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Rebecca L. Spang winner of the 2015-16 LOUIS GOTTSCHALK PRIZE


Rebecca Spang’s book asks a powerful question, "What happens . . . if we consider the French Revolution-a crucial episode in the formation of the modern nation-state-not from the perspective of the use of violence but from that of the regulation of money?"

Spang’s archival works allows her to bring into view an astonishing array of forgotten financial instruments, and her sure grasp of economic issues enables her to track the interplay between politics and the economy, in Paris and in the provinces, in the five decades after the Revolution. Spang’s compelling analyses show that the forms of money accepted by different individuals and communities marked them in "social, regional, and political terms"-thus, in her sure hands, the travails of currency exchange and values become revelatory of the difficulties of nation formation and of the extension of the power and legitimacy of the centralizing state.

The judges also note the ease and confidence with which Spang locates her argument vis-a-vis other powerful modes of understanding the French Revolution. One of her crucial insights, that "the key social nexus" is "not the relation of individuals to the means of production but their relation to the means of exchange" is challenging and provocative enough to engender productive debate and writing in years to come.

Scholars who follow her lead will also notice, as did the judges, the quality and vitality of Spang’s prose: for all these reasons, the judges are unanimous in their recommendation that Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution should be awarded the Gottschalk Prize. Spang’s Invention of the Restaurant (Harvard University Press, 2000) was also awarded the 1999-2000 Gottschalk Prize.