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REVIEW ESSAY

Religion and Politics in the Early Republic: Two Views

Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation
AMANDA PORTERFIELD
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012
264 pp.

An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States
ERIC R. SCHLERETH
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013
304 pp.

These two books deal with roughly the same period. Both take their departure from the 1790s, with Porterfield ending in the 1820s and Schlereth—who has a somewhat wider scope—in the 1860s. Both authors argue that in this period, the United States went through a major institutional change in which the relationship between religion and politics was redefined. Although this transformation seems to have primarily affected the role of religion in society and although the circumstances under which it occurred seem rather local and accidental, it had far-reaching political and social effects. It brought about a paradigm shift in the shape of "democratic" politics moving US society beyond the scope set by Enlightenment philosophy and catapulting it into the role of an advance guard among Western nations.

Schlereth and Porterfield identify three forces as being instrumental in bringing about this change: Jeffersonian liberalism, Evangelicalism, and Deism. While both authors study the interrelationship of all three forces, Porterfield is more centrally concerned with the Evangelicals, while Schlereth places his focus on the Deists. Despite some overlaps, the books complement rather than duplicate one another. In method they do not ap-

proach their respective movements primarily through their leaders' activities and ideas but focus on activities at the grassroots level in order to show ideas in action—thereby giving considerable attention to the media and modes of public persuasion.

Both books take issue in fundamental ways with Nathan O. Hatch's pioneering 1989 study *The Democratization of American Christianity*. They do not deny that a religious democratization of major dimensions took place during the period; however, they assert that Hatch and his followers portray the disestablishment of religion and the expansion of religious liberty as too seamless, thereby ignoring the complex ideological struggles and the messy historical dynamics through which they were achieved. Not only did these historians fail to appreciate the vital role the Deists played in this transformation (Schlereth) but they also turned a blind eye to the authoritarian forms of control the Evangelicals imposed on their communities as well as to the ambiguous policies the Evangelicals and Jeffersonian Republicans pursued vis-à-vis women, slaves, and Native Americans (Porterfield). Even as Jeffersonian libertarianism dismantled traditional political and religious structures, new forms of control and coercion were needed to keep the ship of American society afloat—forms that were supplied by the Evangelical movements. Thus, after having relinquished its power at the level of the state, religion returned as a shaping factor of "private" society. Both books, then, claim to reconstruct the cultural and sociological underpinnings not only of American religious life but of American democratic society.

Outlining the institutional transformation of church and state in the United States, Porterfield sees established religion as going back to a system of codependence of religion and civil government in place in the colonies since the mid-seventeenth century. The colonists viewed the British monarchy as a religious and political institution invested with divine authority. The church communities were considered not only places of worship, fellowship, and religious instruction but also schools of civic leadership. Civic rulers had special responsibilities toward churches in exchange for the contributions churches made to civil life. The Revolution did not entirely supplant this conception. The American Republic moved into the place formerly held by the British monarchy, attaining the status of a divinely inspired project. The Congregationalist clergy "expected civic responsibility and religious life to go hand in hand, and they considered

civic virtue to be an outstanding effect of their church polity. They thought virtuous public leadership in a Christian state resulted from the training in self-government and communal government that church membership provided" (Porterfield 121).

This codependence of religion and civil government remained in place until the 1790s, and in New England well into the nineteenth century. However, as Porterfield and Schlereth agree, it was relatively weak and came under increasing pressure from the advocates of a separation of church and state. One indication of its weakness was the ascendance of Deism during the period of the American Revolution. It first took hold in the elite of American society, and there was little public consciousness of its subversiveness. "In the 1780s," Porterfield writes, "most of the men involved in constructing government in the United States had deistical tendencies; while respectful of Christian morality and mildly observant of Christian rituals, Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and others respected Jesus as an exemplar of moral virtue and tended toward belief in a unitary God of nature who instilled men with reason" (30). In the larger public, Deism was associated primarily with the name of Thomas Paine, who until the 1790s was held in high regard by American contemporaries because of the pamphlets he had written on behalf of American independence. Deism was particularly successful in the colleges, where, as several contemporaries remarked, it almost eclipsed traditional Christianity. Reading Porterfield's account, one gets the sense that in the early 1790s, America was on the verge of becoming a secular nation—without anybody being particularly alarmed by it. Some such impression must also have been held by Thomas Paine, who dedicated *The Age of Reason* to "my fellow citizens of the United States of America" and placed the work "under your protection" (quoted in Schlereth 51). Paine apparently saw the United States in the process of freeing itself from the shackles of an authoritarian religious and political rule and attaining its destiny as the incarnation of nature's reason.

