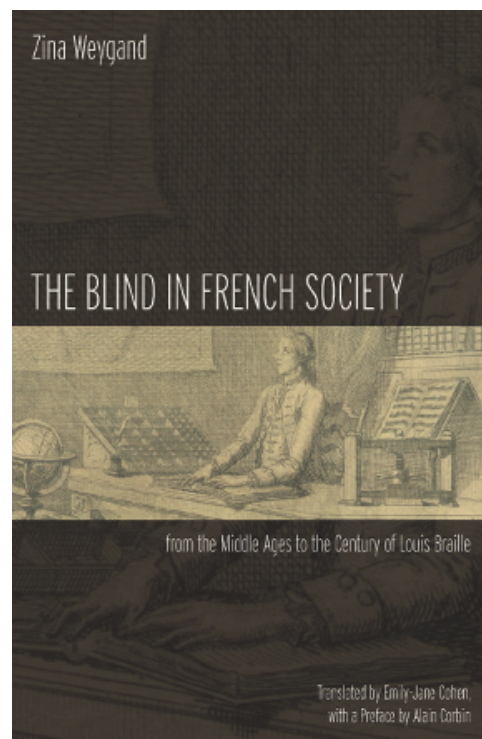


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# The Blind in French Society from the Middle Ages to the Century of Louis Braille

Zina Weygand

Translated by Emily-Jane Cohen  
with a Preface by Alain Corbin



The integration of the blind into society has always meant taking on prejudices and inaccurate representations. Weygand's highly accessible anthropological and cultural history introduces us to both real and imaginary figures from the past, uncovering French attitudes towards the blind from the Middle Ages through the first half of the nineteenth century. Much of the book, however, centers on the eighteenth century, the enlightened age of Diderot's emblematic blind man and of the Institute for Blind Youth in Paris, founded by Valentin Haüy, the great benefactor of blind people.

Weygand paints a moving picture of the blind admitted to the institutions created for them and of the conditions under which they lived, from the officially-sanctioned beggars of the medieval *Quinze-Vingts* to the cloth makers of the Institute for Blind Workers. She has also uncovered their fictional counterparts in an impressive array of poems, plays, and novels. The book concludes with Braille, whose invention of writing with raised dots gave blind people around the world definitive access to silent reading and to written communication.

## Table of Contents

### •Part I

From the Middle Ages to the Classical Age: A Paradoxical Vision of Blindness and the Blind

### Part II

The Eighteenth Century: A Different Look at the Blind

### Part III

The French Revolution and the Blind: An Affair of State

### Part IV

Blindness in France in the Early Nineteenth Century: Realities and Fictions

### Part V

Blindness in the Century of Louis Braille: from Productivist Utopia to Cultural Integration

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**Zina Weygand** is a researcher at the Centre de Recherche sur le Travail et le Développement at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris.

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“In this erudite, sensitive, witty, and impeccably-documented book Zina Weygand draws from the rich tradition of the French *Annales* school, while also offering something completely new. Thanks to her energy and creativity as a researcher, we meet scores of people who might otherwise be ‘victims of the vagaries of existence,’ from the first troupe of blind actors to the ‘individualist, dirty, noisy, and quarrelsome’ residents of the Quinze-Vingts hospice.... Weygand’s in-depth study of the reciprocal relationship between the social treatment and representations of blind people from the Middle Ages to the middle of the nineteenth century invites readers to reconsider the ocularcentric roots of modernity.”

—From the foreword by  
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