



Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century.

Glenn C. Altschuler, Stuart M. Blumin

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What did politics and public affairs mean to those generations of Americans who first experienced democratic self-rule? Taking their cue from vibrant political campaigns and very high voter turnouts, historians have depicted the nineteenth century as an era of intense and widespread political enthusiasm. But rarely have these historians examined popular political engagement directly, or within the broader contexts of day-to-day life. In this bold and in-depth look at Americans and their politics, Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin argue for a more complex understanding of the "space" occupied by politics in nineteenth-century American society and culture. Mining such sources as diaries, letters, autobiographies, novels, cartoons, contested-election voter testimony to state legislative committees, and the partisan newspapers of representative American communities ranging from Massachusetts and Georgia to Texas and California, the authors explore a wide range of political actions and attitudes. They consider the enthusiastic commitment celebrated by historians together with various forms of skepticism, conflicted engagement, detachment, and hostility that rarely have been recognized as part of the American political landscape. *Rude Republic* sets the political parties and their noisy and attractive campaign spectacles, as well as the massive turnout of voters on election day, within the communal social structure and calendar, the local human landscape of farms, roads, and county towns, and the organizational capacities of emerging nineteenth-century institutions. Political action and engagement are set, too, within the tide of events: the construction of the mass-based party system, the gathering crisis over slavery and disunion, and the gradual expansion of government (and of cities) in the post-Civil War era. By placing the question of popular engagement within these broader social, cultural, and historical contexts, the authors bring new understanding to the complex trajectory of American democracy.

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