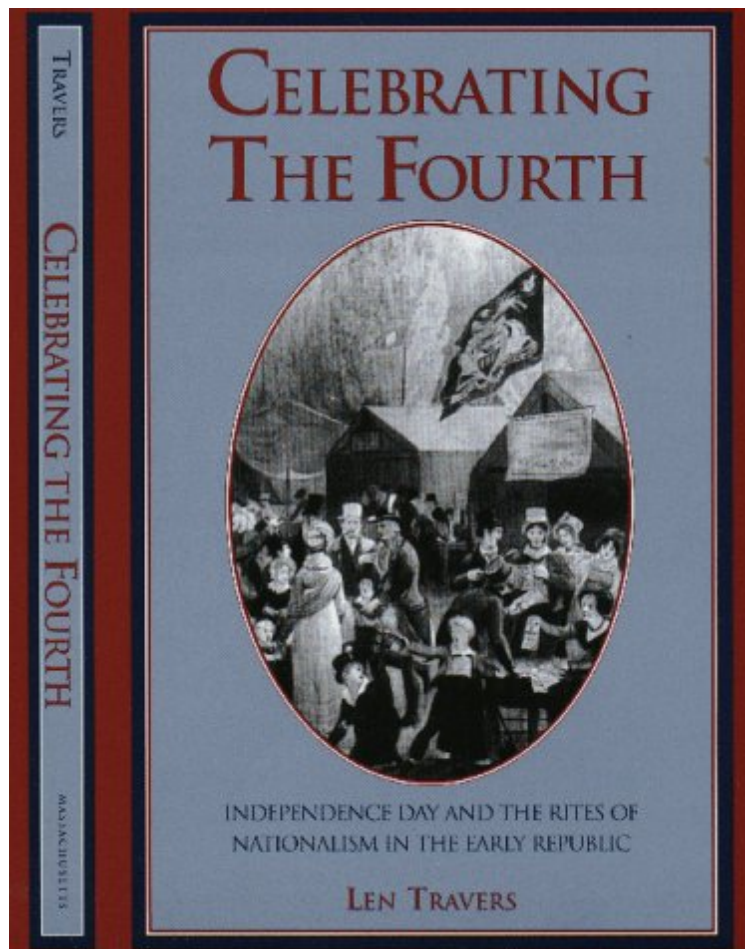


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Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic

Len Travers

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Public rituals have always held a vital place in American culture. By far the noisiest and most popular of these to emerge in the nation's early years was Independence Day. After a decade of fitful starts, the Fourth of July eclipsed local and regional patriotic observances to become the premier "American Jubilee." Celebrating the Fourth provides a history of this holiday and explores its role in shaping a national identity and consciousness in three cities - Boston,

Charleston, and Philadelphia - during the first fifty years of the American republic. Independence Day celebrations justified, validated, and helped maintain nationalism among people unused to offering political allegiance beyond their own state borders. As the observances became increasingly popular and symbolically important, political partisans competed hotly for the right to control the meaning of the festivals.

"Travers traces the origins and functions of the quintessential American holiday from the first festivals in 1777 to the Jubilee of Independence in 1826. Applying anthropological analyses of social rituals, he skillfully explicates the rich symbolic content of such activities as processions, banquets, and entertainments. By examining Fourth of July celebrations in Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston, he is able to note regional variations and to discuss the interplay between local/regional and national identities and interests. [An] excellent book."American Historical "Travers's well-informed, thoughtful, and perceptive decipherings of Independence Day celebrations make a significant contribution to our understanding of the importance of ritual in early republican political culture."William and Mary Quarterly"Travers, in *Celebrating the Fourth*, presents a richly detailed and analytically ambitious account of political rituals during the half-century after 1776. The Fourth of July, he argues, was important because it was one of the only annual rituals that transcended region, class, and faction. National identity neither erupted spontaneously nor spread from the one-sided distribution of pamphlets; rather, it took shape in the midst of an evolving negotiation between organizers and spectators."Journal of the Early Republic"In a richly documented work that will appeal to historians, social scientists, folklorists, and general readers alike, Travers examines the rituals and symbols associated with the U.S. celebration of the Fourth of July. Offers valuable insights into Americans' national vision and ceremonies of the present."Choice"[A] thoughtful, instructive, and entertaining book. Travers adds detail and clarity to our map of early American history by concentrating on the way in which Americans understood and performed their new national ritual."(London) Times Literary Supplement"A well-written, well-researched book that deserves the careful attention of all students of the politics and culture of the early republic."Journal of American History

About the Author
Len Travers is assistant director of the Center for the Study of New England History at the Massachusetts Historical Society.