

“Everyone was Pounding on Us”: Front Porch Politics and the American Farm Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s

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Abstract This essay analyzes agricultural politics and activism in the United States during the farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Although journalists and social scientists studied farm activism at the time, historians have neglected it. As this article demonstrates, however, the farm crisis is valuable for analyzing why ordinary Americans mobilized as citizens and activists in a period of economic dislocation. Informed by the recent “emotional turn” in social movement studies, the essay frames farm organizing as an archetypal example of “front porch politics”. Mostly, farmers organized out of a sense of being wronged; the resulting sense of injustice fueled a rural uprising.

Looking toward the upcoming 1986 mid-term elections, a *New York Times* journalist interviewed several Georgia farm-country men about the state of the country. “Seems to me like some folks somewhere are trying to dismantle America – the steel mills, the farms, the textile industry” said Ed Bailey, an employee of a failing cotton gin and farm supply business in Vidette, Georgia. “That’s become a central theme around here”, one of Bailey’s farmer friends chimed in, “the dismantling of America”. Wynder Smith, a farm supply businessman from nearby Wadley, pointed the finger at Washington and government-set prices. “They are forcing us out of business”.¹

Two years earlier, these same Vidette farm men had helped reelect Ronald Reagan to a second term in a rout of Jimmy Carter’s former vice president, Walter Mondale. But with the 1986 mid-term elections approaching, the Georgia farmers were having a hard time finding a reason to vote Republican.

Who these men voted for in 1986 or 1988 is not as important as the persistent feeling they described – that “somewhere”, “some folks” were busy dismantling America. For that feeling was not new. For almost the whole of the 1970s and 1980s, against the backdrop of severe economic dislocation, most Americans had come to see the dismantling as a steady, merciless process. It did not matter

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who was president. It mattered only that nearer to home – in fact, *in* one's home, and on one's farm, and down at the factory, the life one dreamt of was being taken away, and not gently. In many ways, the unifying experience of 1970s and 1980s America derived from this anxiety, the prospect of losing one's job or home – or both. All over the country, factories and mines shut down, banks foreclosed on farms, and high taxes and rents drove residents from houses and apartments.

Just as home owners in places like Love Canal, New York – a neighborhood that had been built on top of a toxic waste dump – felt more acutely mistreated because they believed they had followed the unwritten rules for claiming a just portion of the American dream only to feel abandoned by government, all over the nation, factory workers, farmers and farm workers, homeowners and tenants felt similarly. The vast majority of Americans sought not millions in wealth, but security and comfort in an American dream that animated their hopes. In the late 1970s and through the 1980s, however, many of them felt fooled as forces beyond their control undermined the very comfort and security they prized. As they sat on their front porches and surveyed the changing world around them, they felt duped, swindled, and in the parlance of the time, "screwed". The new poor of the Rustbelt and Farmbelt, journalist Haynes Johnson later wrote, "had been winners, or so they thought. They had made the 'right' economic moves, had progressed and become confident that tomorrow would always be better than today". But now, "their life's hopes were dashed; their once highly paid blue-collar jobs were gone, their farms sold".²

Most Americans did not take this lying down. They mobilized into hundreds of small organizations and activities, pulling back on the dream they sensed being taken from them, fighting powerful forces including industry and government, and, often, other groups of similarly scrappy citizens. Fundamentally, they organized to defend and hold onto their jobs and homes in ways that were strikingly similar across the country. It was not a unified social movement, *per se*, but to look back at it now is to see a mass mobilization in defense of jobs, farms, and homes that sprang from the same sense of being denied a piece of the American dream.

This history has largely been buried by a landslide of books that recount one or both of two tired tales. In one, historians who were at first puzzled by the rise of the right have rushed to define the decades after the 1960s as marking a national shift toward conservatism and a renunciation of the mid-century liberal consensus. It is, in most tellings, a story of a rout, of conservatism triumphant and liberalism vanquished. There is little evidence of a fight;

indeed, there is little evidence of serious political conflict at all.³ In the other, scholars led mostly by political scientists, have marked the 1970s and 1980s as years of civic disengagement that saw a retreat not only from activism, but from civic life of all kinds, from the PTA to bowling leagues.⁴ Although recent years have seen modest revisions, these two myths have a strong hold in the national memory.⁵ Taken together, the prevailing interpretation is that between the 1960s and the 1990s, most Americans – some have called them the “anxious class” – experienced a crisis of civic membership. Beaten down by sharp economic decline and failed by government, they hunkered down, retreated from politics, and came out only to support any politician who promised to get government off their backs.⁶ Free will and individualism overcame ideals of community and activist government. By the 1990s, political participation, we are told, involved little more than writing checks.

But these generalizations hold true only if we examine America in the 1970s and 1980s by looking for national trends. In so doing, we miss a much more varied American political experience: indeed, we have missed the essential fact that Americans experienced politics in different ways. On the one hand, most Americans watched national politics the way they watched sporting events, observing and gathering information through news accounts in print, on television and radio; the terms of debate were set by political elites and the national discourse, such as it was, becomes grist for conversation around the water cooler, the dinner table, or after church. But it did not often move Americans to sustained political activism.

In contrast, another kind of political experience, closer to home and more immediate in one’s life made it much more likely to move Americans to engagement and participation. This is the politics that is largely missing from our understanding of the 1970s and 1980s, the politics that, as historian Robin Kelly once defined it, “comprises the many battles to roll back constraints and exercise some power over, or create some space within, the institutions and social relationships that dominate our lives”.⁷

This article on farm politics and activism is representative of my effort to reorient our approach to this critical period in American history by rejecting the usual terms of debate – so tightly focused on liberalism and conservatism – and examine American experience from the perspective of what I call “front porch politics”. As the farm activism in this essay makes clear, the key to a citizen’s civic engagement could be found at the front door where he or she could see one or more ominous signs encroaching on their lives, their homes or their communities, and none of which were being

addressed effectively by government. Emotion borne of personal experience consistently sparked political action.

