

analysis; the reader clearly knows when we have reached the page that is allotted to women. This is particularly unfortunate, since so many Wobblies were the most manly of men.

Despite all these criticisms, Brundage does state an argument that merits reflection. Still, this book is so insistently narrow in focus that one little wonders why so many labor historians feel like their field is in crisis.

The Populist Persuasion: An American History, by Michael Kazin. New York: Basic Books, 1995. x, 381 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JEFFREY OSTLER, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

In *The Populist Persuasion*, Michael Kazin undertakes the project of writing a history of populism from the 1890s People's Party to the present. Given the slipperiness of populism both as a concept and as a historical entity, this is an extremely difficult task. The result is a bold, thought-provoking, and important book.

Kazin's introduction outlines his approach to the study of populism. Rather than treat populism as a coherent ideology or as a series of social movements, Kazin analyzes it primarily as a linguistic phenomenon, as a "flexible mode of persuasion" (3). Kazin traces the roots of populist discourse back to the American Revolution and shows that in the nineteenth century, populist rhetoric contained two strands. One, drawing on the rationalism of the Enlightenment, "stressed economic grievances and reaffirmed the producer ethic." The other, drawing on evangelical traditions, "fixed on the ethical beliefs of the majority and called on the nation to return to Christ" (17). Both of these strands were present in the rhetoric of the 1890s People's Party and in William Jennings Bryan's campaign for the presidency in 1896.

In the early twentieth century, Kazin argues, the two strands of populist rhetoric separated. The American Federation of Labor continued the tradition of the producer ethic, while the Prohibitionist crusade perpetuated the pietistic tradition. This separation marks one of two important transitions in populism's history.

The second transition occurred in the late 1940s, when, Kazin contends, populism "began a migration from Left to Right" (4). Kazin discusses this shift and its aftermath through chapters on McCarthyism, the New Left, George Wallace, and the conservative "capture" of populism under the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Kazin concludes with a brief account of the election of 1992 followed by some observations on whether or not populism is the "language we need" (282).

Kazin is aware of the weaknesses of the populist persuasion. Even in its most progressive forms, Kazin contends, populism has been a language available primarily to white men. Kazin observes, for example, that the 1890s People's Party appealed to African Americans on "matters of shared economic concern," but this did not "represent a break with white Americans' racial beliefs or the social hierarchy they justified" (40-41). With respect to gender, he observes of the industrial unionism of the CIO that its "master tropes" were "almost exclusively male" (148). Moreover, Kazin argues, populism tends too easily to become a "language of the dispirited, vengeful, and the cynical" (283), especially in times of perceived decline. Kazin concludes, nonetheless, that because the language of populism is so deeply rooted in American culture and because it allows the possibility of a politics in which the producing class plays a major role in devising solutions to current problems, it would be a mistake to attempt to abandon populist language altogether.

Many readers will undoubtedly compare the *Populist Persuasion* with Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, published in 1955. Hofstadter's controversial book characterized the 1890s People's Party as nativistic, obsessed with conspiracies, and anti-Semitic. Kazin recognizes some validity in Hofstadter's characterization of 1890s Populism, although he regards it as overdrawn. Moreover, more so than Hofstadter, who drew strong parallels between 1890s Populism and subsequent populist movements such as McCarthyism, Kazin recognizes that there is a *shift* to be explained in populism's movement from left to right.

While Kazin's description of this shift is deeply insightful, his explanation seems only partial. The first transition Kazin outlines, the one in which the rationalist and pietistic strands separated, is clearly related to the more general shift from left to right, but after showing the divergence of this rhetoric in the early twentieth century, Kazin does not analyze why the moralistic strand, which he properly associates with right-wing populism, became dominant. As for the second transition, the postwar move from left to right, Kazin describes this shift quite effectively, but he does not offer a full analysis of why it happened.

These problems may stem from limitations of the linguistic approach Kazin employs. These limitations become apparent early on when Kazin's focus on language results in neglect of the People's Party's program. He describes the 1892 Omaha platform as a patchwork "intended to satisfy a range of constituencies" (38), but the core of the Omaha platform, a set of proposals for structural financial reform based on antimonopoly Greenbackism, was more than that. Further, by treating populist indictments of the "money power" solely

as rhetoric unconnected to the concrete proposals Populists advocated, Kazin tends to psychologize this rhetoric, thus making it appear at times pathological.

Kazin often gives the impression that populism's shift from left to right resulted from inherent tendencies of populist language. When Kazin connects Father Coughlin's attacks on the "money power" to an earlier rhetorical tradition, for example, he implies that Coughlin's eventual embrace of anti-Semitism involved no more than the logical outworking of populist discourse.

Kazin's approach becomes problematic in other ways, too. In a society with broad electoral participation, almost all political movements attempt to appeal to "the people," and it is therefore possible to detect some kind of populist discourse almost anywhere. In finding populist language in the CIO and in the 1960s student movement, however, Kazin winds up with a highly elastic definition of populism that seemingly could be applied to almost any political movement. The result is that the concept of populism sometimes loses analytical precision.

Kazin's approach yields numerous rich insights about the strengths, limitations, ironies, and contradictions of populist language. However, the class composition of particular populist movements, the proposals such movements advocated, and the broader institutional and political contexts in which such movements emerged, flourished, and declined all deserve fuller attention. At a time when populism's current manifestations seem deeply troubling, *The Populist Persuasion* is essential reading for everyone concerned about American politics.

Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan, by Nancy MacLean. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. xviii, 292 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT NEYMEYER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

In the mid-1920s, the Ku Klux Klan attracted millions of Americans to the fiery cross. The Klan achieved an immense amount of political and social influence despite a tarnished and violent history. Historians have interpreted the origins and significance of the movement in different ways. Scholars in the 1960s saw it as an aberration, a brief eruption of marginal social and economic groups that had no serious consequence. More recently, however, historians have portrayed it as an important populist reaction to the negative aspects of modernity. Its adherents were middle-class people who used the Klan to address real social concerns, rather than extremists trying to redress the racial, religious, and ethnic imbalances in society.

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