

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-31

**David A. Bell.** *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution.* New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2020. ISBN: 9780374207922 (hardcover, \$30.00).

15 March 2021 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT22-31>

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

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INTRODUCTION BY SOPHIA ROSENFELD, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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As I write, history is not repeating itself.

Yes, the primary seat and symbol of the U.S. government has recently been stormed by an angry mob crying patriotism. Yes, the insurrectionists were enamored of and motivated by a charismatic leader who was both democratically elected and openly hostile to aspects of that constitutional, democratic order once he was in power. Yes, some of the Capitol Hill crowd, with their “1776” and “Don’t Tread on Me” flags and their elaborate costumes, also seemed determined to signal that that what we were witnessing was nothing less than eighteenth century redux.

But the charismatic leader at the heart of this 2021 story was neither a military figure nor a profile in courage in any sense of the word, as were the “great men” who gallop through David Bell’s *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution*. Instead of a George Washington, a Napoléon Bonaparte, a Toussaint L’Ouverture, or a Simón Bolívar, we got only the made-for-TV, parodic version of the warrior-like leader. The quick failure of the popular and delusional attack in his name also shows that what passes for establishment democracy in the U.S. today, even as it often looks a lot closer to oligarchy, has considerable staying power—and that is in spite of that recent leader’s best efforts to disrupt it. Or at least it does for now. The new man in Washington is positively boring by contrast; his old-fashioned proceduralism seems to be a considerable part of his appeal, even as something like a cold civil war rages around him and around us.

And it is for these differences between past and present more than the cross-temporal similarities that this is such an opportune moment to read and to ponder Bell’s ambitious new book and its big thesis. *Men on Horseback* elegantly recounts the exploits of the great quartet of revolutionary leaders I’ve just mentioned, plus the Corsican Pasquale Paoli who provided an early prototype, as they made themselves, with considerable assistance from their fans, into heroes, indeed celebrities of their age. Each chapter ingeniously offers a capsule history of a distinct political revolution of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and also details how its most famous figure came to occupy his starring role. Along the way we learn about transnational borrowings in leadership style, the blossoming media culture of the age, sentimentalism in Enlightenment aesthetics, new notions of masculinity, new forms of warfare, and more. This is cultural history of politics at its finest.

Most of all, though, *Men on Horseback* asks its readers to come to terms with a perplexing (and surprisingly overlooked until now) effect of the American, French, Haitian and, finally, Latin American Revolutions: movements aimed at realizing the rule of the people repeatedly produced a single strongman leader and intense popular affection for that leader as both savior and national founder. Except for George Washington, these men also all ultimately gave up on democracy and the peaceful transition of power via elections. Bell’s point is that charisma itself, rather than disappearing with the rejection of monarchical rule, underwent a kind of apotheosis between the 1760s and the 1820s, and we have been living with the aftermath just as much as written constitutions, human rights, or other more recognizable products of the revolutionary era ever since. Charisma of this modern, “potentially authoritarian” (7) variety is often thought to have, over time, been tamed, bureaucratized, and what the great theorist of the concept, Max Weber, called “routinized” (238) in democratic settings. But this has never happened in full. Charismatic personal leadership always resurfaces, albeit in new embodiments and with new cultural contours. Or so Bell tells us. From this vantage point, we just might be witnessing an important if different variant of this effect now—in the U.S. with vestiges of the Cult of Donald Trump, but also in many corners of the world.

Does Bell have this right? This is where hearing in this forum from five other superb historians—David Armitage, Dan Edelstein, Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan, and Christine Haynes—is so useful. They all sense the big challenge of Bell’s argument. And in a testament to its richness, they all tackle its implications for making sense of our strange present just as much as they consider its consequences for our narratives of a revolutionary past. It might be said that, in every era, we find in the age of revolutions what is most pertinent to us, its heirs. As such, our respondents take *Men on Horseback*, even as they critique elements of it, as an invitation to ponder how best to write the history of democracy now, when its forward trajectory, as Bell himself puts it, no longer seems “inexorable.” (7)

Armitage would have us ask *where* charismatic democratic leadership and, indeed, historical change in leadership on a global scale originated: did prototypes always come from the Atlantic world, moving from North to South, only to be diffused from there? Or were their origins polycentric? Armitage, in particular, notes that charisma also seems to have been a feature of rulership in the Pacific world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, albeit in a less democratic mode, though he asks us to think more about charisma's racial dimensions and, by suggestion, its potential limits as well.

Others want to discuss *when*, which is also a question about the historicity of a seemingly universal category. If charismatic leadership is already to be found in Greek and Roman antiquity, as Edelstein suggests, not to mention in pre-eighteenth-century examples from Niccolò Machiavelli's imagined prince to the English Civil War's Oliver Cromwell, in what does the originality of the charisma of the leaders of age of revolutions lie? Might democracy be simply an independent variable that attached itself to a historical constant or pre-existing phenomenon, as several of our commentators, including Armitage and Edelstein, propose? Or, conversely, is the kind of charisma on display in *Men on Horseback* a fully modern political invention that is just getting going in the era that animates Bell? For de Haan, Bell's examples are mere dress rehearsals for the full-fledged mid-nineteenth century Caesarism and plebiscitary democracy of Napoléon III, which, de Haan argues, should have been the denouement of the story.

These questions in turn prompt others about what accounts for the change in charisma itself over time, starting with its relational dimension. De Graaf and Haynes suggest that there is more to say about forms of communication technology, visual as well as written, which is already an important variable for Bell. But Edelstein proposes that Pericles, in the Athenian public square, achieved a similar kind of sway with nothing more high-tech than his own voice. Others, including Haynes, ask about the other side of the dyad that is charismatic leadership: the masses themselves. Can larger shifts in the history of emotions account for the different kinds of affection (and, I might add, anger and fear) directed at leaders in different circumstances? Moreover, how can one *really* know of what popular sentiment consisted, especially when the existing records so much favor the attitudes of the propagandists over those of their readers, viewers, and auditors?

Perhaps the biggest question raised in this forum, though, is about what it means to write the history of "great men" now. That is a particularly salient issue for historians of diplomacy, but really a question for all historians. Haynes suggests that writing a biographically driven narrative focused on five still-famous leaders (well, four, if we take Paoli to be better known now as a Pennsylvania town than a person) runs the risk of reinforcing those leaders' own mythology: namely, that they had the ability to shape history in their image, starting with nation-building. One could also go further and argue that scholarship in this "great man" mode has the potential to become the handmaiden to new forms of rulership in this mode, that is, new forms of elite, male, charismatic authoritarianism in which the historical contributions of ordinary people of both sexes form nothing more than the backdrop. And yet, by revealing precisely how the sausage was made, Bell could just as well be understood to be breaking his subjects' spell. Haynes is right that Bell does not, in fact, seek to knock his revolutionary-era leaders from their perches either by decentering them in his stories or denying their extraordinary abilities or influence. His interest is rather in exploring the role of these singular men, along with their followers, in inventing the notion of "great men" as an essential source of political salvation and creativity—albeit in the name of the sovereign people—in the first place. In other words, Bell could be said to be historicizing the universal that is political leadership every bit as much as he does the personal attribute known as charisma.

In the last part of this forum, Bell makes this case himself, seizing the opportunity to respond to these challenges and others put forth by his interlocutors. That he does with aplomb, agreeing in places, disagreeing in others, and clarifying his own arguments in defense of the book's principal claim. In a sense, Bell gets here another chance at an epilogue, one written about a year farther into the future than the first one, when the "lure of a charismatic anti-politics" (107) as a perennial solution and also threat to contestatory, democratic politics seems all the more apparent. No one in this forum, including Bell, draws the lines too neatly among past and present and what is still to come; all are too clever to fall into this popular history trap. I might well have started this introduction by saying history *never* actually repeats itself. Yet if we want to write in helpful ways about either the revolutionary era or our current democratic predicament, we would do well to give further thought to the making of the charismatic men of *Men on Horseback* that this book and forum so ably probe.

**Participants:**

**David A. Bell** is Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor in the Department of History at Princeton University. After studying at Harvard and the *École Normale Supérieure*, he completed his Ph.D. at Princeton in 1991 under the direction of Robert Darnton. Before returning to Princeton in 2010 he taught at Yale and Johns Hopkins (where he also served as Dean of Faculty). A specialist in the history of eighteenth-century France and the revolutionary Atlantic, he has published seven books, most recently *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020). He writes regularly for *The New York Review of Books*, *The London Review of Books*, and *The Nation*.

**Sophia Rosenfeld** is Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *A Revolution in Language: The Politics of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 2001), *Common Sense: A Political History* (Harvard, 2011), and *Democracy and Truth: A Short History* (Penn, 2019), and she is currently co-editing (with Peter Struck) a six-volume book series called *A Cultural History of Ideas, Antiquity to the Present* and writing a book, to be published by Princeton, on how the idea and practice of choice-making became so central to modern conceptions of freedom.

**David Armitage** is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History at Harvard University. Among his eighteen books to date are, as author, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Harvard University Press, 2007), *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (Knopf, 2017) and, as editor, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, with Sanjay Subrahmanyam), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge University Press, 2018, with Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram) and *A Cultural History of Peace in the Age of Enlightenment* (Bloomsbury, 2020, with Stella Ghervas). He is currently completing an edition of John Locke's colonial writings for the Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke.

**Dan Edelstein** is the William H. Bonsall Professor of French, and Professor of History (by courtesy) at Stanford University. He is the author of three books, and (co-)editor of seven others. His books are *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (University of Chicago Press, 2010); and *On the Spirit of Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). His most recent co-edited volume (with Stefanos Geroulanos and Natasha Wheatley) is *Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History* (University of Chicago Press, 2020). He is currently working on an intellectual history of revolution.

**Beatrice de Graaf** is Distinguished Professor and holds the chair History of the International Relations, Utrecht University. Her latest monograph, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon*, was published with CUP in October 2020

**Ido de Haan** is professor of Political History at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His fields of study include the history of democracy and the welfare state, the history of political ideologies, and the history and memory of large-scale violence such as the Holocaust and the Napoleonic Wars, as well as the political and cultural reconstruction of postwar states and societies in modern Europe. Among his publications are, co-editor with Paul den Hoed and Henk te Velde, *Een nieuwe staat. Het begin van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* [A New State. The beginning of the Kingdom of the Netherlands] (Bert Bakker 2013); co-editor with Beatrice de Graaf and Brian Vick, *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge University Press 2019); and co-editor with Mathijs Lok, eds., *The Politics of Moderation in Modern European History* (Palgrave, 2019).

**Christine Haynes** is Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She has written on a variety of topics related to nineteenth-century French history, including the literary market, author-publisher relations, war indemnities, and roller coasters. Her most recent book, which was a subject of another roundtable on H-Diplo, is *Our Friends the Enemies: The Occupation of France after Napoleon* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

## REVIEW BY DAVID ARMITAGE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

“The last twenty-five years of the last century and the first fifteen of this,” former U.S. President John Adams wrote in 1815, “may be called the age of revolutions and constitutions.” If David Bell is right in his beautifully crafted, conceptually sophisticated new book, *Men on Horseback*, then Adams should probably have called it an age of revolutions, constitutions, and charismatic leaders. “We began the dance,” Adams continued, referring to the United States.<sup>1</sup> *Au contraire*, Bell might respond. When it came to charismatic leadership, it was the *Corsicans* who started the sequence. The United States did produce one outstanding model of charisma in George Washington, but Bell argues that Adams’s towering predecessor as President was just one link in a chain—or but one movement in the dance—that began with Pasquale Paoli in the 1760s and proceeded via Napoléon and Toussaint Louverture to Simón Bolívar. Bell notes that Adams, no charisma bomb himself, understood better than most of his contemporaries how Washington and later Napoléon inspired what he called “superstitious veneration,” “The short, tubby, balding Adams” (60) was also well aware of each of the contemporary men on horseback and even referred in 1815 to another, the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda. Yet he never grouped them together as a distinctive phenomenon of his own time. Did Adams somehow miss a defining feature of his revolutionary age? Or has Bell now discovered one we should add to its litany of novelties?

