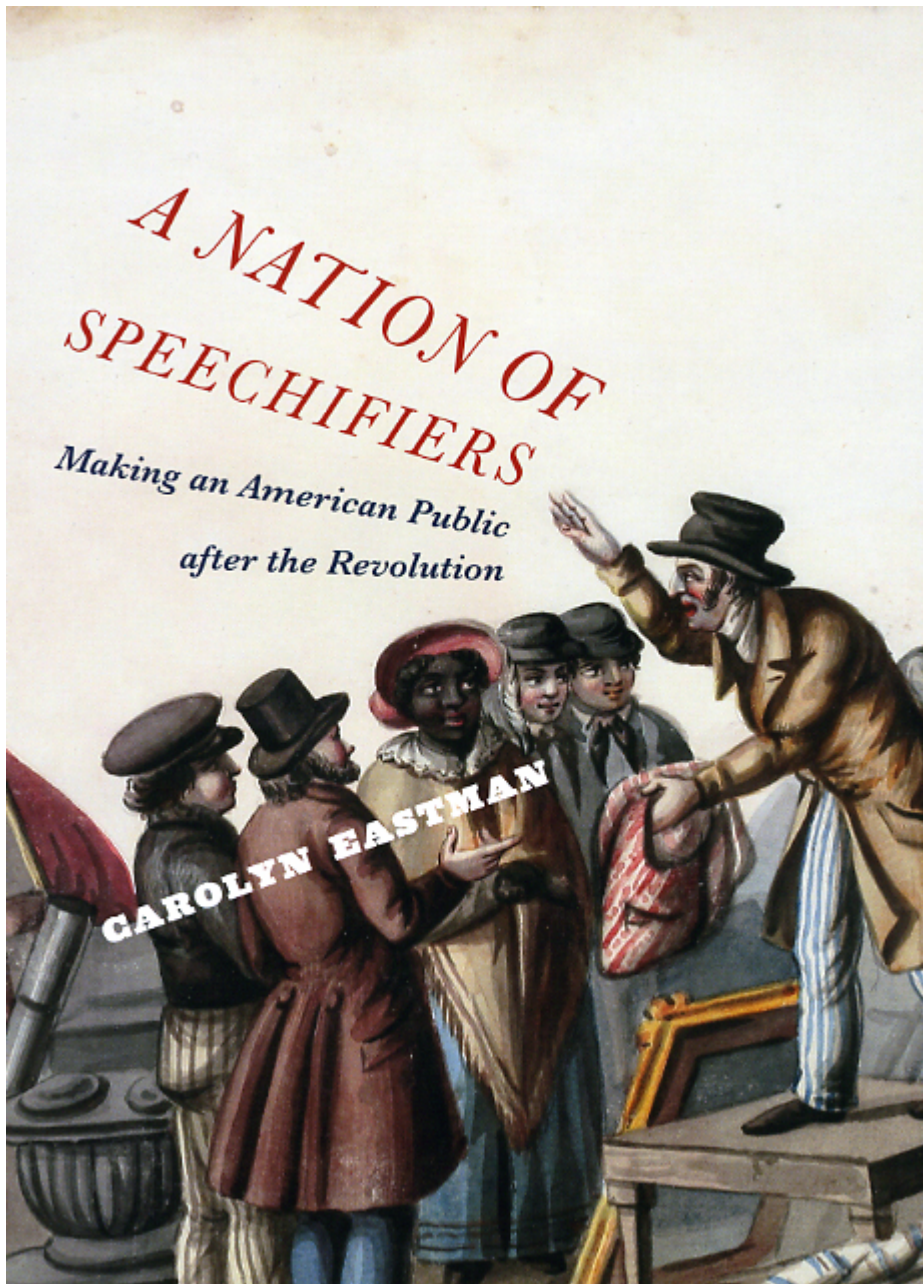
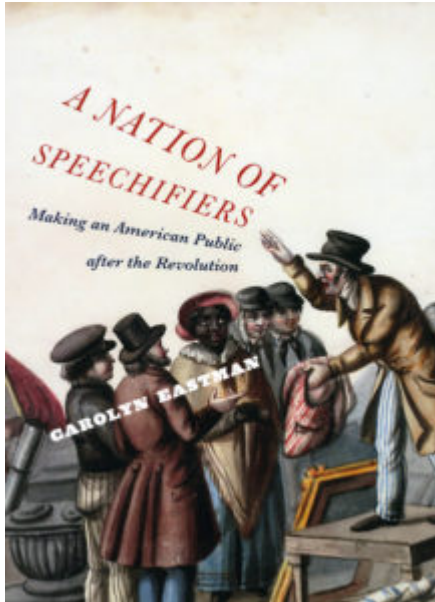


## Speaking and Listening



The Marquis de Lafayette visited Lexington, Kentucky, in May 1825 as part of his triumphal tour of the United States, during which the American people expressed a massive outpouring of love and gratitude for the old hero and his sacrifices in the American Revolution. While in Lexington, Lafayette paid a visit to the Lafayette Female Academy, recently renamed in his honor, where a committee of the academy's pupils greeted him in front of a large crowd. Mary McIntosh and Maria Brown Duncan each delivered an oration to the crowd and to Lafayette to welcome him on behalf of "Kentucky's band of PATRIOT DAUGHTERS." Brown Duncan assured the crowd that, even though young women were "incapacitated from engaging in the active concerns of the government," they were more than able to perform the civic duty of paying tribute to the visiting

hero. After the ceremony, the girls gave Lafayette beautifully hand-written copies of their speeches, which were later published as a pamphlet.



