

# THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN WORLD HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AN INVITATION TO INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

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This essay is about stories or histories. Families have their stories, of difficulties surmounted, victories achieved, serious stories and funny stories, of life together and life continuing.

Peoples have their stories. Think of the Hebrews, and their story of crossing the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian host, a story they told over and over. It gave their life together meaning, identity, and pride.

Peoples have their story, and so does humanity. As a historian, I have a vision, a dream if you wish. At the Olympic games each delegation will step forward and chant the story of its people: this is the story we tell to each other and to you. Then at the end all the delegations will chant: this is the story of humanity we tell together.

In that story of humanity, that is world history, how will the French Revolution appear? How should it appear? That is the question I am examining here.

## I

It might help us to inquire how the French Revolution has appeared in the past. Suppose we think of historical memory as traveling along four tracks or lanes, separate yet sometimes merged and fused. Let us journey down each lane and see what it will yield.

Lane number one is the private memory of a public event. When private memories of the same event are shared by many individuals it becomes a collective memory. I still remember where I was when I received the news that President John Kennedy had been shot. I was walking across the Duke campus on the way to conducting a graduate seminar on Herodotus. As we awaited the news of whether he had died, neither the students nor I were very attentive to what was being said in class. The event was shared. On the following Sunday the Great Litany was read in church: "From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death, *Good Lord, deliver us.*" A devout, eighty-year Episcopalian confessed to me she had never before been gripped by the stunning relevance of the Litany to a current happening.

My mind traveled back to when I had received news equally stunning—Hiroshima and the mushroom cloud in August, 1945; the outbreak of war in Europe in late July 1914 (as a six-year old I innocently inquired of my parents, what is war?) Mentally I continued to other events that once held the fascinated

gaze of a people and even a culture: the slow creep of Napoleon's army to Moscow and its devastating retreat; the running fight of the Spanish Armada up the English Channel; farther back the slow approach of the Persian hosts toward Greece and their smashing repulses at Marathon and at Salamis, a tale that forms the grand theme of Herodotus. Notice the event, the individual memories, and the collective memory come first; the historian comes later to exalt or condemn, to enshrine, to analyze, and to embalm.

On this track of collective memory, where stands the French Revolution? Outside France since 1914 it has ceased to be part of the *active* collective memory of mankind. Down to 1914 the Great War (in capital letters) referred to the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. It was displaced in popular-memory by World War I and later World War II. Down to 1917 the Revolution that everyone adored or loathed--the mobs in the streets and all that--was the great French Revolution. It was displaced in the popular mind by the Bolshevik and later the Chinese revolutions.

Yet prior to 1914 it was recognized as *the* great event in Western culture--remembered individually and collectively from Moscow to Philadelphia and Buenos Aires for its novelty, grandeur, drama, and passion. For the first time in history a great people had stood up and made their masters listen. An era of freedom and universal brotherhood, it was thought, was dawning. Hegel, a contemporary, referred to its early months as "a majestic sunrise." Wordsworth recalled its early days when it was bliss to be alive. Edmund Burke called it "the most astonishing event in the history of mankind." Goethe, an eyewitness to the French Victory at Valmy, recognized a New World had arrived. The demonic events of the Terror fascinated participants and onlookers alike. Nor could they avert their gaze from the military campaigns, the elating victories and dismaying defeats of a war of twenty-two years. Collective memory of the French Revolution as something huge, tremendous, and vital was recaptured by two great historians, Jules Michelet and Thomas Carlyle. To my knowledge Carlyle is the only historian to peer into the dark recesses of a volcanic person (Mahomet in *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*) and a volcanic event (the French Revolution). A volcanic temperament himself, he could resonate to it in others. Within the range of his sources (and he read them all) his *French Revolution* was accurate, and in its great scenes it is still tremendously right. No one really comes up to him.

