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RELATED TOPICS

Barnave	Lafayette	Robespierre
Clubs and Popular Societies	Louis XVI	Sans-culottes
Danton	Marat	Sovereignty
Enragés	Montagnards	Staël
Federation	Necker	Terror
Girondins	Paris Commune	Varennes
Hébertists		

TERROR

On September 5, 1793, the Convention made "the Terror" the order of the day. By this action it signaled its intention to organize, systematize, and accelerate repression of the Republic's domestic adversaries and to ensure quick punishment of "all traitors." But this blunt and candid declaration, this inaugural vote of the Terror, came in unusual circumstances. That morning, the sans-culottes had invaded the Assembly demanding both bread and the guillotine—the guillotine in order to have bread. What they wanted, and what they would obtain a few days later, was a "revolutionary army" of the interior, intended to strike terror in the hearts of hoarders and enemies of the Republic with the aid of a terrifying machine that would be part of its standard equipment, "the fatal instrument that with one blow cuts short both conspiracies and the lives of their authors." Shortly thereafter, a delegation of Jacobins offered a version of the same rhetoric less directly concerned with bread: those to be guillotined were "traitors." It was in order to give official satisfaction to the Paris militants that the Committee of Public Safety declared the Terror to be the order of the day.

The circumstances surrounding this celebrated vote indicate that before becoming a set of repressive institutions used by the Republic to liquidate its adversaries and establish its domination on a basis of fear, the Terror was a demand based on political convictions or beliefs, a characteristic feature of the mentality of revolutionary activism.

As such, it predated the dictatorship of Year II, the Republic, and the war with Europe. It had existed since the early summer of 1789, along with the related idea that the Revolution was threatened by an aristocratic plot that only prompt measures could thwart. The popular violence that engulfed Paris on July 14 was an early consequence of the partly economic, partly political logic that characterized the actions of the Paris crowd; the murder of the minister Foullon de Doué on July 22, followed by the murder of his son-in-law Bertier de Sauvigny, the intendant of Paris, was a summary punishment that temporarily quieted the obsession with grain hoarding and the Versailles plot. In September the terrorist idea found in *L'ami du peuple* and its publisher Marat its newspaper and its champion. The man whom the people of Paris led back to their city on October 6 was less a king than a hostage: in the return of "the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy" the people saw a guarantee that Paris would henceforth be supplied with food as well as an assurance that they would at last be able to monitor the king's activities and the maneuvers of the queen and the royal entourage.

This general, systematic suspicion was inextricably associated with a

persistent overestimation of the degree to which the enemy's strategy was deliberate and his resources were limitless. The plot drew substance from the idea of the enemy's omnipotence, which only the people could thwart. In its crudest form this image existed among the lower orders of the urban population, but it was also present in the minds of many deputies, since it was rooted in the new political culture: just as the Revolution was the reversal whereby the people reappropriated a power previously alienated to the king and to God, the political universe that it inaugurated was populated solely by wills, so that henceforth nothing remained outside human control. The new realm of power was occupied entirely by the people, which through its actions had reclaimed inalienable rights. Yet the people continued to be menaced by an anti-power, which like the nation was abstract, omnipresent, and all-enveloping, but which was hidden where the nation was public, individual where the nation was universal, and harmful where the nation was good. This anti-power was thus the negative, the inverse, the anti-principle of the nation. Such was the fantastic nature of revolutionary society's discourse on power, and it made the aristocratic plot one of the central figures of the revolutionary mentality. It was almost infinitely malleable, apt at interpreting every circumstance, and sustained most of all by ambiguities in the royal attitude.

Traces of the obsession with a plot can also be found, in less caricatural form than with Marat or the Cordeliers, in the words of deputies of the Constituent Assembly, where even at this early date the Assembly encouraged the notion that in case of public emergency it might be necessary to limit human rights. Consider, for example, the February 1790 debate on the right to emigrate: Mesdames, the aunts of Louis XVI, had been arrested on their way to Rome by local authorities in Burgundy. This led to a debate in the Assembly, ultimately resolved in favor of Mesdames by invoking the rights of man, but tested by a strong contrary case that invoked the national emergency. In the following year, the king's flight to Varennes and return to Paris publicly demonstrated the royal family's true sentiments; this minor plot—ill conceived and ill executed—was construed by revolutionary opinion as proof of the great plot, universal, omnipresent, and omnipotent. The Revolution had really already ceased to have a true constitutional king, despite the temporary fiction of an "abduction." Yet it made of this vanquished, captive, but reinstated monarch a formidable enemy, soon supported by all the kings of Europe.

