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ARTICLE

Ideas of Revolution in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions

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This article examines the concepts of revolution that political actors employed during the age of Atlantic revolutions (c.1760–1830) and how they used these concepts to analyze, compare, and connect the era's political events. The article begins by briefly recapitulating the evolving meanings of revolution in the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth. The capacious concept of a "revolution of government" that developed in the eighteenth century remained in regular use into the 1820s as a key conceptual tool to imaginatively connect otherwise disparate political movements/phenomena. Revolutionaries also created two new concepts, "total" and "limited" revolution, that were crucial to drawing political distinctions, especially between the American and French revolutions. These three concepts of revolution, I argue, all gave late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century actors an unusual degree of flexibility—which did not exist before or after the period—in describing the temporal and causal dynamics of revolutionary change.

> *C'est une grande émeute!* – Non, sire, lui répondit Larochefoucault-Liancourt, *c'est une grande révolution.*
>
> Lafayette, 1833[1]

Introduction

In the first minutes of Jean Renoir's film *La marseillaise* (1938), King Louis XVI of France learns of the fall of the Bastille. "So it is a … revolt?" he says quizzically. "No, Sire," replies the courtier Larochefoucault-Liancourt, "it is a great revolution." The brief exchange, quoting a supposedly firsthand account, seems to reveal that even a high-ranking nobleman understood immediately during the first days of the French Revolution that he was witnessing the birth of an entirely new political phenomenon, the "great revolution."[2] To viewers of *La marseillaise* in the 1930s, it

[1]Séance du 23 janvier 1833, *Archives parlementaires*, 2nd ser., vol. 79, 120.

[2]Scholars have been equally drawn to this dubious anecdote, which was first reported by Lafayette in 1833. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), 40–41, uses it to pinpoint the moment at which the modern conception of revolution arose; in Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 1991), xxi, it sets out the problematic of the book; it opens the prominent textbook by Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 7th edn (New York, 2020). Many

would have been equally obvious that the revolution in question was just the first in a line of other "great revolutions" that had reshaped the political world during the intervening 150 years.

The French Revolution undoubtedly provided a crucial pattern or model for subsequent revolutions. Scholars have described the nineteenth- and twentieth-century "modern" revolution as a totalizing political phenomenon: it entails a thoroughgoing transformation of economic and social structures, often involving a large mass movement and the use of violence, figured as a sharp rupture in the fabric of politics, society, even time itself.[3] Historians of ideas interested in the intellectual roots of this nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutionary paradigm have traced back to the French Revolution some of its key elements, including the idea of a progressive and irreversible transformation of the socioeconomic order, and modern revolution's presumed ability to create a rupture in time. These studies have convincingly answered the question of how actors during the age of the first "great revolution" created the conceptual apparatus that later generations of revolutionaries would adopt and adapt to their own circumstances.

This article aims to answer a different question about concepts of revolution during the age of Atlantic revolutions (*c.*1770 to 1825). How did revolutionary-era elite actors use the idea of revolution to think about connections and comparisons among the political events of the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth? It analyzes how actors in the period understood the language of "revolution" and shows how they employed three distinct concepts of revolution to think about relationships among the era's diverse political phenomena. The argument has both historical and historiographic implications: it reinterprets contemporary actors' accounts of their political moment and suggests revisions to how historians frame the field of study.[4]

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are cautious enough to add "supposedly." For other uses, see Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française, des origines à 1900*, vol. 9(2) (Paris, 1967), 617–20. Eugen Rosenstock, *Revolution als politischer Begriff in der Neuzeit* (Breslau, 1931), 104–5; Yahd Ben Achour, *Tunisie: Une révolution en pays d'islam* (2005) (Geneva, 2016), Ch. 4; and Jean-Claude Milner, *Relire la Révolution* (Lagrasse, 2016), 23–5, 70–92.

[3]See the classic definition by Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979), 4. Skocpol "brought the state back in"; note the importance that she attaches to "a society's state" in this passage. Jack Goldstone, the leading contemporary political scientist working on revolution, defines "modern revolution" as combining "in one sequence of events a change in ruling groups, popular revolts, and elite-led challenges involving issues of 'liberty' … plus the additional element of forging new state institutions." Jack A. Goldstone, *The Encyclopedia of Political Revolutions* (Washington, DC, 1998), xxxi. For an excellent critical discussion of these definitions see Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), 30–45, esp. 31–3. See also Eric Hobsbawm, "Revolution," in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., *Revolution in History* (Cambridge, 1986), 5–46, at 7, which defines revolutions as "'breaking-points' in systems under tension." Running alongside these debates have been the long-standing discussions about revolution versus other forms of "contentious politics," for which see Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, 2007), esp. 155–6.

[4]A persuasive recent argument for considering the Atlantic revolutions *en bloc* is David A. Bell, "The Atlantic Revolutions," in David Motadel, ed., *Revolutionary World: Global Upheaval in the Modern Age* (Cambridge, 2021), 38–65, esp. 39–44. Modern definitions of revolution have provided grounds for arguing the special significance of particular revolutions in the Atlantic revolutionary era or excluding others from the category. An outstanding example is Albert Mathiez, *La révolution française* (Paris, 1951), 1, who uses a social definition of revolution to argue for the unique significance of the French Revolution: "Les

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Three main concepts, one older and two newer, structured the comparative reflections of political actors in the revolutionary era. The older one, the notion of a "revolution of government," had come into wide use early in the eighteenth century. A broad and inclusive concept by the 1750s, it encompassed all manner of rapid changes in governments from the fall of ministers to the creation of new polities and constitutions. Authors used the term to describe one-time events, frequently in the past, which might or might not have broader socioeconomic causes or repercussions. Writers on medicine and religion adopted this usage by analogy to describe similar rapid transformations in the bodily and moral realms.

Two newer ideas of revolution took shape during the late eighteenth century. One was a concept of "total" revolution, first used to characterize the French Revolution. This kind of revolution was imagined as an ongoing or unlimited process that either had changed or would change politics profoundly, which would likely have wide-reaching social, economic, and cultural consequences. This new vision of revolution spurred the creation of a countervailing notion of "limited" revolution: a transformation of political structures that had clear limits and an endpoint. This concept resembled the older idea of a "revolution of government," which was also frequently limited in scope, but went beyond it in insisting (in contradistinction to the "total" revolution) that this type of revolution did not call the social order, the economy, or existing culture into question. In so doing, proponents of "limited" revolution drew on a still-emerging distinction between political, economic, and social spheres.

Contemporary observers and actors during the Atlantic revolutionary era deployed these three concepts of revolution for a number of political ends. The capacious eighteenth-century notion of revolution of government, which remained in regular use throughout the period, helped political actors connect seemingly disparate political phenomena. It provided a foundation for proclaiming solidarity and identifying similarity across the revolutionary Atlantic world. The "limited" and "total" concepts of revolution became important as a way to draw consequential political contrasts, especially among the American, French, and Spanish American revolutions. This constellation of concepts, taken together, offered the era's actors a flexibility, distinctive to the period, in describing the temporal and causal dynamics of revolutionary change. The concepts of both revolution of government and limited revolution could accommodate various ways of imagining the relationship between change in politics and other forms of transformational change. This flexibility contrasted with the less malleable causality of both pre-eighteenth-century and more modern concepts of revolution.

The argument I make here draws on a corpus of evidence composed mostly of printed primary sources covering the century and half between the end of the seventeenth century and the third decade of the nineteenth century. I drew together these sources in the first instance by culling the extensive bibliographies and

Révolutions, les véritables, celles qui ne se bornent pas à changer les formes politiques et le personnel gouvernemental, mais qui transforment les institutions et déplacent la propriété." Some of the scholars working on the Haitian Revolution in the 1990s and early 2000s made similar efforts to ensure that Haiti was included in the category of revolution: see esp. Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), 5–7.

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secondary literature on revolution, discussed in more detail below, and through systematic reading of key published primary-source collections (among them J. P. Brissot's *Le patriote français* and Maximilien Robespierre's writings). The argument thus draws on the substantial bulk of sources discovered by prior scholarship, in a variety of genres and European languages. To supplement this bibliographic strategy, I conducted systematic searches for "revolution" and related keywords in digitized databases of book-length seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts in English, French, and Dutch (ARTFL FRANTEXT, EEBO, ECCO, Evans, DBNL); *Early American Newspapers* (North American newspapers); and *Rotunda* (published writings of the American "founding fathers"). These keyword searches cast a wider net, identifying books relevant to the topic that had been overlooked by or omitted from earlier scholarship. Though I have made use of digital tools in assembling the corpus of sources, however, my approach to interpreting them remains firmly analog, grounded in extensive reading and contextualization.

