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Vivian R. Gruder, *The Notables and the Nation. The Political Schooling of the French, 1787-1788*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2007. x + 495 pp. Map, illustrations, appendices, notes, index. \$59.95 (hb.) ISBN 978 0 674 02534 9.

Response Essay by Vivian Gruder, Professor Emerita Queens College, City University of New York, to the review essays of her book by Nigel Aston, Clarisse Coulomb, William Doyle and Joël Félix.

I want to thank Julian Swann for inviting me to participate in the review and discussion of my book for the H-France Forum. My thanks as well to the reviewers for the time they have taken and the insights they have offered; I am grateful for their thoughts and thoughtfulness. In my response to their critiques I shall try to clarify my point of view on issues they have raised.

I acknowledge William Doyle's criticism that in the first three chapters on the First and Second Assembly of Notables, the "turbulent developments between May 1787 and October 1788" are absent. The focus instead is on the arguments of the First and Second Assembly of Notables, which sparked public responses from the beginning to the end of these two years that are examined in the following sections. So too I acknowledge the absence of attention to "personal ambitions and antagonisms of the participants"--Notables and ministers. Some readers may consider these serious lapses. I struggled in my mind particularly over the first. So I must explain my reasons for the organization of the book.

From the outset I did not want to reproduce a narrative of the events of 1787-88--I did not want to repeat what Jean Egret had done. My intention was not to recount events, but to explain the thoughts behind events and developments. Thus it seemed to me that underneath "personal" antagonisms between Notables and ministers were political disputes, conflicts over important issues of government, and those issues required attention. The few changes in membership in the Second Assembly--a minority of new Notables and some former Notables no longer included--do not detract from the arguments presented, which are the focus; I admit though that I should have indicated in the book the precise changes even though the numbers had little effect on the outcome.

The study of political culture became the object of my research. To me this meant a concentration on the thoughts underlying acts and the thoughts linked to experience--not ideas in themselves, as in intellectual history, nor events in the foreground, as hitherto in political history (categories that Joël Félix cites). Having set aside a narrative approach, I had to find a new key for organizing my research and writing. To get at thoughts behind events, I examined diverse media--not just pamphlets, which so many historians had studied and were again studying; nor just the press, which was then a subject of intense research thanks to the Initiative of Pierre Rétat and Jean Sgard. Pamphlets, the press and whatever else served as media--from imagery to poetry and festivities--were the many facets to see the ways the French received news, opinions and arguments; how these circulated among the public; and what individuals or groups themselves expressed through these same media. I tried to anchor the thoughts of

contemporaries to social and political experience: whether Notables, aristocrats, or those with other social identities whose thoughts were made known; and to events in the political sphere that gained public attention and left marks on their ways of thinking. Chronological narrative was subordinated to the media. In its many forms the media served several purposes: through it people could learn what was happening, and reflect on and express similar or different thoughts related to political and social experiences. How the French learned about events, problems and arguments as these unfolded during these two years, and how they responded with their own thoughts and actions transcribed in diverse media became the keys to organizing the book. No organizing principle is without fault, but I hope the one I chose may also have its benefits.

Other points that Doyle makes also require clarification. The French did not turn against the principle of monarchical government nor reject Louis XVI as king, as Doyle correctly states. But the significance of the years 1787-88 is that both the Notables and the public agreed on the need to change above all the existing institutions of monarchical government: the centralized administration and the absolute authority of the monarch. Their aim was public participation in government: decentralized administration at the local and provincial levels; and public control of policies and consent to laws through representatives in national government. Thereafter disagreement arose over the nature of representation. Allegiance to monarchy and to the person of the king went along with strong criticism of the policies that Louis XVI pursued, mainly directed at surrogates in the ministry and his wife but at times at the king himself. Still the Gordian knot between monarchy and nation was not yet untied.

Doyle is correct that one chapter examines only two pamphlets linked to peasant groups. But peasants appear again as participants in many community assemblies that are examined in the final chapter. In some instances rural assemblies explicitly voiced their views, but most often theirs was a silent presence. Their silence was not a sign of ignorance or indifference but of adherence to the views expressed in the assemblies. Since differences of opinion do at times appear among those several hundred assemblies we can feel assured that on the broad goals of double representation of the Third Estate, vote by head in the Estates-General, and free choice of representatives through elections, peasants were in accord with many others in the Third Estate.

