

## **Medicating Omicron and the Continuing Relevance of the French Revolution**

### **What Happens Next – 01.16.2021**

Larry Bernstein:  
Welcome to What Happens Next.

My name is Larry Bernstein.

Today's discussion is on Medications for Omicron and the Continuing Relevance of the French Revolution.

Our first speaker today is Dr. Ari Ciment who is a pulmonologist at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Miami Beach. Ari has treated thousands of COVID patients since the March 2020 outbreak.

Ari spoke on my three programs, and he is now officially a regular on the show by popular demand

Ari thinks Omicron is about to peak and we are going to return to normal life!

This means we are heading towards herd immunity. It also suggests it is highly likely that you will get infected with Omicron in the next few weeks!

Today's discussion will focus on what medications should you take, how long should you quarantine, what symptoms will you get and how to treat them, if at all.

Our second speaker is one of the world's leading academics specializing in the French Revolution.

Tim Tackett is a Professor Emeritus in History at the University of California at Irvine. I have read several of his books on the French Revolution which I loved, which is why I asked him to speak on today's program. I particularly enjoyed his books *When the King Took Flight*, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, and his latest work entitled *The Glory and the Sorrow*.

I want to hear from Tim about the continuing relevance of the French Revolution and what lessons can we learn as it relates to our current polarized politics.

Let's get started.

We welcome back our next guest, Ari Ciment. Ari is a pulmonologist in the Mt. Sinai Miami Beach Hospital. Ari's officially a regular on the show. This is his fourth straight week, completely unprecedented, and takes the lead in a number of- of times he's been on the show. No one even comes close at this point. Ari, so I was I start each episode with the same question. What are you seeing that's different in the hospital this week?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Much of the same. I think that we're probably reaching a peak in the next couple days, and I think it's going to start to come down in terms of the actual numbers.

Larry Bernstein:

Why do you think that?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I just feel like we're starting to hit that peak.

It's still overall very busy in all of the hospitals.

There's just a gestalt that either we're getting better at it or we just feel like we're peaking.

Larry Bernstein:

The patients that do come into the hospital, do they look different in any way, in terms of how sick they are, the type of pathologies they have?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

No, it's still much of the same like we discussed last time. It's more of secondary-

Larry Bernstein:

The sinusitis, the lack of pneumonia in the lungs?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Yeah, the outpatient calls are still more predominant than the hospital calls. And the outpatient calls by and large are the sinusitis and the severe sore throat, flu-like illness. The inpatient is still much of the underlying illnesses being exacerbated by the Omicron.

Larry Bernstein:

You come in for heart disease, and it just happens to be that you're COVID positive.

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Exactly.

Larry Bernstein:

Your body is dealing with a problem, some morbidity. And when you get either the flu or you get COVID, Omicron, the body can only do so much and it deals with Omicron or it's dealing with the other underlying comorbidity, and it can't do both. And when you get in this weakened immune state your liver, your heart, your kidney, ends up in bad shape.

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Yep, that's precisely what it is. And just to think about this, Omicron pandemic phase is we're like getting carpet bombed by hundreds and hundreds of cases. So, even though the percentage of people being

sick is lower than the other variants, just because we're seeing so many, you're going to see lots of hospitalized. But the difference is the previous variants, they came in predominantly with respiratory issues. Now we're not seeing that entirely.

Larry Bernstein:

One of the concerns, as a public policy matter, we were fearful of was that co-terminus with the surge, we would have doctors and nursing staff sick, with Omicron. What sort of absenteeism are you seeing at the hospital? Are the doctors and nurses all getting sick now, or has that already passed?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Yeah, so I can't talk in relation to Mt. Sinai, because I'm not allowed to. But in terms of all general hospitals across the nation, they're seeing that people are sick because it's so contagious. Whether they get it at work or they get it at home; the staff is out. And again, the fact that it's only a five day out is much improved than it would have, would have been a month before. 10 days out would have been catastrophic, I think for the whole healthcare system. Initially, they saw that happening in the UK, and the United States adapted pretty fast.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned to me that masks aren't that effective against Omicron. Why is that?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

It seems that this variant, for whatever reason, gets through a standard cloth mask. I don't know the actual study that showed it, but even the CDC acknowledged that this variant is not protected by just your standard mask. It's interesting that the White House has just recently announced, I think yesterday, that they're going to supply more durable heavier masks for the population, which is a great announcement. It's interesting that the CDC hasn't officially said that that's required. The White House is taking a lead ahead of the CDC when it comes to this. It seems as if you really want to be protected, one mask might not be enough. You have to wear two.

