

## [Review] Jay M. Smith, ed. (2006) The French nobility in the eighteenth century: reassessments and new approaches

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Jay M. Smith, ed., *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century. Reassessments and New Approaches*, University Park: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. 346 pp., further reading, list of contributors, index. \$74.95 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 0-271-02898-X.

Review by Peter R. Campbell, Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin and University of Sussex.

This fine volume of essays on the nobility in the later eighteenth century is a most welcome addition to the existing literature. It comprises eleven essays by American historians whose research engages with the concept of nobility. The collection issues from a conference in 2004 and reflects the cultural turn in historiography that has such sway, particularly in America. There is a stimulating introduction by Jay Smith, whose excellent recent study of the discourse of patriotism with regard to the nobility is in a closely related field. [1] Nine of the eleven essays here could be said to deal with representations of the nobility, and all of them are written with an eye to explaining the relationship of the nobility to the coming Revolution. Overall, the focus is on how the nobility became increasingly open to criticisms that tended to empower other groups in society and deprive the nobility of some of its legitimacy. The approach reflects current North American work, and is quite distinct from that of current French work. The latter tends to focus in a far more archival way upon social, economic and cultural practices to the detriment of discursive constructions, and stresses that the *noblesse* is best viewed as a set of relationships that reflect numerous national and localised groups whose boundaries are often unclear and whose differences are often as great as their similarities. [2] Eighteenth-century royal genealogists like Bernard Chérin (1718–1785), and Antoine Maugard (1739–1817), were keenly aware of how fragmented the nobility was and fretted over the impossibility of arriving at perfectly sound criteria to define noble status. [3] There is also a substantial revival of the political and social history of the *parlements* taking place in France. [4] The upshot is that everywhere revisionism has been shown to be based upon insufficiently deep research and has long been in need of considerable revision itself, in the sense of introducing much greater refinement and complexity.

As collections of essays are by their nature open texts, I am going to deal with them in a different order from the table of contents. In so doing I hope to bring out some themes and show why they pose an important question about the relationship of discourses to practice. The various essays are often complementary and sometimes there is implicit disagreement. The volume might have begun with Jonathan Dewald's essay on why the nobility was so written out of eighteenth-century French history from the Restoration to 1960. That year saw the appearance of Forster's archival study of *The Nobility of Toulouse in the Eighteenth Century* that inaugurated a renewal of interest and a new interpretation of the nobility as modernising, and not redundantly feudal. The answer is that wider currents of thought "rendered nobles at once central and invisible" (p. 306). The presence of Marxism in French academia is only part of the answer, as such views were widespread elsewhere too. It was the unsuitability of noble world-views for the modernising nineteenth-century that French thinkers stressed at the time. Moreover, they bought into the argument that the rising bourgeoisie was, after the seventeenth century, displacing the rebellious elite, one now tamed or reduced to relative insignificance by the rise of the centralising state. Basically, the nobles lost out historiographically because they appeared as the losers in the grand narrative of the rise of a new bourgeois France and a modern state, which they had resisted. Dewald reassesses this story which is so familiar to historians and expands it with

considerations of the role played by concepts of race, and the institutional dominance of certain thinkers. One suspects, though, that the coherence among commentators that is portrayed here was sometimes absent. The editors of the political documentation in the nineteenth century, like Clément, Boislisle, and Avenel, as well as historians of the intendants and *parlements*, must have remained aware of how closely related state and nobility were. Only from the early 1960s, as both the editor and Dewald explain, did revisionism favour a renewed interest in the nobles.

Thus the scene was set for a revival, and the rest of the essays in this book reflect this. Most refer to revisionism – though we should perhaps remember that this was a fashionable overall argument put forward in general essays, and that it never did account for all the characteristics of the nobility and its role, and that revisionism tended to define the political in such a way as to exclude its social components. Although the social may not be much in evidence except as imagery, the authors are for the most part concerned to integrate the cultural into the political. The key issue for most of the historians is how the nobility related to the Revolution, and more specifically how an order came to be seen as an aristocratic conspiracy that despite its abolition on 19 June 1790, continued to be viewed with deep suspicion by revolutionary society.

