

ization in textile industry, trade and transport. The Bourbon reforms and the creation of the viceroyalty of La Plata in 1776 brought prosperity to a close. The burden of taxation became heavier, caused by high expenses for military defense. The textile industry had to compete with the officially promoted products from Spain and a flood of British contraband goods. The nineteenth century began with a general crisis. The history after independence forms a rather unspectacular epilogue.

The general theme of the book is the transition from the moral economy of reciprocal rights and duties through a second stage of hacienda-monopoly of labour and grain into a third stage of small-holding and varied market economy. It is a development typical for what I have called the *Spanish Sierra* in contrast to the *Indian Sierra* where the moral economy continued for a longer time. In reality the history of Indians and Spaniards is a meeting of two civilizations, not always peaceful, with resistance in various manners. The author has stressed the economic transitions with the social consequences, but it was also a process of hispanization of parts of the Indian population. It is a pity that Mrs. Brooke Larson has not treated her subject in this broader perspective.

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ROSSWURM, STEVEN. *Arms, Country, and Class. The Philadelphia Militia and "Lower Sort" During the American Revolution, 1775–1783.* Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, London 1987. xv, 373 pp. \$ 40.00.

This well-researched, judiciously-argued, and thoughtful volume adds considerably to our knowledge of the political and social dimensions of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. More than a decade ago, Richard Ryerson and Charles Olton showed how the timidity of Pennsylvania's traditional political leaders after the late 1760s led to a palpable downward shift in the social basis of political authority during the crisis of independence in 1775–76, as the wealthy landowners, merchants, and professionals who had long dominated the colony's public life either withdrew from politics or reconciled themselves to sharing power with the middling property holders who took the lead in pushing for independence. By providing a close look at the part played by still less affluent social groups, Steven Rosswurm significantly deepens our understanding of this development, and not just during the movement for independence in 1775–76 but throughout the war years.

Rosswurm's study centers on the rise and decline of Philadelphia's lower sort as a class-conscious political force. Previously rendered politically inert by a highly restrictive system of social relations, this group, Rosswurm argues, contributed significantly to political developments in 1775–76 and thereby both acquired a sense of group solidarity as a "class-for-itself" (p. 226) and inaugurated a successful four-year "struggle out of dependency and subordination and into self-activity and assuredness" (p. 225). But this struggle turned sour with the Fort Wilson incident in October 1779. Upset by rising prices and the sabotage of price fixing measures by merchants, some of the lower sort took to the streets, became involved in an attack

on the house of the lawyer James Wilson, and thereby forfeited the support of their middling allies, who not only helped suppress the rioters but subsequently joined forces with “those above [to] put the lower sort back in their place”, first “politically, and finally economically” (pp. 244–245).

In recounting this story, Rosswurm makes two important substantive contributions. First, and perhaps most important, he shows how the revolutionary militia served as a vehicle for the expression of opinion among previously marginal political groups. The absence of an institutionalized militia system in colonial Pennsylvania meant that the associators who met to form a militia in the wake of Lexington and Concord and who were predominantly composed of the city’s laboring poor were able, to a rather remarkable degree, to shape that institution to their own design. Not only did they elect their own officers but through the committee of privates, formed in September 1775 and operating continuously through October 1776, they also determined the conditions under which they would serve and articulated the social and political goals of people from the social categories they represented. Unique to Philadelphia, this committee consisted mostly of men from the city’s middling sorts. Because its members “generally had organic ties to Philadelphia’s lower sort and artisan communities” (p. 69), however, the committee also functioned as the voice of rank-and-file militiamen, thereby, Rosswurm plausibly argues, both enabling Philadelphia’s previously only lightly politicized lower orders to exert a key influence upon the resistance movement and providing them with a “growing sense of [political] empowerment” (p. 72). As the “laboring poor transformed the militia”, Rosswurm writes, the “militia transformed the laboring poor” (p. 75).

By tracing the militia’s responses to its involvement in the war and the political life of Philadelphia from 1776 to 1783, Rosswurm also provides the fullest analysis yet available for any similar group during the American Revolution. What he shows is a group in which the individuals exhibited a persistent tension between a strong sense of civic responsibility, on the one hand, and their own definitions of social justice and personal goals as individuals, on the other. Adamantly opposed to any form of social and political privilege and reacting negatively to any presumption of superiority by either “great and over-grown rich Men” (p. 101) or learned men with too great “a Disposition to refinement” (p. 102), they were quick to oppose monopolies and profiteering at the public expense. Resentful of pacifists, neutrals, collaborators, tories, and others who did not actively support the American cause, they consistently advocated measures to penalize and to punish such people. When they were called into service, they emphatically objected to the unequal military burdens they had to bear, fretted lest those who stayed at home should usurp the businesses and employments of those who had been called up, and worried about the welfare of their families. Accustomed to being “free and subject to no controul” (p. 73), these independent-minded men did not take easily to military discipline, often deserted, and turned out for musters only when their own concerns did not dictate otherwise. Among people with such modest economic resources, fraternity had to be a low priority value, a product of temporary coalitions, and extremely difficult to sustain.

