Premier Zhou En-lai of China was once asked what the significance of the French Revolution was. "It's too soon to tell," he replied. If only Zhou had lived until 1989. This year, which marks the 200th anniversary of the Bastille's fall, a torrent of books, articles, journals, conferences, and exhibitions is telling—or at least attempting to tell—the significance of the Revolution. Here, two eminent scholars provide complementary approaches to the "founding event" of the modern world. Historian Keith Michael Baker explores the French Revolution partly by looking at the revolution it was not: Contrasting the American and the French revolutions, he sheds light on both. Political scientist and biographer Maurice Cranston examines the long-term effects of the Revolution. Surveying its global legacies, Cranston uncovers a significant irony: He finds a revolution whose consequences in its own country were radically different from those it would produce, so explosively, throughout the rest of the world.
My dear philosopher, doesn't this appear to you to be the century of revolutions...?" So wrote Voltaire to his fellow apostle of enlightenment and reform, the mathematician d'Alembert, in 1772. The remark was more prescient than its writer knew. Within a few years, the elegant, aristocratic, and oppressive France to which Voltaire belonged was to explode.

The traditional social order whose injustices Voltaire had done much to publicize was to be swept away. His countrymen were to be seized with a passion to create a new society whose ramifications went far beyond anything the philosopher had expected or desired. Novel ideas, radically different modes of political practice, unprecedented forms of civic and military mobilization, were to fan out from Paris across Europe, as the French set out in 1789 to do nothing less than make the world anew.

The events that began to unfold in France in 1789 gave a profoundly new meaning to the notion of "revolution," a meaning that has transformed world history and touched the lives of all nations. When Voltaire's contemporaries heard the term, they generally thought of abrupt and unexpected changes occurring in human affairs, without the conscious choice of human actors. A new sense of the meaning of the word revolution was beginning to meld in the minds of Frenchmen when they heralded the outcome of the American War of Independence as "the American Revolution." But it was not until 1789 that these various elements fused so dramatically into a powerful new conception.

In presenting their actions to the world, the spokesmen of 1789 conceived of "the French Revolution" as a radical break with the past achieved by the conscious will of human actors, not simply a historical mutation suffered passively by them. No longer a simple moment of change, a revolution became an act of universal significance, pregnant with meaning for humankind and its future. Although carried out by a single people, the revolution was seen by its actors as the conjuncture of eternity and the present, with the fate of all humanity hanging in the balance. The modern conception of revolution was born.

If our own century, too, has been a century of revolutions, this is because men and women throughout the world have continued to play out, in one way or another, that script for modern politics invented by the French in 1789. Not only the modern notion of revolution itself but our contemporary political vocabulary—the distinction between "Right" and "Left"; the notions of nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism; even our modern understanding of democracy and human rights—derive, directly or indirectly, from the French Revolution. Two centuries later, in the bicentennial year of the French Revolution, we find ourselves still confronted by the challenge of understanding the meaning and implications of its extraordinary events.

This challenge is a particularly fascinating one for Americans. For the French Revolution was at once closely linked to the American Revolution, inspired by many of the same ideals, and yet radically differ-
ent in its course, its implications, and its outcomes. The most immediate link between the two revolutions was financial and political. The French monarchy that undertook to support the Americans in their War of Independence against the British was already crippled by accumulated debts from previous wars. It could not long continue to support these debts, nor to incur new ones, while enjoying an inefficient and inequitable tax system. Yet Louis XVI (1774–92) could not reform this system without admitting some version of the principle of consent to taxation, which the absolute monarchy had resisted for almost 200 years. Paradoxically, the monarchy also found itself in the position of supporting and popularizing American arguments for liberty and government by consent as part of its war against the British.

When French participation in the American war eventually pushed the monarchy into virtual bankruptcy (as Turgot, the finance minister from 1774 to 1776, predicted it would), the government was forced to press for extensive reform of the administrative and fiscal system, including the elimination of traditional tax privileges enjoyed by the nobility and the clergy. The nobility and clergy seized upon the American example and refused taxation without representation: They countered the government's reform initiatives with demands for government by consent, fiscal responsibility, and an end to arbitrary power. To resolve the resulting conflict, Louis XVI, on August 8, 1788, was forced to call the meeting of the Estates General for May of the following year. It was a thrilling moment. Every French king since 1614 had refused to consider convening the ancient consultative assembly of deputies from the three social orders (Estates).

Imagine the excitement, the expectations of reform, and the hopes for relief of grievances occasioned at every level of society by this momentous decision of an absolute monarch to call representatives of his people together in a general assembly for the first time in almost two centuries.

Imagine, too, the political problems involved in this resurrection of an institution long thought dead. How was the Estates General to meet, and how were its deputies to be chosen? We can get some sense of the difficulty of resolving these questions if we reflect upon what it would be like if no national assembly had met in America since the Constitutional Convention and it suddenly became necessary to call one today. Should Vermont be given the same proportion of delegates it sent in 1787; and what about the (then-nonexistent) state of California? Would the electoral procedures be the same as they were in 1787? And what about the requirements for eligibility to vote or to be elected? Questions such as these would amount to deciding the nature of national political identity and the meaning of citizenship all over again.

In fact, on crucial points of detail, the French government had no reliable records of how the elections of deputies to the Estates General had been conducted almost 200 years earlier. Abandoning its traditional propensity for secrecy and absolute authority in deciding important matters, it even turned to the public at large for information and advice regarding

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June 20, 1789. Locked out of Versailles, the Third Estate met at a tennis court, swearing an oath "never to be separated until we have formed a solid and equitable Constitution."

the appropriate forms of election (though this may also have been a political tactic to divide and defuse opposition to royal policies). Profound disputes arose over whether the procedures used by the deputies in 1614 to vote on measures should again be followed in a society changed by the passage of two centuries. In the waning months of 1788, as the date for the meeting of the Estates General approached and the government hesitated to announce the procedures to be followed, France was consumed by a bitter pamphlet war.