While most of the essays help us understand why the nobles became unpopular, the road to exclusion is precisely the topic treated by Tom Kaiser. In a deep, wide-ranging and erudite piece, he argues that whatever the long-term differences of interests between nobles and third estate, which were greater than revisionists once claimed, “they shared a growing hostility to Versailles”. (p. 194) Going right back to the sixteenth century he considers the differing, evolving and complex characteristics of anti-nobility. Nobles were depicted as rebellious; they plotted and captured the ear of ministers to encourage the corrupt abuse of royal power. One shade of this anti-noble discourse was promoted by the monarchy itself in 1787. Anti-nobility was also reinforced by fears of courtly conspiracy whose paradigm was the conspiracy of Cataline. Thus, before the Revolution the elements were in place for a vision of the noble order that transformed it into an aristocracy characterised by conspiracy. D’Antraigues and Sieyès denounced an “aulic aristocracy,” while moderates like Rabaut argued that to be patriotic, nobles had to support the Third Estate’s demands. The road to abolition is dealt with in fascinating detail, particularly on 1789, in which the specific reactions of nobles are clearly at least as important as wider discourses, although these too are analysed. In particular, Kaiser stresses that the conspiratorial discourse has been neglected despite its importance. Of course, the fractured multi-faceted order ended up being regarded as unitary. He might have said, therefore, and this is an argument made explicitly by François Furet, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret and implicitly in Michel Figeac’s more detailed work cited above, that the Revolution reinvented or imposed on a varied estate the concept of a single, unitary, nobility, both with the organisation of the Estates General and the subsequent suspicions of conspiracy coupled with revolutionary polemics. [5]

The Revolution certainly imposed a new division on “the nobility”, between those who were for, and those who were against the Revolution. This was the fundamental division that dominated the politics of the nineteenth century. The trauma of this Revolution, during which the nobility became unacceptable, was not only political, but for a liberal noble like Lameth, it was a particularly defining memory when he came to write his memoirs. [6] Liberal nobles such as he, and he was in this sense typical, felt they had been stymied by the conservative opposition to the Revolution within their order. The left misunderstood their aristocratic magnanimity and their efforts were ungratefully misrepresented by both right and left. As Doina Harsanyi explains, this sentiment gave rise to the authorial strategies at work in the noble memoirs, and I found this essay particularly illuminating.

But where did this noble liberalism and conservatism come from? Could it have been from the most important theorist of the Enlightenment? Kent Wright looks afresh at the traditional answer, which is that it had its roots in the influence of Montesquieu, and finds that recent study of the philosophe’s specific relationship to the question of the nobility is lacking. After helpfully passing in review the

social and political philosophical interpretations of *The Spirit of the Laws*, he delights his reader with nothing less than a coherent re-reading of the structure and argument of the book in twenty pages that makes perfect sense to me. Surely here is a book trying to get out. In this essay Montesquieu emerges as a pluralist but conservative defender of a *noblesse* that was an essential ingredient in his definition of a well balanced monarchy, a monarchy whose tendency to despotism is held in check by the end of servitude and by the judicial rights of the nobility in the civic sphere. In contrast to the essentialist approach of Boulainvilliers and Dubos, who saw the nature of the monarchy established under either the Franks or the Romans, [7] this form of monarchical government evolved historically from the unique feudal regime, reaching its apogee for France perhaps in the late Valois period, when there were also estates. Although the calling of estates is not a feature of Montesquieu's argument, it meshes with his idea of mixed government. Wright proposes a reading that seems to allow Montesquieu a logical motive for almost all the elements of the book's structure. His final conclusion relates to Montesquieu's position on the French nobility in his own time in which he is portrayed as a conservative. But surely Montesquieu believed in historical decline, as his study of the Roman Empire showed, and one could argue that he wanted to stop the despotic tendencies and noble rot that were apparent in the monarchy of Louis XIV and Louis XV, by the advocacy of more civic virtue from the nobility. Thus might we extend the argument to suggest that Montesquieu, aware of classical republican virtues and of British commercial virtues, found the virtue of the French nobility of his time wanting, and in need of reinvigoration? And here the argument could join that of the several essayists in the book who stress the theme of opposition to courtly culture, effeminising luxury and corruption that only fuelled despotism. Of course, as Kent Wright says, "intellectual authority is one thing, and political impact another." (p. 251) Even if this argument was Montesquieu's intention, it did not mean he was read that way at the time, for the book was so long and the argument so complex and unclear that readers could pick and choose. If it took 350 years to arrive at this understanding, then they must almost certainly have found other readings at the time.

