

# *The French Revolutionary Tradition in Russian and Soviet Politics, Political Thought, and Culture*

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**Published:** 2019

**Publisher:** Oxford University Press

**ISBN:** 9780198842705

Because they were Marxists, the Bolsheviks in Russia, both before and after taking power in 1917, believed that the past was prologue: that embedded in history was a Holy Grail, a series of mysterious, but nonetheless accessible and comprehensible, universal laws that explained the course of history from beginning to end. Those who understood these laws would be able to mold the future to conform to their own expectations. But what should the Bolsheviks do if their Marxist ideology proved to be either erroneous or insufficient-if it could not explain, or explain fully, the course of events that followed the revolution they carried out in the country they called the Soviet Union? Something else would have to perform this function. The underlying argument of this volume is that the Bolsheviks saw the revolutions in France in 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871 as supplying practically everything Marxism lacked. In fact, these four events comprised what for the Bolsheviks was a genuine Revolutionary Tradition. The English Revolution and the Puritan Commonwealth of the seventeenth century

were not without utility-the Bolsheviks cited them and occasionally utilized them as propaganda-but these paled in comparison to what the revolutions in France offered a century later, namely legitimacy, inspiration, guidance in constructing socialism and communism, and, not least, useful fodder for political and personal polemics.