I was introduced to the collective memory of the French Revolution as drama and passion when in 1922 as a high-school sophomore I read Charles Downer Hazen's enthralling account in his *Modern European History*, written before 1914. To convey the tone, let me read the passage where he describes the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention on 2 June 1793. He writes:

Sanguinary Marat, feline Robespierre were resolved on the annihilation of the Girondists. Danton, thinking of France and loathing all of this discord, when the nation was in danger, all this exaggeration of self, this contemptible carnival of intrigue, thinking that Frenchmen had enemies enough to fight without tearing each other to pieces, tried to play the peacemaker. But he had the fate that peacemakers frequently have. He accomplished nothing for France and made enemies for himself.

The insurrectionary force mobilized by the Paris Commune forced the Convention

to vote the arrest of twenty-nine Girondists. For the first time in the Revolution the assembly elected by the voters of France was mutilated. Violence had laid its hand upon the sovereignty of the people in the interest of the rule of a faction. The victory of the Commune was the victory of the Jacobins, who, by this treason to the nation, were masters of the Convention. But not yet masters of the country. Indeed this high-handed crime of June 2 aroused indignation and resistance throughout a large section of France. Had the departments no rights which the Commune of Paris was bound to respect? The Girondists called the departments to arms against the tyrannical crew,

and sixty out of the eighty-three departments responded. (Great stuff, really!) Such passages remind me of the remark Lord Melbourne made about Thomas Babington Macaulay: "I wish that I could be as sure of one thing as Macaulay is of everything." I wish we could be as sure of one thing about the French Revolution as Hazen was of everything.

Thus was I captivated, via Hazen, by the pro-Dantonist republican orthodoxy of Alphonse Aulard. Nothing has ever exceeded the *shock* when in 1928 I learned from Albert Mathiez as transmitted by Louis Gottschalk that Danton was a crook and that the villain Robespierre, the epitome of evil, was the incorruptible republican hero. The shock was as bad as learning that Santa Claus did not exist. Tell me that it is not so! Since then I have regarded with equanimity the emergence of successive orthodoxies--the Jacobin Marxist, the *Annales*, the current social science fervor--studied them for what they might usefully yield, watched them contribute to the enrichment of knowledge, and then, as systems, dissolve. Orthodoxies and systems pass, but the French Revolution, tremendous, complicated, and ultimately mysterious, remains. In

a history of humanity that tremendousness--its novelty, drama, passion, and popular thrust--should be recovered and communicated.

## II

Still in search of the French Revolution in world historical perspective we turn to our second lane, that of the philosophical or cosmological historians, who seek in tumultuous events a wider reference and a deeper meaning. Since the fourth century there have been in Western civilization three or four comprehensive, all-embracing intellectual syntheses that commanded widespread allegiance: the synthesis of Saint Augustine, revised and expanded by Saint Thomas Aquinas; the synthesis of Newton, John Locke, Condillac, and Condorcet; and the two materialisms of the nineteenth century, the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and the evolutionary materialism of Helmholtz and Darwin as expressed by John Tyndall, Ernst Haeckel, and Herbert Spencer. At their initial moment of statement they all met the criteria of a satisfactory and a satisfying paradigm; they comprehended all fields of learning; they incorporated the best of recent scientific knowledge; they were inwardly consistent and harmoniously coherent; they had an explanation for everything in the physical and psychic world; they moved from the past through the present into the future; and to every believer they offered a significant role in the drama of history.

Also, each paradigm offered its explanation of the French Revolution. The thesis of Joseph de Maistre and of Louis de Bonald was complexly Augustine's Christian epic applied to French history: the City of God versus the City of Satan, every event the consequence of God's grace or God's judgment or of God's grace within his judgment. Condorcet's superb sketch of the progress of the human mind and spirit from the pastoral age through the French Revolution into the future was the history that the science of Newton and the psychology of Locke and Condillac required. John William Draper's history of the intellectual development of Europe and the class struggle theory of the Revolution were consonant, respectively, with the evolution of Charles Darwin and the perspective of Karl Marx. Each explanation of the Revolution was stronger for being integrated into a comprehensive view of the history of humanity and the universe.

