

Simon Schama. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. Pp. 948. Cloth, \$29.95.

In his preface Simon Schama, a British-born, Cambridge-educated, Harvard history professor, writes that "in *Citizens* I have tried to bring a world to life rather than entomb it in erudite discourse." He has succeeded, producing a bestseller more popular with general readers than specialists.

In this "mischievously old-fashioned piece of storytelling" Schama portrays the Revolution down to 1794 through vignettes of leading personalities, dramatically told tales, lurid anecdotes, and occasional theorizing. Rejecting the influence of social forces, he sees the Revolution as the product "of contingencies and unforeseen consequences," especially "individual agency" and "revolutionary utterance." Historiographically, Schama follows Tocqueville's lead in emphasizing the continuation of long-term trends rather than new beginnings. But he goes farther, characterizing the old regime as "troubled more by its addiction to change than by its resistance to it." As a primary cause of the Revolution, he sees a burgeoning patriotism that was humiliated by the loss of the Seven Years' War to Britain. His Louis XVI is a caring social activist whose plans and good works were destroyed by the Revolution.

In his choice of emphases Schama melds a trendy concern with semiotics and political culture with a conservative abhorrence of revolutionary violence which, he says, was largely rooted in hostility to modernization. The moderate revolutionaries of 1789, like their successors later, were morbidly preoccupied with "the just massacre and heroic death" and they all repeatedly evoked violence for selfish political ends, outbidding their predecessors for the support of the bloodthirsty mob. Revolutionary violence "was not merely an unfortunate byproduct of politics, or the disagreeable instrument . . . [of] more virtuous ends . . . violence was the Revolution itself." Schama relishes the gory details of atrocities, consistently showing more sympathy for the aristocracy than either the revolutionaries or the poor. Revolutionary leaders, having created a newly powerful state, then subjected their newly free citizens to its interests, making militarized nationalism "the heart and soul" of the Revolution. In sum, the French Revolution, as Schama sees it, was fundamentally a bad thing that accomplished very little.

Before *Citizens*, Schama was best known for his work in Dutch history, and specialists in the Revolution have been less enthusiastic than Book-of-the-Month-Club readers about this book. (When he appeared on a bicentennial panel at the AHA's 1989 meeting in San Francisco, the murmuring was intense.) Frequently using the first person, Schama sets himself apart from the specialists, contrasting his views with theirs, and then expressing surprise at such a commonplace as the role of the aristocracy in undermining the power of the king. Indeed, Schama's knowledge of the Revolution appears to be as uneven as the coverage of his 27-page bibliography, sometimes well informed, up to date, and reasonably thorough, but occasionally inaccurate, superficial, and sketchy. For example, he erroneously credits Danton with coining the phrase "Error is the order of the day" and places Hérault to the right of Robespierre on the political spectrum of the Convention. The book includes no footnotes, even for quotations, so his contentions are difficult to verify.

No book that vividly tells the story of the Revolution is without merit, and this one has the additional advantage of good maps and over 200 black-and-white illustrations from the period. I recommend it to friends seeking an undemanding but entertaining account, though Christopher Hibbert's *The Days of the French Revolution* is better. For classroom use, William Doyle's new book, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, especially when paired with Keith Michael Baker's documentary collection, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, is a much more judicious choice.

College of the Ozarks

Michael W. Howell

Robert Jackson. *The Prisoners 1914-1918*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989. Pp. viii, 162. Cloth, \$35.00

Robert Jackson, former RAF pilot, military historian, and author of some fifty books, offers in this short work a sketch of the life of British POWs captured by the Germans during the Great War. Based on previously unpublished British prisoner narratives from the Imperial War Museum and some dozen or so similar accounts, most of which appeared in print soon after the war, the book relies on several long quotations from its sources to tell the story.

Jackson organizes his history clearly into chapters that keep the narrative moving. Explaining that both the British and Germans followed rules of war laid down at the Hague Conference of 1907, he then discusses how POWs were treated in the early war years in Germany. Since many of the