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P. M. Jones, *The French Revolution 1787-1804*. London and New York: Pearson Longman, 2003. xviii + 154 pp. Chronology, maps, documents, glossary, who's who, bibliography, and index. \$16.00 (pb). ISBN 0-582-77289-3.

Review by Edward J. Woell, Western Illinois University.

Currently those charged with teaching the French Revolution can utilize one of several impressive textbooks for their courses, albeit each with its unique set of assets and liabilities.[1] These, coupled with sourcebooks, a burgeoning number of internet sites, in addition to the ease with which one can selectively digitize documents and articles, essentially mean that a countless number of options is now available for instructors with pointed pedagogical goals in mind.[2] Yet as typical of so much in our consumer culture, the wealth of so many teaching resources can be both a blessing and a curse. To be sure, the endless choices offer a better opportunity for an instructor to customize a course and truly make it one's own. But with these many options come the additional responsibilities of keeping abreast of all the new offerings, as well as subsequently assessing whether better pedagogical choices could have been made.

Such limitless variety, however, has not deterred P. M. Jones from contributing yet another good resource to an already rich mix. Jones's *The French Revolution 1787-1804* is the latest addition to Pearson Longman's "Seminar Studies in History" series. This collection of textbooks may already be known to many in the French historical community. Indeed, D. G. Wright, Tyler Stovall, and Clive Emsley have contributed to this series, each with regard to a different topic or era of modern French history.[3] According to the publisher, the sundry texts included in the Seminar Studies in History are intended to bridge the gap between specialist articles, monographs, and textbooks by offering the most current research and interpretations, "to be accessible to the non-expert," and to "promote class discussion and encourage students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of major themes and topics." [4]

Jones attempts to attain these lofty goals through a brief and primarily political narrative of the French Revolution. His book is divided into three parts. The first discusses the setting for the Revolution, with an emphasis upon the complicated web of administrative, fiscal, and legal jurisdictions of the late Old Regime. With these preliminaries established, Jones proceeds to the fiscal dilemma that confronted the crown, the inefficient tax system that exacerbated it, and the fruitless efforts to resolve the growing crisis in the 1770s and 1780s. Instructors familiar with the late Old Regime will find in this part of the book a solid political explanation for the coming of the Revolution, but not necessarily a comprehensive view of the context from which it emerged.

Part Two, by far the largest of the three, takes up the Revolution itself, although it begins two years before the meeting of the Estates General. Jones's description of the movement from reform to revolution in 1787 and 1788 is quite detailed, but again its focus is almost exclusively on politics, particularly at the highest levels. The subsequent chapters in this part of the text comprise a rather conventional political account of the Revolution; instructors will find little extraordinary or exceptional in Jones's take on the critical events from 1789 to 1799. But as all historians must, the author takes a stand on decisive issues that have perennially divided scholars. As for the failure of a viable constitutional monarchy, Jones seems to point to the Champs de Mars massacre more so than other critical developments like the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and oath crisis, the Flight to Varennes, or even the advent of war. In explaining the Terror, Jones underscores the critical roles played by human agency and contingency in 1793 and 1794, with no or little consideration for the impact of pre-revolutionary language or political culture. In considering the period from 1795 to 1799 the author agrees with the recent historiographical assessment casting the Directory as, in Jones's words, "the first regime to build upon the achievements of 1790-91, and to make democratic institutions actually work for a time" (p. 65). Given the extension of his narrative to 1804, the author identifies the end of the Revolution occurring not with the Brumaire coup in 1799 but rather with the declaration of the First Empire. For this very reason, Jones's Napoleon Bonaparte comes across as a revolutionary consolidator, particularly within his discussion of the Civil Code.

