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Claire Gorrara and Rachel Langford, Eds., *France Since the Revolution: Texts and Contexts*. London and New York: Arnold and Oxford University Press, 2003. 154 pp. Glossary of names, chronology, and index. \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-340-763-61-2.

Review by Lori R. Weintrob, Wagner College.

As many in our generation struggle to understand what democracy is and how it works, both in France and around the globe, this collection appears at an opportune moment. Organized around nine significant moments in French history, from the Revolution to the recent debate on *parité* (political parity or equal representation for men and women in public life), *France since the Revolution: Texts and Contexts* is shaped by a bold yet simple ambition: “to evaluate the changing fortunes of the Republic as an institution of democratic government and as a fundamental component of French people’s sense of individual and collective identity” (p.2). Undergraduates, graduate students, general readers, and scholars will find much to engage them on the question of what it means to be a citizen, to participate in the democratic process, and to debate conflicting social and political values in modern France. The challenges posed by immigrants in Europe, the *loi des voiles*, the rise of anti-Semitism and the expansion of the European Union have made discussions of citizenship and civic engagement critical. Indeed, the editors conclude with reference to Jean-Marie Le Pen’s strong showing in the first round of the May 2002 presidential elections to illustrate the ongoing challenges to republican values.

The authors have prioritized nine moments when contemporaries divided over and debated the meaning of France’s founding values of liberty, equality, and fraternity and, in the process, reshaped the institutions and policies that underpin republican ideology. This collection thus represents a return to the political narrative, yet one that effectively integrates more recent explorations of “key exclusions” from republican citizenship, notably around gender, religion, race, and class (p.4). Further, the authors define the political much more broadly than parliamentary institutions to include popular demonstrations, the role of the press, citizens’ groups, trade unions, education, international conferences, and, to a lesser extent, cultural life. The essays demonstrate how competing political and economic interests shaped and reshaped public policy and political institutions through France’s five republics.

Given its strengths, this book is highly recommended for an undergraduate course on French history or European politics, for general readers interested in French history, and as a resource for scholars and teachers. Some readers may regret that more attention is not paid to intellectual and visual culture or to economic structures (with some exceptions, and despite the editors’ own expertise in film history, fiction, and crime novels). Others may question the choice to leave out certain “flash points”: for example, there are only a few sentences on the Algerian War and nothing on the origins of the Fifth Republic or the European Union (although the chapter on the 1944 Brazzaville conference offers an excellent introduction to French colonialism). Where relevant, the authors do discuss the use and abuse of history in the political realm, but choose not to make explicit the contested and evolving interpretations among historians themselves of citizenship and republicanism. Nonetheless, this text offers many insights into democracy in France and a basic framework to understand its history and politics.

The first four chapters focus on the construction of and challenges to France’s first three Republics. Hanna Diamond’s chapter on the French Revolution, like the introduction, demonstrates the strengths

and limitations of how liberty, equality, and fraternity were translated into practice. For example, she discusses evolving voting restrictions on men, Pauline Léon's and Olympe de Gouges' petitions on behalf of women, and new Napoleonic institutions like the Legion of Honor (1802), which sought to replace an aristocracy of birth with a meritocracy. The introduction (but not the chapter on the Revolution itself) discusses the Haitian Revolution. This chapter would be strengthened by reference to the penetration of revolutionary values in everyday life and popular political iconography and culture, such as the renaming of streets, children, and chess pieces[1].

One of the strengths of the volume is that each chapter ends with one or two primary sources, in the original French and then in translation. Many effectively capture the division of opinion and dissent outlined by the author. For example, Nigel Harkness' chapter on "The Revolution of 1848: Republican Principles on trial," the subtitle of which might serve as the leitmotif for the entire book, culminates with two provocative sources. Readers can effectively compare Tocqueville's disappointment with the provisional government with the sharper critique by socialist feminists in the issues of *La Voix des Femmes* during spring 1848. As Harkness shows throughout the chapter, feminists used the language of republicanism to aid their cause as, for example, in making analogies between women's conditions and slavery (abolished in the colonies by the provisional government in April 1848). Harkness insightfully positions the provisional government's attempts to "negotiate a middle way between moderate and radical elements" (p. 33). He offers a careful review of their policies, from abolishing the death penalty for political offenses which distanced them from the Terror of the 1790s, to limiting the workday, to failed attempts to introduce universal, free, and secular schooling, to their fateful alienation of the peasantry by raising the main direct tax, the land tax. Harkness skillfully moves from the mobilization of the middle classes at democratic banquets (and their subsequent popularization among the lower classes) to the high turnout (84 percent) in the 1848 elections to gradual disenfranchisement of the electorate (notably 62 percent of Parisians by 1850), without overlooking the disillusionment of prominent women like George Sand and Marie d'Agoult. Harkness thus demonstrates the shifting fortunes of republican values, culminating in the 1848 constitution's promise to protect "family, work, property and public order," which foreshadowed the values of the Second Empire.

