

John Merriman. *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siecle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. Pp 259. Cloth \$26.00.

Merriman, the Charles Seymour Professor of History at Yale University, chronicles the historical period leading up to and following Emile Henry's bombing of the Café Terminus in Paris in 1894. His work links the bombing in Paris to modern acts of terror in the twenty-first century. He argues that Henry's actions were the first to target innocent civilians, resulting in a break from previous acts of terror, which had been perpetrated only against government officials.

Paris, according to Merriman, was in essence a two-class society. On the one end of the spectrum was the opulent lifestyle of the affluent as they passed their time attending operas, shopping in the newly emerging luxury department stores, and dining in the restaurants of the grand boulevards. On the other hand, nearly one half of Parisians lived in deplorable conditions, starving, and destitute. The poor often settled in the less expensive outlying areas of the city, seeking work in the center servicing the affluent. Central to Merriman's argument is Henry, who grew up with the inequalities of Paris and turned to anarchy in an attempt to force revolution. Merriman chronicles the activities of Henry and his obsession with the bombings by other anarchists in France. Henry began his campaign against what he considered to be the unjust French government in 1892 with his first bombing outside a Paris police station, leaving five fatalities. Merriman argues that because of the rising anti-government terrorist actions, panic began to characterize the response of the French government towards these activities. The French media popularized the events, carrying the news of terrorist activities to a broad audience. Widespread knowledge of the isolated events only convinced the French government to implement harsher restrictive laws that further limited freedoms and liberties, which in turn, only fueled the anarchist activities, labeled by the media as the "Dynamite Club."

Merriman's background in nineteenth-century French history provides a solid foundation for his work. He traces the rise of anarchist ideas, the modernization of France, as well as emerging social and political views. The author utilizes archives in France, such as the Archives Nationales, extensively including documents from the various newspapers of the day as well as official reports created by the policing agencies responsible for the security of the city. He is quick to point out the brutality and loss felt by the innocent victims and survivors of the dynamite club's random bombings in the various public spaces throughout the city, which targeted citizens unconnected to French politics. Merriman concludes his work by arguing that while Henry and his collaborators encouraged the anarchist activities they carried out, the movement quickly dissolved into many smaller networks of labor and political groups each with individually exclusive aims. Yet, Merriman reminds us that while Western society today views terrorist bombings as a recent phenomenon, violence perpetrated towards innocent citizens has origins in nineteenth-century France.

*The Dynamite Club* is a well-researched work on the chaos caused by the terrorist activities committed by Henry and fellow anarchists in France. Merriman clarifies a difficult to understand historical period in French history by offering a concise and well-written book for both specialists and general readers.

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