Notwithstanding these important substantive findings, the volume may seriously distort several aspects of the context and meaning of the developments the author seeks to describe. In the absence of systematically-developed evidence for his

attribution of the relative political invisibility of the lower sort before 1775 to social coercion, the author, like many earlier historians, simply takes at face value contemporary charges that upper-class Philadelphians constituted an incipient aristocracy. But the view of these people as a genuinely coercive ruling class will prove difficult to sustain. As Thomas Paine never tired of reiterating and as the committee of privates itself pointed out in June 1776, the social fact that America had “no rank above Freeman existing in it” (p. 101) seemed to be the principal reason for its peculiar felicity. In view of what we are learning about the shallowness of deferential attitudes and the necessarily consensual basis of elite governance everywhere in the British-American colonies during this and earlier periods, it is probably more reasonable to propose some combination of indifference and a preoccupation with private concerns as the explanation for the failure of both the middling and lower sorts to take a more active role in public life before their political awakening in the early and mid-1770s. The ready and independent self-assertiveness exhibited by the Philadelphia lower sort in 1775–76 does not suggest a psychology heavily scarred by a thoroughly repressive system of social relations.

Nor does Rosswurm’s characterization of the ideological disagreements in the Philadelphia political arena ring true. His description of lower-sort ideology as “radical egalitarianism” (p. 253) would seem to be belied by two facts. First, the demand for equal justice, the antagonism to privilege, and even the implicit assumption that the extent of private accumulation ought to be constrained by the public welfare were too widely shared among the American population to be labelled radical. Second, by the author’s own admission a commitment “to the ownership of productive property as the means of self-determination and freedom” effectively precluded Philadelphia “radicals” of whatever class from advocating any form of “social egalitarianism” (p. 106). Similarly, the author’s association of the lower sort’s wealthy antagonists with unlimited accumulationism is probably anachronistic. At the time of the American Revolution, pure accumulation had not yet become a legitimate personal goal. Rather, independence, defined not just as having sufficient property to render one free from external control but also having as few restrictions as possible on one’s capacity to increase and dispose of that property, would seem to have been the ultimate objective of most free men of whatever social class. What may have separated people of greater wealth from those below them was less their desire to accumulate wealth for its own sake than their wish to enhance their capacity to respond as fully and visibly as possible to the rage for social emulation that swept through and provided such a powerful motor for economic expansion throughout most of the western world during the eighteenth century.

These contextual and definitional problems aside, this volume deserves to be widely studied. In addition to the substantive contributions mentioned above, its revelation of the “superficial” and “intermittent” (p. 256) character of the lower sort’s politicization provides more solid testimony than any previous study to the ephemeral nature of any class consciousness that might have developed in this society during this era, while the numerous examples it offers of the weakness of the corporate impulse among all groups in Revolutionary Philadelphia provides yet more evidence of the profound degree to which civic humanist ideology “ran against

the grain” of American society, not as it “was becoming” (p. 254) but as it had long been.

*Jack P. Greene*

ALTER, GEORGE. *Family and the Female Life Course. The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849–1880.* The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (WI) 1988. xiv, 226 pp. \$ 39.50. (Paper: \$ 24.25.)

In this scholarly monograph, George Alter presents the results of several years of work with the nineteenth-century population registers of the Belgian textile city of Verviers. In conducting this research, Alter encountered a number of the problems associated with true longitudinal, continuous event history data. While many of the standard measures and methods in demography are based on combinations of stock data (e.g., censuses, one-time surveys) or basic vital registration (of births, deaths, marriages), population registers pose a challenge, since the population stock is enumerated once when the register is opened and the vital events, including both internal and external migrations, are registered on a continuous basis. Alter does a fine job in coping with these issues, particularly by introducing life-table-type analysis and proportional hazards models.

Verviers is a city in Francophone eastern Belgium which specialized in the production of woolen textiles. Its population grew from about 20,000 inhabitants in 1830 to about 50,000 in 1890. It was selected because of its interesting economic structure, providing employment opportunities for women, and its size, large enough to give adequate socio-economic variation and not so large that the registration mechanism would have been overstrained. The dates circumscribing the analysis were determined by the availability of the register data. Population registers were opened in 1846 and again in 1849, 1856, and 1866. The more recent data (post-1880) were evidently not available for public or scholarly use. The analysis begins with 1849 (and not 1846) because of the short span of the first, relatively less successful 1846 register.

The book's introductory chapter provides a good overview, setting up the debate, describing Verviers, justifying the life-course approach (as opposed to the life-cycle approach), briefly describing methods and giving (on pp. 20–24) an excellent summary of findings. The book is well supplied with such summaries, with one following each chapter and a concise set again in the final chapter. A good deal is made in the book of the life-course approach, which emphasizes the individual's perspective in contrast to the life-cycle approach which uses the household or family as the unit of analysis. One implication is that the tabulations and analyses focus on individual women. Another is that descriptions of family types (for analytical purposes) eschew such categories as nuclear, expanded, extended, etc. in favor of such categories as family of birth and procreative family (after marriage). This perspective has a good deal to recommend it, especially when actions and decisions of family members are of interest rather than phenomena associated with the family or household overall.