Considering Populism: Ancient, Modern, and Absolute

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Abstract

Modern philosophical theory informs the nature of populism and what it means to be a good, in the sense of beneficial to the people, populist from antiquity to the modern world. An analysis of three famous populists, Tiberius Gracchus, Gaius Gracchus, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, through the theoretical lens of Harry G. Frankfurt's books On Bullshit and On Truth elaborates on his ideas of truth and technical use of bullshit as information not committed to any truth in relation to the development of populism. Analysis is divided into two sections: a consideration of how they reached the climax at which their populism was truly beneficial, and a consideration of how they experienced a fall from grace or the shortcomings of their populist vision. What differentiates the good and the bad populist is the conflict between giving a populus truth by the populist who is considered good and the production of bullshit by the populist deemed bad. Throughout the paper, the ideas of the good and bad populist are held as just that, ideas, not necessarily concrete entities. However, concrete actors are believed to be able to shift between the various categories presented. This creates a definition of populism internal to the paper and tied to the consideration of truth and what responsibilities come with power of office. By analyzing the actions of these three men who can be considered populists by the aforementioned internal definition a new picture of what makes a good populist and the course that must be maintained by a populist to remain in that state of beneficiality is created.

1. Introduction

"*Vox populi, non vox regis, vox dei*" (The voice of the people is the voice of God, not the voice of a king)[1], is an aphorism concerning the will of the people in government and is an important political concept not only for the Roman context, but also for the American context. The will of the people is oftentimes difficult to gauge and enforce, but nonetheless this is the ideal of populism. Populism is a difficult thing to place into a concise and sufficiently encompassing definition. This difficulty stems from the fiduciary nature of politics and how this arrangement is often exploited. In essentially all societies where a form of democracy or republicanism is present, populism is bound to arise. With that said, I will give a definition of populism suitable to the discussion and examine the roles of such populists in the Roman context through the Gracchi family and in the American context through the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to create a better sense of what makes a good populist.

2. Populism

A working definition of populism must be created so that a proper foundation for assessment is established. Populism, as defined by dictionary.com, is "any of various, often anti-establishment or anti-intellectual political movements or philosophies that offer unorthodox solutions or policies and appeal to the common person, rather than according with traditional party or partisan ideologies," "grass-roots democracy; working class activism; egalitarianism," and, "a

political strategy based on a calculated appeal to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people[2]." A definition for the term "populist" given by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is "of or relating to a political party that claims to represent ordinary people[3]." Strangely enough, Merriam-Webster seems to avoid a definition of populism as a concept as of my writing this. Some of these definitions are more cynical or optimistic than others, so the initial state of the issue of pinning down populism becomes more clear, especially in considering the semantic differences between the statements which leave ambiguity and those that speak concretely. The definition I will employ in this discussion is admittedly a more cynical definition, namely, "a particular view invoked to create a sense of proximity to a political figure via claims at representation of ordinary people, true or false." The inclusion of "true or false" is particularly important to the discussion, given that the charisma of a speaker can often outweigh, justly or not, the consideration of the reality of an issue.

From this definition, a natural question to ask about populism is whether or not it is a defensible or even preferable stance for politicians to take. The answer is not as simple as a yes or no, but depends on other circumstances. To make this technicality clearer, the work of Harry G. Frankfurt creates an excellent argument about what exactly qualifies someone who tells the truth, a liar, and what he terms the bullshitter. It is this variance that produces the complex landscape of populism in practice. Frankfurt defines the bullshitter as "[Someone who] does not reject the authority of truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all[4]." It must also be said that the truth teller is specifically pertaining to truth which is not changeable by humanity but external to its influence. With these three entities, the truth teller, the liar, and the bullshitter, a better examination of what makes a good populist can be had.

