



The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England

Dror Wahrman

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Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a radical change occurred in notions of self and personal identity. This was a sudden transformation, says Dror Wahrman, and nothing short of a revolution in the understanding of selfhood and of identity categories including race, gender, and class. In this pathbreaking book, he offers a fundamentally new interpretation of this critical turning point in Western history. Wahrman demonstrates this transformation with a fascinating variety of cultural evidence from eighteenth-century England, from theater to beekeeping, fashion to philosophy, art to travel and translations of the classics. He discusses notions of self in the earlier 1700s—what he terms the ancien regime of identity—that seem bizarre, even incomprehensible, to present-day readers. He then examines how this peculiar world came to an abrupt end, and the far-reaching consequences of that change. This unrecognized cultural revolution, the author argues, set the scene for the array of new departures that signaled the onset of Western modernity.

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