Genealogies of modern revolution: historiography

Historians of ideas have shown convincingly that various forms of the "modern" concept of revolution originated during the decades of the Atlantic revolutions. A seminal 1931 essay by Eugen Rosenstock, "Revolution as a Political Concept in the Modern Era," set the agenda for the field. Rosenstock identified the genesis of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century conception of revolution in an eighteenth-century semantic shift: revolution, he argued, went from meaning a circular turning back to a starting point, recalling its usage in astronomy, to being a word that referred to an open-ended and linear process of change.[5] This claim, taken up most famously by Hannah Arendt, remains an article of faith for many historians even though decades of subsequent scholarship have shown that no such stark shift took place in the eighteenth century.[6]

In the 1970s, as part of a larger project on sociopolitical "keywords," Reinhardt Koselleck undertook an exhaustive analysis of the term "revolution" in German-speaking Europe.[7] Drawing on a much larger corpus than Rosenstock's, he showed that during the French revolutionary decade a "collective singular" notion of revolution had developed, which he argued had a "world" character and implied total social reconstruction. In line with his long-standing interests in the construction of historical time, Koselleck stressed the temporal disruption that this newly evolved concept of revolution implied.[8]

[5]Rosenstock, *Revolution als politischer Begriff in der Neuzeit*, 123–4.

[6]Arendt argued incorrectly, based on Rosenstock's essay, that the word "revolution" had primarily an astronomical meaning, as a turning back to an original point, before the late eighteenth century. Only during the French Revolution did it develop a new meaning as a linear, progressive idea of irrevocable change: Arendt, *On Revolution*, 34–41. For recent refutations see Milner, *Relire la Révolution*, 71–5; and Keith M. Baker, "Revolutionizing Revolution," in Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Palo Alto, 2015), 71–102, at 72.

[7]For this project see Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 2004), esp. "Revolution" (vol. 4).

[8]See Reinhart Koselleck, "Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution" in Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, 1985), 49–56. The idea of revolution as a rupture in

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In the decades since Koselleck's initial sally into keywords, scholars have pursued a similar approach in a number of other linguistic corpuses. In French, this includes several monographs and the work of the "18e et Révolution" collective led in part by Jacques Guilhaumou. (Ironically, that project on the "political lexicon" of the French Revolution never produced a study of the term "revolution" itself.)[9] Parallel projects in Spanish in more recent years have covered the Iberian and Iberian Atlantic contexts: these include a substantial entry in the *Diccionario politico y social del siglo XIX espanol* and an entire volume of the *Iberconceptos* collaborative project.[10] These studies have recovered the diversity of meanings that "revolution" had in distinct Atlantic regions even as they persist in showing how these meanings eventuated in modern concepts of revolution.[11]

In the past decade, Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein have proposed a novel account of how a modern concept of permanent revolution emerged during the early French Revolution. Their work is methodologically rich and in many respects persuasive. Baker and Edelstein are careful to interpret the revolutionary era's language in context and root their arguments in a revolutionary *longue durée* extending back to the seventeenth century.[12] Baker's unusual method—he relies on evidence of collocations (appearances of words together) taken from a large corpus of digitized sources—gives his argument a claim to exhaustivity that few other studies have had.

Baker and Edelstein focus on how revolution came to be understood during the French Revolution as an ongoing, open-ended process. Baker's essay in a volume they coedited on *Scripting Revolution* argues that in the 1789–94 period, "revolution" assumed a new meaning as "act" rather than "fact." Having hitherto been a way to describe an event in the past, "revolution" now became an active process that was inhabited and willed forward by "revolutionaries."[13] In an interlocking argument, Edelstein has shown how a "novel concept of revolution" appeared

time was also important to the influential interpretation by François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris, 1978), 31–4.

[9]See Françoise Dougnac, Annie Geffroy, and Jacques Guilhaumou, eds., *Dictionaire des usages sociopolitiques (1770–1815)*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1985–2006); and Alain Rey, *"Révolution": Histoire d'un mot* (Paris, 1989). Though not intended as a study of revolution, Durand Echeverria and Everett C. Wilkie, *The French Image of America: A Chronological and Subject Bibliography of French Books Printed before 1816 Relating to the British North American Colonies and the United States*, 2 vols. (Metuchen, 1994), is a remarkable, comprehensive resource for the study of interrevolutionary comparisons.

[10]See Javier Fernández Sebastián and Cristóbal Aljovín de Losada, eds., *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, vol. 9, *Revolucion* (Madrid, 2009); and Juan F. Fuentes and Javier F. Sebastian, "Revolucion," in Javier F. Sebastian and Juan F. Fuentes, eds., *Diccionario politico y social del siglo XIX espanol* (Madrid, 2002), 628–38.

[11]See e.g. the otherwise very technically proficient and compelling study by Fabio Wasserman, "Argentina/Rio de la Plata," in Sebastián and Losada, *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, 9: 50–53.

[12]They are the first in this debate to take a full-throated Skinnerian approach to the topic. On ideas in context see the classic Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8/1 (1969), 3–53.

[13]Keith M. Baker, "Revolutionizing Revolution," in Baker and Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution*, 71–102, at 95, 102.

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during the first years of the French Revolution, which could "operate as a self-reflexive authority" and authorize ongoing or "continuous" revolutionary action.[14]

Baker and Edelstein's accounts are quite convincing as genealogies of the notion of permanent revolution that were so important to communist revolutionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Edelstein draws a direct line between the notion of "continuous" revolutionary action in the French Revolution and the modern idea of permanent revolution.) Yet in this respect, both Baker and Edelstein remain firmly in alignment with Rosenstock and Koselleck: their central goal, as it was for the early concept historians, is to trace the origins of modern concepts of revolution.[15]

The field's focus on the genealogy of modern concepts of revolution, in short, has left a blind spot when it comes to the meaning of revolution during the Atlantic age of revolution itself. The emphasis on examining concepts of revolution that were important to nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutionaries has led scholars to give short shrift to concepts of revolution that, though prominent in the revolutionary period, did not remain in regular use thereafter.

The "revolution of government" emerges, *c.*1640s–1770s

The "revolution of government" that became one of the main conceptual resources for revolutionary-era political actors had a pedigree that stretched back to antiquity. Its eighteenth-century form, however, was a distinctive conceptual formation: revolution in this period became both broad and thin, able to signify almost any kind of rapid or sudden change, whether in the political system or outside it.

The notion that governments went through cyclical changes was present already in the works of Aristotle. He used the term *metabole* in the *Politics* to denote the transitions from one political regime to another.[16] These shifts, in Aristotle's writings, were closely linked to changes in the social and economic structures of society: changes of regime had socioeconomic causes, and political change reliably brought about redistributions of wealth and other social changes.[17] The Greek historian Polybius took up this model and gave it a distinctive, systematic form. He claimed that states moved in a predictable fashion from one form of government to another, as each type first degraded into its corresponding corrupt version (monarchy into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and so on) and then gave way to the next in the sequence. He termed this process *anacyclosis*. While the timing of these changes was uncertain, their order was predictable and inevitable; the process could be slowed but not stopped.[18]

[14]Dan Edelstein, "Do We Want a Revolution without Revolution? Reflections on Political Authority," *French Historical Studies* 35/2 (2012), 269–89, at 284.

[15]For a strong statement along these lines see David Armitage, "Every Great Revolution Is a Civil War," in Baker and Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution*, 57–69, at 57. This goal is especially clear in Edelstein, "Do We Want a Revolution without Revolution?".

[16]See Thornton Lockwood and Thanassis Samaras, *Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2015), 184 n. 1.

[17]Aristotle, *Politics*, Book V. See also Peter Calvert, *Revolution* (London, 1970), 40–45.

[18]The key passage explicating this process is Polybius, *Histories*, 6:4. Frank W. Walbank, *Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections* (Cambridge, 2002), 185–6; J. G. A. Pocock, *The*

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As Dan Edelstein has recently shown, translators of Polybius brought "revolution" into the vocabulary of early modern European political thought as a translation of *anacyclosis*. The first published translations of the *Histories* appeared in the 1540s; by the 1550s, writers were using "revolution" to denote the cycling of governments.[19] This usage persisted into the early seventeenth century: European thinkers used the language of "revolutions," with a distinctly Polybian cast, to refer to an iterative, cyclical process of major constitutional change. For instance, contemporary histories of the 1647 "Revolutions of Naples," a revolt led by the fisherman Masaniello against Naples's Spanish sovereign, depicted the Neapolitan "revolutions" as the outcome of profound social strife between the poor and the nobility.[20] Authors described the events of the English Civil War as a series of "revolutions" in the same fashion: Antony Ascham's important 1649 treatise paired "revolutions" with "confusions" to describe a profound disruption of the sovereign power.[21]

Between the 1670s and the 1740s, "revolution" expanded to encompass forms of rapid change that were nonconstitutional or even nonpolitical in character, detaching the term from its Polybian and Aristotelian roots. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt have shown that "revolution" was used in the French linguistic corpus during the first two thirds of the eighteenth century "to describe even the smallest changes" in politics. This included "disorders" and "conspiracies" as well as changes of sovereign.[22] The Abbé Vertot's popular 1719 *Histoire des Révolutions arrivées dans le Gouvernement de la République Romaine* was exemplary in this

Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, 1975); and the critique in Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004), 3. Equally familiar to eighteenth-century readers was his claim that this cycle could be slowed or stabilized through the creation of "mixed" governments, incorporating elements of each of these different forms of government. See Walbank, *Polybius*, 204–6.

[19]Dan Edelstein, "A 'Revolution' in Political Thought: Translations of Polybius Book 6 and the Conceptual History of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83/1 (2022), 17–40, esp. 33–5.

