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Lisa Dicaprio, *The Origins of the Welfare State: Women, Work, and the French Revolution*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. xiv +259 pp. Notes and index. \$40.00. (cl). ISBN: 13-978-0-252-032021-5.

Review by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College.

Lisa Dicaprio's long-anticipated book was worth the wait. This work fills in a gap on the shelf next to Albert Soboul, Dominique Godineau and Paul Dutton. [1] The (presumably marketing) decision to privilege the welfare aspect of Dicaprio's work in the title which I knew under the working title of "Women and the First Welfare State" over the gender and labor components of the project does not do justice to the full scope of what she has accomplished – the subtitle is a far more accurate depiction of what the book actually discusses. That said, Dicaprio demonstrates concretely an important set of insights into the political economy of the labor process, the possibilities for the political mobilization of women during the French Revolution, and the emergence of new conceptions and new ways of implementing of the interrelationships of charity, welfare and the state.

The chapters are lengthy and are organized chronologically. Dicaprio uses secondary sources to discuss the nature of charity under the old regime and how it is transmuted into welfare during the liberal stage of the Revolution. She then explores how women were perceived and shifting conceptions of the purpose of the work the state provided work for women. The longest chapter investigates how the political upheavals of the Year II affected the central issues of "work, welfare and citizenship." An important chapter looks at the dismantling of centralized welfare after 9 Thermidor. Finally, an all too brief epilogue hazily sketches the legacy of the experiments in welfare undertaken during the Revolution until the construction of the contemporary social welfare state after World War II.

The most significant contribution that Dicaprio has made to the history of the Revolution is the fleshing out of the women's workshops discussed briefly by Soboul and Godineau. By giving these important institutions the attention that they merit, Dicaprio broadens considerably our understanding of the evolution of the position of women in Revolutionary thinking on assistance, the right to work and political participation and places these issues firmly in the context of administrative centralization and decentralization so central to the Revolution but left out of far too many contemporary accounts. As she has always done, Dicaprio's methodology is to look at state policies, the twists and turns in their implementation and the response of the people affected by these policies. She demonstrates that female labor organization outlived 9 Thermidor because the workshops produced for the war effort and, not surprising, was tied to the fate of the sans-culotte movement and justified by a shift in how women's social roles were understood (pp. 166, 188). Here, Dicaprio polishes the faded luster of George Rudé's interpretation of the period and uses it against the problematic assumptions of Soboul and Joan Landes (pp. 126, 145, 159). [2] This is a valuable corrective that reminds us of the significance of the political choices made after 9 Thermidor.

Dicaprio has also made an important contribution to the growing list of studies of women's labor. Because of its narrow temporal focus and restriction to two women's workshops that employed approximately 9,000 indigent women over a four year period (1790-94) (p. 150), Dicaprio's study is a useful complement to the broad strokes sketched by Judith Coffin, Clare Haru Crowston, and Daryl Hafer. [3] Also by keeping the political economy of labor relations firmly at the forefront of her

analysis, Dicaprio pays critical attention to the “threat from below” a problem not always applied to treatments of women’s work.

It is, somewhat strangely, in the relationship of her analysis of the French Revolution to the origins of the modern welfare state that Dicaprio is least effective in making her contributions explicit. The brief introduction and the epilogue lay out an argument, but the outlines are left unfilled. A fuller treatment of the implications of the decisions about welfare made by the Constituent Assembly in 1790 for the history of modern France and of the modern world more generally would have been quite welcome. Perhaps Dicaprio has tightened the skeins in other places (the lack of a bibliography made this harder to check) but, in any case, more depth on this subject would have improved the book’s argumentative power considerably.

As with any important book, especially relatively short ones, there are some other areas that might have benefited from additional attention. I want to emphasize that these quibbles should not be seen as undermining the significance or power of Dicaprio’s arguments. First, a more detailed examination of questions of production such as was undertaken by Crowston and even more so by Hafter would have been useful in understanding some of the contentious issues raised by the women working in these ateliers. In particular, a focus on production would have showed the limitations of centralization and why the state was unable to enforce certain kinds of changes. Secondly, despite Dicaprio’s emphasis on the significance of the switch to producing for the war effort, she does not cite the key sources that examine the economic mobilization overseen by the Committee of Public Safety. In particular, the fundamental work of Camille Richard would have provided depth and parallels to some of the points made by Dicaprio. [4] Finally, in stark contrast to Godineau’s look at the same subject, Dicaprio is almost exclusively reliant on the accounts found in the series F15 in the Archives Nationales. The records of the Minister of War at Vincennes; the Committee of Public Safety in AF II, the police records in F7 and the reports compiled by the Ministry of the Interior in F12 are strangely almost all lacking from Dicaprio’s accounts. As with the consultation of Richard’s work, I suspect that these sources would have provided depth and details rather than changing her conclusions in any substantive way, but their omission was somewhat troubling.

Lisa Dicaprio’s *The Origins of the Welfare State* should be of interest to people of many different areas of inquiry. From social policy to political economy to gender, Dicaprio’s work makes and supports important claims that will shift the historiography when they are fully assimilated. Competently written, Dicaprio has given us a glimpse of the problems faced by revolutionaries faced with large numbers of indigent women in Paris, administrators who had to run these unwieldy structures and the women who worked, organized, petitioned all while attempting to keep body and soul together for themselves and for their families. This book was indeed worth the wait.

NOTES

[1] Albert Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l’an II : mouvement populaire et gouvernement révolutionnaire, 2 Juin 1793-9 Thermidor An II*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Clavreuil, 1962) of which a small part was translated as *The sans-culottes, the popular movement and revolutionary government, 1793-1794*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998 [1988]) and Paul V. Dutton, *Origins of the French welfare state: the struggle for social reform in France, 1914-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[2] Soboul, *Les sans-culottes*, Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

[3] Judith Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Parisian Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) and Daryl M. Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

[4] Camille Richard, *Le Comité de salut public et les fabrications de guerre sous la terreur* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1922). This is also an area treated in depth in my own work, notably *The Path Not Taken: French Industrialization in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1830* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

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