Montesquieu dealt with gender and power in his *Persian Letters*. Here Mita Choudhury takes up the theme in a helpful essay on a subject that goes back to Chaucer and the scurrilous literature of the eighteenth century, though her version of the lives of cloistered women is less saucy. Abbesses were often daughters of wealthy noble families and not infrequently expected the church to support them in their status and tastes, regardless of their religious calling which implied frugality and communal piety. Some judicial cases show lawyers arguing that feminine passion represented illegitimate power as opposed to the reasonable power of men. "In effect the mother superior exerted a 'paternal' presence in the all-female environment of the cloister." (p. 172). Noble abbesses were increasingly under attack in the last decades of the regime, and were condemned in gender-related ways through the exploitation of social imagery. A case in 1769 involving Jansenism, a new recruit and a noble prioress provides the material for this analysis. The lawyers argued that power in a convent implied not privilege but responsibility to protect the natural equality of all in this secluded environment. The unruly emotions of the prioress were contrasted with the virtue of the persecuted nun, and the prioress's world of the feminised and almost effeminate urban nobility implicitly condemned. Thus the anti-despotic rhetoric "fused anxieties about aristocracy and women" and contributed to a crisis of authority. (p. 187)

Michael Kwass too is interested in "the crisis in social representation that plagued France at the end of the Old Regime." (p. 21) He sets up his question with a perceptive reminder of the importance of the politics of appearances in 1789, when the deputies to the Estates General were required to wear traditional dress, an act that profoundly irritated members of the Third, who felt demeaned. The fact was that the recent politics and debates on consumption had modified views considerably. Kwass then deftly focuses on political economy, considering how the Enlightenment provoked a re-evaluation of traditional social categories. Three texts from the 1750s, by Rousseau, Mirabeau and Forbonnais, illustrate the emergence of three basic vocabularies. Rousseau, in his analysis of consumption, called for ancient civic virtue; Mirabeau called for a more modern, but still classically frugal, form of patriotic virtue for the landed nobility; and Forbonnais offered a more complex interpretation of the role of

luxury in which consumption by the rich promoted the wellbeing of the lower orders with what we might call the trickle-down effect. For the latter, consumption and *luxe* were not moral defects but promoters of status and wealth for all, and thus Forbonnais valorised commerce and merchants as well. Turning back to the relationship between consumption and display, Kwass cautions us against attributing too much in 1789 to just Rousseau's ideas in this field. The deputies in 1789 had "for decades, been exposed to an economic literature that reconceptualized links between consumption, social rank and civic status" (p. 40). As well as being a clearly-written contribution on the understanding of debates on political economy, the essay chimes well with a later one by Blaufarb on the way deputies thought, and the way experience conditioned their responses. The deputies certainly condemned the dress code, but it would be good to know a little more about whether deputies in 1789 had read or owned this literature, as they were from the right social groups to have access. Here intellectual and cultural history could apply the quantitative methods of the social historian. [8]

The chapter by John Shovlin also discusses the Gournay group, and Mirabeau and the Physiocrats, covering basically the same ground as Kwass on political economy and luxury, but in a different way. Because noble authors formed between a fifth and a third of all writers on political economy (as opposed to seven to eight per cent merchants or entrepreneurs) the debates must have engaged the nobility deeply, because the "language of political economy became a critical site for debate on the place of the Second estate in national life." (p. 123) Nobles tried to exploit the idiom to their own advantage and in particular tried to validate the provincial nobility, even as others used it to criticise them. Shovlin stresses the way in which court nobles were censured for their luxury. Indeed, a consensus seems to emerge from the research in this book, that while other sorts of nobles could still be defended in the last decades of the old regime, the court nobility was particularly criticised. As Shovlin notes, the basic arguments had emerged by 1774, but perhaps the final section of the chapter, on the 1780s, could have been deepened with a systematic analysis of the incidence of economic pamphlets or debate in either the Assembly of Notables or the National Assembly. Those pamphlets he references do reveal elements of political economy, as he rightly says, but they also display age-old tropes being used against the nobles, quite as much as new ones. In particular, as he says of Volney, they seem to employ the rhetorical strategy of simply standing the current arguments on their head, making the cultivator rather than the noble "always virtuous, always honest" or portraying nobles as too interested in money and not enough in honor. (p. 136) These were as much classical republican arguments as they were modern political economic ones, and it would be interesting to see how the two could co-exist in their minds. Siéyès is noted, and he does of course figure in a wider political-economic context, and this itself was an achievement. What the mass of the deputies was thinking in terms of the debate on luxury might be an interesting area to develop further.

