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Paul R. Hanson

*Butler University*, [phanson@butler.edu](mailto:phanson@butler.edu)

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## **From Jacobin to Liberal**

Paul Hanson

*Professor of History, Butler University*

### **Abstract**

This article focuses on *From Jacobin to Liberal: Marc-Antoine Jullien, 1775–1848* and argues that this book, written near the end of Robert R. Palmer's career, stands as a sort of bookend to his earlier masterpiece, *Twelve Who Ruled*. The focus of the book, Marc-Antoine Jullien, was a precocious idealist, just sixteen years old when he made his first speech before the Paris Jacobin club. He supported the Jacobin political vision and went on to serve as an emissary in the provinces for the Committee of Public Safety, the focus of *Twelve Who Ruled*. As such, young Jullien was denounced as a terrorist after the fall of Robespierre. He survived the Revolution, however, and Palmer sees in him an example of a young man whose political views evolved over time, from Jacobinism to liberalism. Challenging those who have viewed the French Revolution as leading inevitably to tyranny, Palmer presents the life of Marc-Antoine Jullien as exemplary of the positive legacy of that tumultuous event.

**Keywords** Jacobin, Marc-Antoine Jullien, liberalism, Robert R. Palmer, terrorist, *Twelve Who Ruled*

Near the end of his life Robert R. Palmer published his penultimate book, *From Jacobin to Liberal: Marc-Antoine Jullien, 1775–1848* (Princeton University Press, 1993). On the title page Palmer attributed himself as editor and translator, but the text is roughly one-third Palmer’s commentary on the letters, writings, and life of Marc-Antoine Jullien, so to call him the author of the volume would scarcely be misleading. It is a relatively obscure volume. According to WorldCat it is held by 317 libraries worldwide (most of us, of course, would be delighted if our books were held by 300+ libraries!), as compared to the 2,107 libraries that hold *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*. This is hardly surprising—even among historians of the French Revolution there are those who would know very little of the “young Jullien,” as he was known.

What, then, prompted Palmer to devote a book to the life and writings of this relatively obscure figure, and why should it be of interest to us today? One might think of it, perhaps, as an epilogue to his first monograph, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution*, first published in 1941. Jullien, misspelled in that first book as Julien, appeared on only three or four pages of the volume, but he represented for Palmer an important aspect of the revolutionary experience. A young man at the time, just eighteen in that year of the Terror (September 1793 to August 1794), Jullien served as a special agent for the Committee of Public Safety in the provinces, often associated in particular with the best-known of the Twelve, Maximilien Robespierre. Jullien was a young idealist, and this no doubt drew Palmer to him. As we shall see, young Jullien was exhilarated by the politics of the early Revolution and dedicated himself to assisting in the realization of the Jacobin vision. Nevertheless, he was not blind to the excesses of Jacobin extremists, such as Jean-Baptiste Carrier, and over time he grew frustrated with the inability of the revolutionaries to move beyond factionalism. For Palmer, then, he stands as “typical of many in France who had their hopes raised and dashed by so many rapid changes.”<sup>1</sup> The fact that none of Jullien’s writings had ever been translated also drew Palmer to this project.

Near the end of *Twelve Who Ruled*, Palmer offered a succinct assessment of what he viewed as the central tragedy of the Revolution. “The Hundred Days before Thermidor were not primarily a time of destruction. They were a time of creation, of abortive and perhaps visionary creation, nipped by the fatal blight of the Revolution, the inability of the Revolutionists to work together.”<sup>2</sup> This was an insight that Jullien expressed frequently in the letters that Palmer has translated in *From Jacobin to Liberal*. He sees the life of Jullien, then, as evidence that that progression was not impossible, that Jacobinism did not lead inevitably to intolerance and fanaticism. Jullien did not abandon his idealism as he grew older, but he tempered it with pragmatism, and it is this combination that Palmer sees as exemplary of the promise of the French Revolution. As he stated in his preface to the book, “We have here a career that may shed light on the meaning of Jacobinism, liberalism, and the ‘bourgeois revolution.’”<sup>3</sup>

*From Jacobin to Liberal* appeared on the heels of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, a commemoration that proved to be far more critical of the legacy of 1789 than the centennial celebration had been. Palmer did not ignore the excesses of the French Revolution, the failings of

many of its leading politicians. But he stood in the company of those who viewed the legacy of the Revolution in a very positive light, particularly the emergence of liberal democracy but also the modern welfare state that developed only later. He may have offered this book as a modest counter to the works of historians such as François Furet and Simon Schama, whose interpretations of the Revolution were far more negative.<sup>4</sup>

It would be presumptuous to suggest that Palmer saw something of himself in Marc-Antoine Jullien, but I do propose in this article to draw parallels between Palmer's return to the subject of the Revolution in this book some fifty years after *Twelve Who Ruled* and Jullien's continued rumination on his own revolutionary career until the very end of his life in 1848. Both Jullien and Palmer saw the Revolution as laying the foundation for liberal democracy, rather than pointing the way toward the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. This article explores, through Palmer's reflections on the intellectual and political trajectory of Jullien's thought regarding the ideals of the French Revolution, what we might glean about Palmer's own historical understanding of that momentous event.

