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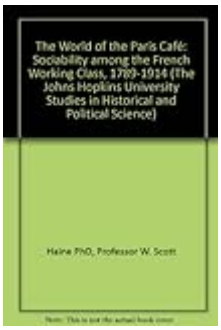

W. Scott Haine. *The World of the Paris Cafe: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914.* Baltimore, Md., and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. xix + 325 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5104-9.

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Parisian Cafe Life

In *The World of the Paris Cafe: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914*, W. Scott Haine examines how Parisian workers constructed cafes and cafe life according to the dynamics of family, work, and politics. Haine, who is the editor of the *Social History of Alcohol Review*, convincingly demonstrates that cafes bridged the gap between public and private, work and leisure, and individuals and their families. To Parisian workers facing the tumultuous political and economic world of nineteenth-century France, cafes served as shelters, incubators, and stages on which they could act. Cafes fostered class consciousness and helped Parisian workers to buttress themselves against the dislocating effects of economic change.

Haine's research and argument are notable for their breadth. He treats cafe life with a wide array of source materials–varying from police records to court records to novels. Haine's facility with cultural source materials as well as quantitative records allows him to evoke a convincing portrait of the men and women who frequented cafes, as well as a sense of how they behaved once they had stepped up to the counters. We learn, for instance, from court records that most cafe goers were not just youths, or bachelors, or debased individuals. To the contrary, they resembled the broader Parisian population of workers more generally, albeit skilled and well-paid artisans predominated.

The World of the Paris Cafe is at its best when Haine investigates and interprets the changing rituals of cafe culture. For instance, in Chapter Five–"The Social Construction of the Drinking Experience"–Haine describes the changing drinking patterns and preferences of Parisian workers and considers their significance. We learn that wine was the staple of cafe drinking during the nineteenth century. However, absinthe, a more potent beverage, became workers' second most preferred drink by 1900. As this change occurred, the rituals of drinking became less connected to collective festivity and more individualized. By the century's end, class-based politicization of drinking had been replaced by its medicalization; for workers, as well as the middle-class, drunkenness had become an individualized pathology.

Organized topically, *The World of the Paris Cafe* also crosses multiple scholarly terrains–including topics such

as gender, family, work, and politics. For the most part, each section underscores Haine's contention that cafes served as a "transitional space" between the public world of early-modern France and the essentially private worlds of the late-twentieth-century. In the context of labor history, we learn that Parisian workers used cafes to preserve pre-industrial connections between work and community and (implicitly) countered economic coercion in the guise of rationalization and mechanization. During the nineteenth-century, Haine argues that working-class women challenged the pieties of masculinized politics. They appropriated cafes as a sort of interstitial space between public and private, that served to blur a rigid compartmentalization of proletariat life in Paris.

Despite the breadth of his argument, Haine fails to explicitly connect his narrative to the scholarly literature on consumption, which marks the books most significant flaw. This omission is surprising not just because consumptive activities are so central to cafe culture but because recent scholarship has shown that consumption has figured prominently across the domains of politics, work, and family. Without this explicit connection, we are left without answers to several important questions implicitly raised here. For instance, how did Parisian cafe culture transform French society more broadly? And, by extension, what was the role of the working class in producing French consumer culture? Judging from *The World of the Paris Cafe*, Parisian workers figured prominently in helping to create twentieth-century French consumer society. But, without a more detailed discussion, the reader is left pondering the book's broadest significance.

This criticism aside, Haine has crafted a nuanced and evocative portrait of the social life of the Parisian working-class. Researchers and academic tourists alike will come to see their next sojourn in a Paris cafe differently. The World of the Paris Cafe will continue to provide researchers into the French working-class, as well as those studying the development of consumer culture, much to think about in the coming years.

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