

# H-Net Reviews

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Joseph Klaitz, Michael H. Haltzel, eds. *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ix + 209 pp. \$57.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-45175-8.

Reviewed by Lora Wildenthal (Pitzer College)

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This volume of essays, based on papers given at a conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in November 1989, contains useful material for those seeking new perspectives on the French Revolution. Most of the essays are by historians; a couple of contributors are scholars of literature. As the editors' introduction states, "This book proceeds from the premises that the Revolution's influence beyond Western Europe has been greatly underestimated and that its impact has truly been a phenomenon of the *longue duree*, continuing to the present on a worldwide stage" (pp. 1-2). The editors speak of the "impact" (pp. 2, 6) of the French Revolution on the various places discussed in the essays: the United States, Poland and East-Central Europe, Russia, Haiti, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Mexico and China. Depending on the essay, authors have taken as their chronological focus the period of the Revolution itself or stretches of time up to the 1980s.

The opening essay by Jack Censer reviews some leading historiographical debates concerning the French Revolution. It provides a brief and conventional orientation to the older work of Georges Lefebvre; the revisionists Richard Cobb, Alfred Cobban, Robert Forster (an essay of whose appears in this volume) and George V. Taylor; and Francois Furet, Lynn Hunt, William Doyle, D. M. G. Sutherland, Simon Schama and John Bosher. Overall, Censer notes the predominance in recent scholarship of a rejection of Marxism and of a more or less negative appraisal of the Revolution. The historiographical debates, as Censer summarizes them, have ignored questions that the volume under review raises: those of international or global effects and interactions related to the French Revolution. While Censer does not remark upon this, the volume as a whole offers the reader some interesting food for thought along these lines. Nor does Censer attempt to situate these debates in the context of the essays that follow—an effort that is arguably the editors' task.

The editors suggest in their introduction that the French Revolution's "impact" is the volume's theme; I

would put forth that actually there are two kinds of essays in the volume, apart from Censer's introduction to the historiographical debates that have focused on France itself.

The first kind fits the editors' conceptualization of "impact" more nearly than does the second. This first kind supplies the reader with histories of states and regions around the world in the era of the French Revolution, and examines the reception and memory of the Revolution in those places during the years since. The essays by Lloyd S. Kramer on Unites States political culture, Jerzy W. Borejsza on Poland and (very briefly) other parts of East-Central Europe, Dmitry Shlapentokh on Russian intellectual life, Elbaki Hermassi on the Arab world, Nikki R. Keddie on the Middle East, Charles A. Hale on Mexico, and Maurice J. Meisner on Chinese socialism fall into this category. These essays do not devote space to the French Revolution in France, which is taken as a given entity, but rather focus on political and intellectual histories of their chosen regions and states.

The second kind of essay is a re-examination of the French Revolution itself in the context of histories of places outside France. The contributions of Robert Forster on Saint-Domingue/ Haiti in the late eighteenth century and of Christopher L. Miller on sub-Saharan Africa belong to this kind of conceptualization of "global ramifications." These essays problematize the French Revolution rather than taking it as a given.

The usefulness of each kind of essay will depend on the purposes of the reader. For those interested primarily in a region such as the Middle East or a state such as Russia, and who seek material on those places that takes into account French Revolutionary thought in the late eighteenth century and later, essays of the first kind will be of interest. Kramer's essay is a particularly fascinating and convincing example of this approach. Instructors will find it very useful for their presentation of the American Revolution. Kramer analyzes how the French Revolution promoted the development of a legitimate opposi-

tion (the two-party system), a public sphere, diplomatic separation from Europe and a more general stressing of difference between the United States and Europe. He also traces the influence of nativism and evangelical Protestantism to receptions of French Revolutionary thought. These, he argues, were constitutive of United States nationalism and to the definition of "patriotism." Kramer's essay is an absorbing account of how political ideas generated in one part of the world can shape internal debates and trends in another in profound ways.

In her essay on the Middle East, Nikki Keddie makes some brief but tantalizing remarks regarding how historians might detect the "influence" of the French Revolution: through local leaders' adherence or resistance to its ideas? She also asks whether thinkers in other parts of the world who referred to political ideas of the French Revolution have come to such ideas without such contacts? The question of the relationship between the "ideas of 1789" and Napoleon, whose impact on the Middle East was great, arises in both Keddie's and Hermassi's essays. In general, however, questions that draw from contexts outside of France and go to the heart of the French Revolution in its "domestic" aspect as well are rare among the essays in this volume of this first kind. Rather, these essays provide, first and foremost, information on their geographical areas. If only implicitly, they tend to depict the French Revolution as a set of symbols, ideas or political acts which became the object of outside commentary. The authors may, as Keddie does, remark on a "darker side" (p. 156) to French revolutionary thought, but do not probe further into the content of that thought.

The essays of the second kind, by Forster and Miller, push further directly at such questions. They refuse a conceptualization of the French Revolution that implies the one-way "impact" of a given entity. Rather, their essays address struggles over the complicated nature and

the operation in historical context of the Revolution's most basic concepts: liberty, freedom and equality. In his essay entitled "The French Revolution, people of color, and slavery," Forster asks what *liberte* meant to whites, free people of color and to slaves (p. 89). He thereby moves his investigation from the level of abstract citation of a famous slogan to a careful tracing of how Revolutionary ideas were deployed by the white French in Saint-Domingue, by people of color in France, and how those usages affected each other. Miller's essay, entitled "Unfinished business: colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa and the ideals of the French Revolution," likewise moves past an interpretation of "good" and "bad sides" of the French Revolution. He asks why the notion of French colonialists bringing ideas of the French Revolution to colonial subjects has endured. He describes a struggle inside and outside France over "colonialism ... as a program for the exportation of values" (p. 114). These two essays offer to the reader new ways of thinking about the meaning of the French Revolution itself, and therefore are of interest to those who otherwise may not turn to scholarship on Haiti and sub-Saharan Africa.

This volume presents an ambitious program that its essays fulfill in two main ways: through a focus on geographical areas that received the French Revolution as a force from the "outside," and on a reciprocal shaping of the meaning of the French Revolution between France and areas outside of France. Its individual essays will offer much to readers with various interests. In addition, the volume provokes important questions of how to think about and break down the concept of "global ramifications."

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