



The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France

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For two hundred years, the Terror has haunted the imagination of the West. The descent of the French Revolution from rapturous liberation into an orgy of apparently pointless bloodletting has been the focus of countless reflections on the often malignant nature of humanity and the folly of revolution.

David Andress, a leading historian of the French Revolution, presents a radically different account of the Terror. In a remarkably vivid and page-turning work of history, he transports the reader from the pitched battles on the streets of Paris to the royal family's escape through secret passageways in the Tuileries palace, and across the landscape of the tragic last years of the Revolution. The violence, he shows, was a result of dogmatic and fundamentalist thinking: dreadful decisions were made by groups of people who believed they were still fighting for freedom but whose survival was threatened by famine, external war, and counter-revolutionaries within the fledgling new state. Urgent questions emerge from Andress's trenchant reassessment: When is it right to arbitrarily detain those suspected of subversion? When does an earnest patriotism become the rationale for slaughter?

Combining startling narrative power and bold insight, *The Terror* is written with verve and exceptional pace. It is a dramatic new interpretation of the French Revolution that draws troubling parallels with today's political and religious fundamentalism.

"A vivid and powerful narrative of the years 1789-95... The narrative is dense yet fast-moving, from the storming of the Bastille to the execution of King Louis XVI to the paranoid politics of the National Convention." --DAVID GILMOUR, *THE New York Times Book Review*

"In such alarming times, it is important to understand what exactly terror is, how it works politically, and what, if anything, can be done to combat it. The historian David Andress has made a serious contribution to this central subject of our times with an accessible account of the way terror overtook the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century." --RUTH SCURR, *The Times* (London)

DAVID ANDRESS, a leading historian of the French Revolution, is Reader in Modern European History at the University of Portsmouth and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France Details

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Paul says

Well-written, engaging account of the French Revolution's first stages (1789-1795) by an author who understands the relevance of their lessons for today's world. From the book:

"A final series of notes were taken from Saint-Just upon his arrest. ... the last note of all is telling: 'The misfortunes of the fatherland have spread across the whole country a sombre and religious hue. Silent reflection is necessary in these distressing times; it must form the disposition of every friend of the Republic.'

...

[W]e return to the present day ... Here, where the rights of citizens to be protected by the law, to be compensated for the slightest wrong (if they can find a good lawyer) and to pursue their personal freedoms – whether guaranteed by hallowed constitutional amendments or new-fangled Human Rights Acts - are taken for granted. Where governments are constantly chased in the name of Freedom of Information, and where the slightest personal failing of a legislator is dissected obsessively. 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 - as if we are to believe, like Saint-Just, in the unquestionable virtue of these legislators. To draw a comparison from Terror to 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, their earnest conviction of their own capacity to see clearly to the truth, and their stark certainty that devotion to the cause of liberty and justice licensed them to eliminate opposition by means beyond the rule of law.

It is the close parallels between our own age's concern with individual rights and the French Revolution's invocation of that concept that make the comparison yet more pointed. ... However awful the consequences, the revolutionaries clearly believed that they had something worth fighting for. Under the rule of Robespierre and Saint-Just ... Terror and liberty became inseparable within the political process. ... [I]t was enough to be 'free from' the tyranny of the aristocracy; being 'free to' act other than strictly patriotically was a nonsense to them.

We live in societies where the positive freedom to act as we wish is perhaps our central concern. ... Positive freedom to choose between an ever-widening spectrum of goods and services is maintained as an unqualified good, as consumer-citizens claim as their rights what the revolutionaries would have dismissed as selfish luxury bordering on debauchery. And at the same time, of course, choice in politics is confined to a narrowing spectrum of appropriately 'patriotic' viewpoints, for all but those prepared to expose themselves to vilification by stepping outside the mainstream. Protecting the unparalleled prosperity of the West is the unashamed goal of those who foster the continuing unchecked spread of the security state, with its increasingly autonomous ability to decide who is and who is not entitled to rights that we think we can take for granted. Saint-Just's final thoughts return unbidden."