Palmer began his book with a vignette of Jullien's father accompanying Marc-Antoine to Paris in 1785 so that his son might attend the Collège de Navarre. They took rooms together in the Latin Quarter near the Pantheon—it is a scene reminiscent of Nikolai joining Arkady at college in St. Petersburg in Ivan Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Sons*. In this way Palmer humanizes his subject, not in order to blind us to his flaws, but to make clear to his readers that they are encountering a flesh and blood individual, not a caricature, just as he did with the members of the Committee of Public Safety in *Twelve Who Ruled*. We meet Marc-Antoine's mother, Rosalie, in these early pages as well, although Palmer demurely refers to her as Madame Jullien throughout. Madame Jullien remained at the family home in the Dauphiné during these early years, and so wrote a number of letters to her son. In one, dated 29 September 1785, she offered him advice. "Make yourself liked by everyone; there is nothing more pleasant than to be liked. Remember too, my good Jules, what you owe to the Supreme Being that gave you existence, provided you with good parents, and has already showered so many favors upon you. Be good and be virtuous!"<sup>5</sup> There is an interesting tension here between his mother's admonishment that he try to be "liked by everyone" and that he be "good and virtuous." The two are not often achieved simultaneously. It is clear from his later life, however, that Jullien did pursue both, and that he took seriously his obligation to his parents who had, as his mother reminded him frequently, made substantial sacrifices for his education. His pursuit of virtue, though, seems to have come at the cost of friendship, at least during the decade of the Revolution.

Young Jullien gave his first speech at the Paris Jacobin club in January 1792. It is an astonishing speech on several scores. First, we should note that he was only sixteen at the time, which marks him as precocious, even in the midst of a Revolution dominated by youth. Second, he spoke out in opposition to the war that many revolutionaries saw looming. He was not alone in this—Robespierre and Marat both opposed France going to war at this time—but it was decidedly a

minority view, both among deputies and the population at large. Third, perhaps most surprising, he spoke out aggressively against King Louis XVI:

Let someone tell me of a single instance, since the date of our liberty, in which Louis XVI has deserved the least bit of confidence from the French people. He took an oath to uphold the constitution. Yes, but the oath was forced on him by public opinion. He protested, and made a cowardly attempt at flight; he has violated his promises, ignored his duties, betrayed his fellow citizens.<sup>6</sup>

These words seem unexceptional to us today. After all, just one year later Louis XVI would go to his death on the scaffold. But a great deal changed in that year. Despite the flight to Varennes, Louis XVI retained the devotion of many of his subjects. Even those deputies on the Left could not muster the will in the summer of 1791 to oust the king. The Massacre on the Champ de Mars in July 1791 put republicans decidedly on the defensive, and even in the summer of 1792 the failed uprising of June would elicit letters of fervent support for the king and queen from departmental administrations across the country. The public opinion to which Jullien referred in his speech was scarcely receptive to calls for a republic at the time he uttered his words. Our young orator was not following the political winds at this moment, then, but was instead out in front of public opinion.

How might we explain the political precocity of young Jullien? Palmer would suggest that much of the credit must go to his parents, a surprise to us today when it seems much more common for the young to rebel against their parents' political views. Jullien's father was himself active in revolutionary politics, as a *suppléant* to the Legislative Assembly and then as a deputy to the National Convention, where he sat with the Montagnards and voted for the death of Louis XVI. And it is clear from Madame Jullien's letters to both her son and her husband that her sympathies lay with those rebelling against royal authority. In the late summer of 1789 she wrote to Marc-Antoine from their home in the Dauphiné. "Everything is quite calm now in our province and wherever I have passed in coming here, but many chateaux have been burned, and what is even more cruel, many peasants have been massacred by soldiers of the bourgeois, or died at the executioner's hands."<sup>7</sup> Shortly after her son's speech at the Jacobin club she wrote to him of an inspiring sermon she had heard at Saint-Eustache, in which the priest extolled the virtues of liberty, equality, and fraternity. And just before the uprising of August 10 she wrote to her husband, "As for poor Louis XVI, it is to relieve him of a burden too heavy for his shoulders that I wish for his deposition." Madame Jullien had recently attended a meeting of the Paris Jacobins, along with two to three hundred other women. "I want to tell your provincials that these Jacobins are real men, true soldiers, not sansculottes, but the flower of the Paris bourgeoisie, to judge by the jackets they wear." It is passages such as this one, I suspect, that inclined Palmer to continue to think of 1789 as a "bourgeois revolution." We may have difficulty today defining the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie with precision, and clearly the Marxist notion of a capitalist bourgeoisie on the march does not work, but contemporaries used this language and for many, like Madame Jullien, it was the revolution of the "respectable bourgeois" that drew their support.<sup>8</sup>