[20]See Vernon F. Snow, "The Concept of Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Historical Journal* 5/2 (1962), 169–70; and Alessandro Giraffi, *An exact historie of the late revolutions in Naples; and of their monstrous successes, not to be parallel'd by any ancient or modern history. Published by the Lord Alexander Giraffi in Italian; and (for the rarenesse of the subject) rendred to English, by J.H., Esqr* (London, 1650), 5–7.

[21]Antony Ascham, *Of the confusions and revolutions of governments wherein is examined how farre a man may lawfully conforme to the powers and commands of those who with various successes hold kingdomes divided by civill or forreigne warres …* (London, 1649). See the good discussions in Snow, "The Concept of Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England," 170–71; Mark Hartman, "Hobbes's Concept of Political Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47/3 (1986), 487–95, at 488–9.

[22]Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, "'Révolution' à la fin du 18e siècle," *Mots: Les langages du politique* (1988), 35–68, at 41–2. Note that for Lüsebrink and Reichardt, this is a problematic finding: they worry that it means that "révolution finit par ne plus signifier rien de spécifique." As will become clear, this is only the case if one expects it to have the "modern" meaning. Similar findings were made by Lisa Kolb and Lothar Schilling, "Ambiguity in Translation: Communicating Economic Reform in the Multilingual Republic of Berne," in Susan Richter, Thomas Maissen, and Manuela Albertone, eds., *Languages of Reform in the Eighteenth Century: When Europe Lost Its Fear of Change* (New York, 2019), 106–12, looking at translations between French and German. A good example of the genre is found in *Du contrat social*. As part of his argument for the superiority of republican forms of government, Rousseau asserts that in monarchies "every revolution in the ministry produces one [i.e. a revolution] in the State"—by which he meant in the state's policies. By describing changes in government personnel and policy as "revolutions," Rousseau embraces this expanded notion of revolution. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Collection complète des œuvres de J.J. Rousseau*, 33 vols. (Geneva, 1782–9), 2: 131.

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regard: Vertot used "revolution" liberally to refer to all manner of change, including regular elections and palace intrigues.[23]

Spanish publications on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century used "revolution" broadly as a synonym for "change" as well. The first dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, published in 1737, defined "revolution" as "unrest, riot, sedition, change [*alteración*]," as well as a "new plan in the state or government." (There, again, is the use of "revolution" as a synonym for "change" in general.)[24] Chilean authors in the eighteenth century, as Alejandro San Francisco has shown, described the conflicts among conquistadores during the early colonial period as "frequent revolutions" and use the term "revolution" to characterize conflicts among the governing elite in subsequent decades.[25]

English-language authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also used "revolution" capaciously to refer to many different types of political change. The Richard Steele-founded *Tatler*, precursor to the celebrated *Spectator*, used "revolution" in a typically acerbic discussion of changes in the ministry. Writing about men who were quick to switch their loyalty to new leaders, the author of the number sardonically suggested that the greatest "Hardship" these men faced was that they got no notice of "any approaching Change or Revolution," forcing them to perform rapid changes in their loyalty and political position. The use of "Change," seemingly as a synonym for "Revolution," emphasizes the fact that "Revolution" could now be used to encompass far more than changes in constitutions.[26]

Debates over the English "Glorious Revolution" of 1688–9 may have played a role in this shifting usage, especially in the English-speaking world. Some contemporary authors chose or accepted the "revolution" label for the 1688–9 events precisely because they did *not* regard it as a fundamental change in the constitution. England entered the crisis a monarchy and exited it still a monarchy.[27] Others, however, seem to have called 1688–9 a "revolution" because they believed that it embodied a fundamental shift in the relation between king and Parliament, which equated to the kind of thoroughgoing, constitutional change that had usually been labelled "revolution" earlier in the century. Given the transitional nature of the concept in this moment, such ambiguity in usage should not be surprising.[28]

[23]See, among others, René-Aubert Abbé de Vertot, *The history of the revolutions that happened in the government of the Roman Republic* (1719), 2 vols. (London, 1770), 2: 10 and 1: 29–30.

[24]Juan Francisco Fuentes, "España," in Sebastián and Losada, *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, 9: 139–50, at 139. Note that this essay incorrectly cites the definition as reading *altercación*.

[25]Alejandro San Francisco, "Chile," in Sebastián and Losada, *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, 9: 107–22, at 107.

[26]See Tatler No. 214, in Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, *The lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.* [*Tatler*] (1709–11) (London, 1786), 338.

[27]See Tim Harris, "Did the English Have a Script for Revolution in the Seventeenth Century?" in Baker and Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution*, 25–40, at 40: "when they invoked the term 'revolution,' the seventeenth-century English essentially meant a regime change."

[28]One of the most interesting recent efforts to discuss ideas of revolution is Pincus, *1688*, 221–24, 302. He argues that scholars who have disputed the revolutionary-ness of the Glorious Revolution are wrong because they have missed how it was "every bit as popular, violent, and divisive as most modern revolutions." Ibid., 302. For a good illustration of the way in which "revolution" could signify multiple different

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As "revolution" acquired non-constitutional meanings, its usage changed in two significant ways. One was that the events called "revolutions" could, increasingly, be any kind of change in a government. Steele's description of the change of ministry left little room to imagine that this "revolution" was anything other than a changing of the guard in the halls of power. Vertot used "revolutions" to describe ordinary political changes in the Roman Republic. In so doing, he broke with the usage of "revolution" by translators of Polybius, who had largely reserved the term for the most dramatic forms of regime change in the Roman world.[29]

By the middle of the eighteenth century, authors regularly used "revolution" to describe changes in government that were *ipso facto* singular and firmly in the past, marking further departures from the Polybian and Aristotelian paradigms. The author of a pamphlet about Madras entitled *The very extraordinary revolution which happened in the government of Fort. St. George in August last, by seizing the person of the governor* (1777) found "revolution" the appropriate word to describe the one-off, unexpected change of political fortune described in its title.[30] A 1749 multivolume examination of the War of Spanish Succession concluded with a reference to the "sudden Revolution that put the House of Bourbon on the Throne of Spain," characterizing dynastic succession as a form of "revolution."[31] Similarly, the author of *A History of the Late Revolution in Sweden* (1776) made "revolution" synonymous with a rapid reordering of political power. This royalist coup—the "revolution itself, or the introduction of despotism"—was understood as a sudden, one-time change in the government.[32] In all of these cases, the shift towards the singular meant that revolution could be firmly situated in the past tense: these revolutions were "late" or had "happened," unlike

kinds of change see J.-M. Goulemot, "L'emploi du mot révolution dans les traductions françaises du XVIIIe siècle des Discours de Nicolas Machiavel," *Cahiers de lexicologie* 13 (1968), 77–9.

[29]This decoupling of major political change from transformations in society and economy smacks of the broader seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century intellectual shift, of which John Locke was the master thinker, that reimagined political constitution and socioeconomic structure as distinct and sometimes autonomous spheres. See Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, 1986), 220; and Laslett, "Introduction" in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), 94–8. See also the discussion of forms of government, which seems to express no particular preference, in ibid., §132–3. Locke and other "liberal" thinkers had a social theory, but *contra* Filmer and "republican" thinkers they saw political structure as somewhat independent of underlying socioeconomic structures. "Republican" thinkers continued to insist on the codependence of socioeconomic structure and form of government, for which see especially Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), Ch. 4; Johnson Kent Wright, *A Classical Republican in Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Thought of Mably* (Stanford, 1997); and Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*.

[30]See also the *Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal* (1760), 1, 114–15. That tract analyzed the causes and consequences of the "late Revolution in Bengal" by which Mir Jafar had become *nawab* of Bengal and adjacent provinces with the support of the East India Company. The pamphlet offered a military and political history of the event, showing how British and Indian forces had contributed to this political change: the author clearly did not regard this "revolution" (singular) as having been inevitable.

[31]Du Mont, *Mémoires de Monsieur de La Torre contenant l'histoire des negociations secrètes des cours de l'Europe pour le partage des royaumes de l'Espagne*, vol. 2 (London, 1749), 370. This usage echoes that of Daniel Defoe, who in a 1711 essay described the deaths that made Charles VI a potential heir to the Spanish throne as the "Revolution which has happened in the House of Austria." Daniel Defoe, *An essay at a plain exposition of that difficult phrase a good peace. By the Author of the Review* (London, 1711), 29.

[32]Charles Francis Sheridan, *A History of the Late Revolution in Sweden* (London, 1776), xii.

