



UNIVERSIDAD  
DE COSTA RICA

REHMLAC

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS HISTÓRICOS DE LA MASONERÍA

LATINOAMERICANA Y CARIBEÑA | ISSN 1659-4223



## “Freemasonry and Civil Society: The Case of the United States”

Guillermo De Los Reyes-Heredia

**UCLA**



Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia. Mexican. Associate Professor of Latin American Cultures and Literatures and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Houston. He also serves as Associate Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and he is a Faculty-in-Residence since 2011. He holds a PhD and a MA from the University of Pennsylvania (2004, 1999) and a MA and BA from the Universidad de las Américas-Puebla (1997, 1994). Dr. De Los Reyes' research interests are: Colonial Mesoamerica; gender, sexuality, and queer theory; Latin American cultural studies; secret and fraternal societies; and policy studies.

Dr. De Los Reyes is the author of *Herencias Secretas: Masonería, política y sociedad en México* (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2009) and is currently working on a book-length project entitled: "*El pecado nefando: Rethinking Gender and Sexuality in Colonial Mexico*." Professor De Los Reyes is member of the Board of Directors of two international organizations: Phi Beta Delta, Honor Society for International Scholars, where he serves as Director of Membership and Policy Studies Organization, where he is Vice-President for publications. In addition he is a Life Member of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) where he is Secretary/Treasurer of the Sexualities Section. Dr. De los Reyes serves as a member of two Editorial Boards: *Íkala: revista de lenguaje y cultura and Politics & Policy*. E-mail: [jgdelosr@central.uh.edu](mailto:jgdelosr@central.uh.edu)

Date received: April 19, 2012 - Day accepted: July 9, 2013

### Keywords

Freemasonry, civil society, volunteerism, democracy, popular culture, political culture, U.S. Freemasonry

### Palabras clave

Masonería, sociedad civil, voluntariado, democracia, cultura política, cultura popular, masonería estadounidense

### Abstract

This article argues that the fairly obscure archives and records of Freemasonry and similar secret ritualistic organizations can teach us a great deal about the ways in which voluntary movements have contributed to the process of democratization. Some of the research questions proposed in this article are the following: Are voluntary organizations an essential ingredient of democratization, and if so, does that include the vast number of voluntary organizations which appear to be authoritarian in their internal affairs? Do groups whose goals and internal structure have little relationship to the nurturing of democracy nevertheless contribute to democratic culture? This work aims to contribute to the now growing volume of literature about civil society, volunteerism and democracy. Two other themes discussed here are the interplay and scholarly use of political and popular culture scholarship and the influence on state and society of secret ritualistic organizations, particularly the Freemasons.

### Resumen

En este artículo se propone que los archivos un tanto oscuros de la francmasonería y de organizaciones ritualistas similares pueden ilustrarnos notablemente sobre las formas en que los movimientos voluntarios han contribuido al proceso de democratización. Algunas de las preguntas de investigación que aquí se plantean son las siguientes: ¿Son las organizaciones voluntarias un ingrediente esencial para la democratización? Y si lo son, ¿se incluyen en este grupo el gran número de organizaciones voluntarias que parecen ser autoritarias en sus asuntos internos? ¿Contribuyen a la cultura democrática los grupos cuyas metas y cuya estructura interna están poco relacionadas con el crecimiento de la democracia? Este trabajo pretende contribuir a la actual discusión sobre sociedad civil, voluntariado y democracia. Otros dos temas que se discuten son la interacción y el uso académico de las aproximaciones teóricas de cultura popular y política al estudiar la influencia que la sociedades secretas y ritualistas, en particular, los francmasones ejercen en el estado y los discursos políticos.

© Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia and REHMLAC.

Academic Committee: Miguel Guzmán-Stein (Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica), José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli (Universidad de Zaragoza, España), Margaret Jacob (University of California Los Angeles, United States), Eduardo Torres Cuevas (Universidad de La Habana, Cuba), María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni (University of California Los Angeles, United States), Éric Saunier (Université du Havre, France), Andreas Önnersfors (Lunds universitet, Sverige), Samuel Sánchez Gálvez (Universidad Carlos Rafael Rodríguez de Cienfuegos, Cuba), Roberto Valdés Valle (Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas", El Salvador), Céline Sala (Université de Perpignan, France), Dominique Soucy (Université de Franche-Comté, France), Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia (University of Houston, United States), Felipe Santiago del Solar Guajardo (Universidad ARCIS, Santiago de Chile), Carlos Francisco Martínez Moreno (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México), Michel Goulart da Silva (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, Brasil)

Invited Editor: María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni (University of California Los Angeles, United States)

Editor: Yván Pozuelo Andrés (IES Universidad Laboral de Gijón, España)

Director: Ricardo Martínez Esquivel (Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica)

Web: [rehmlac.com/](http://rehmlac.com/)

E-mail: [info@rehmlac.com](mailto:info@rehmlac.com)

P.O.B.: 243-2300 San José, Costa Rica

Cited in:

Academia.edu

Aladin. WRLC. Libraries Catalog

AFEHC. Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica

Biblioteca de Georgetown

CRICCAL, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3

CERGE EI. Portál elektronických časopisů. Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Departamento de Filosofía de la Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas”

Dialnet, Universidad de la Rioja

Directorio y recolector de recursos digitales del Ministerio de Cultura de España

DOAJ. Directory of Open Access Journals

Freemasonry and Civil Society Program at UCLA

Fudan University Library Academic Resource Portal

Google académico

Institute for the Study of the Americas at University of London

Latindex (UNAM)

Latindex.ucr. Repositorio de revistas de la Universidad de Costa Rica

Library Catalogue of University of South Australia

Museo Virtual de la Historia de la Masonería de La UNED

*Nuevo Mundo. Mundos Nuevos*

REDIAL. Red Europea de Información y Documentación sobre América Latina

SID. Sistema Integrado de Documentación. Universidad Nacional de Cuyo

Toronto Public Library

UBO. Revues en ligne. Service Commun de Documentation, Université de Bretagne Occidentale

Universia. Biblioteca de Recursos

University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries

Western Theological Seminary. Beardslee Library Journals



License type  
“Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike”

## “Freemasonry and Civil Society: The Case of the United States”<sup>1</sup>

Guillermo De Los Reyes-Heredia

Are voluntary organizations an essential ingredient of democratization, and if so, does that include the vast number of voluntary organizations which appear to be authoritarian in their internal affairs? Do groups whose goals and internal structure have little relationship to the nurturing of democracy nevertheless contribute to democratic culture? Discussing those questions is one of the main aims of this article, which in that respect is a contribution to the now growing volume of literature about civil society, volunteerism, and democracy. Two other themes discussed here are: the interplay and scholarly use of political and popular culture scholarship, and the influence on state and society of secret ritualistic organizations, particularly the Freemasons. This speaks to finding a *modus vivendi* in the search for the conditions that foster democracy<sup>2</sup>. In this article I argue that the fairly obscure archives and records of Freemasonry and similar secret ritualistic organizations can teach us a great deal about the ways in which voluntary movements have contributed to the process of democratization.

