

Bell

## Lawyers and Citizens

The Making of a Political Élite in Old Regime France

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Not only were lawyers heavily represented among the men who rose to power in France in 1789, to a large extent, they also shaped the evolution of French political culture under the ancien régime. David Bell's new book traces the development of the French legal profession between the reign of Louis XIV and the French Revolution, showing how lawyers influenced, and were influenced by, the period's passionate political and religious conflicts. Bell analyses how these key "middling" figures in French society were transformed from the institutional technicians of absolute monarchy into the self-appointed "voices of public opinion," and leaders of opposition political journalism. He describes the birth of an independent legal profession in the late seventeenth century, its alienation from the monarchy under the pressure of religious disputes in the early eighteenth, and its transformation into a standard-bearer of "enlightened" opinion in the decades before the Revolution. His work illuminates the workings of politics under a theoretically absolute monarchy, and the importance of long-standing constitutional debates for the ideological origins of the Revolution. It also sheds new light on the development of the modern professions, and of the middle classes in France.

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