The key innovations of this moment were revolutions and republics, constitutions and declarations, of both rights and independence. The idea of revolution itself was revolutionized, along with key concepts such as nationalism, republicanism, democracy and ideology.<sup>2</sup> Bell suggests that we should add charismatic leadership to this list, much as he has argued for total war as another more pernicious but equally enduring legacy of the era.<sup>3</sup> For well over a century, historians from Alexis de Tocqueville to R. R. Palmer and beyond painted the Age of Revolutions as democratic in character, as egalitarian and anti-hierarchical in aspiration if not always in actuality.<sup>4</sup> Bell, the Lapidus Professor in the Era of the North Atlantic Revolutions in Palmer’s own Department at Princeton, would likely not dissent from that characterization. He adds a crucial twist by arguing that charismatic leadership and modern democracy were born twins together: to use his own genetic metaphor, “the stories of charisma and democracy have wound tightly around one another in their own political version of the double helix” (5). This is the paradoxical, even combustible, compound that Bell terms “democratic charisma” (31), a quality that raised a few extraordinary individuals—all male—above a *demos*, likewise almost entirely male, that was just coming into political consciousness and ready to owe them allegiance.

In this age of charismatic revolution, there could be no lonely or hermitic charismatics. Because “charisma is not just an individual quality but a relationship” (5), it demands believers and admirers, even fanatics. The mass mobilization of soldiers and citizens supplied followers a-plenty to Paoli, Washington, Napoléon, Toussaint, and Bolívar. The late eighteenth-century media revolution deepened the devotion, as an explosion of print and other media circulated their images to create a “despotism founded ... on the affection of love,” as the smitten James Boswell gushed about Paoli. Charisma fused with another novelty of the time, celebrity, to help turn military heroes into founders and redeemers.<sup>5</sup> Backed by their followers, individuals became “revolutionary forces” in the sense classically defined by Max Weber, Bell’s

<sup>1</sup> John Adams to James Lloyd, 29 March 1815, in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1850–1856), 10:149.

<sup>2</sup> David A. Bell, “Global Conceptual Legacies,” in David Andress, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 642–58.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of War as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, with an introduction by David Armitage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques. L’invention de la célébrité, 1750–1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

main theoretical inspiration and sparring partner, especially in his afterword, “Writing Charisma into History.” Indeed, Weber had anticipated Bell’s central conception of charisma as relational when he wrote that “[w]hat matters is how this quality is actually judged by those who are ruled charismatically: how ‘followers’ see things,” though it has taken *Men on Horseback* to flesh out that insight fully in historical detail and with contextual specificity.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike many historians, Bell is more interested in opening up discussion about his subject than in closing it down. In response to his provocations, I would like to suggest three friendly amendments—chronological, geographical, and analytical—to the argument of *Men on Horseback*, to continue the conversation and perhaps to make charisma even more handy for the historian’s toolkit. The first amendment is chronological, for neither charismatic leadership nor the means to amplify it among broad audience was entirely new before the 1760s. It is clear just from the rich evidence that Bell presents that denizens of the Age of Revolutions had a deep reservoir of models to draw upon when fashioning their conceptions of charismatic, from at least Cincinnatus and Julius Caesar onwards. They had biographical compilations of exemplary lives, from Plutarch’s *Lives* to Joseph Priestley’s much-reprinted *Chart of Biography* (1765, and later editions) and beyond, to inspire their imaginings. Plutarch’s immense popularity in the eighteenth century awaits full historical treatment, but while Bell notes his importance for Paoli we can add a host of other admirers from Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Toussaint Louverture at least to Frankenstein’s Creature.<sup>7</sup> And there had been more proximate models than Plutarch’s for more than a century before Pasquale Paoli’s meteoric rise, among them Oliver Cromwell, William of Orange, and Gustavus Vasa. Contemporaries such as Frederick the Great (briefly treated by Bell), Tadeusz Kościuszko, and the Marquis de Lafayette were all charismatic leaders who combined military prowess, political prominence, vibrant public representations and, at least sometimes, popular adulation. We might also backdate any democratizing media revolution to the invention of the newspaper in the 1620s, the explosion of cheap printed images in the Low Countries in the 1640s, the still greater profusion of printed matter of all kinds in the time of the Fronde and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in the mid-seventeenth century, for example. Was it then rather the rise of the people and of public opinion as political forces, rather than the ascent of charisma *per se*, that was the catalytic novelty in this period?<sup>8</sup> Might that also explain why well-qualified contemporary monarchs were found wanting in the charisma stakes, even though kingship provided a useful template for democratic charisma and a figure like Frederick the Great loomed large in revolutionary imaginations?<sup>9</sup> And is that why, say, the Duke of Wellington—no friend of democracy—never joined the charismatic pantheon alongside his humbled rival, Napoléon Bonaparte?

My second amendment, or rather expansion, is geographical. What we might call the “Palmerian” paradigm of the Age of Revolutions focused on the Atlantic, and just on the North Atlantic minus the Caribbean at that. *Men on Horseback* more amply encompasses Haiti and Spanish America, but if we widen the lens still further, it becomes clear that charismatic leadership was a worldwide phenomenon in this period, though one that was unevenly distributed globally. For example,

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<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, ed. and trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 378, 374.

<sup>7</sup> Sophia Xenophontos and Katerina Oikonomopoulou, eds., *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plutarch* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) rather scants the eighteenth century; for Toussaint’s interest in Plutarch, see Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (London: Allen Lane, 2020), 76.

<sup>8</sup> Compare the entries for “Pueblo/pueblos” and “Opinión pública,” in Javier Fernández Sebastián, gen. ed., *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, I: *La era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850* (Madrid: Fundación Carolina, 2009), 981–1113, 1117–250.

<sup>9</sup> William E. Scheuerman, “American Kingship? Monarchical Origins of Modern Presidentialism,” *Polity*, 37 (2005): 24–53, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.polity.2300001> (a precocious, overlooked study of charismatic leadership in the Age of Revolutions); Caroline Winterer, “Enlightened Despotism in Revolutionary America: The Political Thought of Frederick the Great of Prussia,” in Ben Lowe, ed., *Political Thought and the Origins of the American Presidency* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021): 98–124.

Mary Wollstonecraft, writing in the early stages of both the French and Haitian Revolutions, lamented its lack in Britain: “the days of true heroism are over, when a citizen fought for his country like a Fabricius or a Washington.”<sup>10</sup> Yet from the 1790s to the 1840s, “little Napoleons,” as European observers slightly called them, sprang up across the world, from South Asia to the South and central Pacific. Among others, King Kamehameha I (1738–1819) of Hawai‘i, Tipu Sultan (1750–1799) in Mysore, Pōmare I (1753–1803) in Tahiti, and Hongi Hika (1772?–1828), the ‘Māori Napoleon,’ in Aotearoa/New Zealand all exhibited charismatic leadership and often modelled themselves after similar exemplars to their Atlantic and Mediterranean counterparts. They may not have participated in the Atlantic public sphere of Bell’s central actors, but they were just as adept at shaping their own images, at drawing on cultures of consumption and self-presentation and at energizing their adherents. All they lacked was a broadly expressed understanding of the people as a political force, in the sense familiar from the ‘democratic’ revolutions around the Atlantic world. While a broad following was (and remains) essential to charismatic leadership, a specifically *democratic* conception of such a following was (and is) not: we may therefore need to untwist Bell’s historical double helix. Placing the Age of Atlantic Revolutions in global context shows that democratic charisma was not the only species of charisma, either at this moment or later.<sup>11</sup> This fact should spur other historians, not least those of the non-Western world, to test Bell’s hypotheses and to define the varieties of contemporary charisma within their own evolutionary niches.

My third and last suggestion concerns the analytical content of charisma and returns to Max Weber. Weber’s analysis of charisma is, of course, far more temporally sweeping than Bell’s tightly focused study. He traced charisma from the era of the prophets to the age of party democracy and only briefly touched on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example when he typed Napoléon as a “purely ‘plebiscitarian’ charismatic ruler” or lumped Napoléon along with Cromwell and Maximilien Robespierre as instances of plebiscitary democracy as a form of charismatic rule.<sup>12</sup> And yet, impressionistic though Weber’s inexhaustibly fertile account was, it did gesture towards crucial transformations in charisma and was certainly not oblivious to its shifting historical forms. In this regard, Bell might be a little too hasty in passing over Weber’s treatment of the “routinization” or quotidianization (*Veralltäglichung*) of charisma as the sequel and companion to its revolutionary force.<sup>13</sup> How to sustain the magical quality of charisma while also provisioning armies, tracking correspondence and, in the most successful cases, like Napoléon and Washington, setting up new institutions of government: that dilemma of balancing the bureaucratic and the charismatic, the ordinary and the extraordinary, is recurrent and surely susceptible to historical examination.<sup>14</sup> So are some other aspects of Weber’s account, such as the problem of succession to a charismatic leader—perhaps only Washington solved that one, with his Cincinnatan self-denial—and the observation that underlay this, that the “purely ideal typical form” of charisma “exists only in its early stages, as it first emerges.”<sup>15</sup> Whether that is true of modern, democratic charisma, as it might be of charisma *tout court*, remains to

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.

<sup>11</sup> David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (London: William Collins, 2020). Bell has elsewhere expressed a more tempered view of the “global turn” in revolutionary studies: Bell, “Questioning the Global Turn: The Case of the French Revolution,” *French Historical Studies* 37 (2014): 1–24, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-2376501>.

<sup>12</sup> Weber, 377, 407.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, 378–89.

<sup>14</sup> On Washington and (bureaucratic) routinization, see now Lindsay M. Chervinsky, *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Weber, 379.

be determined. That might in turn test another of Bell's hypotheses, that the charismatic as founder, "capable of giving a country a new birth simply by virtue of their extraordinary qualities" (240), was a type peculiar to the Age of Revolutions but rarely witnessed thereafter. Last but not least, there is the matter, untackled by either Weber or Bell, of charisma and race. When François-René de Chateaubriand famously wrote of Toussaint as "the black Napoléon, imitated and killed by the white Napoléon" (*le Napoléon noir, imité et tué par le Napoléon blanc*) in gaol in the Jura, he rendered the two charismatic leaders equivalent, brothers beneath the skin, yet at the same time quite distinct, strangers because of their skin.<sup>16</sup> The modern conception of phenotypically visible, biologically transmissible race was one more invention of the Age of Revolutions: did its DNA not become entwined with that of charisma at some point? As all these questions imply, *Men on Horseback* proves that there is much more to be learned historically about charisma: that is surely a major part of its charm.

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<sup>16</sup> François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, ed. Maurice Levaillant and Georges Moulinier, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 2:764.

## REVIEW BY DAN EDELSTEIN, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

David A. Bell's newest book lays bare a crucial and oddly overlooked paradox about democracy. Defined since antiquity as the 'rule of the many,' popular regimes have tended in practice to elevate and follow a single leader. This tendency is particularly evident in turbulent times, which form the backdrop of Bell's study. From the Corsican general Pascal Paoli to the Spanish American independence hero Simón Bolívar, the age of revolutions witnessed both popular insurrections on a national scale and the emergence of larger-than-life military heroes, who went on to occupy the center-stage of political affairs. These two phenomena, Bell convincingly argues, are not unrelated. He deploys the concept of personal charisma to explain how they connect.

