

— notably Rousseau — June Hargrove explicates the republican project of erecting statues to “great men,” a story which she follows from the First Republic to the Third. In perhaps the most provocative paper (marred by foggy language — his, the translator’s, or both), Jean-Philippe Chimot shows how painters from David and Girodet to Gros and Géricault used color in vividly depicting scenes of death and conveyed what Baudelaire later identified as a sense of modernity, a sense of the transitory present posed in an unstable relation to the past. A quite different perspective is argued by James Leith, who contributes a strong essay stressing discontinuity, or the fundamental differences between the revolutionary era and later republics. Reviving views expounded generations ago by the likes of Albert Mathiez, Leith enumerates the many ways in which the Revolution was religious in its forms and the emotions it commanded. He concludes that the revolutionary faith, an intolerant new religion, did not usher in the founding era of modern republican politics.

Such differences of judgements and perspectives may well be the most useful contribution this book offers to most readers. It is a quite heterogeneous collection, as most published proceedings are. As sketchy and disparate as many of the papers are, the work as a whole does succeed in demonstrating a rich variety of approaches and possibilities for studying culture and the Revolution. Clearly, there is plenty of work to do, and there are important debates to continue.

Charles Rearick
University of Massachusetts/Amherst

Clay Ramsay — *The Ideology of the Great Fear. The Soissonnais in 1789*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. Pp. xxxi, 311.

Events in the French Revolution in the months following the opening of the Estates General at the beginning of May 1789 were played out against a background of escalating violence. Growing rural unrest was followed toward the end of July 1789 by outbreaks of collective panic sweeping across various regions of France: a collective panic known as the Great Fear. Rumours of “brigands” coming to destroy their crops drove peasants to assemble and arm themselves, and scour the surrounding countryside for invaders — invaders who, it turned out, had never existed. By the first days of August, the Great Fear was over. The Great Fear may have been ephemeral and illusory. But it was not without consequence. The National Assembly, thoroughly shaken by the spectre of a rural France given over to anarchy, was led on the famous night of August 4 to vote for the abolition of the remnants of feudalism in the nation.

Clay Ramsay perceives himself as being within the tradition of Marxist historiography in France running from Mathiez through Lefebvre and Soboul — something which very few Anglo-Saxon historians of the French Revolution now care to do. Refusing to accept the widely-held view of the Marxist historiographical tradition in France as having become sclerotic, Ramsay writes of it that it “remains an unfinished work in progress” (xxvi). He represents himself as advancing the study of the Great Fear to the level of ideological analysis, beyond the level of economic and social analysis reached sixty years ago by Lefebvre in his *La grande peur de 1789*. He looks at just one of the regions which Lefebvre had established as having

experienced the Great Fear: the region of the Soissonnais, lying just to the north and the east of Paris.

But is Ramsay on solid ground in linking his work with Marxism? He attempts to portray the Great Fear in the Soissonnais as an affair in which an old world, in responding to a perceived threat, was helping to foster within its midst, paradoxically, and unwittingly, a nascent revolutionary collective mentality. But what emerges from Ramsay's work is the perception that only a part of his contention stands: namely, that the Great Fear in the Soissonnais was essentially just a traditional affair. It took place within the context of a long-established collective mentality and long-established forms of behaviour. Traditional forms of social cohesion and social control were still sufficiently possessed of life in much of the Soissonnais in late July 1789 to be able to overcome any tendency to social conflict. Ramsay's representation of community mobilization in the Great Fear suggests closer ties on his part with the *Annales* School than with Lefebvre or Soboul or Gramsci. And his study also lends itself to the view, now popular among French revolutionary historians, that, during the era of the French Revolution, the regions of France moved in accordance with their own rhythms rather than with some dynamic embracing the entire nation.

