



# **Era of Experimentation: American Political Practices in the Early Republic (Jeffersonian America)**

*Daniel Peart*

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In *Era of Experimentation*, Daniel Peart challenges the pervasive assumption that the present-day political system, organized around two competing parties, represents the logical fulfillment of participatory democracy. Recent accounts of "the rise of American democracy" between the Revolution and the Civil War applaud political parties for opening up public life to mass participation and making government responsive to the people. Yet this celebratory narrative tells only half of the story.

By exploring American political practices during the early 1820s, a period of particular flux in the young republic, Peart argues that while parties could serve as vehicles for mass participation, they could also be employed to channel, control, and even curb it. Far from equating democracy with the party system, Americans freely experimented with alternative forms of political organization and resisted efforts to confine their public presence to the polling place.

*Era of Experimentation* demonstrates the sheer variety of political practices that made up what subsequent scholars have labeled "democracy" in the early United States. Peart also highlights some overlooked consequences of the nationalization of competitive two-party politics during the antebellum period, particularly with regard to the closing of alternative avenues for popular participation.

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