



Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840

By Dror Wahrman

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This book explores the origins of the influential view of modern society that places a "middle class" at its center, as it developed in Britain during the so-called "Industrial Revolution." Using a wider variety of sources and closer methods of textual analysis than previous studies of languages of class, the author develops a nuanced model for the interplay of social reality and social language. He demonstrates that a "middle class"-based language of social description did not simply reflect changes in social structure, but was rather the outcome of political circumstances in a period of radical political change.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Dror Wahrman's richly documented history of how conceptions of the middle class informed political argument...confirms once more the power of linguistic analysis to illuminate the past. At the same time, *Imagining the Middle Class* makes it clear that such modes of inquiry will only be of major benefit to social historians when they are able to advance our understanding of political action and private conduct. To that end, we shall have to match Wahrman's skillful dissection of what was said with an equally penetrating look at who was doing the talking." *Journal of Social History*

"Wahrman's subtle analysis of the role of the middle class in early-19th-century Britain breaks new ground....Wahrman's study is an excellent attempt at rethinking the nature of political change in modern society." *Choice*

"...the book is a contribution to the recent theory wars on 'the correspondence between social being and social consciousness.' This is an outstanding piece of research and analysis that makes an important contribution to our understanding of the political and intellectual history of this period." John Smail, *American Journal of Sociology*

"Unafraid of big questions and controversial answers, *Imagining the Middle Class* is an intelligent, provocative piece of work, one that deserves a wide audience." *Albion*

"...the historic tale he weaves is for the most part a convincing one, and that his book removes one more cornerstone of the edifice of nineteenth-century British History." Miles Taylor, *International Labor and Working-Class History*

"Hopefully, this book will inspire historians to ask some new and searching questions about how bread and butter history, consciousness and the conscious historian interact and cohere (or fail to cohere)." Margaret R. Hunt, *Victorian Studies*

From the Back Cover

The book shows how representations of society focused on a 'middle class' were infused from the French Revolution onwards with highly charged meanings, meanings that then changed radically under different political circumstances. The author uncovers the historically specific origins and the contingent logic of those characterizations of the middle class that we take today as given, from the narrative of its inexorable rise, through its key role in modern society, to its famous embodiment in domesticity.

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