

to demonize Islam as “patriarchal” and “traditional,” and to promote Western society as “liberated” and “modern.” She writes:

The whole point of this book has been to say to my sisters and colleagues in the women’s movement (and to our brothers in the struggle): “Red alert! Red alert! The globalizers are using our ideas to further their goals and to frustrate ours.” To me, feminism was and is about global justice, about taking care of those in need, giving a voice to the voiceless, letting people determine their own destiny. All of these goals are in danger of being defeated by a system of global imperialism that tells the Iraqis and the Afghans and so many other peoples around the world how they must live (p. 200).

Feminism Seduced is a departure from some of Eisenstein’s previous work, which argued that feminists working within the system could transform it. This was the goal of the femocrats in Australia, of which she was a part. Now she is less convinced that a feminism divorced from radical politics can actually improve the lives of any but a very few elite women.

Eisenstein wants to resurrect socialist feminism as an alternative to the ascendant free market feminism. She sees Venezuela as a model, although she recognizes that a great deal of sexism remains in Marxist/leftist circles. She also thinks that alliances with women-of-color movements are a potential salvation for feminism. Postmodernists get the boot, but mothering and maternal values are redeemed and redemptive. In the end the solutions are fraught and the conclusions seem old-fashioned. But her analysis of the “fit” between liberal feminism and global capitalism is spot on. Feminists need to realize how our conceptualization and fight for gender equality can promote the interests of corporations. Global class interests must be considered or else feminism can do as much harm as good.

The Public and Its Possibilities: Triumphs and Tragedies in the American City, by **John D. Fairfield**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010. \$37.50 cloth. 355pp. ISBN: 9781439902103.

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The Public and Its Possibilities re-narrates American history as a left communitarian morality tale. Rapacious capitalists and misguided reformers battle “honest producers and competent citizens” across the centuries, in John Fairfield’s sprawling synthetic history. The book’s title, a hopeful rewrite of John Dewey’s 1927 classic, suggests Fairfield’s thesis: public life has been emptied out, but there is buried treasure to be recovered in the country’s civic-minded past.

Fairfield, a professor of history at Xavier University, draws on two generations of historians who have located “civic republican” strands in American history. This “republican synthesis,” as Robert Shalhope called it, was well underway by the late 1960s as an explicit challenge to the post-war consensus history. Where Louis Hartz found Locke and rights-based liberalism, Gordon Wood, J.G.A. Pocock and others uncovered competing claims rooted in civic virtue and the common good. Among historians, the source, extent, and duration of republican influence is contested, but the idea has proven remarkably supple—one reason Daniel Rodgers’ (1992) “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept” is a neglected classic in the sociology of ideas. The success of the republican historiography has dovetailed, since the early 1980s, with the revival of pragmatism as well as that multi-pronged assault on individualist liberalism that gets called communitarian.

Fairfield’s book highlights “roads not taken” in our “excessively privatized world,” in much the same vein as political theorist Michael Sandel’s *Democracy’s Discontent* (1996). But Fairfield narrates his usable civic past with a small “p” populism less pervasive in Sandel. The populist flavor is among the clues that point to Christopher Lasch, the late historian, as a key influence. There is also Fairfield’s hostility to experts and

professionals, his accent on the middle third of the 19th century, his anti-materialist, life-in-common leftism, his plaint about public culture in long-term decline, even his peculiarly Laschian take on the expert-besieged family. The book is indeed dedicated to Lasch, whom Fairfield met as a University of Rochester college student, and who went on to supervise Fairfield's doctoral work at Rochester. *The Public and Its Possibilities* might be read as the synthetic American history that Lasch never wrote.

The book is organized into four parts, with chapters variously devoted to a given period's culture, economy, or its politics. Following a brief summary of Revolutionary era republicanism, Part I recasts struggles over work in the nineteenth century as a battle between a "civic conception of free labor" and the values of an emerging market society. "Free labor," a term with other contemporary meanings, is here used in Sandel's sense, as work that prepares a laborer to perform his civic duties. This free labor ideal stayed in the fight through the first two-thirds of the century, until its civic aspirations were squashed by the "powerful elites" of the Gilded Age. Part II tells that story of decline in more detail, first pointing to the tragic irony that white workers failed to connect their civic ideal to slavery's injustice. Here Fairfield also portrays the post-Reconstruction political culture as an unholy alliance between Liberal Republicans, misguided reformers, and plutocrats bent on silencing the average citizen.

