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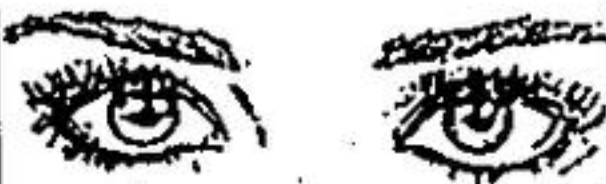
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Book Review

By **ARNOLD AGES**

There is a plethora of new books on the French Revolution - the 200th anniversary of which will be celebrated on July 14.

Among them are:
The French Revolution; Its Causes, Its History, and Its Legacy After 200 Years, by George Rude (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 224 pages, \$19.95); The French Revolution, by J.F. Boshier (W.W. Norton, 353 pages, \$24.95); Citizens; A Chronicle Of The French Revolution, by Simon Schama (Knopf, 886 pages, \$29.95); The French Revolution: Voices From A Momentous Epoch, edited by Richard Cobb (Viking, 256 pages, \$19.95); The Emblems of Reason, by Jean Starobinski (Mit Press, 298 pages, \$14.95 U.S.).
Two Canadians, George Rude and J.F. Boshier, are among the many authors who have written books to commemorate the French Revolution.

George Rude demonstrates shrewdness in pointing out that while many of the grievances expressed by the French peasantry and the middle class against the Ancien regime could be found in other European populations in the 18th century, those factors "did not appear in any similar combination in any other part of Europe."

In his study, of the various historical schools, Rude (a professor at Montreal's Sir George Williams University) is scrupulous almost to a fault in acknowledging the various scholars, from Lefevre to de Tonqueville, who have written on the French Revolution. Juxtaposing their views with his own, Rude expatiates on economic factors (bread riots) intra-community rivalries (the middle class against the aristocrats), military elements (France's participation in the American Revolutionary War) and psychological reasons (bourgeois revulsion towards the working classes) that led France inevitably to the destruction of the old order.

One of the most important aspects of the revolutionary matrix, as Rude points out, was the 18th century's cultivation of a culture of disrespect for authority. The propagation of radical ideas among wide sections of the people was the culmination of a 56-year campaign waged by France's intellectuals (Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau) against the totalitarianism of France's unholy triple alliance - the monarchy, the church and the aristocracy.

In the first decade of the Revolution, these three bastions of French conservatism bore the brunt of the revolutionary zeal. Louis XVI valiantly tried to ride out the seizure of the Bastille and the creation of a quasi parliamentary structure. His attempt to escape from France and form alliances with European nations unhappy with what was going on in France doomed him to a public execution.

FED GRIEVANCE

J.F. Boshier, another academic who teaches in Canada (at York University in Toronto), does not share all of Rude's ideas about the factors that contributed to the upheaval of 1789. He suggests that there was no inevitability to the revolutionary cataclysm and that overpopulation (France was the most populous country in Europe at the end of the 18th century) fed the grievance of the peasantry.

With regard to the role of France's intellectuals, Boshier says that "the ideas of nationalism, or republicanism, of national sovereignty, of democracy, of government by terror and guillotine and the other guiding ideas of the Revolution" could scarcely be found in their writings.

He also observes that Louis XVI could easily have suppressed the uprising had he been willing to call out his 150,000 regular troops, 75,000 militiamen, 7,000 personal guards and the territorial police. That he refrained from doing so can be explained by the fact that he was "a Christian gentleman of the Age of Enlightenment," whose social policies and attempts to ameliorate the condition of his people had been admirable and progressive.

—Arnold Ages, a professor of French at the University of Waterloo (Ontario), specializes in modern intellectual history.

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