Similarly, Rachel Langford, in her chapter on the Commune, captures the divisions in French society and political power not only between Adolphe Thiers and the Parisian volunteer citizens' militias, but within the Commune itself between the tendencies towards Proudhonian local democracy and Jacobin centralization. She evaluates the legislative efforts of the Commune in relation to class and gender while concluding that "communards were the people not the proletariat" (p. 48). Excerpts from documents by Maxime du Camp and Louise Michel also illustrate the high stakes of conflicting interpretations of France's political values. Langford effectively looks back to 1792 and ahead to the 1921 founding of the French communist party to demonstrate the lasting importance of this episode in French history.

Political quarrels in the waning years of the nineteenth century are captured in David Hanley's chapter on the Dreyfus Affair, presented as a challenge to "republican democracy and French identity" (p. 57). Hanley suggests that the polarization of politics was a central consequence of the affair. He traces underlying political divisions, not only between left and right but also in defining what was left and right, from at least 1877 to the 1904 pardon. As Hanley argues, by the 1890s "republican politics was becoming polarized" between moderate Republicans and Radical Republicans (p. 56). Radicals wanted "in policy terms" to push forward reforms to the Senate and presidency, introduce the income tax, and separate Church and State (p. 56). The affair, as Hanley presents it, facilitated the integration of socialists and led to a reshaping of Catholic politics: "The exclusion of moderate Catholics from mainstream political life for four decades is probably one of the least visible but most profound effects of the *affaire*" (p. 62). More ominously, it also fueled the transformation of nationalism from a civic to ethnic basis firmly anchored to the Right, particularly for those like Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras. As in the other essays, Hanley shows the multiple constituencies in France battling to define

republican values. The emergence in a “very real sense of `two Frances,” he concludes, would haunt the nation for the next half-century (p. 64).

In the first of five chapters on twentieth-century France, Cheryl Koos examines the era of the First World War, beginning with tensions caused by a declining birth rate, industrial conflict and expanding empire. She carefully balances detailed discussion of military tactics, including General Nivelle’s two-week campaign in April 1917 that left 150,000 *poilus* (French soldiers) dead, with government censorship policies and evolving attitudes towards working women on the home front. This lays the groundwork for understanding the political, social, and cultural skirmishes that followed the war, including the “sudden emergence of reactionary political movements that were anti-Republican, anti-parliamentary, anti-Socialist, vehemently pro-Catholic, pro-family and pro-natalist” (p.78). With insight and acumen, Koos situates numerous political leaders and parties across the political spectrum within a broader cultural context ripe with discontent over French values that would lead to the collapse of the Third Republic.

Claire Gorrara then tackles one of the most difficult moments in French history, World War II, under the banner of “divided selves,” arguing that the authoritarian Vichy regime “revealed how fragile the Republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity could be in times of crisis” and that “the Occupation highlighted the continuing presence of right-wing elements in French political life ready to profit from [the Republic’s] demise” (p. 91). On the one hand, prewar leagues and factions, which had gained momentum during the Dreyfus Affair or after the First World War, contributed ideas on gender, class, and race that shaped the National Revolution’s motto of *famille, travail, patrie* (family, work, and nation). On the other hand, resistance in the form of clandestine newspapers, intelligence networks, and acts of sabotage was motivated by anti-German or anti-fascist sentiments and outrage at the abuse of individual rights. Neither prevented the discriminatory laws against Jews nor their deportation by French police, as she captures in the poignant story of one nine-year old Jewish girl, Annette Muller, nor the over 10,000 postwar executions and public head-shavings of suspected collaborators in 1944. The era’s legacy, Gorrara records, was not that of General de Gaulle’s postwar vision of a nation of resisters but one of the French fighting “as much among themselves as against the German invader” (p. 90).

