

A final point: Thompson takes an interesting position on the rise of black political power in the city. She argues that this is a good thing; she urges us to see that blacks never before had the power that came with Coleman Young and other city leaders. Yet one can also argue that black political power in Detroit was more symbolic than real. Is black control of a city that was only a shadow of its former self, a city laid waste by years of capital flight, worth great pride or praise? One might claim that African Americans took power at the worst possible moment, when memories of former glory were still fresh, but the trajectory of economic decline was well underway, and the new black leadership could be hit with much of the blame. Regardless of how one comes down on this question, Thompson's work is valuable for forcing us to think in fresh ways about this tragic story.

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Mark A. Lause, *The Civil War's Last Campaign: James B. Weaver, The Greenback-Labor Party, and the Politics of Race and Section* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 2001).

A troublesome aspect of U.S. history for Marxian analysis is America's failure to turn to socialism during the industrial surge of the late nineteenth century. Even the search for viable radical insurgencies during that period has borne little fruit, except for a Populist moment in the 1890s. And agrarian radicalism diverged from the working class upheaval called for in Marxist dogma. Lause re-examines the empirical record and finds a precedent actually existed prior to Populism. The Gilded Age did spawn class struggle, which produced a Greenback-Labor Party in 1880. Although the third party polled few votes, its very existence, according to Lause, indicates a dialectic was operative. The fact that the new organization was stillborn was not due to lack of potential mass opposition to plutocracy. Lause argues overt political repression preserved the two-party monopoly on public power.

Lause's interpretation is not intended to supplant other scholarship, but his thesis does, in fact, challenge at least the emphasis of much earlier historiography. Most historians locate the G.L.P. within a model stressing entrenched partisanship, continuity across time, the centrality of national debates on currency reform, and the ebb and flow of other "greenback" parties both before and after 1880. From this perspective, the "soft" money issue was primarily an intra-

mural Democratic dispute. Third parties did not seek permanent independence, but tried to weaken major parties in order to win concessions. As part of that process, the G.L.P. contributed indirectly to Democratic-Populist fusion in the 1890s and ultimate abandonment of the Gold Standard under Wilsonian Democracy. To forestall bolts, the two party system adjusted and reformed itself while preserving social order amidst prosperity. Interest-group politics, under the stewardship of educated experts, had worked.

Lause rejects this scenario as a myth that re-interprets history to suit partisan agendas. The author claims the G.L.P. was radical in its personnel and program, and had little in common with third parties that sought fusion. The G.L.P., in his view, was not a progenitor of Progressive Democracy. Its leaders "feared rather than wanted to found such a world." Monetary reform was not even the impetus for insurgency. The G.L.P. was a broader revolt "against politics as usual," the devaluation of citizenship, and the monopolistic threat of plutocracy. To illustrate his argument, Lause stresses national aspirations and that many insurgents joined for reasons other than currency reform. Even in the Midwest, the node of greenbackism, a frontier ethic of individualism and communalism, filtered through free labor ideology, was vital to appeals aimed at dissident Republicans. These converts expected the G.O.P. to abolish both chattel and wage slavery, and became disillusioned by the late 1870s. Instead of hard work and virtue bringing material rewards, the independence of producers was disappearing. A possible solution was an electoral realignment such as Republicans in the 1850s had spawned.

Economic distress, discontent with government, and alienation from a Tweedle-Dee/Tweedle-Dum party system provided initial groundswells of support for the new party, just as these conditions helped spawn other third party movements of the era. But the insurgents in 1880, according to Lause, were different. They sought a permanent independent organization. They were more radical and became increasingly so due to an eclectic outreach to workingmen's and reform organizations more concerned about other issues than the debate over "soft" money. According to Lause, socialists were an important component of the G.L.P., not a fringe element. The national platform addressed currency issues, but also included planks on woman's suffrage and public ownership of land, water, and air. And the greenback issue itself often was used as a vehicle to articulate broader social critiques on inequitable distribution of wealth.

Lause points to Weaver's candidacy as evidence the G.L.P. was not fusionist-minded. Greenbackism made coalition with the G.O.P. unlikely. The choice of an ex-Republican to head the ticket was an obstacle to Democratic alliance. Weaver also was an ex-Union general. Selection of an ex-Confederate general as his running mate, according to Lause, shows the G.L.P.'s desire to overcome

sectionalism, avoid “bloody shirt” debates, and create a national voting base. Much of the book documents abortive attempts to extend the G.L.P. beyond the Midwest. By appealing to blacks and calling for federal intervention into the South, Weaver alienated local Democratic leaders. The G.L.P. lacked funds and ultimately succumbed to intimidation and “bulldozing.” The South was abandoned, yet the party intensified its independent stance. The main issue now, though, was not greenbackism, but frauds perpetuated by the Democratic-Republican Party.

