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Gilbert Shapiro, John Markoff. *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doleances of 1789.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. xxxi + 684 pp. $75.00 US (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-2669-6.

Reviewed by Kenneth Margerison (Southwest Texas State University)
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Simply stated, *Revolutionary Demands* is a remarkable book. Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff have spent over thirty years analysing the entire body of general *cahiers* drafted by the French nobility and the third estate in the electoral assemblies of the principal *bailliage* assemblies on the eve of the Estates General of 1789. They have also analysed a representative sample from the parish *cahiers* published in the "Official Series" of the *Commission de recherche et publication des documents inédits sur l'histoire économique de la Révolution française*. Although clerical and urban *cahiers* are not included in the study, the authors have assembled an enormous body of data upon which to base their analyses. The authors have already made this archive available to scholars, and they hope to produce transportable versions with accompanying software in the near future.

The structure of the book is certainly unique. Almost one-third of the text is devoted to the theory and practice of content analysis and to its application in studying the *cahiers*. Most of the actual analyses of the *cahiers* themselves are presented in the form of previously published essays by Shapiro and Markoff, but there are also contributions by Timothy Tackett and Philip Dawson. The authors clearly intend their work to appeal to two somewhat distinct audiences. The first is the body of social scientists who, apparently, are still struggling to create a satisfactory method of analyzing the content of a large body of textural material. Shapiro and Markoff believe they have created such a methodology, and they take great pains to demonstrate its superiority over the alternatives. The second audience, of course, is composed of historians of late eighteenth-century France. Although the authors recognize that many in the latter category may opt not to read the theoretical portions of the book, familiarity with the methodology considerably enhances the reader's understanding of their work. Almost certainly the authors hope that this introduction into content analysis will spur other historians to use their data archive or to undertake the study of other bodies of textual sources.

From the standpoint of social science, one of Shapiro and Markoff's great achievements is the creation of a database of coded information drawn from the *cahiers de doléances* of 1789. Their method of establishing such a database was to employ a number of trained coders to read the *cahiers* and assign specific codes to each grievance. The coders were also charged with determining the action that the drafters sought for each grievance and identifying the assembly which produced the *cahier*. The authors created four categories of codes ranging from the most general to the highly specific plus a fifth category to identify the action demanded. Thus, for example, a grievance might be identified as dealing with government (coded G) and more specifically taxation (coded TA) in the category of indirect taxes (coded IN) concerned with the salt tax, the *gabelle* (coded GA). If the grievance called for the abolition of the *gabelle*, the coder would add the code AB. The advantage of the system is the precision with which the coder could record a code for each grievance. As a result, the coders assigned over 1,200 combinations of codes to the specific grievances in the analysed *cahiers*. Coders also had a means of recording grievances that fit none of the predetermined categories, and they employed a method for making whatever qualifying remarks they thought appropriate. Obviously this system required superb accuracy on the part of the coders, but Shapiro and Markoff ran a number of tests which verified the validity of the method.

The coding of this sample of the *cahiers* and the subsequent tabulation (which appears as an appendix of the book) of the frequency of these grievances is a major breakthrough for historians. Ever since Beatrice Hyslop undertook her study of the cahiers in 1934, historians have used various methods to determine the content of a broad sampling of these fascinating documents.[1] With the exception of Hyslop's coding of the general cahiers, most studies have focused on regional *cahiers* or a limited national sampling.[2] However, all these previous studies have severe methodological limitations. The data gathered by Shapiro and Markoff provides historians, for

the first time, with a complete and accurate tabulation of the contents of all the general *cahiers* of the third estate and the nobility and a representative sampling of the contents of the parish *cahiers*. The authors have also developed sophisticated computer programs to manipulate the coded material. Timothy Tackett's use of their archive to demonstrate the level of hostility to the clergy among urban elites in the west verifies the value of their work for other historians. The chapters of the last third of the book provide examples of various ways that the material can be manipulated to provide answers to some of the thornier problems that have bedevilled historians since the nineteenth century.