The first key to understanding the front porch political perspective is in understanding how Americans came to give up on the idea that government could provide solutions. Thanks to the Vietnam War, urban unrest, Nixon and Watergate, Americans became increasingly convinced that government – from federal to local – was failing to offer remedies or effective leadership on the issues that mattered most. These perceived failings of government came just as most Americans began to sense that their problems, and the nation's problems, were only growing. Life was getting tougher and less predictable. Government seemed unable to solve a host of crises, either because it was incompetent or because it was, itself, the source of the crises.

This narrative should sound familiar. Scholars and pundits have long pointed to the public's lost faith in government – at a moment of national decline – as critical to the rapid rise of the right in the 1970s and 1980s. And it is true that Americans' anxiety and alienation from government helped conservatives and the electoral prospects of the Republican Party which succeeded in reflecting and echoing back the public's anger more effectively than the Democrats. Acknowledging government failure – and, in fact, blaming government – did not, however, amount to offering solutions. The problems most Americans faced in the 1970s persisted even in the heyday of Ronald Reagan's "revolution", and ordinary Americans, as a result, continued to organize around front porch issues. The main mistake scholars have made in evaluating this period in American life has been to conflate that anger and anxiety with the rise of the right. The Right may have benefitted electorally, but, in reality, Americans mobilized across a wide array of political issues not because of ideology, but because they were searching for solutions. Efficacy and ideology are plainly not the same thing.

Americans may have increasingly identified with candidates who seemed to share their frustrations with government's failings, but they did not do so out of ideological convictions so much as practical ones. In fact, political scientists have shown that although Americans began to more frequently label themselves "conservative" or "liberal" in the 1980s (primarily in response to the national punditocracy's frequent use of such terms), they did so in spite of "a lack of attitudinal change" on the pressing political, social, and cultural issues of the time.⁸ Take away this relatively superficial act of self-labeling and look instead at serious political engagement and we find not a steady march to the right in American politics, but pervasive political combat across all kinds of political issues – and almost always unrelated to ideology or party affiliation.⁹ And this

political combat was as prevalent in the 1980s as in the 1970s. Life remained tough and unpredictable. Indeed, one could make the case that Ronald Reagan's first term as president was perhaps most notable for the dawn of community service organizations dedicated to helping Americans of all kinds – from families living in farm country, to urban groups in the midst of the AIDS epidemic, to folks living in suburban neighborhoods built on toxic waste dumps – weather the hardest hard times since the Depression.

Clinging to the rise of the right narrative as the dominant explanatory framework for understanding America at the end of the twentieth century serves only to obscure what really mattered to most Americans: addressing core concerns (physical, economic, legal, environmental, cultural) affecting their families. That is, to the overwhelming majority of Americans, ideology came in a distant second to competence and efficacy. Americans cared about what works, particularly in a crisis – and Americans experienced much of the 1970s and 1980s as a crisis. Front porch mobilization grew out of a highly varied assortment of issues, usually perceived as an encroaching threat. The *proximity* of the threats, and the emotional responses they kindled, drove political mobilization. One might vote Republican or Democrat, or label oneself conservative or liberal, but what got you off your couch and into the battle was the immediate sense of existential threat.¹⁰ The front porch, therefore, became the crucible for moral outrage. In sum, the perception of the existential threat produced the emotion that, in turn, sparked action.¹¹

Farmers have always been beholden to an array of external factors including volatile prices, government policy, lending rates, shipping costs, and the power of various middlemen. And there is a long tradition of American farmers organizing to overcome these hazards and to exercise more control over their circumstances. Dating to the nineteenth century, the politics of the latter had long been dominated by struggles against banks and government and set within a Jeffersonian vision of republican citizenship. That is, in their minds, if not in others', they occupied a hallowed place in the revolutionary ideals of the founders. "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens", Jefferson wrote. "They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds". Moreover, farmers also knew that they had helped win the world wars and outshone the Soviet Union's collective farming model. "You could hardly find a better symbol of freedom", Eric Schlosser says, "than the American farmer".¹² And yet, by the 1980s, farmers found themselves clinging to survival, with many not making it.

The struggle of these iconic symbols of freedom, sitting astride their John Deere tractors has largely been left out of the histories of the 1970s and 1980s. In part, a focus on urban and suburban America in the postwar years has left the rural experience in the shadows. In addition, there is a sense that the 1980s marked an end point, the last gasps of desperate and incompetent independent farmers. But that is far too simplistic. For the family farm movement that arose out of the farm crisis in the 1970s and 1980s sprang from the same kind front porch ethos as the movements against plant closings, drastic wage and benefits cuts, toxic waste poisoning a community, high taxes and skyrocketing rents, etc: in each case, ordinary Americans became activists because they felt as though they had been treated unfairly, had been abandoned by government, and that that unfair treatment would lead to the end of not only their lives as they knew them, but of their hopes and dreams. Far from wanting the government to leave them alone, they wanted it to intervene and ensure that they would be treated fairly. Farm politics, therefore, does not fit the usual narrative of rising conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s. Farmers do not fit the mold. They were both conservative in their entrepreneurial spirit and eager for a government presence that would ensure a fair shake.

Maybe the most important thing to remember about the farm crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s is that no one saw it coming. Just as economic experts in the 1930s could not see – because it fit no historical models – that the Depression would wind up lasting twelve years, economists in the 1970s used an outdated play book against what seemed like an invisible foe. Indeed, farmers thrived compared to most Americans in the 1970s. Global grain shortages drove the price of American wheat to historic highs and with the dollar, unmoored from the gold standard, running weak against other currencies, foreign governments could afford to buy as much American produce as they wanted. The Nixon administration told farmers to plant “fencepost to fencepost”, and fashioned policies to spur further investment in agriculture. American farmers prepared to “feed the world”, by expanding their operations – mostly with money borrowed from banks happy to lend it amidst such rosy price forecasts.¹³

At the same time, in the inflationary climate of the times, the “value” of farm land began to soar. Some farmers began to see themselves as much as investors as producers. One farmer told a *New York Times* reporter that he had borrowed so much money to buy so much land that was going up in value so fast, that every morning he “woke up \$8,000 richer”. Many commentators later noted that a new brand of farmer – younger, college-educated, heir to the family farm – saw a bright future in all of this expansion. And

in this they were encouraged by so-called experts. "The farm crisis caught most university researchers – along with nearly everyone else – by surprise", the *Chronicle of Higher Education* later reported. "Few agricultural economists foresaw just how quickly or how drastically the agricultural bull market of the 1970s would change in the 1980s".¹⁴