Re-reading Condorcet, Draper, Maistre, and Marx is exhilarating. Each one has insights into the French Revolution that it might be well to recover and retain. Condorcet and Draper remind us of the power of ideas in the revolutionary situation. Writing his two-hundred page essay in hiding from the Jacobins in 1793 and without reference to a single book, Condorcet thinks of the utility of meditating on history at all times and places. "If there is to be a science that foresees the progress of the human race, and directs and

accelerates it, the history of the progress that has been already made has to be its primary base." On the very first page he announced his psychology of human beings, that of John Locke and Condillac, and in effect asks, "And my dear historian, what psychology do you have?" He writes:

Man is born with the ability to receive sensations, to perceive them and to distinguish between the various simple sensations of which they are composed; to remember, recognize, and combine them; to compare these combinations; to apprehend what they have in common and the ways in which they differ, to attach signs to them, all in order to recognize them more easily and to allow for the ready production of new combinations.

Reason applied to sensation gave rise in classical Greece to rational knowledge and to its associate liberty. Thereafter, the supreme conflict in history has been between truth and error, light and darkness, the light of rational knowledge and liberty and the dark darkness of ignorant superstition fostered by scheming priests supported by tyrannical despots. After descending into the dark ages of medieval centuries the mind of men revived with the Renaissance, the science and liberty of seventeenth-century England, and the *philosophe* writings of eighteenth-century France. In the glorious American and French revolutions liberty and the rights of man followed as a necessary consequence of the Enlightenment. Despite temporary convulsions, such as the Terror, light and liberty will spread from Anglo-America and France into the rest of the world, wherever they go increasing productivity, diminishing inequalities between sexes, classes, and countries, intensifying intellectual activity, and by the inheritance of acquired abilities, improving the physical organism of human beings. Given time there is no foreseeable limit to the perfectibility of the human race.

In sweep and intellectual vigor John William Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, published in 1863, matches Condorcet's *Sketch*. Chemist, physiologist, physician, inventor, a founder and president of the medical school of the City of New York, author of this pioneer intellectual history and of the first authoritative history of the Civil War (1,882 pages), Draper is one of my favorites for the stimulus of his intellectual acuteness. He writes in the idiom of evolutionary materialism, which gives him a longer perspective than Condorcet. However, since he has the same heroes as Condorcet--rational knowledge and liberty, the same enemies--priests and despots, and makes many of the same points, we shall pass on to Joseph de Maistre and Karl Marx.

If Condorcet speaks of the power of rational ideas and ideals during the French Revolution, Maistre reminds us of its irrationality and madness. Their views of history are mirror images of each other. Maistre's view, published in 1797 in his *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, is apocalyptic and providential. God is always mysteriously in charge, and even Satan is acting out His will. There is an invisible order not readily apparent to the senses and beyond the scope of human knowledge. Locke's sensism, it follows, is a shallow psychology. Humanity is permeated with original sin and the pride and passions it engenders. Reason itself is a feeble instrument, subject to the seductions and storms of irrational impulses that only a spiritual life can purify. Human beings and societies are always precariously sane, living on the edge of irrationality and evil. Human irrationality and violence will always be with us as part of the divine plan. Yes, the supreme conflict in history is between truth and error, light and darkness, but the light is Christianity as interpreted by Catholic priests and supported by the kings, while the darkness is the blasphemy of the *philosophes*. The theory of indefinite progress is an absurdity; a step backward in time may be salutary. "The grand pretension of our age is to believe itself very superior to all others; and the fact is, however, that it is very inferior; it is always in contradiction with ancient common sense." The thirteenth century, the most spiritual of centuries, was his ideal. The French Revolution and its horrors are the punishment of God for humanity's apostasy. Mirabeau, the king of the marketplace, the infernal Robespierre, and Bonaparte are the unwitting instruments of His will. They are bringing a new order of divine justice and regeneration under the aegis of the pope and king.

