

# Geschiedenis van de Moderne en Hedendaagse Tijd

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Leerboek:

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*Europa en de veranderende wereld na de  
Koude Oorlog*

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Eerste les:

De Franse Revolutie

# Thema's

1. Belang FR
2. Oorzaken
1. Verloop
2. Frankrijk v. Europa
3. Napoleon

# 1. Belang Franse Revolutie

- Eind 18de eeuw – WO I: breed veranderingsproces

- Drie ijkpunten:

Standenmaatschappij → mij. gelijke burgers

Soevereine vorsten → soevereine naties

Privilege systeem → staatsbureaucratieën

- FR = startpunt
  
- Franse expansie (1793-1814): export  
revolutionaire principes
  
- FR = voorbeeld
  - Burgerlijke revoluties 1830, 1848
  - Amerikaans continent 1<sup>e</sup> helft 18<sup>e</sup> eeuw
  - Russische revolutie in 1917
  - Communistische China



- Blijvende discussie grote principes
  - Volksoevereiniteit
  - 'Identiteit' en 'natie'
  - Scheiding Kerk en Staat
  - Scheiding der machten
  - Rechtsstaat
  - Sociale rechtvaardigheid
  - Politiek radicalisme
- FR = radicale en snelle verandering

## 2. Oorzaken Franse Revolutie

1. Standenmaatschappij = versleten
2. Sterkere Franse identiteit
3. Politieke en financiële crisis
4. Bijeenroeping Staten-Generaal

# Standenmaatschappij (ca. 25 miljoen)

Clerus: 100.000 – 10% land

Adel: 400.000 – 20% land

- geen belastingen
- feodale privileges

Derde Stand: rest bevolking

- rijke burgers - 20% land
  - boeren - 40% land
  - (land)arbeiders, armen ...
- Betalen belastingen, geen privileges

# Frans grondbezit

- 10% clerus
- 20% adel
- 20% rijke burgerij
- 40% boeren
- 10% kroondomeinen, gemene en woeste gronden

# De standen van het Ancien Régime



# Franse identiteit

Centrale staat en koningschap

→ ° nationale ruimte

Identiteit = mobiliserende kracht

Jacobijnen: ondeelbaarheid republiek

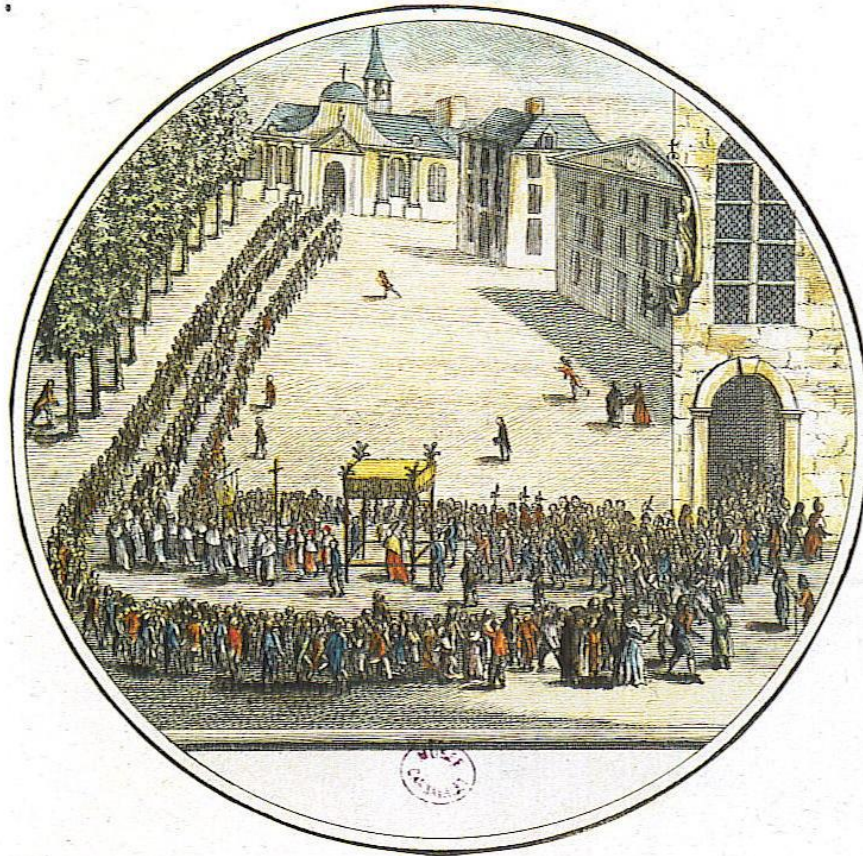
↔ Boerenbevolking (later)

Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1976)

# Bankroet

- Onefficiënt regerings- en economisch systeem
- Clerus & adel =
  - vrijgesteld belastingen
  - gekant tegen hervormingen
- Oorlogvoering → ↑ schulden

# Staten-Generaal (mei 1789)





# 3. Verloop

- Staten-Generaal (mei 1789)
- Assemblée Nationale (juni 1789)
- Assemblée Constituante (1789-1791)
- Assemblée Législative (1791-1792)
- Convention Nationale (1792-1795)
- Directoire (1795-1799)
- Consulaat (1799-1804)

# Staten-Generaal

- Discussie over organisatie
  - Apart of niet apart ?
- Derde stand wou niet apart vergaderen
- Derde stand wou gelijk stemrecht
- Parlement van Parijs besliste anders
  - Opstand derde stand

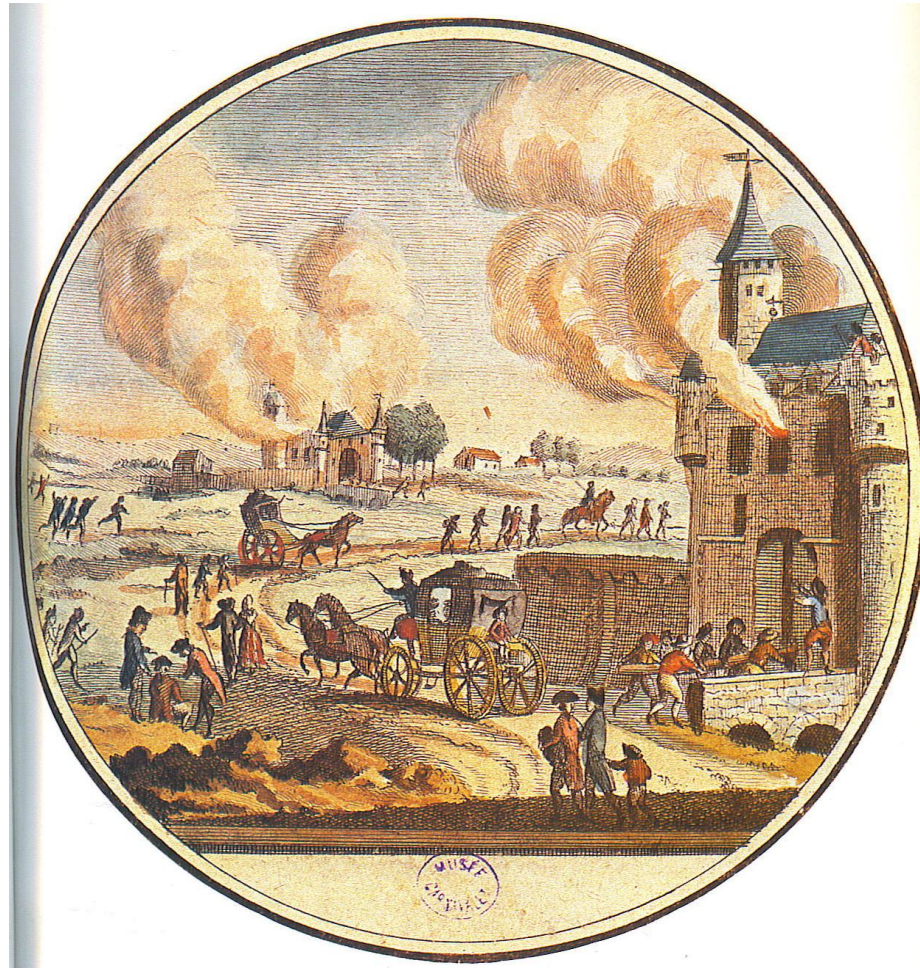
# Eed op de kaatsbaan (20 juni 1789)





La Salle du Jeu de Paume in Versailles met het schilderij 'Le Serment du Jeu de Paume' van David

# 'La Grande Peur' juli 1789

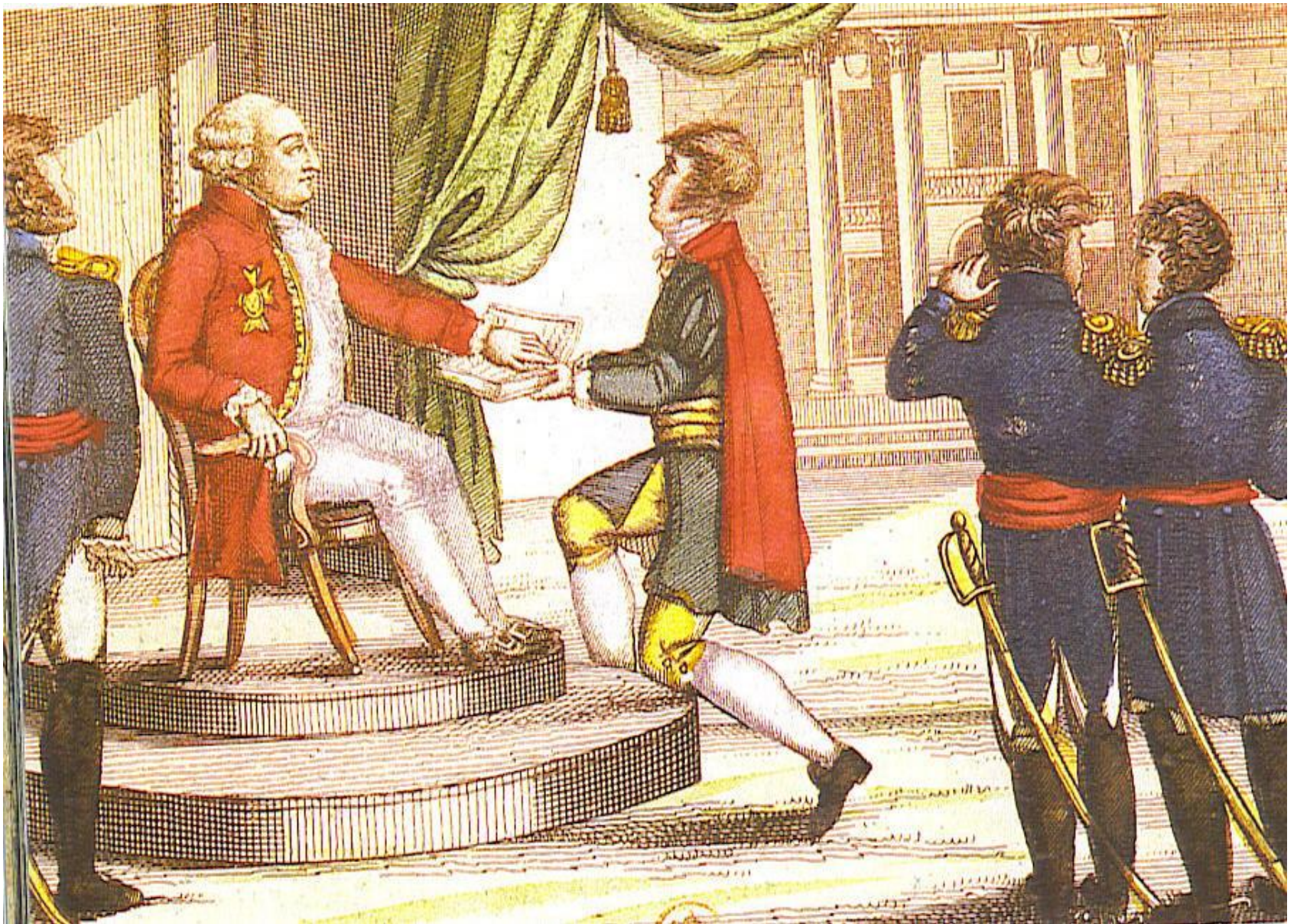


# La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen



# De Assemblée Constituante (= Assemblée Nationale)

- Grondwet 1791
- Politiek zwaartepunt: Assemblée Législative (1-kamerstelsel)
- Zwakke uitvoerende macht
  - Koning → Parijs ; geen vetorecht
  - Constitutionele monarchie





# De Assemblée Constituante

- Vertegenwoordigende democratie
  - ‘actieve’ versus ‘passieve’ burgers
- Scheiding der machten: onafhankelijke rechterlijke macht
- Afschaffing privileges
  - rechtstreekse belastingen
- Administratieve uniformisering