Bell borrows this concept from Max Weber's famous account, but adapts it significantly for his needs. Where Weber did not distinguish much between the shaman and the revolutionary orator, Bell historicizes charisma, focusing on "how it took on a particular form in a particular time and place: the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Atlantic world" (241). Accordingly, he pays particular attention to the "media revolution" (9) that facilitated the transformation of his generals into political leaders. Technological advances in visual and print culture made it possible to scale up the sense of intimacy and trust that Bell rightly places at the heart of the relationship between the charismatic leader and his supporters. Without the proliferation of cheap portraits and print accounts, it is hard to imagine how a George Washington or Bolívar could have won over so many fellow citizens, over vast distances, and at many social degrees of separation.

*Men on Horseback* is a wonderful book on multiple levels. In addition to being one of the most prominent historians of the revolutionary period, Bell is one of the best writers in the profession. His prose is enchanting, his stories gripping, his analyses lucid, and he is witty, to boot (his chapter on Washington is entitled "American Idol"). The book can be read as offering a different approach to global history, one that recognizes the importance of European peripheries (here, Corsica) in addition to imperial ones. As this is not a book review per se, but a forum contribution, however, I will focus my remarks on two more specific aspects of the book.

The first concerns Bell's chapter on Napoléon, though tellingly the *petit caporal* only makes his appearance about halfway through the chapter. That is because Bell in fact proposes here a sweeping political history of the entire French Revolution. To appreciate its originality, it may help to compare it to the most influential preceding account, that of François Furet. Furet, drawing on work by Claude Lefort, framed the fundamental problem of democracy as that of an empty center.<sup>17</sup> In the space previously occupied by monarchic sovereignty, the French Revolution left a gaping hole, which the people could not fill collectively. In replacing the king, the revolutionaries set into motion a political process that, according to Furet, inevitably led to the rise and rule of leaders who claimed to incarnate the people (and therefore to fill the "empty space"). In their name, these leaders repressed anyone who wasn't part of "the people," or rather, who disagreed with their particular definition of the people and the people's needs. The process begun in 1789 thus found its natural conclusion in 1793-94.

Furet's account has often been criticized, yet few have sketched out a comprehensive alternative.<sup>18</sup> By extending his analysis beyond 1793 to 1799, Bell offers a compelling counter-narrative. In his view, Maximilien Robespierre should not be seen as the culmination of revolutionary politics, but as its antithesis. Robespierre understood all too well that in their democratic (or at least democratizing) moment, the French were liable to fall for a Washington. There was even a Washington-in-waiting to be found in the Marquis de Lafayette. By repeatedly presenting himself as a defender of the people, Robespierre

<sup>17</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On Furet's debts to Lefort, see Samuel Moyn, "On the Intellectual Origins of François Furet's Masterpiece," *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville* 29:2 (2008): 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> For one attempt, see Keith Michael Baker, "Political Languages of the French Revolution," in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 626-659.

was not seeking to fill the empty space left by the departed monarch. Rather, he was seeking to block those who would take advantage of the people's trust. This was less a form of democratic politics, than anti-politics.

The irony, of course, was that Robespierre himself ultimately came to enjoy the kind of power that he had warned others sought. Bell rightly rejects the accusation that Robespierre's power was dictatorial (107). In a sense, Robespierre had painted himself into a corner: he had risen to power by denouncing those who sought power, and then when he obtained power, like the proverbial dog catching the car, he does not appear to have known what to do with it. For weeks in the spring of 1794, Robespierre stopped attending meetings of the Committee of Public Safety or sessions of the Convention. That is not how dictators behave.

Bell's new political history of the French Revolution goes beyond simply explaining Robespierre. The latter's version of anti-politics was widespread: long before Bonaparte proclaimed himself first consul, many others also feared the fabled man on horseback (the title of Bell's chapter is "Waiting for Caesar in France"). The entire French Revolutionary decade (1789-99) can ultimately be understood, from a political perspective at least, as a series of attempts to exorcise the specter of the charismatic leader. Bonaparte's success in taking power should accordingly be seen as a kind of capitulation on behalf of those who, for ten years, had mobilized against the threat he embodied. The anti-politics championed by Robespierre and shared by many finally ran out of steam. "Il me faut une épée," the abbé Sieyès remarked before the 18 Brumaire (Bell, 123). The age of politics had returned.

Robespierre is unlikely to have had the gift of prophecy, so how did he know that the French people would fall for an ambitious, successful general? As Bell's chapter title implies, the answer is obvious: the French revolutionaries largely interpreted their own history through a classical lens. The lesson they learned from Roman history was that republics eventually gave way to empires. Before Caesar, there had been Sulla, who ruled as dictator for over two years (the normal term was six months); and after Caesar, the republic was not resuscitated.

It is to the place and influence of antiquity on Bell's thesis that my second remark pertains. Bell mostly limits the scope of his argument to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though in the book's Epilogue and in recent editorials he has carried the story up to the present. To the extent that he does recognize a trans-historical phenomenon at work, it is what he terms "caesarism," a form of dictatorship that masquerades as a democratic ideal.<sup>19</sup> It is certainly the case that, from the eighteenth century onward, there was considerable fear that a successful general could parlay his military victories into political power. Even Leon Trotsky was viewed with suspicion by his fellow Bolsheviks after his successes in the Civil War (as commander of the Red Army).

But there is another, parallel history of the military's entwinement with democracy. Consider one of the oldest known democracies, that of the Athenians. For the roughly two centuries that it lasted, Athenian democracy was almost always under the sway of a single, charismatic leader, typically one of the 10 elected generals, or *strategoï*. The most famous of these was Pericles, who according to Plutarch "for forty years together maintained the first place among statesmen."<sup>20</sup> Such was his power that Thucydides observed how "what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen (*proton andros arche*)."<sup>21</sup> Pericles owed his unique standing in Athens to his annual election as general, one of the few offices in ancient Athens that was elected (as opposed to chosen by lot) and renewable without term limits.<sup>22</sup> And yet, none of the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, David A. Bell, "Fascism or Caesarism? How Napoleon, not Hitler, Exemplifies an Enduring Threat to Modern Democracies," *Public Seminar* (27 August 2020): <https://publicseminar.org/2020/08/fascism-or-caesarism/>.

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch, "Life of Pericles," *Lives* 16.1.

<sup>21</sup> Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.65.9.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

ancient sources describing Pericles's place in Athenian democracy suggest that he aimed at anything more, or that he ever manipulated or corrupted other offices. As Thucydides's comment suggests, his oversized power did not sit easily with the typical conception of democracy as the rule of the many; yet neither did it not come close to the tyrannical government of one.

Pericles was not alone in benefiting from such singular treatment by his fellow citizens. Before him, Themistocles and Cimon had enjoyed similar influence over their co-citizens, in both cases thanks to their military excellence: Themistocles commanded the Greek navy at the Battle of Salamis, routing the Persians under Xerxes; and Cimon, the son of Miltiades, victor of the Battle of Marathon, and a great general in his own right. Later generals, such as Alcibiades, would similarly enjoy extensive political power, at least for a time.

This Athenian counterpoint to the Roman narrative is illuminating on a number of fronts. First, it suggests that the intrusion of military leaders into democratic politics is not only a modern or eighteenth-century phenomenon (see Bell, 8). On a different, much smaller scale, the same kind of sentimental and trusting attachment between citizens and their charismatic leader was possible without the need of the media to accomplish this connection at scale. Pericles made daily appearances at the market, and was well known to his fellow citizens.<sup>23</sup> Breakthroughs in print and visual culture allowed leaders to extend the range of their charismatic power, and to exercise it in new ways; but the basic mechanism which Bell details so well in his book can already be seen at work in a pre-modern democracy.

Second, it is noteworthy that the real internal threat to Athenian democracy did not come from overly ambitious generals, but from oligarchs, who twice seized power and curbed popular participation in government (in 411 and in 404 BCE). Of course, we cannot read too much into this fact, and comparing Athenian democracy to American, French, or Venezuelan republicanism is tricky. It could, however, be that military leaders are less to be feared in a well-established democracy. Consider the number of U.S. presidents who enjoyed the rank of general: including Washington himself, there were twelve.<sup>24</sup> Another eighteen held a senior officer's rank. All in all, two-thirds of American presidents have served in leadership roles in the military. Bell's thesis neatly explains the popularity of army officers in a democracy: when a people wonder in whom to place their trust, it is unsurprising that they look to figures who have literally fought to protect them. Even in current American politics, the military top brass are generally viewed as protecting, rather than threatening, the Constitution.<sup>25</sup>

By focusing on a period of massive political and historical upheaval, Bell's book presents a series of military leaders who were faced with a very particular set of circumstances. In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, when republics were few and monarchy seemed to many to be the "natural" form of government for large states, successful generals could ride revolutionary waves in different directions. There were officers who wanted Washington to be king; and Benjamin Franklin's famous reply to a question about the nature of the 1787 constitution — 'a republic, if you can keep it' — implies that other forms of government were still imaginable at the time.

Just how representative is this singular moment in Western history? The threat that military leaders pose to popular regimes may steadily decrease as these regimes are firmed up. There are certainly exceptions: some states, such as Pakistan and Turkey, alternated for years between civil and military rule. And there were historical trends that led to military coups in Southern Europe and South America, in the 1960's and 1970's. But in countries with an entrenched tradition of self-

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<sup>23</sup> Plutarch, "Life of Pericles," *Lives* 7.4.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Jackson, William Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Franklin Pierce, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses Grant, Rutherford Hayes, James Garfield, Chester Arthur, Benjamin Harrison, and Dwight Eisenhower.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance James Mattis's statement, "In Union There is Strength," 3 June 2020; first published in *The Atlantic*: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/james-mattis-denounces-trump-protests-militarization/612640/>

government, it might not be the generals we should be worried about. Here, the history of another European republic may be usefully remembered: it was not a Caesar who overthrew the republican constitution of Florence, but a banker. The branding of countless Florentine buildings with the Medici coat of arms, still visible today, serves as a reminder that money and haughtiness can trump military glory as the chief dangers to a popular regime.

REVIEW BY BEATRICE DE GRAAF, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

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*He's just not that into you. Love and charismatic leadership in historiography*

The leader does not love you back. The great misunderstanding with charismatic leaders lies in the 'despotism of love': the expectation of the fan base that the relationship with their idol is a reciprocal one. Leaders such as the French emperor Napoléon Bonaparte, Latin America's liberator Simon Bolivar, or the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture attracted immense praise, acclamation, and even love, from their followers. Yet, this love remained unrequited, fundamentally. These leaders were never really in the political game to return this love, but increasingly believed their own legends, ended up in feeding their own egos, and ultimately cared for their own reputations and power alone.

David A. Bell has done a marvelous job in reconstructing the emergence of a type of politician that on the one hand seems to be the culmination and personification of the new democratic ideas that were disseminated in the age of revolutions, but on the other hand perverted nascent democracies by singlehandedly submitting them to authoritarian rule. As Simon Bolivar in a rare moment of self-reflection, sighed with grief, "How can a single man build half a world?" all the while comparing himself to Sisyphus (206). Indeed, in the eyes of his followers, he was the man they most loved. Yet, even Bolivar, the self-proclaimed 'Liberator President,' could not possibly mount the resources to keep his crumbling state together and serve all the needs of his supporters. The holy impatience with which Bolivar, and so many other charismatic leaders with him, waged so many wars and performed so dramatically, invariably led to disappointment and frustration, since they were fundamentally unable to live up to the great expectations that were projected upon them, and either ended up miserable and dejected in jail, or brought down everyone in their fiasco.

