

The following comments offered on the H-France list were the continuing dialogue in response to the essays published in *H-France Salon*, volume 1, issue 1.

Thu, 5 Nov 2009
From: Orest Ranum

I *may* have missed some reference or other, but from what I saw only Tim Tackett mentions Dale Van Kley's work, or more generally, any theme that links the Revolution to religion. You omit it (in your introduction, p. 529) from the new categories and also the new ones you propose.

Revolution and secularization? Our historians seem caught in the latter -- a playing out of Enlightenment and Revolution programs, perhaps not consciously? The trajectory is not a straight one -- given the strength of not only religion, but the Church, in the 19th century, but ...

Your forum historians imply that Van Kley's work does not lead anywhere. I humbly disagree. I am far far away from the Revolution in my own research, but the implicit link between social, gender, war, etc. conditions and trends in the 21st century, and research on the Revolution (see Hesse p. 663) makes me wonder what America our historians are living in?

For me, I am ready to strengthen the already quite permeated "barricades" between religion and the state in this Republic!

Sincerely,

Orest Ranum

Fri, 6 Nov 2009
From: Richard Lebrun

My thanks to Orest Ranum (my old classmate from graduate student days at the University of Minnesota). This needed to be said!

Richard Lebrun
Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba
lebrun@cc.umanitoba.ca

Fri, 6 Nov 2009
From: Norman Ravitch

In response to Orest Ranum's comments, Norman Ravitch responds:

At this point all I can remember about Van Kley's work is the general position that a France which stayed Jansenist, or better yet Calvinist, would have avoided the Revolution and its ills or at least would have been better off. This doesn't sound straight to me. It sounds awfully Protestant.

Norman Ravitch
Savannah, GA
ravitchn@bellsouth.net

Fri, 6 Nov 2009
From : Howard G. Brown

I offer a hearty congratulations to the editors of FHS and H-France, notably J. B. Shank and David K. Smith, for coordinating a very stimulating set of historiographical essays reflecting on two decades of scholarship since the outpouring of the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989. This is an inspired way to launch H-France Salon, and thereby recapture some of the spirit – and even esprit – of the initial list-serve. I'm grateful that the interactive nature of this enterprise gives me (and others) the opportunity to contribute.

Whatever the inspiration for a detailed discussion of scholarly trends in a particular field, whether it is an historic anniversary, a retirement festschrift or a thematic roundtable, the exercise is invariably useful for narrow specialists and the merely curious alike. I have been immersed in the French Revolution since my graduate school years, which coincided with the great bicentennial buzz, but still found the essays to be sources of fresh insight and scholarly works I now “must read.”

As a “specialist,” however, I consider the entire group of essays to have missed one major historiographical trend of the last twenty years: the change in perspective and interpretation of the French Revolution offered by a large and rich body of new scholarship on the years after the Terror. Granted, Jean-Clément Martin does mention this trend, but without citing works and without drawing any conclusions from it. Carla Hesse, too, comes close to revealing the significance of this work by invoking today's generation of “neo-Jacobins” centred on the Sorbonne. (As far as I can tell, Alphonse Aulard, while holder of the Chair of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne, was the first scholar to employ this term to describe the more populist – or radical – republicans of the Directorial period.) Finally, and fortunately, at least for the non-specialist reader of these essays looking for bibliographical updates, a fair number of books that devote much or all of their attention to the period after Thermidor were mentioned in footnotes here and there, usually as examples of work on certain themes: gender, violence, religion, the law, political culture, etc. What is wholly missing is an overview of the contribution these works make collectively to reorienting the field of French Revolutionary studies.

Let's begin with the simple fact of bicentennial commemoration itself. Whereas no French politicians considered 1993 or 1994 years of opportunity to hold bicentennial events, scholars were less squeamish. The polarizing debates that animated the bicentennial of 1789, especially regarding the sources of the Terror, had not yet run their course: hence came the conference at Stanford in 1994 that J.B. Shank noted as a personal inspiration and that later generated the unexpected fourth of those "four blue volumes" to which Rebecca Spang alluded. But that was not it. 1995 too generated a number of bicentennial conferences – and thus conference collections – devoted either to the Constitution of 1795 or the Thermidorian attempt to end the French Revolution (1). 1997 also provided a bicentennial moment, this time triggered by the coup d'état of 18-19 Fructidor Year V, arguably the defining event of the Directory (2). This revealed that the number of scholars working on the First Republic after the Terror had reached a critical mass – in France at least – and so another three annual conferences, with their attendant volumes, ensued in the years 1998-2000, all loosely organized as a sort of rolling bicentennial of the Brumaire coup d'état (3). Together, these four volumes contain a total of 125 papers covering more themes and methodologies than could be usefully summarized here. What held them together were the twin commonalities of periodization and political culture. The bicentennial of Brumaire produced embarrassment in France itself and so generated few commemorative events. Moreover, the handful of international conferences that marked this historical anniversary outside of France, such as the one Judith A. Miller and I co-organized, had little to do with celebration per se. In fact, despite its timing, our colloque (ambiguously and perhaps even misleadingly titled "The Impossible Settlement") deliberately decentred the political events of Brumaire Year VIII and focused instead on cultural matters and "the continuity of contingency" that characterized the decade around it (4).