The war raised both the stakes and the fears. It erased the line between opposition and treason once and for all. It turned nobles and refractory priests into enemies of the fatherland. It quickly dissolved what was left of the royal fiction after the Varennes episode, but not even the fall of the king on August 10 diminished the perceived threat to the Revolution from the conspiracy of external enemies and domestic traitors. On the contrary, the six weeks that separated the fall of the Tuileries from the meeting of the Convention on September 20 marked the entry of the Terror into revolutionary politics.

But the Terror was not yet the policy of the Revolution. For the Legislative Assembly was now only a caretaker regime, and real power had passed

to the victors of August 10: the Paris Commune, composed of the former Insurrectional Committee, rounded out through carefully contrived elections to a complement of nearly three hundred members representing the cream of Parisian militancy. Under pressure from the Commune the Legislative Assembly voted on August 17 to establish a special tribunal and declared refractory priests to be criminals. Under the Commune's direct authority the Paris sections organized themselves as surveillance committees, conducting searches and making arrests. The punishment of the "guilty" was the order of the day. By the end of August the bad news from the frontiers heightened the siege mentality and the obsession with punishment, which were responsible for the massacres of prisoners by mobs in Paris between September 2 and September 6.

This baleful episode illustrates the psychological and political mechanism of the Terror. The victims were mostly common law prisoners (nearly three-quarters of the more than a thousand killed), while the murderers were the victors of August 10: shopkeepers, artisans, national guards, *fédérés*, motivated by their obsession with treason. No orders, no identifiable instructions, came from above. The press poured oil on the fire, and the idea of liquidating traitors was of course an old refrain of Marat's, but the crowd needed no visible leader to conduct a slaughter arranged to look like a rough parody of justice. Danton, the minister of justice, did not intervene, and even the Girondin Roland wrote on September 3: "Yesterday was a day over whose events a veil should probably be thrown." A few weeks later, the September massacres would become a theme in the political battle between Girondins and Montagnards. At the time, however, the politicians of the Revolution endured the event as one accepts the inevitable.

In fact, the Terror was gradually established as a repressive system organized from above and institutionalized during the year 1793, as the Montagnards turned to activists in the Paris sections for support in taking control of the Revolution. The question whether the king's trial and execution formed the prelude to or even the first act of the Terror is not easy to answer. One may agree with Kant that the answer should be "yes" if one sees the death of Louis XVI as an illegal violation of the constitutional contract by the Convention. Or one may answer "no," along with Michelet, if one views the trial as the solemn affirmation of the new sovereignty of the people, incompatible with the old sovereignty of the king. The fact remains that the judgment and execution of Louis XVI were extensively and minutely debated and did not entail creation of emergency institutions.

However firm their legal underpinnings, the king's trial and execution did nevertheless signal a key political victory for the Mountain. Since September the Girondins had been banking on relaxation of repressive and coercive measures. The Montagnards relied on their alliance with militants in the sections and on the implementation of a terrorist policy. January 21 was a great symbolic victory for that strategy. In the spring, Dumouriez's military failures (followed by his defection to the enemy), the start of the Vendée war, and economic difficulties in Paris made it possible to move further in the direction of such a policy.

On March 11 the Convention established a Revolutionary Tribunal; on March 21 it set up the Committees of Surveillance, responsible at the local level for keeping an eye on "suspects," a category largely left to the committees' judgment; on March 28 laws against émigrés were codified and strengthened, depriving those who emigrated of their property and providing for the death penalty if they returned to France. The philosophy behind these measures was well summarized by Danton, who had in mind the September massacres: "Let us be terrible in order to dispense the people from being so." The expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention on June 2 hastened the evolution toward terror by offering, in response to sans-culotte demands, an additional—and important—reward. Both domestic and foreign situations at the beginning of the summer justified a dictatorship by the committees and the dispatch of representatives with extraordinary powers to the rebellious provinces and the armies—measures outside common law. But once again it was the invasion of the Assembly by sectional militants on September 5 that placed the Terror on the agenda.