In 1614, the three Estates of the realm—the clergy, the nobility, and the unprivileged remainder of the people, the so-called Third Estate—had sent three separate delegations, each deliberating and voting separately, with essential issues decided by a majority of two out of the three Estates. Hoping to defend traditional privileges, many pamphleteers who wrote on behalf of the clergy and the nobility at the end of 1788 argued for the continuation of these procedures as part of the "ancient constitution" of the realm. The pamphlets emanating from the Third Estate argued for a modification of the traditional procedures that would favor its interests: They demanded that the Third Estate elect a number of deputies equal to those of the combined privileged orders and that the decisions of the Estates General be made by a majority of all the deputies voting as a single body. Their authors calculated that deputies of the Third Estate would then form a majority together with liberal deputies from the clergy and nobility.

But the most celebrated pamphlet of this period—indeed, of the entire French Revolution—went far beyond these claims on behalf of the Third Estate. In fact, it was
written by a member of the minor clergy, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, one of those sons of the unprivileged who used a clerical career as an avenue for social advancement, only to find their ambitions blocked by the hold of the aristocracy on important positions within the church. Sieyès turned his personal frustrations into an indictment of the entire regime. Published at the very beginning of 1789, his celebrated pamphlet, What Is The Third Estate?, did for the French what Tom Paine’s Common Sense had done for the Americans little more than a decade earlier. It recast the terms of public debate, and, by doing so, transformed the political situation into a moment ripe for revolution.

Sieyès’s argument was radical in its simplicity. Where more moderate spokesmen for the Third Estate objected that the privileged were a minority whose power and pretensions within the nation should be reduced, Sieyès asserted that they could form no part of the nation at all. If a nation, Sieyès argued, were a civil society satisfying the needs of its members through productive economic activities, then the idle and unproductive privileged classes were no more than parasites upon it. Or if a nation were a political association of citizens living equally under a common law, then the claims of the privileged to unequal status and a separate legal identity automatically set them outside it. In either case, Sieyès proclaimed, the Third Estate constituted the entire nation in and of itself.

So even before the Estates General had met, Sieyès had announced the fundamental principle of the French Revolution: A nation is and must be one and indivisible. This claim implied a complete rejection of the traditional social and political order in France, which assumed a multiplicity of heterogeneous entities made one only by their common subjection to the sovereign will of the king. Sieyès’s argument was a radical refutation of the assumption that the division of the Estates General into three separate assemblies was or could be legitimate. Three assemblies meeting separately could never represent the common will of an indivisible nation.

Indeed, in an argument with profound consequences for subsequent French history, Sieyès went so far as to argue that the national will could never be bound by any existing constitutional form. The nation was a pure political being, prior to any constitution; it had only to express its will, in any manner, for existing political and legal arrangements to be suspended. “The nation,” he argued, “is all that it can be by the very fact of its existence. Not only is the nation not subject to a constitution, but it cannot, it must not be.”
This is an amazing conclusion, well worth reflecting upon, because its implications transformed an entire world. By arguing that the nation is the natural and essential human collectivity in which individuals must secure their liberty, citizenship, and rights, Sieyès called upon the French to break with the past. The French not only took up this call but fashioned it into the modern principles of national sovereignty and national self-determination, which they announced in the name of all peoples. The entire history of the 19th and 20th centuries has been shaped (for better or worse) by the efforts of one people after another to recover their national identity and to exercise their sovereignty in a state of their own. Nationalism as a political ideology dates from the French Revolution.

Sieyès’s arguments also made the French Revolution, from the very beginning, far more radical than the American Revolution. The Americans could resist the tyranny of George III and his Parliament by invoking the rights of Englishmen and the tradition of the Common Law. In repudiating British rule, they were not renouncing their entire history. The logic of Sieyès’s argument, by contrast, necessarily implied a radical break with the past. The authority of history was shattered forever by his call to the principles of natural right and sovereign will.

Natural rights, the new idea of nationality, the necessity of a radical break with the past—these were the revolutionary principles Sieyès offered his compatriots in 1789. They were not slow to accept these principles—for themselves and in the name of humanity at large. The message of What Is The Third Estate? was clear: Because the Third Estate constituted the entire nation, the deputies it sent to the Estates General were really the sole national representatives and should act accordingly.

And this indeed is what they decided to do. When the Estates General met on May 5, the Third Estate deputies refused to form a separate chamber. Six weeks later, they broke the resulting political deadlock by proclaiming themselves a National Assembly which alone could express the national will. This was their first revolutionary act. It was reaffirmed three days later, on June 20, 1789, when they swore in the famous Tennis Court Oath not to disperse until the nation had been given a new constitution. And it was doubly confirmed: first, when Louis XVI capitulated by ordering the deputies of the nobility and the clergy to join the new National Assembly; second, when the people of Paris stormed that great citadel of despotism, the Bastille, in order to save the Assembly from the threat of being forcibly dispersed by the royal armies. A “nation” had spoken, not only through its
representatives but also through popular action.

Popular action was to drive the Assembly even further in realizing the logic of a revolutionary break with the past. The fall of the Bastille on July 12-14, 1789, was the signal for disorders throughout France, as townspeople overthrew municipal oligarchies, and peasants impatient for reforms attacked the castles of the aristocracy and destroyed the records of hated feudal exactions. These actions left the new representatives of the nation no choice but to exercise the sovereignty they had claimed on its behalf.

In an emotion-laden session lasting far into the night of August 4, 1789, the deputies extended revolutionary principles far beyond anything they had originally intended. They declared the "feudal regime" abolished: not only feudal dues but the privileges of the nobility and the clergy, as well as of provinces and towns—in a word, the entire administrative, financial, and judicial order of what was soon to be called the Old Regime—were in principle swept away. This celebrated "holocaust of privileges," perhaps the most momentous act of the entire French Revolution, in effect created the modern individual, a person free from traditional status bonds, in a new society that was to be based on property, contract, and individual rights. It also inaugurated a philosophical and psychological dynamic which set the French to exploring the hazardous modern conviction that society can be made anew through the exercise of political will.

Even before the dramatic "Night of the Fourth of August," the assembly had been debating the necessity of a Declaration of Rights. Some members, inspired by the American Declaration of Independence, called for a declaration to proclaim to the nation and to humankind at large the abstract principles upon which the new constitution should be based. Others, fearing social disorder as a consequence of an abstract declaration of rights, preferred the enactment of specific positive laws to prevent abuses of power. After August 4, 1789, however, the outcome was clear. Within three weeks, the assembly had drafted its statement of the philosophical principles upon which a new constitution would rest and a new society be inaugurated. Coincidentally, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was adopted within a few days of the vote on the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Congress.