My contention that Hardy's Journal was not a personal diary but a form of a nouvelle à la main elicits Doyle's strongest criticism. He argues that "the contents of his journal offer no evidence that they were intended for anything other than their author's own satisfaction." Yet Hardy often comments that he is transcribing many parliamentary remonstrances so that his readers might be made aware of them. So too does he summarize not only news of events in Paris but the contents of pamphlets and the manuscript newsletter that he evidently subscribed to. His was a "journal d'événements" that was not limited to his private thoughts and perusal; though not a circulating newsletter as were the Mettra series or the Mémoires secrets, it appears as an "in-house" news digest. And why not? He had a bookstore; bookstores were then often sites of cabinets de lecture where customers could read whatever the owner placed at their disposal.

Joël Félix rightly castigates me for my critical treatment of Tocqueville, for which I offer a heartfelt posthumous apology. For Tocqueville was the first to spotlight the importance of the years 1787-88, to discern its reformist aims and the political leadership of the aristocracy. Yet public support of reform goals and aristocratic leadership does not enter his vision. Instead he turned to writers who became important figures in the Revolution and who epitomized the abstract theorizing that he believed undermined from the start the prospects for a moderate, liberal transformation of the monarchy and society—Sieyès being the leading example. If Sieyès was "trop grand" that is because Tocqueville and historians after him predate his influence on

public opinion and political events. That influence was not exerted towards the end of 1788 nor at the onset of 1789. Que-ce que le Tiers État? appeared only in January, and neither the bookseller Hardy nor the publisher Ruault were aware of it then. Only in June, when the situation changed with stalemate in the Estates-General over seating in common and vote by head did Sieyès's pamphlet offer the argument for the Third Estate to forge ahead. His influence was "grand" but in a foreshortened period of time.

The use of the words "no taxation without representation" in my first published article on the Assembly of Notables of 1787 was an allusion not to the influence of the American Revolution, as Félix assumes, but to my contention that the Notables, as the Americans in the 1760s-1770s, used the leverage of taxation to demand consent to fiscal measures and to lawmaking in general. I do not believe, based on the sources I used and as the chapter on the provincial press indicates, that the American experience had any preeminent influence. The historical precedents or models most often cited in contemporary writings came from French history, albeit a largely mythologized past. It was indeed impressive to see the degree to which history was manipulated and transformed to serve completely opposite political ends, whether monarchical, parliamentary or (Third Estate) Patriotic.

Paradoxes abound in history, but to me it is not paradoxical that in 1787 the Notables were "parangons du patriotisme" and in late 1788 they were "défenseurs du pire conservatisme et, dans le cas des princes, d'une contre-révolution...." Nor did something like a "mutation dans la culture politique" occur among the Notables. In 1787 their political leadership was not in question; they expected to exercise such leadership which then was tacitly accepted. By 1788 the Notables, and parliamentary magistrates and many aristocrats in general, feared the loss of their previously unquestioned political leadership which they defended behind the bulwark of separate and equal representation of each estate and vote by order. They tried to appeal to the Third Estate with the offer of a quid pro quo: the nobility would accept fiscal equality, which commoners sought, in exchange for a quota of seats for the first and second estates in the Estates-General (i.e., equal numbers and separate voting of each order), which would give numerical preponderance to the nobility and (upper) clergy. In that sense the Notables, adhering to the centuries-old belief in the political leadership of aristocrats, "n'ont pas changé d'une Assemblée à l'autre...." If by "mutation dans la culture politique" Félix refers to commoners, that was undeniably true. By 1788 commoners were increasingly autonomous in their political engagement, anticipating and not deferring to aristocratic initiative, and beginning to make claims to an effective political role in national government: demanding for the Estates-General and provincial estates equal numbers and voting weight to the first two orders with vote in common, which the Notables had granted to them in provincial assemblies one year earlier. Surprise at and disappointment with the aristocracy's backtracking on representation and voting turned the Third Estate resolutely against the aristocracy. I may add that I do not believe the Notables in 1787 feared "des conséquences de leur opposition sur la stabilité du régime" and preferred "abandonner à Louis XVI le soin de ramener l'ordre dans le pays...." Their disclaimer of authority to vote on new taxes was a ruse to intensify fiscal pressure on the Crown so as to force Louis XVI to convene an Estates-General which they called for. I believe Félix's own analysis of Louis XVI shows that even if the king retained or regularly summoned the Notables as a consultative body (which they were), that would not have been sufficient to "jeter ainsi les racines d'une monarchie constitutionnelle" nor assuage public demands which extended beyond giving advice and aimed at a role in lawmaking, concessions which Louis obdurately refused.[1]