The Terror was from that point on a system of government, or rather, an essential part, the arm, of the revolutionary government. Its administrative structure was simple. At the top were the two committees, especially the Committee of General Security, whose responsibilities included surveillance and police. At the grass roots was a vast network of local revolutionary committees responsible for identifying and arresting "suspects" and issuing certificates of civism. These were complementary tasks, since any grounds for not issuing such a certificate were also grounds for declaring a person "suspect," that is, an enemy of the regime or merely a potential adversary, a fence-sitter. A wave of denunciations took advantage of this incitement by public authority. "Suspects" were judged by special courts; the principal one was the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris, created in March 1793 and reorganized in September to accelerate its operations. Divided into four sections, two of which functioned simultaneously, it comprised sixteen examining magistrates, a jury of sixty, and a public prosecutor with a staff of assistants, all named by the Convention on nomination by the two committees. The subordination of the court to political power was thus a matter of principle: trial was quick and judges lacked independence; deliberations were hasty and in fact limited to three days by an October decree intended to hamper the defense of the Girondin deputies. The autonomy of the Tribunal consisted in its power to free certain of the accused. Otherwise the stakes were life or death, for it was not long before judgments were reduced to just two: acquittal or execution. Verdicts were rendered by majority vote after secret deliberation, but in the March decree it was stipulated that judges "state their opinions out loud." Michelet and later Louis Blanc commented: "The Terror was in this phrase more than in the whole project."

But the Terror was not contained in any one institution, no matter how symbolic. It was also a ubiquitous means of government, through which the revolutionary dictatorship of Paris would make its iron hand felt everywhere, in the provinces and in the armies. It was exercised by way of "the revolution-

ary army" created in September, a great reserve of activists under the authority of the sans-culotte Ronsin, a political gendarmerie that, keeping one eye on hoarders and the other on the notorious "suspects," represented the Paris sections in every town and village in the Republic. Its chief operative was the *représentant en mission*, designated by the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety to organize the victory of the Revolution on the frontiers and exterminate the enemies of the Republic in the regions in revolt against or at war with Paris. He had full powers to establish special courts or courts-martial to hasten the work of repression, not to mention the even more expeditious justice meted out in the form of mass executions, as in Lyons and the Vendée. The Terror thus operated through a motley fabric of improvised institutions; special courts modeled after the one in Paris were established in Arras, Cambrai, Brest, Rochefort, and Toulouse in the winter of 1793–94. But most of the organs of repression were "extraordinary commissions," civilian or military, created ad hoc in the civil war zones and rendering judgments from which there was no appeal. It was not until the spring of 1794 that the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris began asserting its jurisdiction over an increasing number of cases of counterrevolutionary crime. The laws of 27 Germinal (April 16) and 19 Floréal (May 8) capped this development by granting the Paris tribunal exclusive jurisdiction.

This spring of 1794—a year after the creation of the Tribunal—was also the time of the administrative institutionalization of the Terror through the dreadful law of 22 Prairial (June 10), the draft of which is in Couthon's hand. A majority of the personnel serving the Tribunal were replaced, beginning with the public ministry, which had been headed from the beginning by Fouquier-Tinville. The novelty of the law lay in its redefinition of the mission and lethal omnipotence of the redoubtable court. Its fourth article stated that the Tribunal "is instituted to punish the enemies of the people." More political than juridical, this definition prefaced procedures that were more expeditious than judicial. The text eliminated the *instruction*, or preliminary investigation (article 12), and permitted charges to be brought merely on the basis of denunciations (article 9); it deprived the accused of the assistance of an attorney (article 16) and transformed the hearing into a mere formality by eliminating the examination of witnesses. Article 13 stated: "If material evidence exists independent of the testimony of witnesses, the witnesses will not be heard." Robespierre, who presided over the session of 22 Prairial, mounted the Assembly rostrum to defend his loyal Couthon against those few members of the Convention who were frightened by the nature of this revolutionary justice: "We shall brave the perfidious insinuations of excessive severity with which some have sought to attack measures prescribed by the public interest. This severity is redoubtable only to conspirators, only to enemies of liberty."

The law of 22 Prairial was rescinded in the wake of 9 Thermidor. Deprived of its political source of energy and detested by public opinion, the Revolutionary Tribunal ceased its activities. Though later reorganized, it had permanently lost the quasi-legitimacy and frightful utility it had derived for

sixteen months from the idea of a government of exception, with terror the order of the day.