Larry Bernstein:

Two episodes ago, you commented on access to monoclonals and what was working better or worse for this particular variant. How is the access to the monoclonals in the hospital system? If I'm elderly, can I get it? Is it possible or not?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

There are different hospitals, and you really have to find out from your local hospital which one has it, but there are some hospitals that now carry Sotrovimab. They were limited supply by the federal government and also by the state government. And there are hospitals that have it, but they have very strict criteria. For instance, I know one of the transplant centers here require, really immunocompromised patients to get this specific monoclonal antibody. So it's not for every person who has COVID. It's for the people that could benefit from it most.

Larry Bernstein:

And we talked about strategies of which monoclonal to take. Before we had a- a substantial mix of Delta versus Omicron, and as a result, because Delta was so much more dangerous, you leaned more toward the Regeneron, which was effective. But has the mix of Delta and Omicron shifted dramatically, more towards Omicron to maybe change your decision-making process?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

Yeah. It seems that the Omicron has now really dominated locally. So, it makes more sense to get the Sotrovimab. But still, if you cannot get it because it's so scarce, it still makes sense to take the Regeneron. At least you're protected for the scarier variant, but if you can get your hands on Sotrovimab, then- then go for it. Again, if you have the high-risk factors. It seems as if most patients, even with those risk factors, I mean I see them, a lot of patients refuse to take anything, and actually do quite well, like the majority of patients with the flu or with this illness will do okay.

Larry Bernstein:

Last episode, we talked about the new antivirals coming out of Merck and Pfizer. Two questions. One, is there access to either one available for the population? And second, what are you seeing in terms of the response of your patients to that sort of antiviral?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

So, there was a, I was on a call yesterday with the CDC. I was listening in on their call about Paxlovid and Molnupiravir. Paxlovid really will be the first line over Molnupiravir, because there are some issues in terms of Molnupiravir in perhaps teratogenicity and things like that, and also the fact that Paxlovid is definitely more efficacious. Again, we went over the numbers last time. It was like 0.8 versus 6.3% versus Molnupiravir, which was 6.8 versus 9%.

Larry Bernstein:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Ari Ciment:

So it wasn't as dramatic an improvement, so you might as well get Paxlovid, that was one of the key pearls of the talk. We still don't have it locally accessible. I just reached out to one of my friends who's a CVS pharmacist, and they're still waiting on their first batch, but I do feel by Monday, Tuesday, I think after this call that went out by the CDC, they're probably going to release their first shipment locally.

As we know, we talked about Paxlovid-

having drug interactions, which I'm sort of worried about. And Paxlovid you have to adjust for renal failure, which is something the pharmacist can take care of, but you'll see that most people actually don't need to take these meds. So, if you do have a side effect or there's a problem, you're more readily to stop it and you'll be more than likely okay.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's say that you are a normal no comorbidity patient. You got Omicron. We talked about things to do. I want to kind of break this thing down into the most basic questions. I have a temperature. What do you recommend for the temperature? Do you like Tylenol? Do you like Advil? Do you like something else? I know that there were concerns that Advil was not particularly effective or problematic in the Delta situation. Where are you on basic pain reliever and temperature reduction?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

You alluded to the fact that the World Health Organization originally in March 2020, their first publication came out and they said, "Don't take Advil," because there were some reports in France that there were some patients with adverse reactions when they took the Advil. The reason is because the way that the COVID infected people is through the ACE-2 receptor, and the Advil increases your ACE-2 receptor. The thought was Advil, it makes sense that it made people worse. But they retracted that as soon as the second interim guidance came out, because there was really no hardcore evidence that that happened. Many, many, many patients take Advil, anti-inflammatories, and are totally fine.

My choice has always been Tylenol for fever control. The question is whether or not you should even treat fever. Maybe fever is an adaptive mechanism. So, there's a nice debate. My gestalt is that fever is causing a- a little more oxygen consumption and causing perhaps some of the problems that we're seeing people hospitalized, because they're dealing with high fevers, and it's causing the rest of the systems to possibly go awry.

I'm a fan of fever control, whether it be fans or ice packs or Tylenol. That's my first choice. And then if not, Advil for pain I think is totally fine and safe.

Larry Bernstein:

In previous episodes, you mentioned that Omicron primarily is a sinusitis, upper respiratory inflammation. We talked about the neti pot and Fluminex. How successful are those two products helping out?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I was a big fan of the neti pot and sinus rinse, whatever you can do, because these coronavirus lives in the nasopharynx and oropharynx. How do you think people got pneumonia? Is that they would breathe in tidal volumes of this massive influx of virus in their nasopharynx, and then it would develop into their lungs. That's basically how pneumonia works. You inhale these bugs, and then they take root, and then they wreak havoc.

So, it made sense to do the sinus rinse. There haven't been any clear randomized controlled trials with this specific bug that it has helped. You could rinse with Listerine. Listerine has also antiviral effects. It sounds crazy, but you could find articles showing that Listerine has a positive antiviral effect, if you want to maybe limit your infectivity for other people. I think it- it definitely makes sense to keep the oropharynx and the nasopharynx clean.