Marx reminds us of the power of material and social conditions. In historical investigation the great virtue of Marxist theory has been its power to generate ideas both when it was thought to be right (conformity to historical reality) and when it was thought to be wrong. This was apparent in the intellectual life of Marx himself. For example, when in 1845-1846 Marx was shifting from an idealist conception of history to a materialist one he wrote of Hegel a sentence he was probably applying to himself:

If, like Hegel, one designs such a system for the first time, a system embracing the whole of history and the present-day world in all its scope, one cannot possibly do so without comprehensive, positive knowledge, without great energy and keen insight, and without dealing at least in some passages with empirical history. (*The German Ideology*, quoted in Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution*, 146-147).

The empirical history Marx was regarding most closely was the evolution of two progressive societies, England and France, in comparison with each other and

with backward Germany. Interplaying that evidence with theoretical postulates derived mostly from reverse Hegel he formulated his historical materialism: that economic conditions give rise to classes, class ideologies, and class struggle, that from class struggle emerges a dominant class and its appropriate political form, that, in brief, civil society predominates over the political. In world history such a pattern appeared in the three stages of slave, feudal, and capitalist-bourgeois modes of production and societies, and will appear in the fourth, the proletarian-Communist. The theory seemed to fit perfectly the events of April-August 1789 when a rising bourgeois class in cooperation with the peasants ended the old feudal order and established its ideological and political dominance. Here Marx had valuable insights that ever since have stimulated historical research, whether in affirmation or denial. For Marx the French Revolution was always *the* major revolution to study for the light it throws on the origins, course, and outcome of a revolutionary transition that moved society from one major stage into the next.

But if the bourgeoisie were socially dominant after 1789 and if in theory civil society predominates over the political, why was there a succession of diverse political forms from the Terror dictatorship, the bourgeois Directory, Napoleon's First Empire to the Second Republic (1848) and Napoleon III's Second Empire? For decades Marx explored this mystery of the apparent failure of events to fit theory. He was stimulated to advance a series of special explanatory insights: the obsessive reverence for republican and then imperial Rome; the fragmentation of the bourgeois class; the collective memory of the First Republic and the First Napoleon; the autonomy of the modern centralized bureaucratic state; the bourgeoisie does not have to govern explicitly in order to dominate. Marx never surrendered his theory. Nor did he ever abandon his search for the deeper explanation. As François Furet observes, he may have been wrong-headed, but he was never superficial.

In the formulation of these three paradigms, Condorcet's, Maistre's, and Marx's, one-eyed sight had led to selective insight into historical reality; insight had led to believing, and believing to seeing what was not always there. Yet each paradigm has values the historian of the French Revolution cannot neglect.

### III

Still in search of the French Revolution, we turn, thirdly, to professional historical scholarship. In the past hundred years the most powerful force in revolutionary historiography has been the technology of observant, detailed historical criticism and research--the almost inexorable operation of the processes of cooperative-competitive erudition. The steady search by many scholars for new documentary evidence, the prolonged absorption of many