The parents of the young Jullien also supported his assignment to a first mission on behalf of the revolutionary government in the spring of 1792. In May he traveled to London, serving as a youthful “secret agent.” There he met Lord Stanhope and a number of the other British aristocrats who were sympathetic, at least at that point, to the French revolutionaries. While in London Jullien corresponded with Nicolas de Condorcet, apprising him of British attitudes toward the recent events in Paris, and their impressions, which he was trying to allay, that the French nation was a “horde of cannibals.”<sup>9</sup> Palmer was clearly interested in exploring the genesis of a revolutionary spirit in Marc-Antoine’s formative years, to trace his evolution from naive youngster to committed Jacobin, and eventually to an older and wiser liberal.

The letters among father, mother, and son reveal a great deal about shifting attitudes in France from August 1792 to the summer of 1793. Like many others, Madame Jullien was horrified by the prison massacres in Paris in early September, yet not judgmental, as she wrote to her husband, “Good God! Have pity on a people provoked and forced into such carnage, do not hold it against them.”<sup>10</sup> Weeks earlier, following the August 10 uprising, she had written to her son, “Yet my reason tells me emphatically that humanity has lost fewer men by the gross barbarity of the people than by the civilized rascality of kings and their ministers.” In an October 24 letter to Marc-Antoine, his mother asserted that the September massacres, while indeed an atrocity, had saved patriots from another Saint Bartholomew, but lamented that the Brissotins seemed intent on favoring the interests of the rich. Jullien *père* waxed more philosophical in a letter to his son written on December 15:

This is the rock on which modern philosophy founders. It has indeed established the equality of rights, but it wants to maintain that prodigious inequality of fortunes that puts the poor at the mercy of the rich, and makes the rich the arbiters of the poor man’s rights by not granting him the right to subsistence. This must not happen; it would lead to tyranny.<sup>11</sup>

By the following month, in the midst of the king’s trial, Jullien *mère* had grown more dispirited in her view of national politics. “The Roland faction triumphs in the Convention, and the volcanic eruptions of the Mountain produce only ineffectual noise. The Girondins are unbelievably malicious . . . Just yesterday they demanded and obtained the printing and sending to all the departments of a disgraceful diatribe against Paris.” Ten days later, on 14 January, she wrote, “I will not speak of the National Convention; it is overwhelmed by the weight of its own ignominy.” We are also reminded in this letter, however, that this was a mother writing to her son, and that the son was still quite young. “Write to us often. It is only your letters that give us pleasure. Save time on your other correspondence to give more to us. You write too much and stay up too late at night.”<sup>12</sup>

Palmer makes two important points with these selections from letters in the period from late 1792 through the spring of 1793. The first is that this was a very fluid period politically. In letters from Jullien himself in London, and in the letters from Jullien’s parents in the final months of 1792, it becomes clear that they moved in circles among those political leaders whom we would today call Girondins. Over the course of the winter months they gradually abandoned those

associations and shifted their affinities to the Montagnards. Jullien *père* sat among the Montagnards in the National Convention, but did not align strongly with those who were most ideological in their politics. In early February Madame Jullien dined with the two Robespierre brothers and their sister, and found them a quite agreeable family, not unlike the Julliens in their openness and simplicity. She regretted, though, that Robespierre and Brissot could not put their personal enmity aside to work together for the common good. And this is the second point that Palmer emphasizes in discussing the letters from this period: the Julliens were distressed at the factionalism and divisions that paralyzed the Convention through the first six months of 1793. This would become a constant theme in Marc-Antoine's rhetoric for the next decade, whether he was offering counsel to provincial revolutionaries, or advice to Italian republicans and, eventually, to Napoleon Bonaparte. Factionalism was a scourge and unity among republicans was essential if their efforts to achieve reform were to find success.

Unity was not to be achieved in 1793, however. The struggle between Montagnards and Girondins culminated in the expulsion of the Girondin leaders from the National Convention and, in the summer of 1793, the nation very nearly spiraled into civil war. This was the year of the Terror, the period in which young Jullien found himself most immersed in revolutionary politics. He served as a special agent for the Committee of Public Safety, traveling first to Brittany and then down the coast to Bordeaux. He was now eighteen years old and absolutely committed to the revolutionary cause. Three stops on Jullien's itinerary serve to illustrate the complexity of his political views. In January he arrived in Nantes, where Jean-Baptiste Carrier was overseeing the repression of the Vendée rebellion. Republican armies had been engaged in a bloody war with the rebels since the previous March, with atrocities committed on both sides. Thousands of prisoners were now held in Nantes, awaiting revolutionary justice. In previous months Jullien had written to the Committee of Public Safety complaining of ineffectual representatives on mission, some of them simply weak, others quarreling with each other. In early January, though, he wrote to Bertrand Barère, a member of the Committee, describing Carrier as despotic. On February 3 he wrote to his father, "Carrier is killing liberty and must be recalled."<sup>13</sup> The following day he wrote in more detail to Robespierre, complaining that Carrier rarely attended the meetings of the local popular society, had even closed it for a few days, and "has made terror the order of the day against the patriots themselves, by whom he wants to be feared." Jullien reported to Robespierre the drowning of prisoners in the Loire River, ordered by Carrier. Within a week Carrier was recalled to Paris. He was executed for his terrorist excesses after Thermidor.