Freemasonry, for better or for worse, is part of the political and popular culture of many lands. In fact, it may be that the first controversy between the United States and Mexico, and the first serious historiographical problem in Mexican republican history, involves Freemasonry. That is the dispute over the part played by the first American minister to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, in the early days of the republic<sup>3</sup>. The claim that this article is about a subject which is rarely discussed is substantiated by the fact that while most Mexican historians are aware of the part played in nineteenth-century Mexican history by the York and Scottish Rite Masons, few Mexicans can explain just what the York and Scottish Rites *did* in their lodges or why two Masonic groups became major factors in the founding of the modern

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Paul Rich and Nicholas Heisig for their comments and suggestions. Also, I want to thank Laura Normand for revising this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 498.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Fred Rippy, *Joel R. Poinsett, Versatile American* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1935), 171. Since the Emperor Iturbide was a Mason, there is no evidence to show that Poinsett had any reason for Poinsett to be predisposed to dislike Iturbide or have a secret commission to oppose him. Presumably since they were both Masons he would be disposed to try to help him. The principle of Occam's razor should be applied: the philosophic doctrine that entities and causes should not be multiplied unnecessarily, Rather than fabricate reasons and conjure up motives, we can (unless evidence can be found to the contrary), simply observe that Iturbide was not a very likeable individual, although a brother Mason, and that Poinsett was annoyed by his royal ambitions and the pretentiousness of his court. See William Denslow, *10,000 Famous Freemasons, I* (Virginia: Macoy Publishing, 1957), 283-84. Poinsett audaciously determined that he must change the attitudes of the Mexican government, challenging those in the leadership who were Spanish-born or sympathetic to Spain and who still looked towards Europe. Slowly this made him an interloper, but not because of covert machinations. His efforts to implement American policy were anything but secret and led to his being expelled the country. Although Poinsett (he himself was a Freemason; many of those he found who were opponents to his goals for Mexico were Scottish Rite Masons -who, in his view, were monarchist and socially elitist. See also, Guillermo de los Reyes, *Herencias secretas: Masonería, política y sociedad en México*, (Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2009).

Mexican state<sup>4</sup>.

### Intermediate organizations and trust

Francis Fukuyama's book *Trust* has influenced my choice of topic, not because it is an immortal work, but because he has the apparent ability to sense what has been the issue of the last decade. Contributing to the upsurge in interest in voluntary organizations on the international scene, he advanced a new or revived thesis on how “intermediate institutions” sustain democracy<sup>5</sup>. His work is indicative of the heightened appreciation of private associations which Alexis de Tocqueville considered so important to democracy.

*Associationalism* and *volunteerism* have become catch words. Moreover, scholars’ interest in nongovernmental organizations seems likely to continue to increase, getting more attention in particular from political scientists partly as a consequence of the end of the Cold War:

The renewed interest in civil society first emerged in Eastern Europe after communism crumbled. Leaders like Vaclav Havel wanted to go beyond establishing new governments and create a culture that could sustain political and economic liberalism. They looked for help to those private groups beyond the reach of the state—citizens’ associations, churches, human-rights chapters, jazz clubs—that had nourished dissident life. Around the same time, the victorious Western democracies found themselves confronting sagging economies, a fraying social fabric and the loss of national purpose. Here too the experts and statesmen agreed, revitalizing civil society would overcome our malaise<sup>6</sup>.

The demand that we focus on the components of the informal governmental process has revived political culture as a tool for understanding the state. A political culture approach is a generous and expansive one that displaces the more ideologically-bound discussions that sometimes characterized scholarship during the Iron Curtain era. Regardless of grumbling that Fukuyama has not said anything new, the agenda of social science and cultural studies is going to be enhanced by the discussion which he promotes.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, there is something to the idea that democracy and voluntary associations are linked.

---

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent analysis on the York Rite and the formation and development of republican ideals in Mexico see, María Eugenia Vázquez Semadeni, *La formación de una cultura política republicana. El debate público sobre la Masonería (México 1821-1830)* (México D.F.: UNAM-El Colegio de Michoacán, México, 2009). She argues that the Yorkinos appropriated the republican ideals and created an image of their political rivals, the Scottish Rite Masons, as monarchist. See also, Vázquez Semadeni, “La masonería en México, entre las sociedades secretas y patrióticas, 1813-1830”, in: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 2 (diciembre 2010-abril 2011 [cited November 2<sup>th</sup>, 2012]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac.vol2.n2-mvazquez.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “Bigger Than the Family, Smaller Than the State; Are voluntary groups, what make countries work?”, in: *New York Times Book Review* (August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1995),1.

<sup>7</sup> As for cultural studies emerging from a defensive position, after some years of rational choice dominance in the academy, see Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

## Masonic myth-makers

That testimonial to duty points to there being a strong case for volunteerism as part of the American psyche and for it being partly responsible for American democracy. However, the test of a proposition is not to examine the most attractive examples, but those which present the real challenge to the hypothesis. If voluntary organizations aid democracy, then what about groups like the Masons? The Masons are the archetype of the vast number of American fraternal orders with strange initiations, exotic costumes, and peculiar ceremonies: Moose, Eagles, Owls, Elks, Odd Fellows, Red Men, Pythians, and so on.

In the course of the ensuing pages, the focus is on voluntary organizations in the United States and in particular on the Masons—a cabalistic society that has attracted the interest of composers like Mozart (e.g. *The Magic Flute*), writers like Kipling (e.g. *The Man Who Would Be King*), and politicians (e.g. Washington and Juárez). This is to test whether these non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are contributing to democracy today.<sup>14</sup> It should be kept in mind that it is a fair test: these are not obscure societies but rather popular ones that have captured the loyalties of millions of U.S. citizens.

A point also made in the article is that myths have power and popular myths influence politics, whether or not there is substance to them. Not only is political mythology accepted by the public; it is expected. The *perception* that the Masons are powerful has given them power. The Masons' cultivation of the myth of their contributions to democracy has created the popular opinion that American founders and patriots were Masons and that the symbols of an early republic were Masonic (a phenomenon to be noted in the popular perception of the establishment of the modern Mexican state as well, it should be added). The organizations that are so much a part of popular culture in the United States and that have spread to Mexico, such as the Rotary and Lions, and less innocently the Knights of Columbus and Masons, fall into the category of NGOs. In my opinion, there has been an oversimplification of the positive effects of such groups. Fukuyama, for one, writes as if they were nutritious vegetables and good no matter their variety or quantity. According to his naïve account, if one wants to aid democratization, a helpful ingredient is more NGOs.

