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Ronald P. Formisano

The Concept of Political Culture

"'Political culture': the expression has of late gained general currency," said Hughes in 1988. That same year, at a session of the American Historical Association that turned into a discussion of political culture, Baker observed that despite the concept's "problems of definition," it had "become a popular and over-used buzz-word." As the millennium approached, Silbey was able to write that political culture studies had become "a major enterprise." "We seem to live," said Silbey, "in a scholarly age when political culture is a dominant explanatory and descriptive theme." But he added that the notion remained amorphous, "too easily bandied about in different guises." The concept of political culture is indeed important to historians—too much so for them to remain complacent regarding its casual deployment.[1]

The concept of political culture has attracted a long line of critiques from political scientists, but this essay, by a historian, is not yet another revisionist assault. Historians at the very least need to be informed by an understanding of the concept's tangled history in both history and political science (especially). They must become more self-conscious and more comparative in outlook. Although the political culture approach has often been used in a way that slights issues of hegemony and power, that flaw is not necessarily inherent in the concept or approach.

Historians give "political culture" a variety of meanings;

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1 H. Stuart Hughes, *Sophisticated Rebels: The Political Culture of European Dissent, 1968–1987* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 1; Jean H. Baker, "Comments," paper presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, 1988, 3; Joel H. Silbey, "The State and Practice of American Political History at the Millennium: The Nineteenth Century as a Test Case," *Journal of Policy History,* XI (1999), 8. Related, and even more frequently used, concepts such as "ideology" have hardly been free of multiple meanings. See, e.g., Lorand B. Szalay, Rita M. Kelly, and Won T. Moon, "Ideology: Its Meaning and Measurement," *Comparative Political Studies,* V (1972), 151–174.

many, or most, have finessed "problems of definition" by simply not bothering with any definition at all. In many cases, this situation need elicit no concern, since what authors mean by "political culture" can be demonstrated by their usage and implicit explanatory frameworks. Yet, political scientists, among whom the modern concept originated four decades ago, have engaged in a virtually continuous assessment, re-evaluation, and criticism of the political culture concept's theoretical grounding, methodological implications, and substantive results. That historians appear to be oblivious to these debates is not surprising, given their current indifference to political science, and the relative unfashionableness of "science" per se, especially among the new cultural historians. But this inattention to the ongoing controversy seems to be at odds with the current interest in tracing the epistemological foundations of historical practice that has engaged, in particular, the new cultural historians.[2]

Why has a concept that specialists find so difficult to pin down ("like nailing jelly to the wall") enjoyed such popularity? "Umbrella" concepts often climb into vogue because of their indeterminateness. "Political culture" belongs with those "catchwords" that serve as "deliberately vague conditioning concepts." More than thirty years ago, Pye, one of political science's modern pioneers on the subject, observed that "the mere term 'political culture' is capable of evoking quick intuitive understanding, so that people often feel that without further and explicit definition they can appreciate its meaning and freely use it." That very accessibility, however, signaled "considerable danger that it [would] be

2 In a recent *Journal of American History* forum about the intensity of political participation in the antebellum United States, political culture emerged as central in the exchange between two authors and three commentators. No one bothered to define the term, but it clearly referred to attitudes, beliefs, and values. See Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, "Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy," *American Journal of History,* LXXXIV (1997), 855, 857, 859, 882, 884, 885; Harry L. Watson, "Humbug? Bah! Altschuler and Blumin and the Riddle of the Antebellum Electorate," *ibid.,* 893; Jean Harvey Baker, "Politics, Paradigms, and Public Culture," *ibid.,* 898; Norma Basch, "A Challenge to the Story of Popular Culture," *ibid.,* 900.

Concerning historians' indifference to political science, see, e.g., Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Ithaca, 1988); Robert F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995). The historians associated with the Social Science History Association, however, are an exception to the trend. Concerning the interest in foundations, see Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story;* Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York, 1994); Victoria E. Bonnell and Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, 1999).

employed as a 'missing link' to fill in anything that cannot be explained in political analysis."[3]

Such ambiguity is characteristic of the often synergistic border between disciplines, but deeper reasons exist for the concept's currency. Its origin in comparative politics suggests implications that historians tend to ignore. Furthermore, many new cultural historians employ "political culture" in ways that evade certain classic considerations of political life, namely, power, and who exercises it—in other words, who gets what, why, and how?

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed what Kammen called "the steady expansion of the reach of social history." The "new social history" encircled other sub-fields and pressured historians in various specialties to rebaptize themselves as social historians. As a result, the "social bases of politics" enjoyed considerable explanatory popularity. Likewise, in the 1990s, everyone appeared to become a cultural historian. Neither generalization is literally true, but the new cultural history's imperatives have become so pervasive and dominant that many historians who treat political life seek to legitimize their work by claiming that it illuminates "political culture." Earlier, in the 1970s and 1980s, the new social history came under increasing criticism for too limited a view of politics, power, and policy. The new cultural history's mode of political culture tends to repeat social history's earlier slighting of power and policy dimensions.[4]

The primary goal of this essay is to situate the concept within cultural history's contemporary dominion and to argue that historians need to re-address issues of hegemony and power. Many historians studying political power concentrate on language and the discourses attending social relations and power. Valuable as their work often is, excessive focus on the trappings of power—rituals, symbols, and other expressive mechanisms—comes at the expense

3 Novick, *That Noble Dream,* 7, borrowed the phrase about "nailing jelly to the wall" from from Isaiah Berlin. J. P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization: A Sociological Analysis of Methods and Concepts* (New York, 1967), 42–43; Lucien W. Pye, "Political Culture," in David W. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1968), XII, 204.

4 Michael Kammen, "Introduction: The Historian's Vocation and the State of the Discipline in the United States," in *idem* (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, 1980), 34; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History," *Journal of Social History,* X (1976), 205–220; T. Judt, "A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians," *History Workshop,* VII (1979), 66–94; Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?" *Social History,* V (1980), 249–271; John Garrard, "Social History, Political History and Political Science: The Study of Power," *Journal of Social History,* XVI (1983), 105–121.

of neglecting the material goals and consequences of power. In contemporary accounts of political culture, the predicaments of those traditionally perceived as nonpowerful have taken the limelight, whereas the hegemony of persisting (if challenged) elites has remained in the shadows.

On the positive side, historians, unlike political scientists, have not seen fit to spend their time debating whether political culture is causal or whether it has a behavioral component in addition to the subjective dispositions usually attributed to it. Both intuitively and self-consciously, historians study political culture in holistic and evolutionary fashion—as well they should.

Political culture's intellectual antecedents can be traced as far back as the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, Alexis de Tocqueville, Montesquieu, or even authors in the ancient world, but its modern genesis began in political science with Almond's seminal article of 1956, "Comparative Political Systems." It was vague at inception. According to Almond, "Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political action"; he referred to this pattern as "political culture." He also suggested that the then popular term, "ideology," be confined to "the systematic and explicit formulation of a general orientation to politics," leaving political culture to encompass "the vaguer and more implicit orientations." In the light of subsequent definitions, it is astonishing that Almond initially rejected such terms as "attitudes to politics," "political values," "national character," and "cultural ethos" as intrinsic to political culture; he deemed them "unstable and overlapping." Ironically, references to attitudes, values, and the like became standard elements of later definitions—and remain so.[5]

Soon after, political culture research took off as a political science sub-field, and in 1963 Almond and Verba later published *The Civic Culture*—a cross-national study offering a theory of political stability and democracy that implicitly celebrated Anglo-American representative government—which became a major

5 Gabriel Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics,* XVIII (1956), 396–397. Almond was not the first to use the term in the twentieth century. See Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (New York, 1936); F. M. Barnard, "Culture and Political Development: Herder's Suggestive Insights," *American Political Science Review,* LXIII (1969), 379–397; Almond, "The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept," in Almond and Sidney Verba (eds.), *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Newbury Park, 1989), 1–36.

work of the political culture approach. The political culture literature helped to provide political science itself with a sense of legitimacy and authority after World War II.[6]

The rise of the political culture concept during the 1950s and 1960s was part of the more general ascension of culture "to explanatory prominence in the social sciences and history." "Culture was given causal efficacy as well as being caused," as Berkhofer put it, and political culture (a matter of underlying systems of "patterns of ideas and values") acquired the same traits. Initially, political scientists were excited by the possibility of measuring variations among the political cultures of different nations, but they eventually turned to the study of such entities as "elite political culture" and "ethnic political culture."[7]

The most popular spin-off from the concept's international origins was the comparison of state political cultures. In 1966, Elazar proposed that each American state evinced one of three kinds of political culture—individualist, traditionalist, or moralist—and that these orientations entailed certain variations in public policy and other behaviors. Elazar admitted that his thesis was impressionistic. At bottom, however, it resembled Almond's in its emphasis on a "particular pattern of orientation to political action in which each political system is imbedded." Like Almond's, it, too, could be vague, as in the description of political culture as "rooted in the cumulative historical experiences of particular groups of people. Indeed, the origins of particular patterns of political culture are often *lost in the proverbial mists of time*" (italics mine). Yet, the conviction quickly spread, as Patterson put it in 1968 that "political cultures of the American states ought to be a

6 Pye, "Culture and Political Science: Problems in the Evolution of the Concept of Political Culture," *Social Science Quarterly,* LIII (1972), 286; Samuel H. Beer and Adam B. Ulam, *Pattern of Government* (New York, 1958); Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, 1963); Verba, "Comparative Politics," in Pye and Verba (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, 1965), 512–560. Other works followed, including Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston, 1966); Pye, *Aspects of Political Development* (Boston, 1966).