Porterfield asks herself how it could happen that this process of secularization was reversed within a mere decade and under a president holding secular values and promoting libertarian concepts of government and society quite similar to those advocated by Paine and the Deists. Her study tries to answer this question by charting the history of the unexpected and uneasy alliance between the Jeffersonian Republicans and the Evangelicals

that brought Jefferson to power, pointing out that Jefferson and his adherents were forced to curb their rationalism and allow the Evangelicals to do their missionary work. Under this alliance, the vision of America as a Christian nation was resurrected, albeit with new liberalist premises, while the Deists were vilified and pushed to the margins. Schlereth is less apprehensive about the "religious turn" of American society than Porterfield and more interested in reconstructing the new political logic of this process. With the ratification of the federal Constitution—Article VI prohibited religious tests for federal office and the First Amendment guaranteed free exercise of religion—the first step toward religious disestablishment was taken. Jefferson's libertarian concept of government and its promise to make the separation of church and state complete proved attractive to the Evangelicals because it gave them new access to American society—not on the level of government, but on the level of private society. In order to illuminate the logic of this process, Porterfield and Schlereth draw on recent research on the American public sphere.[1] In the older, republican, understanding, the public was placed alongside the government or even considered identical with it. The citizens proper assembled in person to deliberate the common good. While they may have had different views regarding the latter, a consensus had to be achieved through constructive debate. Governmental politics was seen as flowing from the deliberations of the citizens. In order for this model to function, the citizens needed to act in a disinterested or nonpartisan manner. In the new, liberal model, government and the public are separated—the public becoming a space within society, set up to check the government as well as facilitate the exchange of information and the formation of public opinion. The liberal public sphere does not require disinterestedness on the part of the participants, because it is seen as governed by the market principle securing the public good by a process of competition.

For Porterfield and Schlereth, the 1790s were the key period in which the transition from the republican to the liberal model of the public took place. In Porterfield's view, the traditional concept of the public lost credence during the administrations of Washington and Adams, with the Federalists themselves deserting the high ground of nonpartisanship in the way they dealt with social conflict. Porterfield sees the Shay and Whiskey Rebellions and the protests against the Alien and Sedition Acts as indications that the authority of the federal government was eroding. Changes

in the world of economy and finance as well as developments in France undermined trust in the republican order and intensified the general sense of instability. This is when political and religious movements began to consider themselves agents in a liberal public sphere and engaged in fierce partisan struggles for political power and influence in society. The Jeffersonian Republicans as well as the Evangelicals were quick to grasp the new opportunities, whereas the Federalists and the Congregationalists and Presbyterians—still thinking of religion's social influence in terms of the older model—lagged behind.

While Schlereth describes the transformation of the public sphere predominantly in structural political terms, Porterfield is also interested in the psychological and moral repercussions of this change. It is with some regret that she describes the demise of the ideal of disinterestedness that presumably inspired the citizens' activities in the public of old. The open embrace of partisanship signals to her the ascent of a style of politics where the securing of power and influence of one's party leads to the sacrifice of the principle of rational deliberation and the communal struggle for the common good. Instead the new partisan politics strategically engages the emotions of the audiences. Porterfield shows how the political and religious movements that gained strength in the 1790s learned to make use of the general insecurity by strategically planting and managing mistrust. "Partisan mistrust affected the social and intellectual climates in which religion developed, creating a thirst for higher authority and opening the throttle for religious enthusiasms to rush in to allay mistrust," she asserts (48). Jefferson, who had come to power through this new partisanship model, is considered by her a modern provocateur and master manipulator.

In Porterfield's view, the Deists become a kind of chip in the game of creating and managing mistrust, with the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* marking the beginning of the Evangelicals' public engagement with Deism. Formerly supported by the nation's leading men such as Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Jefferson, Paine was now hooted down. His skepticism about biblical revelation was associated with atheism and Jacobin violence and was declared un-American; reports of his irresolute lifestyle and his alcoholic excesses finished off his reputation. Henceforth, no one among the elite was ready to have his name associated with Paine or Deism.

