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Democracy and Collective Identity in the EU and the USA*

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Abstract

Core state powers continue moving to the centre of the European polity, yet a sense of collective identity among EU citizens remains fragile. We argue that participatory democracy at the European level is a missing element that might create a more robust collective identity in Europe. We examine the history of polity formation in the early American case to probe the link between collective identity and practices of democratic participation, focusing on contestation about the 1789 US Constitution and the creation of pan-US political parties in the early 19th century. Everyday democratic practices helped both to represent and to constitute the nationalization of politics in the early USA, as it moved from being a de facto international organization to a unified polity. This suggests that practices of democracy may likewise help to generate a more robust collective political identity in the EU. The historical record makes clear, however, that these processes are often exclusionary, uncertain, and far from unidirectional.

Keywords: comparative political development; democracy; EU; identity; United States

Introduction

Collective identity has long been understood by scholars to be a glue binding polities together. For Anderson (1991) it is an imagined community of citizens who feel a sense of common belonging despite not actually knowing one another that underpins the modern nation. Today, many core state powers have been moved to the centre of the European polity, even while the EU faces economic, political and social challenges. Yet EU citizens' collective identity remains fragile and shallow (Kuhn, 2015; McNamara, 2015). We focus here on one of the key missing elements that could create a more robust collective identity in the EU: practices of democratic participation at the European level. We examine polity formation in the early American case to suggest there is a link between the practices of democratic participation and the development of robust, shared national political identities. We argue that these practices can help actors imagine themselves as part of a broader political community, as the performance of democracy by citizens is one critical part of the creation of a collective identity in modern polities.

Although the USA has previously been used by scholars as a comparative case for EU policy outcomes, it has not been fully exploited for what it may tell us about the deeper mechanisms of polity-building in a democracy. Tracing how politics became nationalized and democratized in the early decades of the USA suggests one path for generating a more robust collective political identity in the EU. The USA, far from beginning its existence as the centralized federal polity we see today, began as something much closer to an intergovernmental organization of states. The transformation of that thin, elite organization into a locus of popular politics resulted not only from formal institutional changes

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but from revolutions in people's lived experiences as participatory democracy supplanted the technocratic origins of the United States. Practices aimed at promoting the federal union were adopted and promoted by agents seeking to mobilize mass politics, transforming the political imaginary from a confederacy of discrete states linked only by top-down political arrangements to a pan-US imagined political community developed from the bottom up. Exploring these everyday practices of democratic engagement – from voting to listening to a candidate's stump speech to publicly endorsing or opposing a candidate – sheds light on how practices may generate a robust collective political identity in the EU. But the US case also demonstrates that, while public practices of shared democratic contestation help form collective political identities, they may be deeply exclusionary processes that can undermine as well as reinforce processes of unity.

To be clear: we are arguing for the value of examining the *processes* of transformation towards a new, nationalized collective identity in the USA, not that the levels and nature of political identification in the early US and the EU today are comparable. The early US case unfolded in a context where formal institutions denied the rights of women, people of colour, and the poor to engage in the basic acts of citizenship, a clear difference with the EU today. Nor, in undertaking this comparison, do we suggest that the EU *must* move towards a fully unified polity. The gradual, messy movement from identifying politically with a specific state to engaging in trans-state practices that expanded the boundaries of political community in the early American historical record shows that the eventual emergence of the USA as a unified polity was far from inevitable. The US case, in fact, demonstrates clearly the contingency of polity-making as multiple pathways could have led towards, or away from, a unified nation-state and American identity, just as tensions in Europe persist today despite the movement of European governance towards an 'ever closer union'.

Our article proceeds as follows. Firstly, we define identity: how identity comes to be constituted as collective and why this matters for political life. We then consider how practices of democratic participation can transform collective identities in a polity that lies beyond formal political institutions. We argue that, in contrast, the EU has so far been largely been built on a banal collective identity, generated through symbols and practices that were diluted by design, relying on technocratic delegation to achieve legitimacy rather than individuals' and groups' emotional attachment to a collective identity. To investigate the potential for democratic participation to deepen European collective identity, the next section turns to the case of the early USA. We have found surprising parallels to the EU case in terms of the central role of elites in producing the American Union and the sense of distance from the American state felt by many citizens. We demonstrate how practices of more robust democratic participation helped shape a deeper sense of American collective identity than the Framers envisioned, even if these practices still reproduced exclusionary and hierarchical notions of participation. We highlight two key empirical episodes: the performance of democratic contestation around the US Constitution of 1789, and the development of popular practices around new US political parties in the Jackson era of the early 19th century. The conclusion suggests there are some lessons that the US case can offer the EU. Although the social practices generating collective identity can be a powerful political technology for producing the foundations for social solidary, it can also create the potential for destructive and potentially devastating cleavages, as demonstrated in the American Civil War. Democratic participation in

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European politics is a necessary component for collective EU identity, but it will require other elements, such as robust European political parties and supranational institutions to achieve social solidarity, inclusiveness, and effective governance for all.

