

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Paul R. Hanson's review of Eric Hazan, *A People's History of the French Revolution* (London: Verso, 2014).

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The original review may be found on the H-France Review web site at:
<http://www.h-france.net/vol15reviews/vol15no74hanson.pdf>

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Paul R. Hanson does an excellent job of weighing the merits of Eric Hazan's retelling of the Revolution and correcting some of its minor misstatements. He introduces, however, one of his own — trivial perhaps, but one that I would not like to see gain further currency in the community of scholars represented by H-France. I am referring to his contention that “there were no barricades on the streets of Paris during the first Revolution”. [1]

It is certainly true that barricades did not play a major role in the insurrectionary events of that period and displayed nothing like the prominence they would assume in 1830, 1848, or 1871, among many other events of the nineteenth century. But barricades were indeed built in the streets of Paris, most notably on July 14, 1789 and on May 23, 1795 (1 Prairial, Year III). [2] The point is worth making because the barricades of the 1789 Revolution represent an important point of continuity between those of the early-modern period (reaching back to the late sixteenth century) and the better known examples of the modern era. The existence of this continuous chain of barricade events distinguishes the practice of barricade construction from most other techniques of insurrection, for in many ways the Great Revolution constituted a break in the history of collective action. Other pre-existing forms of protest (the *charivari* and food riot, for example) were replaced over time by elements of a new repertoire of protest, many of them forged in the crucible of the revolutionary conflicts of those years. The persistence of the barricade stands as the great exception. For this reason, it seemed appropriate to point out that the belief that barricades played no part in the events of that period, however widespread among historians, is not strictly correct.

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[1] I heartily agree with Hanson that it was inexcusable for the publisher to include an anachronistic image of 1830 barricade fighters on the jacket of Hazan's book. But I was somewhat puzzled at Hanson's view that the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, which portrays events that occurred in June 1832, has exacerbated the “misconception” that he asserts concerning the presence of barricades in the Revolution of 1789. What am I missing?

[2] For references to the relevant primary sources, see pp. 83-92 and 256-60 of my work, *The Insurgent Barricade*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.)

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It seems further appropriate to point out that the "barricades" on 14 July were built by a whole city rising up against the fear of external military attack, joined by the very military garrison that, in classic nineteenth-century "barricade risings," would be shooting down the barricade-builders. First-hand accounts in local archives demonstrate that individuals of every social class were involved in these and other martial preparations during the chaotic days of 12-14 July. The act of barring the streets to potential hostile forces in 1789 had very different resonances to what would emerge in the post-Napoleonic industrialising city.

I can also vouch for the fact that the assumption *Les Mis* is about "The French Revolution" is extremely widespread outside the academic community...

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What does "external military attack" mean? Foreign invasion? Certainly not in Paris before 14 July. Parisians feared the troops that were protecting nearby food shipments. Once the "Great Fear" broke out there were also fears of foreign troops.

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From the horse's mouth re the use of the barricade image despite the vast amount of rich, and populist, French Revolutionary imagery.

Responding to David Bell's review of Hazan's book, Verso's Senior Editor had this to say: "However, apart from the silly gripe about the cover image (ever heard of artistic licence, David?) and the contemptuous tone of the piece..." before launching into a full-scale defence of Daniel Guérin and assault on Ivy League professors.

See Versobooks.com for the full response.