This essay owes part of its origins to an interest in the efforts to promote democratization in the post-Cold War era, which has led to the search for the proper ingredients to produce democracy—efforts which differ from those in previous post-war periods. There is now a much more systematic approach to investigating just what is needed to produce democratic societies, as exemplified by publications like *The Journal of Democracy* and the activities of the U.S. government-funded National Endowment for Democracy. Bringing academic skills to bear on the problem of how to encourage democracy is an instance of the ivory tower proving useful.

During the years immediately after World War I, when democracy was imposed as part of the peace settlement in Europe and new or restored countries were created from the collapsed or curtailed Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, German, and Russian empires, the most

important features of democratization included the empowerment of elected legislatures and the expansion of the electorate. However, this proved insufficient when anti-democratic movements and extremist movements, including fascism and communism, challenged the fledgling governments. Some countries succumbed, although others resisted with varying success<sup>8</sup>.

Today again, the boundaries of previously closed countries have opened and independent political initiatives are taking place almost everywhere in an increasingly redefined world.

## Of Popular Culture

Much of this investigation reflects the fact that the post-Cold War world is witnessing a major renewal of interest in what is called political culture. Samuel Huntington has drawn wide attention by insisting that cultural issues are provoking one of the most important debates in political science. He asks how important it is that there be preconditions established to ensure democracy. He suggests that some believe political leaders can somehow “do it on their own,” and need *not* depend on cultural factors or, for that matter, on economic factors. Huntington rejects that proposition and notes that Western values and economic success assist in bringing about a major wave of democratization.

The contribution of economic well-being to democratization is evident. Nowadays, with a few exceptions such as Singapore, most of the non-oil-producing high income or upper-middle income countries are democratic:

Similarly all of the countries that are Western or that have been influenced substantially by the West, with the exception of Cuba and perhaps one or two others, have become democratic. The countries that have not democratized are those in which the conditions favoring democratization are weak<sup>9</sup>.

There is, however, a worrisome aspect to economic reform and democratization, which even the most ardent free-enterprise advocate can appreciate: the pain is usually such that unless the results are seen soon, the pendulum of public opinion can swing back and the people may be tempted to welcome a more state-managed economy. The net result could be that all the discomfort was endured without harvesting any of the results. Thus, the way is manifestly not easy, but there is some evidence that the impact of economic crises on the transition to democracy can be affected by the institutional framework.

The view that there are economic requisites for democracy suggests that democracy requires wealth, an educated population, and more specifically, a middle class who have the luxury to choose democratic governance. But, as Henry Teune points out, that is not the only

---

<sup>8</sup> Krzysztof Ostrowski and Henry Teune, “Patterns of Democratic Leadership: Country Comparisons”, in: *Democracy and Local Governance: Ten Empirical Studies*, ed. Betty Jacob, Krzysztof Ostrowski and Henry Teune (Honolulu: Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawaii, 1993), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Huntington, “Democracy for the Long Haul”, in: *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, no. 3-13 (1996): 4.

requirement, and “the democratic alternative requires *moderation, trust, tolerance, and willingness to compromise, and indeed to lose in political conflicts*. Its institutions and practice must be socially anchored in democratic values, both in the people and those in authority<sup>20</sup>.”

The study of voluntary organizations in Mexico and the United States gains importance from the renewed perception that voluntary groups can help create the values, trust, and tolerance that Teune mentions, and that there is a connection between such groups and democratization—albeit still poorly understood. But with all respect, that leaves unsettled *which* organizations help democracy<sup>10</sup>. Obviously voluntary organizations come in all flavors. In the case of religious groups, the contributions of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism to political systems have long been discussed<sup>11</sup>. In the case of other associations, including movements that this thesis focuses upon, such as the Freemasons, the attention has been far less.

If there now, finally, is more attention being paid to the subject of voluntary organizations, it partly reflects not only the end of the Soviet Union but the fortunes of political culture as a discipline. The two developments actually are related. As already noted, a number of recent books published in the United States indicate that there is a resurgence in the study of political culture in American academia. This is renewed attention to a topic which has had a considerable history. Political culture is not a new academic catchphrase. Larry Diamond writes in the concluding essay in *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*:

The most basic question one can ask about political culture is, where does it come from? To a considerable extent, political culture is a legacy of the historical past, and elements of the political culture may be traced well back in time...[but] it is quite misleading to conceive of political culture as a body of changeless values and orientations dating back to the formation of the community (or the myths about it) many centuries ago<sup>12</sup>.

Between 1950 and the early 1970s, political culture as a concept enjoyed considerable popularity among political scientists. Landmarks of this era include Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba’s deservedly famous *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963), Alex Inkeles and David Smith’s *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Nations* (1974), and, of course, Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (1959,1981). This successful period for the political culture school was followed by a testing time when conventional political science scholarship was

---

<sup>10</sup> Teune, “Democratic Requisites for Growth and Peace”, in: *Democracy and Local Governance*, 243.

<sup>11</sup> Professor Seymour Martin Lipset writes that, “Religious tradition has been a major differentiating factor in transformations to democracy.” He points out those scholars from Tocqueville’s time to the mid-1970s have observed that, among European countries and the overseas offspring, Protestant countries have been more likely to give rise to democratic regimes than Catholic ones. Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Social Requisites of Democracy Revised,” in: *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994): 5

<sup>12</sup> Larry Diamond, *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 412.



challenged not only by rational choice extremists, particularly in the United States, but by radical academics, particularly in Mexico and Latin America, who combined Marxism with pronouncements about holism and utopianism and supported the so-called “dependency theories” which achieved such prominence south of the Rio Grande. Thus, while political culture studies had been firmly established as part of the academic mainstream for many years, they have recently been under siege.

In any event, the cultural approach that Seymour Martin Lipset and his colleagues use is not a new one, and they would not claim that it as such. In 1965 Sidney Verba stated:

The study of political culture is not new...Surely the works of Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Bagehot represent contributions to the study of political culture, and one finds concern with such problems at least as far back as the Greeks.

In 1975, Walter Rosebaum could claim that political culture's delayed hour really had arrived:

Long before modern scholars minted the term ‘political culture’ much of what it now includes was studied under such names as political ideology, national character, and political psychology; still, in the past several decades, political analysts have approached the topic with a greater sense of urgency and greater investments of time and resources than ever before, so that the study has reached an unprecedented intensity<sup>13</sup>.

Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Antonio Gramsci may also come to mind.

Given the global political problems, the increased attention to the cultural studies approach is unsurprising: “There is no shortage of evidence documenting the prominent role of political culture and culture change in the failure and breakdown of democracy<sup>14</sup>.” More cultural analysis may modify or gradually transform understanding of the predominant political values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape the fate of nations. It can contribute to developing a better understanding in social and economic change, social and civil mobilization, institutional practice, historical experience, and democracy. As I will later discuss, it seems to me that the symbiotic relationship between political culture and popular culture has not received attention, and I have tried to use the two concepts in discussing the Freemasons rather than subsuming popular culture to political culture—as sometimes seems to be the case.

