

That having been said, this text would make for a wonderful summer read; it would be more dangerous, however, in the classroom.

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**Margaret C. Jacob.** *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents.* Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. Pp. xiii, 237. Cloth, \$45.00; ISBN 0-312-23701-4. Paper, \$10.00; ISBN 0-312-17997-9.

**Roy Porter.** *The Enlightenment.* New York: Palgrave, 2001. Second edition. Pp. x, 90. Paper, \$12.95; ISBN 0-333-94505-0.

**Thomas Munck.** *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History 1721-1794.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 249. Cloth, \$65.00; ISBN 0-340-66326-X. Paper, \$25.95; ISBN 0-340-66325-1.

"Dare to reason!" wrote Immanuel Kant in 1784, echoing the words of the ancient Roman poet Horace. "Have the courage to use your own mind! That is the motto of enlightenment." As historians have noted, that is truly the motto of the Enlightenment itself. The three works under review remind us that we are heirs of the Enlightenment in both its positive and less salutary aspects. They also demonstrate how complex it has become to attempt analysis of this seminal movement. All three reflect the current trend to focus less on the great writers of the period and more on secondary figures, the transmitters of ideas however diluted or transformed, and on the intended audiences for what are today often almost forgotten publications. The result is as many questions as resolutions. Even though none of these three books represent theoretical breakthroughs, they do provide useful overviews of the current state of Enlightenment scholarship.

Margaret Jacob has been for more than two decades a distinguished and sometimes controversial authority on the attributes and diffusion of the Enlightenment. Her book, an introduction valuable for more advanced students, is highly readable and far-ranging. She begins with a summary of her view, explicated in her earlier works, of the Enlightenment's radical nature. This radicalism originated as a Protestant protest against Catholic intolerance and absolutism as reflected in the regimes of James II of England and Louis XIV of France; it rapidly expanded into a crusade against a variety of social abuses. Such was the result of the general application of images drawn from science: God envisioned as a benevolent, constitutional monarch and nature understood as a machine governed by universal, general laws intelligible to all men. By the mid-eighteenth century free-thinkers had advanced to touting such outrageous concepts as philosophic materialism and political republicanism. Jacob traces how the desire for liberation ultimately extended to women and slaves. Students

will doubtless be delighted by her comments concerning the role played by pornography in undermining religious orthodoxy and Old Regime authorities.

Two-thirds of Jacob's volume is devoted to excerpts from a select group of documents illustrating her basic themes. There are such standards as Kant's treatise on enlightenment, a bit of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and selections from Voltaire. There are also some unusual choices, including an anonymous and scandalous attack on revealed religion; Lady Mary Wortley Montague's perceptive observations as she traveled from England to the Ottoman Empire; Diderot's celebration of free love in his fictional Tahitian utopia; and Locke's precepts on education, which Jacob finds basic to the Enlightenment presumption of the need to exercise free will in a rational fashion. *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* is an expert's carefully crafted recipe, providing a generous taste of Enlightenment thought.

Jacob's study is concise. Even more so is Roy Porter's book, as much a historiographical essay as an analysis of the character of the Enlightenment. Indeed, it is in large part a critique of Peter Gay's classic *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, published in two volumes in the late 1960s. Gay described the Enlightenment in terms of its major participants. He found the *philosophes* to be united in spirit, members of a post-Christian "family" of critics, opposed to fanaticism, superstition, oppression, metaphysical speculation, and suffocating tradition. Here was the "party of humanity," agreeing with Locke that while reason could not answer all questions, it was the most effective tool we had. Porter, on the contrary, emphasizes the regional and individual diversity of the Enlightenment, its appeal to the literate public, its illusions, and its failures. He comments upon the paradoxes it presented; for instance, here was a movement advocating liberty that served the purposes of absolute monarchs. Christian activists did more than Enlightenment rhetoric to emancipate the slaves in the British Empire.

Porter agrees with Gay in stressing the secularization of western civilization as the major achievement of the Enlightenment, although both men overestimate the extent to which belief in the supernatural, hobgoblins, and religion has been vanquished as a motivating force in our culture. Gay saw continuity between Renaissance humanists and Enlightenment *philosophes*; Porter sees a chasm separating them. With Carl Becker, Porter argues that the Enlightenment substituted nature for God, science for Scripture, earthly progress for eternal salvation, and, in general, new myths for old ones. The result has not been necessarily pleasant. The *philosophes* were a novel breed, independent intellectuals freed from conventional patrons and traditional outlooks. Their achievements, Porter asserts, however noble in intent, were often less illuminating than problematic. Porter's book is a thought-provoking introduction to the subject, as is Jacob's. Like hers it will be of particular value to the sophisticated student already generally aware of the perimeters of the Enlightenment, the individual prepared to handle the ambiguities sketched and the numerous historians

mentioned. Porter includes a short but excellent annotated bibliography of reference works, anthologies, and key secondary works.

Like Porter's volume, Thomas Munck's social history dwells on the enigmas and contradictions of the Age of Reason, although he focuses on the communication of enlightened attitudes rather than the genesis of Enlightenment ideas. Munck deals with northern Europe, where literacy was widespread, and the period between the publication of the Enlightenment's first great satire, Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, and the abandonment of Rousseauian principles in the French Revolution after the fall of the Jacobins.

As the eighteenth century progressed, modes of expression grew in number and diversity; Munck discusses a range from newspapers, pamphlets, and books through prints, debate societies, theater, and street entertainments. He convincingly demonstrates the interpenetration of elite and popular cultures, and he shows how the public and private spheres overlapped considerably. Even the dividing line between enlightened and traditional perspectives was vague. The era played host to prejudiced *philosophes* and open-minded religious establishments both. Less clear is what audiences made of the Enlightenment mindset. Change was glacial in this society dominated by the past, and the reforms that were instituted came late in the century. Typically such measures came not through the bold actions of enlightened rulers but as a result of hesitant princes striking compromises with bureaucrats, intellectuals, and sundry vocal constituencies to meet the growing demand for some governmental accountability. The excesses of the French Revolution indicated the limits of such alliances.

Munck's book is an excellent investigation of what we can presently say about the impact of the Enlightenment beyond its prominent spokesmen. As is true of the works by Jacob and Porter, it would have merit for those already familiar with the outlines of the Enlightenment. All three studies indicate the distance we have yet to travel before we can arrive at a fresh and comprehensive understanding of this era, the progenitor of modernity.

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**Michael A. Morrison.** *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War.* Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Pp. xii, 396. Cloth, \$49.95; ISBN 0-8078-2319-8. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-8078-4796-8.

Secession remains a vexing problem to understand and an even more troublesome issue to explain. Undergraduates often seem to seize upon the issue of states' rights for the South and are less certain why northerners tended to oppose the