From Nantes Jullien traveled south to La Rochelle, where he encountered apathy rather than counterrevolutionary resistance. Palmer presents a lengthy excerpt from a speech Jullien delivered to the La Rochelle Jacobin club, in which he warned them of the dangers of moderatism. He made two comments in particular that he would later come to regret. "I say it openly, woe to the republican who lacks the strength to shun the society of a moderate." As the rest of the speech makes clear, Jullien meant here to distinguish moderates from republicans. His

target, then, were those well-intentioned men who had not yet embraced the French Republic. Of course, just months before, the Girondins—whom we would today consider moderate republicans—had been condemned by Saint-Just as royalists and traitors. It was another phrase, however, that would most haunt Jullien in later years. “There is a true saying: Liberty has no bed except mattresses for corpses, or, as has also been said, to the shame of nations, blood is the milk of liberty at its birth.”<sup>14</sup> These words would be cited by those who denounced him following 9 Thermidor, and again in the years after Napoleon’s fall in 1815. To be fair to Jullien, we should note the words that immediately followed, seldom quoted by his detractors. “But let only the impure blood inundate our land, and the pure blood be spared.” It is words such as these that prompt many to associate Jullien with Robespierre, and to the protégé as well as the patron one might well ask, “Just who will define the difference between pure and impure blood, and on what terms?” The metaphor of blood “inundating” the land is hardly a reassuring one.

Jullien remained in La Rochelle for some time, in part because he fell quite ill. Some days after his speech, as he recounted to Barère in a letter dated 17 February, he received a summons in his sick bed to appear before the district administration. His crime, it seems, was to have failed to present his credentials to the district office when he first arrived in town, though he also suspected that his speech against moderatism had provoked his summons. What most offended him, however, was that the district officials refused to address him as “citizen,” but rather referred to him simply as a “stranger.” Indeed, when he visited the district office he did not even meet his detractors, who remained behind closed doors while a clerk delivered Jullien’s papers to them. One sees in this incident the suspicion of outsiders that often characterized provincial French towns. But one senses as well a growing self-assurance in Jullien, who in his letter to Barère boasted of the success of his speech to the Rochelais. “I flatter myself on having electrified the public spirit.”<sup>15</sup> “Electrified”—this was a word he used often in the letters written to the Committee of Public Safety in those weeks.

By early April he had made his way to Bordeaux, where he spent several months, and here it would be his actions more than his words for which he would later be held accountable. Bordeaux was one of the four federalist cities that rebelled against the National Convention in the summer of 1793 in protest of the proscription of the Girondin leaders. The rebellion in Bordeaux essentially fizzled out, with no significant violence, but it was not until October 1793 that republican troops were able to enter the city. Two representatives on mission, Claude-Alexandre Ysabeau and Jean-Lambert Tallien, oversaw the repression of federalism in Bordeaux. Between October and May 1794 only 104 executions took place in Bordeaux, as compared to the nearly 2,000 people who were executed in Lyon for the crimes of “federalism” or “royalism.” This prompted the Committee of Public Safety to chastise the representatives on mission for their leniency. Jullien’s role in Bordeaux, then, was to be far different than in Nantes, where he had denounced Carrier for his despotism and extremism. In his letters to the Committee, many of them addressed directly to Robespierre, Jullien was openly scornful of Ysabeau and Tallien, describing the former as being far too solicitous of prominent Bordeaux



families and the latter as far too solicitous of his mistress, Thérèse Cabarrus. During the following two months, as Jullien jockeyed with Ysabeau for control of the situation, 198 people were executed in Bordeaux, including the fugitive Girondin deputies Guadet and Barbaroux. Jullien also pressed local authorities to be vigilant in the search for Jérôme Pétion and François Buzot, rumored to be hiding in the region, but they committed suicide before they could be apprehended. In one of his reports to the Committee, Jullien claimed not only to have heightened revolutionary justice in Bordeaux, but to have raised republican spirits as well:

