



## For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s

By Ronald P. Formisano

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*For the People* offers a new interpretation of populist political movements from the Revolution to the eve of the Civil War and roots them in the disconnect between the theory of rule by the people and the reality of rule by elected representatives. Ron Formisano seeks to rescue populist movements from the distortions of contemporary opponents as well as the misunderstandings of later historians.

From the Anti-Federalists to the Know-Nothings, Formisano traces the movements chronologically, contextualizing them and demonstrating the progression of ideas and movements. Although American populist movements have typically been categorized as either progressive or reactionary, left-leaning or right-leaning, Formisano argues that most populist movements exhibit liberal and illiberal tendencies simultaneously. Gendered notions of "manhood" are an enduring feature, yet women have been intimately involved in nearly every populist insurgency. By considering these movements together, Formisano identifies commonalities that belie the pattern of historical polarization and bring populist movements from the margins to the core of American history.

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**Editorial Review**

Review

An utterly compelling and convincing book that will soon take its rightful place as one of the seminal political histories of nineteenth-century America.--*Journal of Southern History*

Studies populist movements by taking a road less traveled. . . . Focuses on the people who made up the bulk of these movements, the rank and file, and he studies the separate activities as a collection of movements over a longer period.--*Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*

Provide[s] significant new material and insights. . . . Helps to clarify and contextualize the heritage of populism, leading to a better understanding of why its political legacy is indeed mixed.--*Journal of Interdisciplinary History*

[A] sweeping survey.--*American Historical Review*

Draw[s] on extensive research and a thorough examination of modern scholarship. . . . Essential reading for students of early American politics. . . . Greatly expands our understanding of and appreciation of the complex and paradoxical nature of American populist movements. . . . Will have important implications for current scholarly debates about the meaning and legacy of popular sovereignty in the decades after the Revolution.--*Common-Place*

[An] extremely interesting and thorough account of the history of populism in the United States. . . . [Formisano's] historical knowledge is prodigious and his account of the dynamics of populism in the country's early decades is obviously definitive. . . . A helpful resource for anyone researching the role of populism in the evolution of American social welfare policy.--*Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*

Formisano's theme is crucial in American history.--*Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*

Masterful . . . [A] testament to [Formisano's] standing as a preeminent historian of American politics.--*Reviews in American History*

Masterfully draws on diverse literatures in political theory, political history, social history, and gender history to offer fresh interpretations of American populist movements from the Revolution to the 1850s. . . . Should become required reading for American historians and political scientists.--*Journal of American History*

A fine work of synthesis. . . . Formisano demonstrates a masterful knowledge of the historical literature, and produces a compelling narrative. . . . This is a wise, significant, and thought-provoking book that takes social movements out of the shadows and places them squarely in the middle of American politics.--*American Studies*

Provide[s] a detailed exploration of disparate movements that are often given short shrift by historians . . . makes a convincing case.--*North Carolina Historical Review*

[Formisano's] linkage of seemingly disparate movements should provoke new questions . . . . An important contribution to the history of populist movements and United States political history in general.--*Maryland Historical Magazine*

#### Review

The American Revolution established the people's sovereignty as the fundamental principle of the new republic. Yet a direct claim to sovereignty was obscured and blunted by elite political power. Time and again in American history movements have risen to reassert that claim. Deeply grounded in decades of research and writing, Ronald Formisano's *For the People* presents a foundational synthesis of the first epoch of these populist insurgencies between the Revolution and the Civil War. Reaffirming his long-held position as one of this country's most eminent political historians, Formisano presents a compelling interpretation of how populist movements moved from eighteenth-century modes of violent resistance to nineteenth-century engagement in electoral politics. *For the People* will be required reading for a generation of historians, political scientists, and students of the American condition.--John L. Brooke, Ohio State University

*For the People* is the most important work in print on the sources and development of the people's unofficial national faith from the Revolution to the Civil War: populism. It is by turns brilliant and arresting. A must read.--Bruce Laurie, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

#### From the Inside Flap

From the Anti-Federalists to the Know-Nothings, Formisano traces populist political movements in the U.S. chronologically from the Revolution to the Civil War, contextualizing them and demonstrating the progression of ideas and movements. Although American populist movements have typically been categorized as either progressive or reactionary, left-leaning or right-leaning, Formisano argues that most populist movements exhibit liberal and illiberal tendencies simultaneously. By considering these movements together, Formisano identifies commonalities that belie the pattern of historical polarization and bring populist movements from the margins to the core of American history.

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#### **Candice Delgado:**

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#### **Sharon Keller:**

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