Nationalism in America:
The Case of the Populist Movement[*]

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Introduction

Unlike other national identities, "American" is a culturally meaningful but structurally empty term, making its positive expression difficult and contradictory. The centrality of the melting pot metaphor to American self-understanding and the importance of immigration for national growth have made the exact boundaries of the term "American" hard to define. At the same time, these factors have prompted mass mobilization in defense of Americanism, from the Know Nothings of the 1850s to the Populist and "100 Percent American" movements near the turn of the 20th century and to the popular reactions to September 11 and the war in Iraq today.

This paper contributes to the otherwise voluminous literature on nationalism by questioning the relative silence of that literature on the case of the United States. We begin by discussing the inattention to the U.S. case in the literature on nationalism, including theoretical and conceptual difficulties posed by American nationalism. We point out some of the reasons why nationalist discourse is a messy prospect in the American case. But we also point out that despite the relative silence of the literature, there are symbolic uses of "American" as an identity that are equivalent to what would elsewhere be termed nationalism. We suggest that American national identity is culturally meaningful but structurally empty – it is clearly resonant for individuals and groups at the same time that it often proves difficult to specify its content and boundaries.

Analyzing nationalism as discourse (Calhoun 1997a) provides a meaningful lens for the study of nationalism. In the second half of the paper, we try to point out what can be gained by taking the discursive construction of American nationalism seriously. We do this by example, using the Populist movement of late 19th century America as our case. Our data come from the movement's use of the label "American" as an identity term. We first provide an analysis of the relational structure of nationalist discourse. We ask how this identity differed from other kinds of ethnic or racial identity labels (e.g., "Anglo-Saxon" or "white") and how it was defined against a number of internal and external "others." In particular, we examine the distinction between racial/ethnic and civic definitions of identity in Populist writing. We then examine the data through a more interpretive lens to point out the embedded layers of meaning that are invoked by the use of the term "American." Although its use was primarily "civic" it had important but complex racial implications.

Why no nationalism in America?

A great deal of social scientific effort has been devoted to understanding the construction and operation of social boundaries (see Lamont & Molnár 2002). Nationalism is a particularly interesting case of such boundary making, and it has been the subject of a voluminous literature. Like all identity terms, nationalism always rests on the creation of a collective "we" in opposition to a specified or unspecified "they." In nationalist expressions, the difference between "we" and "they" is both a matter of citizenship and bound up with ethnicity and race.

The literature on nationalism has examined the "boundary issue" in different ways. One approach has studied the relationship between the nationalist "we" identity and the state (Anderson 1991; Balibar 1991; Brubaker 1996; Gellner 1983), including the complex overlay of modern politico-territorial boundaries on top of long-standing ethno-territorial boundaries (Geertz 1973; Hutcheson & Smith 1994; Smith 1991; Breuilly 1985; Calhoun 1997b). Other work has

focused more directly on the nature and location of the discursive boundary between "we" and "they" (Anderson 1991; Calhoun 1997a; Corse 1997; Hobsbawm 1990; McClintock 1995), and the extent to which nationalist constructions of collective pasts represent "objective" histories (Gellner 1983; Greenfeld 1992; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Smith 1991).

Our purpose here is not to detail each of these areas of scholarship. We highlight these areas of the literature in order to point out the enduring absence of the American case from each of them. There is an astounding range of empirical "cases" examined in the literature, but with only a few notable exceptions the United States is not one of them. In this section, we examine why the American case is absent in the first place. We also outline why we think it needs to be taken more seriously.

To put it bluntly, we think that the American case has been absent largely because it is empirically messy and theoretically inconvenient. No matter which perspective scholars have taken, the boundary issue has been perplexing for the case of the United States. More specifically, we think that there are two related points of ambiguity that make the American case difficult to deal with. The first arises from the conceptual and analytic problems relating to the distinction between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism. The second has to do with the distinction between "internal" and "external" exclusion.

The distinction between "civic" and "ethnic" forms of nationalism is common but problematic. "Civic" nationalism commonly refers to shared substantive visions of citizenship. "Ethnic" nationalism refers to a shared sense of racial or ethnic history. Ethnic nationalism is usually seen as negative and exclusionary, and civic nationalism as positive and inclusive. Rogers Brubaker (1999) has noted the deep analytic and normative confusions that underlie this distinction, yet it continues to resonate. From our perspective there are a number of ways that the American case becomes problematic within this distinction.

On the "ethnic" side, American nationalism is a messy prospect. In many national contexts, the bonds of shared ethnic heritage invoked in a nationalist "we" are relatively easy to draw upon, however fictitious they may be in objective historical terms. Thus, even in modern, cosmopolitan states like Germany, France, and England, invoking the "nation" can be popularly understood as referring to a common ethnic as well as civic history. By contrast, America is what Hans Kohn (1966) has called "a nation of many nations." Immigration has been such a constant and defining force that it has been difficult for Americans to carry any strong sense of common ethnic heritage (Gleason 1980). Indeed, our national consciousness has been divided on this from the start. Immigration is part of how American nationhood and identity are defined, and yet immigration presents a problem for national identity. As Kohn points out, American icons such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson described the American experience as an immigrant experience, even though these same figures were somewhat ambivalent about the civic and racial character of the immigrants. Franklin, for instance, feared that German immigrants would not assimilate, and would make Pennsylvania into a German-speaking enclave (Kohn 1966:p. 143).

On the "civic" side, the American case has proved inconvenient. One reason is that American identity has largely been viewed in individualistic rather than collective terms. In this view, America is a place where groups are generally brought together by shared interests, material or otherwise, rather than shared substantive commitments to the nation as a whole (e.g., Lipset 1963a; Tocqueville 1994). In this view, the "imagined community" would melt away in the face of "self interest rightly understood." Although some scholarship has addressed the shared

substantive commitments of American citizens (Lipset 1963b; Higham 1955; Kohn 1966) an added inconvenience is the fact that the supposedly more open boundaries of civic membership have themselves been a central source of contention among Americans. The tensions between the civic ideals of America and the treatment of people of African descent is the most obvious problem (DuBois 1903; Myrdal 1944; Gerstle 2001), but even the politico-legal boundaries of "white" civic freedom have been complex (Steinfeld 2001).