2.1 Types of Populists and their Hierarchy

To answer the initial question of this line of thought, whether or not populism is defensible, remains, as with many things, in the hands of the practitioner. The truth teller who takes the position of a populist, given that he will most likely refrain from speaking on what he does not know about and avoid the risk of producing bullshit, would make the best populist. This individual, in commitment to truth, will attempt to adequately assess the state of the people he represents and communicate with his constituency in a manner that does not seek blind reelection or engage in blatant argumentum ad populum. The very acknowledgement of truth as a tool will give this individual an advanced position, as once again Frankfurt makes an excellent point that "... truth often possesses very considerable practical utility[5]." The liar would be the second best. This may at first be an absurd assertion to some. The liar is blatantly opposed to truth, the direct antithesis of the truth teller, yet he finds himself in second place in this set of three. The reason the liar would be second best is due to the fact that too many of his actions and statements would contradict the common knowledge of the people. While the liar would produce a turbulent situation for many, this time would be notably short, as it would be inevitable for the liar to fall out of favor with the constituency. So, naturally, this leaves the bullshitter as the worst possible populist. The reason for this is plainly stated in Frankfurt's own definition that he pays no attention at all to the authority of truth[6]. Because of this ambivalence, the bullshitter presents the greatest danger to the public, as he will act chiefly in his own interest, disregarding everything but the superficial approval of his constituents. The only exception to this hierarchy would be the possible benevolent bullshitter, something akin to a particularly positive view of the 20th century politician Huey Long[7], who sparingly disregards truth in public speech to maintain a course toward overall prosperity, but this position would most likely devolve into the generic bullshitter due to that same non-commitment to reality.

2.2 Populism and Demagoguery

One objection foreseeable in this argument is the seeming conflation of populism with demagoguery. This is not accidental, as the two concepts are intimately linked, if not the same in many regards. According to Merriam-Webster, a demagogue is "a leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power[8]." Dictionary.com takes a similar route in defining a demagogue as "a person, especially an orator or political leader, who gains power and popularity by arousing the emotions, passions, and prejudices of the people[9]." These two definitions do not wholly separate the concept of demagoguery from populism, as the previously explored definitions given by these same sources possess similar ideas, especially the definition of populism "a political strategy based on a calculated appeal to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people," from dictionary.com[10]. By this definition, it is fair to say that a demagogue is simply a malevolent populist or to use the rhetoric of this paper, a bullshitter.

3. Populists in the Roman Republic

A notable pair of populists from the Roman Republic are the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Their legacies are contested as both beneficial and detrimental, depending on the end in mind and what is attributed to them as a result of their actions. They both sought to benefit the Roman *plebs*, even if in nothing more than in their legislation, who had long found themselves disenfranchised by the governmental system at the foundation of the Roman way of life. Both of these political players introduced elements into the Roman political realm which would benefit the *plebs*. While this was true, not all was well with the Gracchi and their methods.

3.1 Socio-Political Landscape of the Second Century BCE

The second century BCE sees the major results of the Second Punic War after the Roman victory at Zama in 201 BCE[11]. After this event, the overall economic power of the Roman Republic increased drastically with the acquisition of new territory and the expansion of economic interests. Naturally with increased economic power at such a dramatic rate came increases in disparity between the general population and their interests and those of the upper senatorial class. Even before the second century came and brought with it this economic boom, attempts were made at limiting the involvement of senators in the economic spheres so that there would be more incentive for beneficial legislation, though these attempts were not foolproof since loopholes were quickly found. One such example is the limiting of Claudian Plebiscite in 218 BCE, where members of the senate were restricted in their maritime economic pursuits to only being permitted to own vessels with cargo capacities not exceeding 300 amphorae. While on the surface this seems like an effective method, a loophole quickly found was delegation to others[12]. This was the state of maritime wealth going into the second century: the rising of a new group of people deeply linked to maritime trade, amassing great amounts of wealth from sale of goods ranging from wine to slaves[13]. Regrettably, the situation in land-based industry and economies was all too similar.

On the land, what was essentially an oligopoly began to form. Large tracts began to be bought up by those with significant financial means, as opposed to the speculative nature of getting rich off of importing luxury items from one place to another. Lands won in the conflicts which Rome came out of, what should have been *ager publicus* or distributed to returning soldiers, were instead appropriated by nobles with financial interests in land ownership[14]. This mass acquisition of land comes to a head in producing two things: the emergence of the Roman working villa, and even more massive wealth disparity. With the Roman villa came something more, something which continued to cleave the chasm of wealth disparity, a significantly increased dependence on slave labor[15]. With this explosion of the slave labor market, funded by the blossoming maritime industry, more and more returning soldiers and Roman citizens found themselves without enough land to well support themselves and their families. Given that soldiers were expected to leave their fields to serve in the legions, the Roman Republic found itself in a great paradox of commending the service of their soldiers, but leaving their soldiers to fall behind upon their return from long campaigns, their fields lying fallow and their pockets growing empty.