The third part of the book includes a short but substantial assessment of the recent historiography of the Revolution. Jones begins with the demise of the Marxist interpretation, followed quickly by a consideration of revisionism, most notably the work of François Furet and Keith M. Baker. He also addresses more recent contributions made by scholars examining the role of women, terror and violence, and Napoleon's relationship to the Revolution. In discussing the lasting effects of the revolutionary decade, Jones is quick to point out that administrative and fiscal changes were substantial and enduring, yet he also sees the Revolution as a prime reason why "France found herself ill prepared to meet the challenges of the modern industrial age" (p. 99). The author concludes that the social impact was largely fruitful, arguing that "the biggest gains for ordinary people were the deeply personal ones...Now that it had been demonstrated that the human condition was not fixed, men and women were quietly taking charge of their own destinies" (p. 100). This assessment is followed by twenty-two primary documents of varying length, some of which may not be found in other documentary collections, much less in English as they are here. The last section of the book also includes a small glossary of French terms, a who's who consisting of approximately forty-five prominent figures from the revolutionary era, and a short guide to further reading.

So what, if anything, distinguishes Jones's text from other reputable textbooks on the French Revolution currently available? If the promotion on the back cover of the book is to be believed, this narrative "provides a broader chronological sweep (1787-1804) than most other textbooks on the French Revolution." But for this reviewer that claim is somewhat dubious. True, much in keeping with his previous work on political reform shortly before and early on in Revolution, Jones accentuates key developments leading up to revolution, particularly those during the critical years of 1787 and 1788, much more so than comparable textbooks.[5] The thorough description of events in these years speaks to Jones's interpretive tendency to view much continuity between old regime and new: an argument in which more than just the faint echoes of Tocqueville can be heard. On the other hand, in his discussion of the setting for the Revolution Jones is mostly mute about the broader socio-political and cultural developments of the eighteenth century that certainly loomed large in the revolutionary maelstrom, most notably the Enlightenment and the Jansenist struggles. Relatively little is said, therefore, about the Republic of Letters, the emergence of a public sphere, religious infighting, or, for that matter, the social and economic crises facing France during the last decades of the Old Regime.

Nonetheless, this textbook does, just as it purports on the back cover, identify "the main areas of controversy among specialist historians," specifically in Jones's insightful historiographical assessment. It is also a finely written and well constructed narrative, keenly balanced in an interpretive sense, and thus indicative of Jones's superb record of revolutionary scholarship.

My primary reluctance in utilizing this textbook for my own French Revolution and Napoleon course concerns the academic level of the reader that it seemingly anticipates. Jones abruptly mentions figures like Barnave and Brissot in his text, often with little explanation of who these figures were. While the book's "who's who" can be somewhat helpful in this respect, it does not always compensate for what the writer is assuming of his audience. Otherwise put, the narrative supposes a readership with an intermediate knowledge of the Revolution. Unfortunately, at least in my own experience, such an understanding is increasingly rare among students: even among history majors or those with more than a few history courses under their belt.

In spite of this reservation, though, I recommend that at the very least instructors teaching courses related to the French Revolution thoroughly examine this textbook. They may find Jones's text to be, especially if supplemented with detailed lectures and other appropriate pedagogical materials, a very good fit.

NOTES

[1] These textbooks include, but are not necessarily limited to, Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001; James B. Collins, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, Toronto: Wadsworth Thomson, 2002; Owen Connelly, *The French Revolution and Napoleonic Era*, third edition, Orlando: Harcourt, 2000; William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution*

1789-1799, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Donald Sutherland, *The French Revolution and Empire*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

[2] Among the sourcebooks available in English are John Hardman, ed., *The French Revolution Sourcebook*, second edition, London: Edward Arnold, 1998; and Laura Mason and Tracey Rizzo, eds., *The French Revolution: A Document Collection*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

[3] Clive Emsley, *Napoleon: Conquest, Reform, and Reorganization*, New York and London: Pearson Longman, 2004; Tyler Stovall, *France since the Second World War*, New York and London: Pearson Longman, 2001; D. G. Wright, *Revolution and Terror in France 1789-1795*, second edition, New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

[4] Website: <http://www.ablongman.com/html/ssh/>. Examined on 31 March 2004.

[5] P. M. Jones, *Reform and Revolution in France: The Politics of Transition, 1774-1791*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

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