Campaigning in the Northeast also was ineffective. Weaver still criticized “bulldozing” in the South, but now denounced similar Republican practices in the North. Greenbackism increasingly became more the form than substance of Weaver’s message. But little grassroots support was mobilized, except a few workingmen’s groups. Fusionists in Massachusetts hindered the third party. A Union ticket emerged in Maine, much to Weaver’s chagrin. The Union slate won, but the G.L.P. reaped little benefit when Democrats stole the credit. A beleaguered G.L.P. retreated to its midwestern base. Funding evaporated amidst last minute charges of scandal, despite Weaver’s unprecedented disclosure of campaign finances. Election returns provided only a fraction of anticipated support and the party dissolved. Other third parties, according to Lause, would adopt the G.L.P. style, but not its substance. In this sense, then, the Weaver campaign was unique. America reached a turning point, began to turn, then failed to do so, or at least turned in the wrong direction.

Lause makes a plausible case. Unfortunately, the monograph suffers somewhat due to excessive sentimentality towards its subjects and from dubious dogma, such as claims that history repeats itself. The author is refreshingly candid on these matters. But candor does not negate the fact that his book sets out to illustrate a theoretical model, rather than rigorously testing it. Lause makes his case by overemphasizing facts which buttress his argument, and marginalizing contradictory evidence. The G.L.P. was more nationally oriented, independent-minded, comparatively radical in membership and inclination, and was suppressed, in part, by two-party oppression. But this reader remains unconvinced the party was, in the end, much more than a regional grassroots organization, that fusionist elements were not important, that radical influence was unambiguous, or that other factors were not also responsible for its demise. Perhaps this lacuna is why Lause hedges his thesis with disclaimers that it contests traditional historiography.

The G.L.P., in fact, had national aspirations. Lause is correct. Yet, here, as elsewhere, the author sketches the party as envisioned in the form of what it wanted to become, rather than what it was. While it did try to expand its base with a broader platform, this attempt largely failed. In the end, the G.L.P. fell back upon its midwestern base constituency, among whom the currency debate

was more salient. In fact, over two-thirds of the popular vote Weaver received was cast in that region (over 80% if Missouri and Kentucky returns are included). Lause also argues that the G.L.P. was more independent than other third parties. But “more” independent does not mean it was devoid of fusionist elements. The Union slate in Maine, and less successful coalition bids elsewhere show a fusionist faction existed, especially at local levels. Lause himself notes numerous individuals that abandoned the party over the fusion question during the campaign. Even if an independent course was pursued, more analysis is needed to establish whether this decision was more a matter of choice or necessity.

Lause mentions but does not develop the G.L.P.’s relationship to soft money Democrats, especially in the Midwest where the “Ohio Idea” was pioneered. Was independence a matter of rejecting fusion, or was it due more to a lack of major party interest except in select localities? What is lacking is detailed and longitudinal examination of the issue niche in which the greenback debate evolved and the given context in which the two major parties prioritized and polarized on that question.

Lause’s study underrates the interactive nature of the independence and fusion tactics, as alternative options chosen upon the contingency of immediate circumstances. Indeed, comparisons with the realignment of the 1850s might profitably consider the transition beginning with the Liberty Party in 1840. That party also sought independence and met defeat. Later, alternating tactics, including temporary fusion with both minor and major parties, cleared a foundation for a new Republican Party. In each step of the process, though, the Liberty program was diluted. What began as a campaign to alleviate the plight of black Americans became concerned foremost with rights and liberties of white men, and hardly recognizable to the Old Guard. Perhaps a similar trajectory has application with regard to the transition from the G.L.P. to the advent of Populism and Progressivism.

Lause emphasizes the centrality of radicalism, especially socialism, within the G.L.P.. Fair enough. But it also is true the radicals were not dominant. Lause stresses that free labor ideologues and socialists shared a common critique of plutocracy, but also concedes disagreement existed over the role of a positive state. At one point, Lause contends the G.L.P. was ideologically diverse. Elsewhere, he condemns “comic book” versions of the past for under-rating radical unity. But were the radicals united and influential? Lause admits the Socialist Party did not abandon an independent identity, although it allowed members to affiliate with the G.L.P. But not all did. Some socialists viewed Weaver as a well-meaning, but misguided “brother,” whereas some of them actually actively opposed the G.L.P. Although another group of more amenable socialists aided in securing radical planks in the platform, the confusing man-

ner of their adoption made it possible for party spokesmen to ignore, waffle, or selectively interpret their meaning on the stump and in the press. To determine the relative clout of radicals, additional scholarship will need to apply more rigorous methods and scrutinize a broader range of sources.

