important element in Populism but not in fascism. This is a point well taken."

The discussion finally received the benefit of some research—by persons more patient than Ferkiss—and it emerged that Populists were no more anti-Catholic than they were anti-Semitic. Walter Nugent, in *The Tolerant Populists*, an exhaustive study of the Populist documents in Kansas, did the hard work. Noting that intellectuals had not bothered to look into the literature of the Anti-Catholic American Protective Association to see whether there was a Populist tie-up, Nugent discovered there was none at all. Not only did the Populists avoid all entanglements with the APA, they condemned it by resolution at a Populist convention in 1894. And when somebody tried to label a Populist candidate for Congress with the APA stigma, that congressman summed up his own at-

titude, and that of his party, in a letter:

My Dear Sir:

Your letter concerning my relation to the A.P.A. is just received. In reply I will say that I have never been, am not now, and so far as present intentions go, do not expect to be a member of that society. . . . While in the business I may as well say, in advance of any reports that may be started, that I am not a sheep thief, gambler, drunkard, opium eater or corporation attorney, and that I have never been hung or sent to the penitentiary.

Very truly,
J. D. Botkin

The Populist's "paranoia" was the contribution of Professor Hofstadter. For, carried to its logical conclusion, Hofstadter's "consensus theory" of history can be used to prove that any group which feels poor and powerless is suffering from delusions of persecution.

In the body of Hofstadter's work, all Lower-Class Lefts, from Jacksonian Democrats to the followers of Joe McCarthy, are, to some degree, paranoid. The root of all evil is Populism. (The great scholar of Southern Populism, C. Vann Woodward, remarked in a 1959 article dealing with the intellectuals' hysteria on this subject: "Radix Malorum est Populismus.")

Nineteen fifty-five was the fertile year. It witnessed the appearance not only of Hofstadter's revered anti-Populist work, *The Age of Reform*, but of an anthology, *The Radical Right*, edited by Daniel Bell. The latter was, as Bell said, a book with a "thesis." The thesis—also, mainly, the contribution of Hofstadter—was that much Lower-Class Left activity (in the view of some of the contributors, all of it) has come not from being robbed blind by the rich and powerful but from "status anxiety."

In the "status anxiety" theory, as developed in *The Radical Right*, almost everyone in the country, except the intellectuals, is worried about his status. Hofstadter found, for example, that the most "anxious" groups were people of "old" American ancestry who were worried about losing status and people of "recent" American ancestry who were afraid their status was insecurely gained. That covers, of course, considerable ground. David Reisman and Nathan Glazer, in "The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes," used other categories to describe the backing for the new right-wing movement they feared. The backers would be new money, they said; they made a distinction between East and West, a distinction which was real enough in the days of the Populist but is an exercise in silly snobbishness as Reisman and Glazer handle it. They wistfully recall that "the Baptist Rockefeller, coming from Cleveland . . . allowed Easterners to civilize him by giving away

his money," whereas the new rich of the 1950's wouldn't even move to "large civilizing cities" but lived in "new and expanding industrial frontiers." "And their wives (whatever their secret and suppressed yearnings) no longer seem to want the approval of Eastern women of culture and fashion; they choose to remain within their provincial orbits. . . ." Along with these new rich, Reisman and Glazer found, the dangerous classes were what they call "the ex-masses"—that is, working people who had risen in the world, however modestly. All these "discontented classes," the theory was, felt their wobbly status so keenly that they were ready to rise in rebellion against the intellectuals and "mellow" Eastern wealth. As for the likeness between this "dispossessed" and the Populists, Daniel Bell, blandly ignoring conditions in the 1890's and the Populists' reform program, says simply: "Social groups that are dispossessed *invariably* seek targets on whom they can vent their resentments. . . . In this respect the radical right of the early 1960's is in no way different from the Populists of the 1890's who for years traded successfully on such simple formulas as 'Wall Street,' 'international bankers' and 'the Trusts'" (italics added). Of course, these "simple formulas" were merely names for ruthless and dehumanizing realities in the '90's. But in the intellectuals' frame of reference no lower-class person ever looks for the cause of his misery; he merely picks himself up and seeks a "scapegoat."

The irony is that no group, certainly not working people, is so concerned with status as are the intellectuals themselves. The intellectual, said Hofstadter in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, hopes to serve "as the moral antennae of the race" and to be "the special custodian of values like reason and justice." But this yearning for a status beyond anything to be found in Western society since the medieval Church is only the intellectual's most rarefied vision of his proper status. Peter Viereck puts it with greater candor in *The Radical Right*. In his "The Revolt Against the Elite" (the "élite" are the intellectuals, who are also referred to as "the aristocrats"), Viereck picks up Huey Long's slogan—Every Man a King—and gives it his own twist. Every man is a king in America, Viereck complains, except "the real kings." These are, of course, the intellectuals—or, in Viereck's words "the cultural élite that would rank first in any traditional hierarchy of the Hellenic-Roman West."