By the late 1970s, the fencepost to fencepost growing, combined with the success of foreign competition in the face of a stronger US dollar, saw American farm production more than catch up with demand. Prices fell slowly at first and then more quickly. By the mid-1980s, family farm income had dropped by 83 percent, from \$35,174 to \$6,000. Inflation caused the wealth, on paper, of many farmers to grow substantially as their land values continued to climb, but the price crisis crippled their cash flow. As a result, many farmers borrowed more from their banks and lending agencies; those institutions figured that making operating loans posed little risk when the farmers' land served as collateral.¹⁵ Then, in 1979, the Federal Reserve Bank moved to stop runaway inflation by restricting the monetary supply and allowing interest rates to go up; for farmers, this meant paying back loans at a higher rate and, when the Fed's initiative succeeded, watching the value of their land spiral downward. As lenders became much less inclined to loan farmers that extra operating money they so badly needed, President Jimmy Carter made matters worse by imposing a grain embargo on the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan. Many, perhaps even a majority, of farmers were suddenly carrying more debt than they were worth and had no way to make it up. Massive waves of foreclosures followed, and rural communities across the Midwest began to experience something like another Great Depression.¹⁶ Farmers went from confused to angry. One farmer succinctly summarized the feelings of thousands: "There's a lot of people feeling abused by the system".¹⁷

The crisis only got worse under the Reagan administration. The huge increase in defense spending during the "second Cold War" of the 1980s required more government borrowing, which only drove interest rates higher, driving inflation down even further: the national inflation rate in 1979 was 11.3 percent; in 1983, it had dropped to 3.2 percent and by 1986, it was down to 1.9 percent.¹⁸ Once interest rates made it impossible for farmers to make payments or seemingly ever pay down their debt, they turned to "lender of last resort", Farmers Home Administration, the New Deal agency set up to help farmers keep their farms – to remortgage. Moreover, the Reagan team was so confident in their economic package of deregulation, lower taxes and reduced social spending that they pressed the FmHA to keep lending to farmers. "I remember our

state director when he was still newly appointed coming around to gather a bunch of us supervisors together and saying, 'You *make* these plans work. Use whatever prices you have to, because by fall, the economic program will be working so good that all these will be good loans, you just wait and see'. So we did", recalled one FmHA county supervisor. "Well, it probably took me a year or two before I could see that, hey, year after year, these farmers don't pay their debts – and they borrow more money to cover their last year's bills, and it can't go on". Worse, farmers called FmHA the "lender of last resort" because it made borrowing a humiliating experience; borrowers could do little – even buying seed – without first getting approval from FmHA.¹⁹

Farmers who found themselves in trouble felt blindsided. That sense of being unable to see it coming only added to a general sense of personal failure. Lester and Laura Joens of Manning, Iowa were indicative. They went from being model farmers to bankrupt practically overnight. Married in 1960, parents to four children, active in their church and community, the Joenses worked Lester's father's farm. When Lester's father died in 1980, they bought his land from other heirs so that they could keep on farming. And then came the collapse in land values and prices. In November 1982, the Joenses' bank demanded repayment of all their notes within ten days. They were stunned. They had no idea that they could be required to pay off all notes – including some that were not due to be paid off for years – on such short notice, but their banker pointed out the fine print: the bank had the right to call in any loan it deemed unsound. Two years later, by the time they became symbols for farmers across the country, the Joenses had declared bankruptcy and quit farming to sell insurance. As Laura described it to a reporter, everyone in her family suffered from the farm's failure, but her husband took it the worst. "It was hard on me", she said, "but it's doubly hard on a man. They feel so responsible". Lester said that his spirit died on that day that the bank called in those notes.²⁰

With bankruptcy came auctioneers and the pain of seeing all of one's possessions – symbols of a family's life on the farm – sold off, one piece at a time. "It was a very hard day," Minnesota farmers Steve and Kathy Schroeder later recalled. By the time a bank decided to auction a farmer's land and machinery, equipment and livestock, everyone in the community – the would-be bidders – knew that with no market to sell to, there were bargains to be had. Thus the humiliation of a very public bankruptcy was compounded by seeing one's neighbors as vultures. "Everything was going, too", said Kathy. Locals scooped up "every damn thing we got", Steve lamented. Kathy wept that it felt like "everyone was pounding on us".²¹

The pervasive sense of failure – the bitterness, anger, and despair – galvanized farmers to organize. They consistently made the point that American farmers had not measurably failed. They had produced as much or more than prior generations; they had wrung more than anyone else had from their land. Rather, the system had failed them. They could not get a reasonable price for their produce – which was not their fault.²² “A lot of people try to say this is no different from any other business failure”, said Mike Hrabe, a Kansas wheat farmer. “I tell you there is a great difference”. Hrabe farmed land that had been in his family for more than a century, and he was a proud follower in their footsteps. “Dad and Granddad had both been successful”, he told a reporter. “And I was a member of the school board, member of the church board, a member of the board at the Farm Bureau, and I was a 4-H Club leader. I was pretty well thought of in the community”. Pushed to the brink of bankruptcy in the midst of the farm crisis, Hrabe prepared to take his own life, but stopped only when he saw his son’s Little League uniform. “There is a certain pride in farming, and the shame of failure is just overwhelming. Death seemed better than facing it”, he said.²³

Farmers organized in several phases in reaction to their shifting fortunes, and they organized primarily out of a sense of being wronged. Their political acts came out of a tradition that dated to the nineteenth century, but maybe most important that had garnered headlines as recently as the 1960s. The National Farmers’ Organization, founded in 1955, aimed to win contracts with processors that would provide a “reasonable profit”, and took to a series of “holding actions” – withholding milk, livestock, produce from market – as a way to pressure the processors and also raise prices. By the time the American Agricultural Movement was formed in 1977, only ten years had passed since the NFO staged milk dumpings. In addition, the baby boom produced more young people who moved to the country, and with some of them came a New Left ethos that called for a kind of participatory democracy in which they expected farmers to have a say in the issues that most affected them. In 1975, some of these farmers founded Rural America. They not only launched research projects investigating (and seeking to improve) rural poverty, housing, education, energy and the environment, but they called for a democratization of the USDA and other federal policy reforms that would discourage speculative farm buying and the growth of agribusiness at the expense of family farmers.²⁴