I. Generating Collective Identity

What is collective identity, and how does it matter for politics? Following work in cultural sociology we take individual identities to be the relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about one's self that help actors to create meaning and make the world intelligible (Lamont, 2001; Wedeen, 2002). Actors' identities, however, are always and everywhere part of the broader social structures that can be called cultures or, in this special issue's terminology, collective identities.

Three key observations are in order. First, identities are always relational and multiple (Zerubavel, 1997). One can simultaneously be a scientist, mother and a citizen, or a Parisian, a Frenchwoman and a European. These identities intertwine and are activated in different settings in different ways (McNamara, 2015). While some identities will dominate at some times over others they should not be thought of as statically hierarchical and ordered in an abstract rank, in the way that public opinion sampling such as Eurobarometer often requires. They are better conceptualized as a marble cake, in Risse's (2003) helpful metaphor.

Secondly, identities are always social (Anderson, 1991). Symbolic representations provide the raw materials that let us imagine ourselves and our roles in the world (Swidler, 1986). Practices, the everyday things we do as corporal beings, form our knowledge of ourselves in the world through our lived experiences (Bourbeau, 2017; Pouliot, 2008). Identities, therefore, are not simply something we are, but something we do, generated in part by our everyday lives (Wedeen, 2002). As such, they are inherently dynamic, even if they appear static once they have been sufficiently taken for granted and naturalized (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990)

Thirdly, our identities reverberate onto larger social structures or collective identities, in which they are embedded in a causally reciprocal relationship (Sewell, 1992). What it means to be French, or a professor, or a Catholic, will change over time as the people assuming those identities shape and form those cultures through their own social actions. There is a dynamic relationship between agents, people living their everyday lives and the broader social structures of culture they inhabit. Whether they are overarching structures, such as the social institutions of sovereign states or market capitalism, or narrow ones, such as live-streaming Fortnite video games or the Eurovision song contest, they all generate processes of meaning-making. Culture as meaning-making is a 'a social process through which people reproduce together the conditions of intelligibility that enable them to make sense of their worlds' in specific times and places (Zerubavel, 1997).

As political life relies on actors making sense of their interests and making strategies around the meaning that any given situation has for them, identity and culture prove to be inseparable from politics. Thus, the creation of a collective identity has been an important political resource for political authorities seeking to consolidate their power. The intentional efforts at collective identity construction in service of a polity have a long history, from Roman coinage to the imperial Chinese patronage of neo-Confucianism.

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Arguably, in the West, the rise of the modern nation-state perfected the use of the technologies of symbols and practices to create a sense of collective *political* identity.

Collective Identity and the Centralization of Political Authority

State-building in the modern era has entailed the construction of core state powers: administrative structures, the centralization of taxing and spending, the development of legal and regulatory frameworks and the creation of coercive capacity, all situated at the national level (Skowronek, 1982; Tilly, 1992; Weber, 1976). This centralization of political authority in the nation-state occurred in tandem with the sociological construction of a polity that various studies of nationalism have conceptualized as building social imaginaries (Taylor, 2003), generating national myths (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) or imagining communities (Anderson, 1991) to underpin the new scaled-up polity. Political authorities pursed a wide variety of policies to address the social challenges of state formation – to turn '[p]easants into Frenchmen' (Weber, 1976). Political authorities used symbols and practices to create Belgians or Indonesians to fit the needs of new states, lumping together previously disassociated peoples into a new social group and binding them together in a constructed national culture that created a sense of collective national identity (Hobsbawm 1992; Trevor-Roper, 2008). The modern state has continued to impose political authority through its control over social representations of citizenship and political community, which, if successful, become taken for granted and are not viewed as exercises of state power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The transfer of core state powers to the European level, whether in the creation of a single currency (Risse, 2003), the development of free movement, open border European citizenship regime (Wiener, 1998) or the evolution towards a European defence and security policy (Merand, 2008), all create similar opportunities for building a collective European identity. But contemporary collective European identity is far from the robust and affective commitment of modern nationalism (Fabbrini, 2019).