What are the major demands the authors found in the *cahiers*? The greatest preponderance of grievances concerned taxation in general and indirect taxes in particular. However, the dissatisfaction with the system of taxation varied considerably among the three categories of *cahiers*. Complaints about taxation characterized 66 percent of the peasant grievances but only 43 percent of the third estate and 36 percent of the nobility. Surprisingly, the *droit de contrôle*, the tax on the official registration of documents which imposed burdens on all levels of society, was the most frequently criticized of all taxes. However, more *cahiers* at the parish level complained about the *gabelle* (43 percent) than the *droit de contrôle* (35 percent). More striking was the attention given to constitutional issues in the general *cahiers* of the third estate and the nobility. For example, the *cahiers* of both the nobility (95 percent) and the third estate (86 percent) demanded regular meetings of the Estates General, but only 21 percent of the parish *cahiers* made a similar demand. The French peasantry in 1789 were clearly more concerned with issues directly affecting their economic well-being than those reestablishing the representative institutions of the realm.

The parish *cahiers* demonstrate the level of complaint against the seigneurial system. In *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*, Alfred Cobban asserted that the *cahiers* rarely condemned the seigneurial system. Shapiro is able to demonstrate, to the contrary, that over 70 percent of the peasant *cahiers* contained grievances against the seigneurial system and 84 percent of third estate *cahiers* sought the abolition of specific seigneurial institutions. Markoff reveals that peasants were willing to indemnify the holders of seigneurial rights in specific cases where a monetary value could be accurately assigned, and he suggests that this may have been why the deputies in the Constituent Assembly believed peasants would be willing to indemnify their lords for the loss of seigneurial rights after the abolition of feudalism on August 4, 1789.

Markoff argues that all levels of society were open to change in the spring of 1789 even though there was little agreement as to what that change might entail. In general the *cahiers* demanded reforms, and there were very few requests, with the exception of 13 percent of the noble *cahiers* asking for the maintenance of the seigneurial system, for institutions to remain unchanged. The peasant *cahiers* in particular expressed considerable ill will toward the Old Regime. The nobility were extraordinarily concerned with constitutional issues such as the organization and authority of the Estates General, the establishment of personal liberty, the maintenance of private property, and the financial accountability of the government. The third estate, on the other hand, was less concerned with issues regarding the nature and limitation of government and more interested in issues related to its place in society and its commercial activities. Therefore, third estate *cahiers* demanded vote by head in the Estates General, the abolition of internal customs duties, and careers open to talent in the military. Based on the clear distinction between noble and third estate *cahiers*, Markoff concludes that "the agenda of the Nobility reminds us, perhaps startlingly so, of the degree to which the French Revolution was the work of aristocrats " (p. 382), a view which affirms the conclusions of other recent scholarship.[3]

Shapiro and Markoff manipulate their data to reveal the levels of consensus within the three groups of *cahiers*. At the parish level there was little consensus on the agenda to be pursued, but in those areas where the parishes addressed the same concerns there was strong agreement on demands to be made. Conversely, the third estate and noble *cahiers* registered greater consensus on the agenda to be undertaken than on the actions necessary to end the problems. The authors also measure the relationship between the frequency that grievances appeared in *cahiers* with the level of agreement within groups regarding redress. Only the third estate registered a high level of agreement on the necessary actions to take regarding these frequently discussed grievances. Shapiro and Markoff conclude that this relative consensus within the third estate was a product of the national debate which had preceded the drafting of the *cahiers*. While the nobility had certainly participated in this debate, they had been unable to establish any agreement on agenda because of their ambivalence on certain issues like privilege. Assessing the levels of the greatest disagreement between the third estate and the nobility, the authors cite the issues of the organization of the Estates General, the seigneurial regime, miscellaneous economic

issues, and criteria for mobility.

