

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.

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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

narratives he uses were written by officers, the perspective on prison life is sometimes skewed a little. While officers planned amateur theatricals, sports contests, and kept up the mess, the rank and file did not fare so well. Nor did the other allied prisoners. In a typhus epidemic at Schneidemühl camp in 1914-1915 some 20 Britons died, but Russian deaths averaged 30 per day or 11,000 for the duration of the epidemic. Romanian, Serbian, and other allied prisoners likewise suffered terribly.

Still, in comparison to German treatment of prisoners, both military and non-combatant, in World War II, what British prisoners experienced in World War I seems mild and their accounts of it almost quaint. Rarely did the prisoners suffer from hunger because the Red Cross and other relief organizations saw to it that each POW received thirteen pounds of bread and one ten-pound parcel every two weeks. The German allowed these through to the very end of the war, even as the Germans' own rations were running short. There was little brutality or punishment, except of course for men who made escape attempts. However, in anticipation of Saddam Hussein's "human shields," towards the end of the war the Germans deliberately located POW camps in areas vulnerable to allied air attacks. As a precaution, though, Britain did the same thing on a limited scale.

At the end of the book, Jackson adds a brief chapter on the condition of German POWs in Britain. What is striking is the tremendous increase in numbers over the duration of the war: from 69 camps with 26,000 German prisoners and internees in April 1915 to 518 camps with 250,000 captives in October 1918. Treatment was humane, if not munificent, and Jackson relates only one spectacular German escape from Britain.

The Prisoners provides an interesting perspective on a little-known side of World War I. If that perspective is mostly British and a bit aristocratic, it is valuable nonetheless. Students and teachers will find here some of the drama, tedium, and humanness that prisoners experienced while the great machine of war churned bloodily toward its end. Such insights make the whole event more real.

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R. Jackson Wilson, et al. *The Pursuit of Liberty: A History of the American People*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990. Second edition. Vol. I: 560 pp. Paper, \$27.00; Vol II: 634 pp. Paper, \$29.75.

Reviewing textbooks is like visiting the dentist for a checkup. The experience may be painful or it may be beneficial for you. Since Frances FitzGerald's onslaught on the American textbook in the 1980s, publishers at the collegiate and pre-collegiate levels have been experimenting in order to upgrade and improve the backbone of classroom instruction, the textbook. Many publishers have heeded FitzGerald's remarks about the dullness of textbooks by expending large sums of monies on the production of a grand design classroom teaching package. Textbooks now come fully supplemented and include glossy transparencies, computerized test packets, blackline document masters, student worksheets, map exercises, drills, skills, and other frills. Despite all this seventh avenue marketing, what have publishers done to the textbook itself? Has it been substantially improved? Is it still all gloss and glitter with no substance?

Textbook writing has become a lost art. Seldom does one writer attempt the task of analyzing the historical scene, whether it be American, European, or World in perspective. Where are the Beards, Muzzeys, and Toynbees when you need one? For better or worse, textbooks are now written by committee. No one person seems to have the time (or probably even the wherewithal) to tackle the full-time task of developing a synthesized version of history and historiography as it developed over the past three decades. Usually a team of college-level historians surround themselves with a geographer, a curriculum developer, a reading specialist, and one or two master teachers when developing today's packaged historical products. The material is then field-tested in a variety of school settings—inner city, suburban, and rural—to show that indeed this production will meet ALL students' needs.

Despite these recent efforts by publishers to improve their classroom products, many recent forums such as the Bradley Commission and the Commission for Social Studies still bemoan the lack of synthesis in historical writing and research, especially in textbooks. So what can the classroom student and his mentor use if there are not any suitable books with which to study and analyze the past? The obvious answer is to choose from the best of the lot until a "new" history is written.

Five notable scholars, R. Jackson Wilson, James Gilbert, Stephen Nissenbaum, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, and Donald Scott, have attempted to wrestle with today's upheaval in curriculum development as well as the shifting winds of pedagogical change by approaching the study of the American past in an innovative way. Starting from the premise that students today "seem to know