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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Hardman, ed. *The French Revolution Sourcebook.* New York and London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1999. xvii + 261 pp. $22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-71983-1.

Lynn Avery Hunt. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution.* University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. xiii + 212 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-02087-7; $28.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-271-02088-4.

Laura Mason, Tracey Rizzo, eds. *The French Revolution: A Document Collection.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999. xiii + 357 pp. $31.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-669-41780-7.

Peter McPhee, Inc. NetLibrary. *The French Revolution and Napoleon: a sourcebook.* London: Routledge, 2002. xxii + 213 pp. ISBN 978-0-585-45286-9.

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A Survey of Some Document Readers on the French Revolution

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The quarter century of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era is one of the most written-about historical periods. Most universities offer specialized upper-level courses on the subject, and all historians of Europe confront the subject in their teaching. Within the last five years or so several collections of primary sources have been published. The choice of textbook and document reader is always affected by the instructor's vision of history, and this is especially true when teaching the French Revolution. Your vision of the Revolution will determine not only whether you emphasize social, cultural, or intellectual developments, but also when you begin, and most importantly, when you end the story. Some of the questions that will influence your choice of a document reader include: How much time to spend on the Old Regime, on the causes of the Revolution, on the pre-Revolution? How to balance the social and political, the city and the countryside, the center and the periphery? How to include women, workers, peasants, and non-whites in the narrative? Where to stop the course? Does the abandonment of the principle of Revolutionary government signal the end of the Revolution? Does Napoleon belong to the reactionary nineteenth century or to a broader revolutionary quarter century?

John Hardman's *The French Revolution Sourcebook* is the most thorough collection of sources on the Revolutionary period up to the end of the Terror. The focus here is on France's political and especially constitutional problems, the attempts of those holding power to model an effective political structure to govern the new nation. While this political/constitutional approach has problems associated with it (not least the absence of ordinary people other than as subjects), its strength is the thorough examination of the political crises of the Revolution, and especially the pre-Revolution. On the pre-Revolution Hardman's intention is to present the struggle between the king and the Parlements over how to interpret France's fundamental laws. Most of the documents in this section are government documents, primarily ministerial memos and letters. The section on the edicts of May 1788 contains a host of fascinating documents that allow students to see how things got done (or were effectively hampered) in the Old Regime.

The longest section of the book (about one hundred pages), called "National Assembly," is devoted to the Republic through to the Thermidorean reaction. It begins with conflicts between Girondins and Montagnards, and then between supporters and opponents of the 1793 constitution. Then it moves into the Terror, the attacks on the H=bertists and Dantonists, and finally the downfall of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety. As throughout the book, Hardman's selection of documents is guided by his interest "in those who do possess [political power]–kings, ministers and advisers–because such

people have a more demonstrable impact" (p. xv). In this case this means that most of the documents are either directly from Robespierre or the Committee of Public Safety, or from debates taking place within the Convention.

Hardman's document collection is very strong on the political give-and-take that went on in ministerial councils, at the Estates-General, in the National Assembly and the Committee of Public Safety. No other collection is as thorough on the pre-Revolution or on Robespierre's downfall. Each short section has a well-written introduction, and together these form a short narrative of the period covered by the book, as well as providing the context for the documents. The collection works admirably to describe the constitutional and political struggles that tore apart first the monarchy and then the Revolution itself.

Despite the strengths of the text, it seems to me inadvisable to use it as the sole source for providing primary texts to students. There is little mention of the role of ordinary peasants and workers, women, even counter-Revolutionaries, subjects which most instructors are likely to want to include. That said, there is no better collection available for analyzing and understanding the interplay of events, the theoretical debates, the political backstabbing, and the give-and-take that were behind the edicts of 1788, the calling of the Estates-General, the radicalization of the National Assembly, and Robespierre's downfall.

The other documentary readers surveyed here are broader in content than Hardman's. Laura Mason and Tracey Rizzo's *The French Revolution: A Document Collection* is explicitly intended to provide students with documents that reflect both "contemporary historiographic concerns" and older modes of interpretation. In a practical way this means they include both the kinds of political documents required to understand what the government was doing in Paris, while also including women, slaves, peasants, and artisans. Finally, a guiding principle in their selection is to choose documents that allow us to hear the words of the actors themselves, to see how they experienced and lived the confusion of the Revolutionary period.

