If the subject of our panel is "reconsidering the guilds," my task here is to prevent that. In the last few decades, two aspects of the guilds have received the most attention. First, we have looked at the possibilities that guilds offered to women who were so often excluded from the economic institutions of the Old Regime. Second, we have explored in quite some depth the role of the guilds both in bolstering and in resisting the Bourbons' fiscal and military exactions. Each of these important areas of research has broadened and complicated our understandings of the multivalent institutions of the Old Regime. However, in two other domains, namely technological change and economic growth, the function of the guilds was thoroughly negative.

Adam Smith emphasized the limitations imposed by the guilds and their detrimental effects on the economy. Karl Marx agreed that the guilds were one of the major impediments whose elimination would permit the development and implementation of the technological changes associated with the Industrial Revolution. When Adam Smith and Karl Marx reach the same conclusion based on the same evidence and reasoning, we should pay attention, because it doesn't happen all that often.\(^1\) With

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economic, social, and labor history in relative eclipse, it is my intent to prevent us from losing sight of the guilds' essential economic role.

Much of the field's approach to the guilds has been deeply influenced by anthropology: witness our reliance on references to journeyman glazier Jacques-Louis Ménétra as depicted by Daniel Roche or the great "cat massacre" by journeyman printers described by Robert Darnton. Another important avenue of research initiated by the generation spearheaded by Natalie Zemon Davis and Daryl Hafter and also practiced by Clare Crowston and Janine Lanza rests firmly within the context of the history of women.\(^2\) These historians have demonstrated that, on occasion and in some places, women could use the corporate structure to participate in the economy on a more equal footing. In other words, the legal oppression of women had significant loopholes that women could exploit for their own ends. But the opportunities afforded to a few women in a very restricted number of cities should not outweigh the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of urban women excluded from most economic activities by the gender bias of corporate regulations. Also, by limiting who could

become a master and privileging the sons of existing masters, the guilds prevented many of the most talented Frenchmen, not to mention French women, from exercising a craft, much less the craft they were most suited for. We should not allow the experiences of a few to dominate our evaluation of the guilds.

If we consider the world of production more generally rather than focus on the search for exceptions or the anecdotal, what stands out is not the cat massacres, charivaris, or women guildmasters. Rather the impression that deserves pride of place is the dampening effect of the corporate system on economic growth and technological change. While I have cited the totemic authorities of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, I have no real need to rely on their analysis for my argument. A much more telling and even better informed group of people held a profoundly negative view of the role of the guilds: namely, the economic policymakers of eighteenth-century France. They knew from bitter experience exactly how much of a handicap the guilds were in France's race for preeminence during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

Through the analytic lens of technological innovation and economic growth, the guilds refracted the glare emanating from a greater obstacle: privilege. I have explored elsewhere how privileged areas like the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, Saint-Sever in Rouen, and Saint-Seurin and Saint-André in Bordeaux functioned as proto "enterprise zones" where new technologies were developed and tested. In these areas imaginative and ingenious new products that crossed boundaries between trades that corporate restrictions cast in stone could be fabricated and

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footnote:

3 This material is largely adapted from my forthcoming book, *The Path Not Taken: French Industrialization in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1830* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
sold. These outlets for innovation and experimentation helped keep a French economy strangled by the system of privilege relatively competitive, but they were no substitute for a less restrictive productive environment. To escape the guilds’ stranglehold on technique, the French state resorted to using privileges, granted at the level of the city, the province, and the region as well as nationally to allow innovators to exercise their crafts and develop or adapt new machines and more efficient means of organizing production. This method of technology transfer had some successes, but many more pioneers were thwarted or obstructed by the guilds than could easily be liberated from their restrictions.4