Larry Bernstein:

Well, what, if you've got upper respiratory symptoms, what can I do to make it easier on myself?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I would do the regular sinusitis treatment, which would be nasal, a neti pot sinus rinse, maybe intra nasal steroids really are effective and the regular oral decongestants, if they're needed. That's really the predominant outpatient symptomatology right now, is an upper respiratory tract infection and sinusitis.

Larry Bernstein:

A few days ago, Ari, you sent me the latest CDC guidelines and recommendations for Omicron. Do you agree with it?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

If you were exposed to somebody with COVID-19 and you're not up to date on your COVID vaccinations, then you would have to quarantine. What they did is they amended what it means to be up to date on your COVID vaccinations. So now, unlike the last time we talked, now it's three vaccines, boosted. And the other, the other new finding that's just over the last two days is, it used to be Moderna booster, six months. Now they lowered it to five months. So, it makes it so the mRNA vaccinations, five months, you should get your booster. If not, then you're not considered fully vaccinated. The other interesting thing that went under the radar is that you don't have to quarantine if you are either up to date in the vaccinations or if you had a confirmed COVID-19 within the past three months. Everybody criticizes the CDC for not recognizing natural immunity.

But to me, it's a clear understanding that there is natural immunity and you should be protected for at least three months.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you think at some point, you could have too many boosters? Is- is there a booster max?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I think that that's possible, but I think by the time we get to the seventh booster, hopefully we'll have a better vaccine. Actually, Bill Gates talked about this yesterday. He said the two most unfortunate things with the vaccines are number one, they're not durable.

Meaning you have to get a vaccine every five months. But it doesn't protect you versus infection. As you know, infection causes you to be out of work or school for five days at least. I think that's a beautiful point. We have to work on the durability and we have to work on sterilizing immunity, which is the key, if we can get there. Some vaccines never give us sterilizing immunity, so I really didn't expect it here. But it is a goal.

Larry Bernstein:

The quarantine language that the CDC used, I wonder if it's a little bit political in the following sense. People who have been vaccinated and boosted can still transmit the virus to a third party. Why do you think they decided to focus the quarantine on the unvaccinated and the double vaccinated, and only say, "You know what, if you got the three vaccines, then we're not to view you as having to quarantine if you were in contact with a COVID-19 person." It would seem to me that given that the fact that it's still transmissible through that boosted person, that they're just trying to emphasize that.

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I think that this is actually less political because the triple booster effect really does protect you more than the double vaccine.

I think this is an admission that the double booster really is not enough. So, it's not really punishing the double boosted or the unvaccinated here. It's just being a real time adaptation to reality. The reality is that even triple-boosted people are not protected, but they're protected more than the double booster. What else can you do? You've already got your triple-boosted, you don't really have to quarantine, because the likelihood is that you're not going to get it, but it's still possible, so they do recommend that you test yourself after five days.

Larry Bernstein:

And is there a distinction between getting it and being able to pass it on to someone else? Do you have to get it to pass it on?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

There are a lot of asymptomatic carriers, just like the first time. So yeah, the answer is you don't have to get it in order to pass it on.

To get it means you really are harboring an infection. What I'm seeing clinically, people that are clearly COVID positive, but are testing negative. Meaning they're in the house with four other people. They're all positive. This guy's having symptoms, runny nose, sinusitis and- and yet he's testing negative. And the question for him is, hey, what should I do? So, I'd say that person, you know-

Larry Bernstein:

Quarantine.

Dr. Ari Ciment:

... be mindful, quarantine, be mindful towards other people, wear a mask when you're in public. Yeah, you're testing negative, so the fact of your infectivity is, makes it less likely

because you don't have things shedding in your nose, but still play it safe and act as if you have the disease.

Larry Bernstein:

We end each session, Ari, on a note of optimism. What are you optimistic this week?

Dr. Ari Ciment:

I'm optimistic that Omicron is still looking like a regular cold or a bad flu. And we're getting these therapeutics coming out within the next few weeks for the highest risk people. And it's only going to get better and better.

I should mention that the order of therapy should be first Paxlovid if you were high risk twice a day for five days, then Sitrovimap (the monoclonal antibody) and then remdesivir that is working well in the Pine Tree trial vs. placebo, then the Merck antiviral Molnupiravir. That is best practices for high-risk patients for the order of therapy for Omicron in the third week of January 2022.

Larry Bernstein:

Thank you, Ari.

I would like to introduce our next speaker Tim Tackett who is a Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California at Irvine. Tim's research focuses on French History and in particular on the French Revolution. Tim has written many important works on this topic including his latest entitled *The Glory and the Sorrow*. Tim, please begin your six -minute presentation.