According to Schlereth, the violence of the attacks on Paine was in part provoked by his book's dedication. His critics were worried that his vision of the United States under the aegis of the Deists might be not far off the truth. There were indications that Deism might also be catching on among the masses. With his earlier publications, in particular *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, Paine had shown that he could incite common men and women to action. This led to fears that *The Age of Reason*, too, might prove persuasive. Indeed, Schlereth and Porterfield cite examples of communities, particularly in the South and West, where Deism took hold in a more extensive way (Schlereth 64; Porterfield 17). In addition, Schlereth's study provides ample evidence that, in the 1790s, Deism developed into a movement that acquired organizational structures and made use of the media for public persuasion in ways similar to those of the Evangelical movements. Drawing on the ideas of the French Theophilanthropy movement, Deists developed a civil ethos for America. In addition, they propagated a cosmopolitan concept of citizenship, claiming that it would give the Republic greater stability than traditional patriotism. While Schlereth provides fascinating details of how the Deists developed a party organization and a party ideology, he does not quite explain how this change affected their overall philosophy. They were formerly committed to a rationalist epistemology—namely the idea that reason carries its own conviction; their new advocacy of reason as a civil religion seems to catapult them into the camp of their adversary Edmund Burke, who had maintained that a society built on reason alone could not attain cohesion and permanence.

Despite the high public visibility the Deists attained in the 1790s—Schlereth and Porterfield agree in this—they never presented a real threat to the political and religious establishment. Porterfield views the Anti-Paine, anti-Deist campaigns of the Evangelicals as a strategy that helped them to beat their flock into shape. Invoking the specter of a Deist America, the Evangelicals amplified the sense of instability and chaos already present in the 1790s in order to be able to offer their alternative religion as a remedy. The title of her book, *Conceived in Doubt*, points to this paradoxical strategy: for her, the boom of the Evangelicals in last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth had its origin in the doubt they themselves had sown.

In contrast, Schlereth sees the campaigns against the Deists by the Evangelicals as primarily motivated by their desire to consolidate their power

in a society where religion had become disestablished. Putting themselves firmly behind Article VI of the federal Constitution and the First Amendment—which was the precondition for their own entry into the religious field—the Evangelicals abstained from criticizing the Deists on religious grounds. While thus granting the Deists the protection of the First Amendment to follow their conscience, however, they criticized them on social and moral grounds—by predicting chaos in government and corruption in society should the Deists gain sway. By singling out the Deists as the prime enemies of an orderly society, the Evangelicals established a firm boundary of what is acceptable and unacceptable religious expression and helped bring about a consensus among believers of various denominations concerning the meaning of Protestantism that otherwise would have been difficult to achieve. Thus, for Schlereth, the Deist controversies are the ideological ground on which the United States was constituted as a Christian nation.

In the body of her book, Porterfield paints a very nuanced picture of how the different religious groups—Congregationalists, Presbyterians (Old and New Lights), Baptists and Methodists—responded to the challenge of shaping society in the United States. She also describes in a clear and precise fashion the complex interactions between these groups and the political groupings—Jeffersonian liberals and the Federalists—as well as the ways in which they calibrated and readjusted their strategies both vis-à-vis each other and in response to political and social developments over a period of more than two decades and in different geographic locales. She establishes an important starting point for social engineering through religion in 1802 when the Philadelphia Presbyterians founded a legal corporation (with membership dues) in order to orchestrate urban reform. It was conducted in analogy to the missionary operations of religious societies in Europe who wanted to spread the gospel to heathen lands, except that in this case the heathens were the poor of Philadelphia or the farmers in the South or the West. Porterfield also describes the collaborations of the Presbyterians with parts of the Congregationalist clergy of New England—the latter worrying about their loss of influence and hoping that this alliance might contain the success of the Baptists and Methodists. However, in the end, the former lost out; by 1850, Porterfield informs us, "more than 34 percent of all Americans affiliated with a religious institution were Methodists and more than 20 percent were Baptists. Congregationalists and Presbyte-

rians together counted for less than 16 percent of religious adherents" (116). The Evangelicals had developed a much higher sensitivity to the democratic transformation of American society, drawing many of their new members from regions (in particular the South and the West) and population groups that favored Jeffersonian democracy.