Not long ago, here, a mournful silence greeted the pronouncement of a death sentence in the Military Commission, and the same silence accompanied conspirators to the scaffold; the entire town seemed to secretly bemoan their punishment. Today unanimous acclamations and repeated cries of *long live the Republic* sanction both the conviction and the execution of enemies of the fatherland.<sup>16</sup>

Jullien was particularly zealous in his pursuit of the fugitive Girondins, and proud of the role he played in bringing them to justice. This was not enough, however. In a letter to Robespierre dated 12 Messidor II (30 June 1794) he asked that a number of additional measures be carried out, including “Have the houses destroyed in which Guadet, Salle, Pétion, Buzot, and Barbaroux were found; transfer the military commission to Saint-Emilion to judge and put to death on the spot those who concealed them or were accomplices in their concealment.”<sup>17</sup>

Palmer had two things to say about Jullien’s mission to Bordeaux. First, “[i]t is clear that Jullien, as terrorist at Bordeaux, acted as the agent of the Committee. But he was no passive agent; he positively asked for and solicited the powers that he wanted.” Second, “[i]n extenuation of this ruthlessness it can only be said that Jullien believed that he was punishing dangerous counterrevolutionaries and faithfully executing the policy of the Committee of Public Safety.”<sup>18</sup> Palmer was grappling here, as he did in *Twelve Who Ruled*, with two crucial issues. How, on the one hand, to weigh the orders coming from Paris against the considerable initiative allowed to the representatives on mission in the provinces; and, on the other hand, how to balance ideology against circumstance in evaluating the politics of the Terror. Judicious as always, Palmer tended to emphasize circumstances (or contingency, we might say) while not neglecting ideology, and to emphasize the orders from Paris, recognizing that individual personality influenced how those orders were carried out. Jullien was clearly motivated by his dedication to Jacobin ideology, but not blindly so—he had denounced, after all, the excesses of Carrier in Nantes. Can we compare his ruthlessness in Bordeaux to that of Carrier? His later detractors would do so, but the two situations were quite different. The Vendée rebellion had posed a real threat to the young republic, and thousands had died in the civil war in the west. The rhetoric of the Bordelais may have been extreme, but at no time did the revolt in Bordeaux pose any serious threat to the government in Paris. The vast majority of Carrier’s victims in Nantes were ordinary people, many of them peasants, while the targets of Jullien’s revolutionary justice were predominantly wealthy merchants and the fugitive Girondins, who had been declared outlaws and counterrevolutionaries as soon as they fled Paris.

Less than a month after Jullien's final letter from Bordeaux the revolutionary tide in France shifted, as Robespierre was toppled from power on 9 Thermidor. Even if we grant that Jullien was an agent of the Committee of Public Safety and not a personal envoy for Robespierre, this development placed his life in jeopardy, if only for his resolute pursuit of the Girondin fugitives. Jullien responded to these changed circumstances with alacrity, however. As Palmer puts it, "the startling fact is that he immediately thought that Robespierre might indeed be guilty. It was at Rochefort on 15 Thermidor that he began a career of personal exculpation that lasted the rest of his life."<sup>19</sup> As a first step, he contacted the Club National in Bordeaux and asked that they reprint a speech that he had given back in April. Intended then as a veiled critique of Ysabeau—warning that it was dangerous to accord any individual undue veneration because all men were subject to corruption—these words could now easily be read in reference to Robespierre.

This was a complicated period in the Revolution, as the coalition that brought down "the tyrant" included deputies on both left and right, and many scrambled in the late summer of 1794 to protect themselves from possible persecution. Jullien did so as well, though with limited success. The Committee of Public Safety relieved him of his duties on 23 Thermidor (10 August 1794) and also ordered his arrest. The very next day, before he was apprehended, Jullien published his response to the Committee as an open letter, describing his faithful execution of the orders given him by the Committee, not by Robespierre, and his early, public repudiation of Robespierre after 9 Thermidor. He went on to delineate his notable words and actions since 1789, embellishing somewhat, Palmer observes, the historical record. Jullien's efforts at self-exculpation illustrate a point made by Bronislaw Baczko some years ago, that the interpretation of the Terror began immediately after 9 Thermidor, both in the efforts of the Thermidorians to distance themselves from the policies of the Terror (largely by placing responsibility squarely on the shoulders of Robespierre and his closest supporters), and in the efforts of accused "terrorists" to defend their actions over the previous year. It is impossible for us today in our judgment of the Terror, as it has been ever since the Revolution, to escape the influence of the picture drawn by those who survived it.<sup>20</sup>

How might we best understand what could be characterized as Jullien's opportunism in this period, and Palmer's interpretation of it? Palmer's use of the word "exculpation" certainly suggests that Jullien was guilty of something more than youthful indiscretion. But calling Jullien a "terrorist" should be taken as representing the discourse of the 1790s rather than as Palmer's judgment of Jullien in the context of the historiographical tendencies of the 1990s. Had Jullien made mistakes in his young career? Absolutely—who among us has not? For Palmer, however, the idealism of Jullien outweighed those mistakes and his effort at exculpation represented not so much a determination to save himself at whatever cost, but rather an attempt to make sense of the turbulent politics of the 1790s and a first step on the route toward becoming a political liberal.