Tim Tackett:

The French Revolution is without a doubt, one of the turning points in the history of the Western world. Telescoped within that brief period from 1789 to the early 1800s, there emerged many of the major political and social ideologies that would subsequently come to fruition in Europe and the world from the 19th to the 21st centuries. From liberalism, democracy and republicanism to nationalism, socialism, feminism, abolitionism, and de-Christianization. The wars that ensued between France and the rest of Europe, first under the Republican government and thereafter under Napoleon Bonaparte carried many of the ideals of the revolution throughout Europe and eventually over much of the world.

These are some of the reasons why historians, political scientists and others have continued to debate the revolution, how it originated, how it evolved over time, why it became violent, why and how it came to an end. But in examining the history of the French Revolution, one of the most difficult problems to resolve in my opinion is the origins of a terrible factionalization that beset the French during this period. To some extent, such divisions involved major ideological differences between those promoting on the one hand, the new value system of democracy, Republicanism, and a renewal of the church and religion, and on the other, those demanding the return to the monarchy of the old regime and to Orthodox Catholicism.

But far more difficult to comprehend are the terrible factional divisions that arose among men and women who ultimately supported the same basic values of the revolution and why the revolutionaries became not only killing their opponents but also killing one another. I believe there are five tightly interrelated, causative factors.



First, the fear and suspicion of real or potential enemies among the various elements in society groups.

Second, the spread of a rumor supported notably by the mistrust, uncertainty and confusion over various interpretations and misinterpretations in the media, essentially the early revolutionary press, which differed wildly in political positions and accuracy. And the perceived need by a great many people to develop what sociologists refer to as improvised news to explain their situation.

Third, a growing obsession with conspiracy sometimes real but far more commonly imagined and strongly supported by rumor.

Fourth, an ever-increasing demonization of the other, a tendency to see the perceived opposition as not only wrong, but evil.

And fifth, the political mobilization by a small number of politicians to help promote their own ambitions. Over time, the fears and suspicions supported by rumor seemed to metastasize into the obsession of a monolithic grand conspiracy in which all of one's perceived enemies were thought to be working together.

It was this atmosphere of suspicion, fear and conspiracy, obsession, which explains the terrible factional struggles in the national assemblies of the period between Feuillaunts and Jacobins and subsequently between Girondins and Montagnards factional struggles that often led both sides to seek physically to eliminate their rivals, usually by means of the guillotine.

Nevertheless, the dark side of the revolution based on the emotions of fear and hatred was at least partly counterbalanced by the emotions and enthusiasm and love, love in its collective form of fraternity. And we should not underestimate the importance among the bulk of society, first of numerous great oaths taking ceremonies of allegiance to the revolution.

Second, of the popular revolutionary festivals, and third of the fraternal banquets in the streets of Paris and the other large cities of France. It was only the strong sense of fraternity and nationalism that enabled the majority of the population to come together, to fight a series of wars that saw France threatened across every frontier and ultimately under Napoleon to conquer much of Europe.

What might all this mean for the situation in Contemporary America? I am absolutely not a specialist in American history, but I cannot avoid seeing certain parallels between late 18th century France and the 21st century United States. Metastasis of fear, the obsession with conspiracies, the suspicion and demonization of one's opponents, the widespread rumors now based, especially on the echo chamber effects of the internet and of the power of improvised news or in present parlance of the accusation of fake news.

I would only hope that Americans might somehow come to realize as many revolutionaries ultimately did, that in terms of essential values, there is still more that binds us together than that separates us. That the great majority of citizens can learn to debate and discuss their differences and not perceive their opponents as essentially evil. And that negotiation and compromise can be seen as the essence of a democratic regime are such hopes, wildly, optimistic, perhaps, but I can only hope that they are not.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Tim, my first question is about the lack of institutions in the pre-revolutionary period. There was no legislature or a single meeting of the Estates-General for nearly two centuries. There were no institutions available to establish norms of behavior for the legislative branch. How do you think about those lack of institutional norms as potentially the precursor for the revolution's violence?

Tim Tackett:

Wow, that's a good question. A tough question. There had indeed been no Estates General since 1614 in that pre-revolutionary period, especially beginning in 1788, there was a huge debate over how the Estates General should be organized and what it should discuss. Once Jacques Necker came to power as a minister in Louis 16<sup>th</sup>'s government, a circular was sent out to all the municipalities of France and asking everybody to offer their suggestions, how should this new national assembly be organized?

There were hundreds, (laughs), of responses, many of them published. And by 1789, there was quite a considerable discussion and reflection, a real positive experience.

In addition, among the other reforms that had been instituted in 1788 were provincial assemblies in which people all over France were brought together, through elections and began discussing various issues.

And thirdly in the process of the election to the Estates General there were several levels of elections.