Perhaps a broader sampling of the third party press might prove useful. Quantitative analysis of the background characteristics of convention delegates might also provide insights unattainable at present through anecdotal biographical sketches and summaries of proceedings alone. Based on Lause's account, one might suppose the G.L.P. was misnamed, and should have been called the Labor-Greenback Party. Yet even the author concedes the most powerful faction, throughout the third party's short lifespan, was the "pragmatists," even if radical influence fluctuated and was magnified somewhat over time.

Finally, one must question whether political repression alone was responsible for the G.L.P.'s collapse. After all, despite an independent vote of 1.6 million ballots in 1876, the third party in 1880 polled only a little over 300,000 votes. Either the insurgency was miniscule and class struggle rather mute or, as Lause claims, the two major parties circumvented mobilization of the masses. Claims of bulldozing have merit, but such charges also were, in part, a face-saving gesture to explain abandoning efforts in areas where insurgency simply failed to woo support or funds. Lause argues for a declension in G.L.P. southern support, but one wonders what threshold ever existed to decline from. The G.L.P., moreover, may have committed tactical errors and blunders that also hastened their demise.

For instance, Lause claims appeals to northern white wage earners necessitated that the party support black voting and women's suffrage. Yet, was such a course of action mandated? Republicans in the 1850s managed to combine appeals for white working class support in the North with minimal commitment to civil and political rights for blacks or females. The G.L.P. may have appealed to all classes initially to test the waters before focusing their message more narrowly at receptive audiences. Lause concedes black voters cast ballots in the South during the late 1870s and actually makes the confusing claim that the G.L.P. cracked the solid South before it was solid. It seems, then, that leaders opted to court black voters rather than having it forced on them. In any case, the debate between legitimist and purist within party ranks is left somewhat ambiguous in this study, other than coverage of the fusion issue. Even in the North, moreover, oppression was not always the preferred tactic of major parties. In some states, Democrats were amenable to fusion. G.L.P. independence and radicalism may have actually hurt the party among its core support in the Midwest. Lause, however, fails to provide any quantitative analysis of the G.L.P.'s social base, compare it to groups with similar demographic profiles, and thereby begin to ascertain how much potential greenback support was lost

due to rigid adherence to independence, a broad platform, and rejection of fusion.

Part of the problem is a stylistic choice to let the insurgents "speak for themselves." The approach minimizes distortion of their collective message. It becomes somewhat of a liability when analyzing the dynamics of party competition. Explanations for the G.L.P.'s failure are drawn almost solely from its adherents, and focus on mudslinging and bulldozing. Lause argues "context" over "partisanship," yet his own narrative indicates the latter was important. In a footnote, he relates that cultural regimentation also arrested the turn to socialism. If he means it supplemented political oppression, which appears the case, then perhaps partisanship was important after all. Cultural regimentation also featured socialization into party subcultures. Maybe entrenched partisanship was a major obstacle for the G.L.P. In the South, for example, he attributes Democratic hostility to racism. While this factor was important, partisanship is also pertinent to explaining Democratic antagonism towards threats to its powerbase. Indeed, ritualistic behavior displayed at the unity convention indicates even the G.L.P. was not entirely free from the trappings of broader traditional partisan cultures.

Lause is rightly skeptical of pronouncements by victors, and his study is a valuable corrective to earlier treatments which overemphasized fusionist tendencies. Yet, the thesis is overdrawn, and thereby skews the third party profile towards radicalism, albeit an influential faction within the G.L.P., but not necessarily its defining element. Despite its national aspirations and desire to realign the electoral system, the G.L.P. achieved neither objective, nor is its demise necessarily traceable only to overt political repression. Indeed, its rise and fall may actually have contributed to spawning more fusionist-oriented parties in the future that sought to avoid its fate. A disjuncture may have occurred in 1880, but there may be more to the case for continuity than Lause concedes.

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Kenneth Warren, *Big Steel: The First Century of the United States Steel Corporation, 1901-2001* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

Kenneth Warren has written what will probably be seen as the definitive history of US Steel, or at least of its first 100 years. This is a book that is comprehensive, detailed and, despite being heavily based on documents from US Steel