Europe's Banal Collective Identity

The EU's collective identity is fundamentally fragile, in contrast to most national identities, because of its inherent banality (McNamara, 2015, 2019). McNamara argues that the EU's cultural infrastructure is rooted in banal symbols and practices that navigate national loyalties while portraying the EU as complementary to, rather than hostile to, local identities. The resulting labels, images and narratives are often deracinated and standardized into blandness. For example, even though issuing currency is a core state power, jealously guarded and fought over historically, the euro's paper currency displays abstract bridges and windows instead of images tied to a specific heroic person or historically resonant place. Similarly, the single diplomatic voice for Europe is termed the high representative for foreign and security policy rather than foreign minister to symbolically debase the position (McNamara, 2015)

These examples and many others all point to the historically distinct qualities of the EU's polity in comparison to earlier constructions of political authority. Recently, scholars of collective identity in Europe have argued for a model of political identity where the EU does not compete with or replace but can complement national commitments (Bruter, 2005; Medrano, 2010; Risse, 2010). Influenced by the transactionalist

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ideas of Deutsch (1953; Recchi and Favell, 2009; Kuhn, 2015), scholars have characterized the reactions and attitudes of Europeans as complex, multidimensional and marked by indifference to the EU as well as by politicization (Duchesne *et al.,* 2013). Broader cultural and historical sociological approaches to the politics of the EU have established the importance of this additional layer of identity (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Favell and Guiraudon, 2011; Saurugger and Mérand, 2010).

Like the nation-state, the EU has used political technologies to create social categories and classifications that make the European people legible and thus governable (McNamara, 2015; Scott, 1998;). But the legitimation that is accrued through the EU's unusually self-effacing symbolic and practical activity is therefore relatively thin. While cultural processes tied to the transfer of core state powers to the EU may have made Europe a natural part of the political landscape, the EU itself is often met by its citizens with indifference rather than with affection.

The natural question, then, is: what could create a more robust sense of collective political identity for the EU? One key element has been largely overlooked so far by scholars probing the EU's collective identity: the potential role of embodied and impassioned practices of participatory democracy. Our interest in these factors was suggested by the case of the early USA, to which we turn below after considering how these practices can produce a thick sense of identity.

Collective Identity through Practices of Democratic Participation

Given that practices can solidify and realize identities, or contradict and invert them (Pouliot, 2008; Wedeen, 2002; Swindler, 2002), the logical extension is that shared practices of democratic contestation and competition could transform European collective identity. Democratic processes are premised on a collective sense of shared destiny, even if electoral processes themselves may involve division. What we call participatory democracy is therefore important both for its inherent and legitimating properties and its function of integrating disparate elements into a civic identity (Lacey, 2017; Shani, 2018).

Although participatory democracy can encompass a wide range of practices, we highlight one aspect here: the everyday practices of democratic engagement, from formal voting at the ballot box to gathering with others to listen a candidate's stump speech to using the media to broadcasting one support of (or opposition to) a candidate. These practices are today so familiar to residents of advanced industrialized democracies that they seem tired or shopworn. Yet the advent of practices like political clubs, toasts at partisan banquets, the creation of nationalist festivities (like the Fourth of July), the promulgation and coordination of political periodicals, and the like were actually *revolutionary* in early Western democracies (Pasley, 2016, pp. 13–15; Waldstreicher, 1997). They transformed the social topology of political contestation. Not only did they *represent* supralocal politics to the demos beyond the capital, they also *constituted* a new political repertoire in that the demos that could influence the calculations in the capital.

Democratic practices have been shown to be consequential for the development of robust polities and common identity, suggesting it plays a potentially important role in the contemporary EU. Beyond the US case, recent work has demonstrated that culturally constructed democratic practices produce very different levels of inclusiveness in modern Spain and Portugal (Fishman, 2019), with implications for social solidarity in those two

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countries. The impact of democratic practices around constitutional contestation and universal franchise in the newly independent state of India, drawing together in the political imagination a previously fragmented population, have been documented (Shani, 2018).

We speculate, therefore, that the EU faces a challenge to the resilience and robustness of its collective identity, in part because of what we see as its stunted pan-European democratic participation. While transnational practices are developing for a European-level electoral process, these practices are still nationally oriented, despite the existence of the European Parliament and the increasing visibility of the EU in national elections (Hix *et al.,* 2007; Hix, 2008). The technocratic and elite-driven nature of the EU's polity-building was designed to be insulated from direct overt partisanship and contestation (McNamara, 2019). The tendency of national political elites jealously to guard their partisan political endeavours supported this strategy. While other core state powers moved to the EU, electoral contestation on key partisan issues remained national (Hix, 2008).