Guilds fractured and dispersed markets by isolating cities from their hinterlands and encouraging the growth of rural industry. By limiting the number of apprentices and journeymen while generally preventing masters from having more than one shop, the guilds contained the output of efficient producers and circumscribed the benefits of economies of scale. The impressive powers of inspection wielded by corporate syndics also ensured that shop floor or organizational innovations that challenged the practices of the guild could be handicapped or derailed. Instead, regulation to prevent innovation was the order of the day. From 1715 to 1789, France registered over 300 corporate regulations, an average of almost four a year. A set of rules promulgated in 1782 for Dauphiné ran to 265 paragraphs.5

It is worth recalling that the corporations grouped together small-scale producers. As a group, the masters had little to no incentive to expand production above a certain point or to increase efficiency beyond a certain level. As long as the bulk of the masters could sell their goods at a certain price, other considerations were individual, not collective, concerns.\footnote{On these issues, the best source remains Émile Coornaert, *Les Corporations en France avant 1789* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941).} Productive momentum was hard to sustain as even the best-connected entrepreneurs discovered to their chagrin. Thanks to the corporate structure, the technological and productive inertia of the corporations represented a weighty drag on the growth of the late eighteenth-century economy.\footnote{A good explanation of how these factors worked is in Joel Mokyr, "The Political Economy of Technological Change: Resistance and Innovation in Economic History," in *Technological Revolutions in Europe: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Maxine Berg and Kristine Bruland (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1998), 39-64, esp. 55-7.}

Not even the stimulation provided by the boom in Atlantic trade could break these shackles. Instead of concentrating the production of low-cost textiles among efficient producers within easy reach of the ports, the corporate structure ensured the broadest possible participation in the colonial market. While this may seem to be a positive outcome that "shared the wealth," more importantly it removed the incentives to innovate, substitute capital for labor, or develop goods that could be competitive outside markets monopolized by the French. Unlike their English counterparts, French guild masters could earn handsome profits without innovation. When France was cut off from colonial markets and when the abolition of municipal tolls (octrois) made it possible to ship basic goods from city to city, many of these guild
masters were helpless in the face of producers whose business was not grounded in a captive market. Overcoming this resistance to compete truly, either domestically or internationally, was the central goal of French state involvement in the economy from approximately 1750 until well into the nineteenth century.\(^8\)

All this is not to say that the guilds that were at the base of the system of privilege did not have their defenders, for they surely did. Jean-Baptiste Colbert's successful reliance on corporate regulation of industry in the seventeenth century became an enduring model for French manufacturing, especially the luxury goods France was justly famous for. After Turgot abolished the guilds, the parlement of Paris worried that without protection from poachers and imitators, innovators would cease their efforts and the French fashion advantage would be lost as the quality of domestic goods would suffer without corporate oversight.\(^9\) Champions of the corporate system also emphasized that changes in the manner of production would send ripples through French society that, unless they were checked, could undermine the entire social and economic structure. These arguments from history, the emphasis on the need to protect property along with legal and political justifications, did not convince French policymakers.

To put a human face on some of my assertions, it is time to shift to the story of Alexandre Lapostolle. This aspiring scientist from Maubeuge wanted to join Amiens' guild of apothecaries in 1775. Despite the turbulence of the


period, this was a relatively safe application because, along
with the goldsmiths, booksellers, printers, pharmacists,
butchers, and bakers, the apothecaries' guild was exempted
from Turgot's attempted abolition. Lapostolle had done a
four-year apprenticeship in Paris with the noted chemist
and medical doctor Cadet. He married the daughter of a
local apothecary named Vallot who was supposed to pay
the costs of his mastership as part of the dowry but found
that his business would not support the hefty fee. The guild
accepted Lapostolle's credentials from Paris and admitted
his aptitude for the work, but they did not want this
"outsider" with greater scientific knowledge to take away
business from the three families that dominated the trade in
Amiens. They held meeting after meeting to discuss the
situation. Not only did this strategy prolong the affair, it
also cost Lapostolle significant amounts of cold, hard cash.
He had to pay each of the masters forty sous to attend such
gatherings whether they showed up or not. Having
repeatedly to pay twelve livres for an unproductive meeting
would frustrate anyone, much less this young scientist
imbued with a sense of enlightened rationalism.

