

Sommerville includes a detailed historiographical essay on the rape myth in the appendix that can function independently, and her larger work relies on a careful study of legal statutes regarding rape and legal records from trials of interracial rape cases, particularly from North Carolina and Virginia. The focus on these two states, of course, prompts one to wonder if these findings are applicable to the entire South. Might communities in various parts of the South, or the United States more generally, react to interracial rape differently given Sommerville's contention "that law is not created merely 'by judges and legislators, but by the litigants, witnesses, and jurors in the courtroom'" (p. 7)? Finally, some readers will also wish for a greater discussion of intra-racial rape, of interracial rape cases involving white men and black women, and more comparative analysis of these different forms of rape than are found on pages 64-88 or in chapter 7.

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*Daniel Webster and the Oratory of Civil Religion.* By Craig R. Smith. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. Pp. 304. \$47.50 cloth.)

Craig R. Smith's examination of Daniel Webster's rhetoric will be of primary interest to scholars in speech communication departments, but its most relevant contribution is to debates about the literature of republicanism in the antebellum era. In this text, Smith argues that Webster's repeated invocations of the Union transformed the nation's sense of itself and raised the Union to a sort of mystical totem. This uncontroversial idea forms a useful prehistory of Abraham Lincoln's eschatological statements about fighting the Civil War to preserve the Union rather than to end slavery. But the new material that Smith seeks to examine is the *rhetorical work* that Webster contributed to American politics that laid the foundations for Lincoln. With the notable exception of Robert Ferguson's *Law and Letters* (1984) and Eric Erickson's *Poetry of Events* (1986), there have been few book-length studies of Webster that have tried to frame him as a literary or rhetorical figure as well as a politician.

For such an important project, crucial early pages of Smith's text can be disappointing. Given the centrality of the term of "civil religion" to his title, there are only a handful of paragraphs that define this very problematic idea in American historiography (pp. 4, 8). In the initial

stages of the book, "civil religion" simply seems to mean "glorifying America's immediate past" (p. 9). If I understand him right, Smith's thesis is that Webster was a principal rhetorical engineer of The Civil Religion of the Union—the idea that the nation is something more than a contract between states. In other parts of the text, however, Smith notes that Webster used civil religion to make his points, as if civil religion were a workshop tool already at hand. Throughout his book, Smith acknowledges that other figures as diverse as John C. Calhoun, Charles Sumner, William Lloyd Garrison, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson also constructed or responded to different kinds of civil religion, which makes Webster less the author of civil religion than one practitioner among many.

In Smith's defense, the term itself has proven very complex and elusive. I was helped to understand the ramifications of Smith's project by reading Ferenc Szasz's "Daniel Webster—Architect of America's 'Civil Religion'" (*Historical New Hampshire* 34 [1979]: 223-43), a concise and informative essay not appearing in Smith's bibliography. As Szasz explains it, "civil religion" was first coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to describe republican ideals about a state-derived religion of good citizenship. The term was reintroduced in 1967 by sociologist Robert Bellah, who argued that the "faith" most Americans actually practiced was civil religion, complete with holy texts (the Declaration of Independence), saints (Washington), shrines (the Lincoln Memorial), and holy days (Memorial Day) (Szasz, p. 225).

An explosion of books and articles followed Bellah's essay, with the term being further refined to include several different forms (including folk religion, religious nationalism, democratic faith, and civic piety) beyond the pluralistic and "transcendent" type of civil religion Bellah first characterized. Although scholarly interest on the topic began to wane in the late 1980s, the issues Bellah raised continue to be important, both in our relations with other countries as well as among ourselves. For example, given the Manichean rhetoric of George W. Bush in the "war on terror" (or similar comments by the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s), has the national consciousness really divorced itself from a quasi-religious telos? And, at home, are there not competing visions of the national Union—in other words, the difference between "faith" in America as a place where egalitarian civic agency can resolve injustice (citizen values) and "faith" in America as some sort of "exceptionally" hallowed city-upon-a-hill (national values)? In his 1992 reissue of *The Broken Covenant*, Bellah explicitly stated that he was trying to discuss rituals of citizenship, not idolatry of the state, but the multiple associations of the term "civil religion"

have been hard to keep separate.

