"In the People We Trust!"

A Discursive Approach of the Beginnings of Populism in the United States of America

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POPULISM IS a particularly controversial concept in political science. While there is no consensus over its definition, its inexactitude or, to use Deleuze's term, its "an-exactitude"[1] (Arditi 2005: 362-37; Pârvu 2012: 175-88) has made from the very beginning its empirical strength, as it has been used by the most of the researchers and especially by the wider publics in order to describe a phenomenon endowed with "magical" features: its uncontainable attraction for the masses, its inevitability, its tendency to spread in all the areas of the social-political systems and all over the world, its implacable penchant to immolate the elites of the establishment and to fulfill in this way a rigid meaning of justice. From Ghiţă Ionescu, Ernst Gellner (Ionescu and Gellner 1969), Margaret Canovan (Canovan 1981) to Pierre-André Taguieff (Taguieff 2007) or Cas Mudde (Mudde 2002), populism has been the object of an almost permanent academic struggle over its meaning and its empirical range.

This is why I argue that the most effective approach is to define and analyze populism by using the tools of discourse theory, more precisely, the quasi-political approach of the third generation of this (still) emerging discipline condensed in the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.[2] In a nutshell, this generation of discourse theorists concentrates on the study of the discursive representation of the power relations, mainly on the constitution, confrontation, destruction and restructuring of the dominant networks of power through the dynamics of the discursive placements, displacements and replacements. Discourse theorists draw on two main premises. The first is that there is no pre-existing and self-determining essence of the world, no *Centre* capable to definitively structure and organize the meaningful world; in this, they follow the main conclusions of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1999: 61–79) and Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard 1979). The second is Richard Rorty's idea according to which the existence of reality does not guarantee the existence of truth (Rorthy 1989).

The claim of an absolute truth has to be abandoned once and for all and we should consider truth as being elastic, ephemeral and dependent of the truth regime that holds the rules for assessing the truth claim of a certain sentence.

As I showed elsewhere (Mişcoiu, Crăciun, and Colopelnic 2008: 17–20), based on these two premises, we should rather take the world as a polymorphous system of relations, within which the identities of the actors are always established via interaction. Thus, identity construction through the discursively analyzable social interactions becomes the essential object of discourse theorists. The central idea of discourse theory is that identity is constituted by subject's self-determination in relation to its non-identities, or, in other words, to the identities of the others. This operation is quasi-discursive, meaning that we produce (and we consciously or unconsciously reproduce) descriptions and analyses, which allow us to identify ourselves in relation to the outer world. This way, the discourse is both the "creator" and the "alternator" of identity, as trough the mechanisms of representation it invisibly and temporarily establishes the social positions and places occupied by individuals and groups. The domain of politics is the first to be concerned by this discursive constraint, as its way of functioning is based on the permanent negotiation of the principles of government.

For the clarity of this approach, it is thus necessary to propose a discursive definition of populism (Mişcoiu 2012: 66): "Populism is a discursive register with a hegemonic vocation that relies on the popular identity's exaltation operated through the ideological articulation of the presumed characteristics of a group (the People) and the exclusion of the Others blamed for the non-fulfillment of that groups 'identity'." Some of the elements of this definition require further explanations. The "hegemonic vocation" is the capacity of a discourse to become dominant in a Gramscian sense. The dominant or hegemonic discourse is assumed to be the natural descriptive and interpreting order of that society. A discursive account of populism is impossible without the understanding of hegemony as the result of a permanent process of naturalization of the artificial and of reification of the one reading of the world as being not only central but also the sole possible.

Exalting the popular identity means hyperbolically emphasizing its existence and vitality both in general or theoretical terms (the "People" as a superior or the unique form of collective identity) and in practice (the "People" as the living body showing its existence through the claims it defends). But neither of these hypostases reveals itself without the ideological articulation—the process through which the disparate features of the alleged community are combined in a logical chain of equivalence. Most frequently, the connected characteristics reflect universally recognizable virtues, such as "Brave," "Reliable," "Sincere," "Friendly," "Wise," "Tolerant," "Sympathetic," etc. As for the issue of the exclusion of the blamed "Other," I will discuss it here below more extensively when addressing the fifth argument of the discourse theory.