Larry Bernstein:

The French Revolution was very different from the American revolution and our founding fathers were divided on supporting their French allies during their revolution. Specifically, I'm thinking about the John Adam's perspective who recognized the potential for violence and Thomas Jefferson's, who encouraged revolution every generation. I think Jefferson's quote is "God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion." Why do you think some of our founding fathers looked unfavorably at the French Revolution?

Tim Tackett:

Initially, it was really widespread support for the French Revolution. But there was a great turning point came with the violence that began in France, especially the massacre of September 1792, and then of course the terror.

Jefferson continued to support the revolution but a considerable number of people in America turned their back on the revolution said they'd gone too far.

Larry Bernstein:

Edmund Burke wrote about the French Revolution and his fears were based on the destruction of the strongest institutions in France, like the church, the aristocracy, and the monarchy among others. And as a natural conservative, Burke put great stock in the endogenous complexity on how institutions evolved

and that historically grounded ways should not be cast aside for an untested utopian society. How do you think about Burke's antipathy towards the French Revolution?

Tim Tackett:

I think he had it wrong. He did not realize the extent to which the French Revolutionaries were trying to empirically build a new system. It was not utopian. They didn't throw out everything. They were trying to reorganize some of the major institutions to be sure, but it wasn't, like imagining France should go back to the forest or something as in some of Rousseau's descriptions. Burke says this, "The revolution is made by a series of lawyers who don't know anything about government or complete amateurs."

Well, that's not true at all, they had considerable experience in meetings and considering the possibilities of what should and should not be reformed.

Larry Bernstein:

Some of the ideas that were implemented during the revolution such as changing the names of the months, switching the number of days in a week. I mean, how do we think about when revolutionaries say, "Let's have a 10-day week?"

Tim Tackett:

Well, that came much later, didn't it? Then I've been talking about-

Larry Bernstein:

Fair enough. Some wanted to undermine the power of the Catholic church in French society.

Tim Tackett:

They were basically anti-Christian, they were going after the church when they reorganized the days of the week, and so on.

Larry Bernstein:

And getting rid of Christian holidays and festivals.

Tim Tackett:

Absolutely. Yeah. There was an extensive anti-clericalism and anti-religion that swept over France, but it was always pushed by a minority. In this book I recently wrote about Adrien Colson in the Glory and the Sorrow when he began to realize that the revolution was turning against the church. It was a tiny minority that went to those extremes. I've seen much this same in a new biography that I'm working on and it will come out in a year or two. Most of the French were appalled by many of these many of these radical changes, but they were at war against all of Europe. They were being invaded from every direction. And under those conditions, it was possible for some of the most radical individuals to become more powerful than they had been before.

Larry Bernstein:

Your latest book that you just mentioned is *Glory and the Sorrow*. This is a story about a single Frenchman Adrien Colson. You examined a thousand of Colson's letters addressed to his best friend to figure out his views of the French revolution and how these attitudes evolved over time.

Historians are challenged in ascertaining evolving political opinions, but why do you think there is much to learn from the views from a single individual?

We just lived through COVID, and it would be interesting to see how people's views about masks, vaccinations, and quarantines changed over time. But if you focused on just me as an example, I don't know if we can learn much from my personal views as it relates to society at large. Sociologists have used surveys and other metrics to evaluate changing public opinions. So how do you think of the strengths and weaknesses of analyzing Colson in particular for changes in public opinion of the French Revolution?

Tim Tackett:

I found the story of Adrien Colson, the focus of the book, fascinating in its own right. And then I was quite attracted to the art of storytelling. I think historians' responsibility is to tell, (laughs), tell good stories, or at least that's the way I look at it. I would argue that the petty lawyer, Colson because of his family origins as a tanner's son dwelling in one of the most impoverished sections of Paris is quite a wonderful cultural intermediary for understanding. And to some extent, giving a voice to the people who lived around him, many of whom were radical *Sans-culottes* during the revolution.

So, yes, I look at one person, but I look at one person in the context of the neighborhood in which he lived. And I spent a long time trying to integrate him into that neighborhood and figure out who lived with him and what his relationships were. And the fact that he, coming from very humble origins was able to talk with his neighbors. Artisans and shopkeepers, that many other lawyers would not have been able to do.

He was a witness to what was going on in the society. His life would've utterly disappeared along with the witnessing of his neighborhood. If it were not for these little over a thousand letters written to his best friend over a period of 20 years before and during the revolution, which were miraculously preserved. And (laughs), history always has to be based both on ideas and on documents, on evidence that is available that makes possible an analysis of the questions you would like to ask. Not every question can be answered, but this seemed like a great approach to looking at some of the questions that have long been difficult for historians to broach.

Larry Bernstein:

Colson discusses in his letters the storming of the Bastille. Colson did not participate in the violence, but he saw those who had stormed it. They returned with the heads of the losers on top of pikes and they paraded through Paris. Colson was pleased with the result. What lessons can we take from Colson's willingness to accept violence and mob behavior at that time in Paris?

