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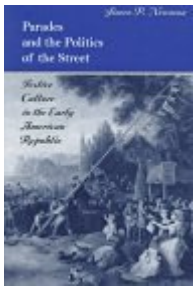

Simon P. Newman. *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997. xiv + 271 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-3399-5.

Reviewed by Jason Duncan

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Simon Newman proposes in *Parades and Politics of the Street* to illuminate and explain the political culture and motivations of the "people without doors" in the first decade of the United States under the Federal Constitution. The political histories of the early years of the new nation have long been dominated by accounts of the leading personalities of those years--Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton--and the conflicts among and between them. Even with the transformation of historical writing brought on by social and cultural historians over the past thirty years, the 1790s have continued to draw the interest of historians primarily interested in national leaders. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick's *The Age of Federalism* and James R. Sharp's *American Politics in the Early Republic*, both published in 1993, focus on the compelling battle of competing visions of the American republic as advanced by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. And some younger scholars such as Joanne Freeman, who are interested in the meaning of political culture in the early republic, have kept the familiar leading men at the center of their analyses.

Simon Newman now enters the field by arguing provocatively that far from the halls of governments and legislatures, politics for most Americans between 1789 and 1801 was less about legislative debates and voting than it was about participating in festivals and liberty pole raisings and wearing cockades in their hats to signify their political preferences. Influenced by the work of English historian E.P. Thompson and writing in the tradition of American scholars such as Linda Kerber, Alfred Young and Jesse Lemisch, Newman has trained his sights, for the most part, on the ideas and actions of those once thought to be "inarticulate." To get at the politics of those from whom we have little in the way of letters, diaries and official papers, Newman utilizes as his main primary source the contemporary newspaper accounts of the parades and festivities that comprised popular political culture in the 1790s.

Newman finds the colonial origins of American popular political culture in militia musters, Pinkster Fests and Pope's Day celebrations. During the upheaval of the American Revolution, ordinary Americans raised liberty poles, drank toasts and celebrated military victories as they voiced

publicly their commitment to the cause of independence and attempted to persuade their neighbors to join it. Crowds of ordinary people gathered in American cities to hear readings of the Declaration of Independence, or, more aggressively, to tear down statues of George III. After the war, mirroring the history of political institutions, popular political culture became once again a primarily local affair. The establishment of a more vigorous national government in the late 1780s created a framework within which emerged a "revitalized politics of the streets" (p. 39).

Americans politicized images of their national leaders, and supporters of George Washington began to fashion a political culture around the nation's first President. Washington was the focus of many political celebrations, including the one in Trenton, New Jersey, in which he was greeted by women and the arch they had built over the entrance to the city. Celebrations such as these caused unease among the early opponents of the Administration, who thought all the pomp and ceremony too monarchical in tone for a republic. Washington himself contributed to the making of such a Federalist political culture; at his weekly receptions, he would bow to his invited guests instead of shaking their hands, a gesture he thought was too common.

Newman also tells of how Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton wanted the United States Mint to issue coins emblazoned with Washington's likeness. The plan, however, encountered opposition, so instead the figure of Liberty graced Federal currency in the 1790s. Undaunted by this setback, supporters of the Administration held extravagant celebrations of Washington's birthday. Opponents of the Administration again questioned the propriety of a republican society venerating men instead of principles. This particular problem solved itself; Washington's successor, John Adams, lacked the charisma and popularity to engender much public adoration. Ironically, it was Thomas Jefferson who was more often feted and toasted than President Adams. Republican partisans, however, were careful to celebrate their hero as a "Friend of the People" as they emphasized the popular aspect of their festivities.

In reconstructing popular political culture, Newman finds that Republicans, especially white males, chose to rally their supporters around celebrations of the egalitarian rhetoric of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. Here Newman is quick to recognize that the old progressive dichotomy of the party of the people (the Republicans) vs. the party of the interests (the Federalists) is complicated enormously by questions of race and gender. He points out that the Federalists, with their belief in a politics of deference and hierarchy, were more likely to accept a limited role for women in public political culture. Newman also reminds us that the Republicans as early as the 1790s supported the property rights of slaveowners at the expense of the human rights of enslaved people. Still, he clearly sees more democratic potential in the Republicans than he does in the relentlessly elitist Federalists.

Central to American popular politics in the 1790s were celebrations of the French Revolution. Its partisans in the United States wore red, white and blue cockades in their hats, sang French revolutionary songs, and took part in "the many parades, feasts and festivals staged in honor of the French" (p. 132). One of the largest such festivals was the "Feast of Reason" held in Philadelphia in 1794; a parade was followed by a ceremony at the home of the French Minister to the United States. In his garden "was erected an altar to liberty, with an elegant statue of the goddess of liberty on it" (p. 146). It is in such vivid details that the strength of Newman's work lies.