A problem in trying to confine a thesis to a reasonable number of pages is that a great deal of evidence has to be summarized rather than fully presented. I wish that space would allow for more examples of Masonic claims to foster democracy. Visitors to Washington should take a close look at the enormous George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria as an example. Visitors to Gettysburg should look at the Friend-to-Friend statuary

---

<sup>13</sup> Renato Rosaldo, “Whose Cultural Studies?,” in: *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 525.

<sup>14</sup> Diamond, *Political Culture and Democracy*, 428-429.

park and visitors to Valley Forge should gaze upon the Memorial Arch recently refurbished by the Masons. There is no lack of visual evidence that the Masons claim to promote American democracy and even to have given birth to it.

They should be gratified that so much has been written, and not only recently, about voluntary societies as promoters and defenders of democracy. In the respected academic journal *Foreign Affairs*, Lester Salamon has criticized “the myth of the immaculate conception,” *i.e.* the idea this is a new phenomenon: “While recent years have witnessed a dramatic upsurge in organized voluntary activity, such activity has deep historical roots in virtually every part of the world.” He warns that “Careful efforts must thus be made to acknowledge the nonprofit sector's peculiar historical roots...” and he concludes that:

The resulting surge of interest in nonprofit organizations has opened the gates to vast reservoirs of human talent and energy, even while it has created dangers of stalemate and dispute. While it is far from clear what must be done to keep these gates open, a crucial first step is a better understanding of the dramatic process underway and the immense new challenges it represents<sup>15</sup>.

### **Some not-so-democratic NGOs**

Perhaps voluntary associations are indeed a mainstay of democracy, but the contributions of such groups as the Knights of Columbus and Freemasons are difficult to credit with the creation of the open society without some vigorous discussion. Their political activities and bitter rivalries do not seem to agree with the proposition that they unreservedly support a harmonizing intermediate zone between family and state that promotes the stability of democracy. The history of such secret and ritualistic organizations has never received the attention in political science or in international studies that the subject deserves. The United States has been a great inventor of such secretive associations, and a large influence on the international fortunes of those such as Freemasonry and the Knights of Columbus. Few are the Americans who do not have ties to one or another of these associations.

Secrecy and ritual are two characteristics of these associations that challenge the assumption that they are the helpmates of democracy, the study of which should be a major focus of research for scholars and students to better understand the problems in claiming that volunteerism *per se* contributes to democratization. Often the popularity of these associations depended more from a love of ritual and secrecy than anything else. Considering how widespread they have become, involving all kinds of people and in many countries, social scientists should give more attention to this aspect of political culture and cultural studies. But elsewhere I also raise the question of their exclusion of blacks and women.<sup>16</sup> How does that

---

<sup>15</sup> Lester L. Salamon, “The Rise of Nonprofit Sector,” in: *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 74 (1994): 28.

<sup>16</sup> See, Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia and Paul J. Rich, “Gender, Sexual, and Racial Trouble: The Crossroads of North American Freemasonry in the Twenty-First Century,” in: *REHMLAC* 4, n. 2, (Diciembre 2012-Abril 2013 [cited March 2<sup>th</sup>, 2012]): available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v4/n2/rehmlac.vol4.n2-gdelosreyesyprich.pdf>. See also De los Reyes Heredia, “Presentación: Género y Masonería en los Albores del Siglo XXI,” *REHMLAC*, 4, n. 2, (Diciembre 2012-Abril 2013 [cited March 2<sup>th</sup>, 2012]):

assist democracy? Although their influence has been and continues to be considerable, they are seldom the subject of *objective* research. Much of what is written about them is polemical.

Moreover, the variety of organizations that employ ritual and secrecy seems so immense that generalizations would be inappropriate. However, I would argue that ritual and secrecy is often what sets these groups apart, making them distinct from a large number of other associations that may have a few ceremonies such as passing along the chair's gavel or investing new members with lapel pins, and that are conservative in their public image and yet chiefly issue-oriented and relatively open to the public. Thus those doing research in this field will benefit from comparisons based on my criteria of *secrecy* and *ritual*, attributes that often go together—although in a number of cases, secrecy is no longer as strong as it once was.

### Seeking order out of chaos

In any event, differentiating among voluntary groups is necessary to bring order out of chaos. Talking about NGOs as if they were a cohesive whole makes as much sense as talking about the plant and animal kingdom. The numbers and purposes of voluntary organizations in the world are startling. The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association monitors the design and fortunes of what to most of us seems a mundane item; the Daughters of the British Empire in the United States of America presumably have a different view of American history from most of their neighbors; the Association to Advance Fat Acceptance has strong opinions on airline seating<sup>17</sup>. In recent years there has been an apparent worldwide expansion of the position of NGOs, reflected in the fact that a recent guide to non-governmental organizations in Latin America cites 80 directories listing more than 40,000 groups, a doubling since 2000<sup>18</sup>.

Study of these societies and their influence is relevant to the discussion of civil culture encouraged by Fukuyama, who proposes that those nations where social trust prevails will prosper far more than those where such trust is lacking. This social trust according to Fukuyama is largely manufactured by the voluntary societies that create civil society. There are considerable problems in simply accepting this blanket assertion as fact, as will be seen. The more guarded views of Seymour Martin Lipset on the place of voluntary societies in democratization are possibly closer to the mark than those of Fukuyama. He believes that many voluntary groups are not democratic in their ideology or operations, but that by virtue of contributing to the pluralism of society they do indirectly support democracy.

Along with its general interest in democratization and political culture and cultural studies, this article is also about fraternalism, which is a major theme in American society. Every American town has its lodge halls where the Odd Fellows, Red Men, Moose, Elks, and Eagles gather. But what do they do? What is their influence? Few subjects provide as much confusion. Chief among these societies is Freemasonry. When one talks with Americans,

---

available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v4/n2/rehmlac.vol4.n2-gdelosreyes.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> George A. Evans, *A Guide to NGO Directories* (Virginia: Inter-American foundation, Arlington, 1995), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, *A Guide to NGO Directories* (Virginia: Inter-American foundation, Arlington, 1995), 1.

everyone seems to have had a relative who belonged, or when asked about the subject has themselves wondered what happened in the temple that was passed each day, or been startled by the references in Tolstoy or Eco. Supposedly, although claimed erroneously, every president of the United States (or of Mexico) has been a Mason.

