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For the People: American Popular Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s. Ronald P. Formisano.
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the male work and family model, so that men, women and children all can benefit.

Cheryl A. Hyde, Temple University

Ronald P. Formisano, *For the People: American Popular Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. \$35.00 hardcover.

Academic inquiry into the nature and extent of populism has faced formidable problems over the years. The most obvious of these is the difficulty in defining populism. Although sociologists, political scientists and social theorists have attempted to analyze populism and offer a definitive account of its characteristics, there is little agreement about what populism entails. It is now generally accepted that attempts to formulate a workable definition are unlikely to succeed and that social science inquiry into this complex phenomenon should focus instead on its historical evolution and manifestations in different parts of the world.

It is in this context that Ronald Formisano has written an extremely interesting and thorough account of the history of populism in the United States from the time of the nation's founding to the mid-19th century. This may strike some as unusual since populism is generally associated with late 19th-century agrarian social movements and the campaigns of the People's Party against the gold standard. But the author shows that populist ideas and activities were at the very core of the American Revolution and that they continued to influence the country's early political development after independence. Despite their own populist proclivities, the founders had to deal with local discontent and even uprisings directed at what some regarded as their growing political elitism. Populism, he also points out, was integral to the anti-Masonic movement of the early 19th-century, the rise of evangelical fundamentalism, to Jacksonian politics and the campaign for abolition. Were the book to continue into the 20th and 21st centuries, the author would no doubt include the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger in California and the Obama campaign in his chronological catalog of American populist politics.

A major issue, which returns to the question of definition, is what types of political activities in United States may be categorized as populist. The author devotes the first chapter of the book to this question but prefers to use the phrase "populist movement" rather than to attempt a standard definition. But populist movements are mercurial and can have both progressive and reactionary goals or veer in one direction or other. The author's discussion of the characteristics of these different movements is particularly helpful. In addition, his historical knowledge is prodigious and his account of the dynamics of populism in the country's early decades is obviously definitive. While the book can hardly be viewed as light reading, it sheds light on the enduring phenomenon of populism and its pervasive influence on American society. It will also be a helpful resource for anyone researching the role of populism in the evolution of American social welfare policy.

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