Another problem with this civic/ethnic distinction has to do with the normative ambiguities that Brubaker notes. The focus of the substantive literature has been ethnic nationalism, since this is generally seen as the normative problem to be eliminated. We therefore tend to overlook the cases of that we label "civic," since these are seen as acceptable. We also tend to overlook the degree to which civic and ethnic strands are always co-present in nationalist claims. Because America is often considered to be a central example of civic nationalism, it therefore tends to drop out of sight. This problem is further complicated by some of the particular features of the American case: not only are Americans invested in a positive view of their patriotism (O'Leary 1999), the practices of nationalism in stable, democratic states are often so routine and ubiquitous – and hence normative – that we do not see them (Billig 1995).

The civic/ethnic distinction is often confounded with issues of inclusion. Brubaker illustrates that ethnic nationalism is usually seen as exclusive and civic nationalism as inclusive. This is incorrect, as he points out – both rest on substantive claims about national membership and both therefore are exclusive and inclusive at the same time. "What varies is not the fact or even the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, but the bases or criteria of inclusion and exclusion," says Brubaker (1999:64). We have already mentioned some of the problems of inclusion. Because the United States has always been seen as a nation of many nations, it is hard to talk about American identity in any definite way. But it is also messy to talk about who is not considered American. Recent work has pointed out that there are both internal and external forms of exclusion (Taylor 1992; Alexander 2001). The exclusion of both internal and external "others" has always been in some tension with the stated "civic" ideals of America, though in different ways, making it also hard to say who would not be American. Moreover, the boundaries of internal and external exclusion have been in nearly constant flux (see Gleason 1980; Higham 1955).

As a result of all of this, the American case is largely absent from the literature. There are a few important exceptions to this claim. Hans Kohn's American Nationalism (1966) provides one of the most important exceptions, but he is mostly interested in American nationhood rather than national identity. As we note above, when he does examine boundary issues, he is perplexed by contradictory inclusionary and exclusionary impulses. Gerstle's (2001) recent work traces repeated shifts from racial to civic nationalism that have informed twentieth century politics. Like Kohn, Gerstle sees these as contradictory rather than conjoined forces in American life. Higham's Strangers in the Land (1955) also stands as an important exception. However, Higham maintained an implicit and somewhat puzzling distinction between nationalism and "nativism." Higham reserved the term "nationalism" for what we would call external exclusion – specifically, reactions to foreign influence. On the other hand, the often violent reaction to immigrants and "internal" others (such as African-Americans and native-born Catholics) was not considered nationalism, though it was clearly aimed at ethnic and civic exclusion. Greenfeld (1992) is relatively uncommon in that she explicitly addresses American nationalism. Her work expresses a similar tension about the problems of inclusion and exclusion: she recognizes racialized exclusions while arguing that these problems are not foundational to American nationhood or nationalism.

Conceptual and theoretical difficulties aside, we think there are American expressions that look in every outward sense like the "nationalism" described in other countries, despite our reluctance to call it by that name. National identification is clearly meaningful to most Americans, particularly after September 11, 2001. U.S. flags blossomed on automobiles, and demand shifts at tattoo parlors brought American symbolism back into vogue in body art (Pfister 2001). On the more violent side, Neo-Nazi and Skinhead violence occurs in the United States just as it does in Germany or France. We have already discussed the academic tendency, stemming from Higham, to label exclusionary movements "nativist" rather than nationalist. In popular parlance too, this becomes "patriotism" or "racism" but not "nationalism."

These examples help to anticipate our analytic focus in the rest of the paper, where we try to show what we can learn by taking the prospect of American nationalism seriously. Craig Calhoun (1997a; see also Bhabha 1990) has argued that there is no absolutely objective definition or measure of nationalism because it exists as a "discursive formation." This is the way we conceive of nationalism, and we use this perspective to examine discursive practices that emerge around the category of national membership. Rather than focus on what constitutes nationalism, we ask instead whether Americans make sense of their lives and their interests through the lens of nation, and if so, how it operates and what it means in terms of boundaries. While we argue that American nationalism deserves more sustained theoretical and empirical attention, in part because of what it shares with other nationalisms, we also do not mean to suggest that the American situation is the same as other national contexts or other sites of nationalist projects. Therefore, we also work to address the distinctive features of American nationalism by simultaneously showing how it is like other nationalisms.

We suggest that American nationalism, like other nationalisms, rests on culturally meaningful distinctions between "we" and "they." However, our analysis of the constitution of in-group and out-group in American discourse tells a more complicated story about how well Americans are able to make sense of and make claims about national identity. Our findings indicate the relative absence of a strong sense of "we". We suggest that American nationalism is culturally meaningful but structurally empty – because it claims to draw on such an inclusive conception of identity and belonging, it works only to the degree that it is not specified too strongly.

The Populist Movement

In the rest of this paper, we want to show both what can be gained by taking American nationalism seriously, and where some of the difficulties lie in dealing with it. We examine the Populist movement of the late 19th century in order to show how nationalist claims operate in the American context, messy though they may be. The Populist movement is an interesting case in part because it illustrates how a political project based on political and class interests simultaneously took the form of a nationalist project. Most work on the American Populist political movement places it as a progressive movement, albeit with some conservative tendencies. This makes a great deal of sense given the material goals stated by the movement. But it misses many of the more puzzling aspects of the movement, such as its radical xenophobia, which were part of what Higham (1955:chapter 4) described as the "nationalist nineties."