In the campaigns of the Evangelical groups, the struggle against infidelity and skepticism was often allied with the fight against sexuality—in particular, female sexuality. As Porterfield argues, the campaigns raised a general mistrust of women, especially of those who had stepped "out of their sphere," either sexually or politically, or both, with Mary Wollstonecraft becoming almost as lambasted a figure as Thomas Paine. At the same time, women—by virtue of their higher sensibility—were considered privileged carriers of religion who could be instrumental in converting their husbands and organizing their communities. Porterfield sees the efforts of feminists in the earlier decades toward gaining a greater political and intellectual equality thwarted by these developments; however, she also acknowledges that by joining the Evangelical movements, many women experienced a new self-esteem and a rise in their cultural status. She also describes a similar development in regard to African Americans, another disenfranchised group. Valued for their intense piety, they were invited by the Evangelicals to join their communities and allowed to experience a harmonious racial coexistence of sorts, although the solidarity they encountered during the camp meeting did not carry over into their everyday lives. Porterfield describes how both Presbyterians and Methodists gave up their original opposition to slavery under the pressure of their white southern clientele and of the Jefferson Republicans, the latter pushing aside the inclusive logic of democracy when it went against their racial interests.

Porterfield attributes the success of the Methodists to their "extremely effective blend of inclusive outreach and hierarchical authority" (131). To her, the egalitarian, nonjudgmental spirit they cultivated and the nonacademic, emotional-experiential forms of religiosity they practiced represent only one side of the coin. The other side consists of a hierarchical system of church government in which the bishop autocratically makes all major decisions in the recruitment of ministers and other matters of the church. Porterfield views the other new church governments that evolved independently and alongside the local, state, and federal governments as imbued

with a similar authoritarian spirit to that of the Methodists. This authoritarian character of the Evangelical organizations corresponds in her view with the structure of the religious experience they propagate, namely, an experience that demands from the individual believer to put him- or herself under the protection of God, the Divine Monarch. Porterfield labors a bit too hard to convince us that the Evangelicals' religiosity implies an emotional "remonarchization" of the believers threatening to counteract the democratization achieved on another level. And yet her worry that, in times of insecurity, the emotional styles of persuasion in the new public sphere may become overdominant and lull mass audiences into a false peace may not be unfounded.

While Porterfield finds the Evangelicals' way of influencing society through the public sphere and organizing society through private avenues highly problematic, Schlereth is much more sanguine about this process. He acknowledges that—notwithstanding the various free inquiry movements that emerged in the nineteenth century—the Deists lost their cultural clout after they had served the purpose of unifying the Protestant groups, but he maintains that their principles became integrated into the texture of American political life. In his view, the 1790s exchanges between Evangelicals and Deists taught Americans how to engage in religious controversy without inciting political violence. In addition, the opposition of free inquiry and Evangelical reform lives on for him in the partisan discourses between the new Whig and Democratic Parties. Finally, he sees Deist principles embodied in the new public sphere model and the principle of competition that governs it; because he trusts that this principle will have a balancing effect, he is not concerned about the cultural power of individual partisan groups. He can thus celebrate the transition of the struggle for power from the political to the cultural sphere, which was facilitated by the new model in the 1790s, as the great achievement of American democracy. Porterfield, on the other hand, is worried that this competition principle might be skewed in a mass society characterized by vast inequalities, not only in economic power but also in access to education and information. In this type of society, the struggle for power is likely to be conducted not only through intellectual means but through the emotions, and as Porterfield is apparently an adherent of the Enlightenment of old, she cannot wholeheartedly embrace the change.

Both studies contain a trove of valuable new information, especially con-

cerning the grassroots development of the movements and the "cultural work" they conducted. Both authors give considerable attention to the new media (lectures, pamphlets, tracts, journals, novels, stories) employed in the campaigns and in organizing their members. That the conversion narrative would be a favorite of the Evangelicals could be expected, but that Deists and free inquirers also drew on it was a novelty for me. Porterfield also shows in detail how gender and race aspects are instrumentalized by these texts. Schlereth is less invested in these issues—presumably because most members of the organizations he discusses were white males (of the artisan class). Porterfield's book is more generalist in scope; it will help readers without special knowledge in the religious history of the United States to get a good grasp of the developments. One problem with her approach is that the background knowledge is organized along thematic lines and distributed over the various chapters, with the effect that some elementary information necessary for the novice is offered very late in the book (for example, a comprehensive overview of the history, organizational structures, and membership developments of the various religious groups is only given in chapter 4, "Church Citizenship"). Schlereth's book, instead, seems more geared toward audiences specialized in intellectual history and the history of political institutions. He often brings in new research on the history of particular terms and concepts such as *heretics* and *infidels* or *free inquiry* that illuminate the developments he describes. However, there are also instances where his conceptual theorizing seems to be disconnected from the larger argument (e.g., when he discusses the past-future attitudes of eighteenth-century political thinkers or ponders the concepts of "informed consent" or "education"). But these are minor shortcomings of two diligently researched and well-crafted books that give one a vibrant sense of the messy modernization process of American democracy.