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the ceaseless, ongoing cycle of changes that Polybius and Aristotle had imagined.[33]

Mid-eighteenth-century authors began, tentatively, to attribute a causal role to human action in the making of specific revolutions. Seventeenth-century authors, working within Polybian and Aristotelian frames, had imagined "revolutions" (in the plural) as an almost natural fact, an inevitable occurrence. Once revolution became singular, however, it could also have discernible causes and causal agents. The 1772 "revolution" of Sweden, in which the Swedish king seized absolute political power, offers the clearest instance of this emerging belief. Observers across Europe agreed that this "revolution" had been effected by King Gustavus III himself.[34] The author of the *History of the Late Revolution* accused the king of organizing a well-laid "scheme" to seize power and described in detail how the "revolution" was "executed" by him. These included elaborate military and political plans that culminated in a dramatic personal seizure of power in Sweden's parliament.[35]

The first half of the eighteenth century also saw the usage of "revolution" to denote rapid change spread to areas of life other than politics or government strictly speaking. As early as 1703, Daniel Defoe had referred to a "Revolution" of "religion" at the time of the formation of Christianity.[36] Over his long career, Jean-Jacques Rousseau used "revolution" to signify change in a wide variety of different domains of life. In his *Lettre sur les Spectacles*, discussing the idea of establishing a theatre in Geneva, he wrote that it would cause "a revolution in our habits, which will produce … one [i.e. a revolution] in our manners [*moeurs*]."[37] In the *Confessions*, he reflected on finding himself suddenly out of favor: "It is easy to judge," he wrote, "what an abrupt revolution must have occurred in my ideas."[38] The *philosophe* Abbé Raynal, in similar fashion, referred to a "revolution in the manners" of the English after the Seven Years War.[39] The Dictionary of the Spanish Academy noted that "disorder and change of the humors" could also be described as a "revolution."[40]

Revolution also became part of the technical vocabulary of medicine during these years, as a synonym for a sudden, often unpredictable, sometimes irreversible, physical change. These meanings migrated not from the technical vocabulary of mechanics or physics (in the sense of the rotation of wheels or heavenly bodies) but from the realm of politics. They were extensions or expansions of the broad political concept of revolution-as-change into other fields of life. Physicians wrote of a "revolution in constitution" that took place when an individual arrived in the

[33]See also Louis-Sébastien Mercier, "L'an deux mille quatre cent quarante," in Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-revolutionary France* (New York, 1995), 300–36, at 330, in which a character describes "the revolution" that had ended despotism in France: it is firmly in the past, singular, and led by a single individual.

[34]R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959–64), 1: 102.

[35]Sheridan, *A History*, 176–7, 192–4.

[36]Daniel Defoe, *The sincerity of the dissenters vindicated …* (London, 1703), 12. See the similar usage in Rousseau, *Collection complète des œuvres*, 23: 205.

[37]Rousseau, *Collection complète des œuvres*, 11: 372.

[38]Ibid., 19: 135–6. "Il est aisé de juger quelle brusque révolution dut se faire dans mes idées."

[39]Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *The Revolution of America* (London, 1781), 120.

[40]"Revolución," in Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de Autoridades*, vol. 5 (1737), 614.

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tropics. (These "revolutions" could be the cause of significant disease.) The *Encyclopédie* used the term to describe an abrupt change in physical condition: "Accident, in Medicine, means a revolution that brings on an illness."[41] And Rousseau, again in the *Confessions*, used it as part of the description of the sudden onset of an illness: "I felt a sudden and almost unimaginable revolution in my whole body."[42]

The nonpolitical uses of "revolution" in the mid-eighteenth century had the same kind of narrow ambit as was common in political uses of the term. Just as it was possible by the mid-eighteenth century to write about "revolution" in politics without adducing socioeconomic causes or consequences, so it was possible to speak of "revolution" occurring in religious practice or belief without accompanying change in the structures of the state or the economic sphere. A "revolution in habits" or "manners" could take place without concomitant changes in politics. The physiological sense of "revolution," by the same token, emphasized physical transformation, leaving open the possibility that other aspects of an individual's life (thoughts, feelings) could be left untouched.

Persistence and transformation in concepts of revolution, 1776–1830

Political actors in multiple Atlantic regions and languages continued to employ the idea of a "revolution of government" as a matter of course from the 1770s through the 1820s. This usage, which has been occluded by recent scholarship, stretched across the political spectrum. Actors' use of this capacious concept of revolution was not merely vestigial. It did important ideological work for both pro- and anti-revolutionary actors, providing a conceptual scaffolding for political alliances and critiques across revolutionary borders.

Starting in the early 1790s, two new concepts of revolution came into circulation alongside this older one. As scholars have long recognized, actors began to use "revolution" in a new way during this period to talk about the French Revolution. Actors described the French Revolution as a "total" form of revolution, which aimed at far-reaching and possibly unlimited changes. In response to this new concept, commentators fashioned a countervailing idea of "limited" revolution: revolution that was limited in scope and aims. This was clearly related to the "revolution of government" but not identical with it. These two concepts became central to important comparative debates about the era's revolutionary movements, first involving the American and French revolutions and then the revolutions of Spanish America.

Persistence

Dictionary definitions offer a handy, albeit methodologically limited, heuristic for assaying the persistence of the eighteenth-century concept of revolution throughout

[41]Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1751), 72. See the similar point made by I. Bernard Cohen, "The Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Concept of Scientific Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37/2 (1976), 257–88. My thanks to Angela N. H. Creager for directing me to this essay.

[42]Rousseau, *Collection complète des œuvres*, 20: 111–12.

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the Atlantic revolutionary era.[43] The 1798 dictionary of the Académie française defined revolution as "change which occurs in public affairs … in opinions, etc.," and more specifically as the "memorable and sudden changes which have shaken" certain countries. The dictionary offered the celebrated 1772 "Revolution of Sweden" as an example of the genre.[44] The 1828 first edition of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* offered a definition that also fell squarely into the pattern of the revolution of government. "In politics," Webster wrote, a revolution is "a material … change in the constitution of government." He offered as examples of the phenomenon "the revolution in England, in 1688," which "was produced by the abdication of king James II," and the cases of the "revolutions in Poland, in the United States of America, and in France."[45]

Actual usage confirms the persistence into the revolutionary era of older, eighteenth-century ideas of revolution. They appeared in politically consequential writings on the American Revolution. Thomas Paine, in one of the 1777 "American Crisis" essays, brassily declared that it would be easier to "effect a revolution" in England by replacing George III on the throne than for the British Army to reconquer America. "Revolution" here equated to a change of sovereign.[46] Multiple authors described the scission of the British Empire as a "revolution." Paine marked the end of the American war with another "American Crisis" paper that extolled US independence, calling it the "greatest and compleatest revolution the world ever knew."[47] The 1780 edition of the celebrated *Histoire des Deux Indes*, published under the name of the Abbé Raynal but coauthored by a number of leading French men of letters, also used "revolution" to describe the breakdown of the British Empire in 1776.[48] He repeated this usage in 1781, in his pamphlet on the *Révolution de l'Amérique*, calling the division of the British empire a "revolution."[49]

Both English- and French-speaking authors continued to employ the older usage to describe political changes on both sides of the Atlantic during the French Revolution. Writing to George Washington in July of 1789 about the month's events

[43]Formal definitions alone are of limited value for understanding how contemporaries employed concepts: they may lag behind actual usage and early modern lexicographers were notorious for copying from one another. But they can provide a heuristic and a starting point. On the use of dictionary definitions see Lüsebrink and Reichardt, "'Révolution' à la fin du 18e siècle," 35–7; and Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1999), 41–3.

[44]*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 5th edn, vol. 2 (Paris, 1798). The previous, 1762, edition of the *Dictionnaire* also included a political definition of "révolution"—"Il se dit aussi figurément du changement qui arrive dans les affaires publiques"—but the entry was shorter and did not include the specific examples that appeared in 1798.

[45]Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language …* (New York, 1828).

[46]Thomas Paine, "The American Crisis" (13 Jan. 1777), in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 1, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, 1945), 71.

[47]Thomas Paine, "The American Crisis XIII" (19 April 1783), in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 1, 230. He uses the term "revolution" throughout this number of the "Crisis."

[48]Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des européens dans les deux Indes*, vol. 4 (Geneva, 1780), 390. The chapter in which this appears, written by Diderot, begins with a paraphrase of the first section of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.

[49]Ibid., 154. He also used "revolutions" in the plural to describe a Polybian cycling of constitutions. See ibid., 38, 74, and perhaps 126.

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in France, US ambassador Gouverneur Morris wrote, "You may consider the Revolution as compleat; that is to say the Authority of the King and of the Nobility is completely subdued."[50] Implicitly, for him, the "Revolution" was complete when only changes in government (the end of the "Authority" of the king and privileged orders) had thus far taken place. Thomas Paine, on the opposite side of the American political spectrum from Morris, deployed the same concept in *The Rights of Man*, referring to "revolutions, or changes in governments," synonymously.[51] Pennsylvanian Tench Coxe, in a 1790 letter to Alexander Hamilton, described the US Constitution as "the revolution of 1789, for as such I view it." His explanation made clear that he meant the creation of a new frame of government. This "revolution," he went on to explain, would open the way to settling "a great number of public difficulties," among them questions about the public debts of the states.[52]

Actors in the francophone world, even as they began to use the language of revolution in new ways, continued to employ the term in the older manner to refer to a completed political change. References to the "revolution of 14 July" were common. Jacques Necker's 1795 history of the French Revolution explained that what had been revolutionary about that day was the transfer of political power occasioned by the destruction of the "vital principle of Royal Authority."[53] Maximilien de Robespierre, French legislator and leader of the Jacobin Club, excoriated a group of his onetime republican allies in 1793, the so-called Girondins, for having opposed the "Revolution of 10 August." This "Revolution," which Robespierre spoke of often, had marked the de facto end of the king's authority and set in motion the abolition of the monarchy.[54] Giuseppe Gorani, an Italian enthusiast for the early French Revolution who had become close with the Girondin group, in turn described their purging from the National Convention as its own "revolution" (the "Revolution of 31 May 1793").[55]

Commentators extended the term "revolution," albeit less systematically, to the revolt by enslaved people in St Domingue now known as the Haitian Revolution. An eyewitness account by a M. Gros, first published in 1792, contains multiple references to the "revolution" of St Domingue. Particularly striking was a passage in which he quoted a free man of color using the word "revolution" in reference to the Haitian uprising. (He attributed the "first causes of this revolution" to

[50]Gouverneur Morris to George Washington, 31 July 1789, in Anne Cary Randolph Morris, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris*, vol. 1 (New York, 1970), 171. For a similar view see John Brown Cutting to Thomas Jefferson, 20 March 1790: "By the letter of Mr. Short you will perceive even if he has not informed you directly himself, that the political revolution in France is considered as secure and accomplish'd." in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 16 (Princeton, 1961), 252.

