

## Book Reviews

Tracy B. Strong: *Learning One's Native Tongue: Citizenship, Contestation, and Conflict in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. xii, 329.)

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What does it mean to be an American citizen? We might immediately answer this question in terms of suffrage, a right that represented much of the historical struggle for inclusion and now extends to member qua member. In *Learning One's Native Tongue: Citizenship, Contestation, and Conflict in America*, Tracy B. Strong cautions against such an answer. American citizenship, Strong emphasizes, is a *political* matter about “what or who one is,” its criteria open to contestation, dispute, and redefinition (2). *Learning One's Native Tongue* is a conceptual history of citizenship that highlights these disputes from the Puritans to the present. Its story tracks that of America; the citizen, like the nation, has always been an unfinished “project,” the development of which cannot be captured by reference to rights alone (9). The right to vote, or what Strong often calls an increasingly “abstract” view of the citizen, obscures more than it reveals about America's past and about what might come next.

For Strong, the dominant narratives of American history and culture have similarly left us with a reductive understanding of who the citizen is. However formidable the challenges to Louis Hartz's “liberal tradition” thesis from the republicanism of Bernard Bailyn and J. G. A. Pocock or the communitarianism of Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre, Strong concludes that a “Lockean” individualism continues to mark the American experience and the character of the citizen within it. Seen through the Lockean model, American citizenship amounts to little more than individual independence, later coextensive with industrial capitalism. This liberal caricature is Strong's central target, but his thesis challenges all of the interpretive models of America as insufficiently political, or ignorant of the varied “grammars of contestation” that clashed and overlapped to produce changing visions of the citizen in different times. The book's chapters trace the concept alongside the nation's wider challenges, first to define itself domestically even before the Founding (chaps. 1–4), then to address the standing of the excluded within its own borders (chaps. 5–6), and finally to find its place internationally (chaps. 7–10).

One of the merits of this book is the author's talent for storytelling. The conceptual history in these pages is not a series of events but a lively unfolding of American life with the citizen at the center. Strong is at his best when weaving

American literature within political history. The words of Emerson, Twain, Melville, and Hawthorne, he reminds us, offer a different and at times more insightful model of American life than those traditionally referenced by political theorists (8).

Alexis de Tocqueville also casts a long shadow over the text, which begins as *Democracy in America* does: with the Puritans as America's point of departure. John Winthrop's "city on a hill" supplies the first vision of citizenship and its accompanying challenge in chapter 1. The image refers to "the life of a people in a given place . . . a life lived together" that introduced a delicate balancing act between individual freedom and the moral partnership of the exemplary city (25). Though Winthrop's city introduced the notion of a collective, it did little to outline the boundaries of it, or to delineate who belonged, who did not, and on what basis. The problem of defining "the collective" occupies Strong in different ways throughout the remaining chapters. Through thoughtful analyses of primary documents—such as the 1865 letter to the freedmen of Orangeburg, South Carolina—we see familiar disputes over the status of women, newly freed slaves, Native Americans, and immigrants in a new light. Chapters 5 and 6, the most impressive in this wide-ranging book, examine such disputes through the lens of political economy to amplify the voices of "non-elites"—nineteenth-century labor and cooperative movements that offered alternative views of citizenship unaddressed in dominant narratives of American culture (182). In these voices, still "relegated to the fringe," Strong finds arguments for the political character of citizenship as a contest over the legitimation of power and wealth (7).

But the author argues that these developments—domestic and international, the subject of chapters 7–8—actually did little to refine the concept of citizenship. Quite the opposite: its criteria became "increasingly abstract" by World War I, its demands "shrinking" at the same time (2). Yet these conceptual changes also tracked the expansion of citizenship in the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Amendments, replacing "natural" (race and gender) and "acquired" (property or church membership) criteria with a legal right to citizenship and suffrage. On this point, the book misses an opportunity to trace the give-and-take of privileges and rights suggested in its introduction. Strong wants his readers to avoid thinking of citizenship primarily as a settled right to vote, but the advantages of viewing citizenship in this way—its more inclusive consequences—figure only secondarily in the argument. Given the author's aim to offer a *political theory* of citizenship, with its changes open to evaluation, we might hope for more on the conceptual and practical tradeoffs between a thick, demanding view of the citizen and a thinner but more expansive one.

While *Learning One's Native Tongue* uncovers much of the "hidden" citizenship discourses in American history, its concluding chapter misses what is most visible in contemporary politics. When Strong speculates on the future possibilities for citizenship, he surveys the phenomena of social media, post-truth politics, even terrorism. But debates about immigration,

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which the author acknowledges “befog our understanding,” surprisingly receive almost no attention in a chapter devoted to where we are now and what is yet to come (313). On this issue, we have seen a revival of the “natural” criteria for citizenship supposedly relegated to the politics of the nineteenth century. Ethnicity and country of origin have recently been proposed as disqualifying standards for would-be immigrants. The next frontier for a *political* theory of citizenship undoubtedly concerns prospective citizens and our applied if often unspoken standards for their inclusion. Those of us interested in these developments would do well to turn to Strong’s important work to see how disputes over who the citizen is—and who she could be—continue to shape and be shaped by public life.

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Kimberly K. Smith: *The Conservation Constitution: The Conservation Movement and Constitutional Change, 1870–1930*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019. Pp. vii, 333.)

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It was during the winter of 2016 that an armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon captured the attention of a nation and caused debate over the legal foundations of the federal government’s authority to manage natural resources and public lands in western states. Although the spectacle of armed militants occupying the refuge drew national debate, much remains to be known about the legal foundations of the federal government’s power to manage these lands. Indeed, US environmental policy textbooks almost collectively take the constitutional origins of American environmental policy for granted. In *The Conservation Constitution*, Kimberly K. Smith, a professor of environmental studies and political science at Carleton College, carefully develops “a synthetic narrative” to examine the etiology and influence of key doctrines and legal arguments such as the public trust doctrine, the equal footing doctrine, the public nuisance doctrine, the state failure argument, and the inherent power argument, many of which influenced and shaped Progressive Era conservation policy and the constitutional regime that gave life to it. Smith calls this new constitutional order the “Conservation Constitution,” which she describes as “a set of legal traditions that continue to structure environmental law and policy, providing the foundations for an emergent green state” (4).