



## **Fire in the Minds of Men**

*James H. Billington*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Fire in the Minds of Men

*James H. Billington*

## **Fire in the Minds of Men** James H. Billington

This book traces the origins of a faith--perhaps the faith of the century. Modern revolutionaries are believers, no less committed and intense than were Christians or Muslims of an earlier era. What is new is the belief that a perfect secular order will emerge from forcible overthrow of traditional authority. This inherently implausible idea energized Europe in the nineteenth century, and became the most pronounced ideological export of the West to the rest of the world in the twentieth century. Billington is interested in revolutionaries--the innovative creators of a new tradition. His historical frame extends from the waning of the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century to the beginnings of the Russian Revolution in the early twentieth century.

The theater was Europe of the industrial era; the main stage was the journalistic offices within great cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, and St. Petersburg. Billington claims with considerable evidence that revolutionary ideologies were shaped as much by the occultism and proto-romanticism of Germany as the critical rationalism of the French Enlightenment. The conversion of social theory to political practice was essentially the work of three Russian revolutions: in 1905, March 1917, and November 1917.

Events in the outer rim of the European world brought discussions about revolution out of the school rooms and press rooms of Paris and Berlin into the halls of power.

Despite his hard realism about the adverse practical consequences of revolutionary dogma, Billington appreciates the identity of its best sponsors, people who preached social justice transcending traditional national, ethnic, and gender boundaries. When this book originally appeared The New Republic hailed it as "remarkable, learned and lively," while The New Yorker noted that Billington "pays great attention to the lives and emotions of individuals and this makes his book absorbing." It is an invaluable work of history and contribution to our understanding of political life.

## **Fire in the Minds of Men Details**

Date : Published January 1st 1980 by Basic Books

ISBN : 9780765804716

Author : James H. Billington

Format : Paperback 677 pages

Genre : History, Politics, Philosophy, Nonfiction, World History, Religion, War, Terrorism

 [Download Fire in the Minds of Men ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Fire in the Minds of Men ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Fire in the Minds of Men James H. Billington**



# From Reader Review *Fire in the Minds of Men* for online ebook

## **S Kasm says**

Incredible read on the passions that foment revolutionary movements...a great historical narrative.

---

## **Anna Bautista says**

This book is one of a rare sort: published in the modern era it nonetheless looks with a relatively honest eye at the revolutionary movements that reshaped Europe, American and finally the world in the past several centuries. Most remarkable because it was written not by a Catholic or a 'conspiracy theorist', but by a secular-left member of the Establishment Atlanticists, James H. Billington (former chief librarian to the Library of Congress).

Billington establishes, with elaborate detail, insightful analysis and endless footnotes, that the modern state and its ideological foundations were in fact birthed by secret societies with anti-Clerical/anti-Catholic religious agendas and anti-monarchical, revolutionary political agendas. The movements which took power in the 18th and especially the 19th century, and which birthed the totalitarian movements (Atlantic liberalism included) of the 20th century were deeply linked together, and in contrast to their public propaganda the 'national revolution', the 'social revolution' and 'liberalism' are more Siamese triplets than nemeses.

He also shows that the political journalism associated with these movement drew its members, its funding and its ideology from these same Masonic-style movements, and one may assume that these interconnections persist to this day.

---

## **Carol says**

A great intellectual history - the stuff I studies in college.

---

## **Pat Rolston says**

I can't add much to existing reviews that point out the magnificent research and brilliant observations by the author. No doubt that the number of names and writing style challenge the reader, but like so many good things the joy is in the journey and effort to make it to the end. I did struggle at times with the scope and in the end I know the satisfaction as a result of the knowledge gained is the ultimate testimony to the greatness of this book.

---

## **Brent says**

I borrowed this book from the library and I'm going to have to buy a copy for myself. It's hard to believe how

much knowledge the author has on the topic of the origins of revolutionary faith. It will take me another reading or two with peripheral research to fully absorb the material. A seminal work!

---

### **Allyson says**

Great book but a tough read. Whew.

---

### **Greg says**

A great understanding of the Russian Revolution.

---

### **Yogy TheBear says**

Very interesting book . And for the non professional hystorian ,ideologist and philoshopist , but who is not ignorant and is curious it is very reveling about the hystory of the 19th century leading to the 20th century. Imeaditly from the first chapters , the french revolution , your beliefs from school and TV about the french revolution are confronted with man and ideas that are just far fetch , utiopian and pre-comunist . And you wonder ... why did this revolution turned out so bad actualy , but the american one turned out so good.... This question is dealt with further on in the book . But stil !!!

Yes there was abuse , poverty , inequality and opresive monarhs and nobels ..... But why did they wanted to change everithing in society !? They fought for utopian goals in order to overcome real problems !!!