Gail Bossenga, author of what is surely the best current short survey on the origins of the Revolution available [9] is interested in how we conceptualise the multiple fractures in the upper echelons of society, a subject that has interested historians since Tocqueville. Working through insights from Max Weber, who characterised the state as patrimonial with a market in status created by the state, complemented with more recent work on the nature of markets, she offers a stimulating set of reflections on the role of the markets as social organisers. Here she focuses mostly on the market in offices, a huge element of "proprietary capitalism" to employ Taylor's phrase [10] and on the advantages in terms of access to opportunities that courtly dynasties, often fused with financiers, enjoyed. This throws further light on the anti-courtier literature that fuelled sentiment in 1789. Revolutionaries desired a level playing field in markets not because of class conflict, she argues, but because the markets had been skewed by the patrimonial state and the monopolistic tendencies it created, tendencies that courtiers were so skilled at exploiting. Her overall argument provides stimulating food for thought, and the essay certainly reminds us of the importance of the state itself in creating and perpetuating key elements in the structuring of social hierarchy. Yet, like all good models, it can only work by leaving some elements out. Can we entirely replace ownership of the means of production with status or are they still intricately linked? A latter-day Marxist might reason, and

without bringing back class, that “in the final assessment,” as they used to say, those with most status were nobles and the richest nobles were usually very considerable landowners. As Bossenga implies, nearly all nobles were probably involved both in the market for status that was either created by or expanded by the state, and as consumers of new status-enhancing commodities. Indeed, and this is grist to her mill, other research shows that the nobilities of Bordeaux, Marseilles, the court and Paris all seem to have defined themselves through consumption as much as anything. [11] But surely the non-venal commercial economy and cultural practices were social organisers too? Although merchant capital fled to the land, as a sound investment both economically and in terms of status, on a higher status (or wealth) level, was not landed capital also increasingly exploited in more modern ways: forestry, mines, the beginnings of the chemical and heavy industry, and capital for transatlantic trade, as Guy Richard and others have shown? [12] True, it was often court nobles like the comte d’Artois who were involved, and perhaps they were so highly ranked that their status was not at risk from *dérogéance*, but this was not always the case, as the history of the elites in the seaports shows. [13] Expanding the analysis to take in all markets would perhaps help explain the fragmentation of the nobility into so many different local, regional and national groups that to view the order as one group was considered inappropriate in this complex society. Gail Bossenga is absolutely right to stress, in the wake of the important insights of David Bien, [14] the importance of venal investments conditioned by the state, and in going beyond this analysis she offers a wide-ranging and deep rethinking of the issues, that is provocative of further reflection and thoroughly in the spirit of this collection.