'The misfortunes of the fatherland have spread across the whole country a sombre and religious hue. Silent reflection is necessary in these distressing times; it must form the disposition of every friend of the Republic.'

- Antoine-Leon Saint-Just

Daniel says

"Truth is better than fiction." Whoever first coined that term had to be thinking about the French Revolution. This is history at its finest.

johnny dangerously says

I highly recommend this book, but it is painfully dry and awkwardly paced. The writer goes on tangents-- and while I generally approve of that, the pacing is awkward enough to give a reader whiplash. Information is not broken up in a manner conducive to straight-forward reading, and one cannot absorb the information presented without a constant alertness that makes the reading experience uncomfortable, if not downright stressful. That said, the book has some fantastic political theorizing (in my opinion, and I am a biased party-- the ideals of the book pander to me to an almost painful extent) and some fantastic observations. They just have to be mined out of the rest of the book with effort that a better writer would have spared us. This is David Andress' first book for 'the general public', and while it shows, it also shows what an excellent mind Andress has for the politics of the French revolution. I look forward to his other books.

Rafael Cavalcanti says

O livro é excelente como fonte detalhada de informação sobre o período da Revolução Francesa, mas não é para iniciantes no assunto pela escrita bastante seca, minuciosa e às vezes maçante. Além disso, o autor envereda por uma ótica favorável à Revolução, não ocultando os horrores do Terror, mas minimizando seus crimes em prol de autodeclaradas boas intenções por parte dos revolucionários. A narrativa acaba comprometida com flagrantes conclusões equivocadas do autor, tratando os revolucionários como "patriotas", demonizando a contra-revolução e concedendo demasiada importância à Revolução para a evolução civilizacional do Ocidente. Por fim, a conclusão do autor é que as atrocidades do Terror foram apenas um atropelo, movido pelo medo, coitados, em meio aos ideais lindos e nobres dos revolucionários. Se o leitor já tiver algum conhecimento sobre o assunto, pode ser uma leitura que acrescente, do contrário, pode vir a ser mais material propagandístico do maior horror, do episódio mais desgraçado que se abateu sobre o França.

Josiah Sutton says

A comprehensive look at the Terror in 18th century France, Andress addresses the issue of using violence and suppression during political upheaval. The final conclusion is a fascinating comparison of current modern politics to principles of Terror. Definitely recommend this book for those interested in the French Revolution and those interested in Political Theory.

Denis says

I haven't read that many books about the French Revolution, but this one must rank among the very best ones. This is History at its best. Obviously Andress not only knows all that one can know about the events that followed 1789 in France, but he's also able to communicate them in a vivid way, and he understands what they mean and represent - as much for the people who lived through those days, as for us, because everything that happened then seems to be a terrifying mirror of what can happen today (and Andress clearly underlines that in his conclusion). As much as I knew about the French Revolution from what I learned at school in a Parisian suburb, Andress' book has opened my eyes about what took place. A few months ago I read the great novel *A Place of Greater Safety*, which also unfolds during the Terror: it showed me what happened from the inside. Andress, as a historian, shows me what happened from the outside - he analyzes every event that shaped the Terror not only in Paris but all over France in a direct, engaging, and extremely detailed way that has kept me captive more than one night. Some of the things he describes are horrifying: the scope of what the Terror really was appears here in its full scale, and it's not a pretty picture. But Andress never really judges, and he makes us feel how incredibly exciting, too, those times could be, and how intensely passionate about their beliefs all Revolutionaries were, no matter how excessive those beliefs often happened to be. The parallels with our times should be a lesson for many people, this book could also have been called *A Warning From the Past*.

José Luís Fernandes says

This is a very good introduction to the French Revolution and the Terror, namely on its political side, yet I hoped a bit more on the War of the First Coalition and the civil wars the Convention faced. That was important because of the subtitle and justify why the rating wasn't greater.