The Populist movement was composed of two successive organizational vehicles, the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party. The central goal of the Alliance was to relieve the suffering of farmers who were increasingly tied to a cycle of debt. The major economic demands of the Alliance were intended to bringing higher prices for farm products and to reduce debt. Alliancemen pursued cooperative efforts at the local level and advocacy of economic reform at

the national level. Eventually, the political passions of many members and leaders, combined with the frustrations that emerged in the course of the movement's experience, pushed the Alliance into the independent political action that had been building alongside the movement. This led to the formation of the People's Party, the followers of which came to be known as "Populists." As in most analyses, however, the term "Populism" is used here to cover both parts of the movement.

At first glance, it might seem a bit strange to examine a nationalist project associated with a largely class-based movement aimed at domestic political reform – and a largely regional one at that. Actually, the Populist demands were tied to a very deep sense of an American "we." The movement was motivated by a sense of anxiety over the declining position of farmers and increasing farm tenancy.[1] These material concerns were articulated through a cultural lens that rested on an imagined past of America as a nation of independent free-holding farmers (Woods 1991; Goodwyn 1976; Ayers 1992). The entire moral economy of the movement was built on this notion. From this perspective, Populism can be read as a reaction against what farmers and working people saw as their declining civic and political status, and a demand for a more open and inclusive American democracy. In short, it was a political movement that was distinctly patriotic.

What is important for this paper is the fact that the movement discourse expressed these class concerns through a national definition of "we" that was both civic and racial. The demand for civic inclusion was one element, but race played centrally into Populism as well. Perhaps most famously, Populists were known for their demands for the inclusion of black voters into their political coalition. This demand was always partial, and limited to "political equality" rather than "social equality," but figures such as Georgia's Tom Watson risked (and ultimately lost) a great deal in order to build a biracial coalition.[2] Yet the movement's response to racial and ethnic difference was not just inclusive. The movement was distinctly xenophobic in many respects, and despite the largely sincere attempt to build a political coalition of black and white members, most Southern white Populists remained avowed racists. This included, at least later in life, Watson himself (Woodward 1963), but also fellow travelers such as Ben Tillman (Kantrowitz 2000).

The Populist case is therefore interesting, because it involved the attempt to mobilize American identity – a culturally powerful and broadly unifying thing – for its own ends. Our analytic goal is to better understand the operation of the term "American" in Populist discourse in relation to both civic and ethnic exclusion. Specifically, we want to know whether this purportedly civic "we" term operated differently from explicitly racial identities, and which racial, ethnic or national specifications of "they" it was defined against.

Our analysis rests on systematic data collected from two movement papers. The first was the Alliance's official journal, the <u>National Economist</u> (collected from 1889-1893). The second source is the <u>People's Party Paper</u> (1891 – 1894 comprehensive, with scattered editions in 1895 and 1896 where available). Although initially collected for other purposes, the Populist data turn out to be important for this study [identifying citation and information removed]. From the two movement publications, every item was collected that jointly referred to class or political demands on the one side and racial, ethnic, or national difference on the other. Altogether, this yielded 823 separate items (46% Alliance, 54% People's Party). The terms used to designate racial, ethnic or national specifications of "we" and "they" in each item were recorded verbatim into a computer database, along with a host of other variables. "American" was recorded as an identity term whenever it was used as an active label (e.g., "Americans") rather than as a neutral

adjective (e.g., “American trade”). This is extremely fortunate for our present purposes, since it allows us to empirically examine how this identity term is used in relation to other racial, ethnic and national “we” and “they” terms.

The Structure of “American”

One way of approaching the issue of American nationalism in the Populist discourse is to do so from a structuralist perspective. Here we focus on two central variables, the “we” terms and the “they” terms in the Populist discourse. From this perspective, we might ask how the connection between the Populist’s “we” terms and the “they” terms is ordered. Specifically, we might wish to know what “they” terms were associated with the use of “American” as an identity term, whether the term “American” was equivalent to other identity terms such as “white” or “Anglo-Saxon” in this regard, and how the use of such nationalist identity terms differs from cases where racial identity remains implicit.

Answering these questions requires that we treat the data relationally. For the analysis in this section, we have recoded the 823 communications from the Populist journals described above, focusing on the racial/ethnic designations of “we” and “they” terms rather than the class-based ones. Many of the individual communications included more than one “they” term. Some included more than one “we” term as well. To capture the relations between the different sets of terms therefore required that we use the we-they pair, rather than the communication, as the unit of analysis. For example, record number 76 in the National Economist data was a communication that included two we terms (“American” and “white”) and two they terms (“foreign” and “black”). In the recoded data, this appears as four we/they pairs (American/foreign, American/black, white/foreign and white/black.) This recoding procedure yielded a new dataset with 1,038 relational pairs as cases.

In the recoded data, we have retained we/they pairs where there was an explicit ethnic/national “they” term employed but no explicit “we” term, and vice versa. This was done in order to assess whether the silences had substantive meaning – that is, whether they were equivalent to other “we” or “they” terms that were used explicitly elsewhere. Cases where there was neither an explicit “we” or “they” term were deleted. For the present analysis, we have also eliminated the 62 cases where the author identified as black, leaving us with the set of we-they pairs produced in white Populist discourse (n = 976).

Table 1 presents the categories for each variable. The six categories of “we” and eighteen categories of “they” incorporate all of the different terms used in the Populist communications. The categories correspond as closely as possible to terms recorded verbatim in the original database, with the following caveats. In a some cases, it was necessary to combine closely related terms (e.g., “Anglo-Saxon” and “Saxon”), especially where one was common and the other infrequent. In other cases, we collapsed sets of infrequently used terms into combined categories (e.g., eur-eth and oth-eth).