Where Max Weber paved the way in conceptualizing charismatic leadership in the realm of social sciences, with Hannah Arendt<sup>26</sup> pairing his insights with the new, twentieth-century situation of totalitarianism and mass terror, David Bell has with his new monography brilliantly situated the emergence of charismatic leadership in early nineteenth-century history. He makes the convincing case that such leadership in the revolutionary and romantic age invoked notions of "romantic love," whereas totalitarian leaders, "by contrast, sought to dissolve the individuality of the followers, to fuse these men and women metaphorically into a single great mass summoned forth by the leader's talismanic powers" (226).

According to Bell, the study of charismatic leadership has fallen out of grace, with modern-day historians rightfully distancing themselves from 'great man theories.' Yet, "historians should put the salad dressing aside," by which Bell means microhistory, history of everyday life, and history from below, with its fixation on mundane topics, and write charisma back into their work again. There are times, he argues convincingly, amongst all structural and institutional changes and transformations, where individuals with "magnetic qualities" did incarnate and channeled "entire epochs of humanity" (237). It is therefore high time for a "cultural history of leadership," *dixit* Bell, which he has set out in this book to produce for the revolutionary age.

First of all, in principle I think that Bell is spot on. In cultural and socio-economic history, the focus on institutions, on routinization practices, on rituals, or on statistics, has obscured the role specific individuals have played in shaping the course of history, especially in crossroad situations, during revolutions and wartime in particular. In focusing on microhistory, historians have paid attention to individual histories, but these individuals have mostly been selected precisely because of their hitherto 'low' and 'obscure' status. The same is true for security studies, where the focus on 'silenced voices' and the introduction of minorities, female voices, alternative perspectives in historiography, has grown in importance over the last

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951).

decade – not because they have shaped history, but because they have been submitted to historical practices of oppression, for example.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, updated, modern biographies on leaders in the field of security, for example, are conspicuously missing in action: think of French police minister Joseph Fouché, Prussian/Allied police director Justus von Gruner, or long-serving Dutch Justice minister Cornelis Felix van Maanen who in France, the German lands, and the Netherlands were responsible for forging a completely new, revolutionary system of police, monitoring and surveillance, and who have until now hardly received attention for their impact on history (there are superb French biographies on Fouché,<sup>28</sup> but these biographies have not been translated or inserted into the historiographical accounts of the early nineteenth century). Perhaps we cannot consider these three police and spy masters ‘charismatic,’ in the sense that they attracted a mass following, but within their bureaucratic realms, they ruled with awe, received spontaneous letters by citizens offering to work and spy for them (I saw these myself in the French and Dutch archives<sup>29</sup>), and inspired whole generations of civil servants. Could that not also be considered a kind of professional charisma, and if not, how does their role as movers and shakers behind the scene, differ from charismatic political leadership as described by Bell?

So, yes, Bell makes excellent and urgent point about the necessity of inserting charismatic leadership back into political and international history. Yet, the question is whether Bell did not perhaps overlook some trends in history that are already doing what he suggests: restoring attention to the role of charismatic leaders and their relationship with their followers, and the emotions they triggered. In new diplomatic history, for example, Brian Vick has explicated how in 1814/5, the princes and generals of the anti-Napoléon coalition were hailed and received by masses of people, upon their return home, with merchandise (coins, shawls, engravings) celebrating their glory sold to the masses.<sup>30</sup> Johannes Paulmann, in his important work *Pomp und Politik*, has moreover demonstrated how monarchical visits were transformed in the nineteenth century to make leaders visible, to showcase them to the world, thereby introducing a new type of theatricalization of politics into the realm of international relations.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, an even more relevant trend in history is the so-called ‘emotional turn’ that explicitly put emotions center stage. All kinds of classical, orthodox historical subdisciplines have undergone an ‘emotional makeover.’<sup>32</sup> Diplomatic, colonial and imperial history have been influenced by this new orientation, political history and cultural history even more so. A whole new journal was dedicated to this new turn in 2017: *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* (EHCS), and leading historian Ute

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Lene Hansen, “The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School,” *Millennium* 29 (1999) 2: 285-306.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Emmanuel de Waresquiel, *Fouché. Les silences de la pieuvre* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> See Beatrice de Graaf, *Fighting Terror after Napoleon: How Europe became Secure after 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), chapter 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> See J. Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2000); see for an excellent review article: Karina Urbach, “Diplomatic History since the Cultural Turn,” *The Historical Journal* 46:4 (2003): 991–997.

<sup>32</sup> Joanna Lewis, “Emotional Rescue: The Emotional Turn in the Study of History,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 51:1 (2020): 121-129.

Frevert has even established a centre in Berlin, to study this phenomenon, along with the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.<sup>33</sup>

In sum, it is high time that the changing and effervescent relationship between leaders and followers is historicized, while putting an emphasis on the pathos of this bond, and the way it is negotiated, situated, manipulated and communicated over time. But for such an intervention in historiography, it would be helpful to have a more focused analysis and comparison of the leadership type investigated here. How uniquely bound was the ‘man on horseback’ to the age of revolutions? Does not Russian President Vladimir Putin, who, among other things, was photographed riding his horse bare-chested, channel the same kind of masculine leadership amongst his followers in Russia in the twenty-first century. And how important is the war imagery and military rhetoric to upholding the status of a charismatic leader for the early nineteenth century, when it was appropriated by so many leaders in the interwar period, or by today’s social media warriors as well?

Bell’s excellent study could therefore be considered a timely call for more fleshed out attempts to historicize the features and traits of charismatic leaders, as well as for more detailed and focused comparisons between leaders throughout epochs: is it their message, or rather the format, the communication technology they have to their disposal, that makes for a different type of charisma? In other words, does television or social media craft and require another sort of charisma than paintings and direct speeches did in the nineteenth century?

And what about the relationship with democracy: are charismatic leaders prone to undermine democracy by default, because they subvert the notion of equality with their idolized posture? Or are they rather the embodiment of the cravings of the democratic masses, as Napoléon III thought (216)? Can they abide by the law, or is the dynamics that drive charismatic leadership which is in principle footed on law-transcending idolatry? In other words, as soon as a leader lets himself be bound by law and proceedings, does he lose his charismatic appeal? Bell devotes a whole, fascinating chapter on George Washington, and applauds him for his resistance to celebrity culture, and his refusal to make himself the pivot of a new revolutionary cult. But is George Washington, the first president of the United States, the exception to the rule, or a type of charismatic leader that is compatible with democratic representation and can be submitted to the rule of law?

Given today’s popular cravings for ‘strong men’ and ‘strong performances’ in politics, with populist leaders on the ascent worldwide, these questions are not just academic, or historical, but instead are extremely relevant for understanding the new mode of charismatic politics in the twenty-first 21<sup>st</sup> century. Charismatic leadership may signal the erosion of parliamentary democracy. It may also be the trap set by social media’s volatile and fleeting expressions of acclamation that characterize today’s political stage. Even a thoroughly democratic leader like President Barack Obama seems to succumb to messianic inclinations in his latest memoirs, in the way he conflates his ascendancy to the presidency with the American destiny as such.<sup>34</sup> But his is a charisma that can do without masculine rhetoric, or shirtless rides on a horseback. I know what I prefer.

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011); Nicole Eustace, Eugenia Lean, Julie Livingston, Jan Plamper, William M. Reddy, and Barbara H. Rosenwein, “AHR Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions,” *American Historical Review* 117:5 (2012): 1487–531.

<sup>34</sup> Barack Obama, *A Promised land* (London: Viking, 2020).

One of the most noteworthy scenes of men on horseback in world literature is presented by Stendhal in *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839). In his search to meet his idol Napoléon, the hero of the story, the Italian young nobleman Fabrizio Del Dongo, ends up in the battle of Waterloo. Emboldened by brandy but also severely inebriated, he misses the crucial moment when the Emperor on horseback passes by: “Fabrizio was sorely tempted to gallop after the Emperor’s escort and join it. What a joy it would have been to serve in a real war in attendance on that hero! Was it not for that very purpose that he had come to France? ‘I am perfectly free to do it,’ he reflected, ‘for indeed the only reason for my doing my present duty is that my horse chose to gallop after these generals.’”<sup>35</sup> Stendhal thus depicts not only the emotional bond felt by many of the men who followed Napoleon, but also demonstrates that men on horseback are not always in charge, but are often subject to coincidence and confusion. He thereby raises the question of how to assess the remarkable interaction between leaders and followers, and how to analyze claims to power and conceptions of authority in post-revolutionary conditions.

David A. Bell, one of today’s most prominent historians of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, is well placed to discuss this question. In *Men on Horseback*, he analyzes how military leaders, such as Napoléon, muster political support, giving birth to modern charismatic rule. Given his background, it is all the more surprising how Bell is able to go beyond the paradigmatic case of Napoleon and to present a global account of men on horseback as instances of modern charisma. He aims to enlighten the emergence of a post-monarchical, perhaps republican, but hardly democratic form of authority of leaders, based on their claim to be “endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.” (240) Bell here quotes Max Weber as the most reliable guide in his exploration of charismatic power, yet he does so in an “Excursus” that comes almost as an afterthought, while his actual analysis is largely inductive, sketching the contours of charisma by an account of the lives of the Corsican rebel leader Pasquale Paoli, together with the much more famous George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, Toussaint Louverture, and Simón Bolívar.

All of these leaders “reflect a shared experience of revolutionary strife, large-scale war, and the founding or refounding of states.” (12) All were all heroes with a strong reputation of military expertise. Despite the Enlightenment’s rejection of war, and the revolutionary ideal of the rule of reason, these leaders filled the gap felt by the loss of the sublime experience of battle and satisfied the sense of emotional commitment that once was claimed by divinely ordained monarchy. Also, each modern charismatic leader presents himself as “a redeemer who had arisen in the midst of frightful crisis,” and is assumed to have generated or regenerated a nation. As courageous general and “father of his country” (13) each of these men on horseback therefore present a new model of masculine authority. In his introduction, Bell also emphasizes that charismatic power is an interactive phenomenon: as much as it is the result of claims to fame, it also stems from ascriptions of celebrity. This allows Bell to present his study as part of a history of emotions, which ordinary people projected on extraordinary leaders. He derives his interpretation of the sentiments from print media which was aimed at “the literate segments of society,” in support of leaders who “were themselves shaped by the engagement with the written word” (16).

Bell’s preliminary delineation of his approach raises a methodological concern: despite the fact that charisma is to a large extent in the eye of the beholder, his main focus is on written sources, not on pictorial imaginations of charismatic power. Although the book contains a separate section with black-and-white illustrations, they hardly play a role in the Bell’s argumentation. This is only partly compensated by the acknowledgement that the rise of modern charismatic power was made possible by a media revolution, creating new conditions for the production and dissemination of printed material. In contrast to the Enlightenment notion of political authority held accountable before a tribunal of reason, Bell presents “a print world that was in fact raucous, freewheeling and frequently rude, driven as much by readers’ quest for entertainment, and publishers’ quest for profit, as by anyone’s quest for edification and improvement” (41). In his reconstruction of the emotional attachments to extraordinary leaders, Bell makes creative use of new genres such as epistolary novels and

<sup>35</sup> Stendhal (Henri Beyle), *The Chartreuse of Parma*. Translated by Lady Mary Doyle (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1901 [1839]), 48.

biography that contributed to the creation of political celebrities. But this analysis has limitations, which becomes clear in comparison to a similar trajectory explored by Lucy Riall in her discussion of the invention of Giuseppe Garibaldi as a charismatic hero.<sup>36</sup> Her story takes place from the 1830s onwards, after the introduction of new technologies, such as photography, engraving techniques and machine-powered printing presses, which established the conditions for the creation of an image-driven celebrity culture on a scale that was largely lacking in the Revolutionary era that Bell discusses.