With the realities of the economic realm being so heinously offensive against the welfare of the common populus of the Roman Republic, the realm of politics consequently began to suffer. The sentiments of the people were with whoever would promise change. For better or worse, the name of the political game being played was to play into the wants and desires of the people, no matter how contradictory to one's own beliefs and no matter whether one intended to deliver on their promises or not[16]. The demagogue, given a more kindly connotation in the ancient world, found his place on the Roman political scene amongst the mounting turmoil. As demagogic figures found the true power of the common people and the lengths they were willing to go to, great cracks were sent through the foundation of Roman politics. Long standing traditions would come to be under threat as the second century burned its marks upon Rome, most notably by the actions and policies of the previously mentioned Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius.

3.2 Tiberius Gracchus

The advent of Tiberius Gracchus to the political scene is what some scholars call the beginning of the end for the Roman Republic[17]. His policies appeared radical to the senatorial class who were reaping the benefits of the economic systems in play, as Tiberius sought to improve the lives of the Roman everyman. Though his career would come to a harsh end due to his own actions and how those actions were interpreted and spun by opposing factions in the political arena, his approaches and policies are worth considering in a discussion of what it means to be a good populist.

The thought of ancient historians seems divided on how to take the figure of Tiberius. The periocha of book 58 of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* paints Tiberius as a dreadful figure, seeking nothing more than his own personal benefit by rousing the people. This bitter resentment on the part of Livy appears in his statement "*Deinde cum minus agri esset quam quod dividi posset sine offensa etiam plebis, quoniam eos ad cupiditatem amplum modum sperandi incitaverat,*[18]" (Then there was less land than what could be divided even now without offense to the *plebs*, since he had incited them to the greed of hoping for an ample measure). This statement plainly accuses Tiberius of exploiting the masses, turning them into a vicious mob. The condemnation is also an insult, as it paints him as incompetent in that he did not foresee the results of his actions. On the other hand, there is the position taken by Plutarch as he comments concerning both of the Gracchi brothers that "as regards bravery in the face of the enemy, just dealings with subject peoples, scrupulous fidelity in public office and restraint in pleasurable indulgence, they were exactly alike," and "no other Romans were so well endowed by nature, they were thought to owe their virtues more to education than to nature[19]." With the full spectrum of virtue spanned by these widely different perspectives, the best manner to arrive at a conclusion seems to be to consider Tiberius' actions, his manner of life, and additional perspectives.

To pull from Plutarch further, he remarks that Tiberius was of a calm disposition "gentle and sedate" and that his style was "pure and elaborated to a nicety.[20]" By this description, granted it is Plutarch's own, the characterization of the elder brother approaches that of an actor concerned for the direction his homeland will take. The ancient historiographer Cassius Dio comments on the political career of Tiberius with an apparent back and forth for his own position on the matter. In the introduction to the career of Gracchus, Dio states simply "*Ὅτι ὁ Γράκχος ὁ Τιβέριος ἐτάραξε τὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων[21],...*" (So Tiberius Gracchus threw the affairs of the Romans into confusion), yet by the time of Tiberius' death, Dio is sure to remark "*Οὐκοῦν οὐδὲ τῶν ἀντιστασιωτῶν τις αὐτῷ θανόντι ἐφήσθη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκεῖνοι, καίπερ βαρύτατον αὐτόν σφισι νομίζοντες εἶναι, ἐπόθησαν[22],*" (So, it was said, not one of [his] opponents took pleasure in his death, but they also, albeit thinking that he was the greatest difficulty for them, missed him). These two statements seem to conflict with one another. If Tiberius were as terrible as Dio and Livy made him out to be, it seems strange that his death would not be met with satisfaction. In fact, this final remark points more to the case laid by Plutarch and another historiographer Appian. Appian writes on the death of Tiberius Gracchus saying "*καὶ οὐκ ἀνέσχον ἔτι αἱ στάσεις ἐπὶ τῷδε τῷ μύσει[23],*" (And yet seditions did not cease at this defilement), which gives a clear interpretation of the events as unjustified. With the consideration of these other perspectives, a picture of Tiberius as a more noble figure seems more appropriate.

