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Steven L. Kaplan, *The Stakes of Regulation: Perspectives on Bread, Politics and Political Economy Forty Years Later*. London: Anthem Press, 2015. 468 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$130.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-7830-8476-0.

Review by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College.

“[M]y work is suffused with the combined aromas of the archives and the bake room” (p. xxv). This pithy quote by Steven L. Kaplan sums up his book and indeed, his long and fruitful career. It reminded me of an autobiographical observation he made twenty years earlier: “France is always on my mind. I have the hubristic and unsettling sense that, somehow, everything that happens to France happens to me. I live two Frances, one as a professional and the other as an amateur, one in the past and the other in the present—as a sort of industrious *flâneur des deux rives*.”[1] In Sinatra-esque fashion, *The Stakes of Regulation: Perspectives on Bread, Politics and Political Economy Forty Years Later* reflects the interests and obsessions of an influential master scholar determined to have “his say” “his way.” By the very nature of the project, Kaplan’s new book is at once a powerful historiographical critique from a combative participant, a profound statement about the field from a scholar whose contributions outstrip his positions of privilege and finally a clarification of the legacy of one of his many achievements. *The Stakes of Regulation* will be reviewed here on its own considerable merits, but it should not be forgotten that this book accompanies the publication of the second edition of the groundbreaking *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV* originally published in 1976.[2]

Kaplan builds on a lifetime of learning to consider *The Stakes of Regulation*. His lengthy introduction is organized autobiographically, setting out his chief intellectual concerns, the scholarly influences that shaped him and how he decided to investigate the “total history” of bread. But the introduction does more than that, it sets out a methodology for historical praxis and engagement between and among scholars that is honest, pugnacious, and daring. Kaplan is interested in “invigorating and renewing the agenda” so he concentrates on “areas of contention...in epistemological assumptions, in methods, in the use of sources, in demonstration, in interpretation, in the assignment of weight and significance to variables and so on.” He states his position clearly: “I consider that there is a deficit of critical debate in this age of winsome uptalk and political correctness; I think that this reluctance to engage is impoverishing” (p. xxxviii). For those familiar with Kaplan’s impressive *œuvre*, this stance embodies much of his approach to writing academic history, a position that became more overt with the revolutionary *bicentenaire* of 1989.

The seven chapters are “problem’-oriented” but circle a number of themes like the “people- problem” (p. xxxix), which considers the difficulties of gauging popular political involvement. Kaplan explores the mechanisms of regulation, agriculture’s role in the French economy, “Collective Action and Its Actors,” the *parlements*, the King and his ministers, “The New Historiography of Political Economy” and finally “Famine, Dearth and Food (In-)Security.” These subjects are treated at different lengths and the chapters hang together more or less well, but each chapter features sustained examinations of a host of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic in history and related disciplines. These examinations range in

depth from a paragraph to twenty pages of sustained engagement of Arnault Skornicki (pp. 288-308). Some scholars come in for considerable praise, most notably Déborah Cohen (pp. 120-135). Though all are treated with respect, most of those whose work is discussed receive a bit of buffeting. Surprisingly and disappointingly, only a few chapters include direct reflections on the impact, shortcomings, or strengths of *Bread*, though the work lurks in the background throughout. Two chapters also include interesting digressions based on primary sources.

There are moments when some of the references or analogies in *The Stakes of Regulation* are a bit jarring. Bringing up Lady Gaga (p. 356, note 33) certainly caught my attention, but in the context of *philosophe* Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet suffering from an atypical form of celiac disease, mention of her campaign against gluten is appropriate. This anecdote calls attention to one of Kaplan's central goals: "When I wrote *Bread, Politics and Political Economy*, to orient myself and engage in the sort of dialogue between past and present that I believe enriches historiography, I turned to current or relatively recent events...that offered certain parallels with Old-Regime subsistence questions" (p. 32). Such "dialogue" permeates the book, but it receives its fullest expression in the chapter on famine and food (in-)security.

Kaplan demands much of his readers. The analysis is dense and his conception of the topic exceptionally wide-ranging. At the same time, Kaplan's prose is occasionally prolix and he delights in *le mot juste*, no matter how obscure. As a result of Kaplan's great learning and dedication to melding consideration of the past and present, sometimes it can be hard to keep the narrative, with its multiple lines of inquiry, clearly in mind. In this context, the notes, bibliography, and index merit some attention. Steven L. Kaplan's footnotes are among the best in the business. They are full of detailed insight, interesting lacunae, and humor along with a wealth of references, historiographical connections and theoretical considerations. To make full use of the vast riches of Kaplan's life-long commitment to keeping current on theory, history and related disciplines as well as the many references to debates in the press, readers would need either a far more detailed index than the bare-bones version included here or a bibliography, which is lacking completely. Unhappily, I was reminded of Kaplan's *La fin des corporations*, a 733-page masterwork with a three-page index and no bibliography.[3] The second edition of *Bread*, however, does have a slightly updated bibliography and a solid index. It is possible that Kaplan wants his readers to engage his books the way he devours those of others. Although this book along with his others reward that much attention, Kaplan and his publishers could facilitate the dialogue.