Ramsay points to the continuing existence in much of the Soissonnais of a "consensual ideology" (xxviii) or collective mentality — "the 'common sense' of the old regime at its close" (xxviii) — which linked all classes together, including the nobility, and which was rooted in economic behaviour of a primarily traditional nature. The rural economy which prevailed in the Soissonnais, although evolving toward capitalism, continued to be conducted within a framework of long-established community practice based upon the venerable triennial system of crop rotation. The presence of a "moral economy from above" (38-39) meant that government administrators acted, and with a certain degree of effectiveness, to alleviate the distress of the poor. Also, Ramsay considers that the continuation of traditional country-town antagonism inhibited the coming together of the urban and rural poor in opposition to the wealthier classes, and thus worked against the development of a revolutionary mentality and revolutionary behaviour.

Class tension throughout most of the Soissonnais, Ramsay contends, had not reached the level of open conflict by the end of July 1789. Consequently, members of the various classes were still able to work together in the face of the perceived danger. It is also Ramsay's contention that, in areas in the Soissonnais in which class tensions had escalated to the point where a traditional collective mentality and shared community identity had broken down, the rumours which provoked the Great Fear had little or no effect.

Significantly, Ramsay denies that the occurrence of the Great Fear in the Soissonnais had anything to do with peasant hostility toward the nobility. As far as the Soissonnais is concerned, he rejects Lefebvre's theory that the Great Fear arose as a result of rumour among the peasantry that the court and the nobility were sending out hired "brigands" to quell the peasants. Following the lead established by historians such as Régine Robin in the study of revolutionary semantics, Ramsay argues that the idea of an "aristocratic plot," while operative in Paris and other urban centres by July 1789, did not gain currency in the Soissonnais until later in the year.

As far as the Great Fear in the Soissonnais is concerned, the nobility, Ramsay contends, was involved in popular action in defense of peasant communities, often in the capacity of leaders of the new hastily improvised "national" militias whose

members were drawn from all ranks of society. And who were those supposed “brigands” assumed to be? Not the hirelings of enraged noblemen, The author argues, in the course of a very interesting analysis of linguistic usage in 1789, but “outsiders”: men who had little or no connection with any local community in the region, and who were, therefore, perceived to be dangerous.

Toward the end of his book, Ramsay does point to the new militias as possessing within themselves a genuinely revolutionary undercurrent. These new militias, he asserts, may have been established by the elites with an eye to maintaining their traditional control over the potentially troublesome lower orders; but eventually, these militias would become truly ‘national’ and democratic, no longer functioning within the framework of the old society of orders and privilege. Be that as it may, Ramsay’s discussion of the formation of the militias during the Great Fear, like the rest of his book, leaves the reader with the impression that as far as the Great Fear itself was concerned, in the Soissonais at least, it took place within an essentially traditional context.

Ramsay’s study goes against the generally-held perception of the Great Fear as having been fuelled by hostility on the part of the peasantry toward the nobility. He also breaks with the idea, commonly held by historians, that it was an integral part of the widespread rural unrest which had occurred during the preceding months. Ramsay argues that the Great Fear took root only in those areas of the Soissonais which had not experienced the earlier unrest. The reason for this, he suggests, is that the earlier unrest occurred in areas in which there had been a collapse of a traditional consensual ideology — the continued existence of such an ideology being necessary if the rumours which gave birth to the Great Fear were to have an effect.

Ramsay is drawn to the idea that the Great Fear took hold, and could only take hold, in those parts of France in which, in the summer of 1789, some form of traditional collective mentality and traditional community was still operative. But he realises that this is an idea which must remain purely speculative until he has had a chance to extend his research beyond the boundaries of the Soissonais.

David M. Klinck
University of Windsor

Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds. — *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. x, 221.

Although men are at the centre of much historical writing, their masculinity has not, of itself, attracted particular attention. Perceived, as one source puts it, as “just chaps”, the gender of (heterosexual) men seems either irrelevant or unproblematic. Women and gays, by contrast, are history’s gendered subjects, and the emphasis of recent work has unwittingly centred the “problem” of gender on them. But the latest development bodes for a change by “engendering men”, and this book was conceived to that end. The aspiration of editors and contributors are to demonstrate that masculinity has analytical significance in history. They aim to make the case for its greater prominence in the mainstream of the subject. The editors, moreover, push some fairly ambitious claims to transform historical understanding by a perspective