[51]Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 1, 243–458, at 446.

[52]Tench Coxe to Alexander Hamilton, 5[–9] March 1790, in Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 6 (New York, 1962), 291.

[53]Jacques Necker, *De la Révolution françoise*, nouv. éd., avec des addition de l'auteur, 4 vols. (Paris, 1797), 2: 13.

[54]For the accusation against Brissot, 10 April 1793, see Maximilien Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1912), 9: 378. Robespierre's clearest explanation of how he understood the meaning of 10 August is in his "Réponse à l'accusation de Louvet," 5 Nov. 1792, in ibid., 9: 80.

[55]Giuseppe Gorani, *Lettres aux Français par l'auteur des Lettres aux souverains*, vol. 1 (London, 1794), 119, 37.

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"France.")[56] An 1804 manuscript by a French observer described it as "this revolution." The author argued, moreover, that the Haitians and their white French allies intended to "revolutionize the Globe" by abolishing slavery, figuring them as active agents of revolutionary change.[57] Such references are admittedly less common for Haiti than for some other revolutions of the era. This may have been a deliberate linguistic choice by early leaders of the Revolution, as some scholars have argued, to set their movement apart.[58] Or it may be that hostile observers intended to downgrade the Haitian movement's importance by calling it a "revolt" or "insurgency." More evidence will need to be amassed to adjudicate these arguments, but in either case "revolution" was undoubtedly part of the contemporary vocabulary for talking about Haiti.

Spanish-speaking political actors during the late eighteenth century and early the nineteenth continued to draw on the language of revolutions of government to describe political events on both sides of the Atlantic. Francisco de Miranda referred in 1799 to one of the periodic coups that took place in France's Directorial government as "a kind of Revolution."[59] In similar fashion, Manuel de Vidaurre, who became a leading theorist of Latin American independence, described a revolt in Upper Peru as the "revolution that happened in Cuzco on 3 August 1814."[60] In Santa Fe in the province of New Granada in 1810, the seizure of power by a local junta was celebrated by a local observer as a "wondrous revolution" that had taken place without shedding a "single drop of blood."[61] The concept of revolution as a bloodless change of regime was widely deployed in Spain itself between 1820 and 1823, a period during which the political structure of the monarchy was changed by the king's reluctant acceptance of a liberal constitution.[62]

The consistency with which we find capacious uses of "revolution" in the era, to describe many different forms of political change, strongly suggests that revolutionary actors were trying to make a point. It is possible that some authors were simply being sloppy or hyperbolic when they labelled every little political event a

[56]Gros, "Historick Recital," in Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago, 2007), 130.

[57][Jacques Périès,] "La révolution de Saint-Domingue," MS 38074, British Library.

[58]This argument is made by Chelsea Stieber, *Haiti's Paper War: Post-independence Writing, Civil War, and the Making of the Republic, 1804–1954* (New York, 2020), 21–2, though Julia Gaffield has uncovered evidence that Toussaint Louverture at least was unhappy with the refusal by European observers to use the word "revolution." see Louverture to Rallier, 26 germinal 7, CO 245/2, The National Archives, Kew. My thanks to Professor Gaffield for sharing this source and her interpretation with me.

[59]Miranda to Caro, 5 July 1799, in *Colección documental de la independencia del Perú*, t.1, v.1, 194: "una especie de Revolucion."

[60]Manuel de Vidaurre, "Justificación motivada por las acusaciones en torno a la conducta seguida en Cuzco," in *Colección documental de la independencia del Perú*, t.1, v.5, 160: "revolución acaecida."

[61]Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila and Arnovy Fajardo Barragán, "Colombia/Nueva Granada," in Fernández Sebastián and Aljovín de Losada, *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, 9: 126. See also the repeated references, in correspondence related to the city of Arequipa's request for special commendation for its loyalty to the Spanish Crown, to "revolucion" and "planes de revolucion." The term in these exchanges refers to declarations of independence from the Spanish crown: see *Colección documental de la independencia del Perú*, t.1, v.7, 420, 430–34.

[62]Fuentes and Sebastian, "Revolucion," 628 and 30.

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"revolution." But it is far more plausible that the inclusive usage that we see from many contemporary actors reflected an equally capacious vision of the revolutionary Atlantic world, as one in which many distinct revolutionary movements were linked together by shared principles and causal chains. This worldview would be entirely consonant with the extensive transatlantic and hemispheric connections among revolutionaries that a great deal of recent scholarship has uncovered.[63]

A number of actors were explicit about their view of the era's revolutions as being interconnected and similar in nature. The American and French revolutions were frequently discussed in this fashion. J. J. Brissot, a leading publicist of the early French Revolution who knew the United States well, declared in 1791, "The *American Revolution brought forth the French Revolution*."[64] The English radical Dr Joseph Priestley, in his reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, opined in similar fashion that "the French … arose from the same general principles" as the "American Revolution."[65] An anonymous pro-French author writing in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1793 insisted, like Priestley, that "French and American principles … coincide." He or she believed that the revolutions had the same aims as well: both were intended only to secure "equality of political rights." "Nothing is more false," the author asserted, than to claim that "equality of property is the object of the French revolution."[66]

Many other revolutions in and after 1789 became the object of similar connective work under the aegis of the notion of a revolution of government. In September 1789, less than two months after the seizure of the Bastille, the British radical Richard Price wrote to a political ally that "a similar Revolution [to France's] has already taken place in the Principality of Liege."[67] A number of observers made similar connections between the Haitian and French Revolutions. We have already seen that M. Gros regarded the Haitian Revolution as sparked by the French. Baron Pompée Valentin Vastey, a leading Haitian man of letters in the

[63]This tendency is in line with the extensive transatlantic and hemispheric connections among revolutionaries that a great deal of recent scholarship has revealed, for which see e.g. Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville, 2010); Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York, 2016); Julius C. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York, 2018); Micah Alpaugh, "The British Origins of the French Jacobins: Radical Sociability and the Development of Political Club Networks, 1787–1793," *European History Quarterly* 44/4 (2014), 593–619; and Janet L. Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven, 2015).

[64]J.-P. Brissot, *A Discourse upon the question, Whether the King shall be tried?*, trans. P. J. G. Nancrede (Boston, 1791), 28, original emphasis. For similar statements by others see also J. F. Vacher in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, 19 July 1792; David Williams, *Lessons to a young prince, by an old statesman, on the present disposition in Europe to a general revolution. The third edition.* (London, 1790), 37; and André Chénier, "Sur l'Assemblée Nationale," in *Le patriote français*, 3 Sept. 1789 ("La liberté qui luit aux champs de l'Amérique / Eclairera, près de vous, les regards des François; / Et bientôt des récits fidèles / Vous annoncer à nos modèles / Les fruits de leur exemple & nos heureux succès")

[65]Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his* Reflections on the Revolution in France (New York, 1791), 2. The point cited here was underscored for the popular reader by being widely reprinted in newspapers. See e.g. *The Newport Herald* (PA), 28 May 1791.

[66]*National Gazette* (Philadelphia) 30 March 1793.

[67]Richard Price to Lansdowne, 9 Sept. 1789, in Richard Price, *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, 3 vols. (Durham, NC, 1983–94) 3: 256.

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early nineteenth century, concluded in similar fashion that "the French Revolution of 1789, was the original cause of the Revolutions of Haiti." Once the "rights of man" had been proclaimed, he argued, they were lodged "in the hearts of both Blacks and Whites."[68]

Spanish American authors grouped the revolutions in the Northern and Southern Americas together by a similar logic.[69] Vicente Rocafuerte, future president of Ecuador, was one of the most enthusiastic comparers of the United States and Spanish America. In his introduction to an 1821 reprinting of a partial translation of *Common Sense* and other American political works, Rocafuerte described the revolutions as both connected and similar. "Seventy years ago … our brothers the valiant sons of Boston cried out against British tyranny, just as we have now against the despotism of the Peninsula [i.e. Spain]." He urged his readers to follow the North American example in forming republican governments.[70] Similar views are to be found sprinkled throughout Spanish American publications of the independence era. An unsigned article in the *Argos de Chile* in 1818, about a translation of Raynal's *Revolution of America*, for instance, opined that there was an "analogy" between "the glorious insurrection of the North Americans and ours": "the same system of oppression … [and] identical causes of complaint on the part of the Americans" had led to similar revolutionary uprisings in both regions.[71]

Contemporary commentators' inclusive view of revolution nonetheless provided a great deal of leeway to draw fine distinctions, judgments, and connections. That is, being inclusive did not mean being indiscriminate. Already in the early eighteenth century, it had been common practice to qualify "revolution" with adjectives. Revolutions could have scale or scope: they could be "great" or not. Revolutions had positive or negative valence: they could be "terrible" or "wonderful" or "glorious." They could be the cause of great changes or the result of them: a revolution could "cause" another or be "sparked" by another. One revolution could contain several other, smaller ones. It was even possible to use this inclusive view of revolution to critique revolution altogether, as René de Chateaubriand did in his 1797 *Essai sur les révolutions*. He argued that the American Revolution, which he called an illegitimate attack on the Americans' "legitimate sovereign," was the "immediate cause" of what he regarded as an equally illegitimate and catastrophic French Revolution.[72]

[68]Pompée Valentin Vastey, *Essai sur les causes de la révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti: faisant suite aux Réflexions politiques sur quelques ouvrages et journaux françois concernant Hayti* (Sans-Souci, 1819), 389.