# De Assemblée Constituante

- Kerk verloor privileges en goederen  
→ bezoldiging priesters
- Oprichting Garde Nationale
- Afschaffing gilden (Wet Le Chapelier 1791)
- Verbod vakbonden en stakingen  
→ Nadeel armere bevolking

# De Assemblée Constituante

- Systeem ten gunste van rijke burgers
- Ontgoocheling bij boeren en armen
- Gezworen tegenstanders
  - Koning en adel
  - Katholieke Kerk

# Interne en externe problemen

- Interne conflicten – politiek terreur
  - Jacobijnen: oudste fractie
  - Girondijnen: conservatieve fractie
  - Montagnards: radicale fractie
- Internationale conflicten
  - Europese coalitie  $\leftrightarrow$  Frankrijk
  - Oorlog: 1792 - 1815

- Franse expansie
- Heilig Rooms Rijk
  - Pruisen
  - Habsburgs Rijk
- Rusland
  - Expansie nr westen
- Ottomaans Rijk
  - Verval na 1774
- Groot-Brittannië
  - Geografische ligging
  - Koloniaal imperium



# Europa eind 18<sup>e</sup> eeuw

- GB: constitutionele monarchie na 1648
- Rusland en Habsburgs Rijk:
  - Verlicht despotisme
  - Kleine middenklasse
  - Boerenbevolking – lijfeigenschap
  - Hervorming én behoud monarchie
  - Multinationale staten
  - Onderdrukking volkssoevereniteit

## 4. Frankrijk v. de rest

- FR = bron van internationale onrust
- Sympathie en afschuw
- Afgezwakt Frankrijk
  - Pruisen, Habsburgs Rijk → Westen
- Verspreiding revolutie in Europa
- Franse oorlogsverklaring aan Habsburgs Rijk
  - Pruisen steunt HR; GB blijft afzijdig

# Assemblée Législative in oorlog

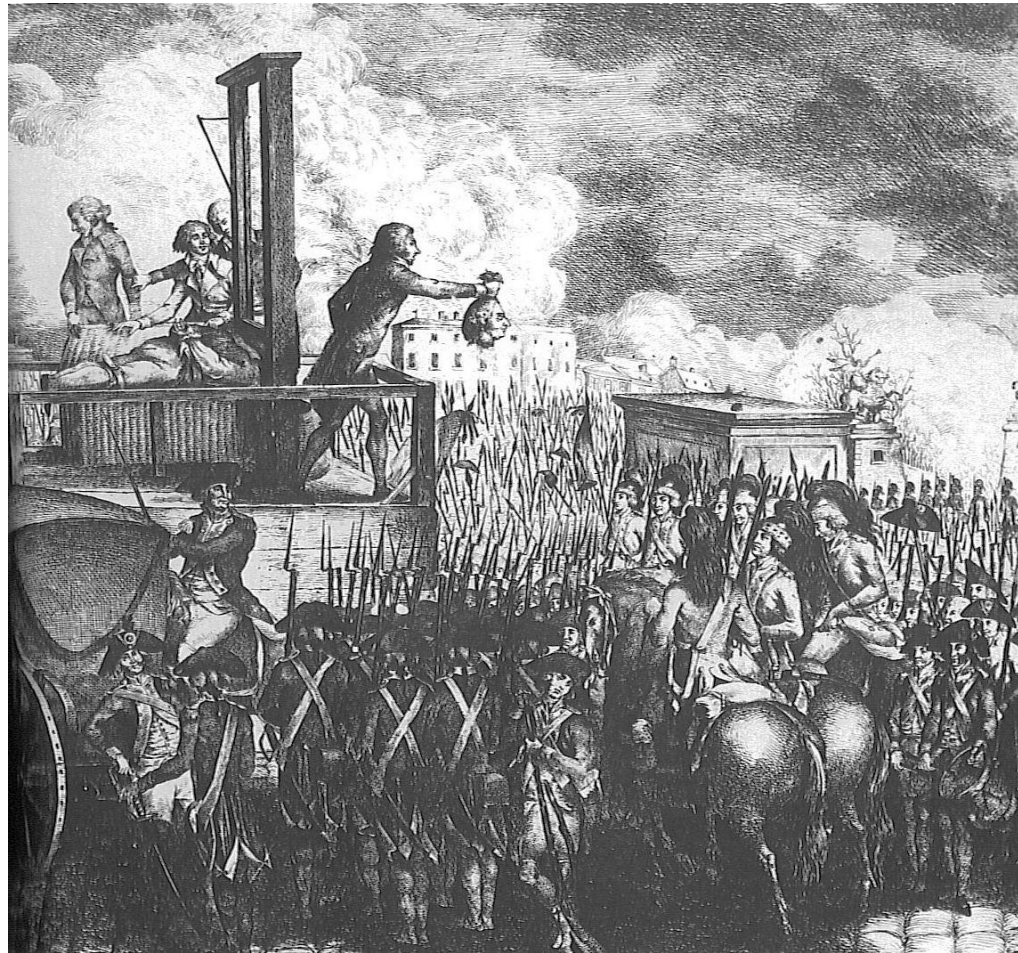
- Onverwachte uitkomst  
Franse massa's  $\leftrightarrow$  revolutionaire leiders  
Dreiging buitenlandse invallers
  - 1792 volksopstand in Parijs
  - Gevangenneming Lodewijk XVI
  - Afschaffing Assemblée Législative
- ° Nationale Conventie



# De 'Convention Nationale'

- Odracht: nieuw grondwet
- Franse Republiek, '*une et indivisible*' (augustus 1792)
  - ↑ Nationalisme
- Steun Frans volk – '*sansculottes*'
- Militair succes
- Radicalere fractie: Montagnards

# Executie van Lodewijk XVI (21 januari 1793)



# Frankrijk v. de rest

- Internationale coalitie tegen Frankrijk  
Pruisen, HR, Spanje, GB
- Franse nederlaag (maart 1793)
- Maximilien Robespierre (1793-1794)
  - Nieuw grondwet
  - Sociale hervormingen
  - Afschaffing slavernij

# Comité du Salut Public

- Dictatoriale macht
  - wetgevende én uitvoerende macht
- Levée en masse - dienstplichtig volksleger
- Brede steun bevolking
- Terreur – guillotine
  - 40.000 executies
- Chaos
- Derde grondwet (1795)

# Het 'Directoire'

- 1789 principes
- Checks & balances:
  - Wetgevende macht: tweekamersysteem
  - Getrapte verkiezingen:
    - actieve burgers → kiesmannen
  - Uitvoerende macht: 5 'Directeurs'
  - Scheiding der machten
- Macht bij gegoede klasse
- Tegenstand: radicalen en royalisten

# 5. Napoleon

- Het Directoire
- Inschakeling leger
  - Napoleon Bonaparte
- 1796-1797: Overwinning in Italië
  - Verdrag van Campo Fornio: vrede HR
- 1799: Brumaire staatsgreep en instelling Consulaat

# Napoleon Italiaanse campagne 1796-1797



# Het 'Consulaat'

- Nieuwe (vierde) grondwet 1799
- Grondige hervormingen
  - Referendum
- Verlicht despotisme
- Schijndemocratie
  - Geen volkssoevereiniteit
- Napoleon = eind Franse Revolutie



# Het 'Consulaat'

- Centraal gezag
- Bekwaam bestuursapparaat
  - Opleiding
- Administratieve hervormingen
  - *Code civil* (1805)
  - *'Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen'*
- Sterke punten AR + FR

# Betekenis Napoleon en het 'Consulaat'

- Stabiliteit
- Intern
  - Concordaat met de Paus (1801)
  - Amnestie voor tegenstanders en dissidenten
  - Sanering staatsfinanciën
  - Economische hervormingen
- Extern
  - Vrede Habsburgse Rijk en Groot-Brittannië

# Consulaat → keizerrijk

- 1802 volksraadpleging  
→ Napoleon consul
- 1804 volksraadpleging  
→ Napoleon keizer
- Geen terugkeer AR

# Keizer Napoleon



# Kroningsplechtingheid (2 december 1804)



Staten-Generaal (mei 1789)

Eed op de kaatsbaan (juni 1789)

Assemblée Constituante (1789-91) – Assemblée  
Législative (1791-92)

- Constitutionele monarchie
- Politiek zwaartepunt: wetgevende macht
- Scheiding der machten

- Convention Nationale (1792-1795)
  - Dictatuur – Comité du Salut Public
  - Geen scheiding der machten
  - Terreur
- Directoire (1795-1799)
  - Scheiding der machten
  - Politiek zwaartepunt: 5 'directeurs' + bezittende klasse
- Consulaat (1799-1804)

## Chapter 9

# THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



41. Social and Cultural Backgrounds
42. The Revolution and the Reorganization of France
43. The Revolution and Europe: The War and the "Second" Revolution, 1792
44. The Emergency Republic, 1792–1795: The Terror
45. The Constitutional Republic: The Directory, 1795–1799
46. The Authoritarian Republic: The Consulate, 1799–1804

*In 1789 France* fell into revolution, and the world has never since been the same. The French Revolution was by far the most momentous upheaval of the whole revolutionary age. It replaced the "old regime" with "modern society," and at its extreme phase it became very radical, so much so that later revolutionary movements often looked back to it as a predecessor. The ideas of the French Revolution, spreading far beyond France itself, decisively influenced the subsequent development of political parties and ideological conflicts throughout much of Europe and elsewhere; indeed, the Revolution still provokes highly charged debates about the characteristics or consequences of social reform, political radicalism, and revolutionary violence.

At the time, in the age of the Democratic or Atlantic Revolution from the 1760s to the 1860s, the role of France was decisive. Even the Americans, without French military intervention, would hardly have won such a clear settlement from England or been so free to set up the new states and new constitutions that have just been described. And while revolutionary disturbances in Ireland and Poland, or among the Dutch, Italians, and others, were by no means caused by the French example, it was the presence or absence of French aid that usually determined whatever successes they achieved. The Revolution in France also contributed to other revolutions in the wider Atlantic world. The great slave uprising in the French colony at Saint-Domingue, which began in 1791 and led eventually to the creation of the independent Republic of Haiti, was inspired in part by reports of the recently declared "rights of man" in France; and later French military interventions in Spain and

Chapter emblem: Detail from *The Tennis Court Oath* by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). (RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)



Portugal set off, somewhat indirectly, the revolutionary movements that swept across Latin America after 1808. Few revolutions, in short, have ever generated such far-reaching historical upheavals.

The French Revolution, unlike the Russian or Chinese revolutions of the twentieth century, occurred in what was in many ways the most advanced country of the day. France was the center of the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. French science then led the world. French books were read everywhere, and the newspapers and political journals that became very numerous after 1789 carried a message that hardly needed translation. French was an international language for educated and aristocratic people in most European countries. France was also, potentially before 1789 and actually after 1793, the most powerful country in Europe. It may have been the wealthiest, though not per capita. With a population of 24,000,000 the French were the most numerous of all European peoples under a single government. Even Russia was hardly more populous until after the partitions of Poland. The Germans were divided, the subjects of the Habsburgs were of diverse nationalities, and the English and Scots together numbered at this time only 10,000,000. Paris, though smaller than London, was over twice as large as Vienna or Amsterdam. French exports to Europe were larger than those of Great Britain. It is said that half the goldpieces circulating in Europe were French. Europeans in the eighteenth century were in the habit of taking ideas from France; they were therefore, depending on their social position, the more excited, encouraged, alarmed, or horrified when revolution broke out in that country.

## 41. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

### *The Old Regime: The Three Estates*

Some remarks have already been made about the social and political institutions of the Old Regime, as the prerevolutionary society came to be called after it disappeared, and about the failure of enlightened despotism in France to alter these institutions in any fundamental way. The essential fact about the Old Regime was that it was still legally aristocratic and in some ways feudal. Everyone belonged legally to an “estate” or “order” of society. The First Estate was the clergy, the Second Estate was the nobility, and the Third Estate included everyone else—from the wealthiest business and professional classes to the poorest peasants and city workers. These categories were important in that the individual’s legal rights and personal prestige depended on the category to which he or she belonged. Politically, the estates were obsolescent; not since 1614 had they assembled in an Estates General of the whole kingdom, though in some provinces they had continued to meet as provincial bodies. Socially, they were obsolescent also, for the threefold division no longer corresponded to the real distribution of interest, influence, property, or productive activity among the French people.

#### *The church*

Conditions in the church and the position of the clergy have sometimes been much exaggerated as a cause of the French Revolution. The church in France levied a tithe on all agricultural products, but so did the church in England; the French bishops often played a part in government affairs, but so did bishops in England through the House of Lords. The French bishoprics of 1789 were no wealthier than those of the Church of England were found to be when investigated 40 years later. In actual numbers, in the secular atmosphere of the Age of Enlightenment, the clergy, especially the monastic orders, had greatly declined, so that by 1789 there were



This image of French peasants shows how farmers prepared their fields and planted seeds during the 1760s, when the picture was published in a French book. The agrarian system shaped property rights and social hierarchies as well as the supply of food in French cities—all of which created resentments or fears that contributed to the coming of the French Revolution.

