

Murder surges to the fore

The left increasingly uses, lauds killing to justify ends

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During a hot summer in 1793, at the height of revolutionary fervor in France, one of the most radical revolutionaries, Jean-Paul Marat, called on the revolutionary government to execute no fewer than 250,000 of his fellow citizens.

This, he declared, was required to protect the revolution from reactionaries and to preserve its ideological purity. The radical left applauded his suggestion.

A short time later, a young woman, Charlotte Corday, knocked at Marat's door and asked to be admitted so she could add a few more names to his list of potential polluters of his revolutionary ideal.

When she reached Marat, who was soaking in a curative bath, she plunged a knife into his chest, declaring that she was killing a monster.

Within days, Corday had been publicly beheaded for her crime. Some months later, Marat's remains were interred in the Pantheon, the monument dedicated to honor France's greatest heroes. Corday was vilified, and Marat was lionized.

A year and a half later, Marat's remains were unceremoniously removed from the Pantheon on the grounds that he had been a bloodthirsty criminal. Over time, Charlotte Corday would become a kind of French folk hero, a woman willing to sacrifice her life to prevent widespread bloodshed.

These events suggest that history is not an arc that bends in any particular direction. Rather, it is a roller-coaster ride that often leaves us without a sense of orientation.

Still, an important lesson emerges from the actions and fates of Marat and Corday. The changing tides of approbation and disrepute should make us appreciate the need for perspective as we make our judgments and before we seek to impose our views on others.

This is fully applicable to our contemporary situation. Today's vigorous struggles between left and right echo some of the turbulence that buffeted France more than two centuries ago.

Our contemporary extremists seem obsessed with a Marat-esque ideological purity that calls for expunging those perceived as enemies. The Democratic Party, as it lurches ever leftward, can soon be expected to begin purging from its ranks those who do not fall into line with progressive ideology.

Those on the far right can be expected to demand expulsion of non-adherents to their own ideology from the ranks of the Republican Party as it moves further right.

We know only too well that the radical French revolutionaries were hardly the last to call for the elimination of perceived opponents. The Soviet communists and the Nazi storm troopers also saw fit to purge their enemies in huge numbers, and they did so without compunction.

Today, the echoes of this kind of intolerance and self-righteousness are increasingly heard within our political parties.

Sadly, murder — the method used by Charlotte Corday to impose her sense of justice — is also seemingly surging to the fore. The killings of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson and Turning Point USA co-founder Charlie Kirk, along with the several attempts on the life of President Trump, together with the adulation heaped on the perpetrators, serve as stark reminders of the willingness of some in our own society to use violence as a tool for change.

A growing sense of moral certainty and moral superiority becomes a platform from which almost any act, including murder, can be justified.

Demonizing those holding contrary or merely different political positions makes it possible to envision exclusion and murder, and even mass murder. The result is hardly ever what the killers expected.

By calling for terror and violence against those with whom he had ideological disagreements, Marat prompted his own demise. In turn, Corday, incited to murder Marat by reason of his extremist views, further fueled the terror that turned the French

Revolution from a movement for beneficial change into a bloodbath, ultimately resulting in a reaction in the form of a military dictatorship led by Napoleon Bonaparte.

People in our society who believe that denigrating and even killing those with whom they disagree is a means of making their views prevail should study history more carefully.

The ultimate outcome of extremist actions is hardly ever the one sought by the extremists, regardless of their political views. Frequently, it is the exact opposite.

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