Lapostolle applied to the *juge des manufactures* and the
subdelegate for justice from the tyranny of the masters. In
response, the guild filed a countersuit with the *bailliage*,
thereby bleeding Lapostolle's meager savings even more.
All these complaints ended up on the desk of the intendant
François-Marie Bruno, comte d'Agay, who decided
forcefully in Lapostolle's favor. Beginning in 1776,
Lapostolle bolstered his credentials by offering a well-
regarded course in experimental chemistry aimed at helping
the dyers and bleachers of this important textile town to
improve their techniques. He also proposed to deliver
medicines at a reduced cost to the local prisons. With such
credentials and achievements to go along with the staunch

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support of the intendant and the Council of Commerce in Paris, you would think that Lapostolle's exclusion from the guild would be short-lived – but you would be wrong. Although granted associate status in 1778, three years after his initial application, Lapostolle only attained the rank of master with all its rights and privileges in April 1786. In fact, it took a certificate granted directly by Louis XVI to overcome the guild's resistance that had been sustained by the refusal of both the bailliage and the parlement to accept the dictates of the royal administration. The basis of their objections was that, as public health officer for the province, Lapostolle had posted a price list of the medicines he dispensed, eliminating the "mystery" of the apothecaries' art which had the effect of generally lowering prices and forcing the entire guild to improve the quality of their wares.

What effect did this barrier to entry have? Lapostolle was interested in the nature of heat with an eye toward improving the metal boilers so essential to dyeing, bleaching, refining sugar, and building steam engines, but his experiments were put off by more than a decade. It was not until he became a professor at the departmental secondary school (école centrale) during the Revolution that he could return to his chosen field. By that point, working in conjunction with professors and scientists in Rouen and no longer young, he confined his research to minimizing the fuel cost of running the boilers France already had, rather than perfecting new ones. Given his undoubted abilities, his interest in public service, and his energy, who knows what innovations Lapostolle might have made without the obstruction of the guilds?10

10 The previous three paragraphs are based on extensive correspondence found in Archives départementales [hereafter AD] Somme C 456; Dhervillez et Alexandre Lapostolle, Plan d'un cours de
Situations like Lapostolle's frustrated and angered the "improvers" who dominated French industrial policymaking after 1750. With the rise of the physiocrats and those administrators influenced by them like Daniel Trudaine and Turgot, not to mention Jacques Necker and Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, free circulation of goods became an increasing preoccupation of royal government. A general lowering of prices for a wider range of manufactured goods and greater international competitiveness were thought to be likely consequences of such changes. Proposals like the Single Duty Project, which was intended to move the customs barriers to the frontiers, demonstrated policymakers' sense that dramatic restructuring of France's economy was imperative. The same sense that change was necessary was behind Turgot's abolition of the guilds and the opening up of the grain trade in February 1776. As finance minister Turgot told Louis XVI, "All the world knows that the police system of the jurandes (guild members) purporting to ensure competent work is entirely illusory." Without that guarantee, he asked, what was the point of the institution?  

Even though Turgot's changes proved too radical, the royal administration had no desire to return the guilds to the

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Chimie expérimentale raisonnée et appliquée aux arts, n.d. [1776], AD Seine-Maritime 5E 108; d'Agay to Trudaine, 29 Feb. 1776, Archives Nationales [hereafter AN] F12 753; and Alexandre Lapostolle, Moyens proposés pour diminuer en France la consommation du bois dans les manufactures à feu et particulièrement dans les ateliers à chaudières, 1798, Musée des Arts et Métiers–Archives historiques N38.