This series of scholarly events, each marking later bicentennial moments in the French Revolution, yielded much more than a shelf-full of pièces de circonstances; it provided momentum to bring a number of major works to fruition. These included an exemplary study of Thermidorian political culture inspired by the seminal work of Bronislaw Bazeko – published in 1989 (5), a monument of archival research on the activities and political networks of so-called "neo-Jacobins" (6), notably astute biographies of Merlin de Douai (author of the Law of Suspects, Minister of Justice, Minister of Police, and member of the Directory), Boissy d'Anglas (paragon of "la république bourgeoise"), and the Abbé Grégoire (head of the Constitutional Church) (7), a fundamental work on the Directory's cultural policies and practices (8), a thorough reassessment of the international states system at the time of the Grande Nation (9), and a lucid reinterpretation of the army's place in politics and society (10), to mention only those works that come first to the mind of an historian generally fascinated by matters political.

It is always tricky to begin listing important works in a field because there are inevitably some that go (often regrettably) unmentioned. This, of course, leaves hostages to fortune. So let me follow in the footsteps of the intrepid David Bell, and take a few, that is, point out a few books that even he and his fellow Salon commentators did not note, but which are of special importance to interpretations of the period after the Terror.

First are two works by Isser Woloch: *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1780-1820s* (New York, 1994) is essential to understanding the extent to which the transformations wrought by the Revolution did not culminate in 1794; *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship* (New York, 2001) grapples openly with the difficult moral question of why so many leading republicans went along with "the gradually unfolding, gilded authoritarianism of Napoleon Bonaparte, the dictatorship that dared not speak its name" (p. 239). It may have been too much to ask of a book already breath-taking in its sweep, but *The New Regime* did not really deal with the role of religion, gender, or the family in the new civic order; fortunately, these latter areas have benefited from a number of important books, all of which provide in-depth analysis of the period after the Terror (11). Taken together, these works make a powerful argument that anyone who wants to understand the full

significance of the French Revolution for the making of modernity must deal with the later 1790s, no matter how complex – and therefore hard to teach – it may be.

Second, someone has to point out – and if I don't, Don Sutherland surely will – that despite a certain amount of hand wringing amongst the ten commentators about the lack of attention devoted to economic history, none of them mentions François Crouzet, *La grande inflation: la monnaie en France de Louis XVI à Napoléon* (Paris, 1993). This is one of the most impressive pieces of scholarship to appear on the French Revolution in the last twenty years. Reading this triumph, along with François Hincker, *La Révolution française et l'économie: Décalage ou catastrophe?* (Paris, 1989) and the enormous achievement of Bernard Bodinier and Éric Teyssier, *L'événement le plus important de la Révolution: La vente des biens nationaux* (Paris, 2000), will lead to the inevitable conclusion that historians who chose to avoid the mists of discourse or the mechanistic application of Marx, have nonetheless greatly advanced our understanding of the French Revolution as an economic and social upheaval that French men and women did not experience in a five-year frame, but over more than a decade.

Even if one takes popular violence and state repression as the hallmarks of revolution, itself a dubious but nonetheless apparently influential proposition, a closer look at actual events reveals that France continued to writhe in revolutionary agony until the early 1800s. I will not reprise arguments I have made more fully elsewhere (12). Nonetheless, it strikes me that too many historians remain the dupes of Thermidorian rhetoric. The victors of Thermidor elaborated and refined the concept of “the Terror” just as the early revolutionaries elaborated and refined the notion of the “ancien régime”; in both cases, the exercise helped to justify and legitimize a seizure of power. This is not to claim that cynicism prevailed over a genuine desire to change things for the better – in either case – , but to point out that the Thermidorians' claim to have put “justice à l'ordre du jour” in order to contrast with putting “terreur à l'ordre du jour” did not prevent the republic from replacing revolutionary justice with military commissions, first to try the rioters of Prairial, then the rebels of Quiberon, and later émigrés after Fructidor, as well as “brigands” well into the Consulate. Furthermore, many departments of France experienced greater violence (whether in the form of crowd action, individual assaults, or public executions) in 1799-1801 than they did in 1792-1794. Finally, it must be considered that the Thermidorians' tidal wave of propaganda about the Terror – both verbal and pictorial – may well have done more to turn it into a “collective trauma” for most Frenchmen, and thus a national experience, than actually living through the events of 1793-94.

The ideology that accompanied “the Terror” made it relevant to the political landscape in Europe before the bicentennial, but the collapse of the soviet empire in 1989-1990 took a rather long time to impact the principal debates animating study of the French Revolution. If history is always written with one eye on the present, why did the struggles in Eastern Europe to deal with lustration and transitional justice and to found new democratic regimes on the basis of representative democracy and the rule of law not inspire a rush to reexamine the dilemmas of the later First Republic, that is, the Thermidorian Convention, the Directory, and the Consulate?

And what about the relevance of dealing with trauma in the wake of the genocide in Rwanda or the civil war in ex-Yugoslavia? Was it enough simply to celebrate winning the Cold War and then return to tired debates that lived on because they had become both personal and institutional? This negligence, along with the other reasons mentioned by our commentators, may also explain why revolutionary studies slid into desuetude as far as the larger historical profession was concerned. Perhaps, now that the West, led – often badly – by the United States, is desperately engaged in figuring out how to conduct “counter-insurgency” against religiously-motivated guerrilla movements while also creating effective free-market economies and ensconcing democratic regimes, historians of the French Revolution will find it fruitful to focus less on the origins of the French Revolution or the descent into

pseudo-totalitarianism in 1793-94 and more on the First Republic's struggle to emerge from societal chaos and create a stable new order after 1795.

Although there is a great deal more scholarship on such matters than our commentators seemed to realize, there is plenty to be done. We have many good biographies of Robespierre, Danton, and Mirabeau (mentioned by David Bell); now it's time for something comparable on Tallien, Fréron, Thibaudeau, and Barras. The struggle between the Montagnards and Girondins (mentioned by Colin Jones) has been documented and debated nearly to death, but we still have little understanding of the Clichyens and the Société Philanthropic, both critical inspirations for the Fructidor coup that turned the corner on constitutionalism and representative democracy in 1797.

