

Masons targeted Unitarians as threats to the proper culture of evangelical republicanism.

Is this simply reactionary populism? Upwardly mobile evangelicals who feared Masons, Unitarians, and freethinkers were ensconced in a region where a culture existed that largely fit their needs and upheld their values because they had so much power to decide what happened there. The opposite was true of workingmen who were wary of an aggressive new political economy that marginalized them. The first movement flourished because its participants had the ability to punish those who did not measure up to their well-developed sense of moral superiority. The second arose because artisans' traditional values and self-worth were being destroyed. Somewhere in this distinction, and the fundamental material difference that produced it, is a need for further explanation of a spectrum that contained reactionary and progressive impulses within populism.

Formisano's theme is crucial in American history. Since the Revolution, citizens, especially those of the lower classes, have sought an expansion of democracy, more direct involvement in the political process, and more power over their lives than their leaders have wanted them to acquire. Though this populist desire has been widespread, populist language, when used by those who were leery of populist movements, never redressed those movements' grievances. As populist language became the dominant American political idiom, hypocrisy and spin became the dominant political praxis.

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A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City. By ERICA ARMSTRONG DUNBAR. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. xvi, 196 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.)

Among the many dramatic changes of the 1960s was a new focus in American historical writing, a focus that initiated a narrative that was more inclusive of the variety of Americans' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. But that inclusiveness was often lurching and fragmented; as Gloria T. Hull noted in her review of black women's studies, "all the women are white, all the blacks are men." Erica Armstrong Dunbar's *A Fragile Freedom* is among the best and richest of the number of new historical works that aim to meld the "sub-topical" groups of the American narrative. It offers readers a more well-rounded synthesis of some of the social dynamics of antebellum America.

Dunbar's work does several things well. First, it helps add specifics to what historians know intuitively: that African Americans in antebellum "free" states made conscious decisions to remain in a sort of demimonde of emancipation.

This ranged from indenturing themselves and/or their children to remaining in service to protective former masters in order to avoid kidnapping. They also did so to seek the umbrella of “belonging” that was so crucial in a society with no public version of social security.

Second, in a seamless motion, Dunbar shifts her readers from the relationships between black semifree women and the white world to the relationships among women who shared a similar racial identity but not the same culture, values, or notions of decorum. Quilting together a fascinating patchwork from scraps of court records, church committee minutes, newspaper advertisements, city directories, and letters, Dunbar gives us a glimpse as to how cultural norms were navigated and negotiated within particular sectors of Philadelphia’s black communities. She focuses in particular on the importance of church committees in setting and enforcing of these norms.

Finally, by examining the exchange of gift books among middle- and upper-class black women, Dunbar takes us to the “mental and moral feast” laid out by these women as they made a space for themselves in the emerging print culture that fed, and was fed by, the developing market revolution of America’s early decades. Concluding that what was at stake was a quest for autonomy and the attempt to fashion a new political landscape, she makes us wish that she had compressed chapters 1 and 2—which repeat information easily found elsewhere—and given even more analysis in chapters 5 and 6, which introduce heretofore unexplored primary data and tantalizing ideas about how that data might be exploited.

A highly readable style and comprehensive bibliography that stretches across more than a century of scholarship add to the value of this short study. Dunbar has laid the groundwork and created an intriguing template for integrating upper- and lower-class interactions, issues, and tensions with other variables such as geography, religion, and behaviors. Let’s hope that other scholars take the opportunity to expand upon Dunbar’s work.

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Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910. By KALI N. GROSS. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. xii, 260 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95.)

Kali N. Gross’s *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880–1910* is a well-documented study that provides demographic data on the crimes, class, and geographic origins of Philadelphia’s black female population. But this study is also much more. It offers the reader a glimpse into the social milieu of the world in which these women lived, worked,