scholars of diverse minds in scrutiny of the evidence, the verification of their conclusions by publication and by scholarly debate--all this steadily transformed and is transforming the scholarly view of the Revolution. The technology of historical method compels Albert Soboul to recognize the sans-culottes do not form a class and that the bourgeois revolution may have been a bourgeois-peasant revolution. It reconciles adversary viewpoints. Girondin versus Montagnard originally was a partisan battle cry, perpetuated in semi-scholarly publication. But now the two experts in the field, Michael Sydenham and Bill Edmonds, are very close to agreement. Research is building a core of scholarly information that is beyond "the play of wind and weather" (Herbert Butterfield). In the 1960s there appeared three prominent histories of the French Revolution: *The French Revolution* (1965) by Sydenham, a narrative, political-oriented historian; *La Révolution* (1965) by Furet and Denis Richet, two authors of the *Annales* circle; and *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française* (1952) by Soboul, a representative of the Marxist world outlook. When these narratives are read side by side, page by page, event by event, the first impression is one of overwhelming agreement about what scholars believe concerning the history of the French Revolution. To be sure, the authors have differences of opinion on certain issues. Was there a feudal reaction in the 1780s? How serious was the counter-revolutionary threat? What was the relation of ideology to the occupation and economic and social position of the believer? Nevertheless, the essential story is the same: the nature of groups composing the National Assembly; the Paris uprising of July 1789; the peasant insurrections of August; the enactment of liberal, constitutional reform; the origins of the war; the reluctance of both Girondins and Jacobins to abandon laissez-faire; and so on. Orthodoxies and systems pass, but erudition and the results of erudition endure.

Nevertheless, the French Revolution which has passed out of the collective memory of the public has also vanished from that of the professional historian, in this sense. The French Revolution was exaltation, in hope and in horror and terror. Its dominant texture was turbulence--and the search for stability and legitimate order. But in our analytic monographic and comparative research, we have dissected, desiccated, dehumanized, and homogenized the Revolution. We have killed the Revolution, you and I, and then embalmed it in academic prose. If the Story is Truth, the Truth is the Story, then Hazen's passionate tale may be more essentially true than our analyses.

#### IV

Still in search of the French Revolution in world historical perspective, I am traveling a fourth track or lane, that of the history textbook. I have begun to collect history textbooks, usually world histories, that are used in the secondary schools of the leading countries of the world. During the past year

many friends have generously and promptly answered my appeal for books: two graduate assistants currently at Duke, Miriam Shadis, and Sunil Kumar, have secured materials on history teaching respectively in West Germany and India; three former graduates of Duke, Nikita Harwich of the University of Caracas, Kathryn Spann, a major in Middle Eastern Studies, and Bill Wilkerson, a Russian specialist, have secured books from Venezuela, Morocco, and the U.S.S.R.; several Duke Ph.D.'s and hence my former students have given of their time: Leslie Bauzon of the University of the Philippines, who sent me several Filipino texts, also put me in touch with Professor Hung-ting Ku of Tunghai University, who mailed textbooks used in the Republic of China (Taiwan); Kenneth Bauzon of Lynchburg College brought back materials from Sri Lanka and engaged me in correspondence with Navin Kiribamune, an engineering student at the University of Peradeya, and with his mother, Sirim Kiribamune, a history professor at the same institution, and they sent and even translated history texts used in the schools; from Burton Beers of North Carolina State University, John Cell of Duke, and Anthony Esler of William and Mary came world histories they have prepared; Jeffrey Gunsburg of Eilat College supplied texts taught in Israel; in addition, a former colleague at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the short-story writer Herb Francis, brought from Madrid a Spanish textbook, while three Duke colleagues came to my aid: Charles Bergquist mailed me books from Colombia; Ralph Braibanti intervened with Dr. S. M. Qureshi, Secretary of Education in Pakistan, and Dr. Kuwait, Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia, to secure books from those two nations; and Mavis Mayer, Administrator of the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute, negotiated an exchange of books with the Japanese International Society for Educational Information, which has assembled since 1954 twenty thousand textbooks. In addition, I appealed to co-workers on previous projects, J.F. Ade. Ajavi of Ondo State University (Nigeria), Fernand Beaucour of the Centre d'Etudes Napoléoniennes (France), Lucian Boia of the University of Bucharest (Romania), John R. Harris of the University of Birmingham (Great Britain), Georg Iggers of SUNY (Buffalo) who introduced me to Professor Zhang Zhilian of Peking University, with whom I have corresponded ever since; Hans Schleier of the University of Leipzig, who overwhelmed me with books at all levels from East Germany; and Jerzy Topolski of the University of Poznań, who not only sent books but had the chapters on the French Revolution translated from Polish into English. Iggers also introduced me to the Georg-Eckart Institut für internationale Schulbuch-Forschung, who invited me to browse in their collection in Braunschweig, (West Germany).