Methodologically, another remarkable aspect of the book, addressed largely implicitly, is its global scope. Bell convincingly demonstrates that the intellectual and political discourse of the Revolutionary era emerged in a global public sphere, in which the reputation of his heroes came about on both sides of the Atlantic, and in intellectual exchanges on a global scale. Moreover, Bell goes beyond the boundaries of earlier accounts of trans-Atlantic interactions, by including not only the Haitian case of Toussaint Louverture – who by now has been well introduced in the Atlantic pantheon<sup>37</sup> – but also to include the South American story of Simón Bolívar. In the end, this is a truly global account, also because Bell's discussion of these two figures is not meant to demonstrate how European or North American issues became dispersed across other parts of the world. Instead, he presents them as separate models of charismatic leadership, emerging in the Caribbean and South America from “tensions between charismatic democratic leadership and charismatic authoritarianism [which] remained far more acute, for far longer, than elsewhere in the Atlantic world” (175).

Although the expansion of the analysis of modern charismatic power to a global scope is attractive, it also raises conceptual and historical questions. A first issue is just how new modern charismatic power actually is. Bell points at pre-existing conditions that informed modern charisma, such as the Enlightenment cult of genius and the charismatic aspects in Christianity. The main reason for Bell to insist on its modernity seems to be the exhaustion of earlier traditional and supernatural justifications of monarchical power. But he seems to overstate the extent to which this was the case, and thus disregards the charismatic aspects in the reconstruction (if not restoration) of monarchical power under post-revolutionary conditions in the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> He also overlooks earlier manifestation of charismatic leaders, for instance in Niccolò Machiavelli's discussion of the new prince, which contains many of the salient elements Bell ascribes to later charismatic leaders, including the implications for masculinity to which Bell refers.<sup>39</sup> An important pre-revolutionary aspect of both Machiavelli's account of the prince and Bell's heroes is the emulation of previous, preferably ancient examples of extraordinary leaders. Bell definitely acknowledges the frequent references to Caesar (often in combination with Oliver Cromwell), sometimes as a commendable model, but more often as a warning against dictatorial tendencies. But these references make you wonder whether these aren't traces of a longer historical legacy of modern charismatic leadership.<sup>40</sup>

More importantly, the book does not discuss Caesarism, with the exception of the final chapter, where Bell only mentions that this was a doctrine that in the 1830s “was taking shape and would flourish for much of the next century” (222). His

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<sup>36</sup> Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> See for instance René Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment: Contesting the Limits of Civic Equality and Participation in the Age of Revolutions* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> See for instance Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp Und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa Zwischen Ancien Régime Und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2000); Juliette Glikman, *La monarchie impériale. L'imaginaire politique sous Napoléon III* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions / Fondation Napoléon, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> See Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>40</sup> See for an analysis of the longue durée of Caesarian imagery Maria Wycke, *Caesar. A Life in Western Culture* (London: Granta Books, 2007). See for a recent account Markus J. Prutsch, *Caesarism in the Post-Revolutionary Age. Crisis, Populace and Leadership* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)

reference here are *Les Idées Napoléoniennes*, published in 1839 by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, but a further elaboration is missing.<sup>41</sup> This lack of attention to Napoléon's nephew's work, both intellectual and political, is a serious omission in Bell's discussion of modern charismatic leaders.

Bell argues that in fact it is not in France but in Haiti and in South America that we need to look for the earliest and genuine elaboration of modern charismatic power. Bell's argument in fact seems to be that beyond the dichotomy of "Washington the self-sacrificing political angel versus Bonaparte the political Lucifer, tempted, corrupt, and fallen" (200), it was initially Louverture who developed an alternative model of fetishist politics, based on idolatry and enthusiasm, as "a central principle of government by a charismatic leader, not just in Haiti but throughout the Atlantic world in the age of revolution" (170). Subsequently, Simón Bolívar "cited Haiti as a new political model" of "personal political leadership," indicating his shift from "classical republican ... to a far more authoritarian stance," not just as "an insistence that an unruly people obey their leader" but as expression of "the idea of an intense emotional bond between the leader and his country that in turn knit the country itself together" (174).

These are important considerations, informed by an inclusive and global approach to intellectual and political history. Yet it seems Bell's inductive reconstruction of the work of men on horseback is only the beginning of something that was actually taking shape at a somewhat later stage. I would argue that *Les Idées napoléoniennes* are the first more or less systematic account of Caesarist – or Bonapartist – leadership, indicating that the men on horseback were not just a political phenomenon that can only be studied in its concrete appearances. It is also a political and ideological tradition that culminates in Weber's discussion of charismatic power, but starts from a contemporary reflection on the rise of a post-revolutionary plebiscitary legitimation of political power at the crossroads of democracy and dictatorship. Louis-Bonaparte Napoléon presents his uncle as new Caesar, as "testamentary executor" of the French Revolution, and as savior of the French nation.<sup>42</sup> He also discusses the plebiscitary instruments Napoléon Bonaparte deployed to legitimize his power, as a prelude to the largely instrumental way in which he himself dealt with democratic means like elections and plebiscites in his rise to power as Napoléon III.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore not just his writings, but also his actions which informs a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between Caesarism, militarism and democracy.

A first issue, a reflection on Napoléon III allows us to address is the complicated relationship between military and political leadership. Bell's heroes all had an impressive military track record, but he also admits that many other examples of charismatic leaders "did not fit the model of the 'man on horseback,' the military hero and savior" (223). This was also the case for Louis-Bonaparte Napoléon, whose only military experience was a short stint in the Swiss army, after his combat experience in a Carbonari militia in 1831 was cut short when he decided to flee before the onslaught of the Austrian army. Yet even if Napoléon III had few military achievements to boast about, his regime was definitely militaristic, not only in the military pomp that characterized his public appearances, but also in the sense that Napoléon III mobilized support by engaging in warfare. His campaigns in the Crimea, Italy, Mexico, and finally against Prussia served more to bolster his domestic position than France's international interests. They set a pattern for later invasions for domestic political purposes – from Poland in 1939 to the Falklands in 1982, from Afghanistan in 1979 and 2001 to the Crimea, again, in 2014. Each of

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<sup>41</sup> Napoléon-Louis Bonaparte, *Les idées napoléoniennes* (Paris: Paulin, 1839); Bonaparte, *Napoleonic Ideas*. Translated by James A. Dorr (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1859).

<sup>42</sup> Bonaparte, *Napoleonic Ideas*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> An older discussion in H.A.L. Fisher, *Bonapartism. Six Lectures Delivered in the University of London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908); more recent is Terrell Carver, "Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: Democracy, Dictatorship, and the Politics of Class Struggle," in Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter, eds., *Dictatorship in History and Theory. Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge and Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press and the German Historical Institute, 2004), 103-127.

the instances also demonstrate the risk of military action to muster popular support, which was already evident in the demise of Napoléon III after his defeat in the Franco-Prussian war.

Bell's focus on biographical case studies leads him to reduce such failure to individual misery and death, of Louverture in prison in the Jura, Bonaparte on Saint Helena, and Bolívar at Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast. At this point, there would have been an opportunity to discuss more deeply another problem of charismatic power, which is that of the routinization of charisma. As Napoléon III demonstrated, successful claims to charismatic authority depend on continued miraculous action, and thus require the creation of crises as opportunities to save the nation from disaster. But such attempt to wag the dog can easily turn sour, and it is therefore very difficult to create a stable regime out of a charismatic claim to power. The outlier in this account of failure is of course Washington. While his military results were also mixed at best, he gained a reputation as selfless leader after his voluntary retreat to Mount Vernon – emulating not Caesar but Cincinnatus. After his return to the political stage in 1787, his personal charisma declined before he grew out to be the embodiment of the republic. From that moment onwards he began to contribute to what John Pocock has labelled the mechanization of virtue: in other words, the transfer of charismatic qualities from individual persons to institutional mechanisms.<sup>44</sup>

A third reason to include a discussion of Napoléon III is that it would have helped to further understand the nature of Caesarist regimes. An important source in this respect is another crucial document of political history in nineteenth-century political history: Karl Marx's account of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's rise to power in *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1852).<sup>45</sup> In his "Excursus," Bell dismisses Marx too easily as the main culprit in the neglect of the role of individuals in history, even as he includes the quotation from "The Eighteenth Brumaire" that "Men make their own history." Not only does Marx thus acknowledge individual agency, but this opening of the second paragraph (not the first, as is indicated in the book) is preceded by the equally famous reference in the opening paragraph to Hegel's remark "that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."<sup>46</sup> It is this observation that forms the beginning of an account of Louis-Bonaparte Napoléon's rise to power, in which political power is defined, not by any iron laws of history, but by the imaginary force of the past – a "world-historical necromancy" in which the "tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."<sup>47</sup> In Marx's analysis, Bonapartism emerged as an imaginary, if not ghostly form of authority, in which the appeal to past heroes serves to muster support from societal groups that lack a clear understanding of their social position (they are classes "an sich" but not "für sich"). This is the kind of crisis, perhaps a very recognizable one for modern mass societies, that creates the opportunity for leaders to mould a chaotic mass into a stable social order. And as Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte expressed in his praise of his uncle Napoléon, this requires the "skill of the workman [...] in knowing how to avail himself of the materials which he has at hand."<sup>48</sup>

But as Marx then observed, the danger of such an aesthetic notion of politics, is that the lead actor becomes enthralled by his creation and turns into "the serious buffoon who no longer takes world history for a comedy but his comedy for world

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<sup>44</sup> John G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Deutsche Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1852); Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." in *Collected Works Volume 11. Marx and Engels 1851-53*, ed., Jack Cohen a.o. (London: Lawrence & Wishart. 1979 [1852]), 99-197

<sup>46</sup> Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 103

<sup>47</sup> Marx, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Bonaparte, *Napoleonic Ideas*, 27.

history.”<sup>49</sup> At this point, Marx echoed the more widespread critique of the theatrical, if not outright mendacious nature of Bonapartist claims to power, most famously voiced by Victor Hugo in *Napoléon le Petit*, in which he argued that the nephew was “a good horseman” but also “a vulgar common-place personage, puerile, theatrical and vain.” He was maybe after all “not an idiot,” but definitely a crook and a fraud, who “does not speak, he lies.”<sup>50</sup>

If this sounds very familiar, it is probably because some present-day political leaders stand in the Caesarist tradition that started in the nineteenth century. The men on horseback Bell discusses clearly formed important stages in the development of this tradition. But I would argue that its conceptualization as an actual political model took place after 1830, and that it was only after 1852 that Napoléon III became the first actual Bonapartist leader in practice. He created the pattern that was followed by later charismatic leaders. In his concluding chapter, Bell confirms the relevance of this legacy for the evaluation of contemporary leaders. But his main concern there seems to have been that the strong emotional bond between charismatic leaders and their followers can turn in a “despotism of love” (230). I would say that the problem with the Caesarist regime that the men on horseback announced is more complicated: it evokes a self-defeating but also destructive logic of military crisis, and in the name of ghosts of the past and an imaginary popular appeal, it creates a delusional authority in the present.