While France was indeed changing, it was doing so largely within the context of existing institutions and frameworks, and was still dominated by complicated and obscure old systems of property, which were often being put to new uses socially and economically. This is further shown by one of the two determinedly archival pieces here, that is also an excellent essay in micro history. By revealing exactly how two seigneuries in Burgundy operated largely from the 1760s on, Robert Schwartz throws light on the way the nobility was perceived as lords in a countryside that was undergoing economic change. His essay also amplifies and refines points made by Bossenga in her sub-section on “seigneurialism and the markets.” His main concern is what seigneurs were actually doing. Rural capitalism was stimulated by rises in grain prices in the 1760s, fuelling higher returns on leases and land prices. In this *conjunction* the seigneurs benefited from the legal support of the *parlement* in Dijon. Schwartz modestly says this is all in Pierre de Saint Jacob, but here it is refreshingly accessible and up to date. The case study reveals how the intricacies of feudal ownership and rights were exploited, and the way “the *seigneurie* became a vehicle for rural capitalism, and the growing benefits of the seigneurial enterprise accrued both to lords and to astute *fermiers* and tenants” (p. 107). Moreover, for these villages at least, Saint Jacob’s accepted portrait of the *fermier* as the terror of the peasantry is not much in evidence, concludes Schwartz. There were antagonisms, but these could be held in check by careful management, for “a well run lordship was geared to making a profit under changing market conditions.” (p. 107) But we should not misunderstand the conflicts in order to suggest that they were essentially between lord and poor peasant. “Key conflicts in the seigneurial offensive after 1750 were likely to be those between *seigneurs* and *nonresident* land-owners, all of whom were more or less privileged.” (p. 97) We might take this as a fundamentally different argument from the work by Hilton Root, who drew wide conclusions on the litigiousness of peasants based on villages whose size and typicality can be questioned on the grounds that, being near Dijon, they actually had in residence numerous lawyers and notaries who, as landowners there, were willing to engage in litigation, and who obviously were not “peasants” though they were in a conflictual “feudal” relationship to the seigneurs. [15] Sadly, there is only one sentence on what happened during the Revolution, leaving us to wonder what happened to these domains after 1789. How did ex-lords profit from the sale of *biens nationaux*, what happened to the managers and owners? Was the Revolution an opportunity or a disaster for these noble seigneuries? Please, Professor Schwartz, tell us in another article.

I have left the chapters by Rafe Blaufarb and Jay Smith to the end because, unlike the other essays, they both are clearly attempting to address a key issue of the relationship between concepts and action. They

both try to show not simply that certain arguments existed on the eve of the Revolution, as general context for the politics, but they are also concerned with precisely how these arguments were used in politics. We find with Blaufarb old ideas and conflicts taking on different language in a new political context, in which the new language is rhetorically manipulated in the service of long-standing interests. For Smith, under the impact of contingent events, newer ideas are undergoing revision and, while there are continuities worth stressing, the ideas emerge from the cauldron of events with quite a different political significance. Both arguments go beyond adducing a relationship between the existence of the discourse and consequent action that is inferred rather than fully accounted for.

Through a thoroughly archival history of direct taxation in Provence, Rafe Blaufarb shows that the *taille réelle*, often thought to be fairer than the *taille personnelle*, was in fact the source of considerable tension between communities and nobles. The regime had been imposed in such a way in the sixteenth century that it fuelled conflict for 250 years. This conflict explains the demand by the Third Estate in the new *assemblée provinciale* of Provence in 1787, and prominently in their general *cahiers*, for a syndic, whose role would be to enable legal action by the Third without having to apply to the noble-dominated estates first. The near victory of the communities against noble tax exemptions in the 1780s had alarmed the *noblesse*. In this context “[t]he successful campaign conducted by the noblesse in 1787 to resuscitate the provincial estates was an attempt to shift its losing battle with the *communautés* away from the field of law and onto the more promising terrain of politics... It is true that the noblesse articulated its demands in a political idiom built around such key notions as nation, constitution, and liberty, ...but the *noblesse* was using it to achieve longstanding aims.” (p. 162) This is a fascinating argument that carries weight and challenges those who stress the rise of a new language to contextualise their findings even more, to see how it is employed in political debate. It is not so far removed in argument from Bossenga’s earlier work on the *officiers* of Lille, and Norman Hampson’s on the nobles of Artois. Of course, this dispute was joined by conflicts over other interests, as is well known, in a snowball effect. “Older concerns did not evaporate in the glare of the beckoning revolutionary future, but rather shaped the aims and assumptions political actors brought with them into the Revolution.” (p. 165)