In one of the most comprehensive essays in this collection, Gordon Cummings examines the political, economic, and cultural contradictions inherent in the “dream of a greater French republic” based on extending “liberty, equality and fraternity” around the globe. He contests the interpretation of the 1944 Brazzaville conference as a moment when, as De Gaulle presented it, republican values triumphed over imperial ambitions, instead emphasizes its reformist measures which built on earlier efforts to preserve the French empire. Cummings illuminates the alliance between left-wing intellectuals in France and in the colonies, from André Gide to Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Jean-Paul Sartre to François Mauriac, who denounced the brutality of imperialism and “France’s unRepublican actions”(p. 103). The essay concludes with thoughtful observations on France’s often problematic political relations to the Overseas French Departments (or DOM TOM) and other nations in the Franco-African “family” which foster African economic dependency.

Nick Parsons’ chapter on “May 1968: Workers against the Republic?” places the question of equality at the center of an analysis when students and millions of workers took to the streets. As presented by Parsons, the new demands for *autogestion* (worker’s self-management) in the workplace, most articulately expressed by the Democratic French Confederation of Labor (CFDT) and young workers, reflected a desire to “secure a greater integration” into Republican institutions by extending democracy into the industrial and economic spheres (p. 117). These gains were, however, eroded in part by the devaluation of the franc a year later and are still incomplete. Indeed, Parsons carries this struggle

through to the 1982 Auroux Laws that mandated annual collective bargaining over wages in companies employing over fifty people.

Finally, Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara tackle the new requirement of political parties to implement *parité* (parity) or “equal access of men and women to public office,” as the revised French constitution now reads. The authors trace political and philosophical arguments for and against parity and evaluate its implementation, with mixed results, in the 2001 elections. The campaign for parity is linked to an accord signed in Rome by Édith Cresson, France’s first and only woman Prime Minister (1991-92), to increase women’s political participation, at a time when only 6 percent of French deputies were women (compared to 30 percent in Denmark and the Scandinavian countries). But when a 1997 manifesto called for “feminizing the Republic” through quotas and other means (p. 125), philosopher and cultural critic Elisabeth Badinter joined others who argued “that the introduction of parity would be in direct opposition to the principle of abstract universalism according to which all citizens are equal” (p. 127). Even as they capture the feminist debate over equality (including providing excerpts from both sides), Diamond and Gorrara rightly question the timing of the measure, which passed during the “cohabitation” of a conservative President Jacques Chirac and a Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, both of whom tried to capitalize on support for parity “whether from conviction or political expediency” (p. 126). This material presents an exceptional opportunity to have undergraduates reflect upon the significance of the constitution, particularly in regards to gender, and the nature of representation itself in a democracy.

Many of the special features of this collection, notably the inclusion of primary sources, enhance the essays’ accessibility to students of modern France. However, given the subtitle of the book, “texts and contexts,” some readers might find certain chapters stronger than others in terms of choice of primary source documents; generally, there are two brief contrasting excerpts for each chapter, each less than a page long. Similarly, the useful references to visual sources available on the internet for the Revolution of 1848 and the Commune would have been welcome in more bibliographies. However, with the exception of the older sources in the initial chapter on the Revolution and some omissions, [2] the few selected references in the bibliographies were a solid start for further research by students or general readers. Finally, other useful features include a glossary of names and chronology at the end of the book and four boxed biographies or snapshots scattered throughout the book: of the revolutionary Olympe de Gouges, of feminist Socialist and pacifist Hélène Brion during the First World War, and of Annette Muller, a Jewish child in Vichy France, as well as a brief close-up of the 1968 strike at one Peugeot factory. These four wide-ranging examples capture the varied faces of republicanism explored in this thought-provoking collection.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- Hanna Diamond, “The French Revolution: Origins and Beginnings”
- Nigel Harkness, “The Revolution of 1848: Republican Principles on Trial”
- Rachel Langford, “The Paris Commune of 1871: The Red Republic’s Triumph and Defeat”
- David Hanley, “The Dreyfus Affair of 1894: Republicanism and its Challengers”
- Cheryl Koos, “The First World War, 1914–18: Death of the Old World, Birth of a New?”
- Claire Gorrara, “The Second World War, 1939–45: Divided Selves”
- Gordon Cummings, “The Brazzaville Conference of 1944: The Dream of a Greater French Republic”
- Nick Parsons, “May 1968: Workers against the Republic?”
- Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara, “The Campaign for Parity in the 1990s: Women and the French Republic”
- Claire Gorrara and Rachel Langford, “Conclusion: Towards a Twenty-first-Century Republic”

NOTES

[1] For an excellent supplementary reading, consider Robert Darnton, "How Revolutionary was the French Revolution?" *New York Review of Books*, 35 (January 19, 1989): 3-10.

[2] For example, for World War II, Michael R. Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford University Press, 1995) and at least one memoir from the resistance.

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