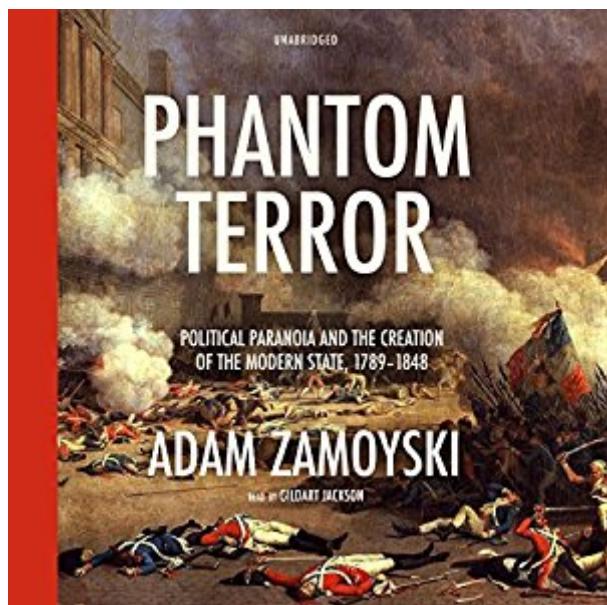


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Phantom Terror: Political Paranoia And The Creation Of The Modern State, 1789 - 1848



Synopsis

For the ruling and propertied classes of the late eighteenth century, the years following the French Revolution were characterized by intense anxiety. Monarchs and their courtiers lived in constant fear of rebellion, convinced that their power--and their heads--were at risk. Driven by paranoia, they chose to fight back against every threat and insurgency, whether real or merely perceived, repressing their populaces through surveillance networks and violent, secretive police action. Europe and the world had entered a new era. In *Phantom Terror*, award-winning historian Adam Zamoyski argues that the stringent measures designed to prevent unrest had disastrous and far-reaching consequences, inciting the very rebellions they had hoped to quash. The newly established culture of state control halted economic development in Austria and birthed a rebellious youth culture in Russia that would require even harsher methods to suppress. By the end of the era, the first stirrings of terrorist movements had become evident across the continent, making the previously unfounded fears of European monarchs a reality. *Phantom Terror* explores this troubled, fascinating period, when politicians and cultural leaders from Edmund Burke to Mary Shelley were forced to choose sides and either support or resist the counterrevolutionary spirit embodied in the newly omnipotent central states. The turbulent political situation that coalesced during this era would lead directly to the revolutions of 1848 and to the collapse of order in World War I. We still live with the legacy of this era of paranoia, which prefigured not only the modern totalitarian state but also the now preeminent contest between society's haves and have-nots. These tempestuous years of suspicion and suppression were the crux upon which the rest of European history would turn. In this magisterial history, Zamoyski chronicles the moment when desperate monarchs took the world down the path of revolution, terror, and world war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

History books are delicate creatures. Reading a history in a stodgy, hyper-academic style can be a laborious, painful, experience. On the other hand, a history written in crisp, lively prose literally brings long-past events to life. *Phantom Terror*, triumphantly, is the latter type. The setting for this book is Europe following the French Revolution and describes the reaction (or, over-reaction) of European governments to this momentous event. Zamoyski's thesis is that the Modern Security State was born as the response to the French Revolution. Not only is this a great read, but it is historiography in the highest order. While he downplays any conscious attempt to draw an analogy between the two time period and leaves any conclusion to the reader, the similarities are inescapable. The saga begins with the conclusion of the French Revolution and ends with the revolts of 1848. Those revolts were very much the response to the oppressive government intrusion described in this book into the private lives of the general population, beginning in Milan, jumping to Paris, then, Berlin, then spreading everywhere in Europe. The French Revolution rattled the European establishment to its core. The concern of the Ruling Class was, "If it can happen there, will it happen here?" Given this concern those governments could have instituted political or social reforms to prevent a similar uprising. Instead, these governments (over-) reacted out of fear and irrationality, and tightened its grip on the general populations. These measures were counterproductive. Zamoyski alludes to -- but describes more fully in his other works -- the popular response to these institutional clamp-downs, namely, the revolts of 1848 and others.

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