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Citation for final published version:

Pearsall, Sarah M. S. and Williams, Mark 2015. David Underdown's Revel, riot, and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England, 1603-1660: introduction. *Cultural and Social History* 12 (3) , pp. 289-293. 10.1080/14780038.2015.1050875

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2015.1050875>

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## Introduction

Sarah Pearsall and Mark R. F. Williams

This forum addresses two simple and straightforward questions: first, what impact has David Underdown's *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* had on the field of early modern English history, and second, how might it influence current and future work? Like the book on which it was based, this forum came out of a conversation at the Institute of Historical Research in London. At an editorial board meeting of this journal, we rashly assured those in attendance that we could put together a forum on this book, which has been so meaningful to so many for the thirty years since its publication.

What follows is our attempt to raise issues about this significant book and its lasting impact over three decades. This forum, like the lively world sketched so elegantly by Underdown, contains a variety of voices. Three of those who wrote pieces are mentioned in Underdown's acknowledgments: his colleague and friend, Donald Spaeth, who read part of the manuscript; another colleague and friend, John Morrill, whose challenging question at the IHR tearoom set Underdown down the path of this book; and his partner in history and life, Susan Amussen. Other contributions are from those who experienced this book as students, teachers, and scholars. All of them offer incisive, provocative analysis of how the questions at the heart of this work continue to inform debates and methods. We are extremely grateful for their excellent contributions.

**SP:** I first experienced Underdown's unique perspective when I took his lecture classes as an undergraduate at Yale University in the early 1990s. The world Underdown brought to life was one of aggrieved Levellers, fierce Quakers, revel, riot, and rebellion. It was then that I first read the book. I adored its insistent loyalty to the "common people." In the last thirty years, our canvas has broadened, sometimes for good, sometimes, perhaps, for ill. Yet, the book offers, as another Yale historian, Edmund S Morgan advised his students, "something valuable even to those readers who...reject [the] central argument."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although I learned much from *Revel, Riot and*

*Rebellion's* regional focus, I also felt a certain amount of impatience about it. When I took his lecture class at the same time I took John Demos' Colonial America lectures, I found myself puzzling over how puritans, contested, in England had become Puritans, settled, in New England. That disconnect, and a sense that historians of Britain and its colonies might think of their worlds as more integrated than most of them seemed to do, started me on a voyage into Atlantic history (which was not much discussed then). I pursued a different course., occasionally along similar currents, though.

In retrospect, I realise that the book's framework of order and disorder, its emphasis on households and communities, profoundly influenced one of my earliest published pieces, a 2002 chapter on gender in the British-Atlantic world.<sup>2</sup> It stays with me today. Many of us, from a variety of times and places, continue to mull over the implications of controversies detailed by Underdown. One of the hotter sort of Protestants in this world, Henry Burton, railed against illicit Sabbath activities for encouraging revolts against authority, turning 'the common vulgar against the magistrate and minister, servants against their masters, children against their parents, and wanton wives against their husbands.'<sup>3</sup> Such concerns reverberate across the centuries and across the oceans. Indeed, in 1776, John Adams laughed off his own wife's desire for laws to protect women by noting:

We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient -- that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent -- that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented.<sup>4</sup>

The 'discontent' of the 'common vulgar,' however they are framed, powerfully animated resistance, revolts, and revolutions. It still captures the attention of historians from all sorts of times and places. The profound groundedness of how these conflicts played out in the West Country still holds lessons even for those of us who fly across the seas.

Indeed, Underdown's teaching and scholarship helped to inspire me to study early modern English history at Cambridge (a place to which I have since returned). Yet my debt is still more personal. When I was a student at Cambridge, I realized I needed a letter of reference for a national PhD grant in the USA. I had only found out about the funding, and the application was due that week, which happened to be Thanksgiving. Back in those pre-email days, I called Professor Underdown in Connecticut and asked, quaking, if he might possibly be able to submit a reference for me—due in two days' time. On the day after Thanksgiving, when even hard-working Americans take the day off, my former teacher drove from his home to New Haven to a closed history department office to fax his reference for me. I am thrilled to acknowledge publicly this generosity; such acts go too often unrecorded in the 'turbulence' of our 'schools and Colleges.' Thanks to his help, I got the grant. The world got another (wanton?!) historian. Now, more happily, you get this forum.

**MW:** I first read *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* in 2005 as an undergraduate as part of a particularly-inspiring third-year module on (what I then knew as) the English Civil War, the reading list for which was populated by many of Underdown's works. Like Sarah, my first encounter with *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* was, in many respects, disorienting: reading it in eastern Ontario having not yet visited Britain (let alone the West Country at the center of *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*) the regions in which Underdown's 'ecology of allegiance' unfolded were familiar only in very vague terms. Reading of the 'chalk & cheese' divergences which, for Underdown, lay at the heart of understanding the divisions of the Civil Wars in these regions required a strained form of analogous thinking on my part. While attempting to imagine the specific hills and pasturelands of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Dorset through the maps provided, I transposed what little I knew of these ecological features from the Ontario landscape. Needless to say, it did not really work; moreover, as part of a course which introduced the broader themes of the Civil Wars and facilitated a broader, more comfortable view of the political, religious, and cultural factors which had brought

them about, Underdown's particularities were relatively easy to set aside for the time being.

