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Gwynne Lewis, *France 1715-1804: Power and the People*. Harlow, England and New York: Pearson Education, 2004. xv + 307 pp. Maps, glossary, notes, and index., 19.99 U.K. (pb). ISBN 0-582-23925-7.

Review by Christine Adams, St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Gwynne Lewis's new book is the sixth to be published in the Longman series, *A Social History of Europe*, under the general editorship of Raymond Pearson. The books commissioned by the series editor set out to explore "the history of the major European nations, states and regions through key phases in their societal development from the late Middle Ages to the present" (p. x). Gwynne Lewis's survey fills the gap between those of Sharon Kettering and Roger Magraw for the same series.[1]

While these books are intended to summarize the latest scholarship in the field, they are also to be "invigorated by the findings and preoccupations of the author's original research" (p. x). Lewis draws on his own research, in particular that on Pierre-François Tubeuf, owner of a coal company in lower Languedoc, as well as his work on revolutionary and counterrevolutionary activity in the town of Nîmes in the department of the Gard.[2] But most impressive is his synthesis of recent literature in the social history of eighteenth-century France. Lewis's volume examines the full range of relevant monographs and reviews the major findings and debates in the field. The breadth of his work—he acknowledges that he "exchanged analytical depth for methodological breadth" (p. 1)—shows the sure hand of a seasoned historian.

Lewis divides his book into three main sections. In part one, "La France Profonde," he examines the absolutism of Louis XIV and the Regency, but then goes on to focus primarily on the "four estates" of France: the Catholic Church, the nobility and the seigneurial system, the ancien regime bourgeoisie, and the "fourth estate" of the poor, urban and rural. He does a fine job of outlining the complicated social world of the ancien regime. He emphasizes the diversity of peasant laborers in rural France (as well as the terminology used to describe them), and analyzes the slow and uneven process of industrialization in France, noting that "the origins and work culture of the majority of factory workers and miners at the beginning of the eighteenth century was rural and peasant, not urban and proletariat" (p. 121). This is a useful point for students who tend to privilege the English model of industrialization as the norm. He is equally careful in his delineation of the nobility, with its overlapping imprecise categories, as well as the ancien regime bourgeoisie. He sets his discussion of these two social groups in the context of the heated debates that have accompanied the use of both the words "feudalism" (pp. 66-67) and "bourgeois," a term which he notes "is charged with explosive, ideological significance" (p. 89). His attention to language and context is a valuable reminder that we cannot always take these categories at face value. And yet, his commonsensical approach resists cleansing our vocabulary of terms which, although problematic, are essential to conceptualizing past social relationships.

Part two considers "Winds of Change" brought about by what he labels "Enlightenments": "Enlightenments" and the people and "Enlightenments" and the state. Topics of love, sex, marriage, medicine, health, and literacy constitute the "people's Enlightenment" while economic growth, police reforms, and efforts to institute "enlightened absolutism" are the focus of the state's "Enlightened" policies. At times, the line between "the people" and "the state" seems to blur; after all, public health policies may have reflected a concern with the well-being of the masses, but were instituted by a state concerned with air quality, sanitation, and hygiene. At times, these policies, such as the "Great

Confinement of the 1720's", strike the reader as less than enlightened, a point with which Lewis would presumably concur.

Part three looks at "Reform and Reaction." In Tocquevillian fashion, Lewis sees the Revolution less as a turning point in itself, and more as part of a movement that began with the reform efforts of Turgot and Necker in the 1770s, and which culminated in the exclusion of the French people from power and the consolidation of state authority. He explores the explosive consequences when growing intellectual sociability, political awareness and a strongly anti-aristocratic mood met up with the fiscal and financial crisis of the Old Regime, resulting in the shattering events of 1789 and beyond. The French Revolution itself, however, plays a relatively minor role in Lewis's overview of the history of this tumultuous century

Despite the fact that this is a work of social history, one that at times harkens back to the class, demographic, and statistical preoccupations of the 1970s, Lewis has made it fresh and infuses it with some of the most exciting current work by ancien regime and Revolutionary scholars. While the specter of Marx still hangs over much of the historiography of pre-Revolutionary France, Lewis argues that the richness, as well as the dynamic, of eighteenth-century France history emerges from the *interaction* of political, social, economic, and intellectual events and movements rather than from the conflict of nineteenth-century class struggles, as defined by Karl Marx (p. 2). On the other hand, Lewis accepts one of the key elements of the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution: that it culminated in the victory of the bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie "not only created by bloody social conflict but also by its dependence upon the French state" (p. 264). In contrast, having helped the bourgeoisie to secure victory in their historical struggle against the aristocracy, ordinary people were punished for their audacious Revolutionary assumption that they were now bona fide members of the (political) nation (p. 3). The revolution of the masses would have to wait for another day.

