

**2008-2009 PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR  
RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY LECTURE**

**The Populist Legacy in Light of the Financial Meltdown**

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Historians have described the last thirty years as America's Second Gilded Age, with striking parallels with the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century. Then as now, the power of corporations grew exponentially amid the traumatic booms and busts of global financial speculations. The rich amassed great fortunes, a prosperous section of the middle class grew more comfortable, and hard times pressed on most everyone else. But how did those on the short end respond to these changes? The Populist movement—made up mostly of farmers but also of wage workers and a mixture of middle-class activists—provided the most intense challenge to corporate power in American history. The press today uses the phrase “populism” to describe a wide variety of political phenomena, much of which has little or nothing to do with the historical Populists of the 1880s and 1890s. Professor Postel will discuss the meaning of the Populists in light of the present financial crisis.

*The President's Award for Research and Creative Activity was established in 1989 and is given each year to recognize a colleague who has made significant contributions to their discipline within the previous five years through scholarly activity, research and publication, or creative and artistic endeavors.*

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