I completely agree with Félix that my book does not deal with royal reform policies nor the influence of Enlightenment writings and public politicization before 1787. There is no lack of works on those themes. The political engagement of the French public immediately leading to

Revolution was less known, apart from Egret, and known in the broadest generalities. And let us not forget that not all experience of politicization erupts in revolution. The "graves tensions du règne de Louis XV," "la rumeur du pacte de famine," "les révoltes frumentaires à la fin des années 1760"--involved serious conflict. The economic crises provoked popular engagement--and elite countermeasures. None of these examples and others such as the conflicts pitting the parlements against the Crown erupted in revolution in earlier years, not even the outbursts against the Maupeou reforms. Not all tensions and conflicts signal revolution. Revolution requires other ingredients to occur, which came together beginning in 1787. Above all was the necessity of consensus, agreement on fundamental political goals to change the system of government, and unity among a broad range of the French public. The demands for local administrative autonomy, consent to taxation and, most basically, participation in government had the power to appeal to and draw together many of the French from diverse backgrounds, before they were drawn apart.

Nigel Aston voices a similar reproach about the absence of "any preliminary summary" of public opinion prior to 1787-88. I would add to what I said in the previous paragraph that to do so in any "summary fashion" would have been very watered down. I do indicate in the sections on the Notables and the community assemblies, and in references to the parliamentary magistrates, that their words did show links to the past--to the ideas of philosophes, physiocrats, and parliamentary constitutionalism--but except for the latter I did not draw out those connections. It is a weakness I acknowledge, to limit the length of the text and because so many other works do a much better job than I could have accomplished in a summary manner. My aim was to provide a "snapshot" of a brief but very important period of two years, albeit with lacunae.

As to "the relative maturity of public opinion" in France and in Great Britain in the late eighteenth century to which Aston refers, it seems to me from my work that the political consciousness of the French, rather than "almost no less than in contemporary Britain," became more keen. The French demanded not only participation through a representative body, which Britain already had; they also sought greater representation for non-aristocrats, i.e. the Third Estate, whereas in these same years the call for suffrage reform to extend the vote to broader sectors of the British public failed and had to await the reform of 1832. How this disparity between the two nations and peoples may be explained is a puzzle that demands attention from historians.

Aston also criticizes the absence of a "comparative feel." I do indicate that the provincial press through book reviews expressed sympathies for self-government with the examples of the American states and Great Britain, as well as Switzerland, the United Provinces (Holland) and ancient Greece. Although newspapers reported on the revolts in the Austrian Lowlands, those events did not enter the debates on political developments in France in the many sources I consulted. But I repeat here what I wrote above and in the book: far and away more attention was given to examples, true or exaggerated, drawn from French history. That the French gave, and therefore I too, greater importance to their own historical precedents does not "concern..." me at all; and far from my feeling "desperate," to indicate the presence of Enlightenment or parliamentary discourse is meant to underscore the heterodox character of political views among contemporaries.

Other lacunae that Aston points out are "the religious aspects of the political contest of 1787-88..." and "the gendered dimension to this emergent national politics." If what I present is "overwhelmingly secular" that is because secular matters--taxes, deficits and political participation--were the main concerns of the French in 1787-88. Those issues attracted the attention of two archbishops, Loménie de Brienne and Boisgelin. The Auvergnat priest wrote about economic and social problems that affected his "rustic society," although he was

sufficiently pious to oppose, in later years, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In these two years the clergy as a collective body also expressed its support for consent on fiscal matters and the convening of an Estates-General, as well as its insistence on retaining its fiscal privilege, these issues made known to the public through the press and pamphlets, and are included in my analysis of the media. A hitherto important publication that has attracted the attention of historians, the Jansenist Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques, had not a single word on the events of 1787-88. The beliefs of Jansenist (or Jesuit) writers did not set apart their political views from those of other Frenchmen in these two years. Religious doctrines or spiritual outlooks did not in any significant way enter the political public sphere—as these had in the past and would shortly in the future.