Drawing as they did upon a common philosophical heritage, sharing a common concern to protect individual citizens from arbitrary power, these two great enactments of the principles of human rights nevertheless differ in fundamental ways. The American Bill of Rights took the form of amendments to the Constitution. Individuals in America were protected from arbitrary government by the judiciary functioning under specific rules already stated in the Constitution. The Declaration of the Rights of Man, by contrast, was adopted before the National Assembly had even begun to enact a new constitution. It enunciated the universal, founding principles which a constitution had to implement, and became the philosophical measure against which any constitution might be found wanting.

The Declaration thus preceded the French Constitution eventually adopted in 1791. And within months of its implementation, that Constitution was repudiated in the name of the very principles enshrined in the Declaration. It was to be the first of many so repudiated, as the French sought not only during the revolutionary period but throughout the 19th century to match successive constitutions to the universal principles set forth in the Declaration.
None of these principles was more important, none made the achievement of a stable constitution more difficult in France, than that enunciated in Article 111: “The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.” The statement clearly echoed clauses in the American Constitution insisting that the source of all power inhere to the people. But the French were to give the proposition a more radical meaning, which led them almost immediately to reject the Anglo-American example of a separation and balance of powers.

The American Constitution was, in fact, one of the models considered when the Assembly turned from drafting the Declaration of the Rights of Man to a debate over constitutional principles. Within two weeks, however, the Anglo-American model had been definitely rejected in accordance with principles already announced by Sieyès in What Is the Third Estate? For a majority of the deputies, national sovereignty was by definition one and indivisible. The idea of the balance of powers—far from being a safeguard of liberty—appeared to be a recipe for constitutional confusion and an impediment to the univocal expression of a supreme national will. Preferring arguments drawn from Rousseau’s Social Contract to those in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws, they looked for liberty not in a constitutional balancing of interests but in the undivided authority of a single legislative assembly made directly responsible for its deliberations and actions to the will of people.

This decision goes a long way to explain the very different constitutional and political histories of the two countries during the past two centuries. The American Founders sought to secure individual rights by dispersing power through a system of checks and balances. The French Founders sought to secure human rights by constructing a unitary form of government, based on the general will emanating from the citizens as a single body. They opted, in other words, to limit particular powers and functions by generalizing power and extending it to all.

From a constitutional perspective, this choice made the representation and delegation of power profoundly difficult. For as soon as a representative body was elected to legislate for the nation, or its deliberations issued in laws or decrees, there was the risk of these actions being perceived as emanating from a particular will which no longer corresponded to the general will of the nation. The dramatic assertions of popular will during the subsequent years of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic experiment with referendums would be replayed through the course of the following century, in efforts to resolve this problematic relationship between sovereignty and representation created by the National Assembly in 1789. The problem has remained at the heart of the fertile history of French experimentation with constitutional forms down to our day.

The American and French revolutions were closely linked in time and, initially, in spirit. But while the Americans attempted in their Revolution to perfect the work of history, the French opted for the far more radical experiment of a philosophical break with the past that would create the world anew. In this bicentennial year of 1989, we are still living amid the consequences of decisions and actions taken 200 years ago on the other side of the Atlantic.
THE UNFOLDING OF A REVOLUTION

We know the exact moment when the idea of—even the word for—revolution was first used in its modern political sense. On the night of July 14, 1789, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt informed Louis XVI that the Bastille prison had been stormed and royal troops had defected before a popular attack. The King's response was almost nonchalant: "C'est une révolte." Liancourt corrected him, "Non, Sire, c'est une révolution."

The King was familiar with revolts; they were popular defiances which could be put down with the means at his disposal. In using the old astronomical term, revolution, Liancourt was not suggesting, however, that there would be a revolving or return. It was, rather, the "irresistibility," such as propels heavenly bodies in their courses, which Liancourt saw entering human events. Control was now out of the hands of the king and his ministers.

The irresistible Liancourt noted would sweep away much of the world as it was known. Below is a calendar of a world transformed.

1789

May 5: Pressed by a desperate need for revenues, Louis XVI convenes the Estates General, the first national parliament to meet in nearly 200 years. Without any living precedent to guide it, the Third Estate (the new middle class) pits itself against the aristocracy. In June, the Third Estate declares itself The National Assembly, determined to write a new constitution.

July 14: A Parisian mob liberates the Bastille, a nearly empty prison but a symbol of the oppressions of the ancien régime. Its "liberation" incites revolutionary actions throughout France.

July 20–August 6: Peasants arm themselves against looting brigands in the countryside but instead turn upon the castles and burn the records of their manorial debts and feudal obligations. Feudalism is, in effect, ended.

October 5–6: A Parisian crowd made up largely of women, the so-called Women's March, proceeds to Versailles and forces the King to return to Paris, where he is now forced to reside.

November 2: The property of the clergy is confiscated and put on sale. Although the sales initially benefit only those who already have property, the Revolution is propelled toward a new redistribution of landed wealth.

1790–1791

February: Religious orders are abolished in France. The church of France becomes a national church, with priests ordered to swear loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The resulting schism will later spark the counter-Revolution.

February 1790–June 1791: The constitutional monarchy, based on the English model from the Revolution of 1688, proves ineffective. The Marquis de Lafayette's compromises fail to reconcile an aristocracy living on feudal dues and a peasantry determined to do away with them. Civil war rages in many regions of the country.

June 21, 1791: Louis XVI, disguised as a valet, attempts to flee the country, only to be captured at Varennes. Thus ends the experiment with constitutional monarchy. Sympathetic to Louis's plight, Prussia and Austria threaten intervention, while inside France almost every interest sees its salvation in a foreign war.

1792

April 20: The Legislative Assembly—led by the progressive bourgeoisie, the Girondins—declares war on Austria. Ensuing military defeats, combined with economic crisis, revive popular discontent and raise revolutionary sentiment to a fever pitch.

August 10–11: Spurred by popular insurrection, the Assembly abolishes the monarchy and forms a convention to write a new constitution. Active participation of the sans-culottes (literally, without trousers, or those who wear breeches; in other words, lower-class artisans who have little or no property) leads to universal suffrage and the arming of lower-class citizens. During this so-called Second Revolution the more moderate Girondins lose control.

