



# The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror

*John Merriman*

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The fascinating story of a long-forgotten "war on terror" that has much in common with our own

On a February evening in 1894, a young radical intellectual named Émile Henry drank two beers at an upscale Parisian restaurant, then left behind a bomb as a parting gift. This incident, which rocked the French capital, lies at the heart of *The Dynamite Club*, a mesmerizing account of Henry and his cohorts and the war they waged against the bourgeoisie—setting off bombs in public places, killing the president of France, and eventually assassinating President McKinley in 1901.

Paris in the belle époque was a place of leisure, elegance, and power. Newly electrified, the city's wide boulevards were lined with posh department stores and outdoor cafés. But prosperity was limited to a few. Most lived in dire poverty, and workers and intellectuals found common cause in a political philosophy—anarchism—that embraced the overthrow of the state by any means necessary.

Yet in targeting civilians to achieve their ends, the dynamite bombers charted a new course. Seeking martyrdom, believing fervently in their goal, and provoking a massive government reaction that only increased their ranks, these "evildoers" became, in effect, the first terrorists in modern history.

Surprising and provocative, *The Dynamite Club* is a brilliantly researched account that illuminates a period of dramatic social and political change—and subtly asks us to reflect upon our own.

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