7 Berkhofer, "Clio and the Culture Concept: Some Impressions of a Changing Relationship in American Historiography," *Social Science Quarterly,* LIII (1972), 198, 299, 300; Moshe M. Czudnowski, "A Salience Dimension of Politics for the Study of Political Culture, *American Political Science Review,* LXII (1968), 878–879; Robert D. Putnam, "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of Ideology," *ibid.,* LXV (1971), 651–681; Dale C. Nelson, "Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status as Sources of Participation: The Case for Ethnic Political Culture," *ibid.,* LXXIII (1979), 1024–1038.

major focus of [comparative] study." Many empirical studies followed, generally confirming Elazar's typology.[8]

State political culture studies examined variations among states in government activities, administrative goals, innovative capacity, popular participation in elections, and party competition. State political cultures also could be important determinants of differing rates of female representation in legislatures. Some studies found mixed results, or challenged Elazar's formulation on conceptual and/or empirical grounds. Dissent and criticism, far less intense than that in comparative national studies, also surfaced in this subfield. But, by the 1990s, a considerable amount of scholarly energy had been poured into understanding "the more subtle subcultural distinctions within American society." Despite the enormous size of this literature, most *historical* monographs focusing on states and invoking the term political culture tend to ignore it entirely.[9]

In contrast to investigators of state political cultures, researchers involved in cross-national comparative studies tended to en-

8 Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: The View from the States* (New York, 1984; orig. pub. 1966), 109, 112; *idem, Cities of the Prairie: The Metropolitan Frontier and American Politics* (New York, 1970); Samuel C. Patterson, "The Political Culture of the American States," *Journal of Politics,* XXX (1968), 209. Early confirming studies included Ira Sharkansky and Richard Hofferbert, "Dimensions of State Politics, Economics, and Public Policy," *American Political Science Review,* LXIII (1969), 867–879; Norman R. Luttbeg, "Classifying the American States: An Empirical Attempt to Identify Internal Variations," *Midwest Journal of Political Science,* XV (1971), 703–721; Arthur R. Stevens, "State Boundaries and Political Cultures: Exploration in the Tri-State Area of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio," *Publius,* IV (1974), 111–125.

9 Elazar, "Afterword: Steps in the Study of American Political Culture," *Publius,* X (1980), 132, 133. This issue of *Publius,* edited by John Kincaid, contained seven articles, and Elazar's comment, entirely devoted to state political cultures. Charles A. Johnson, "Political Culture in American States: Elazar's Formulation Examined," *American Journal of Political Science,* XX (1976), 507; David B. Hill, "Political Culture and Female Representation," *Journal of Politics,* XLIII (1981), 159–168; James D. King, "Political Culture, Registration Laws, and Voter Turnout Among the American States," *Publius,* XXIV (1994), 115–127.

Critiques on the subject of state political culture include Timothy D. Schlitz and R. Lee Rainey, "The Geographic Distribution of Elazar's Political Subcultures among the Mass Population: A Research Note," *Western Political Quarterly,* XXI (1978), 410–415; David Lowery and Lee Sigelman, "Political Culture and State Public Policy: The Missing Link," *ibid.,* XXXV (1982), 376–384. Schlitz and Rainey sparked a scathing rebuttal in Robert L. Savage, "Looking for Political Subcultures: A Critique of the Rummage-Sale Approach," *ibid,* XXXIV (1981), 331–336. In 1988, a single issue of the *Western Political Quarterly* carried articles with contrasting findings. On the positive side were Jody L. Fitzpatrick and Rodney B. Hero, "Political Culture and Political Characteristics of the American States: A Consideration of Some Old and New Questions," *ibid.,* XLI (1988), 145–153. On the skeptical side was David R. Berman, "Political Culture, Issues and the Electorate: Evidence from the Progressive Era," *ibid.,* 169–180. In 1991, another issue of *Publius* (*State Political Subcultures: Further Research*) devoted itself entirely to the subject. The editor's opening essay is a good introduction

gage much more in fundamental questioning of the political culture concept, regardless of whether they were friendly or hostile to it. As early as 1964, Kim warned about its limitations as a causal explanation. Noting that the common denominator in all its various formulations seemed to be its affective aspect, he confidently asserted—in direct contrast to what Almond had originally intended—that political culture was essentially "a set of attitudes—cognitions, value standards, and feelings—toward the political system, its various roles, and role incumbents." Though he did not entirely dismiss the concept on this basis, Kim concluded that it was "confusing," inconsistent, riddled with ambiguities, and possibly worthy of discarding if other political scientists were amenable. In 1968, however, in keeping with the concept's growing appeal, the president of the Pacific Northwest Political Science Association recommended the need for more political culture studies.[10]

By 1972, Pye found that the concept had become a "common term among political scientists and, indeed, intellectuals in general." Yet, Pye also found it to be "elusive," and reminiscent of many other social science concepts "which initially represented powerful and vivid insights but which soon became vague and empty through indiscriminate use." He worried that it could become, as Verba had warned, "a residual category casually used to explain anything that cannot be explained by more precise and concrete factors."[11]

At this stage the dominant method of political culture research tended to be surveys of populations yielding quantitative data regarding "attitudes, opinions and sentiments." Pye wondered whether this strategy's "scientific veneer" obscured the fact

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to the issues involved. Frederick M. Wirt, "'Soft' Concepts and 'Hard' Data: A Research Review of Elazar's Political Culture," *Publius,* XXI (1991), 1–13. The citations in this note are but a sample of this genre.

10 The political culture debate was part of a larger debate in political science about "behavioralism" and the degree to which political science is in fact a science. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (eds.), *Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States* (Ann Arbor, 1993), 202–203. Young C. Kim, "The Concept of Political Culture in Comparative Politics," *Journal of Politics,* XXVI (1964), 335, 321, 336; Dale G. Hitchner, "Political Science and Political Culture," *Western Political Quarterly,* XXI (1968), 533.

11 Pye, "Culture and Political Science," 287. Verba's warning came in "Conclusion: Comparative Political Culture," in Pye and *idem* (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development,* 513–517. Verba remarked also, in an oft-quoted phrase, that political culture "refers not to what is happening in the world of politics, but to what people believe about these happenings" (516).

"that this approach [was] merely a more sophisticated version of the fallacy that macro systems are no more than extrapolations of micro systems," thus failing to establish the connection between the richly complex thoughts and actions of individuals and the collective polity.[12]

Critics less sympathetic than Pye recoiled at the quantitative measurement of subjective dispositions, and during the 1970s, the political culture concept encountered additional criticisms, and lost its appeal for many political scientists. Claims of its demise would be issued periodically thereafter; given the concept's endurance, however, they should be taken with a grain of salt. Generalizations about the fortunes of the political culture concept in a discipline so fragmented as political science serve only to reify one part of the whole at any given time. Neither renunciations nor endorsements of political culture as a rubric, a concept, or a theory have ceased.[13]

The 1970s also saw the complaint emerge that the political culture literature contained the "normative bias" that cultural symbols are shared deeply "by all or most actors in a society," thus promoting stability—and a conservative ideology. The perception that political culture studies tended to privilege the status quo grew stronger amid the rise of Marxist and rational choice perspectives. In 1971, Pateman pointed to the political culture school's assumption that patterns of participation, and the culture underlying it, "cannot be significantly changed." Pateman, however, rejected the idea that cultures cannot be "'shaped' in a more participatory direction." Rather, political elites possess the resources to change public action; class and institutional influences also matter. As Levine put it shortly afterward in a survey of writings on Latin American political culture, the assumptions of congruence and consistency in central values favor the existence of persisting structures: "By not relating values to class and institutional position, ideational approaches ignore the coercive forces and interests which maintain and enforce conformity to estab-

12 Pye, "Culture and Political Science," 291.

13 Glen Gendzel's allegation that political culture approaches are passé, in "Political Culture: Genealogy of a Concept," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XXVIII (1997), 230, 232, disagrees with the account herein, as well as with William A. Reisinger, "The Renaissance of a Rubric: Political Culture as Concept and Theory," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research,* VII (1995), 328–351.

lished norms. . . . [They also ignore] altered technologies, economic opportunities, or new patterns of association and organization." In 1977, Dittmer complained that the political culture concept was too fixated on "systemic stability, as if the absence of change required explanation." Given that representative works looked only to political socialization across generations as a source of change, Dittmer concluded that "political culture is profoundly conservative in its policy implications; in fact, this conclusion seems implicit in the outset from its ambiguous conceptualization."[14]

The critique of political culture as inherently conservative was logical, but the political and social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s generated other misgivings. *Civic Culture* had appeared when confidence in American leaders and institutions was riding high. As that faith declined, so did regard for a theory of democracy that elevated Anglo-American political cultures to inspirational models. Even apart from exogenous historical reasons, many political scientists recognized that, in the early political culture literature, "the characteristics of a developed political system have frequently borne an uncanny resemblance to the principal features of the American political system." This reaction to Western ethnocentrism often fused with the simultaneous rejection of the theory of modernization, the popularity of which also declined precipitously in this period.[15]

Although political culture research in general became less

14 Edward W. Lehman, "On the Concept of Political Culture: A Theoretical Reassessment," *Social Forces,* L (1972), 361, 362; John Street, "Political Culture—from Civic Culture to Mass Culture," *British Journal of Political Science,* XXIV (1994), 102. Early objections from the left included Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, 1966); Richard R. Fagan, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford, 1969). See also Jezy J. Wiatr, "The Civic Culture from a Marxist-Sociological Perspective," in Almond and Verba (eds.), *Civic Culture Revisited,* 103–123. Carole Pateman, "Political Culture, Political Structure and Political Change," *British Journal of Political Science,* I (1971), 292, 296; Daniel H. Levine, "Issues in the Study of Culture and Politics: A View from Latin America," *Publius,* IV (1974), 79, 80; Lowell Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *World Politics,* XXIX (1977), 557. Dittmer repeated the by now familiar criticisms regarding political culture's "catch-all" character and "psychological reductionism" (552).