September 20: A new National Convention is elected. The Revolutionary Army finally halts the invasion of Prussian troops just north of Paris at Valmy. Witnessing the battle, the poet
Goethe declares, “From this day and this place dates a new era in the history of the world.”

**September 22:** Under the new calendar, this day is designated the first day of the new era—Vendémiaire I, Year I. The new calendar (which remains in effect till January 1, 1806) reveals the revolutionary inclination to remake everything, including time.

**December 11:** The trial of Louis XVI begins. On January 14, 1793, he is declared guilty and on January 21, executed.

**1793**

**February 1:** The Convention declares war on Great Britain and the Netherlands and, a month later, on Spain. The government passes into the hands of the far more radical Montagnards under Robespierre’s leadership.

**March:** A series of defeats is suffered by the Revolutionary Army, as counter-Revolution breaks out.

**September 25:** The Convention silences all opposition. The Committee of Public Safety, led by Robespierre, commences a series of public trials and executions, which becomes the infamous “Terror.” By December 1, there are 4,595 prisoners in the jails of Paris.

**October 16:** Marie-Antoinette is executed.

**November 10:** The Cathedral of Notre Dame is converted into the Temple of Reason. A tide of de-Christianization leads to the closing of French churches; elsewhere, cemeteries bear the slogan, “Death is an eternal sleep.”

**December 6:** The Convention, pressed by Robespierre who fears alienating neutral foreign powers, reaffirms the principle of worship. In effect, the 12-member Committee of Public Safety under Robespierre takes the revolutionary momentum away from the popular insurrections.

**1794**

**December (1793) to July:** The revolutionary government stabilizes itself—chiefly by executing its enemies and stifling internal dissent. Production, distribution, and profits are all strictly controlled in order to generate revenues for conducting the war. By spring, the government has amassed an army of a million men, an unprecedented instrument for waging war.

**July 27–28:** The irony of the Revolution is that its success leads to its demise. With its enemies on the right and left liquidated, with popular insurrections subdued and victory in its foreign wars likely, the revolutionary government can no longer intimidate the Convention. In July, the government falls into internal dissension, and during two dramatic days—8 and 9 Thermidor—Robespierre is outmaneuvered by a ramshackle coalition of his enemies. The execution of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and their partisans on 10 Thermidor is the date cited by many historians to mark the end of the Revolution.

**Aftermath**

During the next two years, known as the Thermidorian reaction, the Notables, or “men of substance,” attempted to force the sans-culottes out of political life and also to abandon the controlled economy. But the government they formed under the Directory floundered, equally afraid of royalism and democracy. Moreover, it proved impotent in the face of persistent financial and social crises. The more discredited the Directory became, however, the greater rose the prestige of its conquering generals, especially of the victorious general of the Italian Campaign of 1796–97—Napoleon—Bonaparte. In 1799, the Coup d’État of 18 Brumaire brought Napoleon to power, initially as First Consul, then as Consul for Life, and finally as Emperor. Yet even as he became Emperor, Napoleon consolidated and exported many revolutionary reforms—from judicial equality to the metric system—and indeed, in the eyes of aristocratic Europe, Napoleon remained the “soldier of the Revolution.”
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
IN THE MINDS OF MEN

by Maurice Cranston

On July 14, 1989—Bastille Day—political and cultural leaders of every ideological persuasion assembled in Paris to celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution. Was there something strange about their unanimous applause? All subsequent major revolutions, such as those that took place in Russia and China, remain controversial today. But the French Revolution, which served as the direct or indirect model for these later upheavals, now passes for an innocuous occasion which anyone, Marxist or monarchist, can join in celebrating.

Was this proof only of the anaesthetizing power of time, that two centuries could turn the French Revolution into a museum piece, an exhibition acceptable to all viewers, even to a descendent of the old Bourbon monarchs? Or is there something about the French Revolution itself that, from its beginning, sets it apart from later revolutions?

The tricolour, the Marseillaise, the monumental paintings of David—all celebrate a series of connected events, alternately joyous and grim, which make up the real, historical French Revolution. But there is another French Revolution, one which emerged only after the tumultuous days were over and the events and deeds became inflated or distorted in the minds of later partisans. This is the French Revolution as myth, and it is in many ways the more important of the two.

It is so, one could argue, because the myth, and not the reality, inspired the scores of revolutions that were to come. The actors of the French Revolution, announcing their principles on behalf of all mankind, clearly intended their deeds to have a mythic dimension. They wanted to inspire others to follow their example. Consider the Declaration of the Rights of Man, passed in August of 1789. At no point does it refer to the specific conditions or laws of France. Instead, it speaks in grand universals, as if it were the voice of mankind itself. Replete with terms like citizen, liberty, the sacred rights of man, the common good, the document provides the lexicon for all future revolutions.

By contrast, the earlier revolutionary models which stirred the French in 1789 to act—the English Revolution of 1688 and the American Revolution of 1776—had been essentially political events, limited in scope and conservative in objectives. The English revolutionists claimed to restore the liberty that the despotic James II had destroyed; the American revolutionaries made the kindred claim that they were only defending their rights against tyrannical measures introduced by George III. Neither revolution sought to change society.

The French Revolution, however, sought to do exactly that. Indeed, to many of the more zealous French revolutionaries, the central aim was the creation of a new man—or at least the liberation of pristine man, in all his natural goodness and simplicity, from the cruel and corrupting prison of the traditional social order.

It is easy to see how this grandiose vision of the Revolution's purpose went hand-in-hand with the emergence of Romanticism. The great Romantic poets and philosophers encouraged people through-
out the West to believe that imagination could triumph over custom and tradition, that everything was possible given the will to achieve it. In the early 1790s, the young William Wordsworth expressed the common enthusiasm for the seemingly brave and limitless new world of the Revolution:

France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again.

Here we encounter one of the many differences between reality and myth. The reality of the French Revolution, as Tocqueville maintained, was prepared by the rationalist philosophers of the 18th-century Enlightenment, by Voltaire, Diderot, Helvétius, d'Alembert, and Holbach no less than by Rousseau. Its myth, however, was perpetuated during the 19th century by Romantic poets such as Byron, Victor Hugo and Hölderlin. Byron in his life and in his poetry bore witness to that romanticized revolutionary idealism, fighting and then dying as he did to help the Greeks throw off the Turkish yoke and set up a free state of their own.