Scholars, such as political scientists, sociologists, and culturalists, should have a particular interest in Freemasonry because its power is closely related to the question of the popular perception of its effects and hence its effect on the course of public policy. Currently, historians are the academicians who have developed more interest in the study of Freemasonry. Most of the works come from that discipline<sup>19</sup>. Political culture, cultural studies, and other areas from the social science and humanities do not converse as much as they might. A point made here is that the Masons are aware of popular opinion and have labored to create an image, but their internal affairs often contradict the popular image of them. Granting the Masons credit for behind-the-scenes machinations, popular culture confers an authority whether it existed in the first place or not. The influence of popular culture, in the sense of popular mythology, accounts for much of the strength of Freemasonry in political life. Scholars familiar with popular culture will look at issues in relation to Freemasonry with an understanding of how authority was derived by the creation of legends.<sup>20</sup> Scholars interested in comparative culture will find that Freemasonry's evolution in different countries provides an insight into the graces and faults of individual nation-states.

### **Beyond the myths**

As I stated elsewhere, Masonry is a ritualistic organization with a long tradition of symbolism and cabalism. It is an ultimate spinner of tales and creator of myths, and as such, it has a long history of influencing the political process through what can be called "mythological power<sup>21</sup>." This suggests that scholars should pay more attention to myth-making, which is going on all the time and the study of which is not confined to the investigations of Valhalla or Olympus by classical historians. "As I see it," writes Raphael Patai, "myth not only validates or authorizes customs, rites, institutions, beliefs, and so forth, but frequently is directly responsible for creating them<sup>22</sup>."

Politics provides plenty of examples of myth-making, especially of the self-serving kind: "...traditions are commonly relied upon by those who possess the power to achieve an illusion of social consensus. Such people invoke the legitimacy of an artificially constructed past in order to buttress presentist assumptions and the authority of a regime<sup>23</sup>." Whether it be

---

<sup>19</sup> Burkart Holzner and Roland Robertson, "A Problem Analysis of Processes of Identification and Authorization," in: *Identity and Authority: Explorations in the Theory of Society*, ed. Roland Robertson and Burkart Holzner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Raphael Patai, *Myth and Modern Man* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 2-5.

<sup>21</sup> De los Reyes Heredia, "Freemasonry and Mexican Presidentialism," in: *Journal of American Culture* 20, no.2 (1997): 61-69. See also De los Reyes Heredia, *Herencias secretas*.

<sup>22</sup> Patai, *Myth and Modern Man*, 2

<sup>23</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 4-5.

the successful American presidential candidate William Henry Harrison with his contrived portrayals as the manly-man of the log cabin and hard cider<sup>24</sup>, or Teddy Roosevelt's constant references to routing Spain out of Cuba and the virtues of the outdoor life, political success often seems to hinge on the ability to cultivate a larger-than-life image that will become rooted in popular culture. National identity, too, is related to the creation of a popular pantheon of heroes and of symbols invested with meanings that inspire patriotism. Some of the myths have a grain of truth, and scholars have to be wary of dismissing them as fabrications.

Although the phenomenon has gone largely unnoticed, fraternal organizations have played a large part in American political myth-making. One of the most influential organizations in this respect has been Freemasonry<sup>25</sup>, which has been highly successful in creating the notion that membership is a key to power and that “the Brotherhood” inspired the Founding Fathers. The truth of the myth or lack of truth does not necessarily bear on its influence. If one believes the gun is loaded, one gives power to the person waving it.

The need for leaders to be seen as having a mysterious source of power, of having been anointed and set apart, surely has something to do with why political personalities became active Masons and bothered, along with all their other duties, with holding Masonic office. Masonry held out the promise that it could uniquely contribute to their stature, that leadership was synonymous with lodge membership<sup>26</sup>. The American phrase “cherry-tree stories” seems apt for the unexplored genre of Masonic patriotic-macho myths, which have a firm basis in popular culture<sup>27</sup>.

### **The Stagecraft of Politics**

The status that Masonry both confers and derives from myth-making and from its standing in popular culture has gone largely unrecognized. That is a sign of effective stagecraft. The audience becomes so involved that it forgets it is in a theatre. It is little appreciated how many Masonic stories revolve around the Masonic associations of national heroes and the Masonic associations with the national patrimony, including constitutions and such symbols as seals and flags. Claims are made about the way in which Masonry has contributed to the basic freedoms and rights of the citizenry, or about how being a Mason has helped a leader or reinforced his virtue, or certified to his probity and testified to his

---

<sup>24</sup> See Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>25</sup> For an introduction to Masonic research and bibliography see R.A. Gilbert, “The Hole of Bibliography in Masonic Research”, in: *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 103 (1990): 124-49. For a general methodology see Talal Asad, “Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz,” in: *Man* 18, no. 2 (1983): 3-13. For problems in Masonic historiography see Allen E. Roberts, *Seekers of Truth: The Story of the Philalethes Society, 1928-1988* (Anchor Communications, Highland Springs 1988), and J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (Virginia: Seeker & Warburg, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbours: A Portrait of the Mexicans*, (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1989), 94

<sup>27</sup> “...the first twenty years of the nineteenth century in America saw the manufacture of myths about the Founding Fathers that, like Parson Weems’ tale of George Washington and the cherry tree, made them at once timeless and imitable, distant yet sympathetic.” Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 459.

sagacity—or even saved him from death on the battlefield, or at least protected him from danger at the hands of his enemies.

The study of fraternal movements and their myths requires attention to Durkheim and other classical social philosophers and culturalists, but an important reservation that must be made at the start about the significance of the supposed effects of Freemasonry is that it is not an institution-like family or school that works with the very young. Joining a lodge is customarily something undertaken after reaching the age of twenty-one (sometimes eighteen) or thereafter. Like the theatre, it is an activity largely patronized by adults. Freemasonry confers its ritual degrees at a time in life when, in the view of many behaviorists, the die of personality already has been cast.<sup>28</sup> For this and other reasons which will be discussed, this essay is somewhat skeptical about the claims made for Masonic influence. Nevertheless, Masonry was able to convince the public to attribute to the organization a great influence. An insight into the making of that public perception is provided by studying the legends that grow up around Masonry. They are legends and often lack historical substance. The “royal but” is that legends can exert as much power as facts.

There is no lack of patriots in the United States who, at least nominally, were Freemasons. This is not a uniquely American phenomenon; George Washington and Benjamin Franklin are not the only national heroes who were Masons. In the Mexican case, starting with Guadalupe Victoria or Vicente Guerrero, the first presidents of the young Mexican Republic, many prominent Mexicans have been depicted as loyal members (even if they were never initiated—such as the case of Miguel Hidalgo, one of the Mexican founding fathers) of the Masonic fraternity, the relationship being a symbiotic one whereby they have both given and received stature because of membership. As for the reason why the institution became so much a part of the United States and of Mexico, and without getting deeply into psychological or metaphysical discussions about environment and heredity, it is obvious that Masonic initiation and participation is like other extremely dramatic experiences. The degrees, or rituals, involve the candidate being mock-murdered and resurrected. Such startling events can permanently affect the attitudes and lifestyle of *some* individuals.