Since 2009 the EU has moved away from its apolitical stage, but its politicization has been driven primarily by eurosceptical parties (de Wilde *et al.,* 2016). Euroscepticism has promoted robust pan-European contestation about the role and reach of the European project, but it does not yet include a wide set of alternative views and electoral offerings on explicit discussions of policy trades-offs and their underlying values. This has created an asymmetrical type of participatory democracy, one that is not suited to a stable and inclusive collective identity, and a peaceful European future.

Thus, while the EU is unique, we argue that there are patterns of political development in the 18th and 19th century USA that can shed light on how participatory democracy matters for the formation of collective identity. It is to the transformation from a loose federation of states to a nationalized polity that we now turn, to see how this historical progression towards a collective political identity occurred.

II. Uniting States: The Development of a Collective American Identity

Today, the USA functions in the political imaginary much as a unified nation-state, with a taken for granted collective political identity. But at its outset, the 'American states-union' (Deudney, 2007) resembled instead something closer to an intergovernmental organization of delineated states (Cutterham, 2014). The eventual identification by Americans with the federal polity did not emerge as the inevitable consequence of the institutional arrangement of citizenship, bureaucracies or electoral structures established by the federal constitution. Rather, that outcome resulted from a historical and ongoing set of practices that emerged from the bottom up at moments of key core state power disruption, when actors and institutions were in flux, and the very centralization of the American republic was in dispute.

Conventional histories highlight the actions of famous officials and politicians at the head of state institutions and political movements. We focus instead on the role of the masses, whose practices constituted and changed democratic participation, and engagement with the contestation of American politics. First, we look at the performance of democratic contestation on the adoption of the US Constitution and its aftermath in the late 18th century, then turn to the development of national political parties during the Jackson presidency in the early 19th century. These were the moments when the creation of core state powers at the centre of the American union was in dispute, in which the USA was

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represented, performed and transformed in ways that were critical for the development of the new polity.

It is worth pausing briefly to acknowledge the limitations as well as the advantages of using the 18th and 19th century American case to understand the contemporary European one. One may wonder whether the strength of collective identification between the American people and their state governments was as strong as the attachments of contemporary Europeans to their nation-states, for instance. As a separate issue, the processes by which the European and American unions emerged were distinct, and that may have (through some means) led to different judgements about the importance of democratic participation. In addition, the fact that suffrage was limited in the early USA to only a fraction of the adult population – on average, about 60 to 90 per cent of all white men (Ratcliffe, 2013, p. 230) – contrasts with the universal franchise of contemporary Europe.

These points should indeed be borne in mind, but carrying them too far can lead sceptics to neglect the parallels between the cases. We argue that what is most relevant are the processes and transformations that were wrought by actors in the American case that produced and changed collective identification, as well as how those processes were linked to electoral contestations in ways that produced both shared and rival collective identities.

In this light, what stands out are the similarities in the *balance* of affections between an American of 1790 and a European today. For the American of 1790, her attachment to Virginia or Massachusetts conjured up participation in a polity that was decades (just shy of two centuries) old and possessed a vast arsenal of meaning-making technologies from the courts to local elections. In contrast, the federal union was a novelty that offered excitement but no long-standing attachment. Without making judgments about the absolute levels of these attachments, then, it seems plausible to assert that this ratio *is* similar between the two cases. Furthermore, as our interest is not in explaining the *levels* of a given factor but rather how given practices dynamically produce and *change* collective identities, we can more confidently set aside concerns about the deep history of polity formation, and focus instead on what can be learned from those changes. Finally, although the scope of citizenship has expanded significantly since the 1790s to end gender, property and racial exclusions to a large extent, the expansive participation in the American political system was sufficiently broad to mark it as distinct from, say, monarchical or aristocratic systems – and many of the practices associated with democratic participation extended to include women in particular, even when they lacked the formal right to vote (Waldstreicher, 1997).

The USA as Intergovernmental Organization

At the founding of the USA, few intended that the new federal or national government would form a collective identity that would displace citizens' first loyalties, which would be to their state of residence. James Madison, writing in *The Federalist Papers*, captured the widespread assumption that 'the first and most natural attachment of the people will be to the governments of their respective states.[1] Actors expected so much residual state sovereignty that one scholar has described the US Constitution as a 'peace pact that averted conflict between separate countries' (Hopkins, 2018, p. 4, citing Hendrickson, 2003).

