

REPORTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Society for French Historical Studies

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The Society for French Historical Studies held its thirty-eighth annual meeting on March 19–21, 1992, in El Paso, Texas. The session “Class and Identity: Representations of Urban and Rural Socio-economic Transformation in the Nineteenth Century” focused on complex issues of working-class identity.

In “Women’s Work Identity: Female Labor in the Transitional Manufacturing Economy of July Monarchy, Paris,” Judith A. DeGroat (St. Lawrence University) argued that women’s work identity diverged from male conceptions of labor in two important ways. First, Parisian manufacturing women rejected corporate definitions of skill based on the mastery of a trade. Female labor, located primarily in preparatory and finishing work, required proficiency in the production process. Rather than viewing themselves as unskilled labor, women workers characterized their occupations as a trade (*état*) that required both knowledge and experience. Moreover, women’s work identity included their role as consumers as well as producers. Not only did women view union with a male wage earner as one component in a larger strategy for economic survival, but their work identity arose in large part from their varied unpaid obligations, such as management of the family economy, household duties, and care of family members.

Charles Crouch (St. Johns University) presented “Gender and Socio-Economic Status in Restoration Paris: Evidence of the Bankruptcy Records.” Drawing on bankruptcy ledgers of the Parisian Chamber of Commerce for 1818–1830, Crouch showed the connection between socioeconomic status and gender. Independent women, that is, single, divorced, or widowed women, “had a disproportionately higher percentage of . . . bankruptcies” in the “lower, less financially secure, end of the socio-economic ladder.” In addition, bankruptcy among independent women was more likely to touch those in the lower echelons of Parisian economy. Crouch concluded that gender and marital status had negative implications for the financial and structural situation of Parisian women seeking economic independence.

In “Worker-Peasants, Class Identity and Labor Activity in Saint-Nazaire’s Shipbuilding Industry, 1880–1910,” Leslie Schuster (Rhode Island College) showed that industrialization in Saint-Nazaire did not create an identical, urbanized work force with a homogeneous political agenda. Instead, the priorities and resources specific to the two groups of workers laboring in Saint-Nazaire’s yards – urban-based workers and worker-peasants commuting from a nearby agricultural community – determined separate, and often contradictory, responses to industrialization, unemployment, and shop-floor issues. Land ownership, skill,

and agricultural activities enabled shipbuilding's worker-peasants to resist migration and proletarianization. By integrating industrial production into long-standing patterns of rural work, these worker-peasants retained their traditional community. Their workshop concerns reflected their identity as peasant owners intent on maintaining traditional modes of life and, as such, diverged sharply from the strike agenda of urban workers.

Eighth International Conference of Europeanists

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The Eighth International Conference of Europeanists was held in Chicago on March 27–29, 1992. Seeking to hold a conference that included a wide range of topics and disciplinary approaches, the sponsor – the Council for European Studies (Columbia University) – chose not to impose a unifying theme. Scholars from Europe and the United States participated on more than forty panels dealing with historical and contemporary aspects of European society, culture, economics, and politics. Almost all of the panels covered more than one country, and several focused on the ongoing transformation of formerly communist countries. Perhaps due to Germany's influential position in an emerging integrated Europe, papers dealing with the former East and West Germany were presented in well over half of the sessions.

The panel "Gender and Politics in Early Twentieth Century Europe" considered various social constructions of class and gender, and the degree of continuity and rupture in modern Europe. Mary Nolan (New York University) argued that the ideology and practice of Germany's social rationalization movement during Weimar (in particular, the German Institute for Technical Work Schooling or DINTA) helped create the later Nazi system of industrial relations and worker education in the factory. DINTA and other practitioners of social rationalization called for a world where masculine and feminine spheres were separate – where women devoted themselves to husbands and children, and men "joyfully fought the battle of production." Its efforts in the 1920s contributed to a vision of the ideal male worker and reformed working-class family which proved useful to employers in the Third Reich as well as after 1945.

While Nolan's paper revealed important elements of continuity between Weimar and post-1932 Germany, Atina Grossmann (Columbia University) emphasized 1933 as a point of rupture for German sex reform and social medicine. Weimar social reformers, according to Grossmann, were not worn down by years of eugenic discourse and readily persuaded to support Nazi public health policy for the sake of *Volksgesundheit* (public health). On the contrary, they had to be fired, arrested, and forced to emigrate after 1932. Both papers demonstrate the need for a finely grained understanding of the balance between break and continuity in twentieth-century Germany. In her paper "'Sherry and Silks': The Promotion of Women's Pleasure in London's West End," Erika Rappaport (Rutgers University) analyzed