status quo ante. Instead, the Comte de Maurepas installed a reformed corporate structure in August 1776 that was intended to limit the damage done by excessive corporate regulation and to facilitate the search for alternative means to innovate technologically while stimulating economic growth. The Preamble to the Edict of August 1776 stated the Royal Council's hope that, with fewer rules to follow, the revived guilds would no longer "prevent progress in the arts."^{12}

The reanimated guilds were intended to re-impose the discipline of masters, deemed essential to technological change and quality production, over unruly journeymen and apprentices. At the same time, however, the new structure widened access to membership in the guilds dramatically. Seigneurs could once again grant masterships in areas under their control, but the major changes involved the elimination of a master work ('chef d'oeuvre') or of a formal period of apprenticeship as requirements for becoming a master.^{13}

The Edict of August 1776 envisaged three means of entry into the restored guilds.^{14} First, former masters could join if they paid a fee. Second, those who had set up a shop or begun a trade since Turgot's 1776 February decree could join. Third, former masters could become incorporated or associated members ('agrégés') with the ability to exercise their profession but without the other rights and privileges of a master, most notably the ability to train apprentices and employ a full complement of journeymen. All entry

^{12} Cited by Kaplan, 109.


^{14} See Kaplan, 166-250.
fees were much reduced and those without resident status (forains) no longer faced financial penalties if they joined a guild. Three-quarters of the fees went to the royal treasury.

In addition to these loosened restrictions, the new Edict removed the gender bias of most trades. After August 1776, women could, upon making a formal declaration to the police, exercise nearly all professions monopolized by guilds, although they could not participate in the political life of most corporations. However, for women, this measure was double-edged, for men were also admitted to women's guilds on the same basis, which drew many female complaints. Widows could also acquire permanent authorization to follow the trade of their spouse at reasonable rates even after the typical one-year grace period. Religion endured as the only major discrimination within the corporate world. This aspect of the guilds was made explicit when the Six Corps of merchants who monopolized Paris' commerce used the August Edict to expel Jews who had entered their trades.

Some professions in certain areas, such as the charcoal-sellers and the wool-combers of Rouen, were left outside the realm of the guilds because of deliberate administrative action. In many other cases, two or more professions were amalgamated into a single guild usually where the skills or

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17 Necker to de Crosne, 7 Aug. 1779, AD Seine-Maritime C137.

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raw materials used were similar. In Paris, only fifty guilds were authorized in August 1776, a far cry from 117 before February.\textsuperscript{18} Twenty-one trades were no longer subject to corporate control. For example, the locksmiths (serruriers) and nail-makers (cloutiers) were soldered together in many cities on the theory that both trades worked with iron. Stocking-makers (fabricants de bas) were associated with haberdashers (merciers) because they both dealt with clothing accessories. Yet the economic interests of storekeepers and merchants like the haberdashers were very different from those of manufacturers who only sold their wares wholesale. Although locksmiths and nail-makers had some skills in common, in practice they tended to compete for the right to make wares which lay between their specialties more often than they shared expertise in the use of coal as fuel.\textsuperscript{19} Such amalgamations were to be a long-lasting, but divisive, legacy of the regulations of August 1776. All these changes were an explicit attempt by the royal council to minimize the guilds' impact on technological change and economic growth.

If these legal changes were not a clear enough signal of administrative dissatisfaction with the hindrances of the guild, the letters-patent drafted by Necker in association with physiocratic reformers like Turgot's assistant and protégé Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours, inspector of commerce Simon Clicquot de Blervache, and inspector of manufacturing Nicolas Desmarest and issued by the king

\textsuperscript{18} The powerful and prestigious Six Corps were revived, although the wine merchants were added to the drapers, mercers, goldsmiths/jewelers, furriers, hosiers, and grocers: Garrioch, 99. There were between 117 and 120 corporations in Paris: Sonenscher, 62.