This may seem like an appeal for a return to political history, only of different years during the revolution, which it is, to a certain extent. In fact, however, I was most inspired by Lynn Hunt's contribution, no doubt because it resonates with my most recent research preoccupations. But more important, it boldly suggests the possibility of new paradigms for the study of the French Revolution.

As both she and Sophia Rosenfeld note, however, the history of the self and emotions both face serious methodological challenges. For those with a penchant for the virtues of positivism, however, there is still room for new paradigms in the analysis of the French Revolution. Whether these are going to be social, economic, cultural, intellectual or political, I would argue that they will lack the appeal of contemporary relevance or miss the larger historical significance of the French Revolution, or both, if they do not devote considerable attention to developments after the Terror.

Howard G. Brown
 Professor of History
 Binghamton University
 State University of New York
 hgbrown@binghamton.edu

NOTES

[1] Gérard Conac et Jean-Pierre Machelon, eds., *La Constitution de l'an III: Boissy d'Anglas et la naissance du libéralisme constitutionnel* (Paris, 1999); Roger Dupuy and Marcel Morabito, eds., *1795: Pour une République sans Révolution* (Rennes, 1996). There was little that happened in France in 1796 worthy of a conference two hundred years later, but 1795 continued to resonate in a conference at Dijon in 1996 that became Jean Bart et al., eds., *La constitution de l'an III or l'ordre républicain* (Dijon, 1998).

[2] Philippe Bourdin and Bernard Gainot, eds., *La république directoriale*, 2 vols. (Clermont-Ferrand, 1998).

[3] Jean-Pierre Jessenne, Hervé Leuwers et al., *Du Directoire au Consulat*, 3 vols., (Lille, 1999-2001).

[4] *Taking Liberties: Problems of a New Order from the French Revolution to Napoleon* (Manchester and New York, 2002).

[5] L'automne de la Révolution française: *Luttes et cultures politiques dans la France thermidorienne*, translated from Italian by S.C. Messina, (Paris, 2001); Bronislaw Baczko, *Comment sortir de la terreur: Thermidor et la Révolution* (Paris, 1989).

[6] Bernard Gainot, *1799, un nouveau jacobinisme? La démocratie représentative, une alternative à Brumaire* (Paris, 2001).

[7] Hervé Leuwers, *Un juriste en politique: Merlin de Douai (1754-1838)* (Artois, 1996); Christine Le Bozec, *Boissy d'Anglas un grand notable libéral* (Privas, 1995); Rita Hermon-Belot, *L'abbé Grégoire, la politique et la vérité* (Paris, 2000).

[8] Annie Jourdan, *Les monuments de la Révolution, 1770-1804: Une histoire de représentation* (Paris, 1997).

[9] Marc Bélissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795-1802): De la société des rois aux droits des nations* (Paris, 2006).

[10] Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army, 1750-1820: Careers, Talent, Merit* (Manchester, 2003).

[11] Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, D.C., 2000), Rodney J. Dean, *L'église constitutionnelle, Napoléon et le Concordat* (Paris, 2004) and *L'abbé Grégoire et l'Eglise constitutionnelle après la Terreur, 1794-1797* (Paris, 2008), Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca, 1990) and *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 2004), Jennifer N. Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789-1830* (Ithaca, 2005).

[12] Howard G. Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlotte, Va., 2006).

Sun, 08 Nov 2009

From: David Andress

I should like to thank all my fellow-participants in this rather lengthy process of interchange for their stimulating views - particularly stimulating in their wide variety. Noting that I was rather glad to have been asked to write only a short essay for the original print publication, I particularly feel that Peter Campbell should be applauded for the work of supererogation that is his fine, thoughtful and extensive contribution.

Without wishing to engage with any of the particular points made (for where to start, and more importantly, where to stop, for one less inclined to supererogation?), I should like to make one meta-[or perhaps meta-meta-]historiographical observation. In the process of commentary upon commentary that we have engaged in here, one impression that comes across strongly to me is of an overlaying clash of views about significance. Of course, there is the overt basic question of the significance of the Revolution itself, which we are reading through the lenses of a series of debates about that which both follow and precede the Bicentennial. Then there is the debate about the significance of various views on the significance of the Revolution, which we might call the 'meat' of any historiographical discussion. But I have the impression of a third layer (and I may be in the process of adding a fourth...)

I shall deliberately avoid naming names, but I am struck by a distinction between contributions which regard a broad and contradictory field of interpretations as a welcome, or at least interesting and worthwhile, phenomenon, and those which display, or sometimes merely hint, that some more ordered hierarchy or orientation of views might be desirable. Is it the case, I wonder, that there are some national academic cultures in which the will to power still has a lively effect, and others - more mature, more effete? - where what counts is the ride and not the destination? Or to put the matter another way, do some of us still believe that, in the right conditions, the history of two centuries ago can reach out and touch non-academic lives and politics today - a conviction that would wholly justify a concern with

the presence of appropriate interpretations? I confess that I admire such optimism, if it indeed exists, but I am no longer sure, if I ever was, that I can share it. Does that put me on one side of a great meta-historiographical divide, or am I just suffering from premature curmudgeonation?

Dave Andress
Professor of Modern History
SSHLS, Univ. of Portsmouth
Milldam, Portsmouth, PO1 3AS, UK
Tel. 02392 842204
david.andress@port.ac.uk

Mon, 9 Nov 2009
From: David A. Bell

I may be wrong. But I have the sneaking suspicion that in his masterfully indirect post, Dave Andress is talking about America and Britain when he compares “some national academic cultures in which the will to power still has a lively effect, and others - more mature, more effete? - where what counts is the ride and not the destination.” “Old Europe,” anyone? I further suspect that whilst Dave wishes to avoid naming names, one of the Americans he is thinking of here – the one who gently chastised him in *H-France Salon* for embracing “kaleidoscopic” complexities at the expense of strong arguments – is me.