In the next pages, I will try to use this definition in order to investigate the late 19th century's American emergence of populism. For doing so, I will sequentially apply the five main points of discourse theory as they were synthesized by Jacob Törfing (Törfing, in Törfing and Howarth 2005), both in order to make the definition operational and to highlight the essential characteristics and specificities of this first major form of populism.

1. The first point is that social practices take place in an environment dominated by specific discourses that have themselves their own historical backgrounds. What it is said

today bears the burden of what was said yesterday and determines what will be said tomorrow. The evolution from one dominant discourse to another generally takes place through the liberation of signifiers,[3] as they become free, these signifiers are to be chained in a series of new logical continuums. In this context, some of the free signifiers become nodal points, gathering the various representations of reality in a coherent ensemble, but bearing the legacy of their prior meaning and configurations.

The study of the historical-cultural contexts when processes of free signifiers' proliferation occur is essential for understanding the populist phenomenon. In the United States, as early as in the 1820s, the freedom-equality dilemma that has been initially solved in the favor of the pro-freedom post-colonial elites received a different answer by the election of Andrew Jackson (1828). As opposed to his predecessors, Jackson was a "man of the People," culturally entrenched in the American middle-class farmers' world and sharing a certain degree of resentment against the "aristocratic" leaders of the Northeastern coast (Hofstadter 1955). Some historians trace the origins of the farmers' disdain of the urban East back to the Independence War, when the institutional configuration of the new nation and the overwhelming share of the country's foundational principles have been established as a reflection of the urban modernist Americans. While the image of Andrew Jackson as a forerunner of popular justice and genuine spokesman of the "people" is widespread, many observers underline, on the contrary, that inequalities progressed under his tenure and that industrial America gained a decisive advantage over the agrarian South (Sellers 1991: 14–22), which ultimately led, as a secondary cause, to the Civil War.

Nevertheless, it remains that the "Jacksonian" way of doing politics invaded the public sphere. His most important contribution was the generalization of an increasingly acute sense of unfulfilled economic and social justice that would ultimately be incarnated by William Jennings Bryan. All over the last three decades of the 19th century, the defense of the 'unprotected' was to be embodied by increasingly radical figures who attempted to connect signifiers such as "Order," "Faith," "Duty" or "Tradition."

Primo, the unprecedented mobility of the industrial revolution shook the agrarian society established by the first waves of colonists during the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century. The very temporality of the agrarian society has been definitely disturbed by the industrialization processes that imposed a more accelerated rhythm in all the aspects of human organization. As a Texan populist leader put it in 1891, "Nothing is as it used to be: sons rule on their parents, women work in factories, while only the elder labor the crops. If this ain't the end of the world, tell what it is!" (Wayne 1988: 121–23)

Secundo, there was a widespread concern about the decay of the religious practices that went along with the country's ethno-cultural diversification. The most of the "new comers" were not absorbed by the same type of faith that the Evangelical or the Baptist Americans were: it was less about an inspiring God—directly, deeply and personally communicating with each of the believers—and more about a series of social-religious practices that allowed for the partial social integration of some heterogeneous populations. There was a widespread concern among Baptists and Evangelicals that some other religions would become an essentially social mechanism for immigrants' integra-

tion, while the 'real belief' would be disregarded. The crisis of faith was even better expressed through the image that Southern and North-Western Evangelical believers had about this phenomenon they were confronted with: instead of the traditional faith, the "East" came with the "the Bible of the Rich," preaching the "subjection of all to the power of the gold." (Reichley 1985: 203)

Finally, along with the absence of "traditional order" and "faith" came an increasing feeling that the "natural duties" were no longer duly fulfilled in the American society. As presented above, the traditional social roles seemed to be seriously distressed. Though, populism emerged in 1880s also because of the increasingly spread idea that the federal government has stepped away from the contractual rights and duties established since the Declaration of Independence. On the one hand, it put up too many taxes on the shoulders of the "simple Americans." On the other, it performed a pro-active intervention in favor of the industrial "monopolies" and of the banks. The "popular rebellion" of Jennings Bryan surfed precisely on the discursive synthesis made out of these empty signifiers.