---

### **Szplug says**

I have approached this several times now, and apparently I have been silenced by *reviewer's block*: I cannot summon the words to say anything meaningful about this utterly brilliant, exhausting, scholarly, well-written, divergently focussed, overwhelming, first-class work on the development of *Revolutionary Faith* during the period from the French Revolution to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October of 1917. All I can do is recommend it, without reserve, to anybody remotely interested in this topic. Most of the internet reviews seem to focus upon the fact that Billington uncovers the *occult* origins of the revolutionary tradition, the secret societies in which it gestated and grew, the Masonic and *Illuminist* legacies and borrowings, the obsession with hierarchy and conspiracy, organizational circles and triangles, tiered cell structures and revelational geomancy—this is true, but accounts for a minute portion of this magisterial effort, and leads me to wonder if the majority of those reviewers read much beyond the first three chapters.

What one actually encounters along with the occult aspects comprises a detailed and thoughtful historical analysis of the revolutionary impulse, including the birth and competition of the *nationalist* versus the *socialist* strains; the role played by journalists, poets, musicians, and intellectuals; the subtle interplay between the extremes of the Right and the Left and how they co-opted, interdependent upon, and interborrowed each other's ideologies and tactics; the religious, gnostic, mythological and eschatological elements that abounded in early revolutionary tradition and which continued to exert an influence as that tradition cohered, developed and matured; the equal importance of the positivistic, scientific, and

philosophical strains in the revolutionary edifice as provided by the likes of Saint-Simon, Comte, and Hegel; the pivotal parts played by a variegated cast of actors besides that of primary and well-known figures such as Robespierre, Maréchal, Buonarroti, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Marx, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Lenin; the sovereignty amongst revolutionary dogma of the necessity for a *simplification* of a complex and confusing bourgeois order, an action which called for violence and the overturning of established systems in order to be realized; the actual development of the working class as set against its mythical identity as the *proletariat*; the tenacious and fervent opposition engendered within apostates when they have migrated fully to the opposing side; the curious separations and conflicted histories of the rubrical three under which the French Revolution flowered—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*—amidst a terrain of warfare, revolution, republican liberalism, monarchical reaction, and industrial gigantism; the transference of the center of revolutionary thought and innovation from Paris and France eastwards to Germany and, most importantly, Russia; the morphing of a romantic and utopian revolutionary vision—whose paramount early practitioners were Italians and Poles—into one of an ideological and mechanical structure—exemplified by the Central and Eastern European branches—as well as the evolution of the use of violence from heroic gesture to applied theory; the tracing of the revolutionary faith as exported to the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and—most broadly—North America, including early American Masonic and Catholic influences, the *nationalist* flavors of radical thought in the United States, the innovations of ethnic immigrants—primarily the Irish and Poles—the labour wars of the late nineteenth century, and the progressive drive that picked up speed heading into the First World War; acute penetration of the mindset of the revolutionary intellectual as an alienated and disputatious educated elite commonly ignorant of the actuality of life for the working class and the latter's signal preference for practical economic and political solutions as opposed to the universal and abstract utopian ideologies of the *intelligentsia*; the catalyst property of having a sizable population of highly—perhaps overly—educated young men without the requisite employment suitable for their intellectual aptitudes in the flowering and development of a revolutionary current within modern states; a tracing of the divergent paths taken by the *political* socialists as against the *radical* socialists, along with their competition with anarchism and syndicalism, and the elements of the latter that—in its utter contempt for bourgeois values and centralizing parliamentary process—blended with a newly awoken nationalist revolutionary passion into postwar fascism; the pertinent and powerful role played by women radicals throughout the era placed under Billington's microscope, with special attention paid to Rosa Luxemburg and her leadership of a firmly anti-war and anti-authoritarian communism, her opposition to Lenin, her reluctant support of postwar revolution in Germany, and how her execution in 1919 affected the potentiality of anti-Bolshevik communism in Central Europe; pointed and thoughtful analogies of various nineteenth century revolutionary periods with movements and events in the modern twentieth; and much more.

Of a similar vein to the modern historical output of such as Burleigh—and a perfect companion to Kolakowski and Wohl and even our own unheralded Canuck sparkplug, Graham—Billington shines in a class of his own. This compendium of thoughtful analysis begins with a fascinating exploration of the complicity of the house of Orléans in gestating the revolutionary spirit in France—offering the sprawling, café-strewn garden grounds of the *Palais-Royale* as a meeting place, and fermenting ground, for the restlessly percolating intellects alive to the progression of a liberating and equalizing spirit through the western half of the European continent—and just moves forward boldly and brilliantly tailing those headwinds gusting potently into the nineteenth century. With a tiny font and some one hundred and fifty pages of endnotes, this thoroughly researched and deeply learned tome makes for a slow and demanding textual journey; but I consider every hour of my life that was consumed in reading this to be sixty minutes well spent.

---