

French revolutionary thought and the early Third Republic

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The author:

Julia completed her PhD at Queen Mary University of London in 2015 with a thesis on French revolutionary thought after the Paris Commune. Prior to that, she read for a BA in History and an MPhil in Modern South Asian Studies at King's College, Cambridge. Her research interests are in nineteenth-century intellectual history, particularly of France and its empire, as well as wider histories of socialism, social exclusion, and subjection. Her work has been published in *The Historical Journal* and she is currently adapting her doctoral thesis into a book. Julia is currently a stipendiary lecturer in modern European history at New College, Oxford.

The paper:

This paper calls into question a widely held historiographical perception that the failure of the 1871 Paris Commune marked the end of a French revolutionary tradition inaugurated by the Revolution of 1789 and perpetuated by the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. It reassesses the contexts in which the word 'revolution' was used and shows that this dominant interpretation conflicts with the actual writings of ex-Communards, radicals, and revolutionaries on the subject. The first half of the paper demonstrates that activists' frequent references to the events of the recent revolutionary past were not indicative of the desire to create a static or prescriptive 'French revolutionary tradition'. The second half highlights the significance of a new definition of revolution as resulting from natural evolution rather than subjective will, and discusses it primarily through the work of the influential anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus, its most visible proponent. Revolutionary ideas and programmes persisted but, as in earlier periods, what they took forward was a new vision of revolution, adapting the past, whilst presenting it as a seamless whole. Revolution was and always had been a process of constant adaptation rather than a tradition.