So, at that point, it was Underdown's earlier works – *Royalist Conspiracy in England*, in particular – which initially inspired rather than *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*. What *Royalist Conspiracy* offered was a different sort of historical 'center' from which to operate, employing the ultimately doomed attempts of royalists to ignite rebellion in the Commonwealth and Protectorate and, in doing so, hinting at what historians might learn from failure and disillusionment. This account required little knowledge of local topographies or customs; rather, it was reassuringly universal.

In the longer term, however, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* has been the work of Underdown's which I have revisited time and again, leaving its pages battered and annotated in a way that *Royalist Conspiracy* has simply not been. Two reasons for this come to mind. First, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* invites disagreement in a way that *Royalist Conspiracy* does not. This is a commendation rather than a condemnation: as Phil Withington points out in his essay, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* is a book which is at once very good but, especially with the benefit of hindsight, often wrong or in need of further elaboration. As a graduate student, I admired Underdown's apparent desire to seek out a better sort of discussion rather than simply shut it down with irrefutable, easy statements. Certainly, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* came under intense scrutiny – none more erudite or convivial than that of John Morrill, whose review was subsequently met with a reply and an invitation for 'another cup of tea'.<sup>5</sup> (It is hoped that, in some way, this forum again invites such an opportunity.) Again, as an undergraduate, I had been introduced to much more acerbic and malicious debates among historians, and this example stood as a remarkable standard of scholarly exchange. But Underdown did not shy away from admitting that he was dealing with 'ideal types ... convenient abstractions for analytical purposes'.<sup>6</sup> Instead, he seemed to call for a broadened stage upon which not only patterns of allegiance, but the cultural history of early-modern England might be played out and discussed.

This ambition on the part of Underdown – commented upon at the time of *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*'s publication and all the more evident since – in many respects brought about the second

factor which, for me, has made the book all the more enduring. As Susan Amussen notes in her essay below, questions drove David Underdown's approach to researching and writing *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* – 'Could it just possibly be ..?'. This question demanded, as Lloyd Bowen reflects in his essay, a remarkable interplay between varying scales of analysis, working fluidly across local and national contexts to discern both patterns and divergences. These movements across scales traced communities with discernible centers. For me, as a graduate student, it also provoked other questions. For instance, what of those who had been de-centered, were multi-centered, or who were in the act of re-centering themselves? Where in these accounts of short- and long-term social and cultural change were dislocations and relocations? How, in light of these pressures, did destruction, creation, and re-creation intermesh with and relate to one another? Moreover, as many of the contributors to this forum have observed, there remain shifts in historical analysis which *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* simply did not or could not have addressed: the interplay between print and oral cultures, the role of memory (though Underdown clearly understood something of its place in local ritual), the linguistic and spatial turns, the intersections between masculinity and femininity, and the wider scales of transnational history, to name a few. Excitingly, many of these questions are now being explored, not only in the English contexts in which Underdown exclusively worked, but in the wider contexts of Britain, Ireland, and beyond.<sup>7</sup> But again, the sense which *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* gives, both at the first read and the last, is one of inviting such discussion, begging further questions and the prospect of finding another, neglected part of the early-modern stage upon which these cultures were being enacted. Underdown may, indeed, have been working with 'ideal types', but *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* never assumes flat characters.

The essays which follow stem from the questions which *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* initially posed, the answers which have since been given, and those questions which historians might now pursue in its wake. The authors were approached separately with the hope that each might provide a different perspective on specific themes relevant to *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* and pertinent to current scholarship. In editing the essays, we have tried to ensure minimal overlap (though a book

with such broad resonances will inevitably result in some common themes being addressed). Like Underdown himself, many of these essays adopt a variety of scales in order to make these reflections: they range from broad historical observations to the intensely personal; from transatlantic encounters to the particularities of a tea room. In the spirit with which *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* was written, they ask questions as much as they provide definitive answers; moreover, in tracing how these currents have shifted, they ask what else could possibly be.

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<sup>1</sup> John Mack Faragher, "The Common School: Tell Me What You See," *Common-place* 1 (3) (April, 2001) online at <http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-03/school/>, accessed 30 December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah M. S. Pearsall, 'Gender,' in David Armitage and Michael Braddick (eds), *The British Atlantic, 1500-1800*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 133-151, 318-323, 362-363.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Burton, *A Divine Tragedie Lately Acted, or A Collection of Sundrie Memorable Examples of Gods Judgements upon Sabbath-breakers* (London, 1641), p. 29 as quoted in David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1985), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, 14 April 1776, in *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, online at <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive>, accessed 20 December 2014.

<sup>5</sup> John Morrill, 'Review: The Ecology of Allegiance in the English Revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 26 (4) (October 1987), pp. 451-67; Underdown, 'A Reply to John Morrill', 26 (4) (October 1987), pp. 468-79.

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<sup>6</sup> Underdown, 'A Reply', p. 469.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (eds.), *Community in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006); Allan I. MacInnes, *The British Revolution, 1629-1660* (Basingstoke, 2005); Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013); Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2011); Alex Shepard, *The Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England, 1560-1640* (Oxford, 2003); Laura M. Stewart, *Urban Politics and the British Civil Wars: Edinburgh, 1617-53* (Leiden, 2006); Mark Stoyle, *Soldiers and Strangers: An Ethnic History of the English Civil War* (New Haven, 2005); Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003); John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2006); Phil Withington and Angela McShane (eds.), *Cultures of Intoxication* (Oxford, 2013); Mark R. F. Williams, *The King's Irishmen: The Irish in the Exiled Court of Charles II* (Woodbridge, 2014); Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013).