Jullien's self-defense did not save him at the time. He spent the next fourteen months, until the dissolution of the National Convention, in prison. He continued to write during his imprisonment, both poetry and prose, and Palmer quotes from some of his memoranda. "It will

be seen everywhere that the Revolution from beginning to end was a continued struggle or war to the death between patricians and plebeians, between the rich and the poor;” and a bit later, “A virtuous man, a candid and simple soul, lives among men in times of revolution as in a forest peopled by wild beasts.”<sup>21</sup> This may have been a reference to the Germinal and Prairial uprisings, of which Jullien did not approve.

It was during this period of enforced reflection that Jullien’s view of the Revolution began to mature. He met a number of other revolutionaries while in prison, among whom Palmer makes particular note of Gracchus Babeuf. Palmer characterized Babeuf as a “protocommunist” and Jullien as an “incipient bourgeois democrat,” well on his way to becoming a liberal, it would seem. Both were released from prison shortly after the Vendémiaire uprising (October 1795). Jullien opposed Babeuf’s plans for an uprising against the Directory government, but he did join the Pantheon club, a haven for ex-Jacobins, and in the aftermath of Babeuf’s arrest Jullien’s name showed up on a list of his alleged supporters. By then, however, he had taken a position in the Ministry of Police, ostensibly to combat royalists. In July 1796 he wrote to Napoleon Bonaparte, seeking a job on the general staff of the Army of Italy. Palmer says of Jullien at this stage of his life that he “had believed in and been disappointed by each new wave of the Revolution.”<sup>22</sup> He had not abandoned his idealism, but had grown more pragmatic in his view of politics, and more sensitive, perhaps, to the shortcomings of most human beings.

Napoleon ignored his letter, but Jullien made his way to northern Italy anyway, in the winter of 1797, through the good offices of an old friend, and did indeed perform services for General Bonaparte. In July 1797 Napoleon surprised everyone, especially the government in Paris, by declaring the Cisalpine Republic, and Jullien took it upon himself to write “Notes of Advice to the Cisalpine Patriots.” Palmer cites just over half of the sixty points Jullien offered to the Cisalpine republicans, a curious mix of liberal and illiberal ideas. Among the most notable bits of advice were these:

3. The new legislators must have recourse to the lessons of experience and the history of the French Revolution, to guard against errors that might be compromising to liberty.
4. Early mistakes are irreparable. There must be a plan, well conceived and matured, from which should come the developments, step by step, which are necessary for the final achievement.
5. The world must arrive slowly by a progressive course at its point of maturity. To try to hasten the time fixed by nature is to retard it.
8. In revolutions, prudence is a supplement to force.
10. Unless republicans are united they will be weak and will perish.
12. Patriotism and enlightenment are almost always in a minority in larger assemblies.
13. Unity and prudence in the minority can assure its preponderance over the majority.
14. There must be a secret directing committee ...

20. By never giving the appearance of an idea of a coalition, even for good purposes, you will prevent the birth of factions, which are the scourge of the state.

27. Give institutions to the people to regenerate them; create a new man.

30. If you don't give a republican and military spirit to your citizens you will be merely a shadow, and the country will perish.

46. The French influence must be concealed. Speak of France only with the necessary respect for its government and the constitution it has given you.

56. Yet, I repeat, make haste slowly. To act abruptly is to lose all.<sup>23</sup>

This is a curious and interesting array of advice, certainly reflective of Jullien's own experience. He had not lost his revolutionary idealism—note the admonition to “create a new man”—but the Cisalpine patriots are advised to proceed with prudence and caution, in order to avoid haste. Jullien emphasizes the value of unity at several points, yet asserts that it may well be a unified minority that leads the revolution forward. On the one hand, he warns against factions or the appearance of same (a near obsession among French revolutionaries); on the other hand, he recommends a “secret directing committee.” Perhaps this latter point reflects the lesson of Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals, although that failed uprising could also be said to illustrate the need to avoid haste in one's projects for change. In any case, this point clearly presages the recourse to a “revolutionary vanguard” that the theory and practice of the nineteenth century would increasingly embrace, by Blanquists as well as Marxists. Finally, Jullien's attachment to Napoleon's general staff seems likely to have inspired his emphasis on the importance of a “military spirit.”