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From this rise and fall arises a new set of questions, which have less to do with the institutions of revolutionary Terror than with their role and consequences. It is best to begin once again with Paris and with what information we have about the Revolutionary Tribunal. Examination of the monthly summaries of its activities from its inception to the fall of Robespierre reveals that between March and September of 1793 the Tribunal's work was curtailed, though already its verdicts were limited to either death or acquittal: five to fifteen death sentences were handed down each month, compared with a far greater number of acquittals. The number of "cases" rose sharply in October, that is, just after the measures that followed the *sans-culotte journée* of September 5—measures that made Terror the order of the day, established the law of suspects, and reorganized the Tribunal and replaced its personnel. Actually it was in September that the number of judges was raised from five to sixteen and the number of jurors from twelve to sixty. The personnel of the March 10 tribunal had been completely replaced, with hardly anyone left in place other than the public prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville and his two lieutenants. Oversight by the two committees became discretionary. The figures reveal what a spur these changes were to repression: 193 accused went to the guillotine in the final two months of autumn and through early January. Among these "counterrevolutionaries" were not only Marie Antoinette, Mme. Elisabeth, the duc de Biron (who was ex-general of the Armies of the Republic), and the former duc d'Orléans (who in vain had taken up the new name Philippe-Egalité), but also all the Girondins arrested or declared suspect since springtime, with Brissot and Vergniaud leading the way, followed by the remains of what had been the Feuillant group along with Bailly and Barnave. The guillotine exorcised the Revolution's past at the same time as it felled the Ancien Régime.

By autumn the Tribunal was already judging more than a hundred suspects per month but still acquitting more than half of them. Then, in March, as the prisons filled with suspects and the number of accused to be tried continued to increase, the proportion of death penalties rose, and this change was soon followed by a dizzying rise in the actual number of trials. The causes of the two phenomena were different. The first had to do with the sharpening of factional struggle in the first few months of 1794 and the radicalization of conflicts for power, which led in the end to the guillotine first for the Hébertists and later for the Dantonists (late March—early April): death became the universal sanction for political conflict. The second was, in essence at any rate, the result of the previously mentioned decree of 27 Germinal, carried on a motion by Saint-Just, which centralized revolutionary justice in Paris. This evolution culminated in the law of 22 Prairial, which completed the mechanism of the judicial Terror; nearly 700 judgments were handed down in Prairial and nearly 1,000 in Messidor (June 21–July 21), and together these judg-

ments resulted in close to 800 executions. The Paris prisons were overpopulated; they housed over 8,000 "suspects" at the beginning of Thermidor. Only the fall of Robespierre on the ninth (July 27) halted the endless procession of tumbrils that historians have baptized the "Great Terror."

This summary of the results of the Terror in Paris, based on data from the Revolutionary Tribunal, may usefully be compared with a statistical study, published in 1935 by the American historian Donald Greer, of victims of the Terror nationwide. Confirming two earlier works, Greer arrives at a figure of 16,600 victims executed after being sentenced to death by a revolutionary court of justice (including, as we have just seen, 2,625 in Paris). The number of arrests from March 1793 to the end of July 1794 was far higher, probably close to a half-million: this figure gives some idea of the shock caused by a repressive wave of these dimensions. It also indicates that there were not only acquittals but also, occasionally, penalties other than the death sentence, as well as "suspects" who languished in prison until 9 Thermidor without being tried. The Terror's victims came from all levels of society, with each conflict producing its own characteristic shadings: more peasants in the Vendée, more bourgeois in Paris, Lyons, and Nîmes. In proportion to their relatively small numbers, the upper classes and clergy were comparatively hard-hit.

Greer's chronological graph of executions nationwide shows low or very low figures during the spring and summer of 1793, exactly as in Paris. But what followed was different: the number of death sentences peaks sharply in December 1793 and January 1794, with nearly 3,500 executions in each of these two months. The tragic curve drops below 1,000 from February to May and then climbs again in June and July until 9 Thermidor. The difference between these figures and those from the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris is thus concentrated in the middle of the period, in the months of December and January, when the Terror was at its height in the provinces. This chronology suggests a first comprehensive interpretation.

If we can agree that the Terror began in March 1793 with the creation of the Revolutionary Tribunal and the first measures of public safety, then its least bloody period—indeed not very bloody at all—was the spring and summer of 1793. This was also the Republic's most critical period. The Prussians and Austrians took Condé, Valenciennes, and Mainz in July, and the domestic situation was catastrophic, with the federalist revolt, the victorious Vendean peasants, and the royalist insurgents in control of Lyons, Marseilles, and Toulon, to say nothing of the Paris sections' threats to the Convention. By contrast, when the number of death sentences and executions began to rise sharply in October, the Republic had been saved on the northern frontier by the battles of Hondschoote (September 8) and Wattignies (October 16). Lyons was retaken on October 9, and the Grand Army of the Vendean peasants was defeated at Cholet on October 17. Made the order of the day on September 5, the Terror, when viewed in relation to the war, both foreign and civil, seems to have been a belated response to a situation that had already begun to improve. The diagnosis is still more obvious if we take into consideration the fact that executions reached a peak in December and January and then resumed with even greater ferocity in the spring under Robespierre's personal

dictatorship, at a time when the Revolution faced no more threats at home and the armies of the Republic were taking the offensive on the borders; the law of Prairial and the "Great Terror" have lost any semblance of a connection with public safety.