(Art Media/Heritage/The Image Works)

probably not more than 100,000 Catholic clergy of all types in the entire population. But if the importance of the clergy has in the past been overemphasized, still it must be said that the church was deeply involved in the prevailing social system. For one thing, church bodies—bishoprics, abbeys, convents, schools, and other religious foundations—owned between 5 and 10 percent of the land of the country, which meant that collectively the church was the greatest of all landowners. Moreover, the income from church properties, like all income, was divided very unequally, and much of it found its way into the hands of the aristocratic occupants of the higher ecclesiastical offices.

The noble order, which in 1789 comprised about 400,000 persons, including women and children, had enjoyed a great resurgence since the death of Louis XIV in 1715. Distinguished government service, higher church offices, army, parlements, and most other public and semipublic honors were almost monopolized by the nobility in the time of Louis XVI, who, it will be recalled, had mounted the throne in 1774 and had abandoned recent attempts to break the nobility’s power in the traditional parlements. Repeatedly, through parlements, Provincial Estates, or the assembly of the clergy dominated by the noble bishops, the aristocracy had blocked royal plans for taxation and shown a desire to control the policies of state. At the same time the bourgeoisie, or upper crust of the Third Estate, had never been so influential. Although the “bourgeoisie” was an amorphous social category (indeed, some historians argue that “bourgeois” refers to a class that never had a real social identity), the number of French

#### *The nobility*

merchants, lawyers, and other professional groups clearly grew over the course of the eighteenth century. The fivefold increase of French foreign trade between 1713 and 1789 suggests the growth of the merchant class and of the legal and governmental classes associated with it. As members of the bourgeoisie became stronger, more widely read, and more self-confident, they resented the distinctions and privileges that enhanced the status of nobles. Some of these were financial: nobles were exempt on principle from the most important direct tax, the *taille*, whereas bourgeois persons obtained exemption with more effort; but so many bourgeois enjoyed tax privileges that purely monetary self-interest was not primary in their psychology. The bourgeois resented the nobleman for his sense of superiority and his arrogance. What had formerly been customary respect was now felt as humiliation. Many otherwise successful and wealthy people felt that they were being shut out from office and honors and that the nobles were seeking more power in government as a class. The Revolution thus began in the social and political collision of two moving objects, a rising aristocracy and a rising bourgeoisie.

#### The Third Estate

The common people, below the commercial and professional families in the Third Estate, were probably as well off as in most countries. But they were not well off compared with the upper classes. Wage earners had by no means shared in the eighteenth-century wave of business prosperity.

Between the 1730s and the 1780s the prices of consumers' goods rose about 65 percent, whereas wages rose only 22 percent. Persons dependent on wages were therefore badly pinched, but they were less numerous than today, for in the country there were many small farmers and in the towns many small craftsmen who made a living not by wages but by selling the product of their own labor at market prices. Yet in both town and country there was a significant wage-earning population, which was to play a decisive part in the Revolution.

#### The Agrarian System of the Old Regime

Over four-fifths of the people were rural. The agrarian system had developed so that there was no serfdom in France as it was known in eastern Europe. The peasant owed no labor to the lord—except a few token services in some cases. The peasants worked for themselves, either on their own land or on rented land; or they worked as sharecroppers; or they hired themselves out to the lord or to another peasant.

#### Survival of feudal privileges

The manor, however, still retained certain surviving features of the feudal age. The noble owner of a manor enjoyed "hunting rights," or the privilege of keeping game preserves and of hunting on his own and the peasants' land. He usually had a monopoly over the village mill, bakeshop, or wine press, for the use of which he collected fees called *banalités*. He possessed certain vestigial powers of jurisdiction in the manorial court and certain local police powers, from which fees and fines were collected. These seigneurial privileges were of course the survivals of a day when the local manor had been a unit of government and the noble had performed the functions of government, an age that had long passed with the development of the centralized modern state.

There was another special feature to the property system of the Old Regime. Every owner of a manor (there were some bourgeois and even wealthy peasants who had purchased manors) possessed what was called a right of "eminent property" with respect to all land located in the manorial village. This meant that lesser landowners within the manor "owned" their land in that they could freely buy, sell, lease, and inherit or bequeath it; but they owed to the owner of the manor, in recognition of his "eminent property" rights,

certain rents, payable annually, as well as transfer fees that were payable whenever the land changed owners by sale or death. Subject to these "eminent property" rights, landownership was fairly widespread. Peasants directly owned about two-fifths of the soil of the country; bourgeois, a little under a fifth. The nobility owned perhaps a little over a fifth and the church owned somewhat under a tenth, the remainder being crown lands, wastelands, or commons. Finally, all property rights were subject also to certain "collective" rights by which villagers might cut firewood, run their pigs in the commons, or pasture cattle on land belonging to other owners after the crops were in, which they could easily do because there were usually no fences or enclosures.

All this may seem rather complex, but it is important to realize that property is a changing institution. Even today, in industrialized countries, a high proportion of all property is in land, including natural resources in and below the soil. In the eighteenth century property meant land even more than it does today. The bourgeois class, whose wealth was so largely in ships, merchandise, or commercial paper, also invested heavily in land, and in 1789 they owned almost as much land in France as the nobility and more than the church. The Revolution was to revolutionize the law of property by freeing the private ownership of land from all the traditional and indirect encumbrances described—manorial fees, "eminent property" rights, communal village agricultural practices, and church tithes. It also was to abolish other older forms of property, such as property in public office or in master-ships in the guilds, which had worked to the advantage mainly of closed and privileged groups. In final effect the Revolution defined and established the institutions of private property in the modern sense and therefore brought the greatest economic benefits to the landowning peasants and the bourgeoisie.

The peasants not only owned two-fifths of the soil but also worked almost all of it on their own initiative and risk. In effect, the land owned by the nobility, the church, the bourgeoisie, and the crown was divided up and leased to peasants in small parcels. France was thus already mainly a country of small farmers. There was no "big agriculture" as in England, eastern Europe, or the plantations of America. The manorial lord performed no economic function. He lived (there were of course exceptions) not by managing an estate and selling his own crops and cattle but by receiving innumerable dues and fees. During the eighteenth century, in connection with the general aristocratic resurgence, there took place a phenomenon often called the "feudal reaction." Manorial lords, faced with rising living costs and acquiring higher living standards because of the general material progress, collected their dues more rigorously or revived old ones that had fallen into disuse. Leases and sharecropping arrangements also became less favorable to the peasants. The farmers, like the wage earners, were under a steadily increasing pressure. At the same time the peasants resented the "feudal dues" more than ever because they often regarded themselves as the real owners of the land and viewed the lord as a gentleman of the neighborhood who for no reason enjoyed a special income and a status different from their own. Resentments arose because many of the fees and obligations in the property system no longer bore any relation to real economic usefulness or activity.

#### The "feudal reaction"

The political unity of France, achieved over the centuries by the monarchy, was likewise a fundamental prerequisite, and even a cause, of the Revolution. Whatever social conditions might have existed, they could give rise to nationwide public opinion, nationwide agitation, nationwide policies, and nationwide legislation only in a country already politically unified as a nation. These conditions were lacking in central Europe. In France a centralized French state existed. Reformers did not have to create it but only capture and

remodel it. The French in the eighteenth century already had the sense of membership in a political entity called France. The Revolution saw a tremendous stirring or expansion of this sense of membership and of fraternity, turning it into a passion for citizenship, civic rights, voting powers, and the use of the state and its sovereignty for the public advantage; but at the very outbreak of the Revolution people could salute each other as *citoyen* or *citoyenne* and shout *vive la nation!*

### *Political Culture and Public Opinion after 1770*

The social and economic resentments that existed among ambitious people in French cities and among peasants in the French countryside could finally explode in a revolutionary upheaval because eighteenth-century writers had created a culture that encouraged political and social criticism. Educated persons in the Third Estate could draw on Enlightenment conceptions of reason, natural rights, and historical progress to complain about the irrationality of ancient privileges or the injustice of noble prerogatives. Enlightenment thought provided a language in which people could now describe their dissatisfactions with the obstacles that stymied professional or economic ambitions.

*The Revolution and the Enlightenment*

It has been argued that the famous works of the French philosophes led directly to the revolutionary events of 1789; it was the “fault” of Voltaire, critics explained; it was the “fault” of Rousseau. Many who supported the Revolution also made such claims for its intellectual origins, so that the history of the French Revolution has always been linked in complex ways with the legacy of the Enlightenment. Yet most historians now argue that the connections between the philosophes and the Revolution were by no means as direct as people once imagined. The philosophes themselves favored enlightened social reforms, but they were not revolutionaries and, except perhaps for Rousseau, they rarely promoted the political rights of the lower classes. Their most important publications, including the famous *Encyclopédie*, often attracted more readers among the nobility than among the middle classes. Political theory was far less popular than novels or social satires; there was an enormous audience for Rousseau’s *Julie, or the New Héloïse*, for example, but few persons read the *Social Contract*. The notion that great Enlightenment writers caused the French Revolution is therefore an inadequate explanation for what happened (much as claims that bourgeois economic interests caused the Revolution are also inadequate). It is nevertheless true that the Enlightenment contributed widely to new forms of criticism, public debate, and “public opinion,” most of which challenged the traditional authority of the French king and nobles.

The last two decades of the Old Regime were filled with intense political controversy as the monarchy sought unsuccessfully to suppress the traditional French parlements, as successive ministries sought to raise new revenues, as French journals reported on the new American state constitutions, and as pamphleteers increasingly attacked the officials and courtiers at Versailles. The critical spirit that had developed in salons, coffeehouses, and literary arguments spread rapidly into a developing public sphere of political debate. The new political pamphlets were scarcely concerned with the subtle nuances of political theory; in fact, many consisted of little more than scandalous rumors of sexual misconduct or financial corruption in the affairs of the royal family and government ministries. Stories of corruption in high places stripped away the once sacred image of the monarchy, the church, and the social hierarchy. At the same time, the reading public developed an interest in scandalous legal cases that

*Critical spirit*

pitted members of the aristocracy against aggrieved persons of the Third Estate or that revealed immorality and decadence among ancient noble families. Lawyers could publish their legal briefs without securing the approval of government censors, and, using this freedom, they bolstered their legal arguments with appeals to popular sentiment or natural rights. The injustice of inherited privilege thus became a recurring theme in the scandalous stories of social and personal disputes that French lawyers carried from French courtrooms to the tribunal of public opinion.

By 1789, in France, educated persons in all social classes were coming to believe what Voltaire had said after the famous Calas Affair in the 1760s: “Opinion governs the world.” Campaigns to influence public opinion became a powerful political force in French society during the last decades of the Old Regime, and most such campaigns appealed for public support in the name of reason, rights, or justice. In these ways, the critical thought of Enlightenment culture entered into bitter political conflicts that led finally and unexpectedly to the Revolution.

## 42. THE REVOLUTION AND THE REORGANIZATION OF FRANCE

### *The Financial Crisis*

The Revolution was precipitated by a financial collapse of the government. What overburdened the government was by no means the costly magnificence of the court of Versailles. Only 5 percent of public expenditures in 1788 was devoted to the upkeep of the entire royal establishment. What overburdened all governments was war costs, both current upkeep of armies and navies and the burden of public debt, which in all countries was due almost totally to the high costs of past wars. In 1788 the French government devoted about a quarter of its annual expenditure to maintenance of the armed forces and about half to the payment of its debts. British expenditures showed almost the same distribution. The French debt stood at almost 4 billion livres. It had been greatly swollen by the War of American Independence. Yet it was only half as great as the national debt of Great Britain, and less than a fifth as heavy per capita. It was less than the debt of the Dutch Republic. It was apparently no greater than the debt left by Louis XIV three-quarters of a century before. At that time the debt had been lightened by repudiation. No responsible French official in the 1780s even considered repudiation, a sure sign of the late eighteenth-century expansion and public influence of the well-to-do classes, who were the main government creditors.

Yet the debt could not be carried, for the simple reason that revenues fell short of necessary expenditures. This in turn was not due to national poverty but to the tax exemptions and tax evasions of privileged elements and to complications in the fiscal system, or lack of system, by which much of what taxpayers paid never came into the hands of the Treasury. We have already described how the most important tax, the *taille*, was generally paid only by the peasants—the nobles being exempt by virtue of their class privilege, and officeholders and other wealthy persons obtaining exemption in various ways. The church too insisted that its property was not taxable by the state; and its periodic “free gift” to the king, though substantial, was less than might have been obtained from direct taxation of the church’s land. Thus, although the country itself was prosperous, the government treasury was empty. The social classes that enjoyed most of the wealth of the country did not pay taxes corresponding to their income—and, even worse, they resisted taxation as a sign of inferior status.