Out of this context came the American Agricultural Movement, formed in September 1977 by forty farmers who had been meeting in a Campo, Colorado diner. Often, in farm communities, diners

and coffee shops offered a collective front porch politics experience. Gathering at first in small groups, farmers could see that although livestock yields were up in 1977 and the American crop abundant, the economy's financial walls were closing in on them. The prices they received in 1977 were, on average, down twenty percent from the prices they got at the high-water mark of August 1973; meanwhile, in the inflationary climate, their costs continued to soar. Only more borrowing could keep many of them afloat, and they knew that that was no way to sustain their families. The Campo diner thus became a "forum for cussing and discussing" government farm policy and plotting ways to fight back.²⁵

Going into the winter of 1977–78, the AAM called for a farm strike to demand a number of participatory democracy reforms – such as creating a coalition of agricultural producers to help the Congress write the farm bill – and, most important, that prices be raised to something approaching "parity". Although most Americans may not have understood the meaning of parity, for farmers it had been a longstanding goal. Parity essentially measures the prices of farm products against other commodities, and in relation to the prices of items farmers have to buy; in 1977, farm prices stood at 67 percent of parity, their lowest level since 1933. Farmers argued that 100 percent parity – when the market value of farm commodities essentially matched that of manufactured goods – had been the norm in the years before World War I (indeed, the parity index was based on 1914 levels) and had later been institutionalized, after 1933, by New Deal acreage limitation programs. In the post war years, parity translated into stable middle-class status for farmers.²⁶ By the end of the 1970s, with farm commodity prices not keeping up with prices in other sectors, the AAM blamed the government for designing policies that kept food cheap so Americans could afford to buy other goods and keep the rest of the economy afloat.²⁷ To reorient the priorities of government policy, AAM demanded that the federal government make it illegal for farm commodities to be sold at sub-parity prices and that it establish a National Board of Agricultural Producers made up of family farmers; the Board would then help the USDA balance supply and demand in such a way as to guarantee 100 percent parity.²⁸

The AAM grew from those first forty farmers meeting in a diner to a national organization with 1,100 local offices in 40 states in January 1978; by then, sociologists estimated that more than 3 million people had attended an AAM rally. More visibly, as the AAM called for a national farm strike – asking farmers to withhold their produce or livestock from market – farmers drove their tractors off their fields and into the streets. The defining image of the movement was the long convoy of tractors known as "Tractorcades".

Georgia farmers converged in their tractors on President Carter's hometown of Plains when he visited for Christmas. More than 1,100 tractors formed a 27 mile parade, encircling Lubbock, Texas, as farmers sent a message to their "city cousins" calling for an endorsement of higher prices for farm goods. And most dramatically, more than 3,000 farmers from all over the country descended on Washington, DC – some, traveling at only 15 miles per hour, needed nearly 20 days to get there – to demand a farm bill from the Congress that would guarantee 100 percent parity.²⁹ Throughout the winter and into the spring, farmers roamed the halls of the House and Senate office buildings, stalking representatives, lobbying for a new farm bill. For amateur lobbyists, the farmers had a knack for getting good media coverage; they staged rallies, drove their tractors, and positioned "broad-shouldered and heavy set farmers" at visible locations to distribute literature and catch the television cameras' eye. In one widely-covered move, a group of farmers herded goats on the steps of the Capitol building to attract media and public attention.³⁰

Thanks in part to the midterm election cycle, the farmers found many receptive listeners in the Congress, and going into March it looked as though they would win a stunning legislative victory. But then the Council on Wage and Price Stability – the Executive branch office introduced in the Carter years and charged with restraining inflation – declared that provisions designed to improve the prices farmers would get for their goods would lead to a two to five percent increase in retail food prices, thus sparking cost of living wage increases and higher prices for nonfood product – In short, a spike in inflation across the board. Farmers now came under attack for being, as a *New York Times* editorial put it, a "narrow-interest" constituency. They were blamed for living too high on the hog in good times and expecting consumers to bail them out. President Carter responded by threatening to veto the bill, and the House thus rejected it. In the end, they got an emergency assistance act that increased price supports by only 11 percent and extended credit to farmers in jeopardy of losing their farms. It amounted to applying a band-aid where a tourniquet was needed.³¹

When the AAM returned to Washington even angrier and more aggressive in January 1979 – they deliberately blocked traffic, drove onto the Mall and into the Reflecting pool (causing millions of dollars in damage) and threw a goat over the fence at the White House – they lost public sympathy as the press turned against them, labeling the farmers as destructive and not representative of real farm people.³² The AAM retreated from Washington and split into competing factions, neither of which had much influence in the

1980s. By the early 1980s, with a new Reagan administration generally hostile to farmers and waves of foreclosures spreading like dust clouds across the prairie, the family farm movement turned from abstract calls for parity to basic, more primal, efforts to call off the banks.

Most American farmers would agree with what one Iowa farmer, Myrna Harms, said: "We don't want a handout. We want to be producers".³³ For farmers, there was no difference in their seeking a fair price and industrial workers seeking a living wage. Most of all, they wanted to keep their farms and their way of life, and by the early 1980s, even that was moving out of reach for tens of thousands of families.³⁴ Indeed, as early as 1981, the US Department of Agriculture predicted the end of the family farm. In less than 20 years, the USDA accurately anticipated, more than a million farmers (about half the total at the time) "will be driven from the land" and, predicting the triumph of industrial farming, said that "only 1 percent of the remaining operators will possess half the nation's arable land and food supply". The implications for both rural communities and food quality have been profound.³⁵ Meanwhile, President Reagan vetoed a Farm Reform Bill with flair, lumping it into a category with all other "needless" spending. "I will veto again and again until spending is brought under control", Reagan blustered, making no mention of the ballooning Defense budget. Soon after, at a public appearance, the president joked that America "should keep the grain and export the farmers", and the sky seemed to darken over farm families everywhere. Senator Tom Harkin responded by leading a group of protesters in planting crosses, each one representing a failed farm, in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House.³⁶