This paradox can be understood with the aid of two examples, which help us to move beyond the abstraction of a chronological curve of executions. The situation under the Terror varied considerably in different localities and regions. In Greer's data, more than half the executions took place in the thirteen départements of western France, and twenty percent in the Rhône valley. Characteristic are the case of Lyons and the repression in the Vendée.

In Lyons class warfare superimposed its effects on the consequences of political struggle. The conflict between the Mountain and the Gironde was embedded in social antagonism between the lower classes and the rich. The crusade of the poor found its Savonarola in the Piedmontese merchant Chaliier, who defected to serve the working people in their struggle against the merchant city. The workers lost the mayoralty to a Girondin in November 1792, but the Jacobins held a majority in the Municipal Council and ultimately, in March 1793, obliged the council to approve one of Chaliier's men. On May 29 the Girondins (on the eve of their elimination in Paris) took their revenge, thanks to an insurrection triggered by the levying of a special tax. The city quickly passed from the enemies of the Paris dictatorship into the hands of the royalists, who ruled throughout the summer; but it was retaken by troops of the Convention on October 9.

It now became an "Emancipated City," symbolically rescued from its accursed past and destined to endure a partial razing, limited to the "houses of the rich." Couthon, the city's conqueror, carried out a relatively moderate repression in October. But in November he was replaced by Collot d'Herbois and Fouché, who proceeded with numerous hasty trials and summary executions. Leveling of the large residences along the quays of the Saône got under way. Several thousand suspects were guillotined, shot, or cut down en masse by firing squads. The terror lasted until March 1794.

The history of the revolutionary Terror in the Vendée obeyed the same logic and the same chronology. Again it was a case of putting down an insurrection, the most serious that the Revolution had had to confront. And as in Lyons repression not only came after the victory but actually reached a peak several months later. The Vendée rebellion actually began in March 1793, and reports of its victories resounded throughout the spring and early autumn. But it quickly subsided beginning in mid-October, when the peasant army was crushed at Cholet and moved north of the Loire in the hope of joining an English fleet at Granville, until what troops remained were destroyed in December in the battles of Le Mans and Savenay. But the revolutionary Terror—which is to be distinguished from atrocities and massacres committed in the heat of battle—raged from January to March 1794.

For if the war was pitiless on both sides, what began afterward was of a different nature: it was a massive repression organized from above on orders of the Convention with the intention of destroying not only the rebels but the

population, farms, crops, villages, and anything else that had served the "brigands" as shelter. For such a task the guillotine was no longer sufficient, and in December Carrier resorted to mass drownings in the Loire. But it was in January that an idea proposed by Barère began to be put into effect: "To destroy the Vendée." The Republican troops divided into several columns, each with its own itinerary, with explicit orders to burn all homes and murder their inhabitants, women and children included. This dreadful operation continued until May, and its sad toll must be added to the strict costs of the war: the territory known as the "military Vendée" (comprising parts of Loire Inférieure, Maine-et-Loire, Vendée, and Deux-Sèvres) lost twenty percent of its housing and a substantial percentage of its population.

Numerical estimates of the loss of human life have remained a subject of polemic. It is impossible to be as precise as one would like for two sets of reasons. In the absence of specific sources, historians must resort to comparisons between prior and subsequent population estimates. The documents, moreover, do not permit a breakdown of the three different types of mortality: persons killed in battle (on both sides), persons killed in terrorist repression (whether condemned by a court or simply massacred), and reduced birth rates and increased death rates in the years following the war. Hence it is impossible to give a precise estimate of the number of victims of the Terror in the Vendée. Nevertheless, taken together, the actions of Carrier in Nantes and of Turreau's infernal columns were responsible for deaths numbering in the tens of thousands. This figure, by far the largest item in the final count of victims of the Terror, is left out of Donald Greer's statistics, based primarily on capital sentences. It must be added in round numbers to the total, which it increases considerably.