The more extravagant claims made for the lodge's influence and the commitment of its members do need to be viewed skeptically. Still, Freemasonry and other fraternal societies are no less influential than other social organizations, and so even without making extravagant claims they do contribute to identity; they do foster or encourage certain character traits; they push an individual in directions that he might not have otherwise pursued, and because of the popular mythology about their influence, they give an individual a certain stature. However, addressing which directions and towards what attitudes is not relevant to this investigation.

### **Probing the legends**

The elite's affiliation with Masonry, whether in the United States or Costa Rica or

---

<sup>28</sup> Financial reasons also might influence joining. Dues, especially in the so-called “higher bodies” such as the Scottish Rite with its thirty-three degrees, could be a problem for a young person.

Mexico or any of several dozen other countries, goes back, as has been mentioned, to the early days of the particular state being discussed. In the United States, as elsewhere, the fraternity's ritual along with its secretive and mysterious history provided an ideal soil for developing the *patois* of patriotism<sup>29</sup>. The images of the fathers and founders have grown in stature from Masonic organizations. It has been fancifully argued not just about the U.S. but about other countries as well that Freemasonry helps sustain a modern version of the magician king ruling a blessed and sanctified realm favored by the gods. The mantle of myth to support patriotism was created, incorporating the Masons' embroidered versions of the origins of the American flag:

The Continental Congress with but three or four exceptions was composed entirely of Masons. As Col. George Ross was of Scotch descent, the old Scotch Covenanters' "blue blanker," as it was called, may possibly have suggested the blue field for the union which has been claimed for it; but casting aside this supposition, it is evident that General Washington, when he designed it, had in mind the Masonic covering of the Lodge, the blue and starry decked canopy of heaven. The three colors, the five-pointed stars of fellowship or fraternity and the seven red stripes, all suggestive of the three, five and seven steps of the Masonry of the Blue Lodge, while the six stars on the Master's collar, the four stars on the Senior Warden's, the two stars on the Junior Warden's, together with the blazing star, comprised the thirteen stars of the constellation of the Masonic union, and were the symbols also of the thirteen States which formed the American Union<sup>30</sup>.

In actuality, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Continental Congress was completely composed of Masons or that General Washington or anyone else was thinking of a Masonic lodge when the Stars and Stripes was designed, but the story is illustrative of how Masonry wove itself into a national fabric.

A similar Masonic cherry-tree story concerns the Great Seal of the United States. This appears on the dollar bill, where one side has the rather standard eagle while the other depicts a pyramid and all-seeing eye. Claims regarding its Masonic significance include that the eagle's wings have respectively thirty-two and thirty-three feathers corresponding to the regular and special final degrees in the Scottish Rite, and that "The tail feathers number nine, the number of degrees in the Chapter, Council and Commandery of the York Rite of Freemasonry." As for the pyramid, it supposedly alludes to the third degree and to "the unfinished condition of the Temple when tragedy struck down its Master Architect<sup>31</sup>." Again,

---

<sup>29</sup> Patriotism requires tradition, and this involves investing objects such as flags and Masonic baubles with meaning, "...a practical present is, in part, composed of objects -artifacts and utterances- which are recognized to have survived from a near or a more distant past and are ready to be recalled from where they lie in the present, to be noticed, enjoyed or employed for what they may be made to mean or for whatever they may be worth in respect of current practical engagements. Such artifacts may include an ancient highway marked upon a map and inviting exploration, a 'medieval' castle, an old windmill, a ruin, monuments, relics, pictures and 'antiques' recognized by their design, which (to the instructed) may indicate a maker's name, or by a mark which assigns a date." Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 36.

<sup>30</sup> Edwin Sherman ed., *Fifty Years of Masonry in California I* (California: BiblioBazar, 2011), 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> Reynold M. Matthews, "The Great Seal of the United States," in: *Illinois Freemasonry* 2, no. 1 (1996): 16.

there is no evidence that the Great Seal was invested with such Masonic symbolism, but the Masons' lore has succeeded in making the story part of American political mythology.

Not all the myths with Masonic aspects prove to be outright fabrications<sup>58</sup>. Some cherry-tree tales prove to be true, and therefore serve as a warning about dismissing outright the tales that support a leader's reputation. At least on aquatic grounds, the true account of the long swim by President John Kennedy during World War II—to rescue his marooned men after their ship was sunk—suggests a resemblance to the Díaz case:

In reviewing to what extent Mexican Masonry provided or now exercises influence on the nation's leadership, and what use it has made of "cherry-tree stories," a useful example involves Porfirio Díaz, president from 1877 to 1880 and from 1880 to 1911. Porfirio Díaz is a good example of how Masonry has been used not just in the United States as the source of legitimatizing mythology, but in Mexico as well. He encouraged stories about his early Masonic adventures and sought, against opposition, the post of grand master of the Grand Lodge of the Federal District of Mexico City in 1883, and of grand master of the *Gran Dieta Simbólica de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* in 1890.

Since there is a strong argument that Díaz's administration was the progenitor of modern Mexican political culture, supposed legends about his Masonic life have special meaning. What appeared at the start of research to be only longstanding folklore suggested that Díaz benefited early in his career from his membership in the Craft. Supposedly, when he was on a ship going to Veracruz in 1870 he confided his identity to a brother Mason who saved his life when soldiers boarded the ship to hunt for him. Initial investigation revealed that the alleged Good Samaritan was Alexander K. Coney, a member of Loge la Parafite Union No.17 of San Francisco and the vessel's purser. According to the story, Díaz told Coney that there was a \$50,000 price on his head, but Coney kept the secret when the ship was searched by Mexican soldiers near Tampico and assisted the future president in jumping ship and swimming ashore. Years later when Coney visited Mexico, he refused the \$50,000 reward from the now-president Díaz on the grounds that he had only done his duty to a fellow Mason, but accepted appointment as Mexican consul in Europe and subsequently in San Francisco. Coney's lodge in San Francisco was established in 1851 and had a number of members from Mexico, Latin America, and elsewhere overseas. Its ritual differed from other California lodges and it was also distinctive in that it frequently received visitors from exotic places, including Tahiti. Thus it is well-known and, in fact, still in existence. Surely the adventures of Coney would have attracted attention and its records would confirm or deny the famous story, and, indeed, investigation in the archives of the Grand Lodge of California confirms the ties between Díaz and Coney<sup>32</sup>.

Undoubtedly, to him and to other presidents, having grand and mysterious titles was

---

<sup>32</sup> First I learned about this "story" in Denslow's classic work, *10,000 Famous Freemasons*. I thought it was only a cheery tree story, but then I found the records from the Lodge La Parafite Union No. 17 that confirmed that this event actually took place. See Denslow, *10,000 Famous Freemasons*, 313. See also, De los Reyes Heredia, *Herencias secretas*.



itself valuable, but along with the mystique that Masonry conferred, membership should be viewed in the light of the fact that Díaz and others in the ruling circle were Catholics of sorts and were Freemasons of sorts. (This raises the possibility that they found Freemasonry to be a political counterweight to Catholicism, and thus a way to maintain their credentials with both sides in the bitter confrontations between church and state—confrontations that, in the past, as perhaps now, were so much part of Mexican life.)<sup>33</sup> Díaz used Freemasonry, and the suspicion is that other leaders have done so as well. Masonry is often portrayed as a sinister behind-the-scenes manipulator, but Masonry was in turn manipulated for political purposes. Díaz became a Mason as part of his *pax porfiriana*, particularly as it applied to his conciliation policy towards the Catholic Church, *i.e.* as a way to reassure the anticlericals that concessions to the Catholic Church were tempered by Masonic rationalism.