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<sup>49</sup> Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 150.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Hugo, *Napoléon le Petit* (London/Brussels: Jeffs/Mertens, 1852); English translation from *Napoleon the Little* (London: Vizetelly and Company, 1852), 27, 28 and 30.

## REVIEW BY CHRISTINE HAYNES, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

As the eighteenth century turned to the nineteenth, according to this new work by David A. Bell, there was born a new mode of political leadership, centered on “charisma.” In the last weeks of 1799, Napoléon Bonaparte, who had risen to prominence as a military leader in the wars unleashed by the French Revolution, overthrew the republican government in France, while George Washington, who had saved the new American nation first as commander-in-chief against the British and then as its first president, died peacefully at his home in Mount Vernon, Virginia. In a bizarre effort to link himself to the republican idol, in February 1800 Napoléon ordered a ten-day commemoration of George Washington, including a funeral service at the Invalides military hospital with an hour-long oration by journalist Louis de Fontanes, which emphasized that great political crises demanded actors of “extraordinary personality” (92).

At exactly the same time, an “extraordinary personality” in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, a formerly enslaved black military leader by the name of Toussaint L’Ouverture, was challenging Napoléon’s authority over the island. Although he would ultimately be captured and imprisoned at Napoléon’s order, L’Ouverture was already being compared, for instance by the British *Annual Register*, to both Washington and Napoléon. Meanwhile, in Latin America, all three of these models were being studied by another revolutionary, Simón de Bolívar, who later claimed (without substantiation) that he had witnessed in person the coronation of Napoléon as emperor of France in December 1804. Tightly connected, despite the physical distance between them, these four “men on horseback” illustrate, according to Bell, how the Age of Revolutions engendered not just popular sovereignty, but its “dark twin,” charismatic leadership, soon termed “Caesarism.”

In highlighting the historical interconnection between democratic and authoritarian politics, Bell makes a creative new argument about the origin and significance of “charisma” as a modern—and international—political phenomenon, one which is of obvious current relevance. From the beginning, he is careful to define the term as it developed in the late eighteenth century, as a “gift of divine grace,” connected to “genius,” which was becoming something a person *was* as opposed to acquired (39). The new charismatic leader was characterized by three traits, all highly masculine: he was a military hero; a redeemer, saving his people from crisis (external and/or internal); and a founder of his nation, above the partisan fray. In short, he was a “man on horseback,” arriving to save and re-constitute his state (14). Emphasizing that charisma was not just an individual quality, but also an interpersonal relationship, Bell argues that it involved an intense emotion of love (rather than honor or fear as before, with a monarch), even an erotic desire, between follower and leader (6). As he succinctly states, “This imagined connection is an essential fiction of modern politics” (29). Although it borrowed from classical models, the new conception of charisma was not atavistic, but distinctly modern. Borrowing from Max Weber, Bell calls it a “revolutionary force,” both powerful and dangerous (6).

Situating this “revolutionary force” squarely in the Age of Enlightenment and Revolutions, between about 1775 and the 1820s, Bell argues that the longing for a charismatic leader was born with democracy itself, which transformed the relationship between ordinary people and political authorities. However, unlike the parallel developments of popular sovereignty, human rights, constitutionalism, and republicanism, charismatic leadership as a modern political invention—as opposed to a characteristic of a particular liberator-dictator, such as Bolívar and his successors in Latin America—has not received much attention from historians. For this ambivalent legacy of the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution, Bell identifies a number of causes, including: the weakening of organized religion, which provoked a sacralization of other non-religious sources of authority; new artistic and literary modes, especially the sentimental novel, melodrama, biography, and autobiography, all of which placed a new emphasis on intimacy and individuality; new reading practices, more extensive (in many, often ephemeral, texts) than intensive (in a few select texts, such as the Bible); new forums for political discussion, including salons, cafés, and clubs; a new conception of “celebrity” or “fame” that was reliant on print culture and especially engravings; and new visions of warfare, as described in a previous book by Bell.<sup>51</sup> Above all, he asserts, political charisma

<sup>51</sup> David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

depended upon the media revolution of the eighteenth century, which reached not just across Europe but overseas to the Caribbean and Latin America.

Asserting that his is a cultural rather than psychological history of charisma, Bell draws most of his evidence from propaganda by and about the “men on horseback” themselves, including newspapers, pamphlets, memoirs, speeches, poems and songs, images, and (often heavily fictionalized) biographies, from multiple countries on both sides of the Atlantic. To show how these media constructed the new charismatic leaders, transnationally, he structures his book around four, interrelated, case studies: George Washington, Napoléon Bonaparte, Toussaint L’Ouverture, and Simón de Bolívar. These case studies are book-ended by an introductory chapter on a precursor of the new “men on horseback,” Pasquale Paoli—who led a (unsuccessful) movement for independence in Corsica in the 1760s and, again, in the 1790s, which inspired other revolutionaries on both sides of the Atlantic—and an Excursus on the utility of “charisma” as a category of historical analysis.

By bringing these four case studies into a single frame, along with that of the largely forgotten hero Paoli, Bell makes an original and important contribution to the historiography on the Age of Revolutions, the Atlantic world, and modern political culture. Surveying a wide array of rich printed and visual sources by and about these cases, he provides a close reading of “charisma” as it first emerged in revolutionary politics on both sides of the Atlantic. Following this book, one can no longer consider even a megalomaniac like Bonaparte in isolation from his fellow charismatic leaders, especially L’Ouverture. In spite—or because—of its scope, however, the book is plagued by several conceptual and evidentiary flaws, which undermine its promise.

To begin at the end, by promoting “charisma” as an analytical tool as outlined in the concluding Excursus, it seems to me that Bell undermines his own argument about its historical specificity. Although he emphasizes that this category, as theorized by such early social scientists as Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, and especially Max Weber, was itself a product of the historical developments traced in the rest of the book (237), he also urges historians to pay more attention to the role of powerful individual leaders and their emotional bonds with their followers, throughout history. In effect, he calls for a revival—if also historicization—of the “Great Man” approach to history-writing. On the last page, he recognizes the tension between cultural determinism and individual agency, especially with “extraordinary personalities” such as the ones analyzed in this book (243). But here, and throughout the book, he undercuts his own analysis of the historical contingency of “charisma” in the Age of Revolutions by alternately employing it as a universal and a historical category. This confusion is present from the Introduction, which begins with a reference to the characterization of Julius Caesar by Cassius in Shakespeare’s play about the Roman hero, then jumps a few pages later to a famous photograph of President John F. Kennedy surrounded by admirers in Santa Monica in 1962 (5), before referring to the appeal of Giuseppe Garibaldi and Adolf Hitler (6). In subsequent chapters, to these names he adds a long list of “charismatic” men from across the political spectrum and a wide variety of historical contexts, including, among others: Frederick the Great, John Wesley, John Wilkes, the Marquis de Lafayette, Francisco de Miranda, Benjamin Disraeli, Andrew Jackson, Joseph Stalin, Mao, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Charles de Gaulle, Gandhi, Ronald Reagan, Hugo Chávez, Kim Il-Sung, Barack Obama, and Emmanuel Macron. Late in the book, Bell admits, “Of course, these figures differed wildly from one another and from the men studied in this book. But in each case, fervent followers believed they possessed extraordinary natural gifts and felt a powerful emotional bond with them.” (225) Lumping such wildly divergent men together, however, distracts from Bell’s otherwise compelling argument that charismatic leadership has been locked in a “double helix” (5) with democratic politics from its beginnings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

With regard to the origins of this style of leadership, Bell’s argument is on much firmer and more original ground. In the central chapters on his four main case studies, plus Paoli, Bell convincingly shows how these “men on horseback” referred to and borrowed from each other in their propaganda, symbolism, and practices. Paoli was a model for both Washington and Napoléon (who studied the popular account of the Corsican hero by James Boswell), and Napoléon was in turn a model for L’Ouverture and Bolívar. For instance, the Latin American revolutionary read the best-selling *Mémorial of Saint Helena* (1821) compiled by Emmanuel de Las Cases on behalf of the exiled Bonaparte with great interest, and his own aide, Louis Pérú de Lacroix, imitated it in his diaristic account of three months with the “Liberator” in *Journal of Bucaramanga* of 1828

(203). As the figures in the middle of the book demonstrate, all of these charismatic leaders resembled each other in portraits, with similar dress, stances, and accessories—and even riding the same horse, as in an engraving of Bolívar modelled after the famous painting of Napoléon crossing the Alps by Jacques-Louis David, which is analyzed on page 15.

As Bell admits, it is not always clear how intentional these leaders were in orchestrating such propaganda. Of Napoléon's "overbidding" for status as an extraordinary leader, for instance, he writes, "I cannot say whether Bonaparte pursued this strategy consciously. But his superb political instincts led him directly to it." (119) Regardless of intention, however, Bell convincingly demonstrates that the (often cross-referential) representations of these leaders as "charismatic" circulated far and wide. Following Paoli, who was mentioned in British newspapers alone more than 3,000 times between 1750 and 1770 (44), these four revolutionary-era charismatic leaders were all repeatedly celebrated (sometimes together) with pamphlets, plays, songs, hagiographical "biographies," triumphal arches, birthday and "saint" day festivities, portraits, prints, pottery, handkerchiefs, relics, and naming of towns as well as children. Together, these rich sources reveal a new culture—even cult—of charismatic leadership circa 1800.

Nonetheless, much of this evidence is suggestive rather than definitive with regard to Bell's main claim that "charisma" was a relational, emotional, and transnational phenomenon. Relying mainly on printed sources for elite audiences and resorting too often to mere recounting of biographical details and historical events, this study mentions, but does not pursue, the question of whether and how these media affected (or were affected by) their audiences, especially non-elites. Understandably, it is difficult to get at the reactions of these audiences, particularly the enslaved in Saint-Domingue who were so key to the "charisma" of L'Ouverture or the *campesinos* who were important to that of Bolívar in Latin America. However, given the main claim about the relationship between this new leadership style and popular acclamation, more effort on this front was warranted: more analysis of the new emotional regime of "love" (vs. fear or honor) of the people for these leaders is needed.

To get at this new emotional relationship, there could be more discussion of print runs and editions; of oral rumors and legends, throughout the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas; of the emotional language employed by ordinary citizens regarding all four leaders; and of material culture. Although the book does refer, for instance, to household objects featuring images of these charismatic leaders, its illustrations feature mainly official portraits and printed engravings. More evidence of the variety and circulation of other sorts of material objects—such as the wax figure of Louverture from an exhibition in the U.S. in 1803, mentioned on page 159—would help to substantiate the emotional connection between these leaders and their followers. In the absence of such evidence, this remains a largely intellectual, as opposed to a broader cultural or emotional, history of "charisma" in the Age of Revolutions.

For H-Diplo's audience of historians of international relations, the book's most promising—but ultimately most disappointing—claim is to be a "transnational history" (12). Quoting historian Franco Venturi, Bell notes that a type of despotism founded on love first emerged on "the margins" and in "peripheral places," such as Corsica (32). At a few points in the book, he hints at the international exchanges that helped to construct the new style of charismatic leadership. For instance, he introduces the fascinating character Jean-Louis Dubroca, an ex-monk turned bookseller, who in addition to propagandizing for Napoléon also wrote (at Napoléon's request) a lengthy eulogy for George Washington and a hostile biography of Bonaparte's nemesis, L'Ouverture. Of Dubroca, Bell writes, "We might almost call him the period's leading specialist in charismatic authority, had he not been such a mercenary hack." (117). But isn't it precisely because he was a "hack" that he so well exemplifies the wider transnational emotional cult of charisma?

