

Alan Forrest, The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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Relying upon thousands of newly raised conscripts to augment the remaining professionals from the old monarchical army, Generals Kellermann and Dumouriez scored a decisive victory over the Duke of Brunswick and the forces of Prussia at the Battle of Valmy and thereby firmly established the foundation for the legacy of the volunteers of Year II and the military abilities of French citizen-soldiers. French victory at Valmy became the rationale for conscription laws across Europe in the following decades and served as the basis for a closer relationship between the military and society. Alan Forrest's book, The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory, masterfully traces the evolution of the myths of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era through over 150 years of French and European military and political development. It stands as a concise single volume investigation of the nineteenth and twentieth century French political landscape and military affairs, as well as the ever-contested field of civil-military relations, expressed through a work centred on memory and myth.

Building upon his previous work on the composition and character of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, Forrest begins his work with an examination of events comprising the foundations of the legacy of the revolutionary era. Focusing

primarily on the *levée en masse*, the volunteers of the Year II and the key battle of Valmy, Forrest first establishes the quantifiable nature of the revolutionary armies and battles before charting the course of the legacy of the revolutionary wars in later chapters. Forrest demonstrates quite convincingly that republican appeals to the general populace for service in the military were fundamentally based upon two key concepts; the *patrie en danger* and the notion of a debt owed by each citizen-soldier to the state. Rooted in Rousseauian contract theory, the *levée en masse* was the longest lasting expression of the notion of a reciprocal relationship between the state that would guarantee the freedoms and rights of the people, and its citizens who were honour bound to defend a government based on popular sovereignty. Forrest's synopsis of twenty years of European warfare from Valmy to Waterloo is not aimed at retracing each glorious moment of the French army, but instead serves to highlight key battles, events, speeches, policies, and personalities, civilian and military alike, that became pivotal to the myths of the French Revolutionary wars.

One of the key strengths of Forrest's work is its ability to demonstrate the highly contested nature of the legacy of the Revolutionary wars. Not only was the meaning of the Revolutionary armies and battles subjected to re-interpretation by successive French regimes but also by various demographics across France including radicals, Republicans, Bonapartists, Monarchists, Catholics, Protestants, as well as through regional variations between Paris and the various departments of the country. The reader quickly learns, there was no single, consensus view of the legacy of the revolutionary wars. Through this multi-faceted narrative Forrest weaves a thread of institutional analysis that serves as a baseline to demonstrate continuity and discontinuity through the various French regimes. Plotting the rise, fall and legacy of various organizations, such as the revolutionary National Guard, the Napoleonic Legion of Honour or the short-lived *Franc Tireurs* of the Paris Commune, the author is able to demonstrate the remarkable longevity and plasticity of revolutionary symbols and rhetoric. Each of these organizations had some relationship to the events of the revolutionary wars, however the exact nature of this association evolved in response to contemporary challenges, events and policies. Perhaps the group that best exemplifies this process is *Le Garde National de la Gironde*, or the National Guard. Active in the earliest days of the revolution, the Guard laid justifiable claim to representing the ideal of the revolution. From defending villages and homes against criminal gangs and

popular violence in 1789 to fraternizing with Parisians leading the attack on the Bastille, the National Guard founded itself as the embodiment of the principles of the revolution. Revolutionary ideals of equality and fraternity would eventually be supplanted by more partisan republican loyalties, and although the National Guard took on a more distinctive *bourgeois* character by 1830 and 1848, their rhetoric continued to be rooted in revolutionary imagery and reference their actions in defense of the revolution in 1789. During the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the National Guard served as the primary organization for combating Moltke's invading Prussians after the humiliating defeat of the standing French army at Sedan. Raising over 340,000 troops in little under a week in September 1870 demonstrates not only the continued longevity of the *Garde* in French society, but also the adaptability of revolutionary symbols to military causes. However the National Guard is merely one of a multitude of organizations and associations Forrest employs to illustrate the malleability of the legacy of the revolutionary wars in French political life. His multifaceted approach demonstrates the remarkable variety of causes and historical actors drawing upon revolutionary imagery and symbols, which serves to emphasize the most definable characteristic of the legacy of the French revolutionary wars: adaptability.

Like all historians of this period, Forrest faces the problem of attempting to relate the Napoleonic and revolutionary legacies. At times it is difficult for the reader to delineate which aspects of the myths Forrest discusses are specifically Napoleonic or revolutionary, however this is not a fault of the scholarly abilities of the author, but rather a product of the contested relationship between the revolution and Napoleon. If Forrest was writing a purely socio-political history from 1789 to 1815 then a definitive position on whether or not Napoleon was a child of the revolution would have been essential for his central argument. However, Forrest is writing a history of memory and legacy. His more ambiguous stance on the issue is more justifiable as many historical agents employing the myths of the revolutionary wars may not have bothered to make the same sharp categorical distinctions that historians deploy. Nevertheless, Forrest's work stands as a well-balanced examination of the intersection of politics, society, warfare, and the military as expressed through myth and legacy. Both its content and methodology are highly effective for Forrest's purpose.

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