*Problems of taxation*

A long series of responsible persons—Louis XIV himself, John Law, Maupeou, Turgot—had seen the need for taxing the privileged classes. Jacques Necker, a Swiss banker who became director of the finances in 1777, made moves in the same direction and, like his predecessors, was dismissed. His successor, Calonne, as the crisis mounted, came to even more revolutionary conclusions. In 1786 he produced a program in which enlightened despotism was tempered by a modest resort to representative institutions. He proposed, in place of the *taille*, a general tax to fall on all landowners without exemption, a lightening of indirect taxes and abolition of internal tariffs to stimulate economic production, and a confiscation of some properties of the church. He also sought to give the propertied elements a greater interest in the government by proposing the establishment of provincial assemblies in which all landowners should be represented without regard to estate or order.

Calonne's program, if carried out, might have solved the fiscal problem and averted the Revolution. But it struck not only at noble privileges in taxation but also at the three-fold hierarchic organization of society. Knowing from experience that the Parlement of Paris would never accept it, Calonne in 1787 convened an "assembly of notables," hoping to win its endorsement of his ideas. The notables insisted on concessions in return, for they wished to share in control of the government. A deadlock followed; the king dismissed Calonne

Resistance of the nobles

and appointed as his successor Loménie de Brienne, the exceedingly worldly-wise archbishop of Toulouse. Brienne tried to push the same program through the Parlement of Paris. The Parlement rejected it, declaring that only the three estates of the realm, assembled in an Estates General, had authority to consent to new taxes. Brienne and Louis XVI at first refused, believing that the Estates General, if convened, would be dominated by the nobility. Like Maupeou and Louis XV, Brienne and Louis XVI tried to break the parlements, replacing them with a modernized judicial system in which the law courts should have no influence over financial policies. This led to a veritable revolt of the nobles. All the parlements and Provincial Estates resisted; army officers refused to serve; the intendants hesitated to act; and noblemen began to organize political clubs and committees of correspondence. With his government brought to a standstill, and unable to borrow money or collect taxes, Louis XVI on July 5, 1788, promised to call the Estates General for the following May. The various classes were invited to elect representatives and also to draw up lists of their grievances.

### From Estates General to National Assembly

Because no Estates General had met in over a century and a half, the king asked for proposals on how such an assembly should be organized under modern conditions. This led to an outburst of public discussion, which soon expanded far beyond all previous campaigns to influence public opinion. Hundreds of political pamphlets appeared, many of them demanding a change in the old system by which the three estates sat in separate chambers, each chamber voting as a unit. This voting system was widely criticized because it meant, in practice, that the chamber of the Third Estate was always outnumbered. But in September 1788 the Parlement of Paris, restored to its functions, ruled that the Estates General should meet and vote as in 1614, in three separate orders.

The aims of the nobility

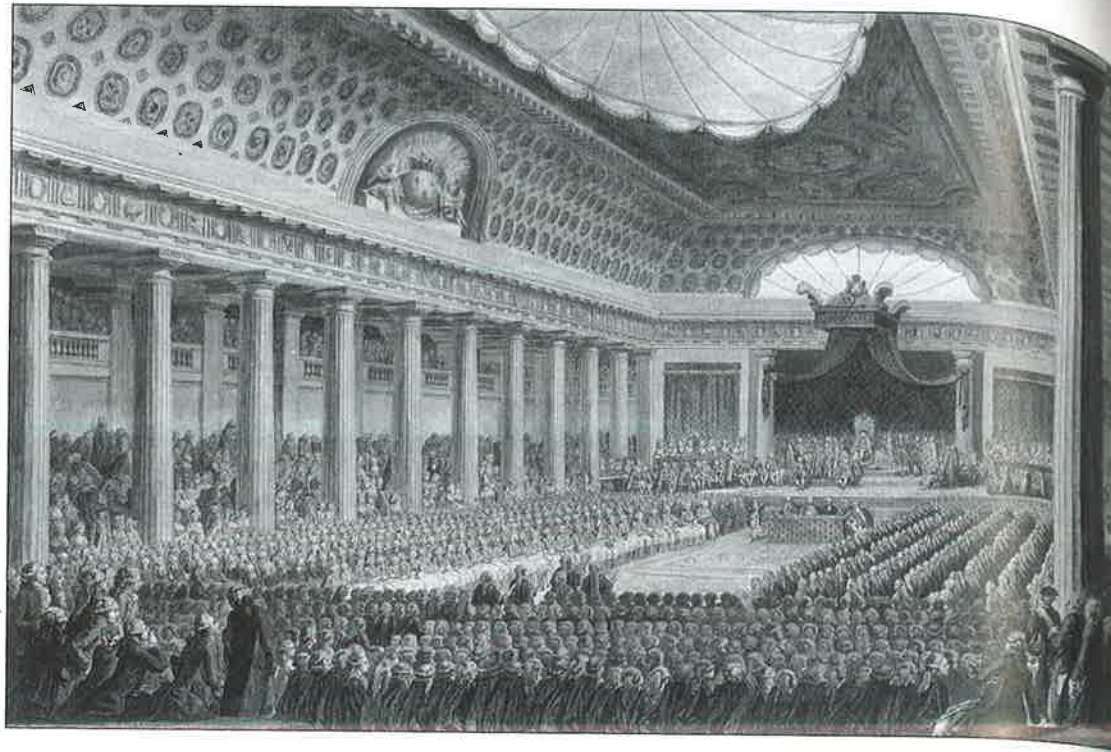
The nobility, through the Parlement, thus revealed its aim. It had forced the summoning of the Estates General to protect and enhance its own political influence, and in this way the French nobility initiated the Revolution. The Revolution began as another victory in the aristocratic resurgence against the earlier absolutism of the king. The nobles actually had a liberal program: they

demanding constitutional government, guarantees of personal liberty for all, freedom of speech and press, freedom from arbitrary arrest and confinement. Many now were even prepared to give up special privileges in taxation; this might have worked itself out in time. But in return they hoped to become the preponderant political element in the state. It was their idea not merely to have the Estates General meet in 1789 but for France to be henceforth governed through the Estates General, a supreme body in three chambers—one for nobles, one for a clergy in which the higher officers were also nobles, and one for the Third Estate.

This was precisely what the Third Estate wished to avoid. Lawyers, bankers, business owners, government creditors, shopkeepers, artisans, working people, and peasants had no desire to be governed by lords temporal and spiritual. Their hopes for a new, more equitable political and legal system formed by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, stirred by the revolution in America, rose to the utmost excitement when "good king Louis" called the Estates General. The ruling of the Parlement of Paris in September 1788 thus came to them as a slap in the face—an unprovoked class insult. The whole Third Estate turned on the nobility with detestation and distrust. The Abbé Sieyès in January 1789 published his famous pamphlet *What Is the Third Estate?*, declaring that the nobility was a useless caste that could be abolished without loss, that the Third Estate was the one necessary element of society, that it was identical with the nation, and that the people of the Third Estate thus embodied (or should embody) the sovereignty of the French nation. Through Sieyès the ideas of Rousseau's *Social Contract* entered the thought of the Revolution. At the same time, even before the Estates General actually met, and not from the books of philosophes so much as from actual events and conditions, nobles and commoners viewed each other with fear and suspicion. The Third Estate, which had at first supported the nobles against the "despotism" of the king's ministers, now ascribed to the former the worst possible motives. Bourgeois critics vehemently rejected the political program and ambitions of the nobility. Class antagonism poisoned the Revolution at the outset and threw many articulate members of the Third Estate into a radical and destructive mood.

The Third Estate reacts

The Estates General met as planned in May 1789 at Versailles. The Third Estate, most of whose representatives were lawyers, would not accept the division of the orders into three separate chambers. It insisted that deputies of all three orders should sit as a single house and vote as individuals; this procedure would give an advantage to the Third Estate, because the king had granted it as many deputies as the other two orders combined. For six weeks a deadlock was maintained. On June 13 a few priests, leaving the chamber of the First Estate, came over and sat with the Third. They were greeted with jubilation. On June 17 the Third Estate declared itself the "National Assembly." Louis XVI, under pressure from the nobles, closed the hall in which it met. The members found a neighboring indoor tennis court and there, milling about in a babel of confusion and apprehension, swore and signed the Oath of the Tennis Court on June 20, 1789, affirming that wherever they gathered, they were the actually existing National Assembly and that they would not disband until they had drafted a constitution. This was a revolutionary step, for it assumed virtually sovereign power for a body that had no legal authority. The king ordered members of the three estates to sit in their separate houses, though he now presented a reforming program of his own, too late to win the confidence of the disaffected and in any case continuing the organization of French society in legal classes. The self-entitled National Assembly refused to back down. The king faltered, failed to enforce his commands promptly, and allowed the Assembly to remain in being. In the following days, at the end of June, he summoned about 18,000 soldiers to Versailles.



Convoked for the first time in 175 years, the Estates General met in a large hall at Versailles in May 1789. This picture shows Louis XVI seated on his throne, with deputies of the clergy seated on his right, those of the nobility on his left, and those of the Third Estate facing him at the other end of the hall.

(akg-images/Newscom)

What had happened was that the king of France, in the dispute raging between nobles and commoners, chose the nobles. It was traditional in France for the king to oppose and reduce the autonomous powers of the nobility. For centuries the French monarchy had drawn strength from urban or bourgeois social groups. All through the eighteenth century the royal ministers had carried on the struggle against the privileged interests. Only a year before, Louis XVI had been almost at war with his rebellious aristocracy. In 1789 he failed to assert himself. He lost control over the Estates General, exerted no leadership, offered no program until it was too late, and provided no symbol behind which parties could rally. He

#### Failure of royal leadership

failed to make use of the profound loyalty to himself felt by the bourgeoisie and common people, who yearned for nothing so much as a king who would stand up for them, as in days of yore, against an aristocracy of birth and status. He tried instead, at first, to compromise and postpone a crisis; then he found himself in the position of having issued orders that the Third Estate boldly defied; and in this complex political predicament he yielded to his wife Marie Antoinette, to his brothers, and to the court nobles, all of whom told him that his dignity and authority were outraged and undermined. At the end of June Louis XVI undoubtedly intended to dissolve the Estates General by military force. But what the Third Estate most feared was a future in which the king would support the nobles as they sought to control the

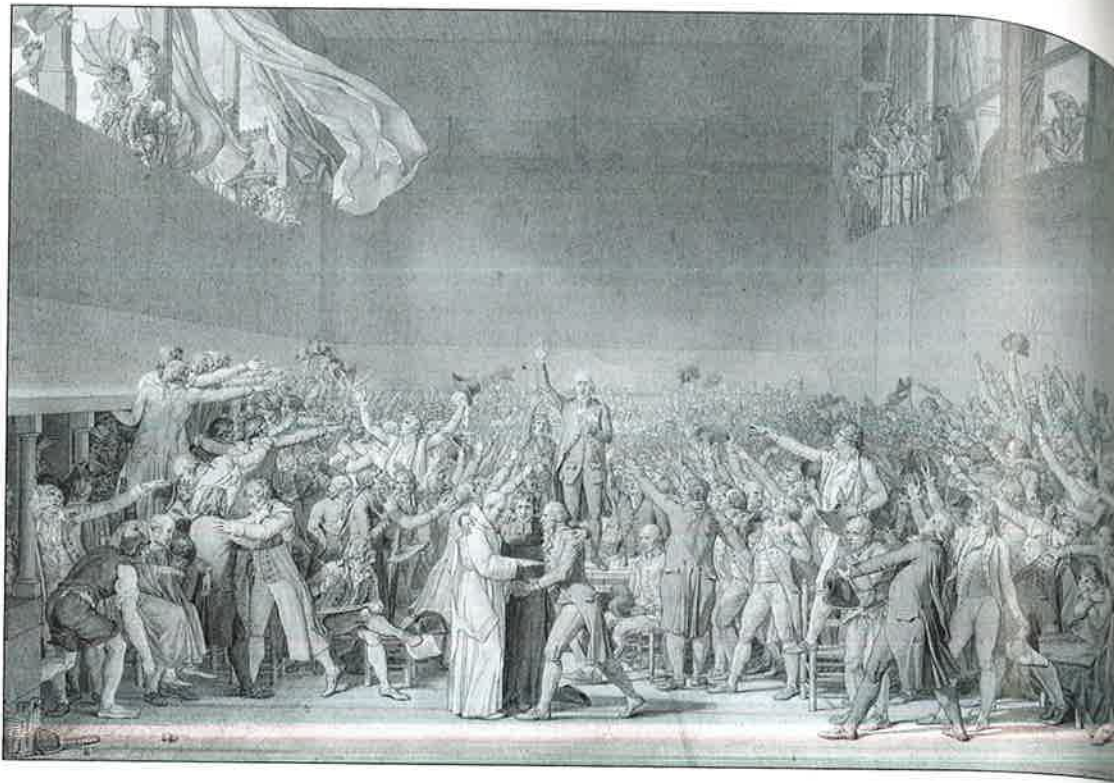
government of the country. There was now no going back; the revolt of the Third Estate had allied Louis XVI with the nobles, and the Third Estate now feared the nobles more than ever, believing with good reason that they now had the king in their hands.