Ordinary Americans early in the French Revolution eagerly drank toasts to Thomas Paine and the Rights of Man. But by 1796, most people in the United States were less enthused about the progress of events in France. Newman blames the onset of the Terror and the opposition of the

American clergy to the French Revolution for the waning of enthusiasm. He is disappointed with this shift in attitude and sees American political culture moving rather quickly to a safe and almost bland middle ground between radically egalitarian France and "counter-revolutionary" England. Indeed, one of the submerged themes of ***Parades and Politics of the Street*** is that the ideas that helped produce American popular political culture in the 1790s were largely derived from France. The ringing rhetoric of ***Common Sense*** and the Declaration of Independence, radicalizing texts in the crucible of the 1770s, were less compelling once independence had been secured. Jefferson and Paine did not offer much of a practical American program in the 1790s, other than to oppose what they saw as Federalist encroachments on liberty. Paine himself left America to take part in the French Revolution.

What there was of American radical politics foundered on race, as Newman explains. The establishment of the Haitian republic, with its promise of racial liberation, certainly put a damper on revolutionary fervor, especially in the South. As the spirit of the French Revolution exploded on American shores in the form of Gabriel's Rebellion in 1800, Newman argues, white Americans of all political persuasions united to isolate African-Americans from public life.

Federalists and their supporters early on feared the radical implications of the French Revolution for the United States. They did adopt some of the practices of their Republican foes, as they wore black cockades to symbolize American patriotism and independence from England. But ultimately the Republican politicians garnered the greater advantage from the politics of the street. Newman argues persuasively that Republican leaders were "far more comfortable with popular politics" than were their opponents (p. 189). But Republicans co-opted the radical spirit of the 1790s as they excluded women and African-Americans. Thus Jefferson's election to the Presidency did not represent the "Revolution of 1800," as Jefferson himself and some historians since would have it. Instead a new political culture was born, one that had been shorn of its radical content but retained its democratic form. Borrowing from the Marxist theory of Antonio Gramsci, Newman argues that the boisterous street politics of the 1790s had been supplanted by a "new partisan hegemony" (p. 191).

Newman's conclusion is not wholly persuasive. He admits earlier that Republicans were less inclusive than Federalists regarding women. On matters of race, Jefferson's coalition was strongest in the South where slavery was most entrenched. And it remains unproven at book's end as to whether the Republican leadership had betrayed the ordinary white men who demonstrated for the Rights of Man in seaport cities in the 1790s. More analysis of exactly how wily (or is it cynical?) Republican party elites hijacked the spirit of the tri-color for conservative ends would have bolstered Newman's argument, although admittedly doing so adequately would probably require another entire book. Politicians, other than the familiar great men, are missing from ***Parades and Politics of the Streets***, although lesser known figures (or not so lesser known, as in the case of Aaron Burr in New York) certainly contributed to the defeat of the Federalists in 1800 in localities across the nation.

Newman at times also lumps ordinary white men together to the point where they appear monolithic. But as he mentions in his opening chapter, one of the staples of colonial political culture was anti-Catholicism, as evidenced by Pope's Day celebrations. When American crowds celebrated the French Revolution in the 1790s, their festivities could have a religious edge as well. As Ruth Bloch illustrated in ***Visionary Republic***, some evangelical Protestants, most of whom were Republicans, were enthused about the French Revolution in part because they saw it as dealing a devastating blow to the Roman Catholic Church in

Europe. This religious tension played itself out on American streets; by the first decade of the nineteenth century, Protestants and Catholics were fighting outside of St. Peter's Catholic Church in Manhattan, which had been established in the 1780s. Thus, ethnic and religious conflict, as well as friction between native born and immigrant Americans, does not figure into Newman's account as it might have. And, as well as he recreates this predominantly urban popular political culture, one wonders how Americans outside of the cities engaged politics in their communities.

Despite the deradicalization of American popular political culture in the late 1790s, Newman finds a positive note on which to end. He proposes that the most enduring legacy of those ordinary people who took to the streets was the legitimization of a dissenting politics in American life that would bear fruit in various reform movements in the nineteenth century. Taken as a whole, ***Parades and Politics of the Streets*** is a valuable book. Simon Newman tells us many important things about both the admirable and regrettable aspects of American political culture in the late eighteenth century. By bringing to life the political actions and ideas of the "people out of doors," he has expanded our understanding of what constituted politics during a formative decade in American history.