After "thirty years of decay," republican values were "rediscovered" in the early Progressive Era—which, in Fairfield's Part III, becomes a window of civic revival. "Progressive Era Americans," he writes, "recaptured the nineteenth-century ambition to create an economy and culture based on democratic participation and popular abilities" (p. 191). That window was soon shut by World War I, when George Creel's domestic propaganda campaign served as the "requiem for a participatory democracy." After the war, "corporate progressives" and chastened realists like Walter Lippmann largely acquiesced, Fairfield argues in Part IV, to a democracy without citizens. Yes, Dewey made nods in the right direction, and the early CIO's campaign for industrial

democracy was an important last redoubt. But labor leaders opted for social security over economic democracy, joining with other interwar elites in constructing a "Welfare/Warfare State." In place of democratic politics, Fairfield writes, Americans got democratic leisure: the "private pleasures of consumption" over "civic values and public experience."

Fairfield's writing is excellent throughout. He has somehow managed to condense entire book-shelves of work into seamless, quote-rich prose. Still, the book's manichean cast—the forces of light locked in struggle with darkness—are grating to even a sympathetic reader. There is a running moral ledger with just two columns:

In the late nineteenth century, working people mounted a spirited challenge to the values of the emerging corporate order. Against the ethic of limited liability, they championed sympathy; against hierarchy, they asserted equality; against competitiveness, they upheld cooperation; against individualism, they practiced solidarity (p. 194).

That is a rousing line, and its populist stridency is typical to the book. The passion is catching, but Fairfield is painting with just two colors. And the villain role shifts with startling speed: Gilded Age good-government reformers seek to shut out the unwashed, while turn-of-the-century Progressives are democracy's leading lights. Fairfield's unifying concept of civic virtue is also asked to do too much work. Republicanism, especially as the decades roll by, seems to slip into a much thinner (if still compatible) notion of participation by the underprivileged. Revolutionary resistance to British corruption is a far cry from machine-era partisan politics, yet Fairfield wants to praise both, and much else besides, as expressions of republican virtue.

The book's subtitle suggests that cities will be a particular focus, and urban settings are frequently invoked. The book's argument, however, does not seem dependent on the city per se, since Fairfield's struggle plays out across popular culture, national politics, and a changing economy. The city comes

into true focus only in his superb last chapter, which pegs twentieth century civic decline to the relative post-WWII fortunes of cities and suburbs. Fairfield's chronicle of post-war urban decay is the best short summary I have seen, but his account is only tangentially linked to public participation and its eclipse. The end-of-book shift to an urban frame helps explain the otherwise puzzling case Fairfield makes in the closing pages for a tax on land speculation.

Fairfield's book is an unapologetic history-cum-polemic, so perhaps its binary employment is not really a fault on its own terms. That may be, but perhaps the past the book seeks to recover would be more usable without the air-brushing.

References

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Serving Country and Community: Who Benefits from National Service?, by **Peter Frumkin** and **JoAnn Jastrzab**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. 310pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780674046788.

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Non-military national service programs exist in many countries but there is something quintessentially American about AmeriCorps, based as it is on the premise that service to one's country not only improves society but also the person involved. AmeriCorps is actually comprised of three discrete programs, all operating under the aegis of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), established in 1993. AmeriCorps State and National mobilizes volunteers by offering a stipend in the form of education credits and a living allowance in exchange for a one-year work commitment. Its programs

are run through nonprofit organizations with which it forms partnerships. The aim is not only to perform public works, such as building affordable housing, but also to change the lives of people who serve to make them better citizens. Besides AmeriCorps State and National there is AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a service program begun in 1964, and the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a ten-month residential service program for young adults.

The book under review focuses on these three programs with the aim of recounting the history of the idea of non-military national service in the United States, describing the various and sometimes conflicting opinions about the proper goals of national service programs, assessing the effects of service on AmeriCorps members, describing some of the programs staffed by AmeriCorps members, analyzing the political fortunes of the parent CNCS, and making recommendations about strengthening AmeriCorps for the future.

Americans have always preferred that social problems be tackled in a decentralized, bottom-up, voluntary way. They are wary of government-sponsored service programs not only because they threaten to undermine the "genuine" spirit of volunteerism, but also because they resent government intrusion into the private sphere. It is testimony to the influence of communitarian thinking in the 1990s, personified by Bill Clinton, that the proponents of AmeriCorps could overcome these political obstacles to set up what has become a very elaborate national service program with funding from the federal government.

The authors make a persuasive case that the goals of AmeriCorps have been partially distorted by these political conflicts, shifting priorities to programs that promise measurable outcomes and spending too much money on evaluation studies to show concrete achievements to a hostile Congress. AmeriCorps was particularly vulnerable to these distortions because at the outset it failed to articulate definite objectives for the program. In recent years it has narrowed its mission to four areas of public work: education, public safety, the environment and child poverty.