Since Plutarch is a seemingly reliable source for the lives of the Gracchi, his considerations of their lives can be taken with much more sincerity. In Tiberius' early life, Plutarch states that he was even thought worthy of being an augur, given his virtue[24]. Shortly after, Plutarch also records a prosperous military career prior to his quaestorship, avidly defending the Republic, being the first over the walls in an attack and being much missed upon his leaving. Plutarch also points out one of the first major fields of negotiation that Tiberius participated in, as in a campaign against the Numantians in around 137 BCE he saved the lives of twenty thousand Roman citizens by his just negotiation for surrender after a failed attempt at retreat by the commanding officer[25]. This success, compounded by the fact that the Numantians refused to negotiate with any other Roman paints Tiberius in the light of not only a skilled orator, but also a person committed to justice more than any other Roman known to his opponents[26]. This picture of a man committed to justice continues as Plutarch accounts for Tiberius' political career. Plutarch gives information on the land won by Rome being bought up by the wealthy and worked by slaves, he recounts a meager effort to speak out against this wrong and from there Tiberius enters with his stance[27]. In Plutarch's speculation on the origin of Tiberius' concern, two aspects are most important to note: the attributed observation of disenfranchised Romans and the spurring on of the people which Plutarch records.

Given that the economic state of the Roman Republic, most notably the disenfranchisement of citizens in favor of slave labor, has already been displayed in ample detail, the claim made by Plutarch that Tiberius was moved by this injustice becomes more sustainable. If this is the case, this response of wanting something better for his countrymen, Tiberius begins to take the shape of a good populist. There must be more to the man, however, since his death was as brutal as it was. The more contentious aspects of Tiberius Gracchus come in with his interactions with the other members of the Roman legislative body and what some would call a power grab toward the end of his life.

3.3 Tiberius and his Fall from Grace

The image of Tiberius Gracchus becomes clouded when considering how he saw the rest of the Roman legislative body, most specifically his interactions with a certain Marcus Octavius. Plutarch records that Tiberius and Octavius were rather close associates initially, but this friendliness was degraded when Tiberius proposed his motion to revoke

the illegally claimed land and return it as *ager publicus*[28]. After this, Plutarch claims that Octavius' hand was forced to act in the interest of those influential men he represented, which incites the clash between these two which were otherwise friends. Plutarch goes on recording that after this blatant affront to Tiberius' interest, he rewrote the law, making it significantly harsher on those illegally possessing the land, demanding that they leave without compensation, as opposed to leaving with, as it would have been[29]. As time went on, with continued invocation of the vetoes respective to Octavius and Tiberius, a new motion was put forward by Gracchus to force the resignation of Marcus Octavius. Plutarch directly comments that this was an "illegal and unseemly" act, but this is considered what was necessary to assure the needs of the people were met[30]. Even Appian records Tiberius' reluctance to take such a measure as he states "*καὶ τῆς πρώτης φυλῆς καταψηφισαμένης τὴν ἀρχὴν τὸν Ὀκτάουιον ἀποθέσθαι, ἐπιστραφεὶς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Γράκχος ἐδεῖτο μεταθέσθαι*[31]" (And when the first tribe voted against Octavius, that he lay down his magistracy, Gracchus, having turned to him, was begging him to change his mind). Both Appian and Plutarch record Tiberius imploring Octavius to change his mind and not be forcibly ejected once again when only one more vote was needed, as the vote seemed it would be unanimous, if carried on, when all seventeen that had voted had done so in favor of Tiberius[32]. Once again, Octavius declined and was stripped of his rank.