15 Archie Brown, "Introduction," in *idem* and Jack Gray (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (New York, 1979; orig. pub. 1977), 3. Included among those who have described political culture's "stagnation and retreat" in the 1970s are John R. Gibbins, "Contemporary Political Culture: An Introduction," in *idem* (ed.), *Contemporary Political Culture: Politics in a Postmodern Age* (London, 1989), 2.

popular in the 1970s, it was still thriving in one sub-field of political science (besides state studies). The study of communist nations became attractive because their regimes aimed at "total political and economic transformation" and comprised an array of "societies with the most diverse historical and cultural traditions." Thus communist countries could be viewed, in Almond's words, "as 'natural experiments' in attitude change." In favorably assessing this sub-field in 1983, Almond responded briefly to critics by asserting that political culture had never been advanced seriously as "the unidirectional 'cause' of political structure and behavior." He expressed the view, shared by leading scholars in Communist state studies, that in "the relaxed version," the relationship between "political structure and culture is interactive." But for critics like Dittmer, the inability to specify political culture as either an independent or dependent variable was exactly the problem.[16]

In communist studies, too, the political culture approach received sharp criticism from writers who favored a more institutional or anthropological perspective. Tucker, for example, advocated a looser "cultural approach to politics," arguing that Almond, Verba, and others, in their mistaken insistence on a subjective-psychological definition of political culture, parted company with "the great majority of anthropologists," who treated culture as behavioral as well as psychological. For Tucker, as well as for many historians, political culture, or "politics as a form of culture," could be taken "as the central subject of the discipline"—that is, not as an explanatory variable but as what needed to be explained.[17]

In 1979, David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon added a

16 Almond, "Communism and Political Culture Theory," *Comparative Politics,* XV (1983), 127; Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism," 554–555, 556. For contrasting views on the utility of political culture in this sub-field, see Stephen White, "Political Culture in Communist States: Some Problems of Theory and Method," *Comparative Politics,* XVI (1984), 351–365; Barbara Jancar, "Political Culture and Political Change," *Studies in Comparative Communism,* XVII (1984), 69–82; Stephen Welch, "Issues in the Study of Political Culture—The Example of Communist Party States," *British Journal of Political Science,* XVII (1987), 480.

17 Robert C. Tucker, "Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society," *Political Science Quarterly,* LXXXVIII (1973), 176–177, 181–182; Fagan, *Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba,* 5–6, 16; Richard H. Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (Berkeley, 1971), xiii, 2, 18; Graeme Gill, "Personality Cult, Political Culture and Party Structure," *Studies in Comparative Communism,* XVII (1984), 111–121. A popular text of this period (Walter A. Rosenbaum, *Political Culture* [New York, 1975], 6–10) defined political culture as "orientations," but also included the study of behavior as necessary to "operationalize" the concept.

new wrinkle to political culture criticism in an essay provocatively titled "A Cause In Search of an Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" Calling the concept "popular and seductive," as well as "controversial and confused," Elkins and Simeon noted a common failure "to specify clearly and precisely the dependent variable," and "a common but disconcerting tendency to shift dependent variables [the explicandum] in mid-analysis." The authors conventionally defined the concept as "a short-hand expression for a 'mind set,'" or "'disposition,'" but called for a more rigorous identification of "the culture-bearing unit in different situations." Given the wide array of such units, besides national cultures, under study, that was good advice. They also argued forcefully that since political culture is "a collective property of groups such as nations or classes" its use in explanation must always be comparative.[18]

In addition, Elkins and Simeon maintained that political culture could hardly be invoked by itself as an explanation, but "almost always in conjunction with other variables." Cultural, institutional, and structural explanations were "not competitors, but collaborators. . . . Instead of asking whether institutions cause culture or culture causes institutions, we should look for their joint effects." This recommendation had been made before, and it would be made again. But many political scientists of different persuasions refused this formula of causal interactivity (and indeterminateness) in favor of privileging culture or structure. Historians, meanwhile, avoided explicit disputes regarding political culture's precise role because those who found the term useful simply took its causality for granted—along with institutions, structure, and interest. Nonetheless, they would have profited from the Elkins–Simeon injunctions regarding specificity and comparison.[19]

By the end of the 1980s, the political culture concept had undergone a vigorous revival. But this "renaissance" entailed no slackening of objections from critics. As the debate continued into the

18 David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon, "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" *Comparative Politics,* XI (1979), 127, 128, 129, 139.

19 Elkins and Simeon, "Cause," 140, 143. Both radical and mainstream scholars raised the objection that political culture underplayed structural factors and ignored how values reflected interests. See Charles R. Foster, "Political Culture and Regional Ethnic Minorities," *Journal of Politics,* XLIV (1982), 560–561, for various criticisms by radicals and conservatives

late 1990s, scholars working with the concept were either searching for a causal middle ground on which political culture could serve as an intermediate variable (or lobbying for an "interactive" relationship between culture and structure), rejecting this approach altogether in favor of a position that emphasized the primacy of institutions, political actors, or individuals' rational choice, or turning to the increasingly influential perspectives of anthropology, interpretivism, and symbolic analysis.

The drumbeat of criticism might easily have convinced the casual observer of political culture's demise. In 1988, Chilton cited the many works drawing attention to the myriad "problems in defining, measuring, and testing hypotheses in political culture." He concluded that the earlier promise of the concept had not been redeemed: "Political culture remains a suggestive rather than a scientific concept." From 1989 to 1993, a succession of scholars—Merelman, Gibbins, Wildavsky, Lane, Nesbitt-Larkin, and Welch—acknowledged the ubiquity of the concept but lamented, or decried, its inability to generate firm conclusions. The entry in the *Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Thought* dismissed, almost contemptuously, political culture's ability to explain anything. Laitin harshly judged political culture to be a "degenerative research program"—unproductive, unclear, and tautological. In 1990, Almond wrote that political culture "had found its way into the conceptual vocabulary of political science" but that it also provided "the occasion for a persisting polemic in the discipline—not as prolific as the pluralism polemic, but quite respectable in the quantitative sense. There are perhaps some 35 or 40 book-length treatments of political culture of an empirical and theoretical sort, perhaps 100 article-length treatments in journals and symposia, and more than 1,000 citations in the literature."[20]

20 Stephen Chilton, "Defining Political Culture," *Western Political Quarterly,* XLI (1988), 420; Richard M. Merelman, "On Culture and Politics in America: A Perspective from Structural Anthropology," *British Journal of Political Science,* XIX (1989), 465, 470; Gibbins, "Contemporary Political Culture," 2; Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, "Political Cultures," Institute of Governmental Studies, Working Paper 90-24 (Berkeley, 1990), 1; Merelman, *Partial Visions: Culture and Politics in Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Madison, 1991), 39; Ruth Lane, "Political Culture: Residual Category or General Theory?" *Comparative Political Studies,* XXV (1992), 362; Paul Nesbitt-Larkin, "Methodological Notes on the Study of Political Culture," *Political Psychology,* XIII (1992), 79–90; Welch, *The Concept of Political Culture* (New York, 1993), 13; Joseph V. Femia, "Political Culture," in William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (Oxford, 1993), 476–477; David Laitin, "The Civic Culture at 30," *American Political*

Almond and Verba featured that very polemic in *The Civic Culture Revisited,* their 1989 collection of essays, which included contributions from proponents and friendly critics, as well as from skeptics who focused their criticism on the central issue of political culture's status as an independent variable. Almond allowed that political culture was not a "theory" but "refers to a set of variables which may be used in the construction of theories." He repeated his argument that political culture be "treated as both an independent and dependent variable."[21]

Three other publications from 1987 to 1990 are indicative of the "renaissance." Wildavsky, in his 1987 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, rooted political preferences—including "interests"—in political culture. He viewed political culture not as an alternative to rational, economic behavior, but as a kind of "cultural rationality." The following year the association's leading journal published two more articles making strong arguments for the causal efficacy of political culture, one by Eckstein and the other by Inglehart, who forcefully defended the Almond–Verba line and argued that different societies embody durable cultural attitudes (or political cultures) that have significant economic and political consequences. In a subsequent book, he added that cultural change in a "post-modernist" society was much more important than it had been during early industrialization.[22]

Not surprisingly, replies to Wildavsky and Eckstein soon appeared in the *American Political Science Review.* Laitin rejected Wildavsky's claim that culture is the source of political preferences. Wildavsky, Laitin said, missed the real source of preferences, interest. Werlin

Science Review, LXXXIX (1995), 168–169; Almond, *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science* (London, 1990), 142, 143. Street's 1994 "Political Culture—from Civic Culture to Mass Culture," clearly missed the mark by complaining of the tendency "to treat political culture like a familiar piece of furniture. Everyone is vaguely aware of its existence, but only rarely do they comment upon it" (95).

21 Pateman, "The Civic Culture: A Philosophical Critique," in Almond and Verba (eds.), *Civic Culture Revisited,* 57–102; Waitr, "Civic Culture from a Marxist-Sociological Perspective," 103–123; Almond, "Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept," 26, 28–29.

