



The Civic Constitution: Civic Visions and Struggles in the Path toward Constitutional Democracy

Elizabeth Beaumont

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The role of the Constitution in American political history is contentious not simply because of battles over meaning. Equally important is precisely who participated in contests over meaning. Was it simply judges, or did legislatures have a strong say? And what about the public's role in effecting constitutional change? In *The Civic Constitution*, Elizabeth Beaumont focuses on the last category, and traces the efforts of citizens to reinvent constitutional democracy during four crucial eras: the revolutionaries of the 1770s and 1780s; the civic founders of state republics and the national Constitution in the early national period; abolitionists during the antebellum and Civil War eras; and, finally, suffragists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout, she argues that these groups should be recognized as founders and co-founders of the U.S. Constitution. Though often slighted in modern constitutional debates, these women and men developed distinctive constitutional creeds and practices, challenged existing laws and social norms, expanded the boundaries of citizenship, and sought to translate promises of liberty, equality, and justice into more robust and concrete forms. Their civic ideals and struggles not only shaped the text, design, and public meaning of the U.S. Constitution, but reconstructed its membership and transformed the fundamental commitments of the American political community. An innovative expansion on the concept of popular constitutionalism, *The Civic Constitution* is a vital contribution to the growing body of literature on how ordinary people have shaped the parameters of America's fundamental laws.

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