This resorting to the illegal brings to light an important question of political philosophy. If the only way to achieve a just and lawful end is through unlawful means, what is the proper course of action? This resorting to illegal methods most likely pushed the needle temporarily in his favor, as he fully intended to seek a higher justice, it seems, but the following events would erase any gains he could argue he made peacefully. Plutarch records that once Octavius was being dragged down from the rostra, the people made an attempt to harm him, much to Tiberius' dismay. Octavius escaped the encounter, but the servant who protected him had his eyes gouged out, the first of much blood to be shed for the sake of internal politics[33].

The second illegal act committed by Tiberius is essentially what brought about the end of his life. Given how much he had shaken the ship of state, Tiberius must have known that a fate worse than that of Octavius awaited him. With this in mind, Tiberius attempted to secure a second consecutive term as Tribune of the Plebs[34]. Henderson remarks that much of the strategy undertaken by Tiberius was not so unusual in the Roman political arena, though the argument presented does not handle his attempt at a second Tribunate[35]. While Henderson concedes that the obstinance displayed by Tiberius regarding his agrarian reform was concerning, by Henderson's own argument, the agrarian reform was not an individual push, but one taken with his father-in-law, Appius Claudius Pulcher[36]. This individual approach to the problem puts Tiberius Gracchus in a position more akin to what was written by Quintus Tullius Cicero, that the politician ought to concern himself chiefly with securing the office[37]. Appian notes that Gracchus prepared for a fight to break out even, perhaps anticipating more extreme measures taken for his cause[38]. Plutarch finally leaves his position of supporting Tiberius in his final acts, which Plutarch claims were done "from motives of anger and contentiousness rather than from calculations of justice and public good[39]." In the end, Tiberius loses his life by his own actions and a confused perception of his final intentions[40].

3.4 Populist Conclusion on Tiberius Gracchus

Tiberius began his career as a rather promising face of the lower classes and soldiers of lower rank who had been watching their fields deteriorate in the various conflicts Rome was thrown and threw itself into. His focus on the economic issues, especially centered around land ownership gives the impression that he had a genuine interest and concern for the lives of the common people and not just the economic health of the senatorial class. That secondary concern for the senatorial class is only compounded by what he did to strengthen the *equites* into a balancing political faction. If the analysis were to stop here, it would be fairly appropriate to say he falls into the category of the truth-teller, given his commitment to rectifying an undeniable reality of the situation. However, Tiberius' actions after the refusal to accept his terms for land redistribution tell a different story. From here, the picture of Tiberius is one of a rash man, prone to the *argumentum ad baculum* raised by tyrants as he harshly punishes those who stand in his way. Despite this, his goal is still the same, namely to rectify the reality of the situation. He is by no means the paragon of populism, but he sits well in the positive range, so long as his descent into force is a cautionary tale.

3.5 Gaius Gracchus

The younger Gaius Gracchus follows after his brother and is in many ways painted as the antithesis to him by Plutarch. Plutarch gives a summation of his thoughts on the man in his opening lines to his entry in *Parallel Lives*, that he was able to make people around him "inspired and frantic with sympathetic delight" and that he was "averse to idleness, effeminacy, wine-bibbing, and money-making[41]." The initial presentation of his virtue, given the ancient connotations

of words such as effeminacy, and his capacity for oratory give him the potential to be one of the good populists, those committed to truth, as it were. This may not be an entirely reliable picture, however, as Dio comments that he was "... ταραχώδης τε φύσει ἦν καὶ ἐχὼν ἐπονηρεύετο, τῇ δὲ δὴ παρασκευῇ τῶν λογών πολὺ αὑτοῦ προέφερε[42]" (... [Gaius Gracchus] was, even by nature, rebelliously disposed and keeping [to such] he acted wickedly, and in fact would excel in his preparation of words much [more] than his [brother]). If Dio is to be trusted, Gaius may in fact find himself in the realm of a bullshitter, a detriment to the populus for his own gain. There may be a fair amount of credibility to Dio, since Plutarch remarks that Gaius would often get ahead of himself in a rage while speaking, and so had a servant who would play an instrument behind him to keep him at a relatively appropriate level[43]. Much of Plutarch's estimation of Gaius parallel those of Tiberius as he becomes a quaestor, participates in an outstanding military career, and building up a public name for himself by his interaction with the common people[44]. Despite the military credibility he had accumulated, Gaius came under scrutiny after he abandoned his consul in Sardinia in a rage, claiming that he was the only soldier that, going into Sardinia, "had a full purse and left it with an empty one[45]." Despite the scrutiny, this comment and his argument that he had been in Sardinia longer than the prescribed military service brought him safely away from any major scandal, believed to have been "most grossly wronged[46]." Gaius was not safe from ridicule after this, but he put away the accusations of being aware of a plan to revolt just as well as the scandal surrounding his return[47]. This gives a precarious position to build his populist platform from, as already the name of his brother and the memory of scandal work against him.