[69]Though such comparisons were widespread, as shown in Merle Edwin Simmons, *La revolución norteamericana en la independencia de hispanoamérica* (Madrid, 1992), they do not mean that the United States had a significant influence on the unfolding of Spanish American revolutions and constitutionalism, as Jaime E. Rodríguez, "Sobre la supuesta influencia de la independencia de los Estados Unidos en las independencias hispanoamericanas," *Revista de Indias* 70/250 (2010), 691–714, has very forcefully argued.

[70]Vicente Rocafuerte, *Ideas necesarias á todo pueblo americano independiente, que quiera ser libre* (Philadelphia, 1821), 11.

[71]*Argos de Chile*, 11 June 1818, in Guillermo Feliú Cruz, ed., *Colección de antiguos periódicos chilenos 1818* (Santiago, 1955), 12–13.

[72]René de Chateaubriand, "Essai historique, politique et moral, sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes, considerées dans leurs rapports avec la Révolution Françoise," in *Oeuvres Complètes de M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Pair de France, Membre de l'Académie Françoise*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1826), 213–14.

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Transformation

The Atlantic revolutionary era brought change as well as continuity in the conceptual landscape of revolution. Starting in 1789, writers developed two new ways of thinking about revolution. These new concepts, which were frequently defined in opposition to each other, can be characterized, drawing on the language of the Marquis de Condorcet, as "total" revolutions versus "limited" revolutions. Though distinct, both were unambiguously regarded as species of "revolution." These concepts, which were used by revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike, emerged most clearly in comparative discussions of contemporaneous revolutions.

Transatlantic interrevolutionary comparisons began percolating almost as soon as the French Revolution began.[73] In 1790, British republican and physician Benjamin Vaughan wrote a letter to future US Supreme Court chief justice John Jay that hinted at an emerging contrast between the American and French revolutions. The "American revolution," he wrote, had been "little more than the separation of partnership accounts." The "French revolution," on the other hand, was far-reaching: "they had more to do than America, which has led them to aim at every thing."[74] An anonymous author writing in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1793 offered a similar argument in an article explaining the "difference between the French and American Revolutions." Although the author regarded the two revolutions as having sprung from the same principles, he or she stressed that the opposition of "cunning priests" and "cruel aristocrats" had led the French "republicans" to adopt transformative social and economic policies, which its opponents derided as "excesses."[75]

The Marquis de Condorcet, a leading intellectual of the early French Revolution, produced some of the era's most fully realized analyses of the two revolutions. A 1790 eulogy for Benjamin Franklin echoed Vaughan's view of the two revolutions. The North Americans, Condorcet argued, had "always been free." Their Revolution, unlike the one then unfolding in France, had thus been a conservative act: "for them [Americans] it was a matter not of conquering their liberty, but of defending it."[76]

Four years later, awaiting his execution at the hands of fellow revolutionaries, the ex-marquis elaborated on the comparison. The Americans, in their revolution, he wrote, had "limited themselves to establishing new authorities, substituting them for those which the British nation had exercised over them until that point." The American Revolution had been "limited" in its aims. The French Revolution, on the other hand, had been "more total" (*plus entière*). "In France," he wrote, on account of the scale of the Old Regime obstacles to overcome, "the revolution had to encompass the entire economy of the society, change all social relations,

[73]Comparisons between the American and French revolutions, as we have already seen, began as early as the summer of 1789. Relatively few of these comparisons, however, offer a clear-cut account of the concepts of revolution that they are deploying.

[74]Benjamin Vaughan to John Jay, 4 Aug. 1790, Papers of John Jay, Columbia University.

[75]*Philadelphia General Advertiser*, 25 Jan. 1793.

[76]Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, "Eloge de Franklin," in *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, vol. 3, ed. A. Condorcet O'Connor and M. F. Arago (Paris, 1847), 372–423, at 393.

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and penetrate to the utmost link of the political chain."[77] This new kind of "total" revolution would be, as scholars have shown, an ongoing, open-ended transformation of society, potentially marking a rupture in the fabric of time, in which "the revolution" embodied a quasi-mythic source of legal or moral authority to radically transform the world.[78]

Condorcet's characterization of the "total" revolution as encompassing "society," "social relations," and "economy" drew on what were then cutting-edge intellectual developments. It was during the decades preceding the French Revolution that both "society" and "economy" in something like their modern form had taken conceptual form. As Daniel Gordon showed some time ago, the use of "society" to describe the "durable and large-scale community" of human beings took off after 1750. Its conceptual existence as a distinct domain was just emerging.[79] Similarly, it was during the mid-eighteenth century that the idea of an "economy," which had its own autonomous dynamics, was coming into wide usage.[80] These developments were what made thinkable the notion of a "total" revolution, transforming separate social and economic spheres, that Condorcet and others imagined.

Enthusiasts for the French Revolution on both sides of the Atlantic articulated similar contrasts between two types of revolution. The British radical David Williams offered an early and influential statement of this position in his 1790 *Lessons to a Young Prince*, which discussed both revolutions in detail. Williams portrayed the American Revolution as having been effected primarily through "passive prudence." Like Condorcet a few years later, he thought the Americans were primarily defending a liberty that they already had. They had "not the resolution, since exhibited by the French, to level all provincial distinctions, and to organize the whole nation into one body."[81] The "purpose of the National Assembly of France," on the other hand, was to "to organize the community itself; to form it into an actual body." To do this required them to "abolish *every* contrivance and pretence by which one or a few may be privileged." Though Williams admired both revolutions, he made no secret that the more complete French Revolution, which aimed at eliminating "every" obstacle, was to be preferred.[82]

A similar conceptual strategy emerged from the other side of the political spectrum in the writings of Frederick Gentz, an acerbic critic of the French Revolution

[77]Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Paris, 1794), 274–8: "se bornèrent à établir de nouveaux pouvoirs, à les substituer à ceux que la nation britannique avoit jusqu'alors exercés sur eux." See the discussion of this book in Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, 1957), 169–70.

[78]See Edelstein, "Do We Want a Revolution without Revolution?", 286–7; and Edelstein, "From Constitutional to Permanent Revolution, 1649 and 1793" in Baker and Edelstein, *Scripting Revolution*, 118–30, at 119–20.

[79]Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670–1789* (Princeton, 1994), 51–4.

[80]See in particular Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); and Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet, from Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago, 1975).

[81]Williams, *Lessons to a young prince*, 63, 64–5.

[82]Ibid., 73, original emphasis.

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who produced the earliest full-scale comparisons of the two revolutions, published in English under the title *The American and French Revolution Compared* (1800). Gentz regarded the two revolutions as radically different in their principles and outcomes. His view of the French Revolution had much in common with that of Condorcet, albeit with the value judgment reversed. The French revolutionaries, in Gentz's view, had been chasing an ever-expanding goal of total transformation. The "perpetual mutability" of their principles and "absolute indefinitude of [the] object" they sought had led the French into conflict, warfare, and bloodshed. It had profoundly altered their society, and indeed all of Europe, leading to "breaches of the rights of property" that (in his words) "held the sword hovering over the head of every one, who had any thing to lose."[83]

Gentz regarded the American Revolution as quite different in character. The Americans, unlike the French, had had "only one object" in view from the start: independence from Britain. Because of this, they had "known exactly how far they were to go, and where they must stop." Though he admitted that the revolutionary war had caused disruptions in the society and economy, he insisted that its effects had been essentially limited and political in nature: "the revolution altered little in the internal organization of the colonies, as it only dissolved an external connection." Property rights and the social order, he stressed—not at all correctly, as we now know—had been unaffected.[84] This account of the American Revolution, as a "limited" revolution that entailed nothing but a shift in political regime, echoed with the notion of a revolution of government that had been widespread during the previous century.[85]

Few of the many contemporary critics of the French Revolution were as explicit as Gentz in mapping the two revolutions onto a total/limited conceptual binary. But like Gentz, virtually all Francophobic commentators who made comparisons between the two revolutions nonetheless used the word "revolution" for both. William Cobbett, one of the most vehement Anglo-American opponents of the French Revolution, disclaimed almost any similarity between "the French revolution [and] that of America." But he called both revolutions.[86] It seems likely that implicit in his understanding of the two revolutions was some version of the contrast, made explicit by Gentz, between a "total" French Revolution and a "limited" American one.