Jay Smith’s subtle essay in intellectual history, thoroughly grounded in the contemporary debates, returns us to the abolition of nobility in 1790. He studies the writings of the fairly well-connected French resident, the Swiss comte François-Louis d’Escherny. As a man of the Enlightenment he could welcome the Revolution of 1789 because he was in favour of reason, liberty, anti-despotism, and could even denounce the higher echelons of the nobility who formed a “formidable aristocracy,” (p. 258). Here Smith would seem about to join Kaiser and Tackett [16] in arguing for the influence of contingent political events – in this case the experience of the 1787–9 crisis – but argues instead that “feelings about nobility ran high in 1789 precisely because the reading and writing public in France had labored long and unsuccessfully to redefine the vital relationship between nation and nobility.” (p. 255) Yet, it was under the impact of events that d’Escherny realised that the Assembly did not share his own idea of equality of opportunity, which was designed to preserve the concept of nobility as a force for emulation. The abolition of nobility on 19 June 1790 to create a socially-levelling equality enraged him and prompted reflections on virtue, in which honor was the mainspring of patriotic virtue. D’Escherny would seem to be typical of many nobles who were against the corruption of the court but in favour of “true honor,” and thus enmeshed in discourses that competed with anti-noble discourse. A comparison with d’Antraigues, also discussed by Kaiser, shows that he too defended true nobility, while simultaneously criticising the court aristocracy. When the crisis arose, for him early in the spring of 1789 (whereas for d’Escherny the choice came somewhat later) he found the transformation of noble honor into a national patriotic honor unacceptable. I sense from Smith’s multiple other articles driving at the same problem of choice and agency, that he is working towards a theory that will help bridge this gap between discourse and action in specific politically charged contexts. This is a problematic that also particularly concerns this reviewer, and I detect some welcome common ground with my own attempts

to make sense of the way patriotism developed as a discourse through interaction with the contingency of events. [17]

The book raises a number of interesting questions, one of which is whether intellectual historians can come up with a theory of how excavating and recovering the differing arguments conditioned political debates in practice. It could be argued that the kinds of arguments made in 1788-9 were of necessity simply those currently available – it seems obvious – but in fact the authors here and historians in general tend to focus on the new arguments that evolved after about 1750, and thus not on all the arguments that were available, such as ideas conveyed by a classical education, or the streams of sixteenth and seventeenth century concepts. We could call this the trap of the new, and the problem is here addressed only by Rafe Blaufarb and by Tom Kaiser with their long-term take on the issues. Both authors point to the existence of older ideas and debates that were still current in the literature on the eve of the Revolution. Perhaps there is a historiographical process at work similar to the one evoked by Jonathan Dewald over the long term, but here confined to our view of the nobility in the pre-revolution. It seems that all the vital changes in the discourses are identified here with the period from 1748 to the early 1770s, and thus the subsequent period 1774-1788 suffers from relative neglect because that period is presumed to show the working out of the debates that will turn out to influence the Revolution. But do we perhaps have, as in Mornet's *Les Origines intellectuelles*, a period of innovation followed by a period of consolidation and diffusion? [18] If we have some excellent work on particular themes studied as discourses over time, like luxury or political economy or finances or honor, we still have too little work on how nobles read and put these ideas together either in general or at particular points. We still do not know whether indeed they adopted them in contrast to much older ideas or whether as rhetoricians, stressed the old or the new to fit particular debates. Another disadvantage of focusing on the new concepts in the 1750s, is that we lose sight of more long-term debates and arguments that foreshadow what may appear to be entirely new ideas in the middle of the century. [19] I put down the book feeling that rhetorical strategies need also to be more fully explored by all of us doing cultural and intellectual history, for this was above all an age of rhetoric.

Overall this is a thoroughly worthwhile and stimulating volume both for its content and as an example of current American historiography. To be sure, a lack of French or British perspective is evident, but perhaps any loss is outweighed by the considerable coherence of the approaches displayed here. The volume is a small monument to the fruitfulness of American work on the nobility and the origins of the Revolution, and will clearly interest all scholars of the later ancien régime. It finds its natural place on the shelf alongside what is almost a companion volume, *Tocqueville and Beyond* (with five essays on very similar themes, including companion pieces by four of our authors here) [20], and *Le second ordre: l'ideal nobiliaire Hommage à Ellery Schalk*, which is a very international collection. [21]

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Michael Kwass, "Economies of Consumption: Political Economy and Noble Display in Eighteenth-Century France."