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This extraordinary occasion highlights important points about oratory and speech-making in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. McIntosh and Brown Duncan were exceptional in being chosen to deliver speeches to the distinguished hero, Lafayette. But their speeches also followed in an established tradition of young women speaking at academic exhibitions in the early republic. The number of girls who spoke at public occasions was declining by the 1820s, but McIntosh and Brown Duncan's presentations to Lafayette illustrate that his traveling companion, the British author Frances Wright, was certainly not the first woman to declaim publicly in the United States when she was attacked for her own controversial speaking tour in 1828 and 1829.

Carolyn Eastman underplays ceremonial occasions such as Lafayette's tour in her new book, but her scholarship offers a number of thought-provoking insights that can help us to understand the importance of such oratory in the early republic. Recently, many scholars have probed how "the public" constituted itself in the United States in the decades following the Revolution by participating in festive culture, reading books and newspapers, commemorating the Revolutionary War, attending religious revivals, admiring portraits of esteemed leaders, and taking part in partisan political organizations and rituals. Eastman brings new attention to the role of oratory, and the interaction between speechmaking and print culture, in the building of the American public between the 1790s and the 1830s.

Eastman seeks to use the history of popular oratory to show how "nonelites" used speeches and print to include themselves in a collective public that defined American national identity in the early republic. She wants "to

demonstrate the broad political import of speeches and writings by ordinary people within the context of constructing an American public," by which she means not only the "public sphere" as defined by Jürgen Habermas, but also some more specific forms of collective self-understanding (5). Race, class, and especially gender play important roles in Eastman's analysis of the ways that giving, listening to, and printing speeches helped people who were outside of power define themselves as part of "a public and eventually to identify as national citizens" (4).

Eastman takes a creative approach to her topic. In the first half of the book, she examines how elocutionary education underwent a shift toward more nationalistic themes after 1810; how the "rise and fall" of girls' public oratory first created and then destroyed a possible female "counterpublic"; and how the frequent repetition of Indian speeches created nationalist, white identities in school children and helped to generate the trope of the "vanishing Indian" in American culture and politics. In the second half, Eastman examines case studies that she sets up as representative of important debates over definitions of "the public" in the early republic. She uncovers how print and oratory sometimes reinforced one another and sometimes clashed as she examines the magazine writings of the New York Calliopean Society, the speeches and publications of protesting journeymen printers, and the clashes between Frances Wright and newspaper publishers in the late 1820s.

Along the way, Eastman makes several significant points. Her examination of schoolbooks is thought-provoking, and she juxtaposes insights about school curricula with the contents of popular instructional speeches in a clever way to demonstrate how "during the second half of the early republic, oratory and print media reimagined the public order—evoking schoolchildren who uncritically admired their leaders, girls who embraced their domestic and nonpolitical roles, and Indians worthy primarily of pity" (111). The chapter on Frances Wright offers an extremely important corrective to historiography that claims Wright was a trailblazer because women were prohibited from speaking in public, especially to "mixed audiences," before her 1820s speaking tour.

Eastman creatively shows how speaking, listening, publishing, and reading were intertwined, and her readers will come away with a new appreciation for the auditory dimensions of identity formation. While the majority of her evidence comes from the northeast, Eastman's approach to analyzing oratory does offer a significant addition to the study of national identity. Many scholars have focused on speeches by famous Americans and their audiences, but Eastman provides the tools to think about those audiences giving speeches of their own.

Eastman argues that "rather than focusing on canonical texts or prominent authors, *A Nation of Speechifiers* examines a profusion of oratory and writing by nonelites and their active uses of the media" (5). Eastman does not do enough to convince the reader that the category of "nonelites" can apply equally to all of her subjects. Surely all students at girls academies were disenfranchised by their sex, but many came from resolutely wealthy "elite"

families and would go on to exercise a large measure of societal influence. It is not clear what interests the middle-class clerks and businessmen who joined the Calliopean Society shared with the struggling journeymen printers—especially since the rising market economy offered each group opposing opportunities for upward mobility. Frances Wright positioned herself outside mainstream culture as a radical utopian reformer and female activist, but was she truly “nonelite?” Eastman never discusses Wright’s association with Lafayette, her visit to the U.S. Congress, or her discourse with many prominent authors and politicians. Eastman does helpfully point us to how all of her examined groups and individuals used oratory to position themselves, but she does not convince us that they necessarily shared a common or “nonelite” sense of identity.

Eastman’s book, and her claim that various groups used oratory and print to think of themselves as citizens, would be strengthened by more attention to how these groups interacted with elites, even if she wants to hold on to the idea that her subjects were all firmly outside that category themselves. More discussion of how printers’ speeches and toasts resonated with Jeffersonian themes or how girls’ speeches stood apart from politicians’ prescriptions for gendered behavior would probably strengthen Eastman’s claim for the importance of these group’s self-perceptions. The ceremony with the Lafayette Female Academy students and the Marquis de Lafayette was certainly not the only occasion when young women such as those studied by Eastman interacted with powerful men in real and symbolic ways that must have influenced their own sense of politics and citizenship.

Eastman offers her voice to the growing number of scholars who helpfully urge us to recognize how those who were outside of power helped to construct public culture and define the issues of the day during the early republic. But her work also reminds us that perhaps a history that includes both elites and “nonelites” will ultimately offer the fullest picture of “the public.” In the meantime, readers will happily finish Eastman’s book with a renewed appreciation for oratory in the early republic.