

# Invisible Sovereign: Imagining Public Opinion from the Revolution to Reconstruction (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History)

Mark G. Schmeller

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In the early American republic, the concept of public opinion was a recent? and ambiguous? invention. While appearing to promise a new style and system of democratic and deliberative politics, the concept was also invoked to limit self-rule, cement traditional prejudices and hierarchies, forestall deliberation, and marginalize dissent. As Americans contested the meaning of this essentially contestable idea, they expanded and contracted the horizons of political possibility and renegotiated the terms of political legitimacy.

Tracing the notion of public opinion from its late eighteenth-century origins to the Gilded Age, Mark G. Schmeller's Invisible Sovereign argues that public opinion is a central catalyst in the history of American political thought. Schmeller treats it as a contagious idea that infected a broad range of discourses and practices in powerful, occasionally ironic, and increasingly contentious ways.

Ranging across a wide variety of historical fields, *Invisible Sovereign* traces a shift over time from early "political-constitutional" concepts, which identified public opinion with a sovereign people and wrapped it in the language of constitutionalism, to more modern, "social-psychological" concepts, which defined public opinion as a product of social action and mass communication.



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