A number of historians of the United States—and of Mexico—in the hopes of making sense out of a confusing situation, have accepted Masonic claims about the movement’s identification with founders and patriots without much examination, and treated Masonry as a democratizing force. This is oversimplification, and this article challenges that oversimplification. So too are anti-Masonic legends, such as that of Jack the Ripper, a story that will be briefly considered as an example of what might be called “reverse cherry-treeism,” taking up these themes in some detail.

There is no denying that Freemasonry helped sacralize and authenticate political leadership. This has led to its involvement with dubious individuals like Warren Harding as well as with Washington, and in the Mexican case with figures like Díaz as well as Juarez.<sup>34</sup> In short, I have tried to balance the view I have presented and have included what might be called anti-Masonic nonsense and unfounded criticism to the Masons, as well as Masonic fabrications of patriotic stories.

Nevertheless, American Freemasonry constantly emphasizes the fraternity's wonderful ties with national heroes. For that matter, so too does Mexican Masonry: for *Hidalgo*, *Juarez*, or *Díaz*, one only needs to read *Washington*, *Franklin* or *Revere*. In the United States, Masons make far too much of the half-truth that the Founding Fathers were members.<sup>35</sup> The same applies for the Mexican case. In the two countries, Masonry has contributed to the creation of a motherland patriotic epic and benefited from its connection with a version of political history that it has helped foster.<sup>36</sup> In Mexico, as in the United States, the fraternity’s history

---

<sup>33</sup> Freemasonry certainly at times was such a counterfoil; Carmelita, Díaz's wife, was the devout Catholic who balanced the equation and compensated for her husband’s Masonic secularism. Freemasonry in that case could provide a comforting psychological reassurance that ultimately Díaz was an anticlerical liberal, although the suspicion is that he really was the ultimate pragmatist. Charles A. Weeks, *The Juarez Myth in Mexico* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1. Everyone interested in Masonry should read this book, which bears directly on such issues as the creation of ritual and the origins of symbolism.

<sup>35</sup> Examples include gallery of paintings of dubious historical accuracy of Washington attending lodge meetings, claims that Masonic lodge led the crowd at Boston Tea Party, and extravagant overstatements about the number of Masons who signed the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

<sup>36</sup> See Barbara Patzek, “The Truth of Myth: Historical Thinking and Homeric Narration of Myth,” in: *History & Memory* 2, no. 1 (1990): 39.

has provided an ideal source for developing one aspect of the nation's mythology. The images of the fathers and founders of the Mexican Republic gained in stature by virtue of their supposed Masonic associations, as did the reputations of leaders in the United States.

This is not to claim that the resulting enhancement of the biographies of the two countries' leadership or the "Masonizing" of events hurt the political culture of either country: exemplars are useful and complete demythologization of a nation's past would seriously affect the legitimacy of government<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, as Lipset asserts, organizations that are internally undemocratic can help sustain democracy. He correctly argues that various internally dictatorial organizations protect the interests of their members:

...by checking the encroachments of other groups, institutionalized democracy within private governments is not a necessary condition for democracy in the larger society, and may in fact at times weaken the democratic process of civil society. The various secondary associations independent of the state which Tocqueville saw as necessary conditions of a democratic nation have been in both his day and ours largely one-party oligarchies<sup>38</sup>.

Although this is not an essay bent on debunking national myths or flaying the Masons, the reality, I argue, is not that Freemasonry and similar groups are a great fountain of democratic ideals, but that, rather shrewdly and quite deliberately, the Masons have been quick to reinforce a popular image of Freemasonry to the effect that Masonry is the protector and source of democratic values<sup>39</sup>. It is no wonder then that politicians have wrapped themselves in Masonic aprons. If assertions about lodges being a positive and spiritual force in Mexico be believed, there needs to be considerably more evidence produced that *either* the rituals somehow cultivated a democratic mentality *or* that there is a set of civic lessons which Masonry teaches which were absorbed by leaders. Yet in the pluralistic wonderland of the United States, where there are so many groups, the Masons possibly do contribute to democratization. They may contribute to democratization, in my judgment, because they add to the diversity of the country, particularly their philanthropic agenda, not because they are so inherently democratic in their practices.

What is undeniable is that, whatever the movement's vices and virtues in a political context, there is a "something" to the mysterious rites of Masonry that seems to meet a deep need, and one which exists in many countries. Masonry may be a secret movement, but it was and remains very much a part of political and popular culture. Masonry has benefited from that, reflected that, and even nurtured that. In the case of Freemasonry, while individuals clearly derived benefit from joining, the strength of the case often made by Masons for

---

<sup>37</sup> And this involves investing objects such as flags and Masonic baubles with meaning.

<sup>38</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 430-431.

<sup>39</sup> The following quote illustrates my point here: "We live through our history, both of fact and symbol. Symbols possess men, and even myths have their uses. George Washington and the cherry-tree myth is part of civil religion and serves us all. Nations live by their legends..." Stanley I. Kutler, "Beware of History When It's Tailored for Convenience," in: *Miami Herald* (May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1995), 4C.

Masonry—that it is consistently a beneficent and democratic influence on the *community*—is not immediately apparent. Indeed, neither are the purity of motives on the part of leaders, particularly politicians, seeking Masonic advancement. The great altruism that the Masons boast about is simply not evident in day-to-day Masonic activity. These secret ritualistic societies that are so much a part of American life do not fit the mold Fukuyama describes of NGOs fostering civil culture. Whatever Masonry has contributed to state and society—or whatever harm it has inflicted—it cannot be ignored. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance that scholars focus on the study of Freemasonry not only from the historical perspective using methodologies from that discipline. I encourage scholars of Freemasonry to propose new methodologies that help us understand such a complex organization that was, has been, and still is part of the landscape of the United States and many other countries around the world. Perhaps that is among the most important messages of this article.