This is a brilliant array of books, with thought behind every chapter and indeed every word. Yet the sample is incomplete--I still haven't penetrated most of Africa. Nevertheless, it is large enough to suggest questions for further inquiry and reflection.

The first human question rises easily to mind: how well are we doing? How do the world history textbooks of the United States compare with those of other countries and other cultures? The answer is: they are among the best in the world. But there are equally vigorous, innovative textbook enterprises elsewhere, and we could learn from them. However, the sobering question is: how well is humanity doing in reflecting on its past and in teaching it to young people?

This question leads to several considerations: for example, to the territory and time covered in each book, to the organization, periodization, and dynamic principles of each work; to how well the national story is integrated with world history, to the relation of the account to scholarly monographs--in other words, the question of accuracy, and to the relation of the story to collective memory. Finally, in these books how does the French Revolution appear in world historical perspective?

From my own experience let me hazard a few answers; then you may inspect several of the books yourselves. "World history" textbooks, "world History" in quotation marks, have evolved over the twentieth century. The first one I knew was by P.V.N. Meyers, studied in 1900 by my parents at the University of Cincinnati--Egypt, Greece, Rome . . . ancient, medieval, and modern. I was enthralled. The tradition was continued by Robinson-Breasted and Hayes-Moon, which I studied in high school in the 1920s, and by Duncaif-Krey-Becker, which I taught in high school in the 1930s. After World War II came the monumental Western Civilization texts. The content broadened from political history to economic, social, and cultural, but the pattern was basically the same--prehistoric man, Egypt, Sumeria, perhaps the Indus and Yellow River valleys, and then Greece and Rome, ancient, medieval and modern. Other great cultures were not treated in and for themselves. Nor were they interplayed with Western civilization, except as subjects to Western imperialistic aggression and retreat in recent centuries.

What is not appreciated is that until recently the same was true in the West of textbooks written in the Marxist perspective. For example, notice the sequence of three excellent textbooks used in Romania--prehistoric man, Sumeria, Egypt, Persia, early India, early China, Greece, Rome . . . ancient, medieval, modern but with an added title indicating an added emphasis and dynamic--ancient: slave mode of production; medieval: feudal mode; modern: expansive capitalism; contemporary--toward a proletarian Communist society. Or if you cannot read Romanian (it isn't too difficult, if you know Latin), try this brilliant Venezuelan text. In their textbook accounts Marxist authors in the West, like their non-Marxist counterparts, still excluded much of humanity.

Change in world history textbook writing since the 1950s came, I suggest, from two sources. First, authors in the West such as William McNeill, L. S. Stavrianos, and T. Walter Wallbank began to write books and textbooks

in which they gave each culture in the Eurasian field its due and to interplay them in time. Cultures rather than classes became the counters, and interactions between cultures the dynamic, setting history in motion. Second, historians from the East, mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Australia, for example, brought Asian societies forward while recognizing the importance of Europe and North America, especially in recent centuries. Thus, the general history of humanity, co-edited and co-authored by Professor Zhang Zhilian of Peking University retains the Marxist categories of slave, feudal, capitalistic, and Communist modes of production and societies, the Marxist interest in revolutionary movements from below, and the Marxist dynamic of class struggle, but it also brings Asian history to the fore. So do the non-Marxist historians of Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, and Australia in vigorous, innovative, and thoughtful histories worth studying. I think it is no accident that in the United States today the best secondary school world history was written by a historian of Japan, Professor Burton Beers of North Carolina State University who was trained by Professor Paul Clyde of Duke University. Then at the college level *The Human Venture* by Anthony Esler of William and Mary not only brilliantly interplays the major cultures but also keeps track of the peoples in Africa, Australia, and elsewhere who never made it into civilization or never wanted to.