In another tantalizing—and eloquent—aside, Bell notes, in a discussion of how L'Ouverture forged a close relationship with a white French aristocratic colonial administrator named Étienne Maynaud de Bizefranc de Laveaux via letter-writing, "It was not only ships but paper and ink that bound the Atlantic world together" (146). But here, and elsewhere, he does not dig deeper into the transnational networks—facilitated by letters, newspapers, printers, officials, sailors, etc.—that were critical to the international circulation of the new mode of charismatic leadership. And, at points, Bell assumes transnational influence on the cult of charisma, without evidence, as when he discusses the influence of Washington on the French revolutionaries: "... while the name Washington—associated with a far less radical revolution—went largely

unmentioned in France in 1793 and 1794, the memory of the earlier adulation he had enjoyed there may still have played a role, in the background, in feeding the abortive cult of Robespierre” (111). It would have been interesting to see more explication of how charismatic leadership was constructed via cultural exchange between nations and, especially, how its North American and European variants were at least sometimes influenced by ‘peripheries’ such as Haiti and Venezuela.

The unsubstantiated suggestion about Washington’s role in the cult of Robespierre reveals another problem with the book, which is the ellision of at least two (and probably multiple) styles of charismatic leadership: the republican version typified by Washington versus the more authoritarian mode of Napoléon, L’Ouverture, Bolívar, and their “Caesarist” successors. Despite the anxiety of his fellow Founding Father John Adams that the commander-turned-president was being “idolized” like a monarch, Washington resisted the celebrity bestowed upon him after the War of Independence; once he assumed office, he was subject to significant criticism; and, of course, after serving two terms, he voluntarily relinquished power. As Bell notes, “His charismatic reputation in 1789 constituted a potential political weapon of enormous power. A Bonaparte would not have hesitated to use it. Washington never did” (86). Such ardent republicanism—which was certainly reinforced by the constitutional and institutional framework of the United States—distinguished Washington from the other three main cases of the book. While Bell characterizes Bonaparte’s authoritarianism as “moderate,” it was still very different from “charisma” in the new United States (124). Both types of leaders may have emerged from the same broad (transnational) cultural context, but in certain places and at certain moments they deviated in significant ways, which deserve further explication.

Despite its provocative claim that democracy and Caesarism have been intertwined in a “double helix” from their beginning in the late eighteenth century, this book ultimately leaves unanswered the important question of why exactly modern charismatic leadership can go so wrong. Although he is never mentioned, except as the “victorious candidate” in the election of 2016 (229-230), Donald J. Trump, lurks figuratively over this book, as he did literally over his opponent Hillary Clinton in the presidential debates of that year. Reading about the flotillas that greeted Washington (80), for instance, it is hard not to be reminded of the recent parades of boats flying Trump flags. One could certainly argue about whether Trump is truly “charismatic” or just a vessel for toxic masculinity and white nationalism. Regardless, we are certainly witnessing a complete degeneration of the type of charismatic leadership, centered on military glory and national unity that was constructed by Washington and others over two centuries ago.

In the Introduction, Bell reflects on the contemporary relevance of his history of “charisma” as a force in politics: “Perhaps it is only at this moment in the early twenty-first century, when the forward trajectory of democracy has come to seem anything but inexorable, that we can clearly glimpse this other side of the age of revolution” (7). This raises another question of whether the dark side of democratic revolution was not glimpsed by observers in an earlier age of authoritarianism, in the 1920s and 30s? In the end, Bell punts on the question of how charisma can undermine republicanism, concluding (in the last sentence of the book before the methodological “Excursus”) only that “We will always have charismatic leaders. They are part of the fabric from which our political societies are woven. Our task is to choose these charismatic leaders wisely, by judging as carefully as possible both the individuals themselves and the causes for which they stand” (231). Given the stakes—historical as well as historiographical—of this question, more critical analysis of the different variants of charismatic leadership is urgent.

To be sure, the story of how charismatic leadership devolved into authoritarianism in the twentieth and, now again, in the twenty-first century is outside the scope of this book. For raising the issue—and for tracing its origin back to the late eighteenth-century Atlantic world—Bell is to be commended. By reminding us that democracy and “Caesarism” were inextricably and *transnationally* interconnected from the very beginning, he may inspire a new line of inquiry for historians of international relations, among others.

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 RESPONSE BY DAVID A. BELL, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
 

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Reading reviews of your own book can be an emotional merry-go-round ride. You feel pleasure at having your work praised—and I am of course grateful for the kind things the contributors to this roundtable have said about *Men on Horseback*, as well as for the time and effort they put into their essays. You can also, sometimes, feel anger at being treated cruelly or unfairly—and I am delighted to have felt none of it here, as all the contributors have been entirely generous and fair. You can feel embarrassed regret at seeing the flaws and limitations of your work cogently pointed out—and I felt a certain amount of it in reading these thoughtful and searching critiques. Finally, you can feel a degree of satisfaction in knowing that you have been part of an interesting conversation—and I felt that as well, but the credit must go principally to David Armitage, Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan, Dan Edelstein and Christine Haynes—and to Diane Labrosse for organizing the roundtable.

Even though the five reviewers did not coordinate their essays, their reviews still feel like a conversation, because they address several common issues. So, in the spirit of conversation, I'll start by discussing two common issues before turning to specific points raised by the individual reviewers.

The most important issue involves chronology, and the distinctiveness – or lack thereof – of the “Age of Revolution” in the history of political charisma. Armitage and Edelstein point out that some of the things I discuss in relation to the age of revolution already existed as far back as classical antiquity. Armitage and de Haan suggest that Oliver Cromwell personified many of the qualities of charisma I associate with a later century. Meanwhile, de Haan, de Graaf and Haynes note parallels with later periods. De Haan devotes much of his review to Napoleon III and argues that to the extent that my book is a history of Caesarism, it needed to include much more on this second, lesser Bonaparte. Haynes finds a tension in *Men on Horseback* between my stated intention to historicize political charisma, and my invocation of it as a “universal category.” In fact, she says that my use of figures from Caesar to Adolf Hitler ends up undermining my argument about the age of revolution’s historical specificity.

I am tempted to respond to these critiques simply by saying that I never intended to write a *longue durée* history of political charisma from antiquity to the present. Armitage has eloquently defended the cause of sweeping, multi-secular “big histories,” and given a marvelous example in his recent study of civil war, but in *Men on Horseback* I wanted to look in greater depth at a single period—and it was already enough of a challenge to do case studies involving several countries on three continents!<sup>52</sup> (For the same reason, I did not attempt a truly global survey of the subject, although the parallels Armitage points to in his “geographical amendment” make me wish I had looked more intently in this direction). Still, I clearly might have done more to convince the reviewers about why the “age of revolution” differed from both earlier and later periods in regard to the history of political charisma, and why the difference matters.

Differences of this sort can be tricky to establish. I certainly did not mean to claim that political charisma itself is a uniquely modern phenomenon. I agree with Weber that it is, in fact, a universal feature of human civilization, albeit with very significant variants across time and space. Edelstein quite rightly points to the many parallels between the figures I study in *Men on Horseback* and a person as remote as Pericles. And continuities across the centuries are reinforced by the fact that later figures so often try to model themselves on earlier ones. Armitage quite rightly notes the immense, continuing popularity of Plutarch’s *Lives* in the Age of Revolution (something I noted myself on 27-28 of *Men on Horseback*). George Washington modeled himself on Cato and Cincinnatus, Napoleon Bonaparte on Alexander and Caesar, Toussaint Louverture on Spartacus—and Simón Bolívar on Washington and Bonaparte, as well as many earlier figures.

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<sup>52</sup> David Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée,” *History of European Ideas* 38:4 (December 2012), 493–507; Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

Nonetheless, something very significant changed in the eighteenth century, above all in the way that admirers viewed and understood both the charismatic figures themselves, and their own relationship to these figures. The proliferation of printed images, and the regular coverage of news in the burgeoning periodical press, gave the admirers a newly vivid, detailed, and up-to-the-minute sense of charismatic leaders. The development of what Antoine Lilti calls celebrity culture, and the language of the sentimental novel, combined to give the admirers glimpses into the private lives, and indeed into what they imagined to be the innermost thoughts and emotions of the figures—and also to believe what Mason Locke Weems stated so baldly in his early biography of George Washington: “It is not in the glare of public, but in the shade of private life, that we are to look for the man. Private life is always real life.”<sup>53</sup> Even while acknowledging the extraordinary abilities of charismatic leaders, admirers also saw these figures as familiars, even as friends, bound to them through affection and love. Finally, and crucially, the development of concepts of civic egalitarianism and of popular sovereignty led admirers to believe that even as the charismatic leaders in one sense served as fathers of their countries, they nonetheless received their power from the people, and owed their leadership positions to popular consent (Armitage rightly highlights this point in his review).

I quite agree with Edelstein that there were striking precedents for this sort of charismatic relationship in Periclean Athens. But in Athens the relationship could only exist in person, orally, within the confines of a small city-state. More importantly, there were few other such close precedents in the long centuries separating Periclean Athens from the Age of Revolution. Oliver Cromwell certainly had a charismatic relationship with his supporters – but it was not the same sort of charismatic relationship that the subjects of my book had with theirs. Cromwell’s supporters did not see him as a sort of personal friend. In the pamphlets and books, they read about him, they did not learn what he ate for breakfast (Washington, so an early biographer claimed, usually had “three small Indian hoe-cakes,” plus tea).<sup>54</sup> And if they saw him, in part, as the choice of the people, they above all saw him as an instrument chosen to lead by God. Cromwell, in short, never became the object of an intense, emotional, personal imagined bond in the way that the subjects of my book did, and this may well be one reason why his regime proved a short-lived failure, and why his example—unlike that of a Pasquale Paoli or Washington—was not widely imitated across the Western world.

I do argue in the book that the transformation of political charisma in the Atlantic world between the mid-eighteenth century and the 1820’s had lasting consequences, and I explored these consequences briefly in my Epilogue. To answer a question posed by Beatrice de Graaf, I do not think that the “man on horseback” was bound only to the Age of Revolution. The same military qualities that did so much to establish the charismatic reputations of the figures I study have done the same for many of their successors, down to the present day. That said, after the Age of Revolution it became increasingly possible for national leaders to establish charismatic reputations without necessarily having served as heroic military commanders.

In the same vein, I of course did not mean to claim that political charisma has remained unchanged since the Age of Revolution, or that it has only evolved along a single path. This is why I would take issue with Ido de Haan’s criticism that what I analyze “is only the beginning of something that was actually taking shape at a somewhat later stage,” and that I needed to pay much more attention to Napoleon III and the elaboration of a formal doctrine of Caesarism in the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, the transformations described in *Men on Horseback* were the beginnings of a great many different things. Caesarism was one of them, but despite Max Weber’s particular fascination with it during the years of the Weimar Republic’s chaotic birth, Caesarism was hardly the only way in which charismatic authority has manifested itself in modern times. Another has been in strong democratic executives, notably the presidency of the United States. A third has been in powerful nationalist leaders who did not themselves hold high office. Yet another has been in Latin American

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<sup>53</sup> Mason Locke Weems, *The Life of George Washington: With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself, and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen* (Philadelphia: Joseph Allen, 1837), 5, quoted in *Men on Horseback*, 88. For Lilti, see Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: L’invention de la célébrité, 1750–1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A True and Authentic History of His Excellency George Washington* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1790), 8, quoted in *Men on Horseback*, 81.