[1] https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers#TheFederalistPapers-46.

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Accepting the early 'United States' as an intergovernmental organization – a sort of American community – seems more plausible if we view the society in its context. Before the war for independence, the 13 future ex-colonies of Britain did not constitute a polity, or even much of a community, in even the shallowest sense (O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Shannon, 2000). Factors like external threat did not automatically entail the creation of a strong common identity and polity, as traditional bellicist arguments about state formation claim (Riker, 1964; Tilly, 1992). After all, the actual war for independence from Britain led to the adoption of the weak Articles of Confederation, not a unified state. Even when that governing compact was replaced by the Constitution, the resulting polity was still weak relative to European states in terms of its command of core state powers. True, the federal government was given formal monopolies over conducting diplomacy, principally trade treaties, with other countries and Native tribes; controlling interstate commerce and money; establishing a judiciary to handle complex cases that crossed state borders; and maintaining a military. But the aim of relegating many of these powers to the federal level was to strengthen the federal union relative to its constituent states to prevent future intra-American jealousies and wars (Deudney, 2007), not to produce a strong Westphalian state.

Because core powers to tax, punish offenses, regulate property and legislate were exercised at the state level, in many ways the states were the key political entities of the era. Rhetorics and practices aiming to establish a singular American nationalism contended with multiple, regional and state-based concepts of nation that aimed to preserve local distinctiveness along the lines of the UK, with its various nations comprising a single polity (Park, 2018).

So how did residents of the USA come to believe that they were members of a single unit rather than a technocratic interstate organization? Broadly, the causal arrow ran *from* political action *to* collective identification (Trautsch, 2016, pp. 292–293), although it reverberated back onto the larger entity, as our theoretical discussion of identity, above, suggests. This process of deepening collective identities beyond the state level was tied to the development of the policy capacities of what we today view as core state powers. But these linkages and developments themselves were not inevitable. Developing an affective sense of loyalty and belonging required the innovations in political technologies that accompanied the formal concentration of power at the new federal level. Such processes weakened attachments to the individual American states while facilitating the emergence of new, supra-state collective identity.

Performing Democratic Contestation over the US Constitution

The ratification of the central document of the US, the Constitution of 1787, represents not only a critical moment in revising the distribution of core state powers between the states and federal union but also as a foundational site for the generation of a new collective identity as an American polity, providing a useful empirical test for our propositions about the potential impact of democratic participation. The challenge was that ratification required securing popular assent for a document written in a secret conclave by representatives of an elite network of transcontinental merchants, capitalists and senior military commanders (Maier, 2010). To win over the public these elites embraced a popular style of politics they had long spurned. They began to produce iconography to generate the

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collective identification necessary for that task. For intellectuals, they produced essays portraying the reformed USA as the culmination of progress in a succession of historical federations from the ancient Greek Amphictyonic League to the United Provinces (see *The Federalist* 38). Yet the significant parts of this campaign involved mounting readily accessible public spectacles like processions and fetes, symbolically drawing the masses into the new covenant they had, after all, played no role in writing (Cornell, 1990; Maier, 2010; Rigal, 1996).

The Federalists' extension of political participation to the common man not only succeeded in winning the ratification of the Constitution but also developed a new repertoire of nationalist practices enabling citizens to perform unity. The ratification of the US Constitution produced a new wave of democratic practices aimed at cementing the new collective identity. The new regime invested heavily in displaying – and thereby creating – its legitimacy and popularity (Heideking, 1994; Waldstreicher, 1997). These practices took the form of public festivals as varied as parades led by craftspeople celebrating their place in the new polity to the grand tour of US cities by president-elect George Washington, a military hero who symbolically captured for the USA each town he visited on his tour towards the US capital. This process of enlisting popular participation, even more than the text of the Constitution itself, became the central meaning-making project for proponents of the federal union.

Some of the new American regime-directed methods of participation echoed today's banality of European political practices and identification, as in the regime's emphasis on publicizing its performance of state functions (Reed, 2019). Yet as new divisions emerged, elites and popular actors used other symbolic political technologies to put forward competing visions of belonging, legitimacy and agendas (Aldrich, 2011). The nascent USA did not possess the capacity or prerogative to enforce a single, orthodox approach to patriotism, instead producing processes of labelling, narrating and mapping that often followed a bottom up more than a top down logic. Those practices – including everything from Fourth of July parades to toasts at banquets – became the means through which 'large numbers of people – men and women – [could] practice nationalism and local politics simultaneously' (Waldstreicher, 1997, p. 13). Far from being banal or taken for granted, they represented means of contesting what the new political community would be. In New England, a region with established religions, ministers led their flocks in performing patriotic observances that stressed the unity of national identification and piety. That would have seemed alien to an audience in religiously diverse Pennsylvania (Park, 2018).