Tim Tackett:

Well, he simply thought that the individuals inside the Bastille deserved what they got.

Colson's descriptions of what's going on in the neighborhood. It widely believed that the shortage of grain for example, was a plot foisted upon the people by the government and that the government was ready to see large numbers of the population die rather than to lose power.

And in retrospect, this seems crazy, but that was the widespread belief. He believed that the crowds when they gathered around and were peacefully asking that the Bastille be opened and that the people be given guns and munitions to defend themselves. Paris at this time was surrounded by a mercenary army. And, people were terrified and were trying to arm to protect themselves. And they approached the Bastille in a peaceful request to petition to the governor of the Bastille to simply open the door and give them arms. Instead, at least in the account that Colson heard and believed, people mocked them from the top of the Bastille.

They turned and exposed their (laughs), their rear ends to the people, and then began shooting at them from way high up, and killed over a hundred local citizens, died in those few hours. So, he believed that they started it. They were the ones who were violent first.

Larry Bernstein:

The modern and contemporaneous opposition to the French Revolution often focused on mob violence such as the storming of the Bastille.

And, not only, did Colson support that behavior, but Bastille Day has become a holiday in France commemorated annually. Why do you think that Bastille Day takes on positive attributes, in support of mob violence and as you describe it the public demand for firearms and the killing of the royal troops?

Tim Tackett:

I wouldn't accept the phrase, "Mob violence." It was a collective action of the people trying to get guns and ammunition to defend themselves. And they didn't start it at the Bastille, when people up high above them started shooting at them, and killed many of their neighbors and friends, they became very angry.

Bastille Day wasn't celebrated at first, but it came to be celebrated as the key event in which the population had armed themselves and taken over Paris. They took over the municipal government in order to organize the defense of the city.

And it was when the King heard what was going on that he agreed to go into Paris himself and accept what the National Assembly had done.

The National Assembly themselves had no army. And it was this action by the people in Paris that preserved the National Assembly.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's use another example, the King was at Versailles and there was a food shortage in Paris, and a delegation of women marched to Versailles to demand bread. And then things got violent and the

protesters demanded that the King leave Versailles and come to Paris. And they dragged him, kicking and screaming, to Paris. How would you describe that? Would you call that mob-like behavior?

Tim Tackett:

(laughing) well they didn't drag him kick- kicking and screaming-

Larry Bernstein:

He did go in a carriage.

Tim Tackett:

He went in a carriage and it was only after he had invited a delegation of the women to come and talk to him, and tell him what they wanted. It was after the National Guard of Paris came on the heels of the women. Let's see if we can't get you to go and talk to the King and tell the King what you want." And the King agreed that he would do everything possible to increase the food supply.

This being said, the next morning there was a pretty violent mob action. A few violent people broke into the castle killed a couple of the guards, and went racing down the halls of the palace looking for Marie Antoinette, (laughs) who was not in good graces with the population. That was the closest that that day came to what one might call mob violence. But I preferred crowd violence, (laughs) as the proper way to look at it.

At that point when Marie Antoinette went fleeing for what she thought was her life down the Hall of Mirrors in her nightgown (laughs) with a few of her women in waiting, to the King's side of the palace. They didn't sleep even on the same side of the palace. And that was what terrified the King. And the King who was always extremely worried about the protection of his family. And at that point, he agreed to people outside calling for the King to come to Paris. Kicking and screaming, no. Unhappy, yes. But it was certainly a traumatic experience for the royal family, that's for sure.

Larry Bernstein:

Years later, the King tries to flee France with his family. This is the title of one of your other books, *When The King Took Flight*, which tells the story of when Louis 16 attempts to escape from France by carriage. But he's caught and then he's dragged back kicking and screaming.

Tim Tackett:

No, no, dragged is not the right word. But, Convinced. Coerced, how about coerced?

Larry Bernstein:

... Sent back to Paris.

Tim Tackett:

(laughs)

Larry Bernstein:

In your book *The Glory and the Sorrow*, you describe how Colson's opinion of King Louis 16th changed over time. When the King is brought back to Paris after his attempted escape in humiliation, Colson does an about face. Colson previously had expressed his love and concern for the King. But now, Colson's view of the King changed on a dime. The king was now a traitor unworthy of his title, and then this quickly led Colson to abandon the monarchy as an institution.

Can you explain how the King's act of desertion undermined the role of the monarchy in French society?

Tim Tackett:

Yeah, it is important to remember that in the early French Revolution, most people greatly admired the King and were perfectly ready to maintain the monarchy as long as it was underwritten by a constitution. And the King had taken several oaths pledging allegiance to the constitution. But then, when he and his family slipped out of the palace and attempted to flee toward the Austrian frontier, which was the territory ruled by the family of his Queen Marie Antoinette, that itself was shocking.

