



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America by Sara M. Evans; Harry C. Boyte

Joel Rogers

Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 16, No. 5. (Sep., 1987), pp. 667-668.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-3061%28198709%2916%3A5%3C667%3AFSTSOD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

Contemporary Sociology is currently published by American Sociological Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/asa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

participants, and barren as explanations of why democratic movements occur at all. The criticisms are related. The puzzle of democratic resistance in America, the authors argue, can only be solved if one sees the ways in which traditional values, and the identities of their carriers, are continually reinterpreted within the "free spaces" of voluntary, communal organizations.

Once this is grasped, however, "there is little mysterious or unknowable about democratic movements for change" (p. 17). In each, it will be found, conditions permitted the construction of an environment in which ordinary people were "able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue" (p. 17). This learning process, and the (re)discovery of group identities it permits, enables movements to withstand the pressures of a hostile political system, and to develop their democratic vision.

If free spaces are the key to democratic change, communities are the key to free spaces. For free spaces to have any stability, they must be constructed out of the particularities of communal life. It follows that those particularities themselves should be reinterpreted. Instead of being seen as barriers to democratic action (as, for example, ethnic identities are commonly seen as barriers to "class" consciousness), they should be understood as the glue that holds free spaces together. The same may be said of the organizational form that free spaces take. Instead of being seen merely as shields from the intrusions of the state, or defenses against the encroachments of a faceless "modernity," voluntary communal organizations should be regarded as the necessary building blocks of democratic resistance.

The bulk of *Free Spaces* is devoted to substantiating these claims through an examination of major social movements. Evans and Boyte briefly consider black struggles, the women's movement, major worker protests, and the Populist rebellion. In each case, they find, these movements relied upon communal organizations, which in each case reinterpreted past traditions of struggle, which reinterpretation in each case permitted a widening of the scope of democratic claims.

The discussion of black struggles focuses on the black church, and the continual reinterpretation of biblical promises of deliverance. The discussion of the women's movement explores the interplay of two traditions of resistance—one centering on the struggle for political rights, the other on using women's private experiences to redefine public responsibilities—as developed within organizations as diverse as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, NOW, and the

Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America, by SARA M. EVANS and HARRY C. BOYTE. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. 228 pp. \$16.95 cloth.

JOEL ROGERS
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Free Spaces is a book about theories and movements of democratic change in America. Early on, Evans and Boyte criticize prevailing "resource mobilization" approaches to social movements, which they fault for being insufficiently attentive to the values of movement

consciousness-raising group. The discussion of worker protests centers on the tradition of radical republicanism, and the importance of ethnic ties and community support for successful worker struggles. The discussion of the Populists, similarly, traces the history of the Farmers Alliance, its myriad community extensions, and its reworking of republican themes. *Free Spaces* concludes with a claim that free spaces still exist (here a purported rise of "value-based" community organizing is offered in evidence). Instead of succumbing to pessimism, democratic critics of the current order should ask about the present sources of democratic community, and the means by which particular expressions of that community can be extended. "Such questions confer the dignity of historical authorship on ordinary people" (p. 202).

I have no objection to the prospect of ordinary people authoring history, and—to the extent that *Free Spaces* is offered in support of the claim that they have sometimes tried to do so, have sometimes had partial success, have always reworked traditional values in the process, and have commonly relied on organizations in their communities for support—no objection to the book.

But Evans and Boyte seem to think they have done more than that. They seem to think they have dissolved the "mystery" of social movements by pointing out an obvious common feature of such movements: "free spaces." But this dissolves no mystery at all, unless one can specify the particular conditions under which "free spaces" themselves emerge, and here the authors fall short. In their historical discussion they only argue from the existence of movements to the existence of the preconditions for their preconditions (free spaces). Such arguments are unhelpful, particularly when (as now), there are few signs of democratic resistance. There are still, after all, many black churches in America, but they are not ignited with the protests that marked the 1960s. Why not, exactly? There are no answers here.

Evans and Boyte's single-minded focus on secondary associations, to the exclusion of formal political institutions, is also potentially misleading. One of the lessons in the history of resistance that they recount is that the state can either constrain or encourage secondary associations, and that without affirmative state action it is nearly impossible to redress background inequalities in wealth and power. To be sure, democratic theory needs an account of secondary associations. But it also needs an account of the democratic state, and the democracy it might order and preserve, more developed than the "rule of the people" with which Evans and Boyte seem content.