2. The second point of discourse theory holds that discourse is set up via "hegemonic struggles" that seek to impose a political leadership by articulating meanings and identities. Hegemonic combats are far from taking place in neutral, conscious and isolated battlefields. Rather they are the results of an everlasting series of sequential and chaotic efforts. The success of these efforts depends of the individuals' propensity to opt for those identity yardsticks that are sufficiently strong to maintain and reinforce some articulations of meaning and, above all, the temporarily dominant articulation. Discourse theory pinpoints that articulations that succeed in offering a credible reading key for the interpretation of major events become hegemonic. For creating and maintaining such articulations, discourse "dispatchers" use the ***ideological totalization***, a process through which discourse is structured in several nodal points, which, being combined, provide a particular representation of reality.

The 1880s–1890s' America was subjected to major disputes concerning not only the relations between the local, the state and the federal levels or the ones between the industrial and the agricultural worlds, but also the very identity of the American society. Antagonism on the definition of the American identity became increasingly socially spread. On one side, there were those who defended the core "inviolable" features of the first and second wave colonists—the famous WASPs,[4] and to an increasing extent, the "acclimatized" Irish and German Catholics. On the other, those who pledged for the extension of the civil body to include the more recent waves of immigrants and the Jews, as the latter layers favored the rapid development of a Federal state that looked like Northeastern urban America (Sellers 1991: 134–39).

The Jacksonian Era's exaltation of the "ordinary People" regained its place in the 1880s, as the massive and to a high extent aggressive process of industrialization led to the rapid reduction of the virgin fields in the West once coveted by the middle-class farmers. While having been allegedly victorious over the formerly all-mighty slave owners in the Civil War, the "ordinary people" seemed to have actually lost in favor of the rich industrialists and bankers of the Eastern Coast. By the mid-1880s, one can identify a process of ideological totalization around two nodal points: Faith and (Hard-) Work, the two

core values of the "simple and genuine" people who "made America and who were supposed to take it back from the usurpers," as one of the future leaders of the Populist Party, Thomas Watson, highlighted it many times (Hofsteder 1955: 80).

The latent floating of these empty signifiers is condensed in a coherent articulation that relates various discontents in a single chain of political claims. The figure of William Jennings Bryan emerges as the articulation between the need to restate traditional values (i.e. faith, duty, family) and defend the social and economic status of the agrarian society (earned through a long chain of wars against the British Crown and the aristocratic slave-owners) (McMath et al. 2008: 1–35). Emerging as a prominent leader of the agrarian branch of the Democratic Party, the charismatic lawyer (born in the Northern state of Illinois) William Jennings Bryan received the informal and then formal support of the Populists and succeeded to dramatically radicalize the Democrats' stance over numerous economic, social and cultural issues, such as the state subsidies granted to farmers, free silver,[5] the control over the cereals' prices or school prayers.[6] By 1894–1895, he succeeded to reduce the 'modernists' of the Democratic Party to a minority; therefore, he managed to win the primaries for the 1896 presidential elections. In the hegemonic struggle for establishing a meaningful American identity according to the Democrats, Jennings Bryan had definitely won "on for the time being the competition" (Lee 2011) with his rivals by imposing a particular account of the People.

3. Thirdly, discourse theory explains that hegemonic articulations of meanings and identities are based on the emergence of "social antagonisms." All the doctrines based on the ideological totalization are centered on the existence of the "Other," as a yardstick for structuring the identity and the principles of the "inner" group. Thus, "alteration" (or, in other words, the invention of the "Otherness") supposes by itself the identification of a non-*Us*, which, in the context of social and political competition, becomes an adversary whose nature and dimensions are signified through discourse. In order to give a sense to our own identity, the "Other" is excluded and, within social antagonism, confronted. Its identity structures our identity but at the same time opens the way for the dismantlement of *Our*-selves, as it offers an alternative to our identity. The determination of what is contained and what is not contained in our identity becomes in this way essential for our perspective of the world and for our manner to perceive the political. This determination becomes understandable through the imaginary construction of political frontiers, which are merely or not at all trans-passable in the case of the extremist and radical collective identities.