\textsuperscript{19} On the haberdashers and stocking-makers, see Tolozan to de Crosne, 20 Dec. 1784, AD Seine-Maritime C137. On the metal trades, see the \textit{Ordonnance de Police} of 9 Apr. 1778, AD Seine-Maritime SE 657.
on 5 May 1779, were a burning beacon. These letters-patent transformed the regulation of French textile production by creating a dual system in which producers could either continue to follow corporate regulations or could make whatever they thought the market would bear. Goods produced according to either option would carry appropriate inspection markers to alert retailers and consumers. This new system was usually described as an intermediate path between full-scale regulation and complete liberty of production. In practice, the intermediate system meant liberty from regulation. Thus, the letters-patent of May 1779 inaugurated a new policy that rejected the longstanding emphasis on quality production by corporate producers associated with the Colbertian legacy.

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21 The correspondence on this subject is voluminous. For the province of Champagne: "Observations de la communauté des fabricants de la ville de Troyes pour se conformer à l'article 2 des Lettres Patentes de Sa Majesté du 5 Mai 1779," 28 Mar. 1780, AN F12 658B and Bruyard, "Mémoire sur les fabriques de la Champagne et de la Picardie," 15 Dec. 1784, AN F12 661. For the perspective of the central government: Abeille, "Observations," 27 Mar. 1781, AN F12 661; Crommelin to Abeille, 1 Aug. 1781, AN F12 654; Necker to the Intendants of Aix, Dijon, Rennes, Pau, Grenoble, Rouen, and Languedoc, 24 Sept. 1779, AN F12 676B; and Montaran, Circulaire aux Inspecteurs des Manufactures de son département, n.d. [1781], AN F12 743.
These measures sharply diminished the role of the guilds in regulating the largest industry in France. No longer did individual entrepreneurs have to conform to corporate regulations on the size, shape, and composition of textiles. These measures also completed the emancipation of rural producers from the control of urban-based guilds, a process begun in the 1750s thanks to physiocratic influence. The exclusive right of certain places to manufacture particular types or styles of cloth, first successfully challenged in 1776, was now extinct. Unsurprisingly, many formerly-privileged urban centers like Sedan and Lille led the unsuccessful resistance to these reforms.

Just as Turgot's "liberty" was intended to release the bonds on French inventive genius, Necker's policies allowed the creative abilities of French textile entrepreneurs to concoct new types of textiles and eye-catching designs as a means of winning over fickle

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consumers and keeping them loyal in the face of foreign competition and shifting tastes. William Reddy's evocation of the emergence of "market culture" as a response to the position of the guilds as "anti-entrepreneurs" frames this discussion and reflects Adam Smith's views on the matter. Additional letters-patent issued on 2 September 1781 to regulate labor relations between masters and workers both within and outside the corporate structure also demonstrated that French policymakers were dissatisfied with the ineffectual discipline exercised by the guilds.

So what does all this mean? These examples demonstrate that the guilds were hindering French economic growth and hampering technological change. Not only can we demonstrate this in hindsight, but policymakers, entrepreneurs, and innovators knew it; that is why they flocked to privileged areas like the Faubourg Saint-Antoine or used concessions from the royal, provincial, municipal, and seigneurial administration to escape the vexations of the guilds.

That being said, my subtext in this paper harkens back to the panel at the Western in 1987 that looked at the guilds and was published by *French Historical Studies* a year later. Then it would not have been necessary for me to make this case or to harness Adam Smith and Karl Marx to make my point. But with economic history in thorough

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27 *French Historical Studies* 15:4 (1988): 688-730. I am, however,
eclipse and the guilds ignored by those who practice institutional history, Daryl Hafer and I have tried to reinvigorate this subject as a means of supplementing and deepening present historical modes of inquiry. We have a friendly disagreement about the guilds: based fundamentally on her analysis of the role of women, Hafer seeks to shift our understanding of these institutions in a more positive direction where I hope to maintain a more holistic approach by looking at technological issues. After all, when it comes to subjects like the link between the guilds and technological change, Marx was right.