I have to confess that I find the national comparison somewhat ironic, for I have always thought of British academic culture as the great home of strong arguments, advanced with enormous wit and the occasional touch of savagery. Just think of the classic debates over the “English Revolution” during which R.H. Tawney famously opined, à propos of Hugh Trevor-Roper’s brutal critique of Lawrence Stone, that “an erring colleague is not an Amalekite to be smitten hip and thigh.” Stone, of course, smited as well as he was smitten, and brought his pugnacious style across the Atlantic to Princeton, where it influenced generations of graduate students, including me.

But questions of national academic cultures and Nietzscheanism aside, Dave is raising two very important points, which were implicit in much of the *FHS* Forum, and which I think deserve further discussion. To what extent should the study of the French Revolution still be characterized by the advancement of sweeping thesis statements, robustly countered by other, opposing thesis statements, in the hope that the ensuing clatter of argument will ultimately generate clarity and light (if not necessarily an “ordered hierarchy” of views)? In other words, to what extent should we be pursuing what Lynn Hunt, in her American way, calls “a new paradigm”? And secondly, to what extent should these strong statements be connected to “non-academic lives and politics today,” as Dave puts it? There seems to be general agreement, in the Forum and meta-commentary, that after the great ideological struggles of the 1970’s and 1980’s, what followed was an implosion, and a degree of fragmentation and disorder that has yet to resolve itself into new patterns of clear debate. Dave, and Peter Campbell, find this state of affairs, on balance, a welcome change. As I wrote in my Salon piece, I find it rather more frustrating.

Some useful comparisons might be ventured here to two neighboring historiographies, those of seventeenth-century Britain, and of the Enlightenment. The first has just seen the publication of a massive “thesis statement” book that seems certain to ignite new debates and controversies over the

meaning of the Glorious Revolution – “1688,” by Steven Pincus (yes, he is American). The other has seen the appearance, over the past few years, of Jonathan Israel’s massive, thesis-driven trilogy, which is also likely to inspire debates for a long time to come (he is British, but, admittedly, has moved to America). How useful are books like this? Does their relentless defense of thesis statements contribute to the advancement of knowledge? (Some would say no – see the recent review essays of Israel by Antoine Lilti in the *Annales*, and Anthony La Voipe in the *Historical Journal*). Should we be looking for something that might again play a similar role in the historiography of the French Revolution? I will be the first to say here that, despite my nationality, I don't find the answers to these questions entirely obvious.

David A. Bell
dabell@jhu.edu

Mon, 9 Nov 2009
From: Howard G. Brown

I know a professor of the French Revolution at the University of Portsmouth, and he knows me, but I'm concerned that he may be developing a split personality since we last saw one another in June. One of these personalities is best known as David Andress, author of books intended for a wide reading public in which there is an explicit parallel drawn between current events and events two centuries ago (1). The other is best known as Dave Andress, who writes to the narrow academic audience of *H-France Salon* where he seemingly dismisses the significance of historical interpretations for "non-academic lives and politics today" (2). Hey, Dave/David, can you clarify your position? Have you changed your mind, or is there another explanation?

(1) David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: 2006), p. 375: "So we return, inevitably, to the present day, where all histories begin and end -- because they are written, and read, in the here and now. ... And now, when non-citizen suspects are detained indefinitely without trial, when new powers of surveillance and public control are hurried into being unchecked, when police ministries endlessly proclaim that only the wicked have anything to fear from subjection to their regimes of scrutiny To draw a comparison from the Terror to the War on Terror may be no more than a facile slippage of words, until we recall the devout dedication of Robespierre and his cohorts to the well-being of their fellow citizens ..."

(2) " ... do some of us still believe that, in the right conditions, the history of two centuries ago can reach out and touch non-academic lives and politics today - a conviction that would wholly justify a concern with the presence of appropriate interpretations? I confess that I admire such optimism, if it indeed exists, but I am no longer sure, if I ever was, that I can share it."

Howard G. Brown
Professor of History
Binghamton University
State University of New York
hgbrown@binghamton.edu

Tue, 10 Nov 2009
From: David Andress

To respond to Howard Brown appropriately, which is to say, twice:

1. I am large, I contain multitudes, what can I do?
2. I draw a firm distinction, which I think is in fact present in those two passages, between A) the ability of us as individuals to use historical events as a source of reflection on our common, and flawed, humanity, then and now, and as historians to present such food-for-thought in appropriate, clear, and sometimes possibly even provoking ways; and B) the assertion, by more-or-less organised currents, blocs or tendencies in the profession, that history might dictate to us a certain way of relating to the present, and the future, and/or oblige certain forms of response.

I am perfectly willing and indeed happy and grateful to admit that sterling work has been done by many to, for example, force an appreciation of gender some distance down the ears of a resistant society, and that historical study may have paid a small part in that; but I'm also aware of the huge distance that still remains between subtle historical and other academic accounts, and the brute realities of political engagement.

I certainly hope to touch lives with my work, but I am fairly confident it will never be part of an organised influence on politics, and if it should by some miracle become so, I would be quite concerned, because lord only knows what politicians would twist it into. Those more optimistic than I about their potential to do material good in the world through academic research are, in that quality at least, blessed with something I lack. I hope such optimism serves them well, but I think they will need an awful lot of it.

Meanwhile, of course, I speak only for myself; which is quite enough work, as there are so many of me.