#### The Lower Classes in Action

The country meanwhile was falling into social dissolution, as the lower classes, below the bourgeoisie, moved into open rebellion against their economic and social conditions. For them too the convocation of the Estates General had seemed to herald a new era. The grievances of ages, and those that existed equally in other countries than France, rose to the surface. Short-run conditions were bad. The harvest of 1788 had been poor; the price of bread, by July 1789, was higher than at any time since the death of Louis XIV. It was also a time of widening economic depression; the rapid growth of trade since the American war had suddenly halted, so that wages fell and unemployment spread while scarcity drove food prices up. The government, paralyzed at the center, could not take its customary action to relieve the problem of food shortages. The masses were restless everywhere. Labor trouble broke out; in April a riot of workers devastated a wallpaper factory in Paris. In the rural districts there was much disorder. Peasants declared that they would pay no more manorial dues and were refusing to pay taxes. In the best of times the countryside was troubled by vagrants, beggars, and smugglers who flourished along the many tariff frontiers. Now the business depression reduced the income of honest peasants who engaged in weaving or other domestic industries in their homes; unemployment and indigence spread in the country; people were uprooted; and the result was to raise the number of vagrants to terrifying proportions. It was believed, because nothing was too bad to believe of the aristocrats (though it was not true), that they were secretly recruiting these "brigands" for their own purposes to intimidate the Third Estate. The economic and social crises thus became acutely political.

People in the towns feared that they would be swamped by beggars and desperadoes. This was true even of Paris, the largest city in Europe except London. The Parisians were also alarmed by the concentration of troops about Versailles. They began to arm in self-defense. All classes of the Third Estate took part. Crowds roamed the city, looking for weapons in arsenals and public buildings. On July 14 they came to the Bastille, a stronghold built in the Middle Ages to overawe the city, like the Tower of London in England. It was used as a place of detention for persons with enough influence to escape the common jails but was otherwise in normal times considered harmless; in fact there were few prisoners in the fortress, and there had been talk, some years before, of tearing it down to make room for a public park. Now, in the general turbulence, the governor had placed cannons in the embrasures. The crowd requested him to remove his cannons and to furnish them with arms. He refused. Through a series of misunderstandings, reinforced by the vehemence of a few firebrands, the crowd turned into a mob, which violently assaulted the fortress and which, when helped by a few trained soldiers and artillery pieces, persuaded the governor to surrender. The mob, enraged by the death of 98 of its members, streamed in and murdered 6 soldiers of the garrison in cold blood. The governor was also murdered while under escort to the Town Hall. A few other officials met the same fate. Their heads were cut off, stuck on the ends of pikes, and paraded about the city. While all this happened, the regular army units on the outskirts of Paris did not stir; their reliability was open to question and the authorities were in any case unaccustomed to firing on the people.

#### The storming of the Bastille



**THE TENNIS COURT OATH**  
by Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748–1825)

This famous picture portrays the momentous decision by members of the Third Estate to continue meeting as the National Assembly of France until they had written a new constitution. The deputies swore their oath at an indoor tennis court because the king had closed the hall in which they had been holding their sessions.

(RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)

The capture of the Bastille, though not so intended, had the effect of saving the Assembly at Versailles. The king, not knowing what to do, accepted the new situation in Paris. He recognized a citizens' committee, which had formed there, as the new municipal government. He sent away the troops that he had summoned and commanded the recalcitrants among nobles and clergy to join in the National Assembly. In Paris and other cities a new national guard was established to keep order. The Assembly appointed the Marquis de Lafayette, "the hero of two worlds," to command the guard in Paris. For insignia Lafayette combined the colors of the city of Paris, red and blue, with the white of the house of Bourbon. The French tricolor, emblem of the Revolution and the new sovereign nation, thus originated in this symbolic fusion of the old and new.

In the rural districts matters went from bad to worse. Vague insecurity rose to the proportions of a general panic in the Great Fear of 1789, which spread over the country late in July in the wake of travelers, postal couriers, and others. The cry was relayed from point to point that "the brigands were coming." Peasants, armed to protect their homes and crops and gathered together and working upon each other's feelings, turned their attention to the manor houses, burning them in some cases and in others simply destroying the manorial archives in which fees and dues

*The Great Fear of*  
1789

were recorded. The Great Fear became part of a general agrarian insurrection, in which peasants, far from being motivated by wild alarms, knew perfectly well what they were doing. They intended to destroy the manorial regime by force.

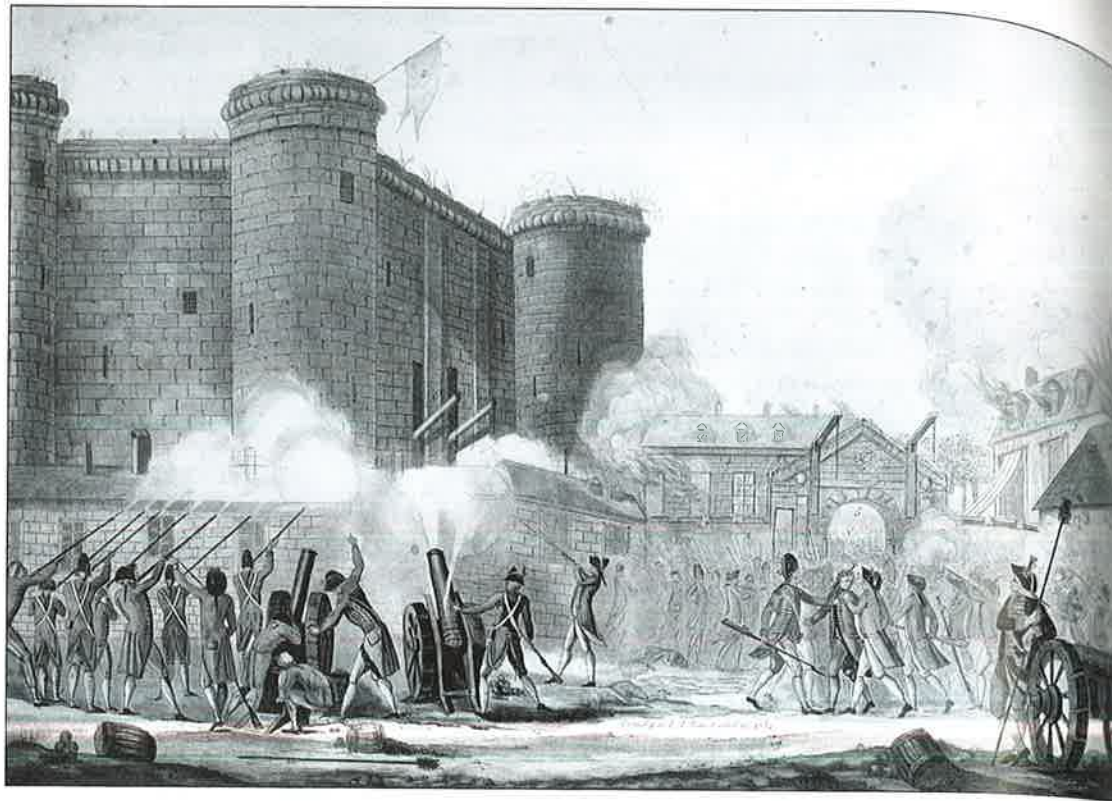
### *The Initial Reforms of the National Assembly*

The Assembly at Versailles could restore social order only by meeting the demands of the peasants, but to wipe out all manorial payments would deprive the landed aristocracy of much of its income; and many bourgeois also owned manors. There was therefore much perplexity. A small group of deputies prepared a surprise move in the Assembly, choosing an evening session from which many would be absent. Hence came the "night of August 4." A few liberal noblemen, by prearrangement, arose and surrendered their hunting rights, their *banalités*, their rights in manorial courts, and feudal and seigniorial privileges generally. What was left of serfdom and all personal servitude was declared ended. Tithes were abolished. Other deputies repudiated the special privileges of their provinces. All personal tax privileges were given up. On the main matter, the dues arising from "eminent property" in the manors, a compromise was adopted. These dues were all abolished but compensation was to be paid by the peasants to the former owners. The compensation was in most cases never paid. Eventually, in 1793, in the radical phase of the Revolution, the provision for compensation was repealed. In the end French peasant landowners rid themselves of their manorial obligations without cost to themselves. This was in contrast to what later happened in most other countries, where peasants, when liberated from manorial obligations, either lost part of their land or were burdened with installment payments lasting many years.

In a decree summarizing the resolutions of August 4 the Assembly declared flatly that "feudalism is abolished." With legal privilege replaced by legal equality, it proceeded to map the principles of the new order. On August 26, 1789, it issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

The Declaration of 1789 consisted of 17 articles that affirmed the general principles of the new state, which were essentially the rule of law, the equality of individual citizenship, and the collective national sovereignty of the people. "Men are born and remain," declared Article I, "free and equal in rights." Man's natural rights were held to be "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." Freedom of thought and religion was guaranteed; no one might be arrested or punished except by process of law; all persons were declared eligible for any public office for which they met the requirements. Liberty was defined as the freedom to do anything not injurious to others, which in turn was to be determined only by law. Law must fall equally upon all persons. Law was the expression of the general will, to be made by all citizens or their representatives. The only sovereign was the nation itself, and all public officials and armed forces acted only in its name. Taxes might be raised only by common consent, all public servants were accountable for their conduct in office, and the powers of government were to be separated among different branches. Finally, the state might for public purposes, and under law, confiscate the property of private persons, but only with fair compensation. The Declaration, printed in thousands of leaflets, pamphlets, and books, read aloud in public places, or framed and hung on walls, became the catechism of the Revolution in France. When translated into other languages it soon carried the same message to all of Europe. Thomas Paine's book *The Rights of Man*, published in 1791 to defend the French Revolution, gave the phrase a powerful impact in English.

*The Declaration of*  
*the Rights of Man*  
*and Citizen*



The capture of the Bastille—the prison-fortress that became a symbol of Old Regime repression—marked the dramatic entry of the Parisian crowd into the rapidly evolving Revolution. Violence in the streets of Paris in July 1789 saved the National Assembly from the king's intention to dissolve it.

(Bibliothèque nationale de France)

The “rights of man” had become a motto or watchword for potentially revolutionary ideas well before 1789. The thinkers of the Enlightenment had used it, and during the American Revolution even Alexander Hamilton had spoken of “the sacred rights of man” with enthusiasm. “Man” in this sense was meant to apply abstractly to the rights of all people, regardless of nationality, race, or sex. In French as in English the word “man” was used to designate all human beings, and the Declaration of 1789 was not intended to refer to males alone. In German, for example, where a distinction is made between *Mensch* as a human being and *Mann* as an adult male, the “rights of man” was always translated as *Menschenrechte*. Similarly the word “citizen” in its general sense applied to women, as is shown by the frequency of the feminine *citoyenne* during the Revolution, in which a great many women were very active. But when it came to the exercise of specific legal rights the Revolutionaries went no farther than contemporary opinion. Thus they assigned the right to vote and hold office only to men, and in most matters of property, family law, and education it was the boys and men who benefited most. Very few persons at the time argued for full legal and political equality between the sexes.

The Rights of Woman

One of them, however, was Olympe de Gouges, a woman who had gained prominence as a writer for the theater and who in 1791 published



Although women gained some new rights during the French Revolution, they were denied the right to vote or to hold public office; and women's political clubs were eventually disbanded. Olympe de Gouges, who is portrayed here in a later engraving, challenged such exclusions in her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791) and other writings, thereby provoking strong opposition from revolutionary leaders. She was charged with sedition and put to death during the Terror in 1793.

(Kean Collection/Getty Images)

*The Rights of Woman*. Following the official Declaration in each of its 17 articles, she applied them to women explicitly in each case, and she asserted also, in addition, the right of women to divorce under certain conditions, to the control of property in marriage, and for equal access with men to higher education and to civilian careers and public employment. Mary Wollstonecraft in England published a similar *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. In France some of the secondary figures in the Revolution, and some of the teachers in boys' schools, thought that women should have greater opportunities at least in education. And there were in fact a few reforms that improved the social rights of women. The revolutionary government redefined marriage as a civil contract and legalized divorce in 1792, thereby enabling women to leave abusive or unhappy marriages (until divorce was banned again in 1816). Inheritance laws were also changed in ways that gave women the legal right to equal inheritance of their family's property.