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The legacy of the Terror poisoned all subsequent revolutionary history and, beyond that, all political life in nineteenth-century France. Throughout the Thermidorian period the Terror lurked about the fringes of the political scene. The royalists used it to forge a weapon of revenge, an instrument for settling local scores in areas where the population leaned toward their camp and Republican troops were thinly scattered, as in the Rhône valley. The republicans would have liked to forget the Terror and root the new institutions of the Year III in the law; Benjamin Constant and Mme. de Staël worked feverishly between 9 Thermidor and 18 Brumaire to exorcise the ghost of the guillotine that haunted the Republic, but to no avail. Thermidor revived the royalist menace and counterrevolutionary violence, and the Directory was unable to accept the election dates legally set by the Constitution. In September 1797 Augereau's army laid siege to Paris at the behest of the director Barras in order to save the Republic from a royalist parliamentary majority. The coup d'état of 18 Fructidor (September 5) was the signal for a new series of "public safety" measures in which deportation to Guiana replaced the scaffold, with refractory priests paying the heavy price. The nation's revolutionary education proceeded on course, and the civil and military putsch of 18—

19 Brumaire 1799 capped it off by establishing a regime "that completed the Terror by replacing permanent revolution with permanent war" (Marx, *The Holy Family*).

In the nineteenth century memories of the Terror imparted a peculiar bitterness to civil struggle, while at the same time adding further passion to the great conflict between Ancien Régime and Revolution. By associating the advent of democracy with a bloody dictatorship, it supplied counterrevolutionaries with arguments and liberals with fears. It embarrassed or divided republicans and isolated socialists. In postrevolutionary France the monarchy was suspect because of the Ancien Régime, but the Republic was unable to cleanse its image of the blood spilled in its name. When it finally triumphed in the 1870s, it was because the republicans had conquered their own demons and presented a pacified version of their great ancestors from which the specter of the guillotine had been exorcised. It was not until the twentieth century, with the injection of bolshevism and the development of a communist extreme left, that a cult of the Terror, associated with that of Robespierre, was established on grounds of revolutionary necessity, where for half a century it flourished in the shadow of the Soviet example.

Thus, there exists a history of the history of the Terror, associated with the vicissitudes of French political history over the past two hundred years. But that history can also be written in a less chronological mode by attempting to reconstitute the various types of interpretation to which the Terror has been subjected.

The most common strategy is to relate the Terror to circumstances external to the Revolution; we are told, then, that the Terror was merely the product of the tragic situation in which the Republic found itself in 1793 and was a terrible yet necessary instrument of public safety. Surrounded by enemies foreign and domestic, the Convention allegedly had no choice but to rely on fear of the guillotine to mobilize men and resources. We find this interpretation being advanced by the Thermidorians in the period immediately following Robespierre's fall, and it was destined to enjoy a brilliant future, for it can also be found in most French public school texts for reasons that are easy to understand: it has the advantage of offering to the ultimately victorious republican tradition a Revolution exonerated of guilt for the terrorist episode, responsibility for which is shifted to its adversaries. That is why this interpretation is favored by many who consider themselves heirs of 1789, for it is a way of escaping the dilemma of contradiction or denial.

The "circumstantial" thesis is often associated with another idea, according to which the Terror coincides with a period during which social strata other than the cultivated bourgeoisie were gaining access to power: specifically, the class of urban artisans and tradesmen from which the sans-culotte activists were recruited and which Mignet, for example, setting the tone for liberal historiography, dubbed the "plebs" or the "multitude" to distinguish them from the bourgeoisie of 1789. Thus circumstances presumably brought to the fore a second revolution, which lacks the historical dignity of the first because it was neither bourgeois nor liberal; its necessity was merely circumstantial, that is, subordinate to the principal course of the event, which con-

tinued to be defined by the principles of 1789 and the rise of the bourgeoisie. But the plebeian nature of this episode makes it possible to understand how the Terror was also the product of elementary political reflexes, at once egalitarian and punitive, triggered by military reverses and internal insurrections. The Ancien Régime had not known how to educate its people, and for this it paid a heavy price at the moment of its downfall.

It is not difficult to find elements of historical reality to support interpretations of this type. The Terror did in fact develop in the course of the Revolution at a time of foreign and domestic danger and out of obsession with "aristocratic" treason and an "aristocratic plot." It continually justified itself in these terms as indispensable to the salvation of the fatherland. It was "placed on the order of the day" and exercised in the name of the state and the Republic only under pressure from sans-culotte militants. The Paris prison massacres of September 1792 showed the extremes to which the punitive passions of the people might go. A year later, it was in part to channel those passions that the Convention and the Committees turned the Terror into a banner of government.

