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## Review of The Just Polity; Populism, Law, and Human Welfare.

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*The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare.* By Norman Pollack. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Notes, bibliography, index. xi + 376 pp. \$29.95.

Rejecting “political narrative” as “debilitating to historical scholarship,” Norman Pollack employs textual exegesis in this effort to construct a coherent intellectual history of Populism. Interspersing extensive quotations with his own paraphrases, elaborations, and inferences, Pollack examines a handful of Populist writings and extravagantly maintains that his work reconceptualizes both the nature and the study of Populism. After struggling through nearly 350 pages of opaque and often tumid prose, few historians will accept such claims. Even those sympathetic to this style of history, which ignores the specific political

context of the documents analyzed, will worry about some issues that Pollack dismisses here. In *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (1962), for example, Pollack warned that "the intellectual history of social movements is without value unless the evidence is in fact representative," but he now ostentatiously rejects any concern about "the representative character of my evidence and . . . generalizations."

Rather than reconceptualizing the study of Populism, Pollack instead merely avoids most of the issues that have dominated Populist historiography in recent years and returns to his own earlier effort to understand Populist ideology. Although still holding a sympathetic and positive view of the movement, Pollack now is as determined to deny Populism's radical nature as he was to insist upon it in 1962. Populists, he argues, opposed not capitalism but its corporate expression, "emergent monopolism." While favoring competitive (rather than monopolistic) capitalism, however, Populists (with few exceptions, mostly among Southerners) repudiated laissez-faire, believing that it had spawned monopolism and did not sanction the active government and the public ownership necessary to restrain corporations and democratize opportunity. Populists thus sought more than "the reinstatement of the precorporate small producer" for they recognized the advantages of collective organization—they simply regarded such corporations as being "within the public's jurisdiction." This view reflected their underlying constitutionalist perspective, which stressed the authority of the governed and the consequent necessity for a government responsive to public needs, not private (corporate) demands. The Populist goal, then, was "an economy and a supportive culture of democratic capitalism."

If this interpretation, stated in such broad outlines, scarcely seems novel, still Pollack's description of the complexity and expansive thrust of antimonopolist capitalism merits careful attention. And certainly he demonstrates that, if the Populists were not the radicals he once thought, they nonetheless

developed traditional American beliefs about political economy into a new ideology that promised to transform America.

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