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Charles Sowerwine, *France Since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001. xxv+505 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-333-65836-1. \$21.95 US (pb). ISBN:0-333-65837-X.

Review by Joelle Neulander, University of Iowa.

With *France Since 1870*, Charles Sowerwine has made a valuable contribution to the study of modern French history. This new book is especially significant because it offers a survey that makes central the cultural and gender issues of the period, incorporating them into a broader history of the politics and society of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century France.

This work presents no significant new primary research but is an exhaustive summary of the period using almost every available current work in its analysis, including the latest works in cultural studies as well as history. Sowerwine loads his chapters with useful statistics and anecdotes, while giving a sense of the political and cultural changes in history. The scope of the work reminds readers of the multiple influences on French history and the breadth of recent scholarship that has expanded our sense of the kinds of sources and stories that make up the thick warp and weft of France's past.

While looking at the important political and social events, from the Paris Commune to the Popular Front, Sowerwine explores the cultural context for those events, giving a broad sense of what it must have felt like to be French during the period. After reading his book, we know how the French voted, what they read, what they argued about, and the movies they flocked to. He spends much time talking about women's experience, including the burden of the notion of separate spheres, the early fights for suffrage, Simone de Beauvoir's contribution to second wave feminism, the feminist criticism of Hélène Cixous, and the recent governmental parity laws. Sowerwine, a gender historian himself, places women securely into the central narrative of French history.

Sowerwine also gives credence to the recent changes in French critical theory, including Derrida, Bourdieu, and Foucault into his overviews of the French philosophical tradition that often stops with the existentialists of the 1950s and 1960s.

The quibbles I have with Sowerwine's presentation are few. First, the small chapter on the First World War might have benefited from a more extensive discussion of that era's military history, especially with regard to the nature of trench warfare and the importance of Verdun. Also, the book would have profited from the inclusion of maps and pictures. There are no maps of France at all here. And his sections on visual culture, which often list works by important artists and the major films of the period, might have been easier to grasp with accompanying pictures that would directly illustrate the points he makes about changing visual perspectives.

In spite of these small criticisms, this book is a wonderful resource for any scholar or student working on the period from 1870 to 1998. I used this book as the textbook for a course covering the same period and found that my best undergraduate students enjoyed Sowerwine's style and came into my classroom

well prepared for lecture and discussion of primary sources. I also believe that this book would serve graduate students well, giving them an overview and place to begin their own research into the period. And although I must highly recommend it for your own undergraduate courses, out of pure selfishness and a chance to glean the text for some of your own lectures, you may want to keep this one for yourself.

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