



The Politicians and the Egalitarians: The Hidden History of American Politics

Sean Wilentz

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One of our most eminent historians reminds us of the commanding role party politics has played in America's enduring struggle against economic inequality.

"There are two keys to unlocking the secrets of American politics and American political history." So begins *The Politicians & the Egalitarians*, Princeton historian Sean Wilentz's bold new work of history.

First, America is built on an egalitarian tradition. At the nation's founding, Americans believed that extremes of wealth and want would destroy their revolutionary experiment in republican government. Ever since, that idea has shaped national political conflict and scored major egalitarian victories—from the Civil War and Progressive eras to the New Deal and the Great Society—along the way.

Second, partisanship is a permanent fixture in America, and America is the better for it. Every major egalitarian victory in United States history has resulted neither from abandonment of partisan politics nor from social movement protests but from a convergence of protest and politics, and then sharp struggles led by principled and effective party politicians. There is little to be gained from the dream of a post-partisan world.

With these two insights Sean Wilentz offers a crystal-clear portrait of American history, told through politicians and egalitarians including Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, and W. E. B. Du Bois—a portrait that runs counter to current political and historical thinking. As he did with his acclaimed *The Rise of American Democracy*, Wilentz once again completely transforms our understanding of this nation's political and moral character.

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