22 Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation," *American Political Science Review,* LXXXII (1988), 589–593; Harry Eckstein, "A Culturalist Theory of Political Change," *ibid.,* LXXXIV (1988), 789–804; Ronald Inglehart, "The Renaissance of Political Culture," *ibid.,* LXXXII (1988), 1203–1230; *idem, Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Societies* (Princeton, 1990), 4, 15–22.

disagreed with Eckstein regarding culture and causality, giving more weight to "political engineering." In response to Wildavsky's bold argument that interests arose out of culture, and were not unanalyzable "givens," Werlin conceded that politics and culture affected one another, but he concluded, "Ultimately, politics is more powerful than culture."[23]

In the 1990s, political culture continued to flourish, most notably with Putnam's *Making Democracy Work,* a study of regional government in Italy. Putnam employed a range of methods and data to track the performance of regional governments (and citizens' attitudes to them) in terms of historical and cultural differences reaching back to the Middle Ages. Even Laitin praised this work as a potentially "stunning" new beginning for political culture research.[24]

Dissenters remained. In 1996, Jackman and Miller, writing in an issue of the *American Journal of Political Science,* attacked the notion of a "renaissance," re-examined the work of Inglehart and Putnam, and reported that "cultural accounts of political life are substantially overstated." Rejecting the notion that political culture possessed any independent causal capacity, Jackman and Miller insisted, rather, that "institutional variations provide a parsimonious and powerful explanation of political participation rates across the industrial democracies," stating the institutional-rational choice objection to political culture in its starkest form. Distinctive to their approach were "the propositions that institutions—political, social, and economic—structure the distribution of incentives for individual action, and that individuals optimize in view of those constraints." Jackman and Miller scorched Inglehart's reply, which appeared in the same issue of the journal, in a second piece, and denied any "middle ground between insti-

23 Herbert H. Werlin and Eckstein, "Political Culture and Political Change," *American Political Science Review,* LXXXIV (1990), 251, 252; Laitin and Wildavsky, "Political Culture and Political Preferences, *ibid.,* LXXXII (1988), 589–596.

24 Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, 1993); Laitin, "Civic Culture at 30," 172–173. Michael Brint, *A Genealogy of Political Culture* (Boulder, 1991), 1, 132–133, also discerned the "renaissance." Other works both exemplifying and promoting the revival included Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder, 1990); Richard W. Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture* (New York, 1992); Almond, "Forward: The Return to Political Culture," in Larry Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder, 1993).

tutional and cultural explanations" because "the two are incompatible."[25]

Since the 1970s, sporadic calls have emerged for a more flexible cultural approach, less reliant on "scientific" methods and less committed to a psychological view of political culture, that could encompass both the subjective and behavioral. Although a 1984 survey showed that "for the majority of political scientists the concept of political culture is used in its purely psychological sense," political science and history took a "cultural turn" toward anthropology during the 1980s. Advocacy of "symbolic analysis" and interpretivism as practiced by Geertz became common. Arguing that "political science will always need to be something more than, or other than, a science," Adams urged his colleagues toward philosophy as well as anthropology, asserting that political meaning "is born not just in what individual subjects consciously think and value politically, but in cultural and intersubjective symbols, in collective meanings inscribed in the symbolic texts of the practices themselves." In 1989, Merelman advocated moving beyond cognitive phenomena ("ideologies, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions") to incorporate "actual behavior" through attention to the "deep structures" embodied in particular cultures. Douglas was the anthropologist of choice for Wildavsky; her "grid-group" categories of culture underlay Wildavsky's premise that political preferences originated in political culture.[26]

25 Robert W. Jackman and Ross A. Miller, "A Renaissance of Political Culture?" *American Journal of Political Science,* XL (1996), 633, 654–655; Jim Granato, Inglehart, and David Leblang, "The Effect of Cultural Values on Economic Development: Theory, Hypotheses, and Some Empirical Tests," *ibid.,* 607–631; *idem,* "Cultural Values, Stable Democracy, and Economic Development: A Reply," *ibid.,* 680–696; Jackman and Miller, "The Poverty of Political Culture," *ibid.,* 712.

26 Hitchner, "Political Science and Political Culture," 552; Tucker, "Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society," 176–177, 181; Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism"; Elkins and Simeon, "Cause." Clifford Geertz, "A Study of National Character," *Journal of Economic Development and Cultural Change* (1964), 207, objected to the "radical subjectification" of culture by the comparativists in a review of Pye's study of Burma, *Politics Personality and Nation Building* (New Haven, 1962). Glenda Patrick, "Political Culture," in Giovannia Sartori (ed.), *Social Science Concepts: A Systematic Analysis* (Beverly Hills, 1984), 281; William Adams, "Politics and the Archeology of Meaning: A Review Essay," *Western Political Quarterly,* XXXIX (1986), 549, 562; Welch, "Issues in the Study of Political Culture"; Merelman, "On Culture and Politics," 471, 477; Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory;* Ellis, *American Political Cultures* (New York, 1993). See Mary Douglas, *Cultural Bias* (London, 1978); *idem,* "Introduction to Grid/Group Analysis," in *idem* (ed.), *Essays on the Sociology of Perception* (London, 1982), 1–8.

Welch's 1993 book recommended a "phenomenological approach" also heavily indebted to structural anthropology, endorsing interpretivism, over behavioralism with its psychological definitions of political culture and survey methodology, and its "scientific aspiration," for "value-freedom." In its favor, interpretivism, with its "conception of political culture as the 'meaning' of political life," included "tests of plausibility" and was "evidentially omnivorous." What is more, it was compatible with a diverse array of methodologies, the only common feature of which was "a distrust of quantitative analysis."[27]

The phenomenological approach of such scholars strongly emphasized "the concrete process of meaning construction" and transcended the vacuous "debate between culture and interest—or structure-based explanation" by denying "the 'givenness' and assert[ing] the 'constructedness" of all social objects. Thus, it denied "the duality of culture and its various ontological opposites, "'structure,' 'power,' 'interests' or 'objective circumstances.'" In sum, Welch proposed that culture be seen "not as a set of givens of which political culture is a subset; it is a process, and 'political culture' refers to that process in its political aspects."[28]

As the 1990s closed, more political scientists were thinking of political culture as a process. Defining political culture as "the term that describes how a society and a collection of leaders and citizens chooses, and has long chosen, to approach national political decisions," Rotberg asserted, "Political culture was/is hardly static; the feedback loop is natural and continuous." Yet, while many scholars still embraced political culture, the thirty-year debate about it as a concept/approach/theory had hardly disappeared. Even a critic as friendly as Reisinger maintained that those who had taken it upon themselves "in the late 1980s to save political-culture theory" still faced several daunting challenges, including "to define the term [!], to disentangle subcultures from a society's overall political culture . . . to theorize how political culture interacts with institutions and other attributes of a polity to

27 Welch, *Concept of Political Culture,* 5, 6. In examining the relationship between culture and structure, Welch sided with those who reject a middle ground because he held that structure and political culture were not separable. Almond and Verba in *Civic Culture* had failed adequately "to differentiate explanans and explanandum" not from lack of care but from "the fundamental inseparability of culture from structure" (26–27).

28 Welch, *Concept of Political Culture,* 162, 164.

produce political outcomes," and to solve problems related to "individual-level orientations, their measurements, and connection to the collectivity." In short, the contested issues, including the causal role of political culture, remained largely those identified in the 1960s and 1970s by Geertz, Pye, Tucker, Dittmer, Elkins, Simeon, and others.[29]

That objections to political culture's ability to serve as causation persisted was remarkable at a time when the social sciences and humanities were turning increasingly to culture as the fountainhead of explanation. Postmodernism and the "linguistic turn" in the humanities had encouraged widespread epistemological skepticism, resurgent relativism, and disdain for grand narratives. In this climate, "facts" and "texts" dissolved into contingent layers of perspectives, readings, and meanings. Geertz's caveat that anthropological research created "fictions," that is, "something made" was familiar to everyone: "Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications. Winks upon winks upon winks." Those with a postmodernist bent had no problem accepting that culture shaped consciousness. Berkhofer recently remarked about "how thorough the penetration of culture has been into areas hitherto considered natural. So complete has this penetration been that the priority given nature over culture in that dichotomy has been overthrown in the human sciences, and culture has become the preeminent explanation of human behavior." It certainly has among historians.[30]

These developments preceded the collapse of Marxism in the Soviet Union and Europe and the resurgence of cultural nationalism. Culture's stock rose among both left and right intellectuals as

29 Robert I. Rotberg, "Social Capital and Political Culture in Africa, Asia, Australasia, and Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XXIX (1999), 339, 342. See also, Ellis and Thompson (eds.), *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky* (Boulder, 1997); Wilson, "American Political Culture in Comparative Perspective," *Political Psychology,* XVIII (1997), 483–502; Reisinger, "The Renaissance of a Rubric: Political Culture as Concept and Theory," *Journal of Public Opinion Research,* VII (1995), 347.