Table 2 provides the initial cross-tabulation of the relational data in which the cells report the number of occurrences of particular we/they pairs. To analyze the structure of the relational data, we use this table as the input data for correspondence analysis (CA). Correspondence analysis is an optimal scaling procedure that examines the relationship between two or more categorical variables by representing the categories as points in a low-dimensional space. CA is an essentially inductive technique in that it does not require strong a priori assumptions about the structure of the data. Mathematically, CA is similar to factor analysis and multidimensional scaling. The initial relational data matrix is normalized, decomposed into row/column vectors

and singular values, and then rescaled to provide point coordinates for each row and column category. Categories of the row and column variables may then be mapped as points on a number of dimensions, which have been fit to the data space.[3]

The variance in the data can be summarized by five factorial dimensions. In this analysis, we focus on the interpretation of the space defined by the first two dimensions, which together accounted for 67.7% of the variance.[4] The map produced from these dimensions appears in Figure 1. The first dimension, accounting for 43.5% of the variation in the data, clearly distinguishes between two versions of difference. To the left side of the figure appear those "we" and "they" terms that relate to the domestic (and particularly Southern and therefore binary) racial context. To the right appear those that had to do with the more properly "nationalist" version of racial difference. The second dimension, accounting for 24.2% of the variation in the data, distinguished two of the relatively uncommon identity categories (ANG-SAX and EUR-ETH) from the others.

In terms of the array of points in the two-dimensional space, four basic groupings appear.[5] One long cluster, at the right of the map, is organized around the "we" term AMER and the "they" terms surrounding it. Another elongated cluster near the center of the map includes the "we" terms WHITE, CAUC, and NONE, and the "they" terms arrayed around them, from black and oth-eth at the bottom of the map to african, jew and chinese at the top. A third cluster includes only the "we" term category EUR-ETH, which in its isolation is strongly distinguished from the other categories on the map. A fourth cluster is formed by the "we" category ANG-SAX and the category indicating no explicit other term.

Our first finding about the organization of the discursive space of the Populists stems from the orientation of dimension 1. This finding is that nationalist expressions of race/ethnicity (generally, those relating to external exclusion) differed from racialized ones (generally, those relating to internal exclusion). This is a finding worth developing, though here we can only do so in passing. Although there is some tendency in recent work to see racial and national forms of exclusion working in tandem in the United States – a tendency we have sympathy with, based mostly on present-day concerns – this finding suggests that there is an analytic importance to preserving the distinction, especially for sociological investigation of the past. At the end of the 19th century, there was actually a shifting language of race. Michael Banton (1992) points out that this was occurring in scientific discourse as well as in popular understandings (see also Pascoe 1996). This was a shift from an understanding of race as "lineage" and "type" to one of race as "subspecies" and "status". The first is a lineal notion of race that is largely historical, the latter a biological notion that suggests an absolute and innate difference. Both were operating in the Populist discourse, the first operating in a "nationalist" context, the latter organizing "domestic" understandings of racial difference.

This much established, we can offer some preliminary answers to the questions set out above. Our first question was what "they" terms were associated with "American" as an identity term. Drawing on the distinction between "nationalist" and "racialized" versions of difference, we can say that the "they" terms associated with American identity in the Populist discourse are decidedly "nationalist" (and external) in focus. Although the list of others is generated by domestic issues – particularly immigration (e.g., the categories "immigrant", "italian", "irish", "alien", and "eur-eth") and what might be termed incipient globalization through investment and commodity market centralization ("English", "foreign") – these terms work to designate a meaningful "external" national boundary rather than simple "internal" heterogeneity.

In short, “American” was used as an identity in opposition to a set of external others. If this seems an obvious point when stated so bluntly, it is worth remembering the striking absence of the American case from the nationalist literature generally, as well as the assumption among many recent “culturalist” authors that, symbolically speaking, nationalism and internal racism operate in tandem.[6] As we have said, we agree with this point in a general sense, and we shall have more to say about this below. Yet we must also nuance the point – if “American” can operate as a structurally empty “we” term, it is one that is nonetheless culturally meaningful, at least in the Populist discourse, in opposition to an explicit set of “they” terms. These are not racial “others” in some general sense, but rather a tightly defined group of others experienced during a period of increasing immigration and increasingly global scope of financial transactions that had previously been experienced as local and direct. For understanding the Populist discourse, it matters a great deal that “American” works with some “they” terms, but not with others.

Building on this point, we can provide an answer to our second question. Did the identity term “American” mean something akin to “white”? As an identity term, “American” (and the closely related term “native”) was not structurally equivalent to other identity terms that operated racially. The two most central racialized “we” categories, WHITE and CAUC, clustered together on the map and were clearly distinguished from the category AMER. Both of the former terms were tied to “they” categories that were clearly understood as racial others, most centrally black Americans (“black”, “colored”, etc.) and Native Americans (“indian”). Also grouped in this cluster were a set of “they” terms clearly marked as other by what we have termed an “external” rather than an “internal” boundary (e.g. “african”, “chinese”, “jew”). What is striking is the degree to which these groups, unlike those discussed above, were understood as racial others, even though they were largely external ones.

Finally, how did the use of “American” as an identity term differ from cases where racial identity remained implicit? That is, given our argument that American nationalism is culturally meaningful but structurally empty, is it also true that “American” is understood as a default identity? Does using no “we” term at all when discussing racial/national difference translate to “American”? The short answer is that it depends who the “they” in question may be. We think that in other contexts it may very well be that “American” is understood as the default identity. A latent but culturally potent “we” can be felt especially in times of crisis, as those American readers thinking back on the days following September 11, 2001 will recall.[7] In the Populist discourse this was not the case, however. We think this is a historically important point because the Populists, despite their undeniable racism on the issue of “social equality”, were pivotal in their definition of the interests of farmers and working people (i.e., those who they saw in a republican fashion as “true Americans”) in an inclusive way. As a Southern movement, stumbling toward interracial organizing for economic and political reasons but simultaneously resisting it for status reasons, NONE was more closely tied to whiteness (specifically CAUC) than to American-ness. It also bears noting here that not all invocations of whiteness were alike. The categories CAUC and WHITE were clearly associated with racialized “they” terms. ANG-SAX was different, despite its racial overtones. It was most closely associated with no explicit “they” term, indicating that it was less a term of exclusion than one of inclusion – a way to link white Americans with white Europeans in a racialized, rather than nationalist, way.

