

maris, mais aussi, voire davantage, en tant que pères, responsables du bien-être et de l'éducation de leur progéniture.

Au total, les questions abordées par ces deux ouvrages sont nombreuses. En inscrivant résolument les identités genrées dans leur contexte économique, social, culturel et religieux, *Negotiating Identities* et *Household Politics* illustrent de brillante manière le caractère construit des normes sexuées et les diverses modulations qu'elles prennent dans l'espace et le temps. Ces travaux démontrent aussi avec brio le renouvellement des perspectives qu'apporte à l'histoire sociale une réflexion sur les genres.

Christine Hudon—Université de Sherbrooke

**Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).**

Historians of France's revolutionary period have held fast to the view that the tumultuous events of 1789 ushered in a decade that effectively removed women from the public sphere and placed them firmly within the home. Following the work of Joan Landes, many have argued that the development of France's republic in the late eighteenth century, which was based on the fraternity of male citizens and duty to the nation, reinforced the domestic and private role of women, a role that was eventually entrenched in French law by Napoleon's Civil Code in 1804. Indeed, although some historians of the period, such as Carla Hesse, have explored the ways in which women often circumvented these developments and succeeded in addressing questions of political empowerment, cultural representation, and agency, the belief that the legacy of the Revolution was responsible for the stymied growth of public womanhood well into the nineteenth century has continued to resonate within the fields of French cultural and gender history.

In *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, Suzanne Desan makes important revisions to this argument by contending that women in households of the 1790s were not part of a "new domesticity," but in fact, frequently engaged with republican ideology, new laws, and increased access to the state, in order "...to challenge their former positions of domestic inferiority" (11). Specifically, Desan argues that the revolution recast the ways in which French women and men experienced family life, by providing them with a new language of equality and liberty that they used to demand relationships based on affection, companionship, and egalitarianism (2). She also discusses radical family reforms passed in the Assembly during the 1790s, from the definition of marriage as a "civil contract" and the legalization of divorce, to the reduction of paternal rights over the marriage of children, and increased equality in inheritance laws (49). In this way, Desan contends that the family became the "cru-

cial matrix ... that linked each individual to the new nation-state,” and was the key arena for applying the most fundamental goals of the revolution (7).

However, forging the new republican family was not left only to the deputies and politicians. Desan argues that families themselves also played a key role in shaping the “new social and political order” of revolutionary France (3-4). They achieved this, in large part, through family courts of arbitration, the *tribunaux de famille*, which were established locally and on a temporary basis to hear and adjudicate family disputes. This new system, according to Desan, made family law and justice “malleable, relatively affordable, and close to home,” and encouraged average citizens to take advantage of the laws (5-6). It gave hope to women in abusive relationships, to cuckolded men, and to those who had been disinherited by their relations. This revolutionary emphasis on family reform gave women, in particular, an active and vocal way of participating in matters of the state. Far from being relegated to the domestic sphere, Desan convincingly demonstrates how, through their petitions and court appeals, women were instrumental in shaping a new vision of the family, one based on “equality and mutual esteem between the sexes,” and which, in turn, was fundamental in transforming gender relations in the late-eighteenth century (172).

At the heart of this transformation, according to Desan, was the importance of marriage, which she argues became a political issue at a time when the revolutionary government, “strove to unite the civil and natural man in service of the new nation and to draw on the distinct, but socially useful qualities of each citizen, female or male” (50). She is particularly convincing in demonstrating that good republican marriages were expected to be “rooted in conviviality, individual liberty, and personal happiness,” and that husbands and wives were equally integral to a successful union (138). The nature of republican masculinity was imagined not as a commanding, patriarchal force that headed the family, but was meant to embody an “energetic, unflinching dedication to the nation and [a] humane *sensibilité* both inside and outside the household” (91). Likewise, women were not simply Rousseauian mothers, but were called to help “regenerate” their husbands to the cause of the revolution and to help them cultivate their republican qualities (69). Thus, Desan shows that the revolutionary ethos of liberty and equality was applied to, but also effected by, the most intimate of relationships in the French republic, and in the process, redefined gender relations as well as the nature of masculinity and femininity.

In *The Family on Trial*, Desan uses a compelling combination of social and cultural history, and is particularly persuasive in demonstrating the ways in which the refashioning of the revolutionary family was accomplished not just at the level of political legislation, cultural discourse, or lived experience, but at the intersection of all of these elements. As a result, her source base is particularly impressive, and gives her the latitude to take the pulse of the nation,

but also to conduct a detailed analysis of the Calvados region, and examine the intricacies of one localized area. Desan carefully and thoroughly excavates court cases, legislation and political debates, état civil records, and a host of other sources, which bring the spirit and practice of the family reforms to life. She is also adept at re-creating the details of particular family crises and dilemmas, which as Desan notes, gives the historian a unique opportunity to “peer into households and assess the contours of this revolution within the home” (6). In addition to marriage reform, Desan devotes chapters to the implications of the divorce law of 1792, the changes made to inheritances, and the debates over determining paternity and legitimacy. All of these issues are impressively woven together within a rich historiographical context to demonstrate the ways in which the family was indeed an important testing ground for the high ideals of the revolution, and at the same time, was crucial to the forging of the revolutionary state. Family reform was also transformative in the lives of average French citizens, and Desan is at her best when she tells the stories of the men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, who could now claim the lofty goals of the new republic for themselves and apply them to their own lives. In this way, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* is a tremendous achievement, one that demonstrates the potential of cultural histories that foreground social practice, and will be of importance not only to historians of the period, but to those who deal with cultural constructions of gender, and the interactions between politics and lived experience.

Julie A. Johnson—Queen’s University

**Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa, eds., *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).**

*Sisters or Strangers?* is a collection of articles investigating how women’s experiences in Canada were shaped by their immigrant, ethnic, and racialized identities. Spanning close to two hundred years of history, this volume begins by looking at the creation of white settler communities in North America and concludes with a discussion of how women not only dealt with the process of immigration, but how they remembered the reception they faced as non-Anglo Canadians in post-war Canada. In between, the collection tries to excavate the lives of women by dealing with a number of important issues from nation building, interactions with the state and public institutions, the representation of women as symbols, family relations and the transmission of culture, to an examination of experience and memory. The editors select works and themes that highlight not only the diversity of women’s experiences, but also the impact of national allegiances and borders on the lives of women. As the edi-