30 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 15, 9; Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story,* 4–5. The power of Berkhofer's observation was proven by the extent to which Marxists fell in line with the cultural turn. See, e.g., Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, 1988), in which the editors observe that as recently as 1975, such a collection on Marxism and culture—boasting thirty-nine contributors—would have been unlikely. "Culture itself was always viewed as secondary and often as epiphenomenal" ("Introduction: The Territory of Marxism," 2).

progressives embraced identity politics and multiculturalism, and neoconservative intellectuals identified the United States' post-Vietnam and post-Watergate political and institutional crises as cultural in origin. As Habermas pointed out, "This phenomenon is presented suggestively [by neoconservatives] with key terms like ungovernability, decline of credibility, the loss of legitimacy, etc."—problems that are at bottom cultural. Because culture's explanatory power in history is overdetermined, historians, unlike political scientists, have not engaged in essentialist debates about culture's causal efficacy. They have used political culture freely as theory, concept, or rubric, with wildly varying degrees of caution and precision; rarely does any historian complain about a lack of definitions.[31]

Historians have used "political culture" as a rubric or concept—only recently as a theory—at least since the 1960s, although the sensibility attending its expression was present much earlier. Awarding primacy to any one historian for introducing the concept is not only arbitrary, but ignores the postwar interdisciplinary ferment that permitted such hybrid concepts to infiltrate the profession. Nonetheless, Bailyn's 1965 book, *The Origins of American Politics,* which contained a chapter entitled "Sources of Political Culture," certainly qualifies as an important precedent. Bailyn did not define "political culture." Nor did he list it in the index. His usage resembled that in political science at the time, except that Bailyn's political culture was broadly conceived, encompassing traditions, institutions, and behavior.[32]

Murrin recently asserted that Bailyn indeed "introduced the concept of 'political culture' to early Americanists. Its impact has been tremendous." Wood, who was less enthusiastic about regarding the *Origins* as a political culture study, praised the book anyway for penetrating "beneath the surface of government [to] lay bare the underlying social reality that molds political institutions and gives life to public events." In 1965, Greene, another

31 Jurgen Habermas, "Neoconservative Culture Criticism in the United States and West Germany: An Intellectual Movement in Two Political Cultures," *Telos,* LVI (1983), 76. See also Gibbins (ed.), *Contemporary Political Culture,* 15. Both the currency of the term and the continuing preoccupation of neoconservatives with culture are evident in "Clinton, the Country, and the Political Culture: A Symposium," *Commentary,* 107 (1999), 20–42, wherein seventeen contributors answer questions regarding the 1998 elections and the "moral disposition of the American people" (20).

32 Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1965).

historian of the North American colonies, invoked, and defined, the term in an essay obviously influenced by Bailyn's work. Political culture, wrote Greene, "applies to that intellectual and institutional inheritance which inevitably conditions, however slightly in many instances, all, even the most revolutionary and impulsive, political behavior." In contrast to the formal "concepts of political thought and institutional development," political culture involved the until-recently ignored "shadowy cluster of assumptions, traditions, conventions, values, modes of expression, and habits of thought and belief that underlay those visible elements." These historians' views of political culture were more catholic and expansive than the political scientists', but both camps shared key assumptions about *underlying* values, beliefs, and dispositions.[33]

Although the concept of political culture continued to be used frequently by colonialists, and began to make its appearance in studies of states, the term did not yet appear frequently in titles of books or essays. In 1974, Banner used the comparative-state approach in an influential essay titled "The Problem of South Carolina," contending that South Carolina's political culture differed "from that of every other state," its traditions, heritage, demography, and political structure combining to create a highly undemocratic political culture. Significantly, Banner's chapter appeared in a collection of essays honoring Richard Hofstadter, who was at least as influential as Bailyn in directing American historians toward the study of political culture. According to one of his leading historiographers, Hofstadter did not achieve significance so much as a "consensus" historian, but as one with a "lifelong quest to comprehend the relationship between politics and ideas in America—or, as he referred to it, the study of 'political culture.' "[34]

33 John M. Murrin, "Political Development," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (eds.), *Colonial British Americans: Essays on the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1989), 414; Gordon S. Wood, "The Creative Imagination of Bernard Bailyn," in James A. Henretta, Kammen, and Stanley N. Katz (eds.), *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority, and Ideology* (New York, 1991), 28; Greene, "Changing Interpretations of Early American Politics," in *idem* (ed.), *Interpreting Early America: Historiographical Essays* (Charlottesville, 1996), 105. Greene's essay was published originally in Ray A. Billington (ed.), *The Reinterpretation of Early American History* (San Marino, 1966), 151–184. Greene wrote it in the fall of 1965 (personal communication).

34 Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789–1840," *American Political Science Review,* LXVIII (1974), 473–487; Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Vir-

"Call me a political historian mainly interested in the role of ideas in politics, an historian of political culture rather than of parties or institutions," Hofstadter told an interviewer in 1960. *The American Political Tradition* (1948), his first major work, displayed, "total obliviousness toward the symbolic uses of politics," though he hardly could be accused of doing so in his later approach to political culture. Yet, Hofstadter's focus even in that book, on what he called "commonly shared convictions," seemed to point to his later interests. So did this passage: "In material power and productivity the United States has been a flourishing success. Societies that are in such good working order have a kind of mute organic consistency. They do not foster ideas that are hostile to their fundamental working arrangements. . . . The range of ideas, therefore, which practical politicians can conveniently believe in is normally limited by the climate of opinion that sustains their culture." In *The Age of Reform,* his 1955 Pulitzer prize-winning book, he left no doubts concerning its orientation. Especially in dealing with the Populists, Hofstadter shifted the focus from "concrete reform proposals to the ideas, attitudes, and prejudices that lay beneath the surface of their political activity. He had, it was clear, moved from a narrow definition of politics as the calculus of self-interest to a broader conception of a political culture."[35]

Although Hofstadter used the concept only infrequently in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), his central concern in that book with "widespread social attitudes, with political responses, and with middle-brow and low-brow responses" ran parallel to that of Almond and other political scientists who were more explicit about political culture. In 1965, Hofstadter put political culture at center stage in the introduction to his collection, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics.* Though the essays had been

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ginia," in Richard M. Jellison (ed.), *Society, Freedom. and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts and New York* (New York, 1976), 14–76. For a rich analysis of a distinctive state political culture, comparing its shifts over time, see Frank M. Bryan, *Yankee Politics in Rural Vermont* (Hanover, 1974). James M. Banner, Jr., "The Problem of South Carolina," in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick (eds.), *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial* (New York, 1974), 60–93. Banner later examined "American political behavior, institutions, and ideas" in "France and the Origins of American Political Culture," *Virginia Quarterly Review,* LXIV (1988), 652.

35 Daniel Joseph Singal, "Beyond Consensus: Richard Hofstadter and American Historiography," *American Historical Review,* LXXXIX (1984), 978, 986; Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), viii–ix; Robert M. Collins, "The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism," *Journal of American History,* LVI (1989), 150.

written during a period of fourteen years, they all had to do "with the style of our political culture as a whole, and with certain styles of thought and rhetoric that have prevailed within it, [and hence] they tell more about the milieu of our politics than about its structure. They are more centrally concerned with the symbolic aspect of politics than with the formation of institutions and the distribution of power." The last sentence anticipated the emphases of the new cultural historians.[36]

Among Hofstadter's students, Kelley was perhaps the most productive and creative interpreter of political culture. From 1969 to 1989, in monographs, texts, and essays, he maintained Hofstadter's sensitivity to symbolic analysis and public ideology, combining it with the findings of the new political historians' about voters and their "cultural rivalries." The result was a synthesis of American politics that, unlike Hofstadter's early emphasis on the lack of ideological conflict between the major parties, examined important divisions in the body politic throughout 200 years of American history: "The ideas of the leadership and the cultural and economic interests of their followers do in fact align with each other, though not always easily." Although Kelley's richly insightful and nondogmatic analysis sometimes blurred the distinctions between political culture, cultural politics, and political sub-cultures, even greater fuzziness would attend many (but not all) historians' continued usages of these terms.[37]

36 Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics: And Other Essays* (New York, 1965), viii.

> The older conception of politics was that it deals with the question: Who gets what, when, how? . . . But Harold Lasswell, who made this monosyllabic question the title of a well-known book on the substance of politics, was one of the first in this country to be dissatisfied with the rationalistic assumptions which it implied and to turn to the study of the emotional and symbolic side of political life. It becomes important to add a new conception to the older one: Who perceives what public issues, in what way, and why? To the present generation of historical and political writers it has become increasingly clear that people not only seek their interests but also express and even in a measure define themselves in politics: that political life acts as a sounding board for identities, values, fears, and aspirations. (viii–ix)

See also Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States. 1790–1840* (Berkeley, 1970), vii.

37 Robert Kelley, "Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon," *American Historical Review,* LXXXII (1977), 532–533; Formisano, "Comment," *ibid.,* 572, 575. Kelley's major works in political culture include *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969), a remarkable analysis of the liberal Democratic outlook set in the political cultures of Britain, Canada, and the United States; *The Cultural*

Starting in the late 1970s, the political culture concept figured prominently in the writing of political history; in the 1980s, it shaped the approach of many influential, and often unconventional, monographs. Probably no two historians defined political culture (explicitly or implicitly) in the same way, but most of the works in question from this decade shared several distinguishing characteristics, foremost of which were a more anthropological view of culture and a methodological eclecticism that moved easily between discussion of the psychological and behavioral. Acknowledgements to Geertz and Pocock, a cultural historian, may well have been as common as nods to comparative political scientists.[38]

Certain studies of political culture might have qualified just as well as studies of sub-cultures. As easily as historians blurred distinctions between a general political culture and sub-cultures, they also tended not to oppose values and beliefs to "interests," often

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Pattern in American Politics: The First Century (New York, 1979), a bold synthesis expanding the themes of his 1977 essay; and *Battling the Inland Sea: American Political Culture, Public Policy, and the Sacramento Valley 1850–1986* (Berkeley, 1989), a powerful demonstration of how cultural and partisan outlooks shaped contests about flood control.

