



The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France

By David Andress

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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 superb popular debut from an enormously talented historian.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Andress offers a visceral account of the guillotining of King Louis XVI in 1793: "he was strapped to a tilting plank, which dropped his head into a brace, and the blade... plunged from above." While the British historian's graphic depiction of numerous executions is a high point of his account of the Terror, he explicitly states it was not the most salient point of the revolution. Countering the historiography of the last generation, including Simon Schama, who said, "violence *was* the revolution itself," Andress focuses not just on the killings but on the "grand political pronouncements, uprisings and insurrections," from the varying ideologies of the dissident parties to the upheaval of the counterrevolution that rendered France unstable for more than a decade, resulting not just in violence but also in social upheaval. And Andress follows the Terror beyond its conclusion to Napoleon Bonaparte's coronation as emperor in 1804, which brought the revolution "full circle," creating a strong central government that scorned democracy and popular sovereignty, the revolution's central tenets. His focus on such paradoxes and on the Terror as the culmination of a complex historical process rather than an unprovoked outbreak of violence, makes for a bracing historical reassessment. 3 maps. (Jan.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Covering the crescendo of the French Revolution, historian Andress narrates its most radical phase, from Louis XVI's attempted flight abroad in 1791 to the 1794 guillotining of Maximilien Robespierre. To readers primed by Simon Schama's *Citizens* (1991), Andress will be a trustworthy guide to an extraordinary period in which hardly any event or personage is historically uncontroversial. In retrospect, the foiled royal escape was the turning point, convincing revolutionaries and the Parisian crowd of two things: the Revolution was incomplete, and counter-revolution was a genuine conspiracy, not fantasy. Grasping this dual aspect of the febrile revolutionary mentality, Andress meticulously recounts the progressive eclipse of moderate factions in the midst of foreign invasion and internal revolt throughout France. It was to master this crisis that the National Convention instituted the Terror, succeeding ruthlessly but undergoing a series of lethal political crises over revolutionary purity. At his explanatory best when invoking the interpersonal animosity and suspicion that preceded a faction's dispatch to the guillotine, Andress viscerally re-creates the Reign of Terror's deadly spectacle. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

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"[A] well-researched, well-written, and highly revisionist work." *Sunday Times*

"Andress, in this compelling study . . . scotches many myths, and gives some sobering parallels to contemporary society." *Scotland on Sunday*

"Andress creates a vivid picture of the time... Amid today's issues of individual rights, legitimate limits of

state power and demonization of enemies, the book has great relevance” ?*Waterstones Books Quarterly*

“This is the most authoritative treatment we are likely to have for many years.” ?*William Doyle, The Independent*

“A tour de force. There is nothing to beat it.” ?*Spectator*

“[A] brilliantly deadpan account . . . one of the ironies that Andress skillfully reveals is that the law was denied, bit by bit, by the very men who had once been practicing it . . . he also shows how the feeble poisoned the righteous, revolutionary anger.” ?*The Guardian*

“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 18th Century.” ?*The Times*

“It is a staggeringly complicated story that is just about ordered into a manageable narrative in Andress's even-tempered re-telling.” ?*The Observer*

“Much important work on the French Terror has been done over the past 20 years by French, English, and American historians, and there is now a need to synthesize this into an accessible narrative history for a wider public. This is David Andress's aim, and one which he generally achieves in this well-written and handsomely produced book.” ?*Sunday Telegraph*

“David Andress has given the reader a meticulous account of the Terror, in all its confusing twists and turns . . . While never failing to convey the drama and horrors of the Terror, Andress resists the temptation to exaggerate or turn drama into melodrama. He has written a book which stands beside Simon Schama's *Citizens*.” ?*Times Literary Review*

“Andress, in this compelling study, offers a far subtler, far more cogent approach to understanding the period, without ever becoming an apologist for the excesses.” ?*Scotland on Sunday*

“Andress creates a vivid picture of the time... Amid today's issues of individual rights, legitimate limits of state power and demonisation of enemies, the book has great relevance.” ?*Waterstones Books Quarterly*

Users Review

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Patricia Briggs:

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