### **An agenda for further research**

The influence of voluntary organizations on political life and society in general needs to be studied on an ongoing basis. Perhaps, as Fukuyama suggests, voluntary associations are a mainstay of democracy. But it is hard to credit such organizations as the Knights of Columbus or the Veterans of Foreign Wars or the Masons, all large and wealthy NGOs, with the virtues which Fukuyama seeks to give to NGOs. They are not the protectors of the open society, and their activities do not unambiguously support the Fukuyama thesis of an intermediate zone of voluntary societies between family and state that promote democracy, whatever the effects of other groups. *So the study of volunteerism's efficacy is obviously going to be on a group-by-group basis.*

By far the most important of the American fraternal organizations is Freemasonry. In the United States no other fraternity approaches it in size and assets. The Masons currently have approximately 2,500,000 members, a number that has been constant since the mid-1990s and has not increased. The Elks claim 1.5 million, but they have nowhere near the properties and investments that the Masons do, nor do the Moose with 1.8 million members or the Eagles with 1.1 million<sup>40</sup>. But clearly all these possessed influence. What that influence is seems more complicated than what Fukuyama makes it out to be. A good example of Masonry's abstruseness and metonymy, as well as its global pretensions, is the litany that the candidate must learn for the first, or Entered Apprentice, degree:

Q. What is the form and covering of a Lodge?

A. An oblong square, extending from east to west, between the north and south, from the earth to the heavens, and from surface to the centre.

Q. Why of such vast dimension?

A. To signify the universality of Masonry, and that a Mason's charity should be

---

<sup>40</sup> "Associations and Societies," in: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2002* (New Jersey: Funk & Wagnalls, Mahwah), 575 ff. See also: <http://www.grandlodge-tn.org/?chapters=Y&page=FAQ>

equally extensive<sup>41</sup>.

To conclude, there is little doubt that the building of social trust through the fostering of *some* voluntary organizations can be contributory to democracy. An estimated 70 percent of the American population belongs to at least one association and 25 percent belong to at least four.<sup>42</sup> What goes on in those associations, as these pages have suggested, is not always easy to understand. Such is the rationale and justification for employing the insights of political and popular culture, and avoiding simplistic analysis of voluntary associations in a period of unprecedented political change.

## Bibliography

- Almond, Gabriel A. and Sydney Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Asad, Talal. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz." In: *Man* 18, no. 2 (1983).
- Associations and Societies. *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2002*. New Jersey: Funk & Wagnalls, Mahwah.
- Braudy, Leo. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- De los Reyes Heredia, Guillermo. "Freemasonry and Mexican Presidentialism." In: *Journal of American Culture* 20, no.2 (1997).
- De los Reyes Heredia, Guillermo. *Herencias secretas: Masonería, política y sociedad en México*. México: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2009.
- De los Reyes Heredia, Guillermo and Paul J. Rich. "Gender, Sexual, and Racial Trouble: The Crossroads of North American Freemasonry in the Twenty-First Century." In: *REHMLAC* 4, n. 2, (Diciembre 2012-Abril 2013). Available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v4/n2/rehmlac.vol4.n2-gdelosreyesyprich.pdf>
- De los Reyes Heredia, Guillermo. "Presentación: Género y Masonería en los Albores del Siglo XXI." *REHMLAC*, 4, n. 2 (Diciembre 2012 - Abril 2013). Available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v4/n2/rehmlac.vol4.n2-gdelosreyes.pdf>
- Denslow, William. *10,000 Famous Freemasons*. Virginia: Macoy Publishing, 1957.
- Diamond, Larry. *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993.
- Evans, George A. et al, *A Guide to NGO Directories*. Virginia: Inter-American foundation, Arlington, 1995.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Green, Donald P. and Ian Shapiro. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

---

<sup>41</sup> Malcolm C. Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor* (Chicago: Charles T. Powner Co., 1974), 51-53.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Rauch, "The Hyperpluralism Trap," in: *The New Republic* (June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994), 23.

- Gilbert, R.A. "The Hole of Bibliography in Masonic Research." In: *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 103 (1991).
- Hobsbawm, Eric. and Terence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Holzner, Buckart and Roland Robertson. "A Problem Analysis of Processes of Identification and Authorization." In: *Identity and Authority: Explorations in the Theory of Society*. Edited by Roland Robertson and Burkart Holzner. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- Huntington, Samuel. "Democracy for the Long Haul." In: *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, no. 3-13 (1996).
- Kammen, Michael. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Kutler, Stanley I. "Beware of History When It's Tailored for Convenience." In: *Miami Herald*. 28 May 1995.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revised." In: *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994).
- Malcolm C., Duncan. *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor*. Chicago: Charles T. Pownier Co., 1974.
- Oakeshott, Michael. *On History and Other Essays*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- Ostrowski, Kryzysztof and Henry Teune. "Patterns of Democratic Leadership: Country Comparisons." In: *Democracy and Local Governance: Ten Empirical Studies*. Edited by Betty Jacob, Kryzysztof Ostrowski and Henry Teune. Honolulu: Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawaii, 1993.
- Patai, Raphael. *Myth and Modern Man*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1972.
- Patzek, Barbara. "The Truth of Myth: Historical Thinking and Homeric Narration of Myth." In: *History & Memory* 2, no. 1 (1990).
- Rauch, Jonathan. "The Hyperpluralism Trap." In: *The New Republic*, 6 June 1994.
- Reynold M. Matthews. "The Great Seal of the United States." In: *Illinois Freemasonry* 2, no. 1 (1996).
- Riding, Alan. *Distant Neighbours: A Portrait of the Mexicans*. New York: Vintage/Random House, 1989.
- Rippy, J. Fred. *Joel R. Poinsett, Versatile American*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1935.
- Roberts, Allen E. *Seekers of Truth: The Story of the Philalethes Society, 1928-1988*. Anchor Communications, Highland Springs 1988.
- Roberts, J. M. *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*. Virginia: Seeker & Warburg, 1972.
- Rosaldo, Renato. "Whose Cultural Studies?" In: *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994).
- Salamon, Lester L. "The Rise of Nonprofit Sector." In: *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 74 (1994).
- Sherman, Edwin ed. *Fifty Years of Masonry in California I* (California: BiblioBazar, 2011).

- Teune, Henry. "Democratic Requisites for Growth and Peace." In: *Democracy and Local Governance: Ten Empirical Studies*. Edited by Betty Jacob, Kryzysztof Ostrowski and Henry Teune. Honolulu: Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawaii, 1993.
- Vázquez Semadeni, María Eugenia. *La formación de una cultura política republicana. El debate público sobre la Masonería, México 1821-1830*. México: D.F.: UNAM-El Colegio de Michoacán, México, 2009.
- Vázquez Semadeni, María Eugenia. "La masonería en México, entre las sociedades secretas y patrióticas, 1813-1830". In: *REHMLAC* 2, no. 2 (diciembre 2010-abril 2011). Available <http://rehmlac.com/recursos/vols/v2/n2/rehmlac.vol2.n2-mvazquez.pdf>
- Weeks, Charles A. *The Juarez Myth in Mexico*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987.
- Zakaria, Fareed. "Bigger Than the Family, Smaller Than the State; Are voluntary groups, what make countries work?" In: *New York Times Book Review* (13 August 1995).