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Richard Godbeer. *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love between Men and the Creation of the American Republic.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. xii + 254 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9120-5; $20.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8018-6294-6.

Reviewed by David A. Reichard (California State University Monterey Bay)
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Bonds of Fraternal Love

In *The Overflowing of Friendship*, Richard Godbeer provides a fresh perspective on the lives of white, "literate educated men" in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century United States. While this may seem to be well-trod territory, what Godbeer offers is new insight into the friendships and relationships formed between men. As Godbeer suggests, while these friendships were important in their individual lives, a closer look demonstrates their connection to the development of a new political discourse for the new nation. "Such friendships," writes Godbeer, "along with marital and parental love, would nurture social and moral instincts crucial to the well-being of a post-revolutionary society" which encompassed a "new national family bound together by parental affection, marital friendship, and loving brotherhood" (p. 12). Building on the work of scholars Anthony Rotundo, William Benemann, Caleb Crain and many others, Godbeer injects a welcome challenge to historians of the early republic to ensure that attention to how men formed bonds beyond political alliances can also be central to an analysis of the period's political transformations. In particular, Godbeer asks us to consider how men's interpersonal relationships–how they connected with other as men–are good indicators of the larger meaning of manhood, and political ideology, in the context of nation building.

Godbeer admits that his focus is on men who were white, educated, and literate. Nevertheless, he argues that a fresh look at this class of men through the lens of their attitudes about and experience of male friendship, challenges the common assumption that "the establishment of individualism" was "a necessary and central feature of American identity" (p. 194). Rather, Godbeer asserts that friendship, "sympathy," fraternal love, and brotherly affection were just as important to the development of a new political ideology in the early republic as was individualism, suggesting the importance of a gendered interpretation of this idea.For legal historians in particular, Godbeer's insights may prompt a fresh look at how friendships between and among men helped shape national, state, and local governments in the Revolution's wake, informed debates surrounding the creation and ratification of the U.S. Constitution and those of the states, and influenced early attempts to sort out power relations–within and among various elected bodies, state and federal courts, and the regulation of the wider economy.

The book is divided into five discrete though interconnected chapters. The first focuses on intimate letters between male friends in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia. His close reading of these documents reveals how deep emotional attachment between men, expressions of "male love," were not frowned upon, but were actually encouraged; as he asserts, these relationships "made men into model members of society" (p. 48). The second chapter examines the impact of sentiment on the form friendships between men took in the eighteenth century, suggesting in part its roots in literary conventions as well as the influence of intimate friendships between women as models. A third chapter examines the connection between spiritual expression and male friendship among pre-revolutionary revivalists and eighteenth-century evangelicals, while a fourth focuses on "fraternal love in the Continental Army" (p. 119). Finally, chapter 5 hones in on how moral and social theorists like David Hume and Adam Smith influenced men in the new United States to see friendships as an essential way to nurture "civic engagement" (p. 158). The result, Godbeer argues, was a republican ideology which "endowed personal friendship [between men] and its encouragement of virtue with a broad social and political significance" (p. 171). A final epilogue hints at how ideas about male

friendship changed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when intense attachments between men became more suspect, or as Godbeer notes, "dangerous and subversive," as "aggressive masculinity … percolated throughout American society and informed imperialistic policies abroad" by the end of the nineteenth century (p. 196).

There are many strengths of *The Overflowing of Friendship*. Throughout, Godbeer's research is meticulous–rooted not only in close attention to the archival record, but also in his broad and impressive reading of a diverse range of scholarship upon which he builds and expands. For example, he builds on what historians of women have argued for years–that gender and gender relations are central to understanding how state formation happens and political ideologies form. Like scholars of romantic friendships between men, Godbeer grapples with the question of whether such close and intimate relationships took any sexual form, engaging a debate about the extent, kind, and meaning of same-sex sexuality in the eighteenth century which has garnered some needed scholarly attention in the last decade. As with much of this research, speculation abounds. However, Godbeer is not afraid to tease possible evidence of same-sex sexuality from his sources, even while recognizing the limitations of the material. His discussion of whether John Mifflin and James Gibson's relationship included a sexual dimension is a good example, drawing from diaries to discern their intentions, exploring instances of sharing a bed, or considering descriptions of provocative and arguably homo-erotic dreams. As is the case with much of this kind of interpretation, caution is needed, yet Godbeer pushes his readers to consider the possibilities, raising questions for future scholars to explore. Regardless of whether same-sex sexuality was part of these men's lives (and given his own findings and those of others, it likely was for some), Godbeer convincingly argues that affection–both in words and physical touch–were important ways men expressed what Daniel Webster described to James Bingham in 1800 as the "bonds of fraternal love" (p. 81).

Godbeer's choice of subject begs the question, however, about the men who are left out of the narrative and the degree to which male friendships described here translated across social class, race, region (North, South), and location (city or country). While these men are not the subject of this book, and Godbeer certainly recognizes that his research should not be read as applicable to all men, one cannot help but wonder what friendships meant to men outside of the narrow slice of social life he explores. Were there regional differences in how men made meaning of male friendships? What role did immigrants play in challenging these ideals, formed as Godbeer suggests, in an Anglo-American social and political world? Perhaps future historians will delve into such questions and expand upon Godbeer's baseline insights.

Overall *The Overflowing of Friendship* is a welcome addition to the literature on the formation of the United States. Through rigorous research, creative use of sources, and deep engagement with the work of scholars before him, *The Overflowing of Friendship* is a thoughtful and new look at the relationships between men of a certain class, race, time, and place. Moreover, his compelling focus on the connection between male friendships and political theory is provocative, and could generate a host of new questions for future research.

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