So tense are these intellectuals about their status that they see simple disagreement as rejection. For example, in the 1952 presidential race between Eisenhower and Stevenson, all the polls showed that the overriding issue with the country was the Korean War, which Eisenhower promised to try to end and which Stevenson favored continuing, following the traditions, so he said, of the war in

Indochina "where the French have fought so long, so valiantly, and so expensively" (as quoted by Stuart Gerry Brown in his *Conscience in Politics: Adlai Stevenson in the 1950's*). The issue for the intellectuals was, of course, Stevenson's famous "patrician charm" coupled with the rumor that Eisenhower read pulp fiction. Long after the votes were counted it did not occur to Hofstadter—or perhaps to many intellectuals—that the country had really been voting to get out of a useless and immoral war. Eisenhower's victory, according to Hofstadter, was simply "a repudiation" of the intellectuals. I do not call such an interpretation paranoid—only dangerously self-centered.

An example of how the intellectual's preoccupation with status is projected onto others is Peter Viereck's explanation of McCarthyism in *The Radical Right*. For Viereck, McCarthy had "populist roots" and the link between him and the Populists was Father Coughlin. But McCarthy's followers, according to Viereck, were not impelled by fear of communism; that was a "pretext"; they were merely enraged at being excluded from "fancy" New York parties: "The aristocratic pro-proletarian conspirators," said Viereck, "are actually being guillotined for having been too exclusive socially—and, even worse, intellectually—at those fancy parties at Versailles-sur-Hudson. McCarthyism is the revenge of the noses that for twenty years of fancy parties were pressed against the outside window panes."

Getting to the right New York parties is undoubtedly of burning importance to most New York intellectuals—just as getting to the right parties in their own communities is important to more modest Americans. As an explanation of why one of two Americans (in 1954) believed McCarthy's lies on the extent of Communist infiltration, however, the New York parties theory seems somewhat inadequate.

The main difference between Viereck and Mencken is that Viereck writes badly. Viereck is Mencken-like in his ferocious contempt for working people and in his longing for an aristocracy. For him McCarthyism was revolutionary: "a radical movement trying to overthrow an old ruling class and replace it from below with a new ruling class." He describes the old Populist desire to unite city and rural workers as a yearning for a union between "the sticks and the slums."

"In America," Viereck says, "classes are . . . more psychological than economic. As suggested earlier, our old ruling class includes eastern, educated, mellowed wealth—internationalist and at least superficially liberalized, like the Achesons of Wall Street. . . . The new would-be rulers include unmellowed plebeian western wealth . . . and their enormous, gullible mass base: the nationalist alliances between

the sticks and the slums, between the hick-Protestant mentalities in the west (Populist-Progressive on the Left, Know-nothing on the Right) and the South Boston mentalities in the East."

Viereck's unsurprising conclusion: "When the alternative is the neo-Populist barn burners from Wisconsin and Texas, naturally I ardently prefer big business. . . ." But oh, as he says, for a higher alternative! I think he means feudalism. "While fully recognizing," he writes, "the harmful snob-motives of the medieval feudal mind, was there not, nevertheless, some sound moral core in its 'reactionary' distrust of the cash-nexus bourgeois?"

Of course, the same kind of thinking has come from other intellectuals—most notably from Henry Adams, who was forever dreaming of the glories of feudal society. Adams was also insanely anti-Semitic, supporting, for example, the French military against Dreyfus. But Adams's anti-Semitism has been cheerfully forgiven by intellectuals, who continued to respect him the while they labored to detect anti-Semitism in Donnelly. This paradox cannot be explained without reference to basic intellectual traditions. The American intellectual tradition has in large part been distinguished by the attachment of intellectuals to aristocratic traditions, by their loyalty to one another and by their fear of ordinary Americans. It is in line with this tradition that even anti-Semitism has been overlooked or minimized in such as Adams and attributed instead to spokesmen for ordinary Americans. *The Radical Right* skimmed the cream of intellectual thought in the 1950's, and so lofty still are some of the names that it seems almost sacrilegious to note that most of them (Hofstadter excepted) knew nothing about Populism except that it had been dangerously lower class and was probably going to rise again. Norman Pollack said it in 1964: "For today's historians Populism is not a movement of the past but a living threat of the present."

To the upper class, intellectuals included, any genuinely Lower-Class Left is a very real threat. Nobody knows whether the next Lower-Class Left will be as great and promising as Populism was or as nasty as the caricature of Populism invented by the frightened intellectuals of the 1950's. In any case, the "New Populism" acclaimed today has little to do with the Populist reality. The "New Populism" too is a product of an Upper-Class Left that has little but contempt for the ordinary Americans who are the stewards of Populism's potential. In 1972 neither presidential candidate even roughly resembles a Populist. Perhaps not in 1976 either; but some day, for Populism remains "a living threat," or, depending upon our commitments, a living promise.