

2019

Book Review: Vox Populi: The Perils & Promises of Populism

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Recommended Citation

Weaver, Robert, "Book Review: Vox Populi: The Perils & Promises of Populism" (2019). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 196.

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Book Review

Vox Populi: The Perils & Promises of Populism, edited by Roger Kimball
Encounter Books, 2017

What is populism, and how and why do we find ourselves in the midst of a populist moment? The United States and Europe are alike caught in the grip of populist fervor, but much disagreement remains about what the term populist even means, and where populism is steering us.

Roger Kimball, editor and publisher of the *New Criterion*, selected and edited this volume. Each author shares his own perspective on the answer to the central questions. All ten appeared in the 2016 volume of the *New Criterion*.

The common thread running through this selection is the attempt to understand the populist moment that we are in. The writers are all acute observers of the present moment centering on the populist Donald J Trump. Each writer seeks to enlighten the present by considering past populist eras and movements.

What does populism mean? Kimball asserts in the introduction that populism is a challenge to the power of the state, as well as to that class of persons who wield the state's power. The motivations, methods and means of populist movements varied over time. This explains the difficulty in giving the term definition. Populism is not an exclusively right-wing sentiment, as some of the authors explain. The current moment, however, clearly has its roots in the conservative philosophy.

Anyone familiar with modern conservative thought will recognize the authors included in this collection. The names Victor Davis Hanson and Sir Roger Scruton represent the caliber of thinking and writing that the editor has brought to the task of explaining populism past and present. A biographical sketch of each author appears at the back of the book. The essays lack citations indicating the date and issue number of the original publication. The editor is remiss for not including them.

Part history lesson, part current events, part future projection, Vox Populi is an enlightening stroll through current conservative thought on the phenomenon of populism. To understand the present it is necessary to understand the past that produced it. This work does an admirable job in elucidating how we got to the present moment. Where it will go is still the subject of speculation, but the reader is better placed to cut through the noisy chatter of political commentary and hear what the voice of the people is trying to say.