

REWRITING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The Andrew Browning
Lectures 1989

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The French Revolution continues to generate historical controversy. During the last thirty years, consensus on its meaning has disappeared. Scholarship and debate constantly reinterpret both the event as a whole and its constituent parts, changing our perceptions and understanding of it. Today the French Revolution is still being rewritten as history. In this volume, eight of the most distinguished scholars in the field present new interpretations of major themes in the history of the French Revolution. They explore areas of intellectual, political, religious, and social development. Two hundred Each age, we are often told, rewrites the past in its own image. In the case of the French Revolution, this is an understatement. In the second half of this century the scholarship has seemed to be in a state of almost permanent revolution as historians have taken up one interpretative or methodological approach after another. Some of the story of this historiographical roller-coaster ride may be known to readers, thanks to William Doyle's best-selling text book *Origins of the French Revolution*, which begins with a long and detailed survey 'Writings on Revolutionary Origins since 193

“The French Revolution,” he wrote, “will only be the darkness of night to those who merely regard itself; only the times which preceded it will give the light to illuminate it.” [20] Certainly the Revolution saw a strengthening of the central administration in the authority conferred on the committees of government and their agents over both Assembly and local authorities—a process carried considerably further under the Consulate and Empire. A state, and the emergence of a whole new apparatus for the exercise of administrative justice. Such reforms were accompanied by a phenomenal increase in national prosperity: the commerce of Bordeaux, on the eve of the Revolution, outmatched that of Liverpool. The French Revolution was a period of social and political upheaval in France and its colonies beginning in 1789 and ending in 1799. The Revolution overthrew the monarchy; established a republic; catalyzed violent periods of political turmoil; and finally culminated in a dictatorship under Napoleon, who brought many of the revolution's principles to areas he conquered in Western Europe and beyond. Inspired by liberal and radical ideas such as equality before the law, the Revolution influenced the The French Revolution was a revolution in France lasted from 1789 until 1799, fought between the common men and the nobles and church of the French society. He rewrote the old French Feudal laws and created a new Napoleonic Code of laws, which remains in France even to this day. Napoleon declared himself the Emperor of France in 1804. France became a republic in 1871.