

For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s. By RONALD P. FORMISANO. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. viii, 315 pp. Notes, index. \$35.)

Ever since popular sovereignty replaced parliamentary sovereignty, citizens have contested its implications. Popular sovereignty meant that the people retained power, limited only by its possessors' choice not to wield it. It potentially justified citizens' perpetual, direct intervention in public affairs, and the people used their unlimited power to ratify hard-to-amend constitutions. As a result, subsequent behavior would be measured against these constitutions. Temporary majorities, no matter how large, were not "the people" and could not violate the people's will as represented in their constitutional statements.

Formisano argues that populism was the result of the constraint of the democratic conception of popular sovereignty. Populist movements arose when groups believed that their republican values and institutions were threatened. Populists hoped to use their sovereignty to alter conditions so that the requirements for citizenship—defined differently by various movements—were available to those they considered to be citizens.

Formisano discusses multifarious populist movements, such as: rural insurgents in the 1780s and 1790s; Anti-Federalists; democratic republican societies; antibanking movements after the Panic of 1819; workingmen's political parties; the Anti-Masons; the Dorr rebels; the New York antirenters; and the Know-Nothing Party. Populism had progressive and reactionary impulses, which explains the diversity evident in Formisano's study. Depending on how populists understood the threats to their values, they challenged the powerful and scapegoated minority religions and vulnerable immigrants. Yet, this insight does not teach a simple Manichean lesson. The Know-Nothings, for example, desegregated schools and greatly increased welfare spending.

The strongest part of the book, and the longest discussion, concerns the Anti-Masons. Before their rise, mainstream politics remained animated by eighteenth-century notions of deference and hierarchy. Formisano observes that the Anti-Masons "substantially influenced the creation of a populist political culture and an expansion and invigoration of the public sphere." As a result, "Anti-Masonry's major legacy . . . was [to shift] the rhetoric of most spokesmen for the major political parties . . . to full blown egalitarianism—at least in style" (141, 158).

At times, Formisano's conception of populism is so broad that it labels rather than analyzes. His treatment of progressive and reactionary populisms fails to explain how Anti-Masons, generally prosperous middle-class evangelicals of the Burned-Over-District, and the workingmen's parties, who feared and despised middle-class evangelicals, shared the same tradition. Formisano contends that there was a clear "tie between egalitarian religion and radical populism" (88), especially Unitarianism, except when such a link did not exist and when Anti-

Masons targeted Unitarians as threats to the proper culture of evangelical republicanism.

Is this simply reactionary populism? Upwardly mobile evangelicals who feared Masons, Unitarians, and freethinkers were ensconced in a region where a culture existed that largely fit their needs and upheld their values because they had so much power to decide what happened there. The opposite was true of workingmen who were wary of an aggressive new political economy that marginalized them. The first movement flourished because its participants had the ability to punish those who did not measure up to their well-developed sense of moral superiority. The second arose because artisans' traditional values and self-worth were being destroyed. Somewhere in this distinction, and the fundamental material difference that produced it, is a need for further explanation of a spectrum that contained reactionary and progressive impulses within populism.

Formisano's theme is crucial in American history. Since the Revolution, citizens, especially those of the lower classes, have sought an expansion of democracy, more direct involvement in the political process, and more power over their lives than their leaders have wanted them to acquire. Though this populist desire has been widespread, populist language, when used by those who were leery of populist movements, never redressed those movements' grievances. As populist language became the dominant American political idiom, hypocrisy and spin became the dominant political praxis.

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A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City. By ERICA ARMSTRONG DUNBAR. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. xvi, 196 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.)

Among the many dramatic changes of the 1960s was a new focus in American historical writing, a focus that initiated a narrative that was more inclusive of the variety of Americans' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. But that inclusiveness was often lurching and fragmented; as Gloria T. Hull noted in her review of black women's studies, "all the women are white, all the blacks are men." Erica Armstrong Dunbar's *A Fragile Freedom* is among the best and richest of the number of new historical works that aim to meld the "sub-topical" groups of the American narrative. It offers readers a more well-rounded synthesis of some of the social dynamics of antebellum America.

Dunbar's work does several things well. First, it helps add specifics to what historians know intuitively: that African Americans in antebellum "free" states made conscious decisions to remain in a sort of demimonde of emancipation.