There was an element of ambivalence, even contradiction, in this note of advice that would continue to characterize Jullien's thought over the coming decade. Between 1799 and 1805 he had intermittent contact with Napoleon. At times he expressed dismay at the curtailment of political and civil liberties, at Napoleon's authoritarian tendencies and his quest for personalized power. But he also admired the order and stability that the First Consul brought to France and much of Europe between 1799 and 1804. In late 1799 Jullien published a supposed conversation between himself and Napoleon, in which Jullien poked gentle criticism at Napoleon's policies while Napoleon defended his accomplishments. In a memoir that Jullien wrote in July 1800 (never published), he offered Napoleon advice about the current situation in Italy, to “encourage that spirit of moderation, good order and wisdom that will make your influence lovable and the regime established under your auspices dear to all citizens.”<sup>24</sup> It is easy to imagine Napoleon laughing at this advice that he should be lovable, if indeed he ever read it.

Jullien's detractors would later assert that his *Colloquy* with Napoleon amounted to an enthusiastic endorsement of his regime, a charge that Jullien vigorously denied. He had serious misgivings about the 1804 coronation of Napoleon as emperor and, as the empire began to unravel in 1813, he published a scathing indictment of Napoleonic rule, comparing him

unfavorably to Peter the Great. Still, like many others, he defended the return of Napoleon to power during the Hundred Days, holding on to the hope that the emperor would honor his pledge to respect civil liberties in a restored regime. However bad Bonaparte might have been, the Bourbons were worse.

Jullien remained committed to playing a role in public life under the Restoration, but his ambitions were consistently frustrated. Palmer summarizes quite succinctly his maturing political stance:

It is to be noted that with his slogan, "Neither Napoleon nor the Bourbons," he never mentions the possibility of a republic, to which he had devoted the best years of his youth. Dreading fanaticism and violence, he had become a liberal. The Revolution was not the war of the poor against the rich, as he had said in the 1790s. It was the struggle of enlightened and progressive persons against obstinate, backward, and selfish upholders of outworn ideas.<sup>25</sup>

The clearest expression of Jullien's liberalism came in his publication of 1830, "The Common Sense of the Nation." In this pamphlet he wrote glowingly of General Lafayette and the Duke of Orleans who represented, in his view, "the two great ideas of LIBERTY and public ORDER, the two necessary elements of any durable society."<sup>26</sup> Written just days after the 1830 revolution, the piece makes it clear that Jullien was no longer an advocate of revolutionary upheaval, because "the very word *republic* would frighten pusillanimous or prejudiced minds, and even very enlightened persons, in both France and Europe. A representative monarchy, if it is well constructed, cast in bronze and not molded in plaster, can give us as much liberty as the sternest patriots desire." Our young Jacobin of 1789 had now become a constitutional monarchist.

Jullien stood for election to the Chamber of Deputies in 1831, but without success. It seemed in these years that whenever he took a step in the direction of public life someone would step forward to remind the public of Jullien's days as a terrorist in Bordeaux back in 1794. "Terrorist" became a label widely used by moderates in the years after Thermidor to demonize anyone who had supported the Jacobin government during the Year II, but Palmer uses it as well in his discussion of Jullien during that period. Denied the opportunity to make a contribution in the arena of French politics, he came to think of himself as a "living martyr." In the final decades of his life, however, he did make public contributions, first in his writings on education, which Palmer sees as his most enduring legacy and, second, as editor between 1819 and 1831 of the *Revue Encyclopédique*. Indeed, it might be his work on education that first drew Palmer's attention to Jullien. Professors in the college of education at Columbia University rediscovered Jullien's work, *A Sketch and Preliminary View of a Work on Comparative Education*, in the 1940s. The *Sketch*, which eventually grew to over five hundred pages in length, included an extensive questionnaire that was to be distributed to all the governments of Europe, the responses to which would constitute the database from which Jullien would draw his comparison. He intended not only to take stock of the current state of education in Europe, but also to advocate for reform. Palmer was clearly impressed by the work. "One comes away from such a barrage of questions with a feeling that Jullien really knew what the problems of schooling were, that he was no mere *philosophe* or *homme de lettres* with opinions on the subject, and that he really meant

to be helpful and useful to those who had the power to set changes into motion. It is equally evident that the project was impractical.”<sup>27</sup> One might argue that this remains true of projects for educational reform today; but one also wonders if impracticality was perhaps part of Palmer’s definition of liberalism.

The *Revue Encyclopédique* also merits comment. As its title suggests, the scope of the journal was wide and eclectic. Its articles dealt with science, literature, and the arts, with a particular interest in the technological innovations of the burgeoning revolution in transportation. Palmer reproduces a table summarizing the geographic scope of the journal’s articles in 1826. Of the 662 substantive articles, the vast majority addressed European topics, with a bit more than a third focusing on France, especially Paris. But North America drew as much attention as Great Britain, and the Republic of Haiti was the focus of fifteen articles, evidence of the continuing debate about slavery in this period. Among Jullien’s own contributions to the *Revue* was an essay on Robert Owen’s experimental community at New Lanark, which he found to be very impressive, especially the schools of the community. Palmer noted at the end of his excerpt from the article that Jullien was committed to “progress,” “civilization,” “virtue,” and “distribution of knowledge among the poor and the working classes,” the hallmarks of the liberalism of the day. “The young Jacobin had come a long way. But the change was more in the means than in the end.”<sup>28</sup> This may be what Palmer found most attractive about Jullien. While he had left behind the tumultuous revolutionary politics of the 1790s, he had not abandoned the ideals of 1789.