38 John G. A. Pocock's reputation came from several essays and, notably, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975). Geertz's influence registered at maximum warp in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (eds.), *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), xvi, 35, 36, 39n, 40n, 48, 61n, 81n, 106, 114n, 165n. The following works are representative of the eclectic approach: Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979), 1–2; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983), 9, 11–12, 147, 355; Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture*, 4, 20–22; Paula C. Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920," *American Historical Review*, LXXXIX (1984), 620–648; Robert M. Weir, *"The Last of the American Freemen": Studies in the Political Culture of the Colonial and Revolutionary South* (Macon, 1986), 2, 236; Philip R. VanderMeer, *The Hoosier Politician: Officeholding and Political Culture in Indiana 1896–1920* (Urbana, 1985), 2–3, 5, 24–30, 163–164; J. David Greenstone, "Political Culture and American Political Development: Liberty, Union, and the Liberal Bipolarity," *Studies in American Political Development*, I (New Haven, 1986), 1–49; Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago, 1986); Kenneth S. Greenburg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore, 1986); Charles Chatfield and Peter Van DenDungen, *Peace Movements and Political Culture* (Knoxville, 1988), xiii (which relied on Pye for a definition to relate peace movements to national cultures); Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina 1815–1861* (Athens, 1989), 2, 117–119; Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German-Americans and Ethnic Political Culture: Stearns County, Minnesota, 1855–1915," John F. Kennedy-Institut Fur Nordamerikastudien, Working Paper 16 (Berlin, 1989) (which invoked Elazar, Verba, and Pye); Albert H. Tillson, Jr., *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier 1740–1789* (Lexington, 1991), 1, 3, 4, 159–160 (Tillson, and Howe, particularly acknowledged the influence of Pocock).

conflating them under the heading of political culture, sometimes with even institutions and behavior added to the mix. Nor did historians worry much about the causal status of political culture. Most frequently, they interpreted political culture as a preexisting inheritance of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, etc., that shaped actions and processes and that changed over time.[39]

Kelley, however, was an exception to historians' usual lack of concern about causality. In 1989, he explained his standpoint by referring to the difference "between reporting the flow of play in a particular sport setting and describing the larger framework that sets up its overall nature: the rules of the game; the contrasting ideas about it, even its purpose in the larger scheme of things, believed in by the opposing coaches; the kinds of people the two teams tend to recruit, their values, and their consequent style of

39 Political culture studies that deal with sub-cultures include John D. Buenker, "Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Cultures in Conflict During the Progressive Era," *American Quarterly,* XL (1988), 187–204; H. James Henderson, "Taxation and Political Culture: Massachusetts and Virginia, 1760–1800," *William & Mary Quarterly,* XLVII (1990), 90–114 (which invoked Elazar and Robert Kelley); Richard Schneirov, "Political Cultures and the Role of the State in Labor's Republic: The View from Chicago, 1848–1877," *Labor History,* XXXII (1991), 376–400; Roger W. Lotchin, "The Political Culture of the Metropolitan-Military Complex," *Social Science History,* XVI (1992), 274–299; Katherine Kish Sklar, "Two Political Cultures in the Progressive Era: The National Consumers' League and the American Association for Labor Legislation," in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and *idem* (eds.), *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 36–62; Nicole Etcheson, "Private Interest and Public Good: Upland Southerners and Antebellum Midwestern Political Culture," in Jeffrey P. Brown and Andrew L. Cayton (eds.), *The Pursuit of Public Power: Political Culture in Ohio 1787–1861* (Kent, 1994), 83–98; Aaron Spencer Fogelman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717–1775* (Philadelphia, 1996), 127, 149–153, 252; Michael A. McDonnell, "Popular Mobilization and Political Culture in Revolutionary Virginia: The Failure of the Minutemen and the Revolution from Below," *Journal of American History,* LXXXV (1998), 946–981 (wherein political culture seems to have a meaning close to hegemony [950]).

Among the innumerable historians who tended to blur distinctions were Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era 1860–1868* (New York, 1977), 3, 7; M. J. Heale, *The Presidential Quest: Candidates and Images in American Political Culture, 1787–1852* (London, 1982), viii–ix, 20, 22, 53, 135, 157, 228–230; Richard R. John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously: The Postal System, the Sabbath, and the Transformation of American Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic,* X (1990), 518–567; Brown and Cayton, *Pursuit of Public Power,* vii; Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi 1830–1900* (Baton Rouge, 1995), 2, 3, 151–182; Maureen A. Flanagan, "Charter Reform in Chicago: Political Culture and Urban Progressive Reform," *Journal of Urban History,* XII (1986), 110, 112, 113, 126; L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Public Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York, 1800–1860* (Ithaca, 1988), 8, 248, 257; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 8–11, 41, 226.

play; who their traditional 'enemy' is, toward whom they orient themselves; and their sense of identity, of cohesion." Kelley did not mean "that these influences are the 'cause' of the teams' season-long performance, since causation is ever elusive," but that "when these underlying factors are brought into the analysis, we are enabled to understand the situation more deeply." These well-taken caveats did not prevent Kelley from narrating the contest between two rival political cultures and the triumph of one of them ("Whig-Republican") in the early twentieth century in attaining not only a "shaping influence upon policy," but also a preeminent place as "the vital and shaping core culture in American life."[40]

Although by the late 1980s, "political culture" had become a buzzword that few historian bothered to define, some historians began to express a sense that it might be confining. Brooke, for example, used the terms "political culture" and "public culture" interchangeably, and, despite the use of the term in the subtitle of his prize-winning *Society and Political Culture in Worcester County Massachusetts, 1713–1861* (1989), his opening sentence declared the work to be "a study of society and public culture." More explicitly, Howe, in the first article bearing the term in its title to appear in the *Journal of American History,* called for an expanded definition of political culture: "to define political culture to include all struggles over power, not just those decided by elections. The women's movement, the struggles for racial justice and the rights of labor, conflicts for control of churches and voluntary organizations, even power struggles among members of the family—all these and more were relevant to the modernization of American life in this period." Howe seemed to be calling for a broader definition of "politics" as well as of "political culture."[41]

40 Kelley, *Battling the Inland Sea,* xv, 324–335. Richard S. Kirkendall, "Water and the Revitalization of Political History," *Reviews in American History,* XVIII (1990), 572, commented that political culture in this book "keeps Kelley's attention riveted on the interplay between society and politics" and indirectly functions as a response to social history's challenge to political history.

41 Patrick F. Palermo, "The Rules of the Game: Local Republican Political Culture in the Gilded Age," *The Historian,* LXVII (1985), 479–498; Lloyd E. Ambrosius (ed.), *A Crisis of Republicanism: American Politics During the Civil War Era* (Lincoln, 1990), 1–2, 4–10, 12–13, 129, 131; William A. Link, "The Jordan Hatcher Case: Politics and a 'Spirit of Insubordination' in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of Southern History,* LXIV (1998), 630, 634; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne (eds.), *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, 1994). Van Horne asserted that political culture "is a new field of histori-

Movement toward a wider definition of politics had, in fact, been underway for sometime, spearheaded as Howe suggested, by historians of women, labor, and African-Americans, as well as by scholars seeking to bridge social and political history. From historians of women and gender (but not only from them) had come a concern for linking the private and the public, as Habermas' concept of the "public sphere" was already freeing politics from formal institutions, organizations, and the state. The attraction of the public sphere as an organizing framework became so appealing, that Baker who in 1988 had recommended "political culture" as the focus for future study of American political history, suggested in 1997 "not just political culture but the larger and more significant theme of American public culture" as a viable area for further research.[42]

Yet, as Brooke recently pointed out, cultural historians tend to reject Habermas' limited and rational view of the public sphere, preferring one far less rational and far more plural and democratic. As Brooke shows, Habermas himself has "abandoned his original position about the public sphere as the exclusive domain of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. . . . [Now] the public sphere is a permanent fixture in modern society—plural, anarchic, wild, unregulated, and fluid with regard to space and time." Definitions and uses of the "public sphere" are proliferating as rapidly as those of "political culture" had multiplied earlier. Brooke, however, re-

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cal inquiry" and that women against slavery created "a female political culture within the structures of antislavery" (xii, 250–251). Sklar, "'Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation': American and British Women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention," *ibid.*, 302, 302–33 n. 6, defined the term as embracing "values associated with women's participation in the public domain as well as their actual behavior." John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713–1861* (New York, 1989), xii, xiv, xviii, 33, 64, 67, 96, 246, 268, 292n. 51, 270, 273, 376; Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System," *Journal of American History,* LXXVII (1991), 1235–1236. Howe's more conventional political culture approach urged that "the study of political culture must take account of the study of personality, of what might be called political *psychology*" (1236).