I also loved his reflections on the reasons for the Terror, which was the result of the demonization of all those opposing to Revolutionary, but above all, Jacobine ideals, coupled with the military and economic setbacks France suffered in 1792 and 1793 that made this radicalization as well as the reactionary answer to the Revolutionary state much easier, yet I felt both his introduction and conclusion focused too much in trying to get lessons for the modern world. That's highly troublesome in any historical work since it implies a greater dose of partisanship than usual in History (and there's inevitably a few of it since there aren't neutral historians).

Finally, I must say the translation was a bit odd at some points in grammatical terms and that there were also a few bits of misplaced ink at some pages, which isn't very professional from the editor.

Matt says

"If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amid revolution it is at the same time both virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue."

- Maximilien Robespierre (1794)

"I no longer desire to remain in a world covered with crime."

- from the suicide note of Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, written after his wife's beheading

One revolution deserves another, which is how I ended up reading David Andress' *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. It started this summer when I read a couple books on the American Revolution, both of which took pains to show the experience from the point of view of people who weren't rebelling. Told from that angle, America's break with Great Britain is an uglier, more complex tale. From there, I hopped over to Stalin, and his role in the massively destructive Russian Revolution. Once I finished that, it seemed only natural to circle back to France in the late 1700s. That's how I landed here, with this clearly written, well-paced, and relatively compact (377 pages of text) story of high ideals ending in the voluminous gush of arterial blood.

As I am often compelled to do on these pages, I must start by confessing my ignorance. I have read very little about the French Revolution. My main source of knowledge comes from Simon Schama's impressionistic *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, a book that served mainly to confuse me, and convince me to stay clear of the topic. (The fault was with me, not Schama; I was clearly in over my head). I know about the guillotine, and the sad ends of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, and I read *A Tale of Two Cities* eight years ago, but that's about it. I'm no expert. I don't even qualify as a novice.

There's a reason for that, though.

The French Revolution is a complicated historical subject. There is question and controversy about when it technically started, when it technically ended, and more importantly, what it all meant. There is a famous quip attributed to Chinese premiere Zhou Enlai. When asked about the impact of the French Revolution in 1972, Zhou reputedly said: "It is too soon to say." Of course, like many great bon mots, this story has been debunked (something was lost in translation, and Zhou was answering a different question than the one he heard); still, the notion holds true. The French Revolution was a convulsive event that is both celebrated and condemned, then and now, and there will never be a final word.

Andress' focus is not on the Revolution in toto. Instead, he takes on a slightly more manageable task by focusing on a period known as "the Terror." Though it defies precise definition, especially by me, the Terror was an interval of revolutionary violence. The king had been deposed, a republic was in the offing, and certain hard-line idealists believed the only way to ensure the nascent republic's survival was to destroy (often through judicial murder) anyone who might be opposed.

The narrative begins in June 1791, with the flight of Louis XVI and his family to Varennes. It ends with the death of Robespierre, an architect of the ideological purges that marked the Terror, and who was eventually consumed by the backlash to his bloody campaign. In between Andress covers the rise of the Revolutionary Tribunal, the September Massacres, and the wars that broke out all over France, between France and Europe, and between the French themselves. (The wars are covered in a wide-angled macro fashion. This is not anything close to a military history). He meticulously describes the deadly cycle of revolution and counterrevolution, as former allies become bitter enemies, and as factions fractured, regrouped, and fractured again.

As mentioned, this does not cover the whole of the Revolution. The opening stages are sketched in broad strokes, hitting the highlights. In a way, this made the book – and the French Revolution itself – more accessible. I got enough information to understand the chronology of events, and their results, without bogging down hopelessly in the details. Of course, this means that if you want the full accounting of the underlying problems in the monarchy, the calling of the Estates-General, and the storming of the Bastille, you will have to look elsewhere.