The grandeur of its lofty aims made the French Revolution all the more attractive to succeeding generations of revolutionaries, real and would-be; the violence added theatrical glamor. The guillotine—itself an invention of gruesome fascination—together with the exalted status of its victims, many of them royal, noble, or political celebrities, made the Terror as thrilling as it was alarming. The wars which broke out in 1793, when France declared war on Great Britain, Holland, and Spain, were fought not by professional soldiers but by conscripts, ordinary men who were ex-

*During the 1790s, the French Army became the “school of the Revolution,” where volunteers learned to “know what they fought for and love what they know.”*
pected to “know what they fought for and love what they know.” These wars were thought of as wars of liberation. It hardly mattered that Napoleon turned out to be an imperialist conqueror no better than Alexander or Caesar; he was still a people’s emperor.

If historians of the French Revolution are unanimous about any one point, it is this: that the Revolution brought the people into French political life. To say that it introduced “democracy” would be to say too much. Although popular suffrage in varying degrees was instituted as the revolution unfolded, no fully democratic system was set up. But popular support came to be recognized as the only basis for legitimating the national government. Even the new despotism of Napoleon had to rest on a plebiscitary authority. These plebiscites, which allowed voters only to ratify decisions already made, denied popular sovereignty in fact while paying tribute to it in theory. (The vote for the Constitution which made Napoleon emperor in 1804—3,500,000 for versus 2,500 against—hardly suggests a vigorous democracy.)

But if Napoleon’s government was not democratic, it was obviously populistic. The people did not rule themselves, but they approved of the man who ruled them. The end of Napoleon’s empire in 1815, which was also in a sense the end of the historical French Revolution, could only be brought about by the intervention of foreign armies.

Those foreign armies could place a king on the throne of France, as they did with Louis XVIII in 1815, but they could not restore the principle of royal sovereignty in the hearts of the French people. They simply put a lid on forces which would break out in another revolution 15 years later, this time not only in France but in other parts of the Western world.

The French Revolution had turned the French into a republican people. Even when they chose a king—Louis-Philippe—to lead that revolution of 1830, he was more of a republican prince than a royal sovereign in the traditional mold. Louis-Philippe, the “Citizen King,” had to recognize, as part of his office, “the sovereignty of the nation.” And what kind of sovereign is it, one may ask, who has to submit to the sovereignty of the nation? The answer must clearly be, one who is king neither by grace of God nor birth nor lawful inheritance but only through the will of the people, who are thus his electors and not his subjects.

The “sovereignty of the nation” was a new and powerful idea, a revolutionary idea, in the 19th century. At the philosophical level, it is usually ascribed, with some justification, to the teaching of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and many lesser commentators considered the ideologue of the French Revolution. What Rousseau did was to separate the concept of sovereignty, which he said should be kept by the people in their own hands, from the concept of government, which he urged the people to entrust to carefully chosen elites, their moral and intellectual superiors. Rousseau held that neither hereditary kings nor aristocrats could be considered superiors of this kind. Rousseau was uncompromisingly republican. To him a republic could be based only on the collective will of citizens who contracted to live together under laws that they themselves enacted. “My argument,” Rousseau wrote in The So-

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Three Leaders—Three Phases of the Revolution. The liberal Marquis de Lafayette initially guided the Revolution. Georges Danton helped overthrow the monarchy, but was executed for being too moderate. Robespierre was both director and victim of the Terror.

The sheer size of France, however, with a population in 1789 of some 26 million people, precluded the transformation of the French kingdom into the sort of direct democracy that Rousseau—a native Swiss—envisioned. Still, the Americans had very recently proved that a nation need not be as small as a city-state for a republican constitution to work. And as an inspiration to the average Frenchman, the American Revolution was no less important than the writings of Rousseau.

The American Revolution thus became a model for France, despite its conservative elements. Moreover, the American Revolution later served as a model for others largely because its principles were “translated” and universalized by the French Revolution. In Latin America, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies could not directly follow the American example and indict their monarchs for unlawfully violating their rights; Spain and Portugal, unlike England, recognized no such rights. But following the example of the French Revo-
olution, Latin Americans like Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín were able to appeal to abstract or universal principles. To describe Bolivia's new constitution in 1826, Simón Bolívar used the same universal and idealistic catchwords which the French had patented 37 years before: "In this constitution," Bolívar announced, "you will find united all the guarantees of permanency and liberty, of equality and order." If the South American republics sometimes seemed to run short on republican liberty and equality, the concept of royal or imperial sovereignty was nonetheless banished forever from American shores. The short reign of Maximilian of Austria as Emperor of Mexico (1864-1867) provided a brief and melancholy epilogue to such ideas of sovereignty in the New World.

Even in the Old World, royal and aristocratic governments were on the defensive. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna, under Prince Metternich of Austria's guidance, attempted to erase the memory of the Revolution and restore Europe to what it had been before 1789. Yet only five years after the Congress, Metternich wrote to the Russian tsar, Alexander I, admitting, "The governments, having lost their balance, are frightened, intimidated, and thrown into confusion."

The French Revolution had permanently destroyed the mystique on which traditional regimes were based. No king could indisputably claim that he ruled by divine right; nor could lords and bishops assume that their own interests and the national interests coincided. After the French Revolution, commoners, the hitherto silent majority of ordinary underprivileged people, asserted the right to have opinions of their own—and to make them known. For once the ideas of liberty, democracy, and the rights of men had been extracted from philosophers' treatises and put on the agenda of political action—which is what the French Revolution with its "universal principles" did—there could be no security for any regime which set itself against those ideals.

In old history textbooks one can still find the interpretation of the French Revolution first advanced by Jules Michelet and Jean Jaurès and other left-wing historians who explained the Revolution as one abolishing feudalism and advancing bourgeois capitalist society. While few historians still view the Revolution this way, the Michelet interpretation was widespread during the 19th century, and its currency prompted many an aspiring Robespierre to "complete" the revolution.

Completing the revolution meant overthrowing...
the bourgeoisie in favor of the working class, just as the bourgeoisie had supposedly overthrown the feudal aristocracy in 1789. The convulsive year of 1848 was marked in Europe by several revolutions which attempted to complete the work of 1789. Their leaders all looked back to the French Revolution for their "historic justification." Tocqueville observed of these revolutionaries that their "imitation [of 1789] was so manifest that it concealed the terrible originality of the facts; I continually had the impression they were engaged in play-acting the French Revolution far more than continuing it."