This collection is divided into four sections. Part 1, "From Old Regime to Revolution," covers the pre-Revolution through to the Tennis Court Oath and the royal session at the end of June, and also contains a section on popular revolt (rural unrest and the March on Versailles, primarily). Part 2 takes the reader through to the king's trial, with chapters on the legislation of the Constituante, the continuing unrest in the countryside, the rise of political tensions (within municipalities, over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and those created by the royal flight to Varennes), and the start of the war. The third part, on the Republican Crisis, has students reading about popular movements during the period of the Terror (sans-culottes, women, slaves, and counter-revolutionaries), the creation of revolutionary government, legislative attempts to create a new society and culture, and the Thermidorean reaction. The final section takes us through to 1803, ending with Napoleon's rise to power. Three chapters on the Directory focus on the government's attempt to restore order, on threats to the new political order from the left and right, and on cultural life under the Directory (primarily the revival of Catholic religious practice). The final chapter, on Napoleon, is brief and all of the documents are proclamations, laws, letters, and memos written by the First Consul.

The Mason and Rizzo reader has many strengths. Except for the Censer and Hunt text (see below), it has the most thorough introductory chapters for each section of the readers surveyed here, in addition to a helpful chronology of events at the beginning of the book. Above all, the emphasis on the experiences of ordinary people is its greatest advantage. As a result of this emphasis, this text also has the strongest coverage of popular revolution and especially the revolts in the countryside, in addition to attempts by the National Assembly to root the new civic order in the provinces. To have three full chapters (sixty pages) on the Directory is also a definite advantage, given the historiographical neglect from which this fascinating half decade is only beginning to emerge.

The main weakness of the work is its treatment of Napoleon. Although the authors try to problematize the issue of Napoleon's relation to the Revolution in their introductory chapter, their decision to end with the start of the Empire, as well as entitling the section "Napoleon Closes the Revolution," leaves little doubt where the authors stand. The same point can be made by examining the author's selection from the Civil Code, which is almost entirely limited to the sections on marriage, divorce, and paternal authority, by far the most reactionary parts of the Code.

One of the strengths of the Mason and Rizzo reader is its inclusion of the Haitian situation, race, and the question of slavery. But the broader European context of the Revolutionary period gets very little space in the text, especially the question of governance over occupied Italy and Germany. This is unfortunate, since the war and occupation starkly reveal many of the tensions within revo-

lutionary ideology, and between ideals and reality, financial and otherwise. How do you extend liberty to those who would use it to undermine the accomplishments of the Revolution?

The selection of documents in Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee's *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* is guided by much the same principle as that of Mason and Rizzo. The authors' stated intent is to "detail the course and impact of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era on the people of France and, to a lesser extent, on the peoples of Europe." They, too, hope to convey the excitement of the period, and as much as possible to allow the actors and subjects to speak for themselves. This book is divided into short chapters of ten to fifteen pages, and the organization is thematic rather than strictly chronological. It includes chapters, for example, on the attempt to create a regenerated France, on "Exclusions and Inclusions" (with documents on Jews, free blacks, slaves, and women), and on the problem of the monarchy and the peasantry. Unlike the previous two collections, this work ends with Napoleon's second abdication, in 1815. The last chapter, "French Men and Women Reflect," is especially interesting, with short reflections on the revolutionary and Napoleonic period by four women and two men; it should provide useful fodder for provoking discussion on the long-term effects of the Revolution.

The breadth of coverage among the documents in this collection is one of its most impressive qualities. There are, though, a few fine subjects that Dwyer and McPhee have left out in their choice of sources. The Haitian Revolution is given short shrift (neither Haiti nor Toussaint-Louverture appear in the index). In addition, the authors leave out the financial and fiscal situation almost entirely. While the absence of financial documents may be understandable given the determination of the authors to make the period as interesting as possible, it is nevertheless likely that the way most ordinary people experienced the Revolution was through hyper-inflation, the Maximum and its end, the sale of nationalized land, and the vagaries of taxation. But rare gaps such as this do not detract from the usefulness of the collection, and the real success of finding interesting documents.

It should be noted that the Dwyer and McPhee reader does not contain introductory chapters at the beginning of each section. While each individual document is introduced and placed in context, the lack of a more general introduction to the issues involved could leave some students uncertain of what to make of the documents. But on the positive side, this offers the teacher the opportunity to place the documents in the context that she or he wishes. And in any case, students would surely be provided with the narrative and introduced to the historiographical issues both in lectures and in textbook readings. Many students rarely read the introductory sections anyway, and encouraging the brightest students to think independently is certainly not a bad thing.