Having put forth a preliminary analysis of the relational structure of the “we” and “they” terms in the Populist discourse, we now want to illustrate another way of approaching the data. Relying on an interpretive strategy, and organizing the data by narrative affinity rather than by the more

rigid relational we/they pairs, we want to illustrate a more culturally sensitive way of approaching the issue of American nationalism.

The Meaning of "American"

From a cultural perspective, we might wish to know more about the operation of "American" on the level of meaning. Specifically, we might want to expand upon our structural findings above by asking whether the term "American" ever took on both nationalist and "racial" meanings as an identity term, and under what conditions it did so. Given that the Populists employed a language of Americanism, in what sense was it also an implicitly racial language? The previous analysis showed only that it was a language of citizenship, which generally differentiated "American" from "foreigners" and "aliens." This analysis thus tended to stress the "external" side of the issue of internal versus external exclusion. It also seems important to point to the "civic" side of the distinction between civic versus ethnic nationalism. We want to examine this latter point more directly by looking at the cultural meaning and context attached to the use of the term. Was the language of Americanism a racial language?

To analyze this, we return to the initial database, where cases are communications rather than we/they pairs. This allows us to interrogate the nuances of meaning in the text itself, and it allows us to examine those cases where "American" as an identity overlapped with other identity terms in the same communication. In this part of the analysis, our goal is to emphasize pivotal meanings in the text rather than the strictly representative cases.

The structural analysis highlighted the distinction between the external/civic and the internal/racial versions of difference in the Populist discourse. We wish to maintain this distinction here – the vast majority of the Populist discourse on racial/national difference was concerned with the racial side of the equation, largely focusing on the problems of building a biracial political coalition in the sharply divided South. But we also want to highlight the fact that when we begin to focus on the level of meaning, even the "external" and "civic" boundaries were connected to domestic issues and to racial ones.

If "American" was always used to invoke an external boundary, albeit with domestic implications, it did so in two ways in this discourse. First, and most centrally, the Populists used the term "American" against those outsiders deemed to be a threat from above. Here, it was alien investors, bankers, and land speculators that were seen as a threat to Americans. For the most part, the emphasis was strikingly civic rather than racial, as in the following statements:

> The title-deeds held by alien aristocrats to American lands are the transfers of the liberty of American citizens and evidences of their thraldom. By those patents the Government of the United States pledges itself to enforce the demands for tribute made by these foreign lords upon their subjects in this country. Can Americans remain content while such facts exist? (NE, July 20, 1889)

> Americans should own the lands of the country and alien ownership should be gradually extirpated so that every citizen should have a chance to own a home free from extortion and unjust exactions of alien or home monopolists. (NE, October 1, 1892)

These examples show the basic outlines of the discourse. "Alien" ownership (and in particular, "British" and "English" ownership) was, in the Populist mind, at the root of the problem for Southern farmers and others. There was some reason for this claim – British investors were in fact buying up Southern land and industry devalued after Reconstruction, and the main exchange

for the New South's staple crop of cotton was in England. What is most important in the discourse is its pronounced civic nature. Not only was the "British lord" and "alien aristocrat" marked on the far side of a civic boundary, the solution to the problem was also drawn in civic terms. The Populists advocated for a more democratic involvement in the economy and for more access to the political machinery.

But the civic issue became racialized as well. Connections that were mostly latent only became explicit in a few communications. Although the communications in which this happened were relatively rare, they were important nonetheless for understanding the nationalist conceptions of the Populists. Examining these connections closely allows us to expand upon our earlier structural analysis. One way that the civic issue became racialized was in the racialization of the "Americans" themselves. In general, the identity term "American" took its power from its structurally empty character – it denoted everyone together and therefore no one specifically. But in the times that its content was specifically examined, it came to denote whiteness. "The Anglo-Saxon of the South is the purest type of American idea of free government and the old Anglo-Saxon love of liberty," according to one communication. The author suggested that the Populist movement was now at the forefront of the American struggle for freedom against tyranny and that it the movement would invoke "the spirit of justice to stand guard with flaming sword and proclaim that through all ages Americans must and shall be free" (NE, September 7, 1889). The angle of American as white was rhetorically important for the Populists (and less reactionary that it might seem) because of the way it was played off of blackness in the relatively established labor idiom of "white slavery" (see Roediger 1991; Gerteis 2002). "Whose slaves are we?" asked one fairly typical communication in this vein. "Americans [–] read, think and act, or your children will be the abject slaves of foreign aristocracy!" (PPP, April 14, 1892). That is, (white) Americans were now enslaved unjustly as (black) Americans previously had been. The methods of force had simply changed from the whip to the mortgage, according to the Populists:

> Interest, earnings, rents, and profits are the shackles Americans have to fear; they are the modern development of the collar, the gives, the manacles, and the clanking chain. Already millions of acres of American lands are laid under tribute to English landlords, and still they continue to gather to themselves the lands, and through them levy their tribute upon American citizens and American industry. (NE, July 6, 1889)

It was also true that the civic/national object of the Populist discourse became racialized – the "English" and "British" became "Shylock" and "Jew." This connection is rhetorically important, but it is missed in the structural analysis. The connection is also historically important, despite its obvious inconsistencies with reality, since it reflects what has been called the "paranoid style" in populist rhetoric. In this, the Populist movement of the 1890s set the tone for small "p" populism for the next century. Below are two statements where this homology is made; the first is a claim about the political bosses, the second a claim about economic bosses:

> Congress was bought. The Presidential success was bought and belonged to Shylock, and he is a British gold-monger. . . The aliens are the land-owners. American yeomanry bought it with their blood and lives at Bunker Hill, and now it has gone into the hands of English capitalists. (NE, June 15, 1889)

> The first move of those wiley English Jews was to work on Congress through Wall street agents and direct to get control of this nation's currency, remembering well that "He who controls the currency of a nation controls its industrial and commercial prosperity." ... The next step was to obtain possession of our farming lands and people them with tenant

> farmers, that the rental might contribute to English support. . . The Alliance demands that those aliens become citizens, or that after five years their lands shall be sold to citizens and the proceeds handed over to such aliens, with the invitation to "git." (NE, October 10, 1891)

Of course, there were a few Populists who pointed out that there was little difference between English (or Jewish) capitalists buying up land and American ones doing the same thing (NE, January 3, 1891). Claims linking material conditions with national belonging, like most claims about national membership, are less significant as measures of historical accuracy and more salient for the kinds and content of social relationships they signify. What is especially clear in the second of these statements, though it needs some comment, is the conjoined nature of racial and civic nationalism. The structural analysis was very clear about the distinction between the racial and the civic/national in the "macro" image of the Populist discourse. Yet at the "micro" level, the distinction becomes blurred.

The first use of "American" was thus as in opposition to those perceived to be above. Less central, but certainly not uncommon, was the use of "American" as a response to those below. Here it was not the alien "lords" but the immigrant "paupers" who were the problem. In this moment of the discourse, the Populists echoed a fairly standard rhetoric in labor circles in the last quarter of the 19th century:

> The aristocratic institutions of Europe have sapped the vitality of their laborers and driven them, like lepers, to contaminate the industry of more fortunate lands….In this riffraff of European vagabonds lies a power servile and mercenary ready to the hand of arrogant plutocracy that would murder liberty at a nod. It is time for Americans to beware. (NE, April 6, 1889)

> [F]oreigners….have been educated under institutions directly opposite to ours, and yet they have equal influence with natives in the conduct of affairs. They may be equally honest as Americans and feel an equal interest in the welfare of the country, but the effect on education necessarily must influence their judgement, affect their conception of the true principles of republicanism. (NE April 20, 1889)

It is also interesting to note that like the "English lords," the new immigrants became racialized in the discourse, and in the same way.

> If the American press and people would waste less time and sympathy for the Russian Jews, and devote more energy toward bettering the condition of the American pauper, they would not only enforce the old adage that "charity begins at home," but would find plenty to do and that at once. All this gush over foreigners in distress is made more sickening when a closer look is given to home surroundings… (NE January 3, 1891)

> . . . The American would die where the Italian or Polish Jew would live and thrive. And this is the serious side of the slum problem for the better class of workmen and laborers in this country. The pressure of such competition, if nothing can be done to remove or lessen it, means slum life for them also. . . (NE November 5, 1892)

Discussion

This paper has examined the discourse of "Americanism" in the context of the Populist movement. Here the focus has been on the relation to "foreigners" – and the particularly

interesting construction of that term by the Populists. This was one case where a class project became yoked to a nationalist project, and a case in which a sense of both shared material interests and racial identity are foregrounded in ways we do not often associate with U.S. nationalism.

The Populist case is an interesting one, but it is not by any means the only one. We examine this case primarily because we have interesting and relevant data with which to do so. We think that the Populist case offers some important insights about the organization of American nationalism. But we also use the case to show what we can learn by taking the prospect of American nationalism seriously; in this sense, we hope that this article prompts more curiosity about the concept and more research into its operation. Did other movements organizing at around the same time treat the term "American" differently? Does American nationalism operate in a much different way at the dawn of the 21st century than it did at the dawn of the 20th? In what ways and contexts do immigrants themselves adopt a "nationalist" language and outlook?

What we can offer at the moment are some conclusions about the Populist use of "American" that we think have some relevance to other cases and other time periods. One central point that comes through about American nationalist claims is that "they" was easier to identify than "we." Misguided or not, the Populist movement had a much clearer sense of its enemies in both class and race terms than it had a sense of the boundaries of its own identity. The entire analysis was based on an imagined community of independent farmers, but exactly who fit that vision was a bit fuzzy. The sense of "we" was a largely negative one – "we" are not "they." We are "American." Even when we are thinking about recent events, it is not clear exactly who is included and who is excluded. This makes American nationalism a rhetorically powerful but analytically tricky thing. "American" in a sense stood as a racial placeholder. It operated as a racial term might, but without having to exactly say who fit. Further, racial and class identities were intertwined in this nationalist project. So while Populists participated in a class-centered movement, their construction of material interests also rested on defining racial others as opposed to Populists' class interest.

We think that this point is important for a general discussion of American nationalism. The point that we started this paper with was that all nationalisms involve a boundary distinction between "we" and "they." While most nationalisms stress the "we," American nationalism is, we think, almost always more clear about the "they." Without clear demarcations of inclusion into the category of "American," the term is often deeply culturally meaningful but structurally empty – it is unspecified and therefore meaningless in structural terms. We would suggest that one result of this is that when the term "American" is used in nationalist discourse, it is used to specify shared interests rather than shared identities. We also suggest, however, that manifest articulation of shared interests does not preclude the simultaneous (and often latent) operation of other cultural logics for making sense of collective pasts and national identity.

The absence of a strongly defined "we" does not mean that American identity is completely open and universal. Nationalist narratives like those used in the Populist movement are always exclusionary to some degree. This calls into question the common assumption that abstract principles of universality and equality characterize inclusion in the category "American". Understanding the ways formulations of membership rest on conceptions of exclusivity rather than on universal definitions of belonging is central to unpacking the meaning of nationalism in America. The present case helps to reorient our study of U.S. nationalism. It challenges conventional representations of an all-encompassing, and therefore empty, universality embodied in U.S. national identity. And in so doing, we suggest that attention to both the relational

structure and the cultural meanings of nationalist discourse can begin to show actors' claims about what is distinctively American.