*caudillos*. This is why, in my Epilogue, I not only dealt with Napoleon III, but also with Andrew Jackson, Giuseppe Garibaldi and José Antonio Páez. I agree entirely with de Haan that my book is inadequate as a history of Caesarism, but for what it is worth, I was not trying to write such a history. Throughout the book, I did occasionally invoke charismatic figures from periods other than the Age of Revolution but tried to make clear the distinctions between them and my principal subjects. Readers will have to decide for themselves whether these invocations ended up undermining my argument about the Age of Revolution's historical specificity, as Haynes believes.

The second common issue involves what Weber called the “routinization” of charisma—“the transfer of charismatic qualities from individual persons to institutional mechanisms,” as de Haan puts it. Both de Haan and Armitage suggest I might have devoted more attention to this phenomenon. I might indeed have discussed it in somewhat greater depth, but I have always found this the weakest part of Weber's writings on charisma, at least when applied to the modern period. In my concluding “Excursus” on charisma I criticized the social theorists Edward Shils and Shmuel Eisenstadt, who made it central to their own work on the subject (238-39).<sup>55</sup> It is one thing to imagine a transfer of charismatic authority to an institution in an era when followers literally believe in the anointed, supernatural qualities of the charismatic leader. The institution then partakes of his sacrality. But where the leader is thought of as only metaphorically divine, as was the case for the subjects of my book, the transfer is much harder to effect, and much less durable. Arguably the American presidency inherited something of George Washington's charismatic authority, but as many historians have pointed out, the American presidency was actually a very weak institution for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the institutions created by Bonaparte and Bolívar largely did not survive their own times in power. The ones that did, such as Bonaparte's Conseil d'État and justice system, did so because they suited subsequent regimes so well, not because of any charismatic quality derived from Bonaparte. As de Haan himself remarks, it is “very difficult to create a stable regime out of a charismatic claim to power.”

As I argued briefly in my “Excursus,” the history of modern political charisma is in fact notable less for routinization, than for the repeated efforts by ambitious political figures to recapture, if only rhetorically, the disruptive, revolutionary aura of their regimes' charismatic founders. These politicians routinely promise fundamental, regenerative change—even “revolutions.” As I noted, in contemporary France it is hard to imagine a figure who is more purely a product of the country's political, educational, and business establishments than President Emmanuel Macron. But what title did he give to his 2017 campaign manifesto? *Révolution* (a year earlier, Bernie Sanders, somewhat more convincingly, gave the same title to his own presidential campaign program in the United States).<sup>57</sup>

Turning to the individual essays, I do disagree with some of the criticisms in Christine Haynes's review. She suggests that I am, “in effect,” calling for a revival of the “great man” theory of history. I hope readers will not come away from her review thinking of me as a latter-day Thomas Carlyle (at least in this sense—in some other contexts I would be intensely flattered to be placed anywhere remotely near his company). To take the liberty of quoting some of my book's concluding sentences: “political and cultural circumstances tightly shaped collective hopes and desires and fantasies, and [...] these in turn shaped a very specific sort of leadership role, one that only a very specific sort of person could play” (243). While the individual character and abilities of individual leaders certainly mattered a great deal, the thrust of the book is to show how they each, in turn, occupied roles that were in large part prescribed for them by their social and cultural milieus—quite the opposite of Carlyle's approach. I would also take issue with the idea that I “punt,” as Haynes puts it, on the question of how charisma undermines republicanism. The individual chapters in fact aim to show in detail how this undermining actually occurred in

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<sup>55</sup> Edward Shils, “Charisma, Order, and Status,” *American Sociological Review* 30:2 (1965), 199–213; Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>56</sup> See for example James T. Patterson, “The Rise of Presidential Power Before World War II,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 40:2 (1976), 39-57

<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel Macron, *Révolution: C'est notre combat pour la France* (Paris: XO Éditions, 2016).

France, Saint-Domingue/Haiti, and South America, and how it very easily could have occurred in the United States as well. I agree with Haynes that *Men on Horseback* would have been improved if I had relied less heavily on what she terms “propaganda” sources, and if I had looked more thoroughly at the transnational networks that carried news and information across borders. But I fear she misconstrued a central point of my book when she writes: “One could certainly argue about whether [Donald] Trump is truly ‘charismatic’ or just a vessel for toxic masculinity and white nationalism.” As I tried to argue, perhaps not clearly enough, charisma needs to be thought of as a relationship. It resides, as Ido de Haan nicely summarized, “to a large extent in the eye of the beholder.” In other words, the question is not whether a person “truly” possesses qualities that could be defined as charismatic, but whether other people think that he or she does. In the case of Trump, alas, a great number of Americans, even now, continue to think of him as intensely charismatic.

Armitage raises a fascinating question about race and charisma at the end of his review, and it is one that I might well have done more to address. I argue in the book that the political charisma of the sort I highlight was, in the Age of Revolution, distinctly gendered, limited to men. Was it also limited to whites? I did, of course, discuss this issue in the chapter on Toussaint Louverture. There, I suggested that many, indeed perhaps most of his white admirers could only place him in the company of the age’s other prominent charismatic figures by deliberately distinguishing him as sharply as possible from “ordinary” blacks, either by likening him to fictional figures with African royal ancestry (a pedigree his own family later claimed for him as well), or even by calling him quite literally a white man in a black skin. I did not, however, pose the question systematically in the book, and ask in what ways writers in the Age of Revolution associated what I call political charisma with distinct (white) racial characteristics.

Finally, I am quite flattered and intrigued by Edelstein’s suggestion that charisma, as analyzed in *Men on Horseback*, offers a new way of thinking about the French Revolution as a whole. I would suggest, however, a slightly different approach from the one Edelstein sketches out in his review.<sup>58</sup> What Edelstein so nicely calls an “anti-politics,” in my view, was not simply the special condition of French public discourse during the Revolution. It has been a long-term constant element of French public life. If we define politics as an arena in which competing forces offer competing claims of various sorts (over distribution of resources, social organization, moral values, etcetera) in accordance with (ideally) equitable rules, then a great deal of French history can be read precisely as a flight from politics, and towards an ideal of social harmony in which this sort of contestation has no place. The absolute monarchy sought to have the king, as an all-wise and all-powerful father of his people, restrict all deliberations related to the public good to himself and his trusted advisors. In 1789, the new National Assembly made hesitant moves towards creating a true political area in France, with competitive elections, contentious governing bodies, and free public discussion at every level of society. But the change was deeply disturbing to a population that had never known this sort of contestation, and in which, historically, political divisions had all too often spun out of control and culminated in civil war and mass murder. Even elected Assemblies repeatedly expressed a fervent desire for harmony (as in the famous incident called “the kiss of Lamourette,” in which deputies broke from their squabbling to hug and kiss each other flamboyantly and to pledge unity in the summer of 1792).<sup>59</sup> The more that actual divisions arose, the more liberal, British and American models of political life lost favor. In their place, a model drawn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideal state was one of absolute social harmony and political unanimity, initially gained support. Maximilien Robespierre, who idealized Rousseau, best expressed this shift, which should be characterized less as an attempt to fill an empty center, than as an attempt to recapture the idealized harmony and unanimity of the monarchy in a democratic mode. As Edelstein has argued in a path-breaking work, during the Terror the desire to instantiate Rousseau’s *Social Contract* increasingly gave way to a “natural republicanism” oriented around the idea of restoring a golden age in

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<sup>58</sup> My thinking in this paragraph owes a great deal to Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> See Robert Darnton, “The Kiss of Lamourette,” in idem, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, 3-20).

which natural law prevailed and the state could wither away. But this vision was no less “anti-political” than the Rousseauian one, and the same ideals of harmony and unanimity dominated.<sup>60</sup>

Charisma comes into this story because, in practice, the French found that it was impossible to restore this harmony in an impersonal manner, around the abstract figure of “the people” or “the nation.” They longed for a person of flesh and blood who would not simply represent, but in a somewhat mystical sense incarnate, the nation. Robespierre, as I wrote, therefore became a figure of tragic irony. Despite having warned more insistently and more eloquently than any other revolutionary against a “personal” politics in which a single individual might stand above all others, and despite his strenuous efforts to pose as nothing but the transparent, modest vessel of the popular will, he found the role of charismatic savior projected onto him. At public festivals, crowds were shouting “Vive Robespierre” along with “Vive la République” (100). His enemies later seized upon this unwanted popularity to tar him as a malevolently ambitious Cromwell in his turn, and to heap upon him all the responsibility for what would become known as the Terror. But their own fumbling attempts to temper political divisions failed as well. Ultimately, the story ended with the rise to power of a very different figure—Bonaparte—who managed to combine a desire for anti-political harmony and for the incarnation of the country in a person of flesh and blood with the Revolution’s democratic impulses. He managed to pose, quite successfully for a time, simultaneously as the figure who stood above the people as a lawgiver, and as the people’s representative. It is a role that many subsequent figures in French (and not just French) history have tried to fill as well, right down to Charles de Gaulle and his successors in the Fifth Republic presidency. Of course, de Gaulle (*pace* Patrick Gueniffey) was no Bonaparte.<sup>61</sup> He recognized the impossibility of eliminating from modern France a sphere of free, liberal, messy and (to him) distasteful political contestation. He sought rather, in his constitution for the Fifth Republic, to create a dual system: a parliament that would serve as the central political arena, and a presidency that would exist at a distance, above the political fray, as a source of unity that would check the nation’s most divisive, destructive political tendencies.

This sort of dual system itself had precedents in the Age of Revolution. George Washington, at the start of his presidency, saw himself in very similar terms to de Gaulle, as above and removed from the political fray. It was with horror that he found himself dragged down into that fray repeatedly during his two terms in office, treated not as a majestic symbol of unity but as the mere head of a political party (de Gaulle had the same dispiriting experience). Simón Bolívar envisaged his role in very similar terms and felt similar frustration at being dragged back down (in his view) into the arena of partisan contestation. Unlike Washington, Bolívar ultimately responded by trying to stage what amounted to a coup d’état and to seize dictatorial power. “America is ungovernable for us,” he lamented.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, the history of modern representative democracy suggests that this form of government can only survive in a stable form by reducing unifying, nation-incarnating, anti-political figures to mere figureheads like the constitutional monarchs of contemporary Western Europe. But the lure of a charismatic anti-politics remains powerful. It grows all the more powerful when the realm of contestatory politics comes to appear hopelessly corrupt and dysfunctional. But even in “ordinary” times, the appeal of charismatic heroes who claim to rise above the pettiness and corruption of political life, who draw followers directly to them in a quasi-erotic manner, and who seem, in a way, touched by the divine, will always have an important place in the sort of representative regimes that first arose in the decades around 1800.

**David A. Bell** is Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor in the Department of History at Princeton University. After studying at Harvard and the *École Normale Supérieure*, he completed his Ph.D. at Princeton in 1991 under the direction of Robert Darnton. Before returning to Princeton in 2010 he taught at Yale and Johns Hopkins (where he also served as Dean of

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<sup>60</sup> Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Patrice Gueniffey, *Napoléon et de Gaulle: Deux héros français* (Paris: Perrin, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Simón Bolívar to Juan José Flores, November 9, 1830, in Simón Bolívar, *Doctrina del Libertador*, ed. Manuel Pérez Vila (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976), 323, quoted in *Men on Horseback*, 208.

Faculty). A specialist in the history of eighteenth-century France and the revolutionary Atlantic, he has published seven books, most recently *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020). He writes regularly for *The New York Review of Books*, *The London Review of Books*, and *The Nation*.