Plausible as Porterfield's and Schlereth's accounts of the modernization of the public sphere under the impact of Jeffersonian liberalism and Evangelicalism are, they largely ignore the realm of literature and letters, which, to my mind, was an important party in this process. In what follows, I would like to add a few observations regarding this realm and also draw attention to recent research by literary and cultural historians on this subject matter.

I believe that the secularization process in the Revolutionary and post-

Revolutionary periods and its apparent reversal after 1800 are tied to large-scale changes in the cultural authority of knowledge and knowledge production that need to be considered in addition to developments in the fields of politics and religion. Porterfield and Schlereth connect the process of secularization with the rise of Deism. The Deists, we are told, develop from a loose band of idealists into a partisan group, thereby acquiring their own organizational and public-relations apparatus. The strange paradox about this process, which somehow is recognized but not discussed by the authors, is that the little band of idealists held an enormous authority in the initial period of the early Republic—so much so that we see them now as the motor of American secularization—while the partisan group of the free inquirers became culturally insignificant after having facilitated the rise of the Evangelicals. In order to explain this paradox, one needs to introduce another "institution" that was as important as established religion, namely, the "republic of letters."[2] While the latter lacked the formal structures religion could draw on, the republic of letters, too, had a place alongside the American state and obtained an official aura. The republic of letters was the eighteenth-century institution responsible for the production of knowledge and its transmission to the governing elite and the people. While contemporaries connected the American state with the republics of ancient Greece and Rome, they considered it a distinctly modern rendition of these older models; for many, it represented the most advanced political system of the West—requiring "scientists" to perfect it and a learned citizenship to run it. I would argue that in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods, Deism was not considered a quasi-religious or antireligious creed but a form of science serving the Republic in a disinterested manner. It profited from the high prestige of learning in the period of the American Revolution and the decades after. This would explain why Deism could gain such a high degree of acceptance among the nation's elites. It would also explain why Deism and religion could peacefully coexist for a long time. While the radical anticlerical bias of someone like Paine would surely not have gone unnoticed, Deism was not perceived as immediately threatening to American religious practices because the republic of letters was considered to be separate from religion. In addition, there was the expectation that religion in America—unlike Catholicism in Europe—was compatible with enlightened reason. Neither Schlereth nor Porterfield takes cognizance of the republic of letters as a system rivaling

established religion and thus, to some extent, they misjudge the position of Deism in the early period of development.

The republic of letters collapsed in the same period as the institution of established religion. Its collapse produced a deep crisis among the men and women of letters—resembling the one suffered by the New England clergy in the face of religious disestablishment, though it may even have gone deeper. Unlike Congregational ministers, men and women of letters were not members of a corporate group that would provide them with an economic support and a spiritual home. The republic of letters had provided for them a central position in the life process of American society; now that it was gone, they found themselves in a void. The literary class does not seem to have adapted to the new conditions of the public sphere and the capitalist market as easily as the religious class. The establishment of the new specialized and diversified institutions of knowledge that replaced the republic of letters took much longer than their parallels in the religious realm—"literature" as an autonomous field of aesthetic production did not come into being before the time of the American Renaissance, and the modern forms of scientific research were not adopted by American universities until much later in the century.

A detailed account of the demise of the republic of letters and the process of institutional restructuring of the literature and knowledge sectors has yet to be written. In the 1960s and '70s Linda Kerber and Lewis P. Simpson drew attention to the deep crisis Jefferson's ascent to the presidency produced in Federalist men of letters.[3] The latter withdrew from the public sphere and sought refuge in a world of aesthetic contemplation. Recently, studies by Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan and Bryan Waterman painted a similar picture of disillusionment and withdrawal with regard to more radical intellectual circles of the early Republic. However, it is not clear why the apparently "left-leaning" Friendly Club, which shared many of the philosophical tenets of the Deists, would not have welcomed the Jeffersonian revolution. In their brief discussions of the Friendly Club, Schlereth and Porterfield attribute conservative inclinations to its members since several of them came from Federalist families (Porterfield 79–8; Schlereth 98–99). To my mind, Porterfield and Schlereth fail to realize the extent to which they still conceptualized their activities in terms of the older model of the republic of letters. The novelist, essayist, and editor Charles Brockden Brown, an active member of the Friendly Club, was deeply committed