The narrative's ultimate achievement is in giving a certain level of clarity to the byzantine twists and turns of the Terror. That's not to say this is without style. Andress ably handles the high (meaning low) points, with an eye for detail that is both keen and skeptical, as in his description of Louis XVI's last moments:

On the scaffold...coatless and with his hair cropped, Louis attempted a speech. He declared himself once more innocent, but pardoned "those who have brought about my death," and seemed about to say more about the shedding of his blood...when Santerre ordered the drums to start up, and his words were drowned out. The executioners moved Louis swiftly into the machinery of death: he was strapped to a tilting plank, which dropped his head into a brace, and the blade of the guillotine plunged from above. Death in this manner was undoubtedly quick, and more painless than other forms of execution, though debate continued in medical circles about whether the head retained consciousness for a few seconds as it dropped into the basket. One or two accounts of Louis' death suggest the blade did not sever his whole neck in one go, and had to be borne down on by the executioner to get a clean cut. With his spine severed already, it is nevertheless unlikely that Louis could have uttered the "terrible cry" that one account claims.

Throughout, Andress attempts to provide an accurate depiction of fraught moments. This was a time of frantic passions, and the contemporary propaganda – bursting with violence and sexuality – is the equal of anything found on the dark corners of the internet today. The truth had a way of quailing before the legend. Andress pays special attention to the myths, outrageous accusations, and hyperbolic accounts that still loom so large in the historical record. When a scene is exaggerated – as, for instance, with the death of Princess de Lamballe – he provides a corrective. He is not an apologist, though, and makes that very plain.

Andress is a French Revolution expert. In the author bio, *The Terror* is described as his first book for "general readership." As a general reader, I can certainly vouch that! The thing I loved most about *The Terror* is how seriously it took its mission to guide me through the thickets of the past. There is a glossary, just in case you start to confuse the Jacobins with the Girondins. There is an annotated timeline, which provides a nice bit of overarching structure. And there is a *dramatis personae* complete with mini-bios, just in case you forgot the importance of Georges Danton (though Danton, with his rapier wit, is hard to forget).

It is clear that Andress has thought a lot about his subject, and that comes through in his perceptions. I liked when he took a step back and tried to figure out what was going on, while keeping an open mind.

On both sides of the gulf between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, the persistent assumption was that one's enemies, be they "men of faction," *aristocrates*, or "fanatics," were consciously and manipulatively seeking to do evil. Some harked back to the common assumptions about the politics of royal courts: that public service was an avenue for private gain through patronage and favor; that opposition to royal policy was treacherous; that the wickedness of ministers was the appropriate element to emphasize when mounting opposition; and that, ultimately, nothing happened in politics without some factional, manipulative agenda at work.

When Andress published this in 2005, he tailored his conclusions to that historical moment, specifically the

rise of the security state. Much of it and more still rings true today. This, I suppose, is part of the allure of studying the French Revolution. It may still be too soon to know its meaning, but never too late to learn its lessons.

Aidan says

Wholly tedious read. Unfocused text with no clear coherence. Not a good book to get on the subject.

This author does not write clearly. He delves on too many insignificant details and persons of lesser importance you've never heard of. His text is a labyrinth to wade through. It's full of distracting terms and titles that contribute little to the understanding of what the author is trying to get at. Most of the attention is on the politics of the day than anything else, and even that attention is dry and confusing.

It's one of those texts where you can read through a whole page and not understand a single thing being said in it. In the end, a lot of times you have to go back and re-read whole paragraphs, because this is how badly it's been written.

Lisa Christian says

This book is one of the best overviews of the Terror that I have ever read. And the easiest to read. I first discovered this gem when researching for my thesis on the development of women's citizenship during the French Revolution. I needed a refresher on the Terror, but a work that would examine the Terror from the inside out - allow historical documents and actions speak for themselves rather than being molded to an author's agenda. Andress's "The Terror" did just that. He allows those who experienced the Terror explain the Terror.

Even though Andress did not focus on women in particular, I found that I understood the origins of the Terror and its effects on each segment of the society, especially how sans-cullottes women who supported the Jacobin take over went from a unique place of political power to suppression and physical and political exile.