So how is the history of humanity faring these days? In 1949 UNESCO authorized the preparation of a history of humanity entitled "The Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind." The editor of volume 4 (1300-1775), Louis Gottschalk, my dissertation supervisor, informed me that the massive six volumes were to be abridged into a college textbook and then into a secondary-school version, to be studied in the colleges and schools throughout the world, thus effecting a worldwide attitudinal change. The six-volume project was massively completed in ten volumes in 1969, but the abridgements were forgotten, abandoned, or deferred. Meanwhile, UNESCO sponsored and completed an eight-volume *General History of Africa* which is being abridged into a textbook, a three-volume *General History of the Civilizations of Central Asia*, and now a *General History of the Caribbean*. In 1978 it authorized a revised edition of the *Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind*.

Humanity, however, has not waited for UNESCO to tell it what to remember. We the people have started to build our own collective memory of world events shared. When did this process start? Let us think back. Chernobyl was such an event of worldwide resonance. Back of that the walk of Armstrong on the moon, the signing of the United Nations charter, the photographs of the mushroom clouds of the first atomic explosions, the events of world War II, the depression, World War I, and (I suggest) the Russo-Japanese War, which engaged the attention of Asia, Europe, the British Empire, and the United States. The authors of these world history textbooks without fail

enshrine each of these collective memories in their account, thus ensuring for a time worldwide resonance in young minds. A people are brought together by common activities and common memories: the English, for example, by a common church, monarchy, law, and parliament, and by the Spanish Armada as an event lived together and as a collective memory. Humanity is being brought together in the same way.

Authors of world history textbooks are doing something more. They are deciding which events of earlier centuries, which collective memories that once resonated throughout a nation or a civilization, should now resonate throughout humanity. The fall of the Bastille is a case in point: it stunned a city, a nation, a continent, even Western civilization. Now, it appears in every world history textbook, to stun the world. The French Revolution itself, whether "The Great Bourgeois Revolution" (Poland) or "the most complete civil revolution ever" (Japan), is momentous in every account. Textbook historians agree to that, and elaborate on its significance. They also agree on the major events of its story as established by historical scholarship, although they may differ acrimoniously, Marxists vs. non-Marxists, on their explanation. Do they also recapture the exaltation, irrationality, and madness of the original events and collective memory? Two textbooks, one from France and the other from East Germany, do. By a brilliant juxtaposition on the same page of narrative text, a snatch from a primary source, and an encounter image that illuminate each other they restore some of the excitement that once was there.

### Epiphany

So having journeyed down four memory lanes, I return to the vision with which I opened. I see as a seer Olympic games in which each national delegation will take the stage and tell the story of its people--this is the story we tell to each other and to you--and then all delegations will recite in chorus: this is the story of humanity we tell together--a revolutionary festival, *à la David*. The story will be elaborated in print, translated into every language, sold at every airport and supermarket, and taught at every school throughout the world. In that story popular mentality and the results of erudition will be fused, turbulence will be retained, resolved, and transcended in an order that animates and empowers but does not kill. How will the French Revolution appear in that story? I suggest that it will appear as a great, tumultuous event in which the exploited and oppressed massively stood up and made their masters listen and to a degree give way, a great event that influentially undertook the realization of freedom, a stage in the ever-spiraling achievements of humanity. And thus, in this way, the French Revolution will reenter the collective memory of mankind.

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Harold T. Parker is author of *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries*, *Three Napoleonic Battles* and several other works on the Revolution-Napoleonic period. Retired from Duke University in 1977, he remains an active scholar. This year he received a Distinguished Service Award from the Society for French Historical Studies. The paper printed here was presented at the History Colloquium, West Georgia College, in May, 1989.

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### *India*

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