In this climate, although some farmers still campaigned for parity, the politics of the Family farm became something more existential. Organizing turned to methods aimed at simply holding on to the farms – at holding on to a way of life. In reality, farm organizers possessed few tools to fend off the banks, but the few they used made for some high drama. In Minnesota organizers brought back the Depression era tactics of the "penny auction" and the sit-in with some success, and set an example for the rest of the country. Even though Gerald and Alicia Kohnen had never missed a payment on their award-winning dairy farm, in 1982 they received a foreclosure notice from the First State Bank of Paynesville. The bank claimed that "declines in local farmland values had devalued the collateral and jeopardized the security of the loans", and since there was a "payable on demand" clause in most farm loan contracts, the bank demanded repayment of the whole loan. Knowing that no farmer could pay it, the bank prepared

to auction off the farm and all of the equipment on it. In response, on the morning of the proposed auction, August 26, 1982, dozens of farm folk organized by Citizens Organized Acting Together (formed in 1979 and known locally as COACT) turned up at the Kohnens' farm. They were "determined to convince potential buyers not to bid anything higher than a nickel or a dollar" for anything. The stunned auctioneer called off the auction. Two years later, as the lender pressed on with its liquidation plans, COACT filled the bank with protesters. This action produced massive media coverage, particularly when the police finally came and arrested 37 people. The bank's determination was shaken. Ultimately, it finally agreed to renegotiate the loan, "settling for a \$50,000 buyout on a \$137,000 obligation". The Kohnens managed then to find another lender to keep them and their farm afloat. In the aftermath, the sympathetic sheriff asked the county to buy a bus because he figured he would need to deal with many more such protests.³⁷

The Kohnen's battle to save their farm served as a model for other farmers who found themselves in similar circumstances, and although there was no hiding the fact that these were acts of desperation, they offered a morsel of hope where there had been none. By 1985, "Farm Gate Defenses" and No Sale auctions garnered headlines from a more sympathetic national press. In Toledo, Iowa, 200 protesters showed up at the county courthouse and, although they could not stop the Federal Land Bank from proceeding with the sale of a farm, activists drove 50 crosses into the ground: 25 were painted white to represent farmers driven out of business by current crisis, and 25 red crosses to represent those believed to be "slowly bleeding to death". This symbolism of the death of the family farm and farmers rivaled photos of tractorcades as the enduring image of the farm crisis.³⁸

That imagery came with a narrative that held Washington responsible for the plight of family farms and made these protests necessary. In one widely covered story, nearly a thousand protesters gathered outside the Clinton County Courthouse in Plattsburgh, Missouri to try to stop the sale of Perry Wilson's farm, foreclosed upon by the St. Louis Federal Land Bank. Wilson started farming in 1933, and had 820 acres, 700 of which were up for sale in March 1985. Eighteen months earlier, he missed a payment – the first time in 51 years – and now was faced with losing his farm. His son, Perry Wilson, Jr., pointed to President Reagan (who had just vetoed the Farm Policy Reform Act) as the main culprit. "Nobody, none of these farmers are asking for a forgiveness of this debt" he said. If the president and Congress would give the farmers a decent price – if they doubled the price of wheat, it would only raise the cost of a loaf of bread by 3 cents – all of the farmers would "pay these debts off".

Instead, Reagan administration policy "hasn't been [designed] to help the farmer, it's been to screw him right into the ground off his land". When "people are losing their homes and farms" and "rural towns are disposed of one by one", Wilson said, and Reagan does nothing to get farmers a decent price, "there's something wrong with that man. He's got a heart of stone". More ominously, Perry Jr. described "them" – government officials – in ways that echoed the world view of the growing militia movement. Congress and the president are "controlling things", he said, but "they want to do away with private ownership in this country. That's all there is to it. They're taking away what our forefathers fought for and our freedom in this country. It's no accident. And the people are getting tired of it. They're getting tired of it". Outside the courthouse, the Sheriff said that he had "worked all week to get this sale called off", but that the bank had "stood firm". When the trustee charged with conducting the sale stepped outside to begin, protesters shouted "No sale! No sale!" for twenty minutes, and a scuffle broke out. Police arrested some of them, but shortly, the trustee and the Sheriff's men retreated into the building to the cheers of the crowd. Ultimately, however, the Wilson family lost its entire farm; Perry Sr. moved into a nursing home and Perry Jr went to work for another farmer.³⁹

By the mid-1980s, as local organizing turned from lobbying for higher commodity prices to No Sale auctions and sit-ins, many involved found themselves providing a variety of services to farmers in trouble. Increasingly, the national press picked up on groups like the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition, Minnesota Farm Advocates, the Kansas Rural Center, the Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance, and the Missouri Rural Crisis Center (and countless others), approvingly noting the practical work these groups did. Formed out of necessity, organizations in each place became aware of their counterparts in other states and began helping one another out.

The Iowa Farm Unity Coalition (IFUC) "assembled one of the most comprehensive sets of services", but in some ways it was least typical. For one thing, IFUC grew directly out of Prairiefire Rural Action and the New Left-like Rural America. The Rev. David Ostendorf, the director of Prairiefire and former director of the Midwest office of Rural America, played a vital role in IFUC from the start. IFUC went out of its way to "restrain tempers and violence" and any hints of the kind of radical rhetoric or action that had backfired on the AAM. As a result, it built a "loosely knit, locally controlled network of farm activists", and, as one political scientist noted, did not "impose rigid discipline on the rank and file". In turn, it won the support of Iowa churches that had a tradition of political engagement as well as by union members, particularly the United

Auto Workers, most of whom worked for “agricultural implement manufacturers”. In addition to organizing farm gate defenses, sit-ins, and other protests, IFUC distinguished itself through its social services: working through local ministers and churches, it helped to form support groups for emotionally distressed farm folk, got food stamps for those struggling to put food on the table, and established a Farm Survival Hotline. The hotline effectively built a network of farmers, as callers would be put in touch with other farmers who had faced similar financial or legal challenges; in time those farmers often became the next cohort to man the telephones. In the meantime, accountants and lawyers made themselves available to farmers referred via the hotline. Although some hardliners criticized IFUC for focusing its efforts on services rather than more overtly political protest, IFUC’s approach gave it a measure of legitimacy among farm families, the media, and policymakers that the AAM, for example, had found impossible to secure.⁴⁰