This shift of collective identity-making to the fragmented public sphere was shaped by its relations with the continued development of official federal power. The US Constitution had not only established new institutions to manage the newly delegated core state powers at the federal levels – Congress, the judiciary, the presidency – but it simultaneously attempted to ensure that these institutions would remain dominated by elites and stay far removed from democratic tumult. State legislatures, not voters, chose both the federal senators and the electors who would select the president; jurists would serve life terms. The *only* direct channel for popular participation in federal affairs was the biennial elections for members of the House of Representatives. The early American experience's resemblance to the elite-driven origins of the EU are clear.

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Political actors soon worked to thwart this elite-centric design by harnessing and mobilizing popular passions. Ironically, the process began with the ratification of the Constitution. To win power under its new institutions, as the Democrats quickly realized and the Federalists slowly accepted, required bringing a wide class of voters into creating, disseminating and performing national symbols. Rival elites in the capital made common cause with political factions throughout the Union, while newspaper editors (who were not nonpartisan journalists but a prominent set of political entrepreneurs and networkers) and other political actors sought to yoke their power to projects reinterpreting what the American collective identity represented.

Organizing the populace for ongoing participation in political disputation and coordinated electoral action upset the designs of the original US Framers. Democratization displaced the genteel patrician culture that had defined Union politics (Freeman, 2002). The Constitution had presumed that the public would assemble for nonpartisan elections only every 2 years, and then disperse, leaving governance to the elect. Yet the ongoing public tumult meant that public opinion and contestation emerged to shape politics continuously. That process entailed making claims about American collective identity to justify this extra-constitutional (even *anti*-constitutional) basis for political action. The political technologies of everyday America, like toasts, newspaper broadsides and processions, that had just provided the means to express unity, now became weapons in political contests. This process did not undermine patriotic, unifying symbols; instead, 'relentless politicization gave nationalist rituals their most important meanings' (Waldstreicher, 1997, p. 9). The political technologies of labelling and narrating played a particular role here. In keeping with prejudices against faction and partisanship, the two contending camps had to couch their arguments in anti-partisan language. Members of each faction performed rituals of patriotic unity to demonstrate that the *other* faction threatened national unity – a partisan anti-partisanship that reaffirmed both the partisan divisions and the centrality of national representation.

In the first true presidential contest of 1796 (Washington having been unopposed in his two earlier elections), the candidates played almost no role in their campaigns. Instead, networks of activists throughout the continent coordinated with each other to bring about the election of their favoured candidate. The basis on which the two factions had divided themselves added urgency to the nationalist projects of meaning-making. US politics had become divided by the question of whether the country should tilt toward France or Britain, which involved not just *realpolitik* calculations but fundamental differences in the content of collective identity, including whether the goal of the American revolution should be a French-style levelling or instead the restoration and continuation of British constitutional legacies (Robertson, 2001, p. 1264). That process was linked the capture of state power via electoral competition and coordination of the indirect mechanisms to control the federal Union, thereby making political participation meaningful in both political and cultural senses (Pasley, 2016; Waldstreicher, 1997). The efforts of these activists proved so successful at organizing both ideology and activism that they turned the Electoral College into an instrument to reflect the popular (if mediated) will rather than having its intended function as a brake on popular passions (Pasley, 2016).

The triumph of this movement came when Thomas Jefferson, who narrowly won victory as president in 1800, pushed through reforms to the Electoral College to make it easier for his Democratic-Republican party activists to control (Kuroda, 1994). Jefferson's

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reign consolidated many of the national symbols of the USA and his emphasis on popular (white, male) participation in government dealt a death blow to the Federalists' elitist designs. Popular participation and democratic contestation had changed the basis for legitimacy in US politics.

Contentious Party Politics as the Site for Identity Construction

After the Jefferson administration, Democratic-Republican governance inaugurated a period of virtual one-party rule that lasted until 1824. The Federalists withered away, unable even to find a candidate to run for president in 1820 (the last uncontested US presidential election). The absence of a stable opposition party meant that there was no opportunity for developing the practices of mass electoral contestation on a Union-wide scale. This was to change, dramatically and not without strife, over the next decades, as new performances of American identity took hold in the building of contentious US-wide mass party politics. The development of American political parties involved symbols and practices that were often unsavory and raucous, but which penetrated far beyond a banal, top-down sense of collective identity to create the type of emotional attachment that defines national identity.