As Gaius committed to his pursuing a political career, he frequently invoked the death of his brother and gathered a great amount of support. Plutarch reports massive crowds joining him whom he would leverage by bringing the unlawful killing of his brother to the front of their minds and putting such an injustice in opposition to the actions of Romans in the past which held extreme respect for officials of all pedigrees[48]. His consistent dependence on such inflammatory oratory places Gaius much more in the modern, pejorative definition of demagogue, rather than the positive ancient connotation. However, the younger Gracchus seems to oscillate between the positive and negative connotations, since there are some very notable contributions he made to the Roman people during his first tribunate. The most famous of his reforms is most likely his grain dole which had ramifications for much of Roman society[49]. Regardless of that, there is more to consider about the younger Gracchus.

Where his brother failed, he succeeded, since Gaius managed to secure a second tribunate immediately after his first by the favour of the people, according to Plutarch[50]. In the span of ten years, the public mood had changed and the work of Tiberius was effectively taken up by his brother, who did not even need to campaign for the office to have it put in his hands. During this second tribunate, Appian records that Gaius shifted his focus to the *equites*, since he had fairly well secured his favour with the *plebs*, transferring judicial powers to them[51] to achieve his goal of undermining the Senate in two ways: removing a power base from them and gaining a backing from another prominent section of Roman society. Around the same time, the Senate decided they needed their own proxy populist, more or less, Livius Drusus, who turned the favor of the people more in favor of the Senate[52]. This may have resulted from Gaius' lack of focus on the *plebs* in favor of the *equites*, but Plutarch also notes that there was a major difference of methodology between Gaius and Livius, namely that Livius would delegate the administration of the measures he proposed, while Gaius was determined to oversee the events himself[53]. Despite Livius gaining more ground than himself with the favour of the populace, Gaius found a way to use land, once again, to sway the people back to his side of the aisle. Plutarch credits Gaius' voyage to the old site of Carthage as the point where his favour with the populace takes a massive fall[54], but Appian claims that Gaius' fame had already well been diminished prior to his voyage and that he actually used the colony as a means of strengthening his connection with the people once again, expanding the amount of people allowed land in the new colony to 6000, as opposed to what had been prescribed[55]. Despite the attempts to reclaim the good standing with the people, this seems to be the point where Gaius fully leaves a position of major power.

3.6 Gaius and his Fall from Grace

It is upon his return that the actions leading to his downfall come into full swing. Plutarch records that Gaius' attempt at expanding the population of the new colony was a catastrophic failure which resulted in a great deal of hardship[56]. Upon his return, he once again had to face the power of Livius over the people and so he attempted a return to form, as it were, collecting his body of supporters around him, even going so far as to live by the forum with them, as opposed to on the Palatine hill[57]. Gaius' methods became increasingly dissonant from his intentions, assuming they still remained with the people, since he would in one moment ignore the mistreatment of his supporters but at another work against his political rivals claiming that it was for the benefit of the people[58]. By this point, Gaius appears to behave very differently from when he had instituted something as massive as the grain dole. Whether this was for his

own protection in that he had to pick his battles is unclear, but what is certain is that his political career continued to suffer from this point on.