The Stakes of Regulation is so rich in insight and sweeping in its consideration of topics that it is exceedingly difficult to summarize Kaplan's many arguments and critiques. To do justice to the complexity of his thinking would take (me) many thousands of words. Instead, I will lay out what I see as the books' major contributions and then consider a few might-have-beens beyond the lack of a bibliography.

The reissue of *Bread* and Kaplan's idiosyncratic ruminations on the field since its publication forty years ago remind us that perhaps no other historian is more tied to one product and that no product is more important, more fundamental, than bread. He convincingly makes the case that no other product shares the same "mystique" (p. xxix) that bread enjoys in France, past, present, and hopefully future. As I worked my way through *Bread* for the first time since graduate school, I could appreciate anew how prescient Kaplan was when he applied the notion of political economy as a framework to examine grain markets, regulation, and the politics of provisioning. If you look at the citations in the burgeoning subfield devoted to French political economy, *Bread* certainly played a major role in establishing its contours and demonstrating its utility. Yet, I fear we have forgotten some of Kaplan's most important lessons, which contributes mightily to the timeliness of this project.

Kaplan's unrivaled archival mastery of all facets of a broad and complex subject, both in the provinces and in Paris have always set a high standard that is difficult if not impossible for less-favored U.S.-based researchers to match. But we could all try harder to develop our topics based on what we find in

the archives rather than look solely for evidence of a specific interpretation. Kaplan thinks deeply about what considerations are missing from his hypotheses and takes counter-evidence seriously. At the same time, Kaplan's reading of various theory approaches and relevant historical work was and is no less encyclopedic.

But it is not just the range and depth of knowledge that sets Kaplan apart. Rather, it is the questions he puts at the center of the study of political economy. While he never forgets to ask "why," *Bread* was and is solidly focused on the "how," and his answer to this latter question profoundly shapes Kaplan's conclusions as to the "stakes" of the events and developments that he traces so well. On issues such as the nature of liberty, liberalism, and liberalization in the eighteenth century, Kaplan's contextualization of ideas in the social and detailed imbrication in the political events of the era was in 1976 and remains today a standard for the field to emulate. His expression of the multiple ways that liberty and regulation were not, in fact, opposites, neither in theory nor in practice emerges as the central theme of Kaplan's work on the total history of the grain trade. Although his methods are difficult to imitate, the explanatory power of Kaplan's findings make the case that his results are worth the effort.

In *The Stakes of Regulation* as well as in *Bread*, Kaplan seeks "to accord the social a certain autonomy" (p. 43). When social history is downgraded in favor of the history of ideas, politics (high or low), or the purely economic, this robs the notion of political economy of much of its grounding and thus its effectiveness. Kaplan's *œuvre* makes that point with authority, but he drives it home through his analysis of the field in *The Stakes of Regulation*. For this reader, that desire to see the social as vital on its own qualities as well as an essential component of political economy is one of the most important contributions these works make to the field.

In the introduction, Kaplan devotes less than two pages to the "shortcomings" of *Bread* (pp. xxxiii-xxxv). He considered some of the issues he identified in later books and recognizes that "Two Score Years" had taught him much. Given the depth of his analysis of others' arguments, it would have been both illuminating and instructive for him to turn his critical gaze inward as well as outward. The lack of a sustained consideration of what revisions to his conclusions might be made in light of the last forty years of scholarship represents a missed opportunity. This consideration might have been done in the chapter conclusions or in a separate chapter. In the same vein, each chapter merited a reflection of what conclusions can or should be drawn from his thematically organized historiographical critiques. It is one thing to leave readers to their own conclusions, but the book's impact would have been enhanced greatly if Kaplan had synthesized some of his chief conclusions about the field.

In the extended "Afterword" (pp. 385-399), Kaplan returns to the autobiographical themes introduced in the introduction. After recalling his teacher R.R. Palmer's admonition that historians must illuminate contemporary issues (p. 388) and his own experiences as a "red-diaper baby" whose "youth was marked by McCarthyism and the early morning visits of the FBI to chat with my father," and his "inability to figure out exactly what it meant to be Jewish in the 1950s in an America (even in New York City) still saturated by anti-Semitism" (p. 389), Kaplan explains his life-long interest in Old Régime debates about the grain trade. In reading his depiction of why liberty was so central "for its exalting perspectives of freedom in a polity that was in many ways arbitrary, oppressive and vengeful, and for its pernicious implications in a society robust in some sectors, disquietingly fragile in many others" (p. 391), it is difficult not to reflect on the impact of the world of Kaplan's youth on his scholarly insights. Whatever its origins in the era of Sinatra's greatest musical influence, the fruitfulness and rigor of *The Stakes of Regulation* encourages us to hope that it is not "The Last Dance."

NOTES

[1] Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Farewell, Revolution: The Historians' Feud: France, 1789-1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4.

[2] Steven L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2nd ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2015).

[3] Steven L. Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, trans. Béatrice Vierne (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

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