But among the leaders of the Revolution, only Condorcet argued for legal equality of the sexes. Intent on political change, the revolutionaries thought that politics, government, law, and war were a masculine business, for which only boys and young men needed to be educated or prepared. The Revolution generally reduced or restricted the cultural and political influence that some women had exercised in the elite circles of Old Regime society. The new political order, as most revolutionaries defined it, was to develop through “manly” opposition to the “feminine” corruptions of the Old Regime court and social hierarchies. “Women are disposed . . . to an over-excitation which would be deadly in public affairs,” one revolutionary deputy argued in a typical justification for excluding women from government institutions. Such assumptions led to restrictions on the rights of women to petition or gather in political meetings; finally, in 1793, the revolutionary government closed all women's political clubs—even though many women had been among the Revolution's earliest and most active supporters.

Exclusion of women

Shortly after adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man the Revolutionary leadership fell into multiple factions. In September 1789 the Assembly began the actual planning of the new government. Some wanted a strong veto power for the king and a legislative body in two houses, as in England. Others, the “patriots,” wanted only a delaying veto for the king and a legislative body of one chamber. Here again, it was suspicion of the nobles that proved decisive. The “patriots” were afraid that an upper chamber would bring



**A WOMAN OF THE REVOLUTION**  
by Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748–1825)

David's portrait of a lower-class French woman in 1795 suggests the determination of the women who joined the revolutionary Parisian crowds and clubs during the French Revolution; and the painting affirms in a more general way the revolutionary challenge to traditional social and legal privileges.

(Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY)

back the nobility as a collective force, and they were afraid to make the king constitutionally strong by giving him a full veto, because they believed him to be in sympathy with the nobles. His brother, the Count of Artois, followed by many aristocrats, had already emigrated to foreign parts and, along with these other émigrés, was preparing to agitate against the Revolution with all the governments of Europe. The patriot party would concede nothing; the more conservative party could gain nothing. The debate was interrupted again, as in July, by insurrection and violence. On October 4, a crowd of market women and revolutionary militants, followed by the revolutionary Paris national guard, took the

road from Paris to Versailles. Besieging and invading the château, they forced Louis XVI and his family to take up residence in Paris, where he could be watched. The National Assembly also moved to Paris, where it too soon fell under the influence of radical elements in the city. The champions of a one-chamber legislative body and of a suspensive veto for the king won out.

The more conservative revolutionaries, if such they may be called, disillusioned at seeing constitutional questions settled by mobs, began to drop out of the Assembly. Men who on June 20 had bravely sworn the Oath of the Tennis Court now felt that the Revolution was falling into unworthy hands. Some even emigrated, forming a second wave of émigrés that would have nothing to do with the first. The counterrevolution gathered strength.

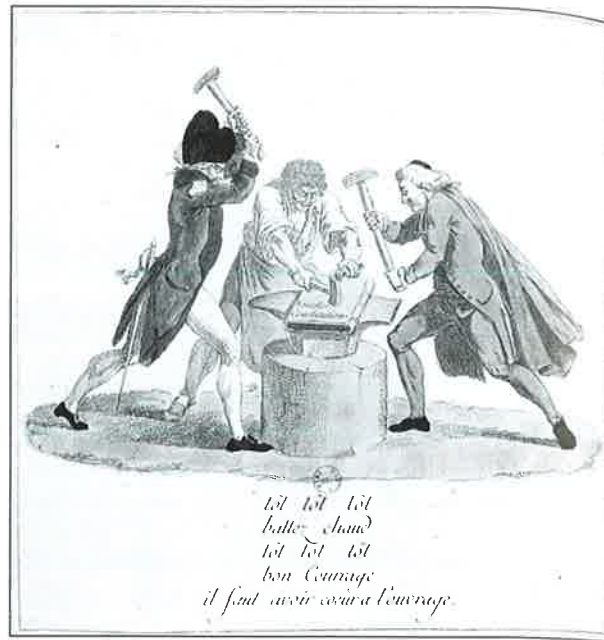
But those who wanted still to go forward, and they were many, began to organize in clubs. Most important of all was the Society of Friends of the Constitution, called the Jacobin club for short, since it met in an old Jacobin monastery in Paris. The dues were at first so high that only wealthier persons could belong; the dues were later lowered but never enough to include people of the poorest classes, who therefore formed clubs of their own. The most advanced members of the Assembly were Jacobins, who used the club as a caucus in which to discuss their policies and develop their plans. They remained a middle-class group even during the later and more radical phase of the Revolution, and numerous women participated in their meetings. Madame Rosalie Jullien, for example, who was as dedicated a revolutionary as her husband and son, attended a meeting of the Paris Jacobin club on August 5, 1792. Tell your friends in the provinces, she wrote to her husband, that these Jacobins are “the flower of the Paris bourgeoisie, to judge by the fancy jackets they wear. There were also two or three hundred women present, dressed as if for the theater, who made an impression by their proud attitude and forceful speech.”

*The Jacobins*

### *Constitutional Changes*

In the two years from October 1789 to September 1791 the National Assembly (or the Constituent Assembly, as it had come to be called because it was preparing a constitution) continued its work of simultaneously governing the country, devising a written constitution, and destroying in detail the institutions of the Old Regime. The Assembly soon discarded most of the political and legal institutions that had governed French affairs for centuries—the old monarchical ministries, the organization of government bureaus, the taxes and tax exemptions, the private ownership of government positions, the titles of nobility, the parlements, the hundreds of regional systems of law, the internal tariffs, the provinces, and the urban municipalities. Contemporaries such as Edmund Burke were appalled at the thoroughness with which the French seemed determined to eradicate their national institutions. Why, asked Burke, should the French fanatics cut to pieces the living body of Normandy or Provence? The truth is that the provinces, like everything else, formed part of the whole system of special privilege and unequal rights. All had to disappear if the hope of equal citizenship under national sovereignty was to be attained. In place of the provinces the Constituent Assembly divided France into 83 equal “departments.” In place of the old towns, with their quaint old magistrates, it introduced a uniform municipal organization, all towns henceforth having the same form of government, varying only according to size. All local officials, even prosecuting attorneys and tax collectors, were elected locally. Administratively the country was decentralized in reaction against the bureaucracy of the Old Regime. No one outside Paris now really acted for the central





The three men at an anvil are a noble, a cleric, and a commoner hammering out a new constitution together. At the beginning of the Revolution, most people expected the three estates to fraternize in the redefined French nation.

(Bibliothèque nationale de France)

government, and local communities enforced the national legislation, or declined to enforce it, as they chose. This proved ruinous when war came, and although the “departments” created by the Constituent Assembly still exist, it became common in France after the Revolution, as it was before, to keep local officials under strong control by ministers in Paris.

Under the constitution that was prepared, sometimes called the Constitution of 1791 because it went into effect at that date, the sovereign power of the nation was to be exercised by a unicameral elected assembly called the Legislative Assembly.

The king was given only a suspensive veto power by which legislation desired by the Assembly could be postponed. In general, the executive branch, that is, king and ministers, was kept weak, partly in reaction against “ministerial despotism,” partly from a well-founded distrust of Louis XVI.

In June 1791 Louis attempted to escape from the kingdom, join with émigré noblemen abroad, and seek help from foreign powers. He left behind him a written message in which he explicitly repudiated the Revolution. Arrested at Varennes in eastern France, he was brought back to Paris and forced to accept his status as a constitutional monarch. The hostile attitude of Louis XVI greatly disoriented the Revolution, for it made impossible the creation of a strong executive power and left the country to be ruled by a debating society, which under revolutionary conditions contained more than the usual number of hotheads.

Not all this machinery of state was democratic. As noted above, women did not receive the right to vote or hold public office; and in the granting of political rights to men the abstract principles of the great Declaration were seriously modified for practical reasons. Because most people were illiterate, it was thought that they could have no reasonable political views; and it was assumed that persons such as domestic servants or shop assistants would merely follow the political views of their employers. The Constituent Assembly therefore distinguished in the new constitution between “active” and “passive” citizens. Both had the same civil rights, but only active citizens had the right to vote. These active citizens chose “electors” on the basis of one elector for every hundred

The Constitution of  
1791

active citizens. The electors convened in the chief town of their new “department” and there chose deputies to the national legislature as well as certain local officials. Males over 25 years of age, and wealthy enough to pay a small direct tax, qualified as “active” citizens; well over half the adult male population could so qualify. Of these, men paying a somewhat higher tax qualified as “electors”; even so, almost half the adult males qualified for this role. In practice, what limited the number of available electors was that, to function as such, a man had to have enough education, interest, and leisure to attend an electoral assembly at a distance from home and remain in attendance for several days. In any case, only about 50,000 persons served as electors in 1790–1791 because a proportion of one for every hundred active citizens yielded that figure.

### Economic and Cultural Policies

Economic policies favored the middle rather than the lowest classes. The public debt had precipitated the Revolution, but the revolutionary leaders, even the most extreme Jacobins, never disowned the debt of the Old Regime. The reason is that the bourgeois class, on the whole, were the people to whom the money was owed. To secure the debt, and to pay current expenses of government, because tax collections had become very sporadic, the Constituent Assembly as early as November 1789 resorted to a device by no means new in Europe, though never before used on so extensive a scale. It confiscated all the property of the church. Against this property, it issued negotiable instruments called *assignats*, first regarded as bonds and issued only in large denominations, later regarded as currency and issued in small bills. Holders of *assignats* could use them, or any money, to buy parcels of the former church lands. None of the confiscated land was given away; all was in fact sold, because the interest of the government was fiscal rather than social. The peasants, even when they had the money, could not easily buy land because the lands were sold at distant auctions or in large undivided blocks. The peasants were disgruntled, though they did acquire a good deal of the former church lands through middlemen. Peasant landowners were likewise expected, until 1793, to pay compensation for many of their old manorial fees. And the landless peasants actively opposed some of the revolutionary changes when the government, with its modern ideas, encouraged the dividing up of the village commons and extinction of various collective village rights in the interest of individual private property.

The revolutionary leadership favored free economic individualism. It had had enough, under the Old Regime, of government regulation over the sale or quality of goods and of privileged companies and other economic monopolies. Reforming economic thought at the time in France and in Britain, where Adam Smith had published his epoch-making *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, held that organized special interests were bad for society and that all prices and wages should be determined by free arrangement between the individuals concerned. The more prominent leaders of the French Revolution believed firmly in this freedom from control. The Constituent Assembly thus abolished the guilds, which were mainly monopolistic organizations of small businessmen or master craftsmen, interested in keeping up prices for certain goods or services and averse to new machinery or new methods.

There was also in France what we would now call an organized labor movement. Because the masterships in the guilds were practically hereditary (as a form of property and privilege), the journeymen had formed their own associations, or trade unions, called *compagnonnages*, outside the guilds. Many trades were so organized—the carpenters, plasterers, paper workers, hatters, saddlers, cutlers, nail makers, carters, tanners, locksmiths,

Assignats

The revolutionary government used paper money to finance its policies. The notes were called *assignats* because they were assigned to, or secured by, real estate confiscated during the Revolution, mostly from the church. Inflation rose rapidly after 1794, so that even notes with denominations as high as 10,000 livres, as shown in this picture, became worthless. The assignats were therefore abolished, and a new, more stable French currency came into use in 1796.

(Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY)



and glassworkers. Some were organized nationally; some, only locally. All these journeymen's unions had been illegal under the Old Regime, but they had flourished nevertheless. They collected dues and maintained officers. They often dealt collectively with the guild masters or other employers, requiring the payment of a stipulated wage or change of working conditions. Sometimes they even imposed closed shops. Organized strikes were quite common. The labor troubles of 1789 continued on into the Revolution. Business fell off in the atmosphere of disorder. In 1791 there was another wave of strikes. The

Assembly, in the Le Chapelier law of that year, renewed the old prohibitions of the *compagnonnages*. The same law restated the abolition of the guilds and forbade the organization of special economic interests of any kind. All trades, it declared, were free for all to enter. All persons, without belonging

to any organization, had the right to work at any occupation or business they might choose. All wages were to be settled privately by the worker and his or her employer. This was not at all what the workers, at that time or any other, really wanted. Nevertheless the provisions of the Le Chapelier law remained a part of French law for three-quarters of a century. The embryonic trade unions continued to exist secretly, though with more difficulty than under the hit-and-miss law enforcement of the Old Regime.

Meanwhile, revolutionary activists set about transforming the symbols, rituals, dress, and holidays of Old Regime society. Seeking to break from the hierarchies and privileges of the past, they developed a new political culture that would be symbolized by a new tricolor flag, new forms of democratic language, new clothing, new festivals, and new public monuments. The art and imagery of the traditional monarchy and church rapidly disappeared from public life. Great festivals of national unity were organized, beginning with the famous

"Festival of the Federation," which brought together a vast crowd in Paris to mark the first anniversary of the assault on the Bastille (July 14, 1790), to celebrate the new liberties of the French people and to create new rituals for what would eventually become the French national holiday.