As to women readers that Aston mentions, I cite the marquis de Bombelles's description of aristocratic ladies who avidly read history in late 1788, at the time that writers fastened on historical precedents with the approach of the Estates-General. The pamphlets of Olympe de Gouges in these two years were in the general stream of thought rather than unique; her feminist writings came later. A few pamphlets ascribed to groups of women were likely apocryphal, or rather satirical spoofs of women's political engagement; the actual involvement of women in political affairs is opaque but probably within the mainstream. I could have included discussion of these and regret not doing so. With writings by or about women, as with religion, it is not possible to include everything and choices had to be made determined by the weight or the originality of the sources. (I also regret excluding two pamphlets whose unique arguments were of particular interest to me).

How representative were the Notables of the elite, Aston wonders? They came from social, professional and institutional categories of high status, thus of the elite, chosen by the controller-general Calonne whose criteria were determined and constrained by considerations of social status, institutional affiliation, and (presumed) political loyalty. Calonne also assumed that these "notable" persons would support his policies and promote them among the public, since the reforms he proposed embodied aspirations that reformers had sought for decades, especially local assemblies engaged in administration. But, as I point out, the hopes of the Notables in 1787, and then of the public, extended beyond the administrative activity that the Crown offered and aimed at participation in government policy and lawmaking. Prolonging the Assembly of Notables in 1787 would not have eased "political tensions" because the Crown, meaning the king, was unwilling in 1787 as in 1789 to cede legislative authority beyond public consent to taxation. And not because Louis acquiesced in the views of the princes of the blood; on the contrary, while the princes opposed doubling of the Third Estate and vote by head in the Estates-General Louis nonetheless granted doubling of the Third in December 1788. As to the "perspective" of the seven princes and "lesser luminaries" among the Notables, their views when identifiable are noted in the analyses of the responses of the several bureaux.

Aston also questions "...how far the Notables believed in public involvement in the life of the state..."—to the extent that aristocrats would be leaders of the public, as I indicated above. It was natural for them to believe this since aristocratic leadership prevailed throughout Europe, including Great Britain. When aristocratic leadership was endangered, the Notables and many nobles attacked and tried to contain public political involvement. We should not be too quick to consider the distinction of estates as "atrophied juridical distinctions." The three orders still served "political purposes" both for the aristocracy and the Third Estate. The distinction of orders was part of the new provincial assemblies that the Notables demanded in 1787, and that particular feature did not elicit criticism, perhaps because the number of Third Estate members was doubled and voting was in common (there were other criticisms of the assemblies' lack of sufficient authority). Separation of orders became a guarantee of voting dominance for the aristocracy in the Estates-General when in late 1788 the Notables withdrew their earlier

support for doubling of the Third and voting in common. As for the Third Estate, Elizabeth Eisenstein pointed out that Patriot leaders—and participants in the community assemblies that I examine—insisted on separation of orders in voting for representatives to the Estates-General so as to preclude the influence of prominent nobles and clergy on voters in the Third Estate and assure the election of commoners to represent the Third. Unity among commoners on these and other issues in 1788-89 did not mean uniformity on all matters. Rather than being "unsure," I clearly stated that on other issues shortly to come to the fore, especially the limits or extent of suffrage for the Third Estate, lines of division were already apparent. The one does not preclude the other.

Aston rightly discerns a shift in my view of the significance of the years 1787-88: from "preparing for Revolution," meaning a pre-Revolution, to a Revolution "already start[ing]." In other words I learned in the course of doing research and writing, and between the beginning and end of the book I worked out a different interpretation.

Clarisse Coulomb also criticizes the lack of detailed reference to political thought and activity prior to 1787, a common theme among the reviewers which I answered earlier, perhaps to no one's satisfaction nor mine. She further states that "les pamphlets de 1788 étaient souvent des reprises de ceux de 1771...." Among the several hundred pamphlets of 1787-88 that I studied, only a handful were reeditions; that lesser number does not preclude arguments attacking the "Maupéou revolution" from reechoing in later years in new writings. The political discourses of 1787-88 had roots in earlier years which I try to indicate if not examine. As to "le recours à l'histoire," I do not believe that I undervalue historical justifications. In addition to chapter 1, to which Coulomb refers, arguments evoking history are examined in the debates of the First and Second Assemblies of Notables and in the chapter on pamphlets; in the index there are several citations under "history and historical discourse" as well as "history manuals" (p. 480). More than once I refer to the intermix of discourses borrowed both from historical precedent and the Enlightenment, as well as the link between arguments based on precedent and the juridical tradition. Nor do I overlook the importance of parliamentary constitutionalism, which I indicate in the chapter on pamphlets (pp. 173-174) and which is cited in the index (p. 488).