Dave Andress
Professor of Modern History,
Associate Dean (Research)
FHSS, Univ. of Portsmouth
Milldam, Portsmouth, PO1 3AS, UK
Tel. 02392 842204
david.andress@port.ac.uk

Wed, 11 Nov 2009
From: Dale Van Kley

1. While thanking Orest Ranum for reminding H-France's readers of my work on *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution* (Yale U. Press, 1996; and in French translation, Seuil, 2003) in connection with H-France's review of the bi-centennial of the French Revolution, I regret that this nod of recognition elicited from Norman Ravitch the comment that all he could remember about my work was "the general position that a France which stayed Jansenist, or better yet Calvinist, would have avoided the Revolution and its ills or at least would have been better off."

Mr. Ravitch's memory must be very short, seeing that he wrote a lengthy review of my *Religious Origins* in the February 1997 issue of *First Things*, to which I replied at similar length in that periodical's August-September 1997 issue.

For those interested in reading the original exchange in its entirety, the contents are readily available on the internet at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/12/004-whig-history-revisited-32>, and <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/09/augustseptember-letters-29>.

If Mr. Ravitch is up to updating the exchange as an enquiry into how well my book's argument has weathered the tremendous volume of Franco-American scholarship on Jansenism and its relation to the Revolution that has appeared during the past ten years, the resultant discussion might actually be of greater interest to subscribers to this forum.

Cordialement,

Dale Van Kley
vankley.1@osu.edu

Wed, 11 Nov 2009
From: Vivian R. Gruder

The French Revolution: Twenty Years After

A number of the writers in *French Historical Studies* and in *H-France Salon* refer to the bicentenary of the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin wall occurring in the same year, 1989. The meaning they tend to draw is that the fall of communism in Eastern Europe undermined what remained of the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution. Perhaps that focus reflects professional habit, or perhaps it is a problem of "not seeing the forest for the trees": theory, concept, linguistic turn, discourse, methodology, paradigm.

What the fall of the Berlin wall signified, as Mikhail Gorbachev wrote recently in the *International Herald Tribune*, was the success of "the will of the people" seeking freedom. That was a great political achievement--and that desire for greater political freedom takes us back to the French Revolution.

Enough of the French people of various groups, classes, regions joined in the quest for political freedom in the form of political participation in government. Historians two hundred years later may dispute whether the monarchy was "absolute" and "centralized" or "baroque," but the French two hundred years earlier did not quibble over definitions. They sought to limit monarchical power to make and to execute all laws; they sought to have a voice in the formulation of policy and law, and to have a role in local administration and in national government. In short, they wanted to end royal absolutism and administrative centralization in whatever form they still existed.

These goals underscore the fundamental political character of the French Revolution, which certainly does not exclude other features and forces, but the latter should not diminish the former. That desire for political participation at the outset of the Revolution resonated among different groups in France in similar and different ways during the years of Revolution: among white settlers in the Caribbean islands and then among their slaves; among sans-culottes, Jews, and also "fédérés" in the south and Vendéans in the west. That same quest for participation also had a "longue durée" both backwards and forward in time, and certainly in qualitatively different ways, from noble monopoly in the past to universal suffrage in the future, and in the past and future the demand for decentralized administration. I do not want to diminish differences in these various articulations of the desire for political participation; each set of demands must be analyzed according to their particular features and contexts. I cite them to underscore the enduring force of that aspiration--and to breach the "wall" that still separates 1789 from the ancien regime. In sum, a view of political culture that embraces not only symbols and gestures or theoretical discourses, but also representation in terms of the quest of different groups for a role in the public political sphere, and the deeply-ingrained hopes and fears related to government that animated one generation after another.

Undercutting that "wall" of 1789 is important from an historiographical perspective and also for the formation of historians. How is a historian of the Revolution able to discern whether some feature was a creation of the Revolution unless he or she is able to draw a comparison with what preceded? How often do we read that Jacobinism introduced the demonization of its opponents? But that tendency characterized "the other side of the barricades" as well, namely the aristocracy, and it had an earlier life going back for centuries, most dramatically during the religious wars. Demonizing the opponent was a long-established feature of political culture in French history--but that history must be known to be able to judge what the French Revolution wrought anew.

I do not like to engage in semantic arguments but the repeated use of "revisionism" in multiple ways in some of the articles may cause confusion, especially among young historians and graduate students. I would like to provide some clarification.

Revisionism among French historians began, so Alice Gérard states, with the argument by Francois Furet and Denis Richet that the Revolution had "deviated" from its original course ("déravage") in 1792--with the onset of war (a "theory of circumstance" perhaps?). The Revolution was no longer seen as a "bloc," to the consternation of other French historians. Revisionism had a different birth among Anglo-American historians. Albert Cobban first argued that the Revolution's accomplishments were exaggerated and hence were a "myth," and then turned his sights on the dominant class interpretation of the Revolution. While disputing the existence of a "revolutionary" capitalist bourgeoisie he retained the class framework, substituting a declining class of bourgeois venal officeholders as the "revolutionary" bourgeoisie; he further disputed the existence of "feudalism" in France as a cause of peasant engagement in revolution. Anglo-American and some French historians contributed to this burgeoning "revisionism" directed at the "orthodox" (i.e., social, class, Marxist) argument that the Revolution was a series of class conflicts, particularly in the origin of the Revolution. Their research, focused on the ancien regime--on the bourgeoisie and the nobility--concluded that the Revolution was not the consequence of rising hostility of the bourgeoisie against the nobility. Furet ("Le Catechisme révolutionnaire") made use of much of that same research to add his forceful voice against the theory of rising bourgeois-noble hostility. What would replace the long-dominant social interpretation was up in the air.

