

to the vitally important point that Strauss's *t'shuvah* was of a philosophical, not theological, nature (16). If this is indeed *apikoros*, or heresy, how can Strauss's insistence upon philosophizing be reconciled with an alleged personal guilt and need for forgiveness by the Jewish people and their God? Of a different order is Howse's allusion to the possibility that both transgression and repentance are not only Jewish notions, but integral to the human experience as such.

No doubt Howse's hypothesis points to the gravity of the "Jewish question" for Strauss. But its understanding would require, as a start, a thorough analysis of Strauss's pivotal writings on the subject, culminating in probing the relation of reason and revelation and their tense interplay as the inspiring energy at the heart of the West. Such issues and their many ramifications entailed by Strauss's evolving views of Judaism generally are scrutinized, for instance, in exemplary and detailed clarity by Catherine and Michael Zuckert as well as by Steven Smith in their recent works on Strauss.

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Elizabeth Beaumont: *The Civic Constitution: Civic Visions and Struggles in the Path toward Constitutional Democracy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xvi, 238.)

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To what extent is the United States Constitution an artifact of elite visions of popular sovereignty and individual rights? What role did voices of ordinary women and men play in the American Founding, in the historical evolution of American political thought, and in the various critical "moments" of democratic inclusion that the Declaration's promises and the Constitution's guarantees have generated over time? These and other related questions animate the analysis presented in Elizabeth Beaumont's important and thoughtful new book, *The Civic Constitution: Civic Visions and Struggles in the Path Toward Constitutional Democracy*.

Beaumont provides a rich and fascinating account of how popular participation has informed constitutional development by going beyond "rights claims and legal mobilization" (18–20) and including, instead, boycotts, petition campaigns, parades, the writing of letters, public speeches, acts of civil disobedience, publication of sermons and poetry, newspaper wars, etc. Her focus here is on four pivotal eras of American constitutional development: "the revolutionary path to independence and the formation of state

constitutions; the drafting, ratification, and amendment of the US Constitution; the antislavery reconstruction; and the women's suffrage *reconstruction*" (1, emphasis mine). Each of these eras is treated as an independent, and meticulously researched, chapter before the book concludes with some engaging pronouncements about the broader implications of this rethinking of American constitutional development from the point of view of "civic founders."

Each chapter offers an extremely detailed account of the popular voices regnant in these distinct historical epochs. The result is a deeply serious and nuanced scholarly engagement with the abiding role of civic agency in American constitutional development. The work successfully demonstrates that the Founding and subsequent constitutional development is a product of dialectical contests between, on the one hand, the visions of the Founding Fathers, "Herculean" Supreme Court justices (18; also see 238), and other elites, and, on the other, civic founders (dissenters, critics, radicals, reformers, and others) who constructed "durable scaffoldings" (5) for new constitutional rights and commitments.

Despite the book's many achievements, however, a few residual comments remain to be made. The first has to do with "case selection" and the notion of what constitutes a signal instance of popular mobilization deserving of scholarly inquiry. In the course of US history, there have been many junctures when populism became central to politics: the Jacksonian era comes to mind immediately, but so do the Progressive era (the start of which both postdates and overlaps with the women's suffrage movement) and the countercultural sixties. What the book is missing is a rigorous and sufficient justification for the almost exclusive focus on the four specific historical junctures that Beaumont selects for her analysis.

To be fair to Beaumont, in the concluding part of the book she does indeed address the implications of her account for various postwar reform movements including but not limited to the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the Occupy, Tea Party, and gay marriage movements. In addition, she does point out that she focuses on abolitionists and suffragists because they are "particularly clear and monumental instances of reformers" (222), and that this book focuses on "one set of transformative civic disputes" (22). But one might still ask: why specifically this particular set and not another?

Her principal defense of her case selection appears to be that the four junctures she analyzes are dictated by the "textual markers" that correspond to them: the early state constitutions, the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments. But as she herself recognizes (226), the Twenty-sixth Amendment, extending the "youth ballot," fits all her criteria (including those that are normative) and remains excluded from analysis.

On the other hand, her defense, based upon a normative consideration, of excluding antisuffragists and the KKK and other opponents of Reconstruction from her category of civic founders (222–24) is better developed, although this

normative criterion could have been better highlighted in the beginning of the book's argument.