There were not many French revolutionaries who lived long enough to witness the revolutions of 1848, but Jullien was among them. Indeed, despite his disenchantment with radical republicanism, he signed a placard posted in the first arrondissement of Paris in March 1848 calling for a democratic assembly. Most of the fourteen points of the pronouncement would have been compatible with Jullien’s liberal views, demanding civil liberties and reforms reminiscent of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. But the placard also championed the “sovereignty of the people” and the “unity and indivisibility of the French Republic,” hallmarks of Jacobinism with which Jullien was no longer comfortable.<sup>29</sup> The factionalism that he had so decried in the 1790s soon reemerged and led to the violence of the June Days, and although Jullien did not live to see it, the balloting at year’s end brought a second Napoleon to power at the head of the French government. What is significant here is not the disappointment of 1848, but rather the fact that even in the last year of his life Marc-Antoine Jullien still wanted desperately to make a contribution, to move France closer to the ideals of his youth.

R. R. Palmer’s agenda in writing this book was twofold. First, he wished to take this huge, dramatic event of the French Revolution and explore it at a human level, just as he had done with his first great book, *Twelve Who Ruled*. He might have entitled that first book *The Committee of Public Safety* or *The Year of the Terror*, as it was after all about both of those things. One of his basic premises, though, was that people make history: that the French Revolution was about ordinary people, in extraordinary circumstances, struggling to make a better world. Second,

Palmer wished to explore—through Jullien—the nineteenth-century legacy of the French Revolution. There have been many who have argued that 1789, or more properly 1793, led inexorably to the repressive regimes of the twentieth century, to Stalin and/or Hitler.<sup>30</sup> Palmer did not share that view. For him, Marc-Antoine Jullien was an exemplary figure, a young terrorist, a committed Jacobin, who came to embrace liberalism in his later years. Palmer recognized the tragedy of 1789, but he also recognized, and admired, the idealism.

In all of his work, R. R. Palmer insisted that history holds lessons for us today, and this book is no exception. He sums up Jullien, in his final paragraph, in this way: “He continued to assert the sovereignty of the nation as a means of securing equality of civil rights and liberty of thought and action, with appropriate considerations for the preservation of law and order.” Palmer concludes the book with: “Could he have returned to earth toward the close of the twentieth century he would have been glad to see these ideas still alive.”<sup>31</sup> One might well add that, if R. R. Palmer also could return to earth here at the second decade of the twenty-first century, he might well offer the idealism of Jullien, and his warnings against the danger of factionalism, as a salutary lesson for politics and politicians in our own time.

## Notes

1. R. R. Palmer, *From Jacobin to Liberal: Marc-Antoine Jullien, 1775–1848* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), ix.
2. R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (London, 1966), 306. This is a reprinting of the original Princeton University press edition, first published in 1941.
3. Palmer, *From Jacobin to Liberal*, ix.
4. François Furet, *La Révolution: de Turgot à Jules Ferry, 1770–1880* (Paris, 1988); and Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York, 1989).
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 10.
7. *Ibid.*, 6, and for the quotations that follow, 12–13.
8. For a recent iteration of the Marxist interpretation see Henry Heller, *The Bourgeois Revolution in France, 1789–1815* (New York, 2006).
9. *Ibid.*, 19.
10. *Ibid.*, 16, and for the quotation that follows, 22.
11. *Ibid.*, 23–24.
12. *Ibid.*, 26.
13. *Ibid.*, 41–44.
14. *Ibid.*, 46, and for the quotation that follows as well.

15. Ibid., 47.

16. Paris, Archives Nationales, AF II 46, dossier 359 (letter of 11 Messidor II). Surprisingly, Palmer does not cite this letter, probably because he had only published collections at his disposal. See also Paul R. Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic under Fire: The Federalist Revolt in the French Revolution* (University Park, PA, 2003), 215–228, for a more extensive discussion of the repression in Bordeaux.

17. Palmer, 59.

18. Ibid., 56, 60.

19. Ibid., 60.

20. Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution after Robespierre* (Cambridge, 1994).

21. Palmer, 69–70.

22. Ibid., 76.

23. Ibid., 83–86.

24. Ibid., 101.

25. Ibid., 130.

26. Ibid., 145, and for the quotation that follows, 146.

27. Ibid., 173.

28. Ibid., 196–199.

29. Ibid., 224–225.

30. See, for example, François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981).

31. Ibid., 226.