By far the most ambitious work useful for teaching the French Revolution published within the last decade is the book, CD-ROM, and website combination edited by Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt (*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*). The integration of multimedia formats with more traditional text documents makes this collection an excellent resource for helping students understand the revolutionary period. The textbook part of the collection is a combination of a narrative of the Revolution, and a selection of about fifty primary sources arranged thematically. The selection and arrangement of primary sources is well thought out, with in-depth coverage of a few issues rather than an attempt to include everything. There are, for example, six documents on the Damiens affair, taking the students from the Paris Parlement's remonstrances against the denial of sacraments to Jansenists and ending with Damiens' sentence ordering death and dismemberment. Each chapter of the narrative includes several groupings of documents on issues such as equality in the Old Regime and Revolution, the problem of universality, women, and slavery.

The most useful and interesting part of the Censer and Hunt collection is the accompanying CD-ROM and website, which both contain the same collection of hundreds of primary texts, revolutionary songs and images, and short audiovisual mini-lectures from both of these leading historians of the Revolution. While the short lectures on the CD-ROM are interesting and well delivered, they would be difficult to integrate into a course–it is hard to imagine students independently watching them, and presumably class time would be better spent delivering one's own view of the Revolution. That said, the collection of primary sources is unparalleled, and the easy availability especially of so many images and songs from the period is sure to be highly useful. The collection of about three hundred transcribed print texts is almost equally impressive. In fact the sheer size of the documentation available here makes the Censer and Hunt multimedia combination almost irresistible.

While much more thorough than the printed text, the collection of electronic documents available on the website and CD-ROM is directed primarily toward the

same themes. This means that it has particular strengths, especially on the causes of the Revolution and on the Old Regime in general, on which this collection is much stronger than any other I have seen. The documents, commentary, and narrative are also very effective in communicating changes in political culture, both in the transformation that occurred during the Old Regime, and during the radicalization of the Revolution. The integration of the story of women, and especially the treatment of the Caribbean situation, are both likely to be highly useful in teaching. The inclusion of documents from the American Revolution, as well as comments on the French Revolution from Jefferson and others in America and England, is likely to provoke interesting discussion among students as well.

The book *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* is certainly useful for provoking thoughtful discussion among students, but its short length and sharp focus can create some difficulties in teaching from it. The book is about two hundred pages long, split almost evenly between narrative and primary sources (texts and images). There are clearly college teachers who prefer short textbook treatments of about this length–Popkin's *Short History of the French Revolution* and Doyle's *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* are aimed at this market. The advantage of using such short texts is that it should free the instructor and students to spend more time analyzing primary sources and discussing historiographical issues. To my mind, however, there is a danger that the lectures will fill up with the story of the events, or that class discussions will become too general and divorced from the events. When I last taught the Revolution, I used the Censer and Hunt collection, and tried to mitigate its brevity by using it in conjunction with another narrative text (William Doyle's *Oxford History of the French Revolution*), but students complained vociferously about the duplication between the two texts. The only way in which I can envisage using the Censer and Hunt collection, then, is in conjunction with a longer textbook treatment of the Revolution. But this makes the book part of the trio mostly irrelevant–students will not read two narratives of the same event, and the documents in the book are also available online and on the CD-ROM. Still, the usefulness of the CD-ROM alone makes it well worth the purchase price–and students with a high-speed internet connection could save themselves that money by using the website instead.

Each of the four document readers surveyed here has its own individual strengths, each would work well in the teaching of the French Revolution, and all are reasonably priced (about $30.00 U.S. for the Mason and Rizzo book, while the rest sell for about $20.00 U.S. each). I might hesitate to use the Hardman collection as the sole document reader in a general course on the Revolution because of the level of knowledge it assumes of students, and especially because of the exclusive emphasis on the government in Paris. But if supplemented with some documents on the experiences of ordinary men and women in the city and countryside, it would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the period up to the end of the Terror than any of the other readers. Indeed, it is unlikely that teachers will find every document they want in any of these readers.

As for my own conception of the Revolution, only the Censer and Hunt collection has enough on the Old Regime and the causes of the Revolution, only the Mason and Rizzo text spends enough time on the period from 1795 to 1799, while the Dwyer and McPhee reader is unparalleled on the question of coercion, resistance, and popular attitudes toward the revolutionary and Napoleonic governments. Any of these document readers would serve admirably well to allow students close contact with the actors and subjects of the period, and would allow the instructor to teach the analytical skills necessary for placing documents in context. In the long run, however, my hunch is that, despite the extra work involved, we will increasingly turn to the Internet for primary documents in our teaching, because of the way that this allows us to customize the readings for our classes and in accordance with our own conception of the subject.

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