Comparative discussions of revolution extended to Spanish America beginning in 1808. Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian peninsula, the abdication of the Spanish king, and the establishment of first a governing junta in 1808 and then an imperial Cortes (parliament) in 1810, generated a profound political crisis in

[83]Frederick Gentz, *The Origin and Principles of the American Revolution Compared with the Origin and Principles of the French Revolution*, trans. J. Q. Adams (1800) (Chicago, 1955), 65, 62, 68–9.

[84]Ibid., 54, 58, 68. On the transformation of property in the aftermath of the American Revolution see Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54/2 (1997), 307–46; and Matthew P. Spooner, "Origins of the Old South: Revolution, Slavery, and Changes in Southern Society, 1776–1800" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2015).

[85]See Gentz, *American and French Revolutions Compared*, 4, 70.

[86][William Cobbett], *The bloody buoy, thrown out as a warning to the political pilots of America …* (Philadelphia, 1796), 203–4.

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the transatlantic Spanish Empire. This "Atlantic crisis" helped to spark uprisings throughout Spanish America, which eventually led to independence during the 1820s.[87] The debates about Spanish America were more three-cornered than the earlier ones, since they could refer to both the French and American examples. But they also plotted revolutions along the axis from "limited" to "total."

Some of the earliest comparative discussions in Spanish America took place in the periodicals that proliferated after 1810. One pitted the editors of the *Mercurio Peruano*, a moderate newspaper published in Lima, against the editor of *El Robespierre español* (The Spanish Robespierre), a radical journal briefly published in Cádiz. *El Robespierre español*, as befit its French namesake, advocated for a Jacobin-style revolution in Spain: the sixth issue, for instance, demanded that the nobility be abolished.[88] Yet more than advocating for French-style reforms, the editor of *El Robespierre español* cast the Spanish "revolution" in the image of the French. In an imagined dialogue published in the twelfth issue, he outlined a strikingly "total" vision of the Cortes's power. "What restrictions are there … on the Cortes?" the editor had one character ask. "None," came the reply. The second character echoed language used to describe the French National Convention: "The Spanish people … have given their deputies plenary power … to break up, reform, abolish, create anew, revise or excise whatever is needed for the salvation of the patria, and its future happiness."[89] Like the French Revolution, in his view, the revolution in Spain was unbounded and in principle limitless.

The editors of the *Mercurio Peruano*, who evidently followed *El Robespierre español* closely, used an article on liberty of the press to offer an alternative vision in a March 1812 issue of their newspaper. The original article, in language reminiscent of French radicals of the early 1790s, had excoriated the ministry for threatening liberty of the press. The editors of the *Mercurio* reprinted the article and rebutted it with considerable sarcasm. They ended with a commentary on the relationship between revolutions. "It is not correct that our revolution has the violent and bloody character the French one had," they wrote. "Do you not know what revolution is? Revolution is the time of reform [*el tiempo de las reformas*]." In their view, they went on, "the Spanish" had been thrust into a revolutionary situation without "seeking it out." The Spanish people's responsibility now was to "draw [from it] that which is consonant with the general welfare" and nothing more: only "to banish all tyranny … and set the state in order."[90] These limited goals, focused on removing "tyranny" and restoring "order," were a far cry from the unbounded transformations envisaged by the editor of *El Robespierre*.

A related comparative analysis of the Spanish Empire's revolutions appeared in the Chilean republican newspaper *El Semanario Republicano* in late 1813. The author proposed to discuss the "revolutions" or "enthusiasms" in Spain, Buenos

[87]For valuable discussions of the Spanish imperial crisis from an Atlantic perspective see esp. José Maria Portillo Valdés, *Crisis atlántica: Autonomía e independencia en la crisis de la monarquía hispana* (Madrid, 2006); and Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, 2006).

[88]See *El Robespierre español* 6 (23 May 1811), 46–8

[89]*El Robespierre español* 12 (n.d.), 94–5.

[90]*El Mercurio Peruano* 2/23 (20 March 1812), in Carmen Villanueva, ed. *Periódicos: Colección documental de la Independencia del Perú*, vol. 3 (Lima, 1973), 243–4.

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Aires, "Mexico, Cundinamarca, Caracas and Quito."[91] He dismissed the "revolution" in Spain for its failure to adopt republican government or promote "new men" to positions of power. It had been, in his view, too limited. He had a more favorable view of the revolutions in Mexico, Quito, Caracas, and Cundinamarca. All were in some measure republican and they pursued, he wrote, "the same cause." Yet they, too, had failed to take what he believed to be the "natural" next step, namely creating a "concentrated … and central" government for the Americas.[92] This brought him to the "revolution of Buenos Aires," which he regarded as the most "glorious" and "worthy of attention." Its "strength" came from being backed by the "general enthusiasm of the people." Its leaders had pushed for the formation of a supreme government over the newly independent republics, which he argued would ensure the safety and success of the revolution throughout the Americas.[93]

Like the idea of a "revolution of government," the "limited" and "total" concepts of revolution provided common frameworks through which eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century political actors could make sense of their rapidly changing political world. The revolution of government, a broad and inclusive concept, lent itself to lumping revolutionary movements together, whether positively or negatively. The "limited" and "total" concepts of revolution were better suited to creating contrasts. Both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries found these concepts useful as a way to generalize and connect revolutionary movements across the era's diverse political landscape.

Time and causality during the age of revolutions

The three distinctive ideas of revolution that circulated during the age of Atlantic revolutions gave rise to a period-specific flexibility in how actors imagined the temporality of revolutionary change. Because they understood "revolution" as capable of describing change largely or entirely in the realm of government and politics, eighteenth-century actors could posit a number of different causal and temporal relationships between "revolution" in politics and other kinds of change. Revolution in government or politics could follow from, occur alongside, or precede change in the social, economic, or cultural spheres. These multiple possibilities contrast sharply with the single path, consisting of major political transformation closely tied to a transformation of society, that was characteristic of ideas of revolution before the 1700s and after the 1820s.

To modern eyes, the account of revolutionary causality from the age of Atlantic revolutions that seems most familiar is the idea that changes in government or politics were caused by deeper or longer-running forms of change in other areas of life. Modern scholars typically view revolutionary change as the product of long-term causes, often at least partly socioeconomic in nature.[94] Some revolutionary-era

[91]*El Semanario Republicano* 2 (6 Nov. 1813), in *El Semanario republicano, y otros impresos publicados en 1813* (Santiago de Chile, 1913), 124; and *El Semanario Republicano* 3 (13 Nov. 1813), in ibid., 136., 124, 136.

[92]*El Semanario Republicano* 2 (6 Nov. 1813), 124–5.

[93]*El Semanario Republicano* 3 (13 Nov. 1813), 136–7.

[94]For influential statements of this position see Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; and Hobsbawm, "Revolution."

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actors believed so, though they typically cited a change in "sentiments" as the key causal factor. An anonymous pamphleteer writing in 1790 about the French Revolution, for instance, argued, "However unexpected or sudden the late revolution of our government may appear," it was the result of "a gradual change in the sentiments of the nation" that was "strongly symptomatic of an approaching alteration in the constitution."[95]

Significant authors and actors on both sides of the Atlantic developed accounts of the causes of a change in "constitution" that saw it as following in the wake of other forms of change. The French counterrevolutionary Marquis de Bouillé, writing in the late 1790s, described the political events of 1787 as a product of long-germinating changes: "This year the revolution which had already taken place in the mind and in the manners and customs of the nation began to shew itself in the government." (This was also how the Abbé Barruel described the origins of the French Revolution in his influential conspiracy theory.)[96] John Adams is usually believed to have offered a version of this argument about the American Revolution toward the end of his life: "The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the Minds and Hearts of the People."[97]

Those who thought about changes in constitutions in this sense, as the consequence of changes in other domains of life that had already occurred, had in common a belief in revolution's inevitability and durability. The political revolution, when it came, was merely the late-ripening fruit of a long growing cycle. The political valence or value judgment attached to that interpretation was by no means identical, as the cases of Adams, Bouillé, and Barruel show. Adams regarded the American Revolution, in which he had played a major role, as an unmitigated success. Barruel and Bouillé were virulent opponents of the French Revolution. Yet, not surprisingly, both of these counterrevolutionary figures were notably fatalistic about the Revolution; neither seems to have seriously considered that it could be fully reversed, however much they might have wished it.[98]

Another possibility was that change occurred simultaneously in the political sphere *and* in another one; that is, multiple *kinds* of revolution occurred simultaneously. This does not seem to have been especially common among revolutionary-era authors, but it did have one important exponent: the Anglo-Irish MP and polemicist Edmund Burke. In writing about the October Days of 1789 in *Reflections on the*

[95]*Reflections on the causes and probable consequences of the late revolution in France; with a view of the ecclesiastical and civil constitution …*, (Dublin, 1790), 6.

[96]François-Claude-Amour, Marquis de Bouillé, *Memoirs Relating to the French Revolution* (London, 1797), 45. See also the famous argument by the Abbé Barruel: "Cette revolution etoit depuis long tems meditée en France, par des hommes qui, sous le nom de philosophes, sembloient se partager le role de renverser, les uns le trone, & les autres l'autel." Abbé Augustin Barruel, *Histoire du Clergé pendant la Révolution francoise*, vol. 1 (London, 1793), 3.

