



**Thomas Carlyle: *The French Revolution, A History* (1837)**

This two-volume work is very famous for having romantic narrative. Carlyle emphasises the position of the poor in France.

**Lynn Hunt** is a feminist historian who thinks that the French Revolution was caused by a change in political culture and a breakdown in Absolutism. Her major works include *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (1984), and *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (1992).



**Alphonse Aulard *Modern France. A Companion to French Studies* (1922)**

“From the social point of view, the Revolution consisted in the suppression of what was called the feudal system, in the emancipation of the individual, in greater division of landed property, the abolition of the privileges of noble birth, the establishment of equality, the simplification of life ... The French Revolution differed from other revolutions in being not merely national, for it aimed at benefiting all humanity.”

In 1954, **Alfred Cobban** gave a lecture attacking the Marxist school of thought. He said that it wasn't a social revolution, but a political one with no capitalist agenda.



**Albert Mathiez: French Marxist historian (1874-1932)**

He thought that the French Revolution was caused by a class struggle. He is a leader of the Marxist school of thought on the issue of the French Revolution. He argued that 1789 pitted the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, and then the Revolution pitted the bourgeoisie against the sans-culottes.

**William Doyle** is a Revisionist historian who emphasises the ideological and economic origins of the Revolution. He has written some very famous works on the Revolution including *The Origins of the French Revolution* (1988).

### Tasks:

- Sort the interpretations into chronological order and discuss the following questions:
  - What do you notice about the interpretations over time?
  - What do the different historians think caused the Revolution?
  - When was the turning point in thinking?
- Use the different interpretations to corroborate and challenge your own ideas in your extended writing on the causes of the French Revolution.

### Teacher Notes:

The aim of this resource is to introduce students to the ever-changing historiography of the French Revolution and to provide an introduction to using the work of historians in their own writing about the past. It links to the causation card sort [resource [26278](#)].

You could ask students to work in pairs, or enlarge the speech bubbles to stimulate class discussion.

### Answers - open to debate and discussion:

- a. The interpretations change over time: start off as Classical/ Marxist thinking that emphasises social causes. There is a marked change after Cobban who is a Revisionist. Currently there is no consensus. This can be linked to methodology and purposes of history in different time periods.
- b. Social, Political and Intellectual factors. Other historians also emphasise the economic causes as being the underpinning factor.
- c. Turning point can be seen as 1954 with Cobban. His ideas were held in higher esteem after the collapse of Communism.

The statements summarising the arguments of historians have been generalised to make them accessible to a wider range of KS3 students.

More detailed information is available at

- [alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/french-revolution-historiography/](http://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/french-revolution-historiography/)
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography\\_of\\_the\\_French\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography_of_the_French_Revolution)

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