That there is "pas ou peu question du jansénisme" is correct. Writings by Jansenists that I examined invoked parliamentary constitutionalism, the source in earlier decades of much of Jansenist political thought (as distinct from its religious thought). Following the abolition of the Jesuits in the 1760's, historians agree, a mutation from religious to political concerns among the Jansenists was underway (but not in the Jansenist Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques in these two years; see above). Furthermore, the writings of two prominent Jansenist writers, Le Paige's Lettre sur les lits de justice, republished in late 1788, and Maulrot's Dissertation sur le droit de convoquer les états généraux, republished in early 1789, were already outdated by events.

There is no study of the provincial estates in my book, Coulomb regrets, but those estates are not ignored. An evolution in public thought about provincial estates in these years is explained: in 1787, following initial euphoria over the creation of provincial assemblies, provincial estates came to be considered better alternatives and demands arose to replace the assemblies with estates; in late 1788 the community assemblies vigorously attacked existing provincial estates and sought reforms of their membership, voting practice, and operation. I regret that I overlooked the work of Julian Swann on the estates of Burgundy, but I do cite some of Marie-Laure Legay's writings on the estates of Artois and her argument about the transformation of provincial estates in the second half of the eighteenth century (p. 466, n. 41).

Coulomb raises the Tocquevillian theme of "rupture" or "continuation," a choice of one or the other, she regrets, the book does not unequivocally make. While patterns and components of

thought antedated 1787-1789--historical references, Enlightenment values and language, juridical rhetoric (and also the tendency to ostracize and demonize opponents)--there was also rupture. Foremost were demands for representation in government through forms that would be elective rather than appointive or based on status, and which would give greater weight to commoners; and the rare feature of virtually universal consensus among the three estates on the need to limit absolute and centralized monarchical authority through greater public participation in provincial and national institutions. Just as that broad agreement between aristocracy and commoners was limited in time and ended in late 1788, so too did the aristocracy experience similar unity and dissension. In 1787-88 most nobles (including members of the royal court) and upper clergy supported demands for greater participation in government. Few aristocrats publicly supported the government's policies and royalist arguments. In their common political opposition and goals, did the aristocracy constitute "un bloc"? But not one that was adamant (even the "blocco storico" that Antonio Gramsci identified with the Jacobins was short-lived). On other matters divisions within the aristocracy existed or arose at the same time and especially before and after 1787-88, however fleeting but important that moment of unity. Rather than embrace "rupture" or "continuation," unity or divisiveness, we should determine which tendency prevailed within different and specific contexts.

Lastly, Coulomb points to additional bibliographical omissions. I do not cite in this book William Doyle's pioneering article questioning an "aristocratic reaction" because I did not want to repeat what I had already argued in my historiographical article "Whither Revisionism? Political Perspectives on the Ancien Régime," in which Doyle's article appears in the first note.[2] Michael Kwass is not only not ignored, he is referred to on p. 37 and his book cited on p. 393, n. 12. I did not know of Olivier Chaline's book on Godart de Belbeuf, but the procureur-général of the Parlement of Normandy is not even mentioned by name in the text, only in the footnote citation to the 1955 article; I hope that is not a grievous oversight.

Again I want to express my gratitude for this opportunity to clarify my arguments and I am pleased at the generous responses of the reviewers. My book is not a "total history" of the years 1787-88. Any and all lacunae that reviewers here and in the future note, such as a prosopography of all the Notables or a linkage between political culture before and during 1787-88, we may leave as work for future historians.

NOTES

[1] Joël Félix, *Louis XVI & Marie-Antoinette Un couple en politique* (Paris: Payot, 2006).

[2] Vivian R. Gruder, "Whither Revisionism? Political Perspectives on the Ancien Régime," *French Historical Studies* (Spring 1997, 20-2), 245.

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