The movement of core state powers to the federal level, the practices of democratic participation and the reorganizing of citizens' identities as Americans had found a stable equilibrium by the early 19th century, but one with almost immediate limits. A single, elite-driven party's conception of the national interest and of US identity dominated politics, producing those good feelings that retrospectively gave the post-1812 war era its name. The one-party system failed, however, in the 1824 presidential election cycle when the Democratic-Republicans' heir apparent suffered a stroke (Ratcliffe, 2015), leading to a four-way split in the presidential race. In the November balloting, the secretary of state John Quincy Adams won a plurality of electoral votes, while the frontier general and populist Andrew Jackson won most of the votes cast by individual voters. As the Constitution requires when no candidate has won a majority of the electors, the election was thrown to the House of Representatives, where Adams won in January 1825.

A presidential election determined by a two-stage, anti-democratic process represented a triumph for the Framers' vision of elite governance. But it would be a pyrrhic victory. Over the next 4 years Jackson's supporters, eager to avenge their defeat, created the first truly mass American party, which organized its followers around a clear platform, candidate and identity. The Jacksonians argued that legitimacy could only be claimed by the candidate who won most of the (white, male) votes. Jackson's election as president in 1828 consequently heralded a more expansive and democratic American politics, even if the list of those excluded from public life, including women and African Americans, constituted the majority of US residents (Wilentz, 2006).

The "New Democracy" (as it called itself) was forthrightly a creature of a mass public. Unlike the Federalists and Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans, both of whom had professed an anti-party ideology, the Jacksonian Democracy embraced factionalism at every stage, rewarding its supporters with federal patronage while condemning its rivals, a supposedly corrupt and anti-democratic elite. It was the efforts at party-making that proved to be the most lasting contribution of Jackson's administration to US democratic practices. The advent of the Democracy Party, and the subsequent mass parties that imitated it,

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completed the imbrication of the Constitution's formal, elite institutions with popular, participatory practices that could form the foundation for a newly robust US collective identity.

One of the identity-generating innovations of the mass parties of the 1830s was the emergence of nominations and party-making through a complex system of county, state and national conventions that were far more direct and participatory than the previous system that had been dominated by officeholders themselves. The Democracy Party's success led even its elite opponents to copy its innovations through the newly formed opposition Whig Party, despite its members' overtly conservative views (Holt, 1999). They soon surpassed even the Democracy Party in the arts of making mass federal politics an everyday reality for Americans. By 1840 the Whigs would run what was in many ways the first modern US-wide presidential campaign, featuring a candidate (William Henry Harrison) who was presented as a hard scrabble, hard-drinking working-class man of the people, despite the reality of his wealth and history of high office. His campaign featured popular appeals through songs, torchlit processions and a slogan so snappy it's remembered nearly two centuries later ('Tippecanoe and Tyler Too', celebrating Harrison's his running mate and his slaughter of Natives during the suppression of a Native insurgency; Troy, 2012).

Some may dismiss these practices as folderol or demagoguery. Yet they represent one important means by which political identities are produced in democratic societies. The advent of stable organizations that could reliably produce these activities and attachments at scale represented a broader transformation in the social processes that created and reproduced American identity. The onset of mass parties meant that the popular contestation of politics at a federal – or as it was increasingly and revealingly called, national – level became an immediate and routine part of the American Union. This was not the remote republic of reason that the Framers of the US Constitution envisioned, but it was the raucous society that Tocqueville called 'democracy in America'.

Crucially, core political identity-building technologies – narrating, mapping and labelling collective identity – were being wielded by the political parties, which were not formally part of the government. These popular movements dwarfed the minimal official state apparatus in the backwater of Washington, DC, where the federal government consisted of only a few hundred officials and several thousand clerks. Balogh (2009) refers to this as the 'mystery of authority' in 19th-century America: how could such a tiny government command power great enough to remake a continent? Rather than being concentrated in formal legal situations, governance was shared among popular and elite organizations and between private, state and federal institutions, filling the American Union with meaning and providing reservoirs of popular collective identity from which the Union could draw to nurture itself and coordinate the activities of its agents.