Second, Beaumont appears to be more concerned with a demonstration of the fact and details of popular constitutionalism than with its intellectual sources. This is especially true of the chapters dedicated to the revolutionary period and the Founding. For example, Beaumont somewhat casually announces that "colonists drew quite loosely and creatively from various intellectual traditions, including Lockean liberalism, civic republicanism, Calvinism and Puritan theology, Scottish moral philosophy, English Whig thought, and, less commonly, the democratic radicalism of the English Levellers" (38). This is a bit of a missed opportunity because a sustained engagement with the intellectual history of the ideas of popular sovereignty and the ideational and intertextual context of these primordial civic foundations would have taken us a step further than simply an account of the fact of their occurrence and in turn have yielded, I think, interesting explanations for a range of questions. Some of these questions are: Is it the case that a pervasive sense of "bourgeois radicalism" (see Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism* [Cornell University Press, 1990]) in America led these civic groups to mobilize against entrenched hierarchies? Is it possible that these sentiments came about as a result of Americans' sense of virtue, or communitarianism, or even religious attachments? Responses to these questions could explain, in turn, some patterns of historical change and continuity and shed light on why some popular movements (abolition, universal suffrage, etc.) persist with more legitimacy than others (eugenics, temperance, etc.).

Equally, we are told that many delegates to the Constitutional Convention had "praise for the British system and condemnation of states' relatively more democratic approaches" (88), yet "public attachments to new ideals and structures of popular sovereignty took these options off the table" (89). But how precisely did it come to be that the public *became* attached to these new ideals of popular sovereignty?

The role of popular constitutionalism in the movements for abolition and women's suffrage should come as no surprise. After all, as critiques of the dominant white, male elite hegemony, these movements necessarily had to have a popular base. But the greatest merit of these chapters is the very detailed, thoroughly researched, historical reconstruction of these popular voices and their specific claims for equal citizenship. Here we also have more information on specific intellectual sources, including particular reinterpretations of the Declaration and the Constitution and public resistance to the Court's decisions relating to slavery, coverture, and so on. There are also some precise references to intellectual lineage here—for example, we get to know that suffragist Sarah Grimké was reading Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (167), and that Lucy Stone was adapting the rhetoric of Frederick Douglass (186).

Finally, although *The Civic Constitution* is obviously an impressive accomplishment, it could certainly have been shorter without any loss in its

substantive content. Beaumont's writing is elegant but there is quite a bit of signaling, foreshadowing, recapitulation, and even repetition.

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Jeffrey A. Becker: *Ambition in America: Political Power and the Collapse of Citizenship*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. Pp. xi, 197.)

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Does moral decline pose a grave danger to American liberal democracy? This serious little book argues that it does. And if so, what can we do about it? Jeffrey Becker offers suggestions, but no guarantees. This is a book more confident about decline than recovery, although with thoughts on both.

Becker addresses such questions under an old-fashioned heading: how selfishness and zealotry can lead to the “collapse of citizenship.” But his concern is idealistic and up to date, as well as sympathetic to ordinary morals and public opinions. He understands citizenship as dedication to “popular self-government” and even “moral equality” (149). A collapse of citizenship means a loss of dedication to America’s guiding ideals, a loss among both the powerful few and the people at large. It is in this Lincolnian sense that democracy has a moral problem, not merely a social or political problem. The reader should overlook a certain density, looseness, and repetition in Becker’s prose. He will find significant commentary on our postmodern era (“celebrate me!” 115), some sober and independent argument (without hopes or fears of visionary innovations), and a tenacious survey of contemporary authors similarly worried.

For Becker, “ambition” means both modest ambitions and the need of a few for power, reputation, accomplishment, and distinction. Americans “have lost the ambition to be citizens” (149). He worries about a self-centered attitude among ordinary people and leaders alike, but especially among leaders. We are getting more candidates aiming merely for fame and power, or at most for some narrow cause, and a run of celebrity candidates who finance and organize electoral runs on their own. Becker, who stays away from examples, intimates some critique of Left, although mostly of Right. Candidates pride themselves on being mavericks, run against government, disdain the restraints of government, and even denigrate the public generally. Office holders develop a pompous and demagogic style. The people turn away and turn to private pleasures now hawked and indulged with the spice of self-expression. What ever happened, Becker asks, to “doing the tasks of