If the 19th century was, as many historians describe it, the "century of revolutions," it was so largely because the French Revolution had provided the model. As it turns out, the existence of a proper model has proved to be a more decisive prod to revolution than economic crisis, political unrest, or even the agitations of young revolutionaries.

Indeed, the role of professional revolutionaries seems negligible in the preparation of most revolutions. Revolutionaries often watched and analyzed the political and social disintegration around them, but they were seldom in a position to direct it. Usually, as Hannah Arendt observed, "revolution broke out and liberated, as it were, the professional revolutionists from wherever they happened to be—from jail, or from the coffee house, or from the library." Tocqueville made a similar observation about the revolutionaries of 1848: The French monarchy fell "before rather than beneath the blows of the victors, who were as astonished at their triumph as were the vanquished at their defeat."

Disturbances which during the 18th century would hardly have proven so incendiary ignited one revolution after another during the 19th century. They did so because now there existed a revolutionary model for responding to crises. During the 1790s, revolutionaries outside of France such as Toussaint L'Ouverture in Haiti and Wolfe Tone in Ireland tried simply to import the French Revolution, with its ideals of nationalism, equality and republicanism, and adapt it to local conditions. And well into the 19th century, most revolutionaries continued to focus their eyes not on the future but on the past—on what the French during the 1790s had done in roughly similar circumstances.

To be sure, the French Revolution possessed different and even contradictory meanings, differences which reflect the various stages of the historical Revolution. The ideals and leaders of each stage inspired a particular type of later revolutionary. The revolutionary men of 1789–91, including the Marquis de Lafayette, inspired liberal and aristocratic revolutionaries. Their ideal was a quasi-British constitutional monarchy and suffrage based on property qualifications. The revolutionaries of 1830–32 realized this liberal vision in France and Belgium.

The Girondins and moderate Jacobins of 1792–93 became the model for lower-middle-class and intellectual revolutionaries whose political goal was a democratic republic and usually some form of a "welfare state." The French Revolution of 1848, with its emphasis on universal manhood suffrage and the state's obligation to provide jobs for all citizens, initially embodied their vision of society.

A third type of revolutionary, the extremists of 1793–94 such as Robespierre and Gracchus Babeuf, inspired later working-class and socialist revolutionaries.

A reactionary such as Prince Metternich would hardly have distinguished among these three types of revolutionaries. But a later observer, Karl Marx, did. Seeing that the nationalist revolutions of his time ig-
Lenin (shown here in a 1919 photograph) exploited the precedent of the French Revolution to legitimize the Bolshevik Revolution in the eyes of the world.

nored the socialist-radical strain of the French Revolution, he came to deplore its influence on later revolutionaries.

Marx, who by 1848 was already active in communist politics, condemned what he considered the confusion of understanding in most of these revolutionary movements. An emotional yearning to reenact the dramas of 1789–1815 seemed to him to stand in the way of a successful revolutionary strategy. In a letter to a friend in September, 1870, Marx wrote: “The tragedy of the French, and of the working class as a whole, is that they are trapped in their memories of momentous events. We need to see an end, once and for all, to this reactionary cult of the past.”

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin had no such reservations. He passed up no rhetorical opportunity to present his Russian Bolsheviks as the heirs of the French revolutionary tradition and the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a reenactment of France’s Revolution of 1789. Lenin went so far as to call his Bolshevik faction “the Jacobins of contemporary Social-Democracy.”

It is not difficult to understand Lenin’s motives. Throughout the 19th century, most of the successful revolutions in Europe and Latin America had been nationalist revolutions. (Indeed, when the revolutionary German liberals of 1848 issued their Declaration of Rights, they ascribed those rights to the German Volk as a whole and not to private persons.) But the
example of the French Revolution suggested that a revolution could be more than just a matter of nationalism. Taking the example of the French Revolution under the fanatical Robespierre, one could argue, as Lenin did, that the true goal of revolution was to alter the way people lived together, socially and economically.

Yet, as we know, Lenin looked back upon a century when attempts at radical social revolutions had been ultimately and uniformly abortive. The French Revolution of 1848, which removed the “liberal” King Louis-Philippe, briefly gave greater power to the working class. During its most promising days, the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) even accepted a seat in the legislative chamber. But the coup d’état of Napoleon III in 1851 soon brought an end to all this. The communist movement, which Marx described as a specter haunting Europe, produced no more tangible results than most specters do. Before World War I, Marx was notably less influential as a theoretician than were the champions of “revolutionary socialism” such as Proudhon and Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864) who persuaded the workers that their interests would be better served by reform and democratic process than by revolution.

It was World War I which put revolutionary socialism back on the agenda again. The “war to end all wars” gave Lenin the opportunity to persuade the world that the French Revolution could be repeated as a communist revolution in, of all places, Russia. Not only did the upheavals of war play into his hands but the ideology and propaganda adopted by the Allied powers in World War I did so as well. When their early military campaigns went badly, the Allies attempted to make the war more popular, and the enormous casualties more tolerable, by declaring their cause to be a war for “liberty.” In the name of liberty, Great Britain, France, and the United States encouraged the subject nations of the German, Austrian and Turkish empires to throw off the imperial yoke.

But in championing national liberty, the Allies were guilty of hypocrisy. Neither Great Britain nor France had any intention of permitting nationalist revolutions within their own empires or those of any neutral power. But Lenin was able to catch them in the trap of their own contradictions.

By declaring to the world that the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 was a reenactment of the French Revolution, he was able to attach to his regime all those

"Robespierre with a Chinese face": Mao’s Cultural Revolution hoped to realize Robespierre’s dream of pushing beyond political reform to remake man and society.
strong, if mixed, emotions which the French Revolution had kindled in the outside world from 1789 on. In symbolic ways, both large and small—such as naming one of their first naval ships Marat, after the French revolutionary leader—the early Soviets underscored their connection with the earlier revolution. The attempts of the Allied powers to send in troops to save Tsarist Russia from the Bolsheviks was immediately seen by a war-weary world as a reactionary, counter-revolutionary “White Terror,” and public opinion soon put an end to that intervention.

After 1917, the Soviet Union’s self-image became less that of a revolutionary regime and more that of a well-established socialist empire. This transition unexpectedly enabled its adherents at last to obey Marx’s injunction to abolish the cult of the revolutionary past and to fix their eyes on the present. The idea of revolution thus passed from the left to the ultra-left, to Stalin and Trotsky and, later, to Mao Zedong and his Cultural Revolution in China.

Yet even during the extreme phase of the Cultural Revolution, Mao still evinced his debt to the French Revolution, a debt which he shares with the later “Third World” revolutionaries. Whenever a revolutionary leader, from Ho Chi Minh and Frantz Fanon to Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega, speaks of a new man, or of restructuring a whole society, or of creating a new human order, one hears again the ideas and assumptions first sounded on the political stage during the French Revolution.

In fact, there can be no doubt that a “cultural revolution” is what Robespierre set afoot in France, and what, if he had lived, he would have tried to bring to completion. As a disciple of Rousseau, he truly believed that existing culture had corrupted modern man in all classes of society, and that an entirely new culture was necessary if men were to recover their natural goodness. The new religious institutions which Robespierre introduced—the cult of the Supreme Being and the worship of Truth at the altar of Reason, as well as the new patriotic festivals to replace the religious holidays—were all intended to be part of what can only be called a cultural revolution. Robespierre did not believe that political, social, and economic changes alone, however radical, would enable men to achieve their full humanity.

But while the ideals and the language of the cultural revolution sound nobler than those of the political revolution, such elevation of thought seems only to authorize greater cruelty in action. Robespierre’s domination of the French Revolution lasted for only a short period, from April 1793 until July 1794, when he himself died under the same guillotine which he had used to execute his former friends and supposed enemies. Moderation was restored to the French Revolution after his execution by the least idealistic of its participants—a cynical Talleyrand, a pusillanimous Sieyès, and a crudely ambitious Napoleon. Likewise, moderation was restored to the Chinese Revolution by the Chinese admirers of Richard Nixon. Yet while moderation had been restored to the real historical French Revolution, the inevitability of the return to “normalcy” was often conveniently ignored by later revolutionaries.

And what of France itself? At first glance, all the major subsequent “dates” of French history seem to be in a revolutionary tradition or at least of revolutionary magnitude—1830 (Louis-Philippe); 1848 (the Second Republic); 1852 (the Second Empire); 1871 (the Third Republic); 1940 (the Vichy French State); 1945 (the Fourth Republic); 1958 (the Fifth Republic). Yet these headline dates, all suggesting recurrent tumult, may be misleading: France has not been wracked by major upheavals nor
by social earthquakes that left the structure of society unrecognizable, as Russia and China were after their revolutions. Continuity may be the most striking feature in French life. Robert and Barbara Anderson’s *Bus Stop to Paris* (1965) showed how a village not more than 10 miles from Paris remained unaffected year after year by all the great rumblings in the capital. Are we dealing with a revolution whose myth is all out of proportion to the facts?

Tocqueville, that most dependable of all political analysts, offers an answer: The major change effected by the Bourbon kings during the 17th and 18th centuries was the increasing centralization of France and the creation of a strong bureaucracy to administer it. This bureaucracy, in effect, ruled France then and has continued to rule it through every social upheaval and behind every facade of constitutional change. This bureaucracy has provided stability and continuity through the ups and downs of political fortune. The French Revolution and Napoleon, far from making an abrupt break with the past, continued and even accelerated the tendency toward bureaucratic centralization.

Tocqueville almost broached saying that the French Revolution never happened, that the events not only looked theatrical but were theatrical: The French could afford to have as many revolutions as they pleased, because no matter what laws they enacted, or what persons they placed in their legislative and executive offices, the same civil servants, the functionaries, the members of *l’Administration*, would remain in command.

How many revolutions can the historian cite as having left the people better off at the end than they were at the beginning? Unfortunately the discrepancy between its myth and its reality may have made the French Revolution a deceptive model for other nations to imitate. The myth treated society like a neutral, ahistorical protoplasm from which old corrupt institutions could be extracted and into which new rules for human interaction could be inserted at will. The reality was that France, with its unusually strong state bureaucracy, could withstand the shocks and traumas of radical constitutional upheaval.

In modern history, revolution often seems a luxury that only privileged peoples such as the French and the Americans and the English can afford. Less fortunate peoples, from the Russians in 1918 to the Cambodians in 1975, on whom the burden of the established regimes weighed more cruelly, have often enacted their revolutions with catastrophic results. It is perhaps one of the harsher ironies of history that, since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the more a country appears to need a revolution, the less likely it will be able to accomplish one successfully.
The study of the French Revolution seems, at times, like its continuation. Pro or contra, approving or condemning, the historians of the Revolution have continued to battle for the meaning of those tumultuous years. Instead of weapons, declarations, and guillotines, the battle of interpretations employs words, detailed research, and ever subtler arguments.

The classical republican argument for the Revolution found an early and ardent advocate in Jules Michelet, author of the *History of the French Revolution* (1847–1853). Practically converting democracy into a religion, Michelet declared that the "noble people" of France had cast off their chains during their righteous struggle against privilege.

The opposing case was powerfully made by Hippolyte Taine in his three-volume *French Revolution* (1878–85). Unlike Michelet, Taine refused to identify the Revolution with the nation; indeed, he labelled the revolutionaries vagabonds and bandits who caused France to lose a grandeur which it never regained.

Taine, and most subsequent conservative interpreters, owe a great debt to a work contemporary with the Revolution itself, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The British political thinker argued that the revolutionaries' determination to treat society as a tabula rasa became a rationale for destroying traditions of accumulated wisdom so laboriously acquired over time.

There has, of course, been a position between the partisan extremes. And, indeed, the one work from the 19th century which continues to be mined for fresh insights is a model of the dispassionate approach—Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1856).

Tocqueville, an aristocrat by birth, advanced the ironic view that the Revolution was not truly revolutionary. Although the French in 1789 intended "to tear open a gulf between their past and their future" and "to leave every trace of their past condition behind them," Tocqueville found "that they unconsciously retained most of the sentiments, habits, and ideas which the Old Regime taught them." Tocqueville concluded that most developments popularly ascribed to the Revolution—particularly, national centralization—were already occurring under the Old Regime.

So much for the 19th century. If the first victims of the French Revolution were the politicians and nobles who fell under the guillotine, the Revolution's prime victims during the 20th century have been trees. Whole forests have been "guillotined" for the more than 100,000 books, monographs, and articles that have been written about the "founding event of the modern world."

Dominating the first half of the 20th century was the argument set forth by four French scholars, François Aulard, Albert Mathiez, Georges Lefebvre, and Albert Soboul, successive holders of the Chair of Revolutionary Studies at the Sorbonne. The Chair spoke, and its verdict was Good. A good revolution. Aulard's *The French Revolution: A Political History* (Unwin, 1910), Albert Mathiez's *The French Revolution* (Russell, 1962), Lefebvre's *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton, 1947), and Soboul's *The Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution* (Clarendon; 1964) made both more "scientific" and more radical the romantic arguments of Michelet.

Georges Lefebvre, in particular, refuted the notion that either Taine's low rabble or Michelet's noble "people" caused the Revolution. He made the case that it was, instead, the handiwork of the rising middle class.

Until the 1960s, Lefebvre held sway. Historians tended to see the Revolution as a "class war" in which the middle class violently repudiated an obsolete aristocracy. The middle class, according to Lefebvre, represented the future of "a society in which modern capitalism was barely beginning, and in which the increase of productive capacity seemed the essential corrective to poverty and want."

Opponents of the Revolution invoke the Terror to condemn the whole revolutionary enterprise; even the pro-Revolutionary Michelet blanched before the violence of that extreme period. But Lefebvre and some writing in his wake mitigated the horror of even those bloody
days. For example, R. R. Palmer in *Twelve Who Ruled* (Princeton, 1941), while not justifying the violence of the Terror, made the actions of Robespierre and his faction more plausible by placing them in the context of a beleaguered wartime government.

While Lefebvre’s work is generally considered among the finest histories written during this century, it is hardly surprising that the “Lefebvre school” met opposition among those scholars who found its class-struggle approach too Marxist, too neat.

Alfred Cobban, for instance, in *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1964), argued that the Revolution actually delayed rather than accelerated the rise of an industrial middle class in France. Following Cobban’s revision came George Taylor’s 1967 article in the *American Historical Review*, “Non-capitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution.” Taylor showed that no substantial economic difference existed between the nobility and the bourgeoisie before 1789. Since the Revolution, in his view, was not the result of a class struggle but a strictly political movement, he concluded that “the phrases ‘bourgeois revolution’ and ‘revolutionary bourgeoisie,’ with their inherent deceptions, will have to go.”

Many recent studies are noteworthy less for their contributions to the long partisan struggle than for their exploration of neglected questions and odd corners of the Revolution’s history. Whether one’s interest is popular culture, militarism, or feminism, the Revolution has provided many scholars with a helpful “distant mirror.”

The role of women emerges clearly in the original source materials collected by Darline Levy, Harriet Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795* (Univ. of Ill., 1979). Initially, women protesters voiced traditional economic grievances, but their demands for bread and subsistence were “a bridge to modern political activities.” What began “as if the women were in rehearsal trying out new roles” ended by their “emerging as autonomous political actors.” These women set a precedent, the editors claim, that “was not to be forgotten.”
Another useful anthology illuminates the Revolution in Print: The Press in France 1775-1800 (Univ. of Calif., 1989). These 14 essays edited by Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche remind us that, in a world without telephones, radio, or televisions, a revolution would have been unthinkable without the press. "When the revolutionaries grasped the bar of the press and forced the platen down on type locked in its form," Darnton says, "they sent new energy streaming through the body politic. France came to life again, and humanity was amazed."

As important as the press in shaping the Revolution—and more ominous for future politics—was the creation of the Revolutionary army. Richard Cobb's The French Revolutionary Armies (Yale, 1987) and Jean-Paul Bertaud's The Army of the French Revolution (Princeton, 1988) reveal how the army served as the "school for the republic." Mass conscription assembled an army of amateurs innocent of the mercenary courtesies and professional restraints that had governed "civilized" warfare during the 18th century. Goethe, observing the battle of Valmy in September, 1792, and the French soldiery made fanatical by ideology, commented that a new era in history was beginning. It would take another century to perfect and name this new kind of armed struggle: total war.

Even if the French Revolution had left no legacy, even if there were no heated disputes about its meanings, the story of the French Revolution—beyond the imagination of any dramatist to invent—would still fascinate. Not even Balzac could have come up with a plot in which well-meaning players intent on liberty and reform set in motion an inexorable process that leads to tyranny and their own deaths. For sheer dramatic narrative, J. M. Thompson is unmatched in relating The French Revolution (Oxford, 1945).

In a more recent account Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution (Knopf, 1989), Harvard historian Simon Schama recreates the complex sweep of the Revolution. Schama claims he has an objective more interesting than judging the Revolution—witnessing it. But buried within Schama's nearly one thousand-page chronicle, there is an argument consisting of several theses: Destabilizing modernization in fact preceded the Revolution; a potentially "good" Revolution was ruined by its violence; the "sovereignty of the people" and individual liberty do not go hand in hand. All of these points reflect the thinking of the contemporary French historian, François Furet.

And mention of Furet brings us to the present bicentennial year. For now, after 200 years, a clear victor in the Revolutionary battles can be declared: It is Furet himself. The Economist recently crowned Furet the "new monarch of French studies of the Revolution," and the critic George Steiner described him as "the impresario of 1789-1989."

Furet's analysis, developed in such books as The French Revolution (with Denis Richet, Macmillan, 1970) and Interpreting the French Revolution (Cambridge, 1977), rests on its crucial distinction "between the Revolution as a historical process, a set of causes and effects, and the Revolution as a mode of historical change, a specific dynamic."

In effect, Furet says, that revolutionary dynamic "invented" a new kind of political discourse, a new political sensibility. The achievement of the Revolution was "the institution of a new social experience...the formation of the modern sensibility and of the modern democratic spirit."

Furet's emphasis on this quiet revolution within the violent Revolution uncovers a dimension of history actually concealed by the actions of the revolutionaries, and it has influenced almost every historian working in the field today. Like Tocqueville, Furet stresses the long revolution within the short revolution. Moreover, by declaring that the long revolution has finally realized its goals—that "the Revolution is over"—Furet has written a history that appeals to today's prosperous Western democracies. As the New York Times commented, "His is a history for a happy bicentennial."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Titles in this bibliography were suggested by Donald Sutherland of the University of Maryland and R. Emmet Kennedy of The George Washington University.