George Taylor hinted that political causes lay at the origin of the Revolution. A new "paradigm" long ignored seemed to open. Yet a political interpretation of the Revolution became, in the writings of Furet and Keith Baker, an emphasis on the preeminence of ideology and discourse (the "linguistic

turn"). That view, I suggest, should be called "neo-revisionism" since it differed profoundly from the initial arguments of revisionism. In turn, Furet in his chapter on Augustin Cochin pushed "neo-revisionism" further by introducing (or re-introducing) the argument that the roots of the Terror lay already in the political ideology of 1789—and even earlier, in the culture of the absolute monarchy and the influence of Enlightenment ideas.

"Post-revisionism," as coined by Colin Jones, includes efforts by some historians to bring back a class analysis into interpretations of the Revolution. The validity of those works and of future writings in the same vein will depend on the ability of historians to employ Marxian analysis with acuteness and subtlety. (As an ironic comment on "class," how does one explain that Boissy d'Anglas, a "comte" in 1789, became a "paragon of 'la république bourgeoise'" of the Directory—except that "la république bourgeoise" is placed in quotation marks?)

Vivian R. Gruder
Professor of History, Emerita
Queens College, City University of New York
vrgruder@gmail.com

Wed, 11 Nov 2009
From: John Harvey

"Context, Critique, and Clio"

Dear all:

On this mild Armistice Day in Minnesota I am tempted to insert my (admittedly ignorant) keyboard where it perhaps does not belong. Dare I prompt these friendly responses to the very interesting treatment of recent historiography on the French Revolution? My position is not one of expertise per se on the Revolution. I veer in from the angle of one who follows historiography more closely, and has been enlivened on "historiography & Revolution" by a recent (~three hour!) roundtable on the career of Robert Palmer.

1) There seemed to be very little attention to the contextual coupling of the Revolution with the Napoleonic coup or the Empire itself. I know that we try to make historiography manageable by constructing intellectual baskets that we can carry in an essay. But aside from debate about the Revolution's origins, its tie to the Enlightenment, or its global breadth, does it seem rather artificial not to challenge the conceptual de-coupling of the eras? Or, if indeed the two historiographical traditions should remain distinct, ought we to inform ourselves why, at least to the wider public? Or is this a dead horse?

2) Second, in terms of context and critique, I have to ask why almost of the texts surveyed were only those from English and French-speaking countries. I realize that our trans-Atlantic focus tends to be a tradition, consistent with surveys from the early '90s from the '70s or before. But without demeaning at all that content, have we been implicitly marginalizing the work coming out of Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, Scandinavia, etc? Even if in the past the guild considered there to be too little work beyond the Anglo-French debate, with all of the movement since the '60s to a more "global", interconnected world, and in the context of a "France" increasingly embedded in a wider Europe itself, should we not also be asking how the debate is playing out across the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and Mont Blanc? I'd be excited to

see a future salon or survey that included a scholar's perspective from these other viewpoints. Can we really understand European trends, or a comparative and contextual debate, only through English and French?

I say this for two reasons. There seemed to be rather little attention to the Revolution and its impact beyond the "Atlantic" context raised by Dubois, which addressed the vigorous placement of French studies under the (non-white) imperial gaze. That seems long overdue. But have we lost the awareness of the work that continues apace on the impact of/interrelation to the entire '89-1806 era to the rest of Europe? The reception of the revolution in central Europe, I know, has indeed provoked new revisionist writing, both in English and in German. If this corpus is not treated here, where would American or British students of the Revolution learn from it?

Secondly, I might offer that even the most learned of our "classical" scholars of wide Continental learning, such as Gottschalk and Peter Gay, really tended to set aside for example the entire corpus of Germanic-language study on the Napoleon, the Enlightenment, and the Revolutionary era in their own historiographical surveys (when the field was also more compact). Even Palmer, who viewed the Revolution as a transnational phenomenon, only treated its historiography really within Franco-English spectacles (excepting Karl Vossler.) So, speaking just to the topic of which I best follow (Germany), the past decade has seen a raft of fascinating studies on the German perspective on the French Revolution and the revolutionary-republican tradition. [1, below] I honestly think that we lose a lot by not including it in surveys or even individual reviews. The Russian perspective on the Revolution bears attention too.

3] Here I may be inviting dismissive frowns. But it seems a bit curious to me that another Anglo-American tradition in terms of studies on historical writing about the French revolutionary era is that we tend to cut our historiographical teeth discussing the innate politics of the French historiographical debate. I can think of a dozen American historians who completed dissertations on the national politics of the French historiography on the Revolution, from Paul Farmer to Jacques Goutor, Jim Frigulietti to Larry H. Davis. Important books continue to be written on the "politics" of French historical writing (re. Steve Kaplan, Linda Orr, Robert Gildea, Michael Christofferson). When we write about how French historians "write", we embed it in a political/national/ideological context.

Yet even with the recent appearance of *Why France?*, (and the German counterparts noted below), I would mildly question the reluctance of English-speaking historians to problematize their own current and past writing of French history/the Revolution in any kind of comparable climate. I know that this may be a rejected point. But even if we scan surveys such as that in "textbooks" like *Imagined Histories*, or leaf through periodical essays and forums that have appeared in journals, there seems to be an invisible wall to the question of how the national political dynamic of America, Britain, Canada, etc. have influenced the noted trends of historiography. [2] I read dim traces in this recent debate. But the cleft between the eagerness to pose French writing as the result of politics, while implicitly considering our own debate within an assumed neutral/objective/professional guise, seems another oddity. And, of course, our own French historian Peter Novick in his renowned study on the AHA [another '88/9 event?] was focused only on Americanists, as he averred in his introduction. As I think we tried to suggest recently in our roundtable on Palmer, one cannot understand either the scholar or the wider historiographical debate without a clear, critical context of what we, as Americans, think citizenship ought to be. And that, I would suggest, remains highly contested even within the luncheon halls of our annual conferences.