In the case of the late 19th century American populism, the "alteration" mechanisms are easily identifiable. The chain of equivalence among signifiers such as "Faith," "Order," "Duty" and "Tradition" found its stability in the articulation of an opposite chain of equivalence between "Richness," "Greed," "Moral Decay" and "Foreigners." The dangerous "Other" appeared as the "country-less" North-Eastern banker or industrialist, eager to conquer the entire America and to "sell it for profits."[7] For instance when arguing in favor of the radical platform of the Populist Party, Ignatius Donnelly smartly played on the integration of all the Christian believers in a common societal project, as he was a Roman Catholic candidate searching for a rural electorate that was quasi-dominantly Protestant. Therefore, he insisted on the "urgent common combat of the hard-working Americans

of all kind" and pointed out the twofold "huge gap" that had divided America, correspondingly the danger that "genuine people" could be "swallowed" by the "unfaithful soldiers of the Evil."

It is obvious that within this articulation, religion played a crucial role. The Manichaean dichotomy was constructed in such a way that borders between the "Army of Chris" and the "Servants of the Devil" became impenetrable. The few examples of "redemption," such as the case of a banker from Philadelphia who, after having lost everything, became a new-born Christian and joined Jennings Bryan's campaign, allegedly confirmed the existence of this confrontation within the American society.

One of the most important operations was to nominally stabilize the adversaries. After several hesitations, the populists opted for "Money-Power," a simple formula that could easily pass even for those who were less inclined to portray the Republicans or more generally the urban Easterners as the very incarnation of the Devil. "Money-Power" not only illustrated the mono-dimensional and immoral essence of the opponents, but was also fit for a conceptual integration with the Biblical account of the cupid and lawless people, such as the merchants that Jesus chased out of the Jerusalem Temple. During the 1896 campaign, Jennings-Bryan vigorously attacked the overwhelming strength of "Money-Power" and the "Washington-controlled" policies leading the farmers to bankruptcy (Barnes 1947: 367–404). One of the most famous quotes from this campaign concentrates the essence of the way Jennings-Bryan demonized his adversaries by using a religious-moral-economic rhetoric: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." (Reichley 1985: 203)

4. The fourth assertion of discourse theory regards the dismantlement of discursive orders. A discursive system dislocates when it unsuccessfully tries to bring credible explanations to the new developments that occur in the actual world. Dislocation takes place under the "destructive" action of the other discursive systems which aspire to hegemony by attempting to capture the signifiers freed by the formerly dominant system while agonizing. The apprehension of a set of publicly notorious free signifiers and their coherent ideological totalization give to a certain discursive system decisive chances to win over the others.

After the 1896 defeat against the Republican William McKinley, the rhetoric of Jennings-Bryan evolved in two phases: the first was one of "political normalization," as he abandoned the most of his radical claims and acted as a mainstream politician, and the second one, after the First World War, when he progressively swept towards a quasi-religious Evangelic form of militantism that culminated with the ridiculous attempt to repress evolutionist education in schools during the famous Scopes Trial (1925) (Wood 2012: 147–64). Nonetheless, his name as the term "Populist" itself has rather been associated with a series of political and electoral failures. After all, as Pierre Mélandri observed (Mélandri 2007: 310) the capacity of the Populists to persuade outside the increasingly isolated agricultural South and North-West was weak and after 1896 became insignificant. There was a striking contrast between, on the one hand, the ambition of the Populists to represent the "poor" as a whole—meaning the fusion between the interests of the disenchanted farmers and of the disabused industrial workers—and, on

the other hand, the rhetoric articulation that almost exclusively concentrated on signifiers that rang a bell only with the "Old America's ears." Consequently, the rather cosmopolitan working urban layer, though confronted to difficulties that have been underlined by the Populists, did not recognized themselves in the Jennings Bryan's account of the world and in his pleas for the restoration of the traditional American society.

Moreover, by 1900, following several years of economic growth under the Republicans, the most radical populists tried to regain the confidence of some of the rural voters by demonizing no longer only the "Money-Power conspiracy," but also the urban world itself. It is the case of Mary Elizabeth Lease, an ardent militant and writer, who exalted the virtues of the traditional rural way of life. Or, of an even more radical Populist, Thomas Watson, who qualified cosmopolitan cities as being "filled with the junk of the Creation,," whilst the duty of the "patriots" was to "clean out the invasive hordes" (Hofsteder 1955: 53). Such campaigns sealed the fate of the Populist Party by definitely isolating it in a specific form of resistant anachronism.

