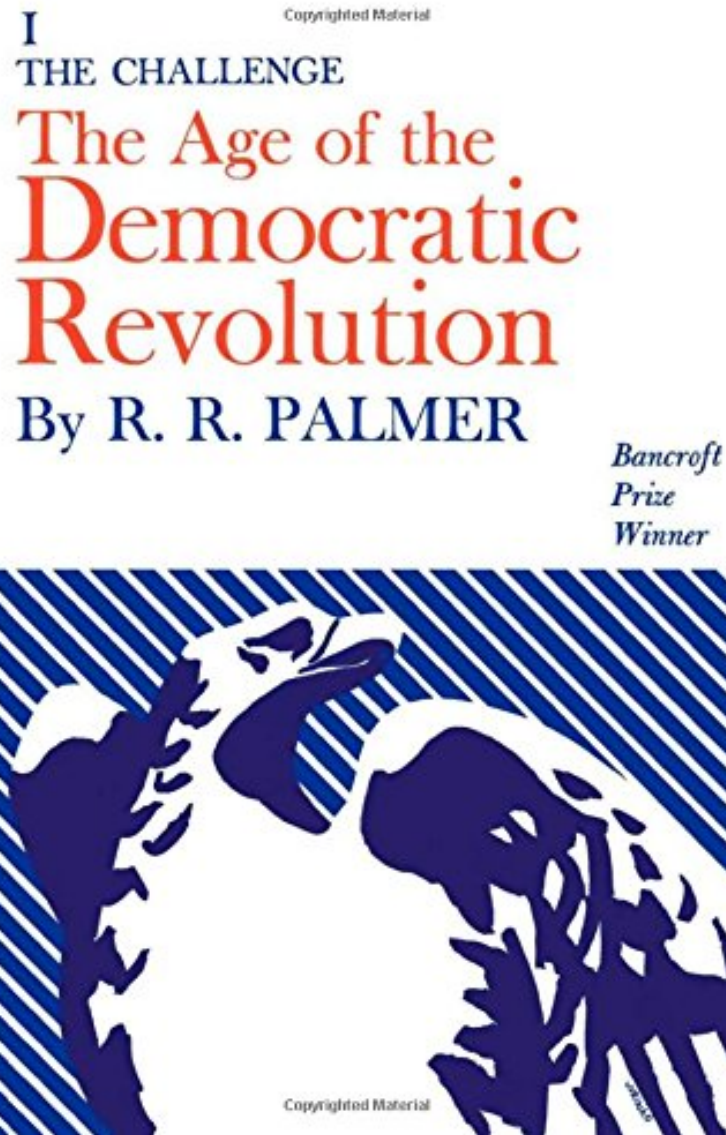


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## Age of the Democratic Revolution, Vol. 1: The Challenge

*R. R. Palmer*

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**R. R. Palmer : Age of the Democratic Revolution, Vol. 1: The Challenge** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Age of the Democratic Revolution, Vol. 1: The Challenge:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Broadbased and comprehensive review of the 18th century democratic revolutionBy Theodore L. ZawistowskiExactly the materials I needed. Very informative for the student and lover of history interested in the 18th century democratic revolution in America and across Europe..2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. While a reference book for the Northern Hemisphere experience, this man is lucid,

interesting and I wish he had written about AusBy Roger WareDenser to read but very erudite in its coverage. This book helped me to understand Philip Zelikow's points of the present MOOC course on History of the MODern ;Wrold.32 of 33 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding Comparative AnalysisBy R. AlbinWritten over 40 years ago, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* is still the major effort at interpreting the political upheavals of the late 18th century. Covering a remarkably broad range of societies, Palmer deals with France, the American Revolution, Britain, the Holy Roman Empire, various German states, Russia, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. This is an effort to reveal the major structural features of political and social conflict in what Palmer refers to as the Atlantic world. Since he has extensive discussion of Eastern Europe as well, it might be better to describe his frame as something like Greater Europe. In order to produce his major structural analyses, Palmer narrates and analyzes events across several decades and across several countries. It is a measure of the quality of Palmer's scholarship and writing ability that this book serves as an excellent narrative overview of the political and diplomatic history of many of the countries discussed. Not surprisingly, France and the events generated by the French Revolution occupy a central place but one of the most impressive things about this book is how Palmer features the importance of events in places like Holland and the Austrian controlled parts of Italy. Even the tiny Genevan republic and Ireland receive thorough and enlightening coverage. Palmer sees the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and allied events as driven by the collision of a series of pan-European forces. He points out that the first half of the 18th century had actually seen a hardening of social barriers, a decline in social mobility, and increasing dominance of important political institutions by smaller inherited elites. The increasingly aristocratic nature of many European societies was opposed to a very large extent by Monarchies wishing to extend their authority. The financial strains imposed by the Seven Years War appear to have been particularly important in prompting several governments, France, Britain, and even the Holy Roman Empire, into attempts to extend royal power and reduce the power of traditional and aristocratically dominated institutions. Implicit in Palmer's analysis is that the humanitarianism of the Enlightenment had produced alternative ways of looking at society and governance that undermined the legitimacy of aristocratic institutions and social structure based on deference. Ironically, some aspects of Enlightenment political theory were used to defend traditional institutions. Over the course of the second half of the 18th century, this collision produces, at least initially, aristocratic success in turning back the challenges to traditional institutions. In many countries, notably France, the aristocratic revolution is followed is then followed by Democratic Revolutions resulting in the ultimate destruction of a huge array of traditional political and social institutions. Palmer has thoughtful discussions of the varying aspects of this general phenomenon in a large array of nations. Britain and the American colonies prove to be important exceptions to the general model and their unique features result in the American Revolution and what can only be called a relatively peaceful counter-revolution in Britain. This is then followed by a superb series of discussions of the consequences of the Democratic Revolutions throughout Europe and North America. Some aspects of Palmer's analysis are probably incorrect. This is not surprising as he wrote over 40 years ago and there has been a lot of important scholarship since the publication of this book. For example, I think Palmer is a bit unfair to Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists in the USA. I suspect that some will find this book, with its emphasis on political history, a bit old-fashioned. These, however, are quibbles. In terms of breadth of understanding and depth of analysis, this is a truly outstanding work of scholarship.

For the Western world as a whole, the period from about 1760 to 1800 was the great revolutionary era in which the outlines of the modern democratic state came into being. It is the thesis of this major work that the American, French, and Polish revolutions, and the movements for political change in Britain, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, and other countries, though each distinctive in its own way, were all manifestations of recognizably similar political ideas, needs, and conflicts.

"Robert Palmer possesses the combination of patient scholarship and broad philosophical inquiry the task demands. . . . This book will enlarge and clarify our understanding of modern Western history. It will do more than that. It will re-emphasize the strength and vitality of the roots that supported the growth of democracy in the Old and New Worlds."--Geoffrey Bruun, *New York Times*"It is a stimulating and provocative book in explicit defense of a position--a moral, political, if not quite religious position--which is the relatively unexamined position of the great majority of Americans. A reading of this book should help many to an explicit examination of their beliefs that may strengthen them and should certainly clarify them."--Crane Brinton, *New York Herald Tribune*"Professor Palmer presents his historical synthesis with meticulous scholarship, pungent clarity, and emphatic conviction. . . . He has the rare gift of analyzing a historical situation in a manner that reveals, at the same time, both its past and its present significance."--J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Saturday* "An examination of the revolutionary movements in Western Europe from 1760 until the first explosions of the French Revolution...it searches for the common ideas, needs, and situations between the American Revolution and the contemporary movements in Europe."--Commonweal