Please accept with my best regards,

John Harvey
Assoc. professor, modern Europe
St Cloud State
jlharvey@stcloudstate.edu

[1] Briefly, in terms limited only to a few examples of historiography, from Beate Gödde-Baumanns, *Deutsche Geschichte in französischer Sicht; die französische Historiographie von 1871 bis 1918 über die Geschichte Deutschlands und der deutsch-französischen Beziehungen in der Neuzeit* (1971) to Heinz Sproll, *Fränzösische Revolution und Napoleonische Zeit in der historisch-politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik :Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht 1918-1933* (1992); Steffen Kaudelka's **important** *Rezeption im Zeitalter der Konfrontation. Französische Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichte in Deutschland 1920-1940* (2003), or the collected surveys edited by Matthias & Katharina Middell as *200. Jahrestag der Französischen Revolution : kritische Bilanz der Forschungen zum Bicentenaire* (1992). A score more could be added on the French Revolution itself over the past decade.

[2] I would offer, as one example, that we as a field still lack any real study of the "Anglo-American revisionism" that occurred from the 1930s to the Furet breakthrough. Its reference is ubiquitous. See even the most recent posts that raise Taylor or Cobban. But the works/debate in English is always, from my view, seen as a nice, scientific, professional challenge. It was that, yes. But it was inherently political, and yes, in a varied and nuanced manner, conservative. Certainly this bears new research, as that generation is passing, and the archives have opened up a bit.

Mon, 23 Nov 2009
From: Lynn Hunt

I may be too late with this brief reply to the H-France Salon on the FHS issue on the French Revolution 20 years after the Bicentennial.

Since I raised the question of paradigms in my FHS piece it will come as no surprise that I want to try to defend them once more. Yet at the same time, I want to argue that there is a synergistic and not necessarily antagonistic relationship between the proliferation of new empirical research that we have witnessed in the last twenty years and the development of new paradigms. They don't go hand in hand but they can sometimes have fruitful conversations. It is perhaps worth remarking as well that the three great paradigms of explanation for the French Revolution came from authors – Marx, Tocqueville, and Furet – who did not write traditional histories of the French Revolution or do much if any empirical work on its various aspects. Surveying the forest and studying a particular tree are different ways of approaching a problem. We need them both.

My concern about paradigms is not just intellectual in a narrow sense. The French Revolution was the first laboratory of modernity in politics, gender, war, race, ideology, religion, class, nationhood and even the sense of the future. It is therefore not just another subject. It necessarily occupies a pivotal position in any meta-narrative of modernity itself. It seems to me obvious (though as yet unsubstantiated) that the next major paradigm of the French Revolution will be one shaped by discussions of globalization. For this to be truly compelling, more work has yet to be done on global economics in the 18th century (the slave trade and studies of Saint Domingue are a start), on the questions of finance within France (handled as an intellectual problem in part by Michael Sonenscher), on the effects of war both before and

during the Revolution (David Bell touches on these issues in his response to the FHS pieces and his own work), on the influence of foreigners in articulating universalist ideals (now being studied by Suzanne Desan), and on integrating events in the colonies as well as the new imperial adventures into the “French” story. We know a lot about why the previous meta-narratives do not work, but just saying no has never been very interesting to me. Still, I hesitate to say yes too emphatically to globalization for some things about the interest in it trouble me: most “theories” of globalization are in fact simply warmed over modernization theory, and globalization as a concept at times seems to sacrifice the microhistorical to the macroeconomic and cultural, gender, and social history (best carried out locally or at most nationally) to the revenge of diplomatic, military, and traditional political histories. I don’t think this outcome is inevitable; I believe that diplomatic, military, and political history have all evolved in interesting new directions, and in any case I am convinced that these are issues we will be discussing for some time to come.

Lynn Hunt
lhunt@history.ucla.edu

Mon, 30 Nov 2009
From: Liana Vardi

The discussion about how to approach the French Revolution has been extending into a discussion about “doing history”—to which I thought I might add my two-cents’ worth:

There are not only different ways of doing history; there are also very intelligent ways of doing it differently. The paradigm-seekers do not, I trust, see themselves as penseurs able to rise above a mass of undigested detail, while the tillers in the fields remain mired in their data. Thick descriptions, local studies, and a new drive to capture the manifold “experiences” of contemporaries do not float in an interpretive vacuum. Each, in its own way, investigates how things worked, attempting to get at something meaningful, and sometimes even something “relevant” to our own times.

Rather than ‘paradigm shifts’, it seems to me that for the past several decades we have been contemplating a number of suggestive hypotheses. These stimulated a great deal of fresh research, much of it enriching our understanding of various episodes in the Revolution. Once presumed to be the only valid approaches, they have fizzled out, undone by endless fine-tuning which drained them of creative energy. There is a law of diminishing returns at work here.

No paradigm has successfully ‘challenged’ the “social interpretation” of the French Revolution because none can offer as multi-faceted an explanation of the cataclysm. Its seductions were apparent in the early nineteenth century and it has stuck for a reason. Furet et compagnie reminded us that there were other dimensions, and that was fine too. We have been offered a new set of issues to explore: the Revolution in global context, the restructuring of the state, the eruptions of violence, anxieties and intellectual doubts, religion, etc... What is to be gained by each presuming to provide “an” answer, aka a new paradigm? What is wrong with complexity?