If the American nationalist discourse is exclusive, then we should ask what sort of exclusions it rests upon. In the first part of this paper, we noted that the related ambiguities of internal versus external exclusion and civic versus ethnic exclusion made the American case messy and inconvenient for studies of nationalism. The Populist case certainly shows this, but it also shows why we should nevertheless pay attention to American nationalism. Part of the messiness is revealed in the differences between the structuralist and culturalist analysis that we provided.

The structuralist analysis emphasized the importance of both the civic/ethnic and internal/external distinctions and their correlation with one another. The analysis shows that the Populist discourse clearly distinguished between what we called "nationalist" reactions and "racialized" reactions. Nationalist reactions were based on civic exclusion of external others – here "American" was the key identity term used in relation to "foreign," "immigrant," and "English" others. Racialized reactions were based on ethnic exclusion of internal others – here "White" and "Caucasian" were the identity terms used in relation to "black," "negro," and "colored." Even here some ambiguities arose – "Jew" and "Chinese" clustered with the internal others while "Italian" and "Irish" clustered with the external others. In such cases, both the civic/ethnic and internal/external distinctions become strained. But overall the structuralist analysis points to the analytic usefulness of the distinctions, despite their theoretical problems. Simply put, even if the distinctions are useless as objective classifications of nationalist "types," they remain substantively meaningful for the actors producing nationalist discourse.

The culturalist analysis provides a different set of conclusions: even if the Populist discourse maintained civic/ethnic and internal/external distinctions on the surface, they broke down on the level of meaning. Even the civic and external side of Populist discourse was clearly related to internal concerns and it was clearly racialized. It is in this sense that the factually problematic but culturally important linkage between the English land investor and the Jewish Shylock should be read, for example. The difference between these two perspectives is important, and we see no reason to choose between them. It is the tension between the "good" civic and external-oriented nationalism seen in the structuralist analysis and the "bad" ethnic and internal side that begins to emerge in the culturalist analysis that makes the American case so interesting.

We are sympathetic as well to the claim that American identity is also related to the exclusion of internal "others" (especially black Americans) as Gerstle (2001) and others have claimed. Such a claim suggests that "American" and "white" are equivalent terms. Yet we want to raise a caution about this claim on the basis of our findings. At least in Populist discourse this was not the case. The structuralist analysis showed a strong distinction between the two terms – they related to quite distinct sets of others. Even the culturalist analysis which revealed a more "ethnic" side to the putatively "civic" discourse around American identity showed that white identity was by no means a given or universally meaningful category for the Populists. We think that this caution bears extension beyond the Populist case. We think that a more interesting issue arises when no explicit racial or national label is used at all. When is American identity implied rather than spoken? Certainly, the category "NONE" was different from "AMER" in the Populist discourse, but this is not always so.

We suggest that attention to how racialized and civic exclusions and inclusions are formulated, like those we have suggested above, may provide more leverage in analyses of nationalism. This is especially so for studies of modern, democratic states where discourses of inclusion and

multiculturalism often make claims about exclusion normatively untenable or simply absent. For instance, while democratic membership and participation have never been universal conditions in democratic societies (Calhoun 1994), we continue to have a difficult time explaining the boundaries of who should be included and why – so much so that many democratic states expand their membership today in ways they and their members find difficult to sustain materially and culturally (Joppke 1998; see also Lind 1995). While ideals about American openness and inclusiveness are culturally powerful, this inability to give substance to identity and nationhood tends to leave "American" structurally empty. In contrast to this undefined universality, we suggest that an examination and rehabilitation of positive, substantive versions of inclusion is also useful for analyses of nationalism and national identity.

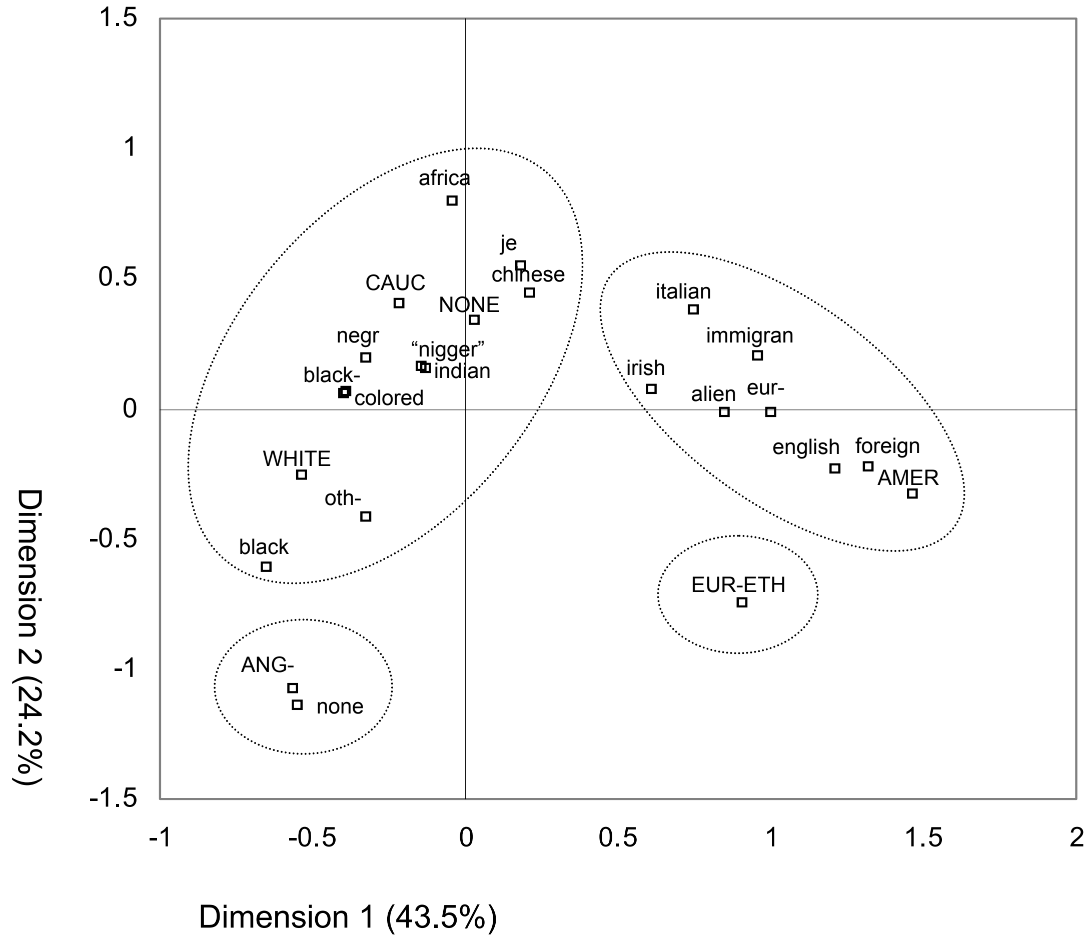
Table 1: Categories of "We" and "They" Terms