Tensions continued to climb toward their breaking point amongst the political factions. Another murder is committed, but this time it is not against the populists, rather against their opposition carried out by people allied with Fulvius, a friend of Gaius. A servant of the new consul, Opimius, who was opposed to Gaius, was stabbed to death with writing instruments which Plutarch states were "said to have been made for just such a purpose[59]." Appian even records that this killing occurred on the inferred orders of Gaius himself, though the glance given may have been rather misunderstood[60]. The partisans of both groups go back and forth over the various injustices committed against them. Among the populists, Tiberius is mentioned frequently, mirroring the early campaigning of Gaius, in how he was killed and his body was simply tossed aside, despite his tribune status[61]. This lack of ceremony was considered a great contrast to the honored mourning of the servant who was killed[62]. The recordings of Appian and Plutarch diverge at this point. Plutarch claims that Gaius' opposition armed themselves first, while Appian claims the exact opposite[63]. Regardless of the order in which the factions armed themselves, both Appian and Plutarch agree that the populists attempted to gain leverage by seizing the Aventine hill. This venture failed and both were killed in the chaos that ensued[64].

3.7 Populist Conclusion on Gaius Gracchus

While the younger Gracchus did attempt to do well by the people, ultimately, a flaw in his character seems to have brought about his downfall. The anger which fueled his campaign for the tribunate and his overall oratory bled into the people he was representing. In continually invoking images to enrage the people, his arguments for their treatment fell into the trap of devolving into an argument ad populum. With his appealing to the people and the large crowd he could manifest, the tactics he employed then became a further manifestation of rage, transmuting into an argumentum ad baculum. Despite Gaius most likely realizing what he was doing in his rhetoric, as both Appian and Plutarch recorded his elegance, it is this very thing that brought about his failure. He lost control of the raging beast he turned the people into. By the results of his actions and tactics, it seems most appropriate to place him between a benevolent bullshitter and a bullshitter. His benevolence was well manifested in actions and laws, such as the grain dole, but this did not save him from the fate his actions won him. His appeals to the rage of the people, defying any semblance of courtesy which may have preserved him pushed him to become a bullshitter properly. As such, his life was ended, along with those of his supporters whom he risked.

4. Populists in America

Populism in America has a relatively short but notable history, partly due to the albeit short lifespan of the United States as a major world entity thus far. This movement for populism has manifested as milder reforms as well as contentious calls for heavy reform. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is notably populist in that his actions during the Great Depression focus on preserving the lives of the citizenry for the sake of preserving the nation[65]. Despite his populist leanings, however, he is not the most extreme American populist that can be found. That title most likely resides with Huey Long, if regarded in a positive light. All of this is to say that Roosevelt did not stand alone in his populist notions as the American people grappled with internal strife, asking what the government was meant to do and what it could do for them.

4.1 Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FDR is remembered fondly in some circles and not so well in others. He began his presidential legacy with his management of the Great Depression and ended his never before or since seen four terms with the closing year of the Second World War[66]. William Pederson states it well when he remarks of FDR's legacy that, "While FDR guided America out of the Great Depression and navigated a dangerous world war, he demonstrated that even great leaders can be blinded by success and unchecked power, particularly during times of war and hysteria[67]." There are many blemishes that stain his legacy of social progress, which makes him a prime candidate for examining the tightrope of the populist.

FDR began his political career in much the same way as Theodore Roosevelt, holding the governorship of New York prior to his presidential candidacy, as well as several other positions within the state legislature[68]. He was trained

in part by an American pragmatists, William James, which gave some basis for how his political philosophy had formed[69]. As he proceeded into his first term, FDR began to engage in a sort of experimental image crafting. He lifted the ideas of previous presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson forward in order to modify them for the present moment, namely a moment of international economic decline and reassessment of ties. From Theodore Roosevelt, FDR brought forward the idea of his 1912 running platform and from Wilson he brought forward the model of the League of Nations which was in need of remodeling to produce a more effective system[70]. While these were effective political tools to employ, the monolith of FDR's career truly is his New Deal.