42 Paula Baker, "Domestication of Politics," 620–647; *idem, The Moral Frameworks of Public Life: Gender, Politics and the State in Rural New York 1870–1930* (New York, 1991), xv; Samuel P. Hays, "Political History and Social History," paper delivered at a conference of the American Historical Association (1988), "The Possibilities of American Political Thought" (in possession of author); Habermas (trans. Thomas Burger [with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence]), *The Structure and Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Jean H. Baker, "Politics, Paradigms, and Public Culture," *Journal of American History,* LXXXIV (1997), 898.

mains an advocate of the Habermasian perspective because of its sophisticated definition of the public and its expanded understanding of politics beyond the electoral and legislative. It has served the critical function, he argues, "of helping historians to organize, discuss, and assess the dimensions of 'culture' with an eye toward the power relations in society usually bundled together simply as 'politics.' "[43]

Yet, as Brooke himself suggests, recent histories of political culture rarely concentrate on "power relations in society," at least not in the traditional way. They are essentially studies of popular participation in public celebrations, rituals, parades, and other forms of "out-of-door politics," as well as of the symbols and meanings of those activities as purveyed in a nationally circulating print culture/discourse. As such, they make original and often valuable contributions about how popular participation facilitates nation-formation and identity. Waldstreicher's recent prize-winning book on the origins of American nationalism, for example, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes,* imaginatively reveals the power that ordinary people possess, as well as how they obtain it (even if often indirectly), but it hardly illuminates power's exercise or goals. Cayton observed that Waldstreicher, despite his "marvelous analysis of rhetoric and performance[,] tends to banish from center stage questions of contingency and power," while also neglecting "the impact of the policies of the federal government." Symptomatic of the same problem, Edwards rejected the political culture concept (or "public culture") precisely because it invited "hopelessly broad definitions of *power* that obscure more than they explain."[44]

43 Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XXIX (1998), 54–55, 61, 48. For a representative adaptation of Habermas using the terms "public space," "public culture," and "political culture," see Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1999), 16–20, 115–119. For an example of the political culture and public sphere concepts used together, as well as attention to traditional dimensions of power and policy, see Margaret R. Somers, "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere: Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy," *American Sociological Review,* LVIII (1993), 587–620. Though Somers does not bother to define political culture in that work, she gives an even clearer sense of its meaning in "The Privatization of Citizenship: How to Unthink a Knowledge Culture," in Bonnell and Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn,* 121–161.

44 Two of the books that Brooke reviewed made extensive use of political culture: Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Streets: Festive Culture in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, 1997). Waldstreicher raised a question at the conclusion of his study regarding

Symbolic politics indeed possess the capacity, as Edelman, and others, emphasize, "to serve as powerful means of expression for mass publics"; they also "convey benefits to particular groups." In Edelman's view, rooted in a more skeptical tradition of symbolic analysis than prevails today among historians—owing more to Antonio Gramsci than Geertz—ritual acts are important expressions of discontent, enthusiasm, and involvement, but function only to a minor degree in policy formation. Edelman distinguished sharply between "politics as a spectator sport and political activity as utilized by organized groups to get specific, tangible benefits for themselves." He also distinguished, too sharply, between the mass of spectators for whom politics is "a passing parade of abstract symbols," and the smaller number whose "political actions" get them the "tangible things they want from government."[45]

A vast literature of four decades disputes Edelman's notion that non-elites have no capacity to initiate "political actions." What historians have learned from anthropologists are (1) that publics are not mere passive recipients or consumers of symbols, or mere "material creatures, but also symbolic [and ritual] producers and symbol users," and (2) that in the conflicts of ordinary social life, "some persons invariably control or exploit others. These inequalities are as much disguised, mystified, and lied about as old age and death." Current discussions of power in many political culture studies stray too far from consideration of the few who reap the material benefits, as well as from such mundane items as (in Geertz's words) "the distribution of wealth, control over the instruments of force, flow of the tokens of status, or patterns of personal obligation." "Agency" has trumped "hegemony," almost to the latter's vanishing point. Balance needs to be restored.[46]

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the "quantity of actual participation," but seemed not to answer it (216–219). Newman asserted that ordinary Americans renegotiated the relationship between rulers and ruled, but his findings seem ambiguous (186–192). Cayton, "Review Essay: We Are All Nationalists, We Are All Localists," *Journal of the Early Republic,* XVIII (1998), 525, 527; Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York, 1997), 172 n. 11. For a study explicitly comparative of political cultures and focused on policy, see Rebecca Starr, *A School for Politics: Commercial Lobbying and Political Culture in Early South Carolina* (Baltimore, 1998).

45 Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, 1964), 2, 3, 5, 12.

46 For a critique of Edelman's "very pessimistic, even despairing (he would say realistic) view of the degree to which powerful groups and institutions can shape the perceptions and values of ordinary people," see James Scott, "False Consciousness, or Laying It on Thick," in

Recent history writing about the French Revolution, for example, that has the Revolution producing an entirely new political culture and a "set of discourses or symbolic practices by which claims are made" in politics, "has had the advantage of taking scholars out of the important but overfrequented debating chambers of the National Assembly or Jacobin Clubs into the streets, to look at the press, pamphlets, prints, songs, and ceremonies that made up the new culture." An influential book in this genre is Hunt's *Politics, Culture, Class and the French Revolution* (1984), which makes power the "central concern" because, Hunt argued, it was acquired by the revolutionaries in every part of France. Yet, Hunt explicitly rejected any social analysis of the new political culture that emerged with the revolution, preferring instead to employ the classic political culture approach to uncover "the rules of political behavior . . . . common values, [and] shared expectations." Revolutionary political culture could not be deduced from "social structures, social conflicts, or the social identity of the revolutionaries." Hunt de-emphasized "underlying social or economic interests" to concentrate on behavior: "symbolic practices, such as language, imagery, and gestures. . . . In many ways, the symbolic practices . . . called the new political class [of the revolution] into existence."[47]

Merelman (ed.), *Language Symbolism and Politics* (Boulder, 1992), 209. David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, 1988), 8; Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York, 1974), 5–6; Geertz, "Study of National Character," 208. Gramsci (ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971), 12, focused on the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production." In addition, there was "state coercive power" for those who did not "'consent' either actively or passively." Elsewhere, Gramsci wrote about "corruption-fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations in which . . . the use of force is too dangerous) . . . the weakening and paralysing of one's . . . opponents by the taking over of their leaders, whether covertly or . . . overtly, in order to create confusion and disorder in the opposing ranks" (David Forgacs [ed.], *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935* [New York, 1988], 261). T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review*, XC (1985), 573, pointed out the utility of combining Geertz's approach to integrative cultural symbols without ignoring inequalities of power.

47 T. C. W. Blanning, "Introduction: The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution," in *idem* (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* (Chicago, 1996), 12. The first quoted phrase is Blanning's quotation from Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 4. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, Class and the French Revolution*, xi, 10, 12, 13. Hunt has also figured as a leading spokesperson for the "cultural turn." See *idem*, "Introduction: History,

Hunt admitted that her study eschewed "specific policies, politicians, partisan conflicts, formal institutions or organizations." Her interests lay in "the underlying patterns in political culture that made possible the emergence of distinctive policies and the appearance of new kinds of politicians, conflicts and organizations." (How "specific policies" differed from "distinctive policies" was not clear, but, in any case, Hunt showed scant interest in policy.) The effect was seemingly to divorce power from policies: "Political symbols and rituals were not metaphors of power; they were the means and ends of power itself." Following this line of reasoning, Hunt insightfully expanded on the "politicization of the everyday" and how the Revolution "enormously increased the points from which power could be exercised." The power of the revolutionary state expanded at every level "as people of various stations invented and learned new political 'microtechniques.' Taking minutes, sitting in a club meeting, reading a republican poem, wearing a cockade, sewing a banner, singing a song, filling out a form, making a patriotic donation, electing an official—all these actions converged to produce a republican citizenry and a legitimate government. . . . Power, consequently, was not a finite quantity possessed by one faction or another; it was rather a complex set of activities and relationships that created previously unsuspected resources." In Hunt's rendition, power transmuted into participation and a sense of efficacy—meaningful, to be sure, but linked only indirectly with policies.[48]

Hunt discussed a wide variety of "political cultures" throughout her book and provided an illuminating description of the new symbols, language, rhetoric, thought, and expectations of politics inaugurated by the Revolution. In only one paragraph in her conclusion, however, did she address "the social and economic changes brought about by the Revolution" that were "not revolutionary. Nobles were able to return to their titles and to much of their land. . . . the structure of landholding remained much the same; the rich got richer, and the small peasants consolidated their

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Culture, and Text," in *idem* (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), 1–22, which has influenced political scientists as well; Elizabeth J. Perry, "Introduction: Chinese Political Culture Revisited," in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and *idem* (eds.), *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989* (Boulder, 1992), 5 (Perry's quotation of the paragraph cited here).

48 Hunt, *Politics,* 14, 54, 56, 72.

hold, thanks to the abolition of feudal dues. Industrial capitalism still grew at a snail's pace. In the realm of politics, in contrast, almost everything changed. . . . Revolution became a tradition, and republicanism an enduring option. Afterwards, kings could not rule without assemblies, and noble domination of public affairs only provoked more revolution." The other complex changes that Hunt described were indeed momentous, but the question remains, Should "the realm of politics" be so divorced from social and economic continuities? The point is not to denigrate Hunt's justly important study. But even new vistas of insight and understanding, such as those that Hunt has helped to open, can be confining, or at least incomplete.[49]

The new cultural history has helped to make political history exciting again, but, as Donald Kelley observed, the current "turn" has been preceded by at least three innovative schools of historical inquiry, beginning in the later nineteenth century. Biernacki also noted continuities between the new cultural history and the "old" social history that it was meant to transcend, criticizing culturalists for "building explanations that rest on appeals to a 'real' and irreducible ground of history, though that footing is now cultural and linguistic rather than (or as much as) social and economic." This essay, however, urges that appeals to cultural-linguistic and social-economic "footings" (dare I say causes?) continue to be made as parts of multicausal explanations.[50]

Similarly, recent admonitions that political culture studies adhere closely to the language of historical actors seem to ignore that political-cultural historians have been unpacking words, meanings, and their contexts since Pocock, Hexter, Bailyn, and others did so a generation or two ago. In a series of essays in the 1960s, Pocock advised experimenting with "techniques for identifying

49 *Ibid.,* 221. For the variety of political cultures discussed, see *ibid.,* 74, 181, 192 (revolutionary), 140, 147 (regional), 145 (the left), 222 (Old Regime). For a similar critique of Hunt's book, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990), 99–103. For a critique that preceded Hunt's book, see Fox-Genovese, "On the Social History of the French Revolution," in *idem, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1983), 213–248.