Markoff, using sophisticated statistical methodology, measures the noble and third estate agreement or disagreement in the *cahiers* by examining the influence of urbanization, royal centralization, intellectual stimulation, commercial activity, and the presence of economic crisis at the *bailliage* level. He concludes that there is more homogeneity between noble and third estate *cahiers* in areas characterized by strong royal centralization and vibrant economic activity. *Bailliages* with less agreement between the orders were in the *pays d'états*, which had less centralization, and in areas with less economic vitality. No single variable determined the level of agreement or disagreement, but opportunities for ennoblement seem to have little influence on the level of agreement obtained. Furthermore, areas experiencing economic crisis exhibited higher levels of agreement between the estates perhaps indicating that the elites found common ground in the midst of social upheaval. On a related subject, Shapiro and Philip Dawson argue that in towns with ennobling offices, the demands of the bourgeoisie were more radical than in towns without such offices. Using statistical arguments, they concluded that this radicalism was not a result of the difficulty of obtaining these offices, but was a byproduct of resentment against their simple existence.

Convinced that the *cahiers* offer valuable insights into pre-revolutionary public opinion, Shapiro and Markoff believe that they have developed the methodology for extensive exploration of them, and they present their readers with examples of how this data can be used. In the process they demonstrate a deep historical understanding of the *cahiers* with which they are working, the issues at stake in early 1789, and the meaning of these documents to the individuals who drafted them. Their findings, in contrast to most monographic studies, do not support a central thesis or develop a specific theme. The results of their work on the *cahiers* have more the character of a series of small studies on a large body of information. The *cahiers* provide an ideal subject for the methods of content analysis. Each *cahier* consisted of a list of demands which can be catalogued or coded. Most of the demands did not require a great deal of elaboration, and, unlike published materials of the pre-revolutionary period, they did not contain long political discourses based on a wide variety of ideological components which would be difficult if not impossible to code.

Despite the thoroughness and intelligence with which the authors have undertaken their study, a content analysis of this sort cannot answer all the questions surrounding the *cahiers* of 1789, a reality clearly recognized by the authors. For instance, this methodology could not take into account local political struggles which might significantly alter the character of grievances, such as the loss of control by the urban representatives from Troyes of their *bailliage* assembly or the dispute between the local *négociants* and the glass manufacturers in Metz over the creation of a national tariff.[4] Nor could such analysis reveal that the rural communities of the Gironde–engaged in a long-standing rivalry with the city of Bordeaux–had little influence on the final form of the grievance list of their *bailliage*.[5] Regarding the establishment of consensus between the nobility and the third estate, the codes ignore the attempts of Parisian members of the Society of Thirty, who were determined to create a union of orders in the Estates General, to influence directly the drafting of the noble and third estate *cahiers* in a number of *bailliages*.[6]

The recognition of the limitations of content analysis in no way demeans the usefulness of this methodology for studying the *cahiers* of 1789. Shapiro and Markoff have provided historians with a wealth of new information about these important pre-revolutionary documents. Their creation of a data archive and the software to manipulate it will provide opportunities for other historians to analyse the *cahiers* in new and exciting ways. The authors' imaginative use of the data in their own studies of the *cahiers* demonstrates new methods of looking at old problems. In short, the publication of *Revolutionary Demands* signifies an extraordinary achievement on the part of the authors, and it opens the door to the further exploration of this rich collection of source material so important for the study of the French Revolution.

Notes

[1]. Beatrice Hyslop, *French Nationalism in 1789 According to the General Cahiers* (New York, 1934).

[2]. For example see Paul Bois, *Paysans de l'ouest: des structures économiques et sociales aux options politiques depuis l'époque révolutionnaire dans la Sarthe* (Le Mans, 1960); Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge Mass., 1964); Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *La Noblesse au XVIIIe siècle: de la féodalilté aux lumières (Paris, 1976); George Taylor, "Revolutionary and Nonrevolutionary Content in the* Cahiers *of 1789: An Interim Report,"* French Historical Studies_ 7 (1972): 479-502.

[3]. Allison Patrick, "The Second Estate in the Constituent Assembly, 1789-91," *Journal of Modern History* 62 (1990), pp. 223-52; Kenneth Margerison, *Pamphlets and Public Opinion: The Campaign for a Union of Orders In the Early French Revolution* (West Lafayette, 1998).

[4]. Lynn Avery Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786-1790* (Stanford, 1978), pp. 64-65; Kenneth Margerison, *P.-L. Roederer: Political Thought and Practice During the French Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 28-31.

[5]. Alan Forrest, *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 34-36.

[6]. Margerison, *Pamphlets*, pp. 119-23.

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