Banning labor organizations

A revolutionary political culture

Supporters of the Revolution planted "liberty trees" in towns throughout France, and they began to wear "liberty caps" and tricolor cockades to show their political allegiances. Later revolutionary governments encouraged new artwork in which the nation came to be represented by a female symbol of liberty, Marianne. Statues of Marianne offered alternatives to traditional Catholic icons of the Virgin Mary and gave illiterate persons new visual images by which they could understand that national sovereignty and liberty had replaced the king and church at the symbolic center of French political life. A profusion of revolutionary plays, novels, and songs conveyed the same message. By promoting the new political ideas and symbols in every sphere of daily life, the French Revolution created a new national identity and "nationalized" the French people through the use of cultural rituals that would later become common in other national movements of the modern world.

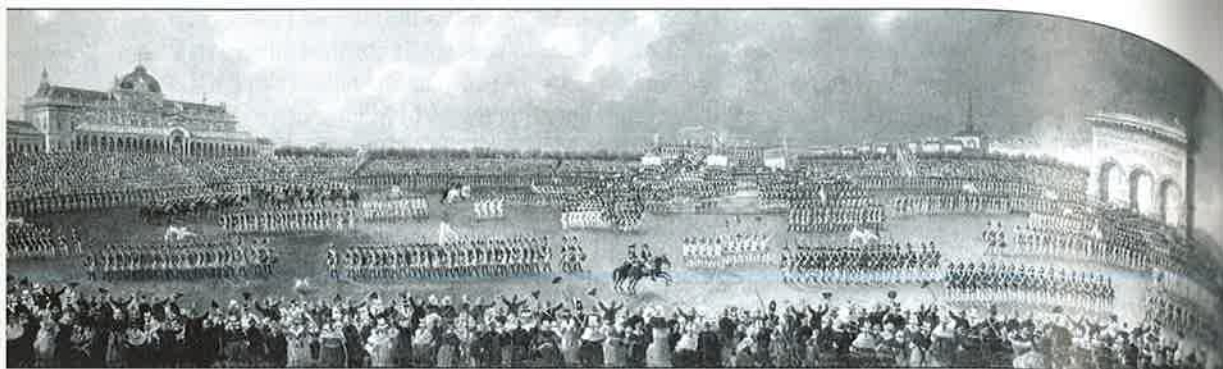
### The Quarrel with the Church

Most fatefully of all, the Constituent Assembly quarreled with the Catholic Church. The confiscation of church properties came as a shock to the clergy. The village priests, whose support had made possible the revolt of the Third Estate, now found that the very buildings in which they worshipped with their parishioners on Sunday belonged to the "nation." The loss of income-producing properties undercut the religious orders and ruined the schools, in which thousands of boys had received free education before the Revolution. Yet it was not on the question of material wealth that the church and the Revolution came to blows. Members of the Constituent Assembly took the view of the church that the great monarchies had taken before them. The idea of separation of church and state was far from their minds. They regarded the church as a form of public authority and as such subordinate to the sovereign power. They frankly argued that the poor needed religion if they were to respect the property of the more wealthy. In any case, having deprived the church of its own income, they had to provide for its maintenance. For the schools many generous and democratic projects of state-sponsored education were drawn up, though under the troubled conditions of the times little was accomplished. For the clergy the new program was mapped out in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790.

This document went far toward setting up a French national church. Under its provisions the parish priests and bishops were elected, the latter by the same 50,000 electors who chose other important public officials. Protestants, Jews, and agnostics could legally take part in the elections, purely on the ground of citizenship and property qualifications. Archbishoprics were abolished, and all the borders of existing bishoprics were redrawn. The number of dioceses was reduced from over 130 to 83, so that one would be coterminous with each department. Bishops were allowed merely to notify the pope of their elevation; they were forbidden to acknowledge any papal authority on their assumption of office, and no papal letter or decree was to be published or enforced in France except with government permission. All clergy received salaries from the state; the average income of bishops was somewhat reduced and that of parish clergymen was raised. *Sinecures*, plural holdings, and other abuses by which the church had supported noble families were done away with. The Constituent Assembly (independently of the Civil Constitution) also prohibited the taking of religious vows and dissolved all monastic houses.

Some of these church reforms were not in principle alarmingly new, because before the Revolution the civil authority of the king had designated the French bishops and passed judgement on the admission of papal documents into France. French bishops, in the old

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy



The revolutionaries created rituals and symbols to celebrate the new nation they were trying to establish. The great festival of the Federation in Paris on July 14, 1790, assembled the king, the National Guard, and a huge crowd in a symbolic expression of the national unity and national liberties that the new political institutions were supposed to protect.

(Bridgeman- Giraudon/Art Resource, NY)

spirit of the “Gallican liberties,” had traditionally resisted papal power in France. Many were now willing to accept something like the Civil Constitution if allowed to produce it on their own authority. The Assembly refused to concede so much jurisdiction to the Gallican Church and applied instead to the pope, hoping to force its plans upon the French clergy by invoking the authority of the Vatican. But the Vatican pronounced the Civil Constitution a wanton usurpation of power over the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the pope also went further, condemning the whole Revolution and all its works. The Constituent Assembly retorted by requiring all French clergy to swear an oath of loyalty to the constitution, including the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Half took the oath and half refused it, the latter half including all but seven of the bishops. One of the seven willing to accept the new arrangements was Talleyrand, soon to be famous as foreign minister of numerous French governments.

There were now two churches in France, one clandestine, the other official, one maintained by voluntary offerings or by funds smuggled in from abroad, the other financed and sponsored by the government. The former, comprising the nonjuring, unsworn, or “refractory” clergy, turned violently counterrevolutionary. To protect themselves from the Revolution they insisted, with an emphasis quite new in France, on the universal religious supremacy of the Roman pontiff. They denounced the “constitutional” clergy as schismatics who spurned the pope and as mere careerists willing to hold jobs on the government’s terms. The constitutional clergy, those taking the oath and upholding the Civil Constitution, considered themselves to be patriots and defenders of the universal rights of man; and they insisted that the Gallican Church had always enjoyed a degree of liberty from Rome. The Catholic laity were terrified and puzzled. Many were sufficiently attached to the Revolution to prefer the constitutional clergy but to do so meant to defy the pope, and Catholics who persisted in defying the pope were on the whole those least zealous in their religion. The constitutional clergy therefore stood on shaky foundations. Many of their followers, under stress of the times, eventually turned against Christianity itself.

Good Catholics tended to favor the “refractory” clergy. The outstanding example was the king himself. He personally used the services of refractory priests, and thus gave a new reason for the revolutionaries to distrust him. Whatever chance there was that Louis XVI might go along with the

“Constitutional” and  
“refractory” clergy

Revolution now disappeared, for he concluded that he could do so only by endangering his immortal soul. Former aristocrats also naturally preferred the refractory clergy. They now put aside the Voltairean levities of the Age of Enlightenment, and the “best people” began to exhibit a new piety in religious matters. The peasants, who found little in the Revolution to interest them after their own insurrection of 1789 and the consequent abolition of the manorial regime, also favored the old-fashioned or refractory clergy. Much the same was true of the urban working-class families, in which both men and women might shout against priests and yet want to be sure that their marriages were valid and their children were properly baptized. The Constituent Assembly, and its successors, could never finally decide what to do. Sometimes they shut their eyes at the intrigues of refractory clergy, in which case the constitutional clergy then became fearful. Sometimes they hunted out and persecuted the refractories; in that case they only stirred the passions of the most devoutly religious persons and social groups.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy has been called the greatest tactical blunder of the Revolution. Certainly its consequences were unfortunate in the extreme, and they spread to much of Europe. In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church became officially anti-democratic and antiliberal; and democrats and liberals in most cases became outspokenly anticlerical. The main beneficiary was the papacy. The French Catholic Church, which had clung for ages to its Gallican liberties, was thrown by the Revolution into the arms of the pope. Even Napoleon, when he healed the religious schism a decade later, acknowledged powers in the papacy that had never been acknowledged by the French kings. These were steps in the process, leading through the proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870, by which the affairs of the modern Catholic Church became increasingly centralized at the Vatican.

With the proclamation of the constitution in September 1791, the Constituent Assembly disbanded. Before dissolving, it ruled that none of its members might sit in the forthcoming Legislative Assembly. This body was therefore made up of men who still wished to make their mark in the Revolution. The new regime went into effect in October 1791. It was a constitutional monarchy in which a unicameral Legislative Assembly confronted a king unconverted to the new order. Designed as a permanent system for the modern governance of France and for the protection of the rights of man, it was to collapse in 10 months, in August 1792, as a result of popular insurrection four months after France became involved in war. A group of Jacobins, known as Girondins, for a time became the left or advanced party of the Revolution and in the Legislative Assembly they led France into war.

#### 43. THE REVOLUTION AND EUROPE: THE WAR AND THE “SECOND” REVOLUTION, 1792

##### *The International Impact of the Revolution*

The European governments were long reluctant to become involved with France. They were under considerable pressure. On the one hand, pro-French and pro-revolutionary groups appeared immediately in many quarters. The doctrines of the French Revolution, as of the American, were highly exportable: they took the form of a universal philosophy, proclaiming the rights of man regardless of time or place, race or nation. Moreover, depending on what one was looking for, one might see in the first disturbances in France a revolt of either the nobility, the bourgeoisie, the common people, or the entire nation. In Poland those who were trying to reorganize the country against further partition hailed the

French example. The Hungarian landlords pointed to it in their reaction against Joseph II. In England, for a time, those who controlled Parliament complacently believed that the French were attempting to imitate them.

*Inspiration of the Revolution*

But it was the excluded classes of European society who were most inspired. The hard-pressed Silesian weavers were said to hope that “the French would come.” Strikes broke out at Hamburg, and peasants rebelled elsewhere. One English diplomat found that even the Prussian army had “a strong taint of democracy among officers and men.” In England the newly developing “radicals,” men like Thomas Paine and Dr. Richard Price, who wished a thorough overhauling of Parliament and the established church, entered into correspondence with the Assembly in Paris. Business leaders of importance, including Watt and Boulton, the pioneers of the steam engine, were likewise pro-French because they had no representation in the House of Commons. The Irish too were excited and presently revolted. Everywhere the young were aroused, the young Hegel in Germany or in England the young Wordsworth, who later recalled the sense of a new era that had captivated so many spirits in 1789:

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!*

*Anti-Revolutionary sentiment*

On the other hand the anti-Revolutionary movement gathered strength. Edmund Burke, frightened by the French proclivities of English radicals, published as early as 1790 his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. For France, he predicted anarchy and dictatorship. For England, he sternly advised the English to accept a slow adaptation of their own English liberties. For all the world, he denounced a political philosophy that rested on abstract principles of right and wrong, declaring that every people must be shaped by its own national circumstances, national history, and national character. He drew an eloquent reply and a defense of France from Thomas Paine in the *Rights of Man*—an influential book that argued for the universality of inalienable human rights. Burke soon began to preach the necessity of war, urging a kind of ideological struggle against French barbarism and violence. His *Reflections* was translated and read throughout Europe, becoming in the long run an important work in the emergence of modern conservative thought. In the short run it fell on willing ears. The king of Sweden, Gustavus III, offered to lead a monarchist crusade. In Russia Empress Catherine was appalled; she forbade further translations of her erstwhile friend Voltaire, she called the French “vile riffraff” and “brutish cannibals,” and she packed off to Siberia a Russian named Radischev, who in his *Voyage from St. Petersburg to Moscow* pointed out the evils of serfdom. The terrors were heightened by plaintive messages from Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and by the angry émigrés who were constantly leaving France and who were led as early as July 1789 by the king’s own brother, the Count of Artois. The first émigrés were almost all nobles, and they settled in various parts of Europe where they could use their international aristocratic connections to preach a kind of holy war against the evils of revolution. They bemoaned the sad plight of the king, but what they most wanted was to get back their manorial incomes and other rights. Extremists among the émigrés even hinted that Louis XVI himself was a dangerous revolutionary and much preferred his brother, the unyielding Count of Artois.

In short, Europe was soon split by a division that overran all frontiers. The same was true also in the wider Atlantic world. In the United States the rising party of Jefferson was branded as Jacobin and pro-French, that of Hamilton as aristocratic and pro-British, while pro-revolutionary and anti-revolutionary groups fell into violent conflicts within the French Caribbean colony at Saint-Domingue. A new interest in independence began to

spread among some Latin Americans, including the Venezuelan Francisco de Miranda, who became a general in the French army. In all countries of the European world, though least of all in eastern and southern Europe, there were revolutionary or pro-French elements that were feared by their own governments. In all countries, including France, there were implacable enemies of the French Revolution. In all countries there were people whose political ideas and local conflicts increasingly expressed their strong support or deep hostility for the revolutionary changes in France. There had been no such situation since the Protestant Reformation, nor was there anything like it again until after the Russian Revolution of the twentieth century.

*The Coming of the War, April 1792*

Yet the European governments were slow to move. Catherine had no intention of becoming involved in western Europe. She only wished to involve her neighbors. William Pitt, the British prime minister, resisted the war cries of Burke. Pitt had failed to carry a plan for reform of Parliament and was now concentrating on a policy of orderly finance and systematic economy. His domestic program would be ruined by war. He insisted that the internal affairs of France were of no concern to the British government. The key position was occupied by the Habsburg emperor, Leopold II, brother to the French queen. Leopold at first answered Marie Antoinette’s pleas for help by telling her to adjust herself to conditions in France. He resisted the furious demands of the émigrés, whom he understood perfectly, having inherited from Joseph II a fractious aristocracy himself.

Still, the new French government was a disturbing phenomenon. It openly encouraged malcontents all over Europe. It showed a tendency to settle international affairs by unilateral action. For example, it annexed Avignon at the request of local revolutionaries but without the consent of its historic sovereign, the pope. Or again, in Alsace there had been much overlapping jurisdiction between France and Germany ever since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (see maps, pp. 144–145, 184, 327). The Constituent Assembly abolished traditional manorial dues in Alsace as elsewhere in France. To German princes who had long held rights to these payments in Alsace the Assembly offered compensation, but it did not ask their consent. Moreover, after the arrest of Louis XVI at Varennes, after his attempted flight in June 1791, it became impossible to deny that the French king and queen were prisoners of the revolutionaries.

*The Declaration of Pillnitz*

In August 1791 Leopold met with the king of Prussia at Pillnitz in Saxony. The resulting Declaration of Pillnitz rested on a famous *if*: Leopold would take military steps to restore order in France if all the other powers would join him. Knowing the attitude of Pitt, he believed that such an agreement could never materialize. His aim was mainly to rid himself of the French émigrés, but the émigrés perversely received the Declaration with delight. They used it as an open threat to their enemies in France, announcing that they would soon return alongside the forces of civilized Europe to punish the guilty and right the wrongs that had been done to them.

In France the upholders of the Revolution were alarmed. They were ignorant of what Leopold really meant and took the dire menaces of the émigrés at their face value. The Declaration of Pillnitz, far from cowering the French, enraged them against all the crowned heads of Europe. It gave a political advantage to the then dominant faction of Jacobins, known to history as the Girondins. These included the philosophe Condorcet, the humanitarian lawyer Brissot, and the civil servant Roland and his more famous wife, Madame Roland, whose house became a kind of headquarters for the group. They attracted many foreigners also, such as Thomas Paine and the German Anacharsis Cloots, the

“representative of the human race.” In December 1791 a deputation of English radicals, led by James Watt, son of the inventor of the steam engine, received a wild ovation at the Paris Jacobin club.

The Girondins became the party of international revolution. They declared that the Revolution could never be secure in France until it spread to the world. In their view, once war had come, the peoples of states at war with France would not support their own governments. There was reason for this belief, because revolutionary elements antedating the French Revolution already existed in both the Dutch and the Austrian Netherlands, and to a lesser degree in parts of Switzerland, Poland, and elsewhere. Some Girondins therefore contemplated a war in which French armies should enter neighboring countries, unite with local revolutionaries, overthrow the established governments, and set up a federation of republics. War was also favored by a very different group, led by Lafayette, which wished to curb the Revolution by holding it at the moderate political limits of constitutional monarchy. This group mistakenly believed that war might restore the much damaged popularity of Louis XVI, unite the country under the new government, and make it possible to put down the continuing Jacobin agitation. As the war spirit boiled up in France, the Emperor Leopold II died. He was succeeded by Francis II, a man much more inclined than Leopold to yield to the clamors of the old aristocracy. Francis resumed negotiations with Prussia. In France all who dreaded a return of the Old Regime listened more readily to the Girondins. Among the Jacobins as a whole, only a few, generally a handful of radical democrats, opposed the war. On April 20, 1792, without serious opposition, the Assembly declared war on “the king of Hungary and Bohemia,” that is, the Austrian monarchy.

### *The “Second” Revolution: August 10, 1792*

The war intensified the existing unrest and dissatisfaction of the unpropertied classes. Both peasants and urban workers felt that the Constituent and the Legislative Assembly had served the propertied interests and had done little for them. Peasants were dissatisfied with the inadequate measures taken to facilitate land distribution; workers felt especially the pinch of soaring prices, which by 1792 had greatly risen. Gold had been taken out of the country by the émigrés; paper money, the *assignats*, was almost the sole currency, and the future of the government was so uncertain that it steadily lost value.

Peasants concealed their food products rather than sell them for depreciating paper. Actual scarcity combined with the falling value of money to drive up the cost of living. The lowest income groups suffered the most. But dissatisfied though they were, when the war began they were threatened with a return of the émigrés and a vindictive restoration of the Old Regime, which at least for the peasants would be the worst of all possible eventualities. The working classes—peasants, artisans, mechanics, shopkeepers, wage workers—rallied to the Revolution but not to the revolutionary government in power. The Legislative Assembly and the constitutional monarchy lacked the confidence of large elements of the population.

In addition, the war at first went very unfavorably for the French. Prussia joined immediately with Austria, and by the summer of 1792 the two powers were on the point of invading France. They issued a proclamation to the French people, the Brunswick Manifesto of July 25 declaring that if any harm befell the French king and queen the Austro-Prussian forces, upon their arrival in Paris, would exact the most severe retribution from the inhabitants of that city. Such menaces, compounding the military emergency, only played into the

France goes to war

Economic dissatisfaction

hands of the most violent activists. Masses of the French people, roused and guided by a more radical faction of Jacobin leaders, notably Robespierre, Danton, and the vitriolic journalist Marat, burst out in a passion of patriotic excitement. They turned against the king because he was identified with the foreign powers at war with France and also because, in France itself, those who still supported him were using the monarchy as defense against the lower classes. Republicanism in France was partly a rather sudden historical accident, in that France was at war under a king who could not be trusted, and partly a kind of popular lower-class movement against the traditional nobility, in which, however, many bourgeois revolutionaries shared.

Feeling ran high during the summer of 1792. Recruits streamed into Paris from all quarters on their way to the frontiers. One detachment, from Marseilles, brought with them a new marching song, known ever since as the *Marseillaise*, a fierce call to war upon tyranny. The transient provincials stirred up the agitation in Paris. On August 10, 1792, the working-class quarters of the city rose in revolt, supported by the recruits from Marseilles and elsewhere. They stormed the Tuileries against resistance by the Swiss Guard, many of whom were massacred, and seized and imprisoned the king and the royal family. A revolutionary municipal government, or “Commune,” was set up in Paris. Usurping the powers of the Legislative Assembly, it forced the abrogation of the constitution and the election, by universal male suffrage, of a Constitutional Convention that was to govern France and prepare a new and more democratic constitution. The very word Convention was used in recollection of the American Constitutional Convention in 1787. Meanwhile hysteria, anarchy, and terror reigned in Paris; mobs of insurrectionary volunteers, declaring that they would not fight enemies on the frontiers until they had disposed of enemies in Paris, dragged about 1,100 persons—common criminals, refractory priests, and other alleged counterrevolutionaries—from the prisons of the city and killed them after drumhead trials, in brutal executions known as the “September massacres.”

For nearly three years, since October 1789, there had been an abatement of popular violence. Now the coming of the war and the dissatisfaction of the lower classes with the recent course of events had led to new explosions. The insurrection of August 10, 1792, the “second” French Revolution, initiated the most radical and violent phase of the Revolution.

## 44. THE EMERGENCY REPUBLIC, 1792–1795: THE TERROR

### *The National Convention*

The National Convention met on September 20, 1792; it was to sit for three years. It immediately proclaimed the beginning of a new era: Year I of the French Republic. The disorganized French armies, also on September 20, won a great moral victory in the “cannonade of Valmy,” a battle that was hardly more than an artillery duel, but which induced the Prussian commander to give up his march on Paris. The French soon occupied Belgium (the Austrian Netherlands), the Savoy region near the Swiss-Italian border (which belonged to the king of Sardinia, who had joined with the Austrians), and Mainz and other cities on the German Left Bank of the Rhine. Revolutionary sympathizers in these places appealed for French aid. The National Convention decreed assistance to “all peoples wishing to recover their

Agitation and violence in Paris

Spread of the Revolution

liberty.” It also ordered that French generals, in the occupied areas, should dissolve the old governments; confiscate government and church property; abolish tithes, hunting rights, and seigneurial dues; and set up provisional administrations. Thus revolution spread in the wake of the successful French armies.

The British and Dutch now prepared to resist. Pitt, still insisting that the French might have any domestic regime that they chose, declared that Great Britain could not tolerate the French occupation of Belgium. The British and Dutch began conversations with Prussia and Austria, and the French declared war on them on February 1, 1793. Within a few weeks the Republic had annexed Savoy and Nice, as well as Belgium, and had much of the German Rhineland under its military government (see map, p. 404). Meanwhile, in eastern Europe, while denouncing the rapacity of the French Jacobins, the rulers of Russia and Prussia, as we have seen, came to an arrangement of their own, each appropriating a portion of Poland in the second partition in January 1793. The Austrians, excluded from this second partition, became anxious about their interests in eastern Europe. The infant French Republic, now at war with all Europe, was saved by the weakness of the Coalition, for Britain and Holland had no land forces of consequence and Prussia and Austria were too jealous of each other, and too preoccupied with Poland, to commit the bulk of their armies against France.

#### The Jacobins split

In the Convention all the leaders were Jacobins, but the Jacobins were again splitting. The Girondins were no longer the most advanced revolutionary group as they had been in the Legislative Assembly. Beside the Girondins appeared a new group, whose members preferred to sit in the highest seats in the hall, and therefore were dubbed the “Mountain” in the political language of the day. The leading Girondins came from the great provincial cities; the leading Montagnards, though mostly of provincial birth, represented Paris and owed most of their political strength to the radical and popular elements in that city.

These popular revolutionists, outside the Convention, proudly called themselves “sans-culottes,” because they wore the workingman’s long trousers, not the knee breeches or *culottes* of the middle and upper classes. They were the working class of a preindustrial age, shopkeepers and shop assistants, skilled artisans in various trades, including some who were owners of small manufacturing or handicraft enterprises. For two years their militancy and their activism pressed the Revolution forward. They demanded a broader equality that would be meaningful for people like themselves, they called for a mighty effort against foreign powers that presumed to intervene in the French Revolution, and they denounced the now deposed king and queen (correctly enough) for collusion with the Austrian enemy. The sans-culottes feared that the Convention might be too moderate. They favored direct democracy in their neighborhood clubs and assemblies, together with a mass rising if necessary against the Convention itself. The Girondins in the Convention began to dismiss these popular militants as anarchists. The group known as the Mountain was more willing to work with them, so long at least as the emergency lasted.

#### The execution of the king

The Convention put Louis XVI on trial for treason in December 1792. On January 15 it unanimously pronounced him guilty, but on the next day, out of 721 deputies present, only 361 voted for immediate execution, a majority of one. Louis XVI died on the guillotine forthwith. The 361 deputies were henceforth branded for life as regicides; never could they allow, in safety to themselves, a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France. The other 360 deputies were not similarly compromised; their rivals called them Girondins, “moderatsists,” or counterrevolutionaries. All who still wanted more from the

Revolution, or who feared that the slightest wavering would bring the Allies and the émigrés into France, now looked to the Mountain wing of the Jacobins.

#### Background to the Terror

In April 1793 the most prominent French general, Dumouriez, who had won the victories in Belgium five months before, defected to Austria. The Allied armies now drove the French from Belgium and again threatened to invade France. Counterrevolutionaries in France exulted. From the revolutionaries went up the cry, “We are betrayed!” Prices continued to rise, the currency fell, food was harder to obtain, and the working classes were increasingly restless. The sans-culottes demanded price controls, currency controls, rationing, legislation against the hoarding of food, and requisitioning to enforce the circulation of goods. They denounced bourgeois traders as profiteers and exploiters of the people. While the Girondins resisted, the Mountain went along with the sans-culottes, partly from sympathy with their ideas, partly to win mass support for the war, and partly as a maneuver against the Girondins. On May 31, 1793, the Commune of Paris, under pressure from the sans-culottes assembled a host of demonstrators and insurrectionists who invaded the Convention and forced the arrest of the Girondin leaders. Other Girondins fled into hiding, including Condorcet, who wrote his famous book, *Progress of the Human Mind*, before he was captured and put in prison, where he soon died.