But even worse, he wrote a letter and left it on his desk, in which he formally renounced all the oaths he had taken previously. In the ethos of the revolutionaries, perjuring your oath was tantamount to treason. He had committed perjury; this is what comes back again and again in the rhetoric of the time. So, that the flight set in a motion a call for his overthrow and demands for the overthrow of the monarchy.

The King came back. And he subsequently issued a kind of a *mea culpa* and he announced he would sign the new constitution, and he was maintained on the throne.

But no one was ever quite sure they could trust him. Colson was never quite sure he could be trusted. If he had perjured himself in three or four oaths previously, how could one really depend on his remaining true to this new oath of 1791?

Larry Bernstein:

In your opening remarks you commented about conspiracy, fears and uncertainty resulting in violent behavior against opponents. For students of the French Revolution to see the nuance, fiction can sometimes help by letting us get inside the heads of characters to appreciate that fear.

When you teach the French Revolution, do you incorporate fiction. I recently re-read *A Tale of Two Cities* and Victor Hugo's *Ninety-Three*. How do you think about using historical fiction?

Tim Tackett:

I think really good historical fiction, can be extremely valuable. I'm very unimpressed by Dickens and by Hugo. I think they get so much wrong. Dickens view of the popular masses as mobs, which is a term-

Larry Bernstein:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Tim Tackett:

... that you seem to prefer. But, (laughing)-

... I don't I think that does not present the situation as it evolved in France at all. Hugo's picture of Ninety-Three is interesting, but maybe he goes too far in the other direction. The best historical fiction for the Revolution is Hilary Mantel's book.

Larry Bernstein:

That Hilary Mantel book is entitled A Place of Greater Safety. The French Revolution was a major topic in American high school curriculums when I was a student there. But, Western civilization has taken a backseat to world history. How do you feel about the reduced focus on French history specifically and the Revolution in particular?

Tim Tackett:

Well, I'm very much in favor of a global approach to history. There have been attempts, notably by my colleague Ian Collier, to write a more global history of the French Revolution. The French Revolution did not exist in a vacuum.

On the one hand, the French Revolution would influence, as I argued in my six minutes, all of Europe eventually all of the world. But there were things going on outside France which influenced the Revolution. Certainly, the uprising in Haiti had a powerful influence on the debates in The Assembly.

Let's not throw out the baby with the bath water. I think we need to maintain both European history, French Revolution, and other parts of the world.

Larry Bernstein:

Each generation of historians looks anew at the French Revolution, but always in the context of what's going on in the world at that time. How do current events affect our judgement?

Tim Tackett:

Well, it's inevitable, isn't it? All history is, in a sense, contemporary history that was Benedetto Croce the Italian philosopher. We invariably see the past, at least to some extent, through the lens of the present. But we also advance on the shoulders of the past, and history is at least in part a science. Where interpretations, the hypothesis of the scientific method must be based on an accumulation of evidence. So, one's present experience helps us to ask new questions, and that's good. Push the historian to seek out new evidence to answer those new questions.

I put aside the classic question of why revolutions begin, and usually portrayed in a very abstract way these influences: the enlightenment, and the social setting, and the changes in the weather and whatever. And I prefer rather to ask how individuals became revolutionaries. I like to focus on individual experience. And this is how I became to be exploring the great mass of contemporary day to day correspondence.



The fall of the Soviet Union brought a sharp and pretty rapid end to the Marxist interpretation of the revolution. There's a trend towards a more empirical history beginning with the opening up of numerous new sources, and asking questions that don't really fit in the old Marxist or even an anti-Marxist paradigm towards women's history, and ethnic history, and global history of the revolution. Towards a new interest in biography, and micro-history, these are some of the new trends that have come out.

Larry Bernstein:

What are the current generation of young academic historians who do research on the French Revolution working on?

Tim Tackett:

The global history of the Revolution and women's history in the Revolution. There's a return to biography and microhistory.

Larry Bernstein:

What does microhistory mean?

Tim Tackett:

It was basically a geographic thing in its origin. But I would interpret it in a biographical sense. By looking at one individual, if we're careful to put that individual and follow him or her in context, we can have a microhistory that tells us a great deal about the macrohistory.

Larry Bernstein:

My favorite biography of the French Revolution was R. R. Palmer's book about 12 of the revolutionaries. Your initial six-minute discussion highlighted the factionalism among those 12, the lack of trust, the demonization, and the killing of each other. How do you explain that extreme form of factionalism that resulted in murder?

Tim Tackett:

Well, that's what I tried to outline (laughing) in my book called *The Coming of the Terror*, I devoted (laughing) two or three chapters to just that question. I still love Robert Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled* was the title of the book.

