

The Political Pedagogy of Everyday Life in the French Revolution

Authors : Michael Ruiz

Abstract : Many scholars view the French Revolution as the origins of 'modern nationalism,' citing the unprecedented rhetorical power of 'the nation' and the emergence of a centralized, modern nation-state during this time. They have also stressed the role of public education in promoting a national language and creating a sense of shared national identity among the masses. Yet as many cultural historians have shown, revolutionary leaders undertook an unprecedented campaign to overhaul French culture in the 1790s in order to cultivate these national ideals and inspire Republican virtues, in what has been called 'political pedagogy.' In contrast to scholars of nationalism, who emphasize formal education, revolutionaries attempted to translate abstract ideas of equality and liberty into palpable representations that would inundate everyday life, thereby serving as pedagogical tools. Material culture and everyday life became state apparatuses not just for winning over citizens' hearts and minds, but for influencing the very formation of the citizen and their innermost 'self.' This paper argues that nationalism began in 1789, when 'the self' became a political concern and its formation a state project for cultivating political legitimacy. By broadening the meaning of 'political pedagogy,' this study brings together scholarship on nationalism with cultural history, thereby highlighting nations and nationalism as banal, palpable, quotidian phenomena and historicizing the complex emergence of 'modern nationalism.' Moreover, because the contemporary view of material culture and pedagogy was highly gendered, this study shows the role of culture in the development of a homosocial, male-dominated public sphere in the 19th century. The legacy of the French Revolution's concern with culture thus persists as much in our vocabulary for political expression as it does in the material world, remaining deeply embedded in everyday day life as a crucial, nearly-invisible, component of nationalism.

Keywords : French Revolution, nationalism, political culture, material culture

Conference Title : ICCH 2018 : International Conference on Cultural History

Conference Location : Osaka, Japan

Conference Dates : October 11-12, 2018