

Beyond the founders: new approaches to the political history of the early america...

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Book Review: Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic

Paisley et al.'s book *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* charts the development of both the upper and lower class people who settled in America during its infancy. According to the authors, the politics of America as it developed were constructed and determined by the actions and activities, as well as principles, of everyone in America, not just the elite. No matter what their background, individual Americans of all shapes and sizes and economic statuses determined the politics of this infant country. Accommodation and contestation were the primary weapons by which ordinary people dictated policy and established the rules for American property ownership. This book provides a detailed account of the means by which people of all economic backgrounds shaped the politics and atmosphere of the American republic.

According to the authors, there is a distinct difference between all actions being political and all politics informing action. "Historians have come to understand that 'politics' encompassed a much more capacious realm extending well beyond the confines of voting, electioneering, and the formal institutions of governance" (p. 108). However, these unique and diverse ways to express political opinion were revolutionary and egalitarian. If these actions are better understood, the sense of politics in the early American republic can be sketched in more detail.

The political involvement of the lower class was done in very interesting ways. For example, in 1802, Thomas Jefferson, who had recently been

elected President, was rewarded with a "mammoth cheese" that a small community of Baptists in Massachusetts had made for him (p. 37). In order to show their affiliation for political parties, Americans of all classes identified themselves through the clothes they wore, attending banquets and parades, and participating in the burgeoning partisan media and press systems.

Despite the fact that women and blacks were often prevented from participating in the political process, they still attended public events, voiced their opinions in the media, and formed associations to support political figures. In the 1830s, farmers rebelled against their greedy New York landlords by dressing up as Indians. These small but important actions were all evidence of an increasingly growing interest in politics, and the ability for all Americans to participate in some way in the political discourse.

In this book, a collection of essays helps to delineate some of the more interesting and evocative methods of political action in the early days of the Republic. Despite the fact that social and cultural history have become so important following the 1960s and 1970s era of academia, political history has not suffered, but instead been enhanced by the student of all sides of American history. By understanding the cultures and social activities of those in America at that time, we can better learn how they expressed their political views and participated in these processes. While the Founding Fathers played a vital role in the creation of America, often ignored are the regular people who helped them shape the United States into a concrete body of government and a fully-formed society.

The book's sections demonstrate many different ideals regarding American political history espoused by the authors. The first section, " Democracy and Other Practices," stresses that historians should not strictly focus on political parties, but instead focus on social activities and the behavior of people at the time to learn how politics was regarded by the public. In " Gender, Race, and Other Identities," the authors explore the connection between identity and politics. During this time, people started to more closely associate with political parties and organizations, attaching that stamp to their own identities as they participated in voluntary associations and performed private activities for political purposes. In " Norms and Forms," the development of politics and the Constitution itself is linked to ideologies and their innate competition. Finally, in " Interests, Spaces, and Other Structures," the people's connection to expansion and development of America is viewed through the annexing of Texas; because public opinion demanded it, political action was taken, and this was a revolutionary idea for America.

In conclusion, subject of political discourse itself is tackled in this book on American politics. The authors claim that, because the public sphere and its civil activities are so important to political discourse and bringing the people into the process, that it should be emphasized even today. Social and cultural historians are just as important to studying history as political historians, and the fetish for the Founding Fathers must be deemphasized in favor of everyone else who helped to shape this country. This connection between society, people of all classes and cultures, and the way our country

is run is at the heart of this essay collection, and it is an idea not to be taken lightly.

References

Pasley, J. L., Robertson, A. W., & Waldstreicher, D. eds. (2004). *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.