Gail Bossenga, "A Divided Nobility: Status, Markets and the Patrimonial State in the Old Regime."

Robert M. Schwartz, "The Noble Profession of Seigneur in Eighteenth-Century Burgundy."

John Shovlin, "Political Economy and the French Nobility, 1750-1789."

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Doina Pasca Harsanyi, "The Memoirs of Lameth and the Reconciliation of Nobility and Revolution."

Jonathan Dewald, "French Nobles and Historians, 1820-1960."

## NOTES

[1] Jay M. Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[2] Michel Figeac, *L'automne des gentilhommes. Noblesse d'Aquitaine, noblesse française au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002).

[3] See A. Maugard, *Remarques sur la Noblesse, dédiées aux Assemblées provinciales* (Paris, 1788).

[4] See Olivier Chaline, *Godart de Belbeuf, le Parlement, le roi et les Normands* (Lunery: Berthout, 1996); Caroline Le Mao, *Parlement et parlementaires. Bordeaux au Grand siècle* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005); idem, *Les fortunes de Thémis. Vie des magistrats du Parlement de Bordeaux au Grand siècle* (Bordeaux: F.H.S.O., 2005); Clarisse Coulomb, *Les pères de la patrie. La société parlementaire en Dauphiné au temps des Lumières* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2006); Alain Lemaître, ed., *Le monde parlementaire au XVIIIe siècle. L'invention d'un discours politique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

[5] François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans E. Forster, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 103; Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, trans W. Doyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[6] Alexandre de Lameth, *Histoire de l'Assemblée constituante* (2 vols., Paris, 1828).

[7] Henri de Boulainvilliers, *Essais sur la noblesse de France, contenant une dissertation sur son origine & abaissement. Avec des notes historiques, Critiques et Politiques; Un projet de Dissertation sur les premiers Français & leurs Colonies; et un Supplément aux notes par forme de Dictionnaire pour la Noblesse*, (Amsterdam [Rouen], 1732; Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Histoire critique de l'établissement de la monarchie française dans les Gaules*, 3 vols. (1734).

[8] Although it is not on this period, the recent cultural analysis of a new *parlementaire* by Caroline Le Mao offers a thought-provoking approach to this problem of libraries and reading: "Une bibliothèque pour devenir noble : le cas de François-Arthus Duhamel," *Revue française d'histoire du livre*, 128 (2007): 41-52.

[9] Gail Bossenga, "The Origins of the French Revolution," *History Compass*, 5/4 (2007): 1294-1337.

[10] George V. Taylor, "Types of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France," *English Historical Review*, 79 (1964): 478–97.

[11] For an overview of work on consumption see Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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-- Ed., *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: Reassessments and New Approaches* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2006). Articles and Book chapters: "Dreadful Enemies: The Beast, the Hyena, and Natural History in the Enlightenment," *Modern Intellectual History* (forthcoming, 2015). "The Decline and Fall of the French Nobility: An Invisible History?" *Francia* (forthcoming, 2015). "The Nobility," in *Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 40-55. "Substance and Subtlety in the Analysis of 1789: The Exam Reassessments and New Approaches." Edited by Jay M. Smith. "Smith, well known for his studies of the French nobility, presents a stimulating collection of essays originally presented at a 2002 North Carolina Humanities Center symposium. Description. Reviews." In this book, a group of prominent French historians shows why the nobility remains a vital topic for understanding France's past. *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* appears some thirty years after the publication of the most sweeping and influential "revisionist" assessment of the French nobility, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret's *La noblesse au dix-huitième siècle*. *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century : Reassessments and New Approaches*. 2 (1 rating by Goodreads). Hardback. English. Edited by Jay M. Smith. Share. US\$99.44. "Historians have long been fascinated by the nobility in pre-Revolutionary France. What difference did nobles make in French society? What role did they play in the coming of the Revolution? To what extent one may draw general conclusions from the case studies that make up many of the essays is open to debate; it is certain that this book will stimulate further research."-Thomas Worcester, *Canadian Journal of History* "Smith, well known for his studies of the French nobility, presents a stimulating collection of essays originally presented at a 2002 North.