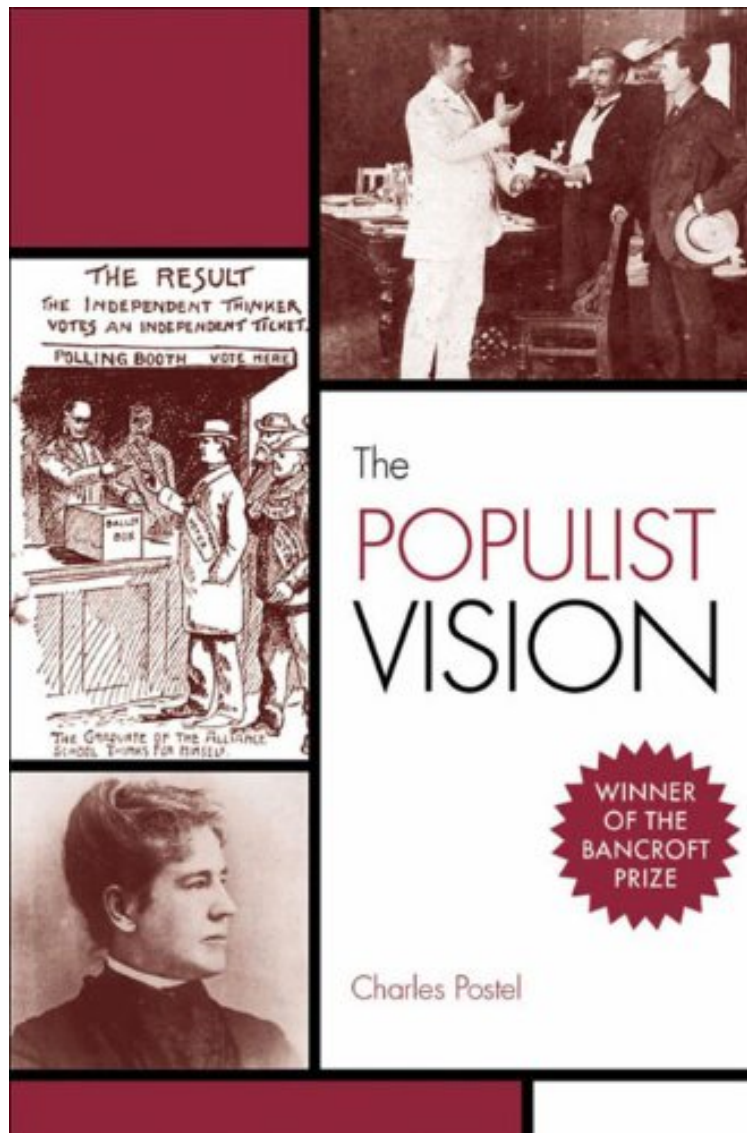


The Populist Vision

Charles Postel

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Charles Postel : The Populist Vision before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Populist Vision:

5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Sloppy, unscholarly treatment of Lawrence Goodwyn's work on PopulismBy Think TwicePrior to reading this I read Lawrence Goodwyn's "The Populist Moment"; I'm astonished at the praise Postel has received. He seems to be most interested in questioning interpretations of Populism that portray them as regressive fantasists, resisting a capitalist future as they clutch at agrarian communal traditions. Accordingly he launches the book with a characterization of them as modernizers and developers. Fair enough, and Goodwyn would agree. But I'm boggled at the extent to which this intention somehow leads Postel

to minimize the commercial, class-determined basis of the hardship the Populists faced. Most prominently, the crop lien system -- which Goodwyn begins his book with as a key determinate of the economic fortunes of Alliance members and thus a determinate of their critical analysis and remedies -- Postel barely mentions in unfocused paragraphs 120 pages into the book. After this questionable rendering of the social environment of Populism, it is surprising when Postel finally discusses Goodwyn near the book's end. There Postel questions the importance Goodwyn gave to Populism's undermining by the "shadow movement"; in brief, a combination of silver monetarists and opportunistic politicians who were indifferent to the essentially greenback/flat money analysis of the Populists and also bent on turning the "movement culture" of Populism into a tame electoral base. According to Postel, Goodwyn thereby "fails to take into account the external obstacles that the movement faced. Among other things, the Populists had to break the formidable grip in which the two established parties held the political system." (p. 270) This is an absurd, careless, and unscholarly reading of Goodwyn. Goodwyn spends many pages discussing the difficulties the Populists faced dealing with the deformed politics of post-Civil War sectionalism, with its ready potential to dumb down the unavoidably complicated discussions of Populist monetary policy with bloody shirt waving and accusations of treason. His portrayal of this grip runs a gamut of accounts from outright voter fraud and assassination to describing the psychological strain experienced by Populists as they departed the "party of their fathers." He pays particular attention to the way in which the anti-Populist electoral machine assembled by Mark Hanna anticipated the massive political advertising of the 20th century and succeeded in transplanting bloody shirt Civil War thematics into a timeless "patriotism." Overall, Goodwyn makes it clear that the strong opposition to Populism by local and national commercial interests, particularly the Eastern banking establishment, took on both economic and political forms. It was this multi-pronged opposition that placed Populism under such severe pressure that the shadow movement's metallist compromise, offering an alliance with the Democratic party, could gain enough traction to create internal dissension over Populism's more comprehensive Omaha principles and seriously weaken the movement. So, please read Goodwyn. His analysis is far more nuanced than Postel is apparently capable of appreciating, and which the subject itself certainly deserves.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An inspiring book. By John E. Banks This book presents a clear picture of the role of the Populists in American politics at the close of the 19th century. I particularly enjoyed the sections on Bryan, Debs, and those who brought them to the forefront of more popular leader as TR.

6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. The truth about Populism By Hailin This book was stunning and informative to me, as it put the history of what we know of as "Populism" in a new light--especially in terms of how that term is used today. It's not an "easy" read, but all the facts and documentations of the movement made it a worthwhile struggle for me. I've already recommended this book to many of my friends, especially those who are currently involved in political activities.

In the late nineteenth century, monumental technological innovations like the telegraph and steam power made America and the world a much smaller place. New technologies also made possible large-scale organization and centralization. Corporations grew exponentially and the rich amassed great fortunes. Those on the short end of these wrenching changes responded in the Populist revolt, one of the most effective challenges to corporate power in American history. But what did Populism represent? Half a century ago, scholars such as Richard Hofstadter portrayed the Populist movement as an irrational response of backward-looking farmers to the challenges of modernity. Since then, the romantic notion of Populism as the resistance movement of tradition-based and pre-modern communities to a modern and commercial society has prevailed. In a broad, innovative reassessment, based on a deep reading of archival sources, *The Populist Vision* argues that the Populists understood themselves as--and were in fact--modern people, who pursued an alternate vision for modern America. Taking into account both the leaders and the led, *The Populist Vision* uses a wide lens, focusing on the farmers, both black and white, men and women, while also looking at wage workers and bohemian urbanites. From Texas to the Dakotas, from Georgia to California, farmer Populists strove to use the new innovations for their own ends. They sought scientific and technical knowledge, formed highly centralized organizations, launched large-scale cooperative businesses, and pressed for reforms on the model of the nation's most elaborate bureaucracy - the Postal Service. Hundreds of thousands of Populist farm women sought education, employment in schools and offices, and a more modern life. Miners, railroad workers, and other labor Populists joined with farmers to give impetus to the regulatory state. Activists from Chicago, San Francisco, and other new cities provided Populism with a dynamic urban dimension. This major reassessment of the Populist experience is essential reading for anyone interested in the politics, society, and culture of modern America.