The Minnesota Farm Advocates began with Lou-Anne Kling, who, with her husband Wayne, farmed soybeans, corn and wheat and ran a “farrow-to-finish” hog operation on their 160 acre farm near Granite Falls (Wayne also farmed another 300 acres with his father). She first tried her hand at political organizing when prices dropped so low that they feared losing their farm. They signed up another 20 farmers for a July 4 Farmers’ Independence Day, during which they planned to plow under one acre of small grain each day for a week, “to show that it was cheaper for us to plow it under as green manure than it was to harvest it”. But when July 4 came, only a few others plowed under their crops. The protest was a bust. Since “organizing farmers is like trying to haul frogs in a wheelbarrow”, she later said, she turned to electoral politics and ran for the state legislature in 1982. She lost the election, but along the way she found that farmers gravitated to her, and some sought her help on their individual cases. In response, she and another farmer undertook an informational tour to tell farmers about their rights with the FmHA and other lenders. Soon the demand for her advice grew to the point that the Wheat Growers Association gave her an office in St. Paul. “People were lined up in the hallway”, she later recalled. “It was just such a desperation for knowledge! . . . I could only spend half an hour or forty-five minutes with them. They’d lay their paperwork out, and we’d go through it quick. I’d say, ‘Try this and this and this’, and they’d be off”. In time, she went to the state legislature and showed them a map indicating all the places in Minnesota where she had advised farmers, urging them to set up a program to help the thousands of other farmers she had not yet met. The legislature allocated \$102,000 for her to start up Minnesota Farm Advocates with a staff of 35 advocates, many of whom

were women farmers from the northwest who farmed all day and then worked the phones all night. Advocacy programs in other parts of the country tried to emulate Kling's Minnesota example; by 1988, Kling had trained advocates in similar programs in sixteen states.⁴¹

Minnesota farmers could also turn to Groundswell, a nonpartisan grassroots jack-of-all-protests organization that grew out of a 1985 St. Paul rally that brought together 17,000 protesters in support of a Farm Policy Reform bill before Congress. Funded by contributions and grants, Groundswell organized No Sale rallies and sit-ins, but also engaged in lobbying the Minnesota legislature on farm policy, and raised money to provide direct relief to farmers faced with medical costs or household bills. It also published a newsletter that it distributed to 1,500. Some of the membership in Groundswell overlapped with the Farm Advocates, and both organizations served to support one another.⁴²

To some, this advocacy work may not have seemed like political work, but to the farmers themselves any such distinction would have seemed laughable. The various crisis centers and hotlines may have directed all of their energy toward one form of social services or another, but in practice, it represented a community under siege – not unlike Love Canal residents, Rust Belt steel workers, or low-rent urban tenants pushed aside by gentrification. It was a fundamentally political act, if only in front porch terms that made little sense to most of the policymakers, Reagan administration officials and big city newspaper editors.

Four months after President Reagan's veto of the 1985 farm reform bill, representatives of many of these service organizations, as well as others, met in Des Moines where they formed the National Save the Family Farm Coalition (NSFFC). Bolstered by the credibility and legitimacy of the social service mission of so many farm organizations, the NSFFC brought more weight to the 1986 campaign to pass the Save the Family Farm Act as well as farm credit reform in 1987. By 1988, when the coalition included 37 organizations in 22 states, the FmHA changed course and wrote off \$7 billion in farm debt, thus allowing 100,000 farmers the chance to keep farming. On the other hand, the Reagan administration waited until the November election had passed and then served foreclosure notices to 80,000 farmers with delinquent FmHA loans. No amount of organizing, local or national could stop it – though, thanks to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Allison v. Block* (1983), the farmers held the right to seek loan deferrals or restructuring.⁴³

The 1970s and 1980s may have, in the end, marked the last great grassroots mobilization of American farmers.⁴⁴ Where the twentieth century began with 39 percent of Americans living on farms, it

ended with only 1.5 percent living on farms, and with most Americans giving little thought to where their food comes from before it arrives at the supermarket, any future mass mobilization around farm politics seems a distant dream. The family farm movement represents a rich and varied local political experience that is at odds with the caricature that national pundits take of the heartland as purely “Red State” conservative. Examining colors on a map not only misses the substantial support that Jesse Jackson had in farm country, but also the fringe elements that gravitated to supporting Lyndon LaRouche and wound up in militias in the 1990s. Both camps came from the same experience of seeing a federal government that had once worked with farmers now setting them adrift. Both took it personally because the threat from the banks and Washington were not abstract, but met them at their farm gate, as they stood on soil that some of their families had tilled for generations. The appeal of Jesse Jackson and Lyndon LaRouche to farmers, therefore, did not lie in the soundness of their political proposals so much as in the exhaustion of any other perceived viable options. In the end, though, few placed much hope in electoral solutions. The only option that made sense in the day-to-day of the farm crisis was organizing outward from one’s front porch. For more than a decade, tens (maybe hundreds) of thousands of farmers sustained a political movement on the national stage and, most important, kept hope alive for countless farm families at the local level. In time, however, the front porch approach gave way to the limits of its own exhaustion and with it, perhaps, an exhaustion of American democratic possibilities.⁴⁵

Notes

¹ “Georgia Farm Despair Stokes Anger at GOP”, NYT 26 Sep 1986.

² One reviewer of the 1974 book, *The Screwing of the Average Man*, noted that “when you list in one place all the ways in which citizens are taken to the cleaners, it is indeed depressing”. David Sanford, review of David Hapgood, *The Screwing of the Average Man* (New York, 1974) in *The Washington Post*, 10 Dec 1974, p. B6; Haynes Johnson, (New York, 1991), 427.