Nevertheless, neither the circumstances nor the political attitudes of the *petit peuple* are enough to account for the phenomenon. The "circumstances," too, have a chronology. The risks for the Revolution were greatest at the beginning and in the middle of the summer of 1793, at a time when the activity of the Revolutionary Tribunal was relatively minimal. By contrast, the Terror intensified with the improvement of the situation and the victories, starting in October. It reached a peak during the winter, in a Lyons that had been vanquished for several months and in a defeated Vendée that had to be put to the torch, as well as in countless other places where there were violent clashes as a result of initiatives on the part of local militants or envoys of the Convention. There was indeed a connection between the civil war and the Terror, but it was not that the Terror was an instrument for ending a war; it followed and actually prolonged rather than shortened the war. One cannot credit it with patriotic devotion without falling into inconsistency, because to do so would be to assume—incorrectly, by the way—the existence of a counterrevolutionary France. Nor can one credit it with saving the fatherland or maintaining the Republic, since it came after the victory. "The Great Terror," wrote the republican Quinet as long ago as 1867, "nearly everywhere revealed itself after the victories. Can we maintain that it caused them? Can we argue that, in our systems, effect precedes cause?" (*Critique de la Révolution*).

The explanation involving the role of popular attitudes accounts for only some of the facts. It is indeed true, as we have seen, that the pressure to establish a terrorist dictatorship came chiefly from sans-culotte militants. But it is not a simple matter to establish a dividing line between the "people" and the political elites, between "popular" culture and "high" culture. What about Marat, for example, who may be considered one of the purest ideologues of the Terror? To which group did he belong? This demi-savant, who since 1789 had been denouncing the aristocratic plot and tirelessly calling for scaffolds to be erected, straddled both "cultures." The same can be said of Hébert and the Hébertists, who extended his influence in Paris and played so important

a role in the republican repression in Vendée. In fact, in 1793 terrorist discourse was in the mouths of nearly all the leaders of the Revolution, including those who had no special relation to sans-culotte activism, the legists and bourgeois of the committees and the Convention. Barère's demand in the summer of 1793 for the total destruction of the Vendée is enough to make clear the grip of terrorist fanaticism on all the Montagnard deputies.

Of course this call for widespread extermination grew out of the civil war, even if that was not its only cause. But, as Mona Ozouf has demonstrated, from the autumn of 1793 to the spring of 1794 the case for the necessity of the Terror abandoned the circumstantial grounds of the war in favor of a more fundamental justification: nothing less than the Revolution itself. After the end of March and the liquidation of the Hébertists, which put an end to the bloody escalation of what remained of sans-culottism, the Terror, by this point the exclusive instrument of the Robespierist clan, had ceased to be a matter for learned and sometimes philosophical rationalization. It was less a part of the arsenal of victory than of an ambition for regeneration.

Nor was the climate any longer that of a besieged city, since the frontiers had been liberated and the civil war extinguished. The most obvious use of the guillotine was no longer the extermination of avowed enemies but rather that of "factions": the Hébertists followed by the Dantonists. The Terror raged all the more fiercely because the Robespierist group had no further support either on its left, among the activists, or on its right, in public opinion; it was a government of fear, which Robespierre portrayed in theory as a government of virtue. Conceived in order to exterminate aristocracy, the Terror ended as a means of subduing wrongdoers and combatting crime. From now on it coincided with and was inseparable from the Revolution, because there was no other way of someday molding a republic of citizens.

Hence the Terror cannot be reduced to circumstances, whether the emergency situation or pressure from the *petit peuple*, surrounding its birth. Not that circumstances played no role; obviously they provided an environment in which ideology developed and allowed terrorist institutions to be gradually put in place. But this ideology, present in the Revolution of 1789, predated the circumstances and enjoyed an independent existence, which was associated with the nature of French revolutionary culture through several sets of ideas.

The first of these ideas was of man's regeneration, in which respect the Revolution was akin to a religious annunciation but in a secularized mode. The actors in the events actually conceived of their own history as an emancipation of man in general. The issue was not to reform French society but to reinstitute the social pact on the basis of man's free will; France represented only the first act of this decisive development. This truly philosophical ambition was unusual, however, in that it was constantly caught up in the test of actual history, as though the truth of a religious promise had been left to empirical verification by the facts. In the gap between facts and promise was born the idea of a regeneration, to reduce the distance between the Revolution and its ambition, which it could not renounce without ceasing to be itself. If the Republic of free citizens was not yet possible, it was because men, per-

verted by their past history, were wicked; by means of the Terror, the Revolution—a history without precedent, entirely new—would make a new man.

Another idea said roughly the same thing, or arrived at the same result: that politics could do anything. The revolutionary universe was a universe populated by wills, entirely animated by the conflict between good intentions and evil plans; no action was ever uncertain, no power ever innocent. As first Hegel and later Marx recognized, the French Revolution was the theater in which the voluntarism of modern politics revealed itself in all its purity. The event remained ever faithful to its original idea, according to which the social contract could be instituted only by free wills. This attribution of unlimited powers to political action opened a vast field to radicalization of conflicts and to militant fanaticism. Henceforth each individual could arrogate to himself what had once been a divine monopoly, that of creating the human world, with the ambition of recreating it. If he then found obstacles standing in his way, he attributed them to the perversity of adverse wills rather than to the opacity of things: the Terror's sole purpose was to do away with those adversaries.