Category	Terms included	Frequency
1. "We" Terms		
AMER	"American", "native"	127
ANG-SAX	"Anglo-Saxon", "Saxon"	22
WHITE	"White"	354
CAUC	"Caucasian"	11
EUR-ETH	"Celtic", "German", "Irish", "Scotch"	6
NONE	No explict "we" term used	456
2. "They" terms		
black	"Black"	69
colored	"Colored"	198
negro	"Negro"	278
"nigger"	"Nigger"	33
black-oth	"Afro-American", "Coon," "Cuffee", "Darky", "Mulatto"	21
African	"African", "Ethiopian", "Ghans", "Hangese", "Krens"	10
Alien	"Alien"	37
Foreign	"Foreign"	69
Immigrant	"Immigrant"	5
English	"English", "British"	62
Indian	"Indian", "Choctaw", "Chickasaw"	41
Chinese	"Chinese", "Mongolian"	25
Jew	"Jew", "Hebrew"	25
Irish	"Irish", "Celt"	17
Italian	"Italian", "Sicilian"	13
eur-eth	"French", "German", "Hun", "Hungarian", "Pole", "Scandinavian"	24
oth-eth	"Arab", "Burmese", "Eurasian", "Hindoo", "Japanese", "Mexicans"	10
None	No explicit "they" term used	39

Table 2: Frequency Table for Relational Data

	AMER	ANG-SAX	WHITE	CAUC	EUR-ETH	NONE
black	2	3	55	1	0	8
colored	1	2	98	1	1	95
negro	3	3	117	4	0	151
"nigger"	2	1	11	0	0	19
black-oth	0	1	9	1	0	10
african	0	0	1	0	0	9
alien	14	0	4	0	1	18
foreign	39	0	3	0	1	26
immigrant	2	0	0	0	0	3
english	33	0	5	0	1	23
indian	3	1	14	1	0	22
chinese	3	1	2	0	0	19
jew	3	0	3	2	0	17
irish	5	1	1	0	0	10
italian	4	0	0	0	0	9
eur-eth	10	0	1	1	1	11
oth-eth	0	3	1	0	0	6
none	3	6	29	0	1	0

Figure 1: Correspondence Analysis of Relational



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PPP People's Party Paper (Atlanta, GA).

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Endnotes

[1] Note that Hofstadter (1956) is credited with this "status anxiety" argument. Although this has been ridiculed by some authors, a new wave of scholarship on the movement does emphasize the "moral economy." Pollack (1990) and Clanton (1991) examine the movement's democratic critique of the country's political and market systems. For both authors, it is clear that this progressive movement was also profoundly backward-looking.

[2] For classic studies of the Populist's ambiguous history with regard to race, see Watson (1892), Abramowitz (1953), Woodward (1963), and Gaither (1977). Some overviews of the movement in general are Hicks (1961), Goodwyn (1976), and McMath (1993).

[3] Our correspondence analysis computations were done using UCINET. On the method of correspondence analysis generally and the interpretation of its results, see Clausen (1998), Greenacre (1994), Blasius (1994), Blasius & Greenacre (1994) Weller & Romney (1990). Although the procedure is infrequently used in American social sciences, its roots are quite established. Clausen and Weller & Romney point to its foundations in work by Hisrchfeld (1935), Fisher (1940), and Guttman (1941).

[4] The third dimension also accounted for a significant proportion of the variance (16.9%), but its interpretation is trivial. This dimension was driven by a strong distinction of just two categories (ANG-SAX and oth-eth) from everything else. The other dimensions explained only a small fraction of the variance (9.5% and 5.9%, respectively) and were not substantively meaningful.

[5] We discuss these groupings informally, but they correspond to the four cluster solution provided by a cluster analysis of the data from the first two dimensions of the CA output. The clusters were formed by the "nearest-neighbor" measure (also called the "single-linkage" measure) using the hierarchical clustering procedure in SPSS. See Aldenderfer & Blashfield (1984).

[6] See, e.g., Wade (2001); Gerstle (2001); McClintock (1995); Takaki (2000); Christie (1998); Manzo (1996); Gilroy (1993); Lowe (1996); Goldberg (1993: chapt. 2). For more structuralist work asserting the same point, see Balibar & Wallerstein (1991).

[7] In such moments, even mundane pronouncements seem to take on new meaning, as indeed do symbolic exchanges that are not even verbal. Flags on all articles of clothing became the equivalent of an explicitly stated "we," but even fashion "statements" made without such obvious symbols seemed to speak with new clarity. We do not, of course, want to suggest that this is unique to the contemporary United States. It is true, we think, of all moments of radical rupture (revolution is the obvious case in the sociological literature) where the rupture is understood on a national scale.