50 Donald R. Kelley, "The Old Cultural History," *History of the Human Sciences,* IX (1996), 102; Richard Biernacki, "Method and Metaphor After the New Cultural History," in Bonnell and Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn,* 62–92 (quotation on 63).

and exploring the paradigmatic languages in which political discourse has been carried on." "At any given moment," Pocock insisted, "the 'meanings' (one cannot avoid the plural) of a given utterance must be found by locating it in a paradigmatic texture, a multiplicity of contexts, which the verbal force of the utterance itself cannot completely determine." In the same decade, Bailyn chided colonialists for dismissing revolutionary pamphlets as propaganda: "This language, in all its extravagance, is a key not only to the thoughts and motivations of the leaders of the Revolution but to their actions as well."[51]

It is one thing, however, to seek "to recover the experience of politics through the analysis of contemporary language," and another to accept the proposition that "language is constitutive of social reality" and is the only vehicle for understanding "activities and experiences (power, class, struggles, interests, inequality, and relationships of all kinds) that are inevitably construed through a cultural/linguistic lens." Regardless of whether it is sensible to construe the past as language (to simplify a complex and contentious controversy), United States historians of political culture, in pragmatic fashion, have operated for a long time (as have most political scientists) on the premise that "[e]mbedded in the meanings of words are traces of the values, assumptions and operating principles, in short the beliefs, of those who employ political language." They have understood that analysis of such beliefs is a key to understanding social and cultural change.[52]

Is political culture a *theory,* as recently asserted in the pages of this journal? Rotberg's quotations from Almond, Verba, and Pye

51 Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought," in *idem, Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1989), 35, 29; J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (London, 1961), 202–210; *idem,* "Republic Virtue, Liberty, and the Political Universe of J. G. A. Pocock," in *idem, On Historians: Reappraisals of Some of the Masters of Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 255–303; Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics,* 11. See also, Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Harry S. Stout, "Culture, Structure and the 'New History': A Critique and an Agenda," *Computers and the Humanities,* IX (1975), 227; Baker, *Affairs of Party,* 12.

52 Jay M. Smith, "No More Language Games: Words, Beliefs, and the Political Culture of Early Modern France," *American Historical Review,* CII (1997), 1413, 1414, 1416. The debate about the "linguistic turn" comprised several issues of *Past & Present* during 1991 to 1992 and *Social History* from 1992 to 1995. See David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, "Social History and Its Discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language," *Social History,* XVII (1992), 165–188.

do not seem to justify the term, from which even Almond backed away (see above). It remains, however, a powerful organizing concept and approach to political and social life. Historians could benefit from emulating political scientists' greater rigor in identifying the political cultures that they discuss and in recognizing the inherent comparativeness of the concept. It is not just that political culture "has always implicitly promised . . . that it would help observers to understand what made Russians behave differently from, say, the English, or the Chinese differently from the Japanese, in the conduct of daily political affairs." The logic of political culture is always comparative, whether its unit of measure is a city, state, region, class, group, or nation. Historians vary widely in the extent to which they have made comparison explicit, and when they do compare, they usually do so by time rather than place (for example, colonial contrasted with post-Revolutionary or early nineteenth-century political culture). Gutmann and Pullum recently described not only the change from one (national) political culture to another over time, but also related it to differences among "state-level" and "ethnic-group political cultures." Too often, however, the political culture of a spatial unit is invoked as explanation with no suggestion of how its culture resembles/differs from similar cities, states, or nations.[53]

Political culture also illuminates forms of power and their consequences, but cultural historians must overcome their reluctance to integrate parades in the streets with elites' competition for, and management of, tangible resources. Silbey recently noted

53 Rotberg, "Social Capital and Political Culture in Africa, Asia, Australasia, and Europe," 341–342. Writing about the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*'s two special issues on "Patterns of Social Capital: Stability and Change in Comparative Perspective"—XXIX, Winter and Spring—Rotberg also asserted, "The imposing thread that unites this collection is political culture, and the contribution to it of social capital" (356). Yet, a majority of contributors did not use the concept explicitly, and one clearly preferred the terms "public culture" and "public sphere." See Raymond Grew, "Finding Social Capital: The French Revolution in Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XXIX (1999), 410, 417, 427, 428, 432. Grew's essay was also noteworthy for its apt connection of cultural analysis to the exercise of power. Lane, "Political Culture: Residual Category or General Theory?" 364; Levine, "Issues in the Study of Culture and Politics," 77; Welch, *Concept of Political Culture,* 149–152; Elkins and Simeon, "Cause," 140; Myron P. Gutmann and Sara M. Pullum, "From Local to National Political Cultures: Social Capital and Civic Organization in the Great Plains," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* XXIX (1999), 725–762. Hunt, *Politics,* provided surprisingly little description of Old Regime political culture; see, e.g., 222. Margaret C. Jacob, "Social Studies after Social Construction: The Turn Toward the Comparative and the Global," in Bonnell and Hunt, *Beyond the Cultural Turn,* 95–120.

the aversion, even hostility, of social and cultural historians to "ordinary politics" (elections, voters, legislatures, policies, etc.) and especially to the "domain of white political power." He exhorted cultural historians (especially those of race, class, and gender) to pay attention to "ordinary political activity," as well as the "political classes' exercise of power." His plea deserves to be heard. It may well be time to reverse Geertz's dictum that pomp serves power (too), not (just) power pomp.[54]

Mainstream approaches to political culture in political science often display a similar shortfall in comprehending power. Nonetheless, historians may well profit from considering the history of the concept beyond their own discipline. For one thing, they might gain renewed appreciation for their own "more eclectic and holistic" approach, bridging beliefs and material cultures, the value of which is even conceded by numerous political scientists. When a political scientist admonishes colleagues that, instead "of talking of the explanatory power of political culture, we need first to explain political culture"—that is, its evolution, ontology, and further development—he is recommending the kind of work that historians do, and do well. Historians begin, or should begin, by assuming that political culture is what needs to be explained.[55]

Finally, historians of political culture would do well to keep in mind—for humility's sake—the indeterminacy shadowing the political culture concept, especially given the continued reliance of most definitions of it on dispositions and mentalities: "atti-

54 Silbey, "American Political History," 5–6, 9. For an example of what Silbey advocates, see Jane Sherron De Hart, "Women's History and Political History: Bridging Old Divides," in John F. Marszalek and Wilson D. Miscamble (eds.), *American Political History: Essays on the State of the Discipline* (Notre Dame, 1997), 25–53; Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery;* Formisano, "The Party Period Revisited," *Journal of American History,* LXXXVI (1999), 93–120. Geertz's original line was, "Power served pomp, not pomp power" (*Interpretation of Cultures,* 335).

55 Robert Kelley, "Political Culture," in Mary Kupiec Cayton, Elliot J. Gorn, Peter W. Williams (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1993), III, 2270; Street, "Political Culture—from Civic Culture to Mass Culture," 110; Hitchner, "Political Science and Political Culture," 552; Gray, "Conclusions," in Brown and *idem* (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States,* 254–255; Laitin, "Civic Culture at 30," 171. See Roy C. Macridis, "Interest Groups in Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Politics,* XXIII (1961), 45, which recommends a "good understanding of the historical dimension" of polities to acquire "a comprehensive comparative look at the main features of a political system: political culture, social configuration, leadership and governmental institutions." Gutmann and Pullum, "From Local to National Political Cultures," in their analysis of social capital in the Great Plains, positioned political culture both as what was being explained (726, 732, 749, 759) and also as what was explaining change and associated phenomena (735, 756, 758).

tudes," "orientations," "beliefs," "values," and the like. More than thirty years ago, Fleming demonstrated how the etymology of "attitude" revealed the word's transformation from something physical and visible into a conceptual "black box." Fleming's point is reflected in political scientists' continual quest for more precise meaning, through an interminable shuffle of terms and definitions—Almond, for example, defining an "attitude" as a "*propensity* in an individual to perceive, interpret, and act toward a particular object in a particular way" and referring not just to "basic beliefs and values commitments" but also "primordial attachments"; or Merelman plotting the search for "deep structures . . . *inaccessible* to direct observation" (italics mine). This observation of political scientists' semi- , or even unconscious, pursuit of the ultimate key word is not intended to discourage the use of any term, nor that of the political culture concept. The concept and its allied terms have proven effective for a long time (according to Almond, since the writing of the Bible). United States historians have long derived inspiration from the discourse of Alexis de Tocqueville, that early political culturalist, and his use of "moeurs," "the habits of heart," or, simply, "mental habits." The "historical turn" in political culture studies has always been present. It needs, however, to be exploited fully and self-consciously, with particular attention to explicit comparison and the several dimensions of power in society.[56]

56 Donald Fleming, "Attitude: The History of a Concept," in Fleming and Bailyn (eds.), *Perspectives in American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), I, 285–365; Patrick, "Political Culture," 278–279; Brown, "Introduction," in Brown and Gray (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States,* 1; Almond, "Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept," 13; *idem, Discipline Divided,* 152; Merelman, *Partial Visions,* 48; James Caesar, "Alexis de Tocqueville on Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual," *American Political Science Review,* LXXIX (1985), 656–657.