I do think that the conspiracy obsession was very prevalent during this period. And it was hard to know who one could trust. Several of the great early revolutionaries had turned out to be traitors, in the view of later revolutionaries. The great Mirabeau was found out to be in cahoots with the king. Lafayette fled to the Austrians. These people who everyone thought had been great heroes of the revolution turned out to be traitors. How could you trust anyone? And this, this lack of trust was a major element in fomenting a fear of hidden conspiracy.

Certain politicians mobilized these fears for their own political purposes. Conspiracy fears was a major element in the factionalization.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you think that the particular individuals was important to the escalation of violence? Robespierre, was nicknamed the incorruptible; he had a vision of what society should be like. And people who didn't see eye to eye, he thought opposed the revolution, and like the Queen in Alice in Wonderland, "Off with his head." How important was ideological purity as part of this trend towards bloodshed?

Tim Tackett:

If you look at what these people believed the Girondins on one side, and the Montagnards, who supported Robespierre on the other side, their fundamental ideologies are not that different. They're all Republicans, none of the wants to bring back the king, they're all pretty much anti-clerical. It's hard to understand on many levels why they began killing one another. I don't think it's a question of ideological purity per se, it was a question of individual hatreds for sure. Robespierre, and Brissot absolutely hated one another.

Larry Bernstein:

Immediately after the French Revolution, Napoleon takes power. The monarchy is replaced by a dictator and then after Napoleon by a return to the monarchy. The church quickly regained its place in the society. How, how do you think about the social changes and individual rights as to whether the French Revolution was a success or a failure?

Tim Tackett:

I think in the short term it, one could argue that it was a failure, declarations of rights that had been instituted early in the revolution were pushed aside, especially by Napoleon. But not everything. The revolution remained as a model by reformers.

Larry Bernstein:

What do you think of the role of the artist in communicating the ideas and the grandeur of the Revolution? And in particular, I'm thinking of the great revolutionary artist Jacques-Louis David, who painted numerous important moments in the Revolution. What role did his art play in defining, both for his generation and future generations, the French Revolution?

Tim Tackett:

Jacques-Louis David played an enormous role. I mean the guy I'm studying right now, a guy named Roux, each year writes his brother and says, "Come and see the latest paintings by David. They're so inspiring." And once the Revolution took place the Tennis Court Oath-

... and maybe above all, the Death of Marat. They're wonderful pieces of art. If you go in the Louvre today, you'll see all of these presented on some of the biggest walls in the museum. How much did they influence people's views and so on, who can say?

David, took a truly radical turn in the Revolution. He became a member of the Committee of General Security. He was a terrorist.

He was a close friend of Marat and nearly lost his life for that. And changed his ways, became a court painter for Napoleon after the Revolution.

Larry Bernstein:

Which way was the wind blowing at the time, I suppose?

Tim Tackett:

Exactly. Well, he spent several years in prison and then painted another magnificent painting of the coronation of Napoleon. That was perhaps more successful as propaganda.

And we have to think that they had a certain influence, but it's hard to say what.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you think the French revolution was a consequence of the incompetence of Louis XVI? if the monarchy had been in the hands of a more enlightened leader, would France had transitioned to a constitutional monarchy like in England?

Tim Tackett:

Yes and no. Certainly a more competent king could've made a huge difference. He lost control of the situation. There were certainly economic problems. The American Revolution probably far more important in France, as it caused a near bankruptcy of the royal government.

The American Revolution was a world war. It was very expensive. And, it was very successful for the French.

They got revenge against the English. They were quite pleased with that, but it had cost a fortune. And, they had great difficulty balancing the budget. And so much of the pre-revolution began as the king with his ministers tried to find a way of balancing the budget. It's partly an economic crisis born of a geopolitical crisis and certainly partly a question of the mediocrity of the king with a power grab of the nobles and parliament.

Larry Bernstein:

I think of it as winning the battle but losing the war. Tim, I end each program on a note of optimism.

Tim Tackett:

(laughs) Well, my general feeling is pretty pessimistic right now in terms of America's situation. Biden and the Democrats might get together somehow and bring about some changes that the terrible factionalization of the political scene could be overcome. It's every bit as bad as the 1850's and even the Civil War.

There was a bit on public television the other day about little local societies that are trying to do just that, get people together to talk. It's very hard to hate someone when you sit down in their living room and chat with them.

Some optimism, maybe.

Larry Bernstein:

Tim, thank you very much.

Tim Tackett:

Larry, thank you so much for your great questions. Terrific questions, actually.

Thanks to Tim and Ari for joining us today.

That ends today's session.

If you are interested in listening to a replay of today's What Happens Next program or any of our previous episodes or if you wish to read a transcript, you can find them on our website [Whathappensnextin6minutes.com](http://Whathappensnextin6minutes.com). Replays are also available on Apple Podcasts, Podbean and Spotify.

Good bye.