   FDR's New Deal, composed of several programs meant to alleviate the economic turmoil of the time and reform the social protections system to better protect against such dire situations, did do as it was meant to, but there were many cans that were kicked down the road, as it were. The first major step of the New Deal, the Social Security Act, was brought into effect in 1935[71]. This is a double edged sword for many reasons, but the most important of the reasons is that even now the American populus is struggling with the idea of what it means to be a welfare state and whether or not that is a noble path in the American experiment. As the name would suggest, this act established the social security system, providing for those who could not effectively provide for themselves. This is, for all intents and purposes, a decision well in line with a populist vision. There is nothing to be gained in the immediate scope of the project for those who would never find themselves in a position of substantial financial instability which leaves the focus on the working people, those who drive the motor of the economy. The second major facet of his New Deal was the allowance of collective bargaining and by that the right for workers to organize themselves through the National Labor Relations Act[72]. Again, this is an undeniably populistic move, as it removes power from the hands of employers which had been exercised to brutal extents in the past[73]. The final piece of legislation to compose FDR's New Deal was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act in 1944, commonly termed the G.I Bill[74]. Once more, FDR shows his populist hand as he gives tremendous benefits to the troops returning from the Second World War and effectively secures benefits for soldiers thereafter. All of these positions are quite obviously good and natural to take from the perspective of the populist. They openly benefit large swathes of people of various backgrounds at various stages of life. Even beyond these actions, FDR went so far as to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, which overturned xenophobic restrictions on Chinese naturalization since 1882[75]. Not only did FDR appeal to the wider audience of Americans with his actions passed under his presidency, he appealed to the neglected sectors of society. If this were where the record of his legacy ended, he would be a perfect example of a truth-teller populist. Regrettably, this is not the case.

4.2 Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Shortcomings

A major stain on FDR's presidency lies in his decisions pertaining to the Japanese-American populus. Initially, the actions taken were extremely disturbing, but not the worst they would get. The initial measures taken after the attack on Pearl Harbor were to seize assets of Japanese-American services, namely banks and businesses[76]. The measures grew into something unthinkable in the eyes of a democracy: to allow the collection of Japanese-Americans into internment camps[77]. This very action works entirely contradictory to the ideas of a populist. If anything, this would be a concession to a type of majoritarianism where the majority class has rights above and beyond those of the minority. It falls in line with the remark of Knott, as he says about FDR that had a tendency to act a bit Wilsonian with his undermining of institutions generally external to himself[78]. Pederson gives another excellent example prior to the internment of Japanese-Americans where FDR's overreaching was quite clear. In attempting to gain a more effective management platform for the presidency, he was also attempting to undermine a portion of the Supreme Court which was threatening his New Deal legislation[79]. In addition, FDR also attempted to pack the courts through additional legislation, effectively undermining the system of election and appointment[80]. It is this fault of overextension that often is the undoing of a populist, the failure to see oneself as on par with the components of the society and government external to themselves. While FDR has a pleasant legacy in peace-time domestic affairs, more or less, his policies for expanding the power of his office leaves a harsh stain on his record.

4.3 Populist Conclusion on Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FDR carries with him, as has been shown, much that is positive, but seemingly just as much that is negative. While he did seem to genuinely care for the American people, there was something that grew and mutated from his pragmatic training. In his pragmatism, he saw that direct access provided expedient results, however, there was a failure at foresight with his actions. In seeing that there was much good he was capable of doing in office, FDR seems to have shifted from the truth-teller populist to the benevolent bullshitter, as he saw strings which could be pulled to expand his own powers for leading the nation. It seems this fear eventually drove him to alienate pieces of the American

public which were easy targets, most notably the Japanese-Americans. And so again there is a piece seen to be missing from the potentially good populist, a bridle on ambition.

5. Conclusion

Populism has much to offer the people, as has been seen in the good done by all three political figures examined. Tiberius wanted to ensure the Roman people had a stake in Roman land, Gaius wanted to do the same and keep the Roman people well-fed, and FDR wanted to see economic and social protections of all sorts for the American people. Yet, each of these men failed, sometimes in massive ways. Tiberius failed in that he wanted to grasp more power for himself, much like FDR, and Gaius fueled flames of discontent to achieve his goals. All of these men began their journey from the same place, wanting to better their homeland and its people, and they all fell in some capacity whether it was a breaking of their own will or a breaking of the law. With that said, the duty then falls to the people to bring up a truth-teller, to produce a populist.

6. Endnotes

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26. Plutarch, Life of Tiberius Gracchus, 5.3

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29. Plutarch, Life of Tiberius Gracchus, 9.1-3

30. Plutarch, Life of Tiberius Gracchus, 11.2

31. Appian, Civil Wars, 1.12

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35. Henderson, 51-64

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43. Plutarch, Life of Tiberius Gracchus, 2.4-5

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