Early American political parties, in other words, mastered the core powers of narrating, labelling and mapping that in the European context have largely been the property of the EU (McNamara, 2015). They used these technologies not in an attempt to make the USA a banal, taken for granted concept, as the EU has done, but in the service of a colourful and permanent contest for power via democratic participation. Publishing newspapers aimed at a wide audience, like the *National Whig*, became part of the strategies of political parties. These periodicals, subsidized by the government's continental postal network (Skocpol, 1997, pp. 460–462) and funded by wealthy patrons or (when their co-partisans

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controlled the right governments) by placing in them legal notices paid for by governmental entities, promoted identities, narrating America through the print culture (Blau and Elman, 2002). Increasingly, even formal governmental activities, like individuals' petitions to Congress, became important for identifying actors that could be conscripted into political networks more than for their direct policy implications (Carpenter and Schneer, 2015).

The rise of political parties in the Jacksonian era demonstrates the complex interplay between the production of a collective identity and the movement to the centre brought about by brute power, reminding us that identity construction under democratic contestation is not a simple process. Added to the earlier episode of nation-building over the ratification of the US Constitution, this lesson that does not offer a sunny outlook for the development of a collective European identity as of core state powers around democratic participation are moved to the EU level, but it demonstrates the importance of this key arena for polity-building.

Conclusion

At its beginning in the eighteenth century, the USA's elitist and insulated political culture had much in common with the EU's early permissive consensus. The means of transforming the USA from a remote states-union to a deeply felt political community were anything but banal, in contrast to much of the EU's efforts to create a sense of European collective identity. The American government did its part to promote identity from the top, harnessing the opportunity afforded by the construction of Washington as the new capital city, for instance, to promote a new architectural grammar through which a US identity could be expressed. But the real work was done by paid scribblers, patronage-seekers and exuberant ideologues who invited the public to join in politics through feasts, toasts and essays that rhetorically and performatively created a new identity. Practices of collective identity-making took place through everyday, 'man in the street' social interactions rooted in the practices of democratic contestation, both face to face (like processions) or imagined (like newspaper accounts of shared experiences); and those identities became simultaneously individual ('I am an American') and collective ('An American does, thinks and believes X'), in line with our theoretical expectations. Unlike the banal employment of these technologies in the EU case to naturalize European authority without directly confronting national sovereignty, the American case quickly saw passionate and entrepreneurial engagements in contests for power, as democratic participation opened up beyond the initial founding elites.

An important lesson for the EU lies in the role that practices play in creating collective identity, beyond the formal institutional shift of core state powers to the European level. The relationship between the spare institutions and limited powers of the US Constitution and the development of American collective identity was far from certain. Even if the Framers intended that stability and unity would nurture commonality, the actual accomplishment of collective identity involved a degree of passionate and sometimes splintering popular participation that they had not intended or that they had even explicitly sought to prevent (Bernstein, 2010, p. 1079). This process created deeply felt attachments to collective identity, but we should note that the process was not irreversible or wholly controllable. Had we concluded our case study of the USA in 1860, our conclusions about the

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relationship between collective identity and union would have been very different. Our case thus provides a warning to those who may assume that there is a straightforward path to a either a solidly united Europe or a clear devolution back to national polities.

Today, core state powers continue to be moved to the EU level, despite its ongoing crises. But electoral contestation and the practices of democratic participation remain at the national level, with eurosceptic parties (ironically) providing the most robust venue for direct engagement over the future of Europe. The 2019 elections of a new European Parliament saw an unprecedented level of interest, engagement and participation across Europe, beyond eurosceptic parties like Germany's AfD or the UK's Brexit Party to the new pro-EU parties like Volt Europa – and everything in between. Supporters of a stable and robust EU should recognize that this type of overt, pan-European practice of contestation, even if it is uncomfortable, may be the type of democratic participation necessary to perform and thus to embody a resilient European collective identity and ultimately, more robust democratic legitimacy for the EU.

The experience of the early American case gives us reason to believe that building European-level participatory democracy would push forward collective European identity, although it would not be a panacea, or teleologically lead to a stable and peaceful union. As more and more core sovereign powers are moved to the European level, the disjuncture between deepening political authority in the EU and an underlying absence of impassioned, felt European identity has become more and more problematic. While many would seek to dampen the expressive displays of anti-EU politics that are part of democratic participation, the experience of the American case demonstrates that a robust collective identity demands openness to the contestation inevitable in any true polity. The question is how to ensure that the broad public, with actors from all sides of the partisan spectrum, and with all manner of visions for what the EU should be, will participate inclusively in the variety of democratic practices that generate a collective political identity. To leave aside the role of democratic participation in the exercise of core state powers at the European level is to doom the European project to a technocratic demise.

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