5. Finally, discourse theory holds that the dislocation of a certain discursive horizon is strongly connected with the emergence of the'"split subject. As a consequence of subject's failure to achieve a fully integrated identity, he or she is always in a process of search for an identification that offers the illusion of the complete integration. Politics is a field where the promises concerning the achievement of a common welfare may be widely understood as a perspective for acquiring a full identity. According to Slavoj Žižek, the failure of the "final identification" generates the dramatization of the search for identity (Zizek 1966: 16–18). It may lead to a choice in favor of some of the most radical discourses, which promise the immediate achievement of a full identity. But as long as these radical discursive systems fail at their turn to accomplish this promise, they feed the "dislocation of responsibility": the "Others" are always responsible for the failure of a full identity's achievement. This way, the perpetual creation and recreation of discourses in which those excluded from the inner group are guilty for the absence of a fully integrated identity become indispensable.

Researches of social psychology are practically inexistent in the late 19th century America, as psychology itself was a discipline *in nuce*. However, several writers, philosophers, historians or journalists of those times have contributed to the understanding of the way the main social, economic and cultural cleavages present in the American society impacted over the individuals' representations and actions, and, to an even deeper level, over their degrees of confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. The clash between two worlds—the one of the idealized agricultural society, based on an almost religious appropriation of the "promised fertile lands," and the other of the unstoppable industrial progress that would assure America's worldwide supremacy—had sizable consequences over the individual's self-representation.

The promises of equal participation to decision-making including a fair distribution of wealth vanished after the macro-stabilization that followed the Civil War. By the 1880s, none of the existing political actors had the capacity to enforce a project based on such a series of measures, and it was up to the Populist Party to raise the flag of equity. But for a sizeable part of the small farmers and generally of the rural Southern and Mid-Western conservative social layers, the deception provoked by the fact that the succes-

sive governments did not consider their claims as priorities of the political agenda had traumatizing effects. On the one hand, the first impulse was to reject the very idea of politics and to search the comfort within their families and the local communities. In the Mid-West, the electoral participation of the rural population, disabused by the repeated failures to hinder the penetration of the silver mine owners in this vast area, went constantly down between 1865 and 1888, as several statistics reveal (Wayne 1988: 223).

On the other hand, with the emergence of the Populists and with the Jennings-Bryan's break-through in the Democratic Party, this social layer radicalized and became increasingly responsive to the anti-establishment political appeals. Split between this two stances—inaction and rejection of politics vs. engagement in favor of the populist/populist-democrat platform—the rural population of the South and of the West proved to be an ideal target for the Populists of the 19th century's last decade. As opposed to the moderate Democrats and to the elitist Republicans, the Populists and the radical Democrat candidate Jennings Bryan whom they supported offered a clear binary representation of the American society that allowed for the plenary identification with those who "defended the People" (Stanley 1964). Consequently, the wide success of the 1896 Jennings Bryan's populist campaign among the Southern rural and small urban population could be also interpreted as a consequence of the individual's identification with his ideas and, without any doubt, with his charismatic character. But with the failure to win over McKinley and more generally to impose the rural-populist claims over the majority, the rise of the agrarian South was tempered and so was the farmers' and small entrepreneurs' attempt to identify with a clearly cleaving political project. Onwards, the electoral and more generally the political power of the rural world decayed and, with some moments of resurrection, had to finally bow in front of the strength of the urban modern world.

The 1900 and 1908 Jennings Bryan's re-nominations as a Democratic candidate revealed another man, whose eclectic promises were far from the 1896 radicalism and made the object of his adversaries' mockery (McKinley 1964: 49–58). These two far less populist campaigns resulted into some increasingly weak results. Jennings Bryan lost 155 to 292 in the Electoral College in 1900 (against the incumbent McKinley) and 321 to 162 in 1908 (against Theodor Roosevelt), far less than the score he lost in 1896: 271 to 171 against McKinley, with a small margin in numerous states that could have made the difference. Consequently, it would be logical to conclude that the populist mobilization of 1896 was the maximum extent that this current has ever been able to rich.

Conclusions:

By using the tools of discourse theory, I tried to make an alternative account of the emergence of populism in the late 19th century America. If the research question formulated at the beginning of this article was if discourse theory brought a certain contribution to the understanding of the populist phenomenon in an emergent mass-democracy as the United States were at that time, the answer could not be negative. There is no doubt that discourse theory provides a remarkable analytic tool and

that it offers a valuable alternative to the monist traditional approaches. However, on a more accurate level, is discourse theory sufficient to analyze the reasons of the political (at least partial) success of this particular kind of populism? The obvious answer to this second question is "no."