³ The profession’s engagement with the history of conservatism was jump-started by a special issue of *American Historical Review* that included Alan Brinkley, “The Problem of American Conservatism”, *American Historical Review*, 99 (April 1994), 409–429; Leo P. Ribuffo, “Why Is There So Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything about It?”, *ibid.*, 438–449; Susan Yohn, “Will the Real Conservatives Please Stand Up? Or, the Pitfalls Involved in Examining Ideological Sympathies, A Comment on Alan Brinkley’s ‘Problem of American Conservatism’”, *ibid.*, 430–437. Another early essay is Michael Kazin, “The Grass-Roots Right, New Histories of U.S. Conservatism in the Twentieth Century”, *American Historical Review*, 97 (February 1992), 136–155. A recent roundtable that considers the tidal wave of scholarship on con-

servatism includes builds on Kim Phillips-Fein's review essay, "Conservatism, A State of the Field", *Journal of American History* (Dec 2011), 723–743.

For a sampling of titles each of which seeks to explain the rise of the right in the 1970s and 1980s, see Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies, the Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2002); Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer, *Rightward Bound, Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Godfrey Hodgson, *More Equal than Others, America from Nixon to the New Century* (Princeton, 2004); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland, The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of a Nation* (New York, 2008); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan, A History, 1974–2008* (New York, 2008); James Patterson, *Restless Giant, The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York, 2004); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade, How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, 2010); Michael Schaller, *Right Turn, American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980–1992* (New York, 2006); Gil Troy, *Morning in America, How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, 2005); Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened, A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York, 2005); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares, The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York, 2006); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell, The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York, 2011).

⁴ This argument was most famously made in the late 1990s by Robert Putnam in a series of articles and later a book, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2001), but others, notably, Robert Bellah, et al., had made a similar case in the first edition of the influential *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York, 1985) and reinforced it in the 1996 edition (Berkeley, 1996).

⁵ A few scholars have argued that the Sixties effectively lived on through the 1970s and 1980s; see, for example, Van Gosse and Richard Moser, *The World the Sixties Made, Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia, 2003); Dan Berger, *The Hidden 1970s, Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2010); Stephen Tuck, editor of a special issue on the 1970s in *The Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008), 617–688; Robert Surbrug, *Beyond Vietnam, The Politics of Protest in Massachusetts, 1974–1990* (Amherst, MA, 2009). Two who have argued against civic disengagement are Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest, Social Movements since the Sixties* (Philadelphia, 2010), and Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties, A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York, 2011).

⁶ See the preface to the 1996 edition of Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* xxi.

⁷ Kelley, *Race Rebels, Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1994), 9–10.

⁸ For example, Miller and Hoffmann find that "attitudinal differences among various groups" on key issues like abortion, homosexuality, and school prayer "have remained fairly stable over the past 25 years"; Alan S. Miller and John P. Hoffmann, "The Growing Divisiveness, Culture War or a War of Words?" *Social Forces*, 78, 2 (December 1999), 721–752. See also, Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?, the Myth of a Polarized America* (New York, 2005).

⁹ It would be easy to misread this non-ideological response as a pragmatic response to political issues, but that does not necessarily make it

congruent with the pragmatism we associate with William James, John Dewey or even the Consensus School historians. The farmers chronicled here were not averse to embracing ideology in discussions about other national questions, for example; but ideology simply did not matter where finding solutions to the crises under which they labored were concerned. One useful intellectual history of pragmatism is David Hollinger, "The Problem of Pragmatism in American History", *Journal of American History*, 67, 1 (1980), 88–107.

¹⁰ As Ronald Inglehardt made clear, value systems and ideologies do not mobilize people to act; value systems may motivate person to adapt an ideology (p. 371–2), but people act only when they want to achieve a goal/solve a problem. According to Inglehardt, the United States witnessed more mobilization in post-1960s in part due to rising political skill level among "mass publics", as education became more widespread and "political information more pervasive". Inglehardt *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (New York, 1990).

¹¹ Here my work is informed by the relatively recent trend in social movement studies that emphasizes emotion as an essential mobilizing factor among activists. See, for example, James M. Jasper, "The Emotions of Protest, Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements", *Sociological Forum*, 13, 397–424; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics, Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago, 2001); Goodwin, Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements", in David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspieter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Boston, 2007); Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics, Emotion and ACT-UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago, 2009). According to Piven & Cloward, one needs to have a change in consciousness that precipitates a change in behavior. "The movement must become defiant, violating the social expectations and even the laws the members of the movement deem unjust. The defiance must become collective to maximize its effect". Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements, Why They Succeed and How They Fail* (New York, 1978), 3–4.

¹² Schlosser, Introduction, *Farm Aid, A Song for America* (New York, 2005), xiii.

¹³ Barry J. Barnett, "The US Farm Financial Crisis of the 1980s", in Jane Adams, ed., *Fighting for the Farm, Rural America Transformed* (U Penn Press, 2003), 162–164; Eric Ramirez-Ferrero, *Troubled Fields, Men, Emotions, and the Crisis in American Farming* (New York, 2005), 8.

¹⁴ Barnett, 165, 170, Kathryn Marie Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession, Farm Loss in America's Heartland* (Chicago, 2000), 2.

¹⁵ Barnett, 165–166.

¹⁶ Harry Boyte, Heather Booth, and Steve Max, *Citizen Action and the New American Populism* (Temple, 1986) 134, Ramirez-Ferrero, 9.

¹⁷ Dudley, 35.

¹⁸ Barnett, 166.

¹⁹ Dudley, 122.

²⁰ "Farm Wife Speaks Out on Personal Farm Crisis", *Carroll Daily Times Herald* 30 January 1985, p. 5.

²¹ Dudley 126–127.

²² Ramirez-Ferrero, 141.

²³ "Farm Belt Suicides Reflect Greater Hardship and Deepening Despondency", *NYT* 14 Jan 1986.

²⁴ Patrick H. Mooney and Theo J. Majka, *Farmers' and Farm Workers' Movements, Social Protest in American Agriculture* (New York, 1995), 94, 98–100.

²⁵ William P. Browne, *Private Interests, Public Policy, and American Agriculture* (Lawrence, KS, 1988), 64.

²⁶ "Farm Strikers Give Bergland Five-Point Plan", *New York Times* 7 Jan 1978, p. 8; Dudley, 150–153.