to this model—seeing himself as a "social" and "moral scientist" investigating the life world of the Republic as well as a teacher of republican virtue of sorts (see Schloss). Having a cosmopolitan rather than a nationalist outlook, he viewed the United States as the most advanced phase of a global republican movement. The type of universalistic liberalism he adhered to profoundly clashed with the new particularistic and localistic liberalism of the Jeffersonians. While Brown did not subscribe to the Federalist version of the republic of letters, but rather to a more modern (Godwinian) form, he still advocated a type of science in pursuit of "truth" and "justice." The experience of the new public sphere, which was dominated by organized forms of partisanship and where the struggle for truth became hostage to tactical manoeuvers, left him bitter.

Critics have long speculated about why Brown stopped writing novels at the turn of the century. In her insightful discussion of Brown's last novel *Jane Talbot* (1801), Porterfield tries to provide an answer. The novel, which details the "conversion" of a young rationalist and skeptic to Christian common sense, is for her a metaphor for Brown's own conversion to the camp of religionists. While she may overstate her case regarding the author's conversion, her study as a whole provides a plausible reason for the spirit of resignation that set in among men and women of letters at the turn of the new century. The force religion attained within the frame of Jefferson's new liberalism made their own endeavors in the republic of letters appear futile: in the struggle for the minds of Americans, religion had eclipsed letters. The alliance of Jeffersonian Republicans and Evangelicals brought Brown and his co-laborers face-to-face with the power of history—a history in which their kind of intellectuality no longer seemed to have any place. Waterman's account of the later history of the Friendly Club gives one the impression that once the frame of the republic of letters was gone, the activities of the members lost their focus. They were not ready for the new type of hard science that was in the offing, nor did they have the political temperament to form a party and struggle for power.

Not all writers in the early Republic became disoriented by the new developments. For example, the writers of sentimental novels—many of them women—quickly adapted to the new public sphere and made use of its opportunities. As they did not produce their work within the framework of the republic of letters—the intellectual prestige of the novel was low—they were less wary of putting their products through the commodification

process of the emerging print market. Porterfield discusses one of the most commercially successful novels of the period, Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, using it to illustrate her thesis that American culture in the 1790s nourished a sense of mistrust in women and women's sexuality. However, she also could have addressed the fact that the sentimental tradition in general, and novels such as *Charlotte Temple* in particular, made contemporaries familiar with the new type of "felt knowledge" that was at the basis of the Evangelicals' understanding of revealed religion and was employed so successfully at the camp meetings. In fact, the domestic novel—which moved into the place of the sentimental novel and led the genre to new cultural respectability—can be seen as enacting the democratic-religious ethos flowing from the alliance of Jefferson's Republicans and the Evangelicals. Writers such as Catherine Sedgwick and Harriet Beecher Stowe used the sentimental experience to "extend the franchise"—in the field of literature—to women, African Americans, and Native Americans, with results as politically problematic as those attained by the Evangelicals who tried the same in the field of religion. Porterfield might have profited from a consideration of the more recent work on the politics of the sentimental and domestic novels by literary and cultural historians. The latter, in turn, will find in Porterfield's and Schlereth's discussions of the changes of the public sphere inspiration for their own treatment of this subject, which after the publication of Michael Warner's pioneering study *The Letters of the Republic* (1990) has perhaps been too exclusively concerned with the genre of the novel and its modern—emotional-imaginative—forms of nation building.[4] Porterfield's and Schlereth's detailed reconstructions of the discourses of the different partisan groups make clear that despite the new emotional forms of persuasion that obtain in it, the modern public sphere is still a place of lively communication and exchange—a place where the struggle about the future shape of the nation is conducted by the careful calibration and adjustment of rhetoric.

NOTES

1 For an excellent overview over the newer developments, from which I profited when writing this review, see Brooke.

2 For a brief history of this institution, see Klancher.

3 See also, more recently, Dowling.

4 Inspired by Benedict Anderson, Warner sees the public of old transform from a concrete space in which citizens are engaged in a direct conversational exchange into an abstract sphere inhabited by isolated, anonymous reader individuals who participate solely via their imaginative projections. See also Stern and Barnes.

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