However, if we take into consideration the fact that discourse theory is far from claiming that it is by itself alone capable to approach general political phenomena, this negative answer could be challenged. In fact, discourse theory takes the discursive paradigm as a framework that gives the possibility to integrate open and multidisciplinary explanations. It is precisely its conclusion on the disappearance of a regulatory center of the social sphere that opens the way to negotiations between several readings of the world, which require the corroboration of data and interpretations proposed by all the social sciences. Consequently, as I tried to do in this article, it is not only possible but also mandatory to combine within the strategy proposed discourse theory an interdisciplinary analysis that gathers incentives at least from disciplines such as political sociology and institutional and electoral history.

The 1890s populist momentum reveals—for the first time in the era of mass political culture—the inner contradictions of liberal democracies, split between the foundational-ideological obligation to be responsible and responsive to the people and the practical necessity to organize an effective and coherent decision-making system. With the help of discourse theory, the gap between these two imperatives becomes analytically more understandable and consequently more addressable both in scientific and political terms. ❑

Notes

1. Benjamin Arditi characterizes populism as an '*anexact*' concept, following the terminology proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in order to describe the "essentially and not accidentally inexact terms" that elude the binary oppositions between exactitude and the inexactitude. The "obscure" character of populism is due to this very capacity to escape all the definitional attempts.
2. The overarching concepts of the third generation of discourse theory were developed especially in: Ernesto Laclau, Mouffe, Chantal, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Verso: London, 1985); Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Verso: London, 2000); Chantal Mouffe, (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (Routledge: New York, 1996).
3. The notion of *signifier* (*stream of sounds or acoustic image*) was coined by Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of Structural Linguistics. In relation to the *signified* (*concept*), the signifier constitutes the *sign*, which is the fundamental unit of linguistic analysis. The problem with the Saussurean project is the strict *isomorphism* between the signifier and the signified. This means that only one concept can correspond to each stream of sounds, implying that there cannot be any distinguishable difference between the concept and sound. A response to the failure of this project comes from three directions: semiology (science of signs in society) and more specifically, the work of Roland Barthes, the psychoanalytic current inspired by Jacques Lacan and the deconstructionist movement initiated by Jacques Derrida. *Grosso modo*, all these authors argue that a signifier cannot be permanently attached to a particular signified and thus, the meaning is only temporarily fixed to a centre of command.

4. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.
5. Elected in Nebraska, Jennings Bryan strongly campaigned in favor of bi-metallism (the use of both gold and silver) and for the reinstatement of the coinage of silver, that would favor the farmers as prices would have naturally risen. The Republicans and the moderate Democrats were opposed to such measures as they feared an uncontrollable inflationist spiral. For more details, see Samuel DeCanio, 2011. "Populism, Paranoia, and the Politics of Free Silver," *Studies in American Political Development* 25 (2011): 1–26.
6. For a relevant analysis of Jennings Bryan's influence over the Democratic Party, see Pierre Mélandri, "La rhétorique populiste aux Etats-Unis," in *Les populismes*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux (Perrin: Paris, 2007), 301-28.
7. As a William Harvey put it in one of his public speeches accompanying the launch of his *Tale of Two Nations* (1894), a novel that is for numerous critics a quintessence of the xenophobic and anti-Semitic mood of that period.

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Abstract

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While all the democratic systems have historically claimed representing the interests of the People, after being consistently entrenched, the most of them have in various ways partially excluded demos from the main decision-making processes. By the end of the 19th century, for numerous differently politically oriented philosophers, journalists or activists and regular citizens, the promises of the 1789 French Revolution and those of the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States of America have proved to be ignored by the leading officials and parties. As a response, a new political phenomenon, later known as populism, struck the pioneering democracy born out of popular revolution. While there is a considerable amount of literature about the beginnings of the American populisms, there are few writings aiming at comparing them by using the qualitative methods of political science. In this article, I shall deal with the case of William Jennings Bryan, in an analysis based on the methodology of discourse theory.

Keywords

Populism, Faith, Power, Agrarian, Claims