In the end, the Revolution put the people in the place of the king. In order to restore to the social order the truth and justice ignored by the Ancien Régime, it returned the people to its rightful place, usurped for so long by the king: the place of sovereign. What the Revolution, following Rousseau, called the general will was radically different from monarchical power in the manner of its formation yet identical to it in the extent of its jurisdiction. The absolute sovereignty of the king presaged the sovereignty of democracy. Wholly obsessed with legitimacy, having thrown off divine guidance without establishing reciprocal checks and balances in the American manner, the Revolution was unwilling to set limits to public authority. It had lived since 1789 on the idea of a new absolute—and indivisible—sovereignty, which excluded pluralism of representation because it assumed the unity of the nation. Since that unity did not exist—and Girondin federalism showed that factions continued to plot in the shadows—the function of the Terror, as well as of purging elections, was invariably to establish it. As early as 1795, in the discussion of the Constitution of Year III, Sieyès would blame the Terror on the Revolution's errors regarding the concept of sovereignty (speech of 2 Thermidor); somewhat later this idea was adapted and systematized by Mme. de Staël, Benjamin Constant, and finally Guizot.

This explanation of the Terror is not incompatible with a more sociological type of interpretation, which incidentally can also be found in the work of Constant and Staël. An enthralling chapter of the latter's *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (book 3, chap. 15) in fact suggests that the Ancien Régime bequeathed to posterity not only its conception of sovereignty but also the harshness of its social relations. Aristocratic society, composed of castes created by the monarchy and fiercely jealous of their privileges, left the embers of its violence to the Revolution, which fanned them into conflagration: "Because the various classes of society had almost no relations among themselves in France, their mutual antipathy was stronger . . . In no country were nobles as much strangers to the rest of the nation. When they touched

the second class, it was only to give offense. . . . The same scene was repeated from rank to rank; the irritability of a very sensitive nation inclined each person to jealousy toward his neighbor, toward his superior, toward his master; and all individuals not content to dominate humiliated one another." In part, therefore, the "Terror" may have stemmed from an egalitarian fanaticism born of an inegalitarian pathology in the old society. For there is no reason not to think that in the genesis of the bloody dictatorship of Year II, Ancien Régime and Revolution combined their effects.

François Furet

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TREATIES OF BASEL AND THE HAGUE

Between April and July 1795 the French Republic succeeded in removing three powers from the coalition. It was not the first time that such a thing had happened, since the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Emperor's own brother, had in February signed a treaty guaranteeing him neutrality. But the treaty was a small achievement for revolutionary France; it needed to consolidate its borders, deploy its troops, and establish that a regicide nation could treat with kings. These goals were achieved in three stages, not without difficulties. To follow chronology we would have to begin with the first Treaty of Basel, signed with Prussia on April 5, 1795, then follow the negotiations with Holland that culminated in the "Treaty of The Hague" of May 16, and conclude with the second Treaty of Basel between France and Spain (July 22). But the logic of the Revolution was not determined by calendar dates. Between Holland and Prussia there was a radical difference: on the one hand a *diktat*, a veritable protectorate, on the other an agreement, not without misgivings, between two powers.

The Treaty of The Hague scarcely deserves its name. France dictated its conditions. The once "United Provinces" had been disunited for nearly two centuries, well before July 14, 1789, by the struggle between the stadtholder and liberal bourgeois forces. In 1788 Prussian armies had invaded Holland in support of the stadtholder. In fact, Holland was riven not so much by internal dissension as by its place in the international arena. A key element in English commerce, it covered the French border. The Scheldt was an essential base for Great Britain but a barrier for France. From 1793 to 1795 the Dutch nation had suffered the consequences of the military situation. On February 16, 1795, the Dutch proclaimed the independence of the "Batavian nation" and expressed the wish that they might establish between themselves and France a relation of "sister republics." This was a utopian dream. Sieyès and Reubell were sent to The Hague to remind the Batavians of the conditions of fraternity. With the "treaty" signed on May 16, 1795, France annexed Dutch Flanders (the region of Maestricht and Vanloo) and forced its younger sister to accept occupation by an army of twenty-five thousand men and a tribute of one hundred million florins, to say nothing of the innumerable paintings that found their way to Paris. The two republics were united by a defensive and offensive alliance.

A product of circumstances, the Treaty of The Hague did not count for