



Imagining Deliberative Democracy in the Early American Republic

Sandra M. Gustafson

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Deliberation, in recent years, has emerged as a form of civic engagement worth reclaiming. In this persuasive book, Sandra M. Gustafson combines historical literary analysis and political theory in order to demonstrate that current democratic practices of deliberation are rooted in the civic rhetoric that flourished in the early American republic.

Though the U.S. Constitution made deliberation central to republican self-governance, the ethical emphasis on group deliberation often conflicted with the rhetorical focus on persuasive speech. From Alexis de Tocqueville's ideas about the deliberative basis of American democracy through the works of Walt Whitman, John Dewey, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr., Gustafson shows how writers and speakers have made the aesthetic and political possibilities of deliberation central to their autobiographies, manifestos, novels, and orations. Examining seven key writers from the early American republic—including James Fenimore Cooper, David Crockett, and Daniel Webster—whose works of deliberative imagination explored the intersections of style and democratic substance, Gustafson offers a mode of historical and textual analysis that displays the wide range of resources imaginative language can contribute to political life.

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