The dangers that lurk behind seeking simple, “bold” frameworks seem to me greater than allowing new questions to move center-stage while others gracefully bow out. Demanding “importance” ends up twisting modest dissertations --those old-fashioned “contributions to knowledge”—into incongruous claims. I have become something of a positivist in my old age and enjoy learning new things. I place much weight on the “evidence” (textual, archival, whatever); it makes me think. Reading fine scholarly work turns into a dialogue with the author about his/her findings. I might be frustrated at times that they haven’t reached the same conclusions as I —no self-respecting author offers no conclusions—but the encounter itself has been instructive.

Books that are “good to think with” come in many guises. I hope it is one thing about which we can all agree.

Liana Vardi
Department of History
University at Buffalo
vardi@buffalo.edu

Mon, 30 Nov 2009
From: Paul Sonnino

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Vardi for observing that the Salon discussion of the French Revolution has turned at the last moment into a discussion of historical methodologies, which gives me an occasion, since, though not a specialist in that period of French history, I teach the course regularly and have imposed the reading of its classical interpretations (Burke, Marx., Tocqueville, and Cobban---not Furet) upon numerous generations of befuddled students.

I fully agree with Professor Vardi that of all the interpretations, the social is still the best, and especially the Marxist social, with its mischievous capacity to reduce all ideological humbug to manifestations of class interest. Burke tries to warn us that it is dangerous to get single payer health care all at once and Tocqueville tries to convince us that a regime which had presumably isolated every one of its citizens could be brought to a standstill by a rowdy assembly of notables. But Cobban is right. None of these theories stand up to the every day experience of human beings, and history, after all, is an attempt to extend our memory, not to create ever more inventive paradigms which no person living at the time would ever recognize. History is not a disease that kills you whether or not you know its name in a medical book. It is, however, a form of preciosity if one turns it into ever more banal and/or esoteric paradigms

In terms of paradigms, it seems to me that one of the most persistent is the one that the Germans later called the *Weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, the notion that there is something great and meaningful going on in history under the presidency of God, the dialectic, the *longue durée*, or whatever, and few movements, since Augustine wrote the *City of God*, have been more *Weltgeschichtliche Bedeuted* than the French Revolution. Burke saw it as a cataclysmic threat, Marx and Tocqueville as an irresistible force. Only Cobban had the effrontery to suggest that it was one hell of a mess.

Now some years ago, I made an intervention on H-France in regard to the French Revolution, which

was greeted with a modicum of appreciation, a modicum of outraged indignation, and a whole lot of indifference, on which I will now elaborate briefly

I would suggest that it does not take a brain surgeon to see, like Tocqueville, that the movement of European society in the late eighteenth century was toward democracy. It did take the great R.R. Palmer to illustrate this point in detail in his classic *Age of the Democratic Revolution*. But a movement toward democracy is not a Reign of Terror. Nowhere in Europe that I know of, even under the protection of French revolutionary armies, did atrocities reach the level that they did in France between 1792 and 1794. The French Revolution, in all of its Dickensian glory, only took place in France, which, for all its charm, is not the center of the universe.

Why, you ask, did it only take place in France? Well, of course, I don't know. It could have been the will of Allah, or a collection of monads in the pre-established harmony, but in terms of our limited human perceptions of how things take place, I would simply have to keep referring you to Louis XVI, or whoever was advising him at that particular moment. Who could have done more things, not even beginning with the dismissal of Turgot, to bring about his own execution? All that trickery and bad faith over the doubling of the third. Locking out the third and then caving in to them. Rumors of troops that were never available. Alliance with the very elements of the old regime that had brought the monarchy to a standstill. Refusal to work with the National Assembly on a Constitution that would have doubled the power he had under the old regime. The in your face of the Flanders regiment, Running away and getting caught. Entering a war which he hoped he would lose. I mean what could the Feuillants or even the Girondins do in the face of a government that insisted on throwing them into the hands of the sans culottes?

I find it peculiar that with all of the ideological wars that have surrounded the historiography of the French Revolution, we do not have a close textual analysis of the decision making process at Versailles and in Paris during those critical days. At least I have not found one.

I am the first to admit. The French Revolution unleashed new forces that had been kept in check by the Old Regimes. The levée en masse, the sense of national unity, the heavenly city of the eighteenth century philosophers, all these things came squirting out as if Louis XVI had hit the tube of toothpaste with a sledge hammer. But in England, Spain, in Germany, in Italy, in the United States, they came out oozing every morning with just enough quantity to fit on to the toothbrush and only occasionally spilling over into the wash basin. In Prussia this was even done by the aristocracy.

My course this Winter Quarter is on Tuesday and Thursday 2-3:15 in South Hall. Lectures are thoroughly illustrated with power point. Two papers and a take home final are required. We are in desperate need of paying students due to the financial crisis in the state of California.

Paul Sonnino
sonnino@history.ucsb.edu

Tue, 1 Dec 2009
From: Sarah Hanley

Hi there: If we have moved in this interesting discussion to a wider look at "doing history" (as Lianna Vardi's cogent remarks suggest), I have a great source for those interested in plumbing historical

methodology (or in sparking a great debate in a graduate student seminar: Alan Spitzer, *Historical Truths and Lies About the Past* (UNC Press), where a terrific introduction is followed by four riveting case studies that examine the "doing": they are (1) Dewey's "retrial" of Trotsky in Mexico; (2) the Dreyfus Affair; (3) the defense of de Mann (by literary theorists, including Derrida); and (4) Ronald Reagan at Bitburg. This is a really challenging book and a pleasure to read. Sarah.

Sarah Hanley

Professor of History and Law
Department of History
International Programs
College of Law (by courtesy)
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

28 Grasshopper Lane
Scituate, Ma. 02066
781.545.7816