²⁷ "The products and goods and services that we have to buy, they've increased [in price] from 500 to 1500 percent and we're still selling our product at the same old price we had in 1948", said Alan Gains, president of the Oklahoma branch of the AAM. Government policy, he said, could be summed up as "cheap food policy". Ramirez-Ferrero, 124.

²⁸ William P. Browne and Mark H. Lundgren, "Farmers Helping Farmers, Constituent Services and the Development of a Grassroots Farm Lobby", in *Agriculture and Human Values* Spring/Summer (1987), 14–15.

²⁹ "Farms, Food and Fair Play", *New York Times* 8 Jan 1978, p. NES8; "City in Texas Encircled In a Parade of Tractors", *NYT* 4 Jan 1978, p. A14; "Farm Strikers Give Bergland a Five-Point Plan", 7 Jan 1978, p. 8; Ramirez-Ferrero, 132; Browne, 68.

³⁰ Mooney and Majka, 102; "The Strength of the Farmer is Not Limited to the Land", *NYT* 26 Mar 1978, p. E5.

³¹ The farm strike may not have helped; although there are no firm statistics on the levels of participation, experts at the time claimed that most grain farmers had withheld at least part of their crops, which had helped to bring prices up just as the Congress was considering various versions of a farm bill. Mooney and Majka, 103; "The Strength of the Farmer is Not Limited to the Land", *NYT* 26 Mar 1978, p. E5; "Wage-Price Council Attacks Farm Bill as Spur to Inflation", *NYT* 23 Mar 1978, p. D1; "The Rush to Buy Off Farmers", editorial, *NYT* 26 Mar 1978, p. E16; "Commodities, Farmer's Strike and Rising Prices", *NYT* 1 May 1978, p. D3.

³² Almost all mainstream press reports now not only cast the farmers as being overly aggressive and destructive, but the lack of sympathy for the farmers' plight deepened to the point that reporters routinely claimed that a) farm income was up in 1978 (true enough, given the rise in prices), and that b) protests were driven by a minority of "unwise farmers" who took on too much debt and "militants" driven by greed. "A Harvest of Ill Will", *Newsweek* 19 Feb 1979, p. 61; "When Farmers Tied Up Washington", *US News & World Report* 19 Feb 1979, p. 7; "Farmers Raising Cain", *Time* 19 Feb 1979; "Farmers Stage a Protest Over Newspaper Reports", *NYT* 17 Feb 1979, p. 19; "Mass Protest Has Simply Gone Out of Style", *NYT* 18 Mar 1979, p. E5.

³³ As one scholar has more recently noted, "AAM members did not want subsidies. In fact, they felt that, given the low prices that they have historically received, it was the farmer that was subsidizing the American public's access to cheap food". Barnett, 65.

³⁴ Barnett 65; Ramirez-Ferrero, 146.

³⁵ David Kline, "The Embattled Independent Farmer", *NYT Sunday Magazine* 29 Nov 1981, p. SM35; on the rise of industrial farming and implications for American food quality, see also Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York, 2005).

³⁶ "Throwing Money at Farmers", editorial, *NYT* 1 Mar 1985, p. A26; "Reagan Kills Farm Aid as Battle Opens on Spending", *NYT* 10 Mar 1985, p. E1; "When Nothing Happens and They Call it News", *NYT* 22 Mar 1985,

p. A14. In a later editorial, the *New York Times* agreed with Reagan that farm subsidies should be eliminated because they only served to keep a “floor under farm income”, thus “artificially” raising crop prices which, in turn, resulted in a “windfall to foreign producers”. What farmers really needed, was extended payment periods to help them “weather the crisis” and at little cost to taxpayers. “The Aid Some Farmers Need”, editorial, *NYT* 30 Sep 1985.

³⁷ Jim Schwab, *Raising Less Corn and More Hell, Midwestern Farmers Speak Out* (Urbana-Champaign, 1988), 197–202; Boyte, Booth, Max, 141.

³⁸ “Farm Sale Protested”, *Carroll (Iowa) Times Herald*, 10 Jan 1985, p. 12.

³⁹ Schwab, 159–164; “Jackson Leads Peaceful Protest of Farm Foreclosure”, *NYT* 9 Apr 1985, p. A12.

⁴⁰ Mooney/Majka, 100, 111; Browne, 73–75, 77, 83; Browne and Lundgren, 18.

⁴¹ Dianna Hunter, *Breaking Hard Ground, Stories of the Minnesota Farm Advocates* (Duluth, 1990), 50–53; Schwab, 135–139, 141; the Minnesota Farm Advocates continues its work to this day, with 11 full-time advocates (see web site, <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates.aspx>)

⁴² Hunter 93–98; Boyte, Booth, Max, 135; Joyce Barrett, *Mending a Broken Heartland, Community Response to the Farm Crisis* (Alexandria, VA, 1987), 68–69.

⁴³ Browne/Lundgren 21; “Washington Loosens Grip on Indebted Farms”, *NYT* 6 Mar 1988; p. E5; “80,000 Farms Face Foreclosure Peril”, *NYT* 12 Nov 1988, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Although some scholars have credited the family farm movement with isolating the market boasters and holding off a more calamitous collapse of family farms, that is setting a pretty low standard for success. In fact, any legislative victories – such as the Food Security Act of 1985 that resulted in substantial increases in federal aid – mostly helped agribusiness and served only to postpone the collapse that came in the 1990s. Mary Summers, “From the Heartland to Seattle, The Family Farm Movement of the 1980s and the Legacy of Agrarian State Building” in Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston, *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State, Political Histories of Rural America* (Ithaca, 2001), 310; Barnett, 169; Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York, 2005), 64–66; Hodgson, 205–209.

⁴⁵ Hodgson, 207; Jackson had been attending anti-foreclosure rallies since 1984, and finished second in the 1988 Iowa caucuses, behind cross-border favorite son Illinois Senator Paul Simon. “New Jackson Finding Dividends in Iowa”, *NYT* 4 Feb 1988; on angry farmers taking up with the militia movement see, Joel Dyer, *Harvest of Rage, Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning* (New York, 1997); James Corcoran, *Bitter Harvest, The Birth of Paramilitary Terrorism in the Heartland* (New York, 1995).