One of the strongest features of this book is Lewis's careful attention to the newest scholarship in the history of ancien regime and Revolutionary France. While he emphasizes social history, true to his assertion that the social emerges only in the context of political, cultural, and intellectual movements, he draws together the full spectrum of historical research. Lewis is particularly skillful in his use of case studies to highlight trends and debates: for example, Maurice Hamon and Dominique Perrin's work on the Saint-Gobain glassworks in Picardy, and Paul Bamford's history of the Chaussade family.[3] As one of the scholars whose work Lewis generously cites, I greatly appreciate his book for bringing the findings of more specialized monographs to a wider audience. But it can, at times, become a distraction. For the teacher and the graduate student, this book is a godsend; it outlines the historical debates, offers useful bibliography for further reading, and, in general, provides a shortcut for the scholar eager to obtain a gloss on current trends in the social history of the ancien regime and Revolution. However, this may also limit its attractiveness to the general public, or even for use in an undergraduate survey. Non-specialists may not be interested in the names of the specific scholars associated with seemingly arcane debates about French economic progress and the fiscal situation of the monarchy. Lewis's careful crediting of his sources and the attribution of arguments in the text can sometimes get in the way of the narrative flow.

Still, this book is much more than just a survey textbook, a summary of the latest scholarship. It is a text with a strong point of view. As Lewis points out in the introduction to his book, it is not intended "to provide a general history of eighteenth-century France. Its main focus is the relationship between the decline of an aristocratic and ecclesiastic state, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the reaction of *le peuple* to both of these historic evolutions" (p. 1). While past social histories of ancien regime France have often emphasized continuity, the *longue durée* in the style of the Annales school of history, Lewis underscores conflict: "... it was the complex, often violent deconstruction of this relationship that played a crucial role in the fall of the Bourbon monarchy, the course of the Revolution of 1789 and the shaping

of the modern French State” (p. 1). In particular, he wants to give due weight to the actions of the poor and “powerless” in the shaping of French history. Still, in his account, the actions of the state—in particular, war, along with the economic consequences of and fiscal expedients attempted to manage war—are key to the unfolding of events.

Lewis sees the Revolution as a moment when the relationship between power and the people might have been redressed, and asks the question: “[W]hy were the poor denied a legitimate voice, at a national level, in deciding the shape of their own lives, and what were the consequences of this denial” (p. 4)? He shows a laudable sympathy for the quashed aspirations of the masses of the French “*le peuple*” who, in his view, ultimately gained little from the French Revolution. “Our argument throughout this work has been that one of the striking, and ultimately fatal, failures of ancien regime and Revolutionary administrations was the inability to create anything approaching a sustainable, substitute welfare state for the working classes” (p. 270). This harkens back to William Doyle’s pessimistic view that ultimately, the French Revolution was in every sense a tragedy.”[4]

While Lewis is clearly a careful scholar, a few mistakes make their way into the text; for example, Sophie was the wife, not the mother, of Rousseau’s *Emile* (p. 60). He sometimes opines that one historical interpretation is “more plausible” than another (see, for example, p. 69), or that a particular historical thesis is “contentious” (p. 154) without explaining why. Still, this book is an important contribution to understanding eighteenth-century France and the abundant historical literature it has generated.

NOTES

[1] Sharon Kettering, *French Society 1589-1715* (Harlow, England and New York: Longman, 2001); Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914: A Social History* (Harlow, England and New York: Longman, 2002).

[2] Gwynne Lewis, *The Advent of Modern Capitalism in France, 1770-1840: The Contribution of Pierre-François Tubeuf* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); *The Second Vendée: The Continuity of Counter-Revolution in the Department of the Gard, 1789-1815* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[3] Maurice Hamon and Dominique Perrin, *Au coeur du XVIIIe siècle industriel: condition ouvrière et tradition villageoise à Saint-Gobain* (Paris: Editions P.A.U., 1993); Paul Bamford, *Privilege and Profit: A Business Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

[4] William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 425.

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