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“Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts” by Johann N. Neem

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data in the sense that the application of social identity theory (SIT), the primary social psychological approach focusing on the drawing of in-group boundaries, is a bit imperfect. While SIT's central insight is useful for explaining the existence and importance of group boundaries, the data limits Wong from engaging a related, important issue: namely, SIT is quite interested in the fluid and contextually salient aspects of these boundaries and how changing frames or situational cues can shift one's subjective sense of "us." Using survey data presents a snapshot of community boundaries, certainly, but necessarily obscures the ways that politicians, advertisers, and the media deliberately try to create, shift, and highlight various definitions of the in-group to further various aims. At one level, the snapshots discussed here are useful for getting a baseline sense of how various American groups determine community membership. At another, it is unable to fully grapple with the central aim of American political life—the attempt to create enough of a sense of "us" to win elections and enact political agendas. That these boundaries are somewhat fluid isn't easily studied with this methodological approach, and perhaps some social psychologists would quibble with the ways SIT is applied to these large-scale surveys. To her credit, Wong does not discount this mismatch, she simply focuses on what she can gather from the data, and *Boundaries of Obligation in American Politics* is an interesting and relevant read.

Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts. By Johann N. Neem. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. x+259. \$49.95.

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In this useful book, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts*, Johann Neem challenges Tocqueville's claim that voluntary associations are fundamental to American democracy. Drawing primarily on archival materials from postrevolutionary Massachusetts, Neem argues that in fact the role and legitimacy of voluntary associations were bitterly contested. Accordingly, the chapters of the book correspond to competing visions of civil society from the early years of the republic to the emerging crisis over slavery.

The first substantive chapter of the book looks at the Federalist vision, which construed civil society as an arm of the state. That is, in an effort to bind together an otherwise fragmented polity, the state sanctioned a select group of voluntary associations that could generate ties of social affection. This practice turned sanctioned associations into public institutions and stigmatized other associations as self-created minorities seeking to pursue private gains at the expense of the public good. Readers

will be fascinated to learn that Harvard was once a public university and that the Congregational Church was supported by tax dollars.

The rest of the book chronicles the gradual separation of civil society from the state, with special attention to the key actors involved at each stage of separation. Unlike the Federalists who believed that the state was the embodiment of the sovereign people, the Jeffersonian Republican opposition held that the voice of the people could be heard more directly through civil society. Ordinary people eventually forged a grassroots public sphere of their own by developing a national network of local and state auxiliaries, knit together by dues and annual reports. Then, as Democrats and Whigs came to replace Republicans and Federalists, the Whigs, who were chronically in the opposition, worked to shield elite associations from Democratic interference, claiming that organizations (e.g., libraries, professional associations) that serve the public good should not be subject to the vicissitudes of partisan politics.

By addressing the origins of American civil society in this way, Neem makes at least three important contributions. If scholars of civil society have insisted that a space for deliberative discourse exists or should exist in between the state and the market, Neem has given us a concrete empirical case in which the space in between was in practice a moving target. Indeed, no such space existed in the immediate postrevolutionary period when chartered voluntary associations were part of the state apparatus. Moreover, whereas Jürgen Habermas (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [MIT Press, 1991]) and Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (*Civil Society and Political Theory* [MIT Press, 1992]), for instance, have examined the role of civil society in the transition from either absolutist or authoritarian regimes to democratic ones, Neem shows us how civil society assists in the political development of a democracy. Lastly, this book adds to our already considerable historiographical knowledge on the politics of the Early Republic by showing that the conflict between disinterested civic virtue and special interests, the central tension of republican discourse, was more pervasive than originally thought. Neem unearths evidence of this tension in reference to churches, learned societies, social clubs, and hospitals. In this Neem has shown an uncommon breadth of scholarship. The book draws on data not only from archival newspapers (the usual stock-in-trade in political history), but also on charters of incorporation, legal decisions, intraorganizational correspondence, and the minutes of legislative debates and school board meetings.

Although we are better off for Neem's undertaking, there are some weaknesses that bear mention. First, political historians have written extensively about the stigma of early political parties as dangerous, self-interested factions eating at the heart of the republic. Indeed, Federalists and Republicans each viewed the other as an illegitimate faction even as they framed themselves as patriots. As such, it is not so surprising to find

that political elites would have looked upon self-created voluntary associations in much the same way.

Second, Neem misses, or chooses not to make, the causal argument implicit throughout the book—namely that American innovations in the concept of civil society were due largely to the efforts of those marginalized by mainstream party politics, typically members of the opposition, but also grassroots organizations like abolitionist and temperance societies that eventually became third-party movements. In this, his narrative gestures at a framework that is closer to Gramsci's use of civil society than that of Habermas, whom he cites at length in the introduction. For Gramsci (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [International Publishers, 1971]), political hegemony is forged not by deploying the coercive capacity of the state, but by transforming the kind of common-sense understandings of the world that can only take hold in schools, churches, and other institutions of civil society. Throughout Neem's book, we watch as one party after another suffers a setback and goes underground to rebuild and expand their base of support in religious and educational institutions.

Neem's analytical silence affects the conclusion, which in my view is a disappointing way to end an otherwise impressive work. Neem implies that early debates about the proper role of civil society in a democracy have become ideal types that reexert themselves through American history in a kind of path-dependent duel between those who believe that civil society strengthens democracy and those who regard it with suspicion. This feels uncannily like consensus history, which is precisely what Neem aims to challenge by documenting the uncertain status of civil society in the Early Republic. The rest of the book advances a far more interesting, if understated, claim—namely that civil society is continually transformed by the political underdog.

Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups. By Erika Summers Effler. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Pp. xx+237. \$23.00 (paper).

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Social movement groups and other voluntary associations face numerous threats to their survival. Unlike paid organizations, their persistence depends on the generous contributions of members' time, energy, and material resources. In addition, movement groups, which typically have lofty, idealistic goals, rarely achieve their social or political change objectives, which can sap members' commitment to the cause and put the group at risk of fizzling out or imploding under the pressure of repeated failures. How then do they persist? Movement scholars have typically addressed this question by examining members' commitment or participation in