Although Smith's text might have benefited from a discussion of its stance toward different forms of civil religion, his book simply asserts that Webster used civil religion to great effect. Using a biographical organization, Smith traces Webster's Federalist background, his early court cases, the Plymouth, Adams-Jefferson, and Bunker Hill speeches, the replies to Robert Hayne, and the Seventh of March speech, in each case showing how Webster sought to transform America's past (and present) into a unified nation.

Some of the interpretations of these speeches are informative and detailed, but they rarely make accessible the vivacity of Webster's best work, such as when Webster was illustrating the most important element of Revolutionary eloquence during his encomium on Adams. He stamped on the platform and shouted that it was "action, noble, sublime, godlike action" (*Speeches* [1889], p. 167). Wrestling with the main contradiction of Webster's life—the man who stripped himself of a career's worth of moral ethos by stumping for the Compromise of 1850—Smith fudges it a bit, stating that Webster's Union rhetoric stayed consistent over his life, although his views changed. Smith's storytelling gets better toward the end, largely because he moves away from using the framework of his first book on Webster, *Defender of the Union* (1989), which occasionally is literally pasted wholesale into the current text.

As a rhetorician, Smith's primary claims about Webster's work are twofold. First, he argues that Webster skillfully blended the genres of deliberative, ceremonial, and forensic oratory—the term Smith uses to describe this characteristic is "braided genres" (pp. 2, 264). Second, he argues that Webster excelled at using "fugal forms"—the habit of playing variations on given ideas over the course of a long speech, or over the course of an entire career of oratory. I am not sure if these rhetorical techniques self-evidently contribute to the construction of civil religion, and a discussion of the connection would have been interesting.

The most interesting aspect of this book is its attempt to ask how philosophical or religious ideals become manifested as rhetorical practices. Smith's Webster is a scion of a dying aristocratic party (the Federalists) who was able to carry the spirit of Revolutionary unity long into the period of Jacksonian populism. The best parts of Webster's speeches—the ventriloquism of Adams in the Jefferson-Adams memorial, the introductory and concluding passages of the second reply to Hayne—are often cited for their political aspects. However, students of earlier ages also studied them as literature: the Saxon

vocabulary, ingenious variations on sentence length, and dynamic shifts of tone. Those rhetorical aesthetics are still with us, and though we do not call them a religion, perhaps we should.

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*The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era*. By Mark E. Neely Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Pp. xiv, 159. \$29.95 cloth.)

For the last forty years, a vigorous and sharp-edged controversy has dominated the history of antebellum American politics, a controversy that boils down to the question of whether there really were any politics in early-nineteenth-century America at all. There were, of course, presidents and legislatures and judges—all of whom were being elected by what Walter Burnham calculated in 1965 to be record-breaking rates of voter turnout—and torchlight parades, take-no-prisoners newspapers, and uproarious political meetings. But the question has really hung on what, exactly, American voters thought they were doing when they voted in such record proportions, or read partisan newspapers, or whooped it up at candidates' rallies. Burnham's conclusion, which has been followed over the years by Michael Holt, Joel Silbey, William Gienapp, and now Mark Neely, was that the voter turnout figures represented a deep commitment, in terms of issues and ideology, to politics.

Ranged on the other side, Lee Benson, Ronald Formisano, and Philip Converse all argued that other—and usually nonpolitical—motivations were what really swayed the antebellum voter, motivations that spread out to include kinship, ethnicity, and religion. The most recent dismissal of the preeminence of the political is Stuart Blumin and Glenn Altschuler's *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (2000), in which the political life of the pre-Civil War decades is reduced almost to the level of an illusion. Party elites, argued Blumin and Altschuler, routinely and securely manipulated the electoral process for their own ends, and Americans turned out for the rallies and the elections only because these events afforded them free entertainment.

Neely could not disagree more. In the inaugural Steven and Janice Brose Lectures, which he gave at the Richards Civil War Center at Penn State in 2002 (and which are published here as *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era*), Neely severely