[97]See John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 13 Feb. 1818, *Founders Online, National Archives*, at https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6854. Adams's argument in this letter is somewhat loosely stated; it may be that he is referring to a shift in sentiments that occurred during the imperial crisis, *c.*1765–75, which most scholars today would consider part of the "American Revolution."

[98]See the useful summary of their careers and ideas in R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, vol. 2, *The Struggle* (Princeton, 1964), 225, 51–5. Palmer makes clear that Bouillé, unlike many other emigrés, had no illusions that the revolution could be entirely reversed.

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Revolution in France, Burke asserted that the "most important of all revolutions, which may be dated from that day," was "a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions." (In making this argument, Burke was playing off conventional wisdom that held that the October Days, during which the royal family were forced to return from Versailles to Paris, were "revolutionary" because they had shown that the king could be forced to submit to popular pressure.)[99] Although I did not find this approach to be very common in revolutionary-era writings, it has become a hallmark of some recent work in cultural history, which argues that the transformation of culture was as much the core of eighteenth-century "revolution" as any change in the distribution of political power.[100]

Eighteenth-century concepts of revolution also opened up a third way of understanding the relationship between forms of change in a period of revolution: that rapid change in the political sphere would outstrip the pace of change in other areas of life. On this view, significant political change could occur without those changes in the political sphere immediately or automatically carrying along with them the rest of social life. This vision of revolutions in government as precocious or the leading edge of change was implicit in the political strategy of key actors in the French Revolution. The clergyman and publicist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, for instance, argued powerfully in *What Is the Third Estate?* (1789) that the first step towards a regeneration of France was to create a new constitution.[101] This preoccupation with constitution-making-first continued throughout the revolutionary decade, with Robespierre himself repeatedly calling for a "National Convention, as the sole remedy to the ills of the *patrie*"—the Convention's nominal purpose being to write a new constitution.[102]

If revolution of government came first, then other things would have to come later. We have already seen a few instances in which actors imagined revolution and its aftermath unfolding in this fashion. This could be a matter of economic change catching up to political transformation, as Tench Coxe suggested in looking to the creation of a new political economy after the "revolution" that had been the implementation of the US Constitution. Spanish Americans expected that significant social and economic changes would follow on the "wondrous" revolutions that took place in 1810 and after. Leaders of the early French Revolution, too, understood that completing "revolution" in the purely constitutional sense was necessary in order for other forms of change to occur: Sieyès, for one, was clear-eyed about the fact that the abolition of the privileged orders' economic and legal advantages, the main desideratum of the Third Estate, would only happen if political power were restructured first.

A number of actors focused their attention on persistent cultural habits or attitudes that remained to be modified in the wake of radical political change. The American Francophile poet Joel Barlow, for instance, wrote that the "political part of [the

[99]In an earlier passage, Edmund Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 2, ed. Francis Canavan (Indianapolis, 1999), 174. See also the remark along the same lines in ibid., 82.

[100]See e.g. Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, eds., *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750–1820* (Berkeley, 2002); and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "Cultural Practices and Revolutions, circa 1760 to 1825," in Wim Klooster, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Atlantic Age of Revolutions* (forthcoming).

[101]See Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *What Is the Third Estate?* in Sieyès, *Political Writings* (Indianapolis, 2003), 92–162, at 133–4.

[102]"Réponse à l'accusation de Louvet," 5 Nov. 1792, in Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes*, 9: 80.

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American] revolution … was not of that violent and convulsive nature that shakes the whole fabric of human opinions, and enables men to decide which are to be retained as congenial to their situation, and which should be rejected." As a result, he wrote, it remained for the Americans to form "a national character." Cultural change, in other words, would have to follow in the wake of pure political change.[103] James Mackintosh, the Scots Whig jurist and publicist, saw a similar process at work in the French Revolution. In *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, his 1791 response to Burke, he defended the National Assembly's decision to abolish titles of nobility "on the principle that the security of a revolution of *government* can only arise from a revolution of *character*." It was necessary, he wrote, to inculcate the principle of "equality" that the government had declared "into the spirits and hearts" of the French public. A change in culture was needed in the wake of a change in constitution.[104]

As Mackintosh's reference to "security" suggests, this form of revolutionary change—with constitutional change moving ahead of other spheres of social life—was in many respects an anxious vision. When constitutional change took place in advance of other kinds of change, especially the cultural changes that would be needed to underpin a democratic or republican polity, the political revolution itself could suddenly seem rather fragile.[105] The constitution of a state that had undergone radical change was now almost of necessity out of sync with the social, economic, and cultural content of the society. This mismatch or cultural lag put the stability of the "revolution" (i.e. political change) at risk.[106]

Recognizing that eighteenth-century actors could imagine political change as running ahead of the transformation of other parts of society casts a new light on the proposals that any number of actors made in this period to "end" or halt revolutions. If "revolution" meant only an ongoing process, then efforts to end or stop it were *ipso facto* counterrevolutionary. But if the "revolution" to which actors were referring was a revolution of government, then efforts to stop it could be protective, a first step towards bringing the surrounding cultural and social contexts into alignment. It seems far from coincidental, in this regard, that the most famous effort to "end" the French Revolution—the proclamation issued in mid-December 1799 that read "The revolution is fixed upon the principles with which it began. It is finished"—had accompanied the Constitution of Year 8. The Constitution itself, on this interpretation, could be understood as a reaffirmation of the "revolution," imagined in orthodox eighteenth-century fashion as a revolution of government, not its opposite.[107]

[103]Joel Barlow, *Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe, Resulting from the Necessity and Propriety of a General Revolution in the Principle of Government. Part II* (London, 1795), 46.

[104]James Mackintosh, *Vindiciæ Gallicæ. Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers Against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke …* (London, 1791), 81, emphasis in original.

[105]For a discussion of this theme see Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "Atlantic Cultures and the Age of Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74/4 (2017), 667–96.

[106]I am influenced here by the argument in Isser Woloch, "On the Latent Illiberalism of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 95/5 (1990), 1452–70, esp. 1467, which makes a strong case for the importance of taking into account the pressures and threats that revolutionaries faced in assessing their conduct.

[107]"La révolution est fixée aux principes qui l'ont commencée. Elle est finie." See Milner, *Relire la Révolution*, 116 ff.

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Conclusion

By the 1840s, as far as the most advanced theorists of revolution were concerned, eighteenth-century concepts of revolution had become terribly outdated. To see this one need look no farther than the young Karl Marx. In an 1844 newspaper essay, he retrospectively berated the French Jacobins for their seeming inability to understand that the social question was the foundation of all political ills. A revolution that was essentially political, Marx declared as if the point were now self-evident, was both "limited and contradictory." The social revolution, which aimed at a thoroughgoing transformation of society, was the only true revolution.[108]

Marx's declaration, however partisan in tone, suggests a clear line of division between two revolutionary epochs. During the Atlantic revolutionary era, eighteenth-century notions of revolution remained important to how actors understood their political world and its possibilities. In the modern era beginning around 1840, on the other hand, for a growing number of political actors, social revolutions were becoming the only ones that really counted.

Conditioned as we are by the brassy revolutionary rhetoric of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the long ideological ascendance of the idea of social revolution, we tend to forget that this earlier era even existed. Or, as Lafayette did in his 1833 speech to the Chamber of Deputies, we remake eighteenth-century revolution in the modern era's image. This blurring of the earlier period and its distinctive concepts of revolution has been unfortunate—and not just for historians of the era. The history of revolutionary concepts during the long eighteenth century has implications for historians of modern revolutions as well.

Revolutionary change, as late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century actors imagined it, was limited, fragile, and often insecure. Nothing could be farther from the metaphor of the unstoppable wave so frequently invoked by the self-confident revolutionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, constantly moving forward and submerging everything in its path. "Revolution" in the eighteenth-century sense, meaning changes in the structures and agents of political power, was finite in time and limited in scope. Whether such a "revolution" even survived was always an uncertain prospect, dependent on changes in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. For all of their protestations to the contrary, revolutionaries in the modern era had to cope with similar problems. Keeping the eighteenth-century vision in clear focus can illuminate similar kinds of contingency and frailty that ran through even the most successful revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Even as they stressed its fragility, however, political actors during the Atlantic age of revolutions saw revolutions everywhere they looked. Though they disagreed vehemently about the substance, goals, and even value of the era's political upheavals, contemporaries used the language of revolution inclusively to refer to a wide variety of political phenomena.[109] This capacious usage should make it impossible for scholars of the Atlantic revolutions to summarily exclude any of the era's

[108]François Furet, *Marx et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1986), 27, 162.

[109]A rare exception in the period is to be found in John Charnock, *Rights of A Free People: An Essay on the Origin, Progress, and Perfection of the British Constitution …* (London, 1792), 76, which articulates a distinction between "revolution" and "rebellion."

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political events from the category. It should raise questions for scholars working on later periods as well. Modern revolutionaries and the scholars who study them have long been in the habit of focusing on events that they deem "great revolutions," often to the exclusion of all else. The eighteenth-century history of revolution suggests how narrow and limited a view this represents. Instead of pressing the age of revolutions into service as the origin point for the idea of a "great revolution," historians of modern revolution might consider how and where eighteenth-century concepts of revolution persisted into later periods—and the more capacious and diverse revolutionary world that they allow us to see.

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