Indeed, Andress's work allowed me to better articulate my own theory of female citizenship as both active and passive during this time, how that citizenship evolved and was acted in the public sphere.

"The Terror" was also a fascinating read. I could hardly put it down and I would (and do) return to it again and again.

Hotrats says

Too academic for me but very fascinating. They didn't teach this in high school history class.

Steve. g says

This is a fantastic subject and I love reading about it. David Andress starts 'The Terror' with two big claims. One is that the conclusion to Simon Schama's brilliant book 'Citizens', that the revolution was just about violence, is not good enough, and two, that the French Revolution like the American Revolution before it was a step forward on the road to civil rights and liberty and that the struggles that were fought were the beginning of modern politics as we recognize them and that the central ideas of Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism were born out of this particular revolutionary process.

Unfortunately the book that follows this doesn't address these ideas. At no point does the author attempt to show how these occur short of telling the reader that they did occur.

Absent all violence from the French revolution and there was no underlying triumph of liberty. There is no magna carta liberatum, no Declaration of Independence, no "I have a dream", no "You can't handle the truth!!" moment in the French Revolution. There's the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the citizen' of course but this was never actually used. It was shelved the moment it was actually needed as it acted as a bit of a mood killer during the hysterical rampaging, but was forever held up as an ideal of what France could look like once the cleansing was done. It was not recognition of natural rights but 'rights' as a gift of the state. The state would grant these rights to everyone once all enemies of the state were destroyed.

The 'Terror' is, I think, written in defense of the idea of a Revolution, not the one that happened, that was an absolute mess, but in defense of the prospect of a republic of ideals and dreams and sentiment and virtue and nothing not even the nonappearance of that promised republic, will sway him from its defense.

To prove that the revolution wasn't just about violence we find it itemized. Revolutionary; justified and sadly understandable and frankly they had it coming. Counter-revolutionary; baffling and crazy. Anywhere-where that the revolutionary violence gets barbaric we find that, well, other people do bad things as well... this is a principal free zone.

It's taken as read here that the Republicans' revolutionary hearts are driven by liberty and equality because they say they are, despite all their actions seemingly being driven by ego, pride and hatred. We find people massacring their way across the country described as 'patriots' and those defending their own families' farms and way of life labelled 'guerrillas'.

(216)' In September, a representative sent to Nantes was warned (by the committee of Public Safety) that "we can be human only when we are assured of victory".'

'The control of violence, if it meant on the one hand preventing aimless popular vengeance, meant on the other channelling the energies and fears behind the threat of such vengeance into supposedly more purposive, but sometimes little less bloody initiatives.'

Whatever that means in real terms! Lord help the peasant on the receiving end of that beating.

There's a tangible spin to most episodes. An acceptance that a certain amount of blood needs to be spilled if you want to further the cause of equality; that equality is a state to be physically made and not a state of mind to be understood and freely entered into.

(236)'...there were only 104 executions in Bordeaux, although there were many more cases of fines handed down to the rich, imprisonment of suspects and other penalties. The population of Bordeaux was bullied, and some individuals paid a high price for their crimes, but overall, in this phase of the terror at least, the city

was not brutalised.'

The 104 executees and their families to one side one wonders how many random executions it would take for the author to describe it all as brutal.

All around evil prevails and order falls away and constantly throughout the book the author cajoles you to keep the idea in mind that no matter what takes place before your eyes important things are at work here. This is kind of hinted at in the title of the book 'Terror; Civil War in the French Revolution'.. as if it was an unfortunate diary mix-up rather than one being directly the cause of the other. 'Oh no!', someone has invited us out for a meal on my bowling night!!' This feels like a deliberate deception and reads like it, and once you feel that grip on your arm you can never quite shake it off.

(195)'It would be two months before the deputies re-entered the city, this time with troops, and the aimless and pointless defiance of Bordeaux's well-heeled youth would earn them nothing but harsh treatment.'

Darn those aimless and pointless youths...

The author seems to think that society is on a one way evolutionary path, that crisis is an ingredient of progress. I think that a countries decent into chaos is a bad sign, he thinks that it is an essential step in its rising fortunes.

He thinks that that rioting - no matter how it's fermented- is the purest form of democratic expression.....except of course when it's not.

Here we find the young Frenchmen who decide that they liked their lives just how they were..

(202)'Many young men found the only way to evade the call of the Republic was to join guerrilla bands ('Chouans')that had flourished in the densely hedge bound bocage landscape since those protests.'

'..Evade the call of the republic' being a sweet way to say avoid being killed by the Republicans.

'In their heartlands, most chouans never-the -less remained integrated members of their communities until the time came to stage raid or a retaliation.'

Look away now gentle reader.

'In the meantime, the chouans traded in fear and the humiliation of isolated patriots. In late 1793, one outraged individual reported that he had been made to climb the local church tower and cry vive Louis XVII!!'

'Much about this pattern of chouan activity indicates clearly that they were attempting to defend a pre-existing set of local community norms against the alien republican values of those they fervently denounced as ...intruders.'

'pre-existing local community norms'!?Why would you say such a thing?

On page one the author says of Soviet communism, *'(itself of course originally a project to better the lot of the oppressed)'*. This is potty. It is literally impossible to entertain that idea in 2015 but he seems to hope that you will.

If though, by champion of the oppressed, he means that all reactionary peoples and races will be destroyed in

the revolutionary inferno then fine but otherwise it was not quite the same thing at all.

(Workers of the world unite up alongside that freshly dug trench please; you have nothing to lose but your heads....)

This is a fundamental flaw, a slight of hand, that you can slaughter your way to purity and that you can nationalize the conscience of a people.

The Rights of Man does not contain the profound truth of the Declaration of Independence. Aside from the fact that it was rights for an elite cadre alone, all rights are subject to the requirements of the state. A gift to be recognized when all the factors and indicators are aligned which is no gift at all.

When the lawyers and journalists of the Jacobin emote about their honour and patriotism and equality and fraternity it's done because it's all about their 'freedom'. And they talk about everyone else's freedom in the same way that a ransom note talks about freedom. ie; It's heavily qualified.

For all the sentimentalising of their own honour and purity there no speech quoted, no argument in favour of the republic they could build together just invective against everyone who questioned the purity of the one on offer. A slow noose, a tightening grip, a bullying violence, a malevolent hatred against all objectors and a reach for mass murder. These are not the first signs of the rosy fingered dawn of Liberty...It's the incubation of a state sponsored death cult.

(44) 'From this came two themes that would drive the Revolution relentlessly forward from now on, a belief in the need for more change to consolidate what had gone before , and a growing and an increasingly violent willingness to engage in open conflict with the ever swelling ranks of the perceived 'counter revolution'.

(237)'On the 4th Dec sixty men were chained together and blasted with grapeshot on the plaine de Brotteaux outside the city, and 211 more on the following day. Grotesquely ineffective, these mitrailleades resulted in heaps of mutilated, screaming half dead victims, who had to be finished off with sabres and musket fire by soldiers physically sickened at the task. The political abstractions of the peoples justice did not translate well to reality; as the Commission wrote, 'this method has not had the execution that one would have desired', and 'other more sure means' should be adopted. More normal firing squads supplemented the guillotine in future, in carrying out over 1800 executions in the coming months.'

'The political abstractions of the people's justice did not translate well to reality.'

I'm not saying that the book does not detail the squalid thuggery but it's written as if it all has a purpose above that and is a means to a noble end and he writes as if, teething problems aside, the political abstractions prevailed.

In the authors hierarchy of values it's better for the people to live under a revolutionary, centralising, self-fascinated, thought police state than it is to live under a bankrupt, indifferent, outmoded imperial court. Is it? Who knows? I don't, but Jeanette and Jean are never consulted. We are locked into the Communes and Sections and Jacobins deliberations as if they are the prime source of truth and liberty. It would have made more sense of the violence if we index linked it to the price of bread, but making sense of the violence is not our aim, so we don't.

The peasants here are an intellectuals dream from socialist central casting. With heads of doe and fists of steel who rise up!, rise up! at the revolutionary words of Marat or Robespierre and then once the revolutionary leaders attain actual power any price fixing riot or discord is discounted as Pitt inspired

ingratitude and it would be better for all parties if the peasants would shut up and get on with their peasanting.

The author invites us not to draw our own conclusions.

(262) *‘..none of this, however, is conclusive evidence for anything. What it should remind us is that the republic of the 1790s was not a modern police state, despite the ambitions of the law of 14 frimaire. The surveillance of individuals was almost impossible to maintain consistently. The network of police agents that the government ran were most effective when simply listening in to public conversation in cafes and bread-queues....’*

(296) *‘We must again remember that France in 1794 was not a modern police state, still less a totalitarian dictatorship.’*

Well they were as modern as they could be.

It wasn't just the church's lands, authority and influence that the new state coveted, it had a distrust of any authority other than its own and an ambition to colonise the private sphere in every individual. New absolution would come via patriotism and patriotism was solely the realm and by definition of the state. It was not love of country but love of government. Not love of neighbour but suspicion of anyone who diverges. Love of some abstract pure tomorrow that makes death today the swiftest and most efficient way to installing peace by force, which requires of the individual a sacrifice for progress and argues that evolution requires extinction. An ends to means dilemma overcome by all the 20th centuries year zero revolutionaries Lenin, Hitler, Mao and Pol Pot with the same predictably horrific outcomes.

‘That's enough mother! Be quiet!’ shouted Gamelin, ‘what's it matter if we suffer hardships for a short while? The Revolution is going to make the whole human race happy for ever and ever!’ (The Gods will have blood. Anatole France)

Well it didn't do that, in fact it achieved none of its aims. It did not bring about Equality, Fraternity or Liberty. It did not bring about a Republic either but was followed soon by a military dictatorship and all out European war. It did not end the monarchy, Louis XVI was followed by the XVII then by Emporer Napoleon who was followed by a Louis XVIII another Napoleon and a Louis-Napoleon. This wasn't some great societal schism it was a brilliantly violent interlude to business as usual.

Simon Schama's book *Citizens* is far, far better.

Jeff says

Really good introduction to the French Revolution but sometimes it does get a little difficult to read. The author has included a nice glossary of terms and biographies of important persons, so if you are confused it is easy to look things up.

Dave says

The writing is not great, but it gets four stars because of the author's approach to the subject. Rather than finger wag in a 'I would have done better fashion' (a fault as prevalent in historians as it is in humanity) Andress attempts to understand the Terror from the inside out. He takes a sober look at the threats facing France as a result of the Revolution. He explains without explaining away the evil.

Indeed, the French Revolution was 'too big to fail,' and that may have been part of the reason for the terrible measures they took to preserve it.(less)

Alexandra Butterworth says

The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France by David Andress is an extensive analysis of politics, corruption, constant upheaval, and death. Andress spells out the build-up, peak, and decline of the Terror in order for the reader to answer the very important questions he presents in his introduction. After presenting his initial argument of: the legitimacy of dehumanizing your enemies, detaining anyone suspect, and if terror is justifiable as a way of fixing internal and external problems; he states that the French Revolution and the American Revolution began on the same grounding during the Age of Reason. He also points out that the French and American Revolution death toll based on population and emigrates were hardly any different. At first, as a reader, that is a stunning comparison, but it is a comparison that should be more often made. While the revolutions were started on the same grounds, the two diverge completely. Yet, both ending success. If taking into the account that the Americans were fighting off a colonial power for freedom and the French were fighting off an entire social order hundreds of years old with all of Europe up in arms to stop them; it is fair to say that they succeeded. Those varying degrees of success are what is addressed throughout the rest of the chapters. Starting with the Flight of Varennes.

The flight itself was poorly planned and further demonstrated to the people Louis's intentions towards agreeing to the new government and validated their lack of faith in him as their leader. After attempting to rally his people to his aid during his capture, he realized his pleas fell upon deaf ears (Andress 36). Louis was escorted by armed ordinary Frenchmen back to a Paris that will soon spiral into regicide and shortly thereafter, terror. Upon arriving back to Paris, the Royal family fully understood the hatred of the people. Though the people of Paris could not express their agitation, their lack of manners when the carriage passed showed it. This flight not only validated the peoples' hatred but also revealed the difference in ideology for the Revolutionaries.

The new belief in the more radical form of politics within the National Assembly was now threatening the revolution that was initially created. Most of the country was willing to let the National Assembly judge the matter (Andress 50), but what kind of example should be made when dealing with Royal Family? Some, during this time, still wanted a monarch without the previous absolute power. Lafayette was actually trying to help save the monarchy by suggesting to Austria that they cease hostilities in order for him to restore peace. Ironically, Marie Antoinette alerted the authorities to his plan because she had no desire to be rescued by a man she so heartedly despised (Andress 78). As you can imagine, the authorities didn't take well to the news and hostilities increased resulting in the September Massacres and the death of Princess de Lamballe.

The French National Convention was elected when France was still a monarchy but its first decree abolished it. The Convention was divided between the radical Montagnards, the less radical Girondins, and those in

the middle. This created extreme differences in opinion, especially, when deciding on Louis's fate. In the end it was decided by (not really) one more than half of the votes that Louis was to be sent to the guillotine. The Convention started republicanism in France but it also allowed regicide and eventually evoked the Terror.

The Convention continued to be the leading authority during the reign of Terror along with the Committee of Public Safety lead by Robespierre; both unrestricted by checks and balances. Decrees were passed that ex-nobles and clergy were suspect and could be deprived of civil rights. They ordered the death of the duc d'Orléans and many others including Marie Antoinette as they started to purge the government of people who weren't revolutionary enough (the previous radicals). People such as Danton, Desmoulins, and Philippeaux who had been a part of the revolution since its beginning are now seen as counter-revolutionary and executed.

After a series of bad decrees by Robespierre, like dechristianizing the people, led to his downfall. He was deemed an outlaw. Couthon, a supporter of Robespierre who was also arrested, proposed summoning armies to their aid but that idea was lost when the Convention's forces came to arrest them. Robespierre attempted to take his own life but only succeeded in shattering his jaw and leaving himself in agony. As his bandage was torn from his face to fit into the guillotine, he screamed in agony only to be silenced by the machine he used to silence countless others. As Andress's book comes to an end the reader watches the fall of the Republic and the Convention into the hands of Napoleon who eventually crowned himself Holy Roman Emperor.

The Terror was a book that leaves the reader thinking. What all has the French Revolution influenced? Were the people involved all villains or were there many more shades of grey than the reader started the book out believing there were? While it succeeds in Andress's goal to make you think about the questions he presented in the introduction, it does leave the reader reeling from the information taken in. It was definitely a monster to tackle; one that is hard to fathom reading without any prior knowledge of the French Revolution or the Terror even with the provided time line, glossary, and list of characters. Andress's tactics in explaining the Terror and all its components were very thorough but lacked the voice and tone of a writer that makes reading a book like this more fun. Thus, rendering it difficult for readers with no prior knowledge to follow along since it is presented in such a way that it has no real perspective. Instead it is the perspective. There was no right or wrong, Andress simply lays out the history in a fashion that lets you decide what the reader thinks on their own without him telling the reader his opinion. That is completely respectable and why anyone who wants to read a book about the politics and complete history of the Terror should read this book. If someone want to read something with a definite point of view on the Terror they should be steered elsewhere. With that being said it was a fantastic, detailed window into the politics of the Terror and should be given its due recognition.
