

Islamic period because of its association with the ruling elite, but differences in skin colour — she uses the term race — no longer determine conceptions of beauty or the selection of marriage partners. Here, too, the reader is left wanting more evidence about and exploration of the decline of unitary, racialized ideals of feminine beauty.

Many of the social science contributions to this collection are either so theoretical that only readers conversant with the theorists will find them rewarding, or so entangled in convoluted debates (on subjects such as anorexia or pornography) that only specialists will fully appreciate them. The least theoretical, most comprehensible, and most empirical of the social science studies are based on surveys of hairdressers and young African-American women. “The Frosting of the American Woman: Self-Esteem Construction and Social Control in the Hair Salon” actually quotes hairdressers before interpreting their remarks to be examples of how they use “appearance anxiety” and “the flawed self” in their practice. “Young African-American Women and the Language of Beauty” discerns major contradictions between the young women’s stated ideals and their beauty practices, but also between their rejection of artificiality and their respect for the hard work required to be attractive. The author, Maxine Leeds, suggests that their discourse reinforces a Eurocentric ideology of beauty and femininity, and that this “discourse on gender” undercuts attempts to establish “a new discourse on race”. Such attention to beauty workers and women, with all their contradictions, should appeal to historians.

One final quibble. While the editor, Karen A. Callaghan, offers a broad theoretical orientation in her introduction, she does not identify or speculate about the many opportunities for comparison between the individual essays, especially those on Islamic and Christian aesthetics of feminine beauty.

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Timothy Tackett — *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi, 356.

A new book by Timothy Tackett is always one to be welcomed, for he is at once an able writer, a respected scholar, and a pioneer in the art of applying a new methodology to major problems in socio-political history. Moreover, in this book, which is as informative in detail as it is authoritative in substance, he brings his fresh approach to a particularly crucial question, that of the composition and character of the Constituent Assembly, the first national parliament of Revolutionary France.

Although Tackett does not give more than minimal attention here to the historiography of his subject, some understanding of this is necessary for any proper appreciation of his latest work. In this perspective, three relatively recent develop-

ments are notable. The first and most obvious is the general abandonment, if not the repudiation, of the Marxian interpretation of the Revolution, that supposedly sacrosanct view of it as a series of class conflicts engendered by inexorable economic forces. A second feature of recent writing is that those once derided as the “Revisionists”, the historians who first challenged the Marxist dogma and were condemned for their apparent inability (which was really a refusal) to advance any other explanation of everything, have again become increasingly interested in the importance of ideas and in the relationship of the Revolution to the Enlightenment. A further consequence of all this, natural although for some less desirable, is that studies of 1793–1795, the climacteric years of the Revolution, are apparently being replaced by new scrutinies of its beginnings before, in, and immediately after 1789. Tackett’s concern with the first National Assembly, and more particularly with the social character, culture, and political attitudes of the deputies who composed it, is thus both representative of recent scholarship and particularly pertinent to the crucial question of why the high hopes of 1789 finally foundered amidst the horrors of 1794.

This is not to say that Tackett endorses any explanation of the Revolution as the outcome of a previously formulated ideology. On the contrary, he sees most of the deputies as practical men, widely experienced in local affairs, who looked askance at abstract ideas. These men, he maintains, acquired increasingly intransigent attitudes only as they tried amidst constant pressure to resolve an apparently endless series of formidable problems. Tackett’s conclusion, that in 1789 and 1790 ideology was the result rather than the cause of the Revolution, will no doubt be questioned, for his initial assertion that the deputies at first shared no more than a general desire for reform is not entirely convincing. Abstractions apart, the men of 1789 were certainly the heirs of an actual absolutism, decrepit though it was in practice. Nonetheless, Tackett’s searching analyses and his personal perception of how men’s opinions developed from day to day will henceforth be indispensable for all students of the period.

Although it is neither possible nor desirable to summarize here the more particular conclusions of this work, its quality demands some further indication of its structure. After initial consideration of the economic, social, and cultural background of the deputies of each of the three Estates – an immense undertaking in itself — Tackett considers their reactions to one another during the daily tensions and major crises that arose between their first meetings in May 1789 and the conflicts that culminated in the acceptance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in the early summer of 1790. It is thus both an exercise in collective biography throughout a specific period and a systematic study of the evolution of the psychology of the groups which accepted, or repudiated, the Revolution as it developed during that time.

Moreover, as the annotation, the tables, and the listed sources show, this survey is almost exclusively based upon primary sources, particularly the author’s collection of the surviving letters, journals, and memoirs of 129 deputies, his “principal witnesses” (p. 9 and *passim*). Since this analysis is supplemented by the consideration of many formative factors other than the Assembly’s main debates, the

attention Tackett gives to such relatively neglected matters as the proliferation of committees, the relationship between the deputies and their constituents, and the rise and fall of a variety of transitory clubs is also informative and stimulating.

Despite its clarity, however, this remains a book more for scholars than for the general reader. Tackett indeed disarms an obvious criticism by explaining in his introduction that his work is neither a traditional political history nor one which purports to comment upon every aspect of events (p. 13). Even so, it may be that too much is presumed. Thus, so far as personalities are concerned, the reader will encounter Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve simply as one of many “local lawyers of considerable repute” (p. 36) who had “advocated reforms of the criminal justice system” (p. 56); but neither his subsequent importance nor his miserable fate is ever indicated. Again, Tackett’s concern with the development of attitudes apparently causes him to evade previous assertions that some single specific occasion was of cardinal importance. Indeed, his rigid concentration upon his thesis and his primary sources sometimes suggests no other scholarly arguments merit attention.

Such comments, however, relate principally to what Tackett does not say. The fact remains that the present book is invaluable both in detail and in substance, and the hint that another may follow is therefore doubly welcome. If we are indeed to have a salutary reminder that changing circumstances were as influential in 1790–1792 as they were in 1789–1790, perhaps we may also hope that Tackett will allow himself a little more latitude in descriptive writing. All analysis apart, the account he gives in these pages of the crises of May and June 1789 is certainly exciting, and both his initial portrayal of the opening of the National Assembly and his concluding account of the euphoria that prevailed during the first Festival of Federation may well be thought worthy of Michelet himself.

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Peter McPhee — *A Social History of France, 1780–1880*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Pp. vii, 347.

Peter McPhee has written a lively introduction to the social history of France between the end of the Old Regime and the consolidation of the Third Republic, the principal merit of which is its emphasis on the social experience of women and the integration of a wide range of recent work on gender and ethnicity into a comprehensive survey. In contrast to Roger Price’s *Social History of Nineteenth-Century France*, which minimizes the social impact of the French Revolution and concentrates on mid-nineteenth-century agencies of structural change, McPhee insists that the revolutionaries “reshaped every aspect of institutional and public life according to bourgeois assumptions of rationality, uniformity and efficiency” (p. 97). Unlike Christophe Charle, who anchors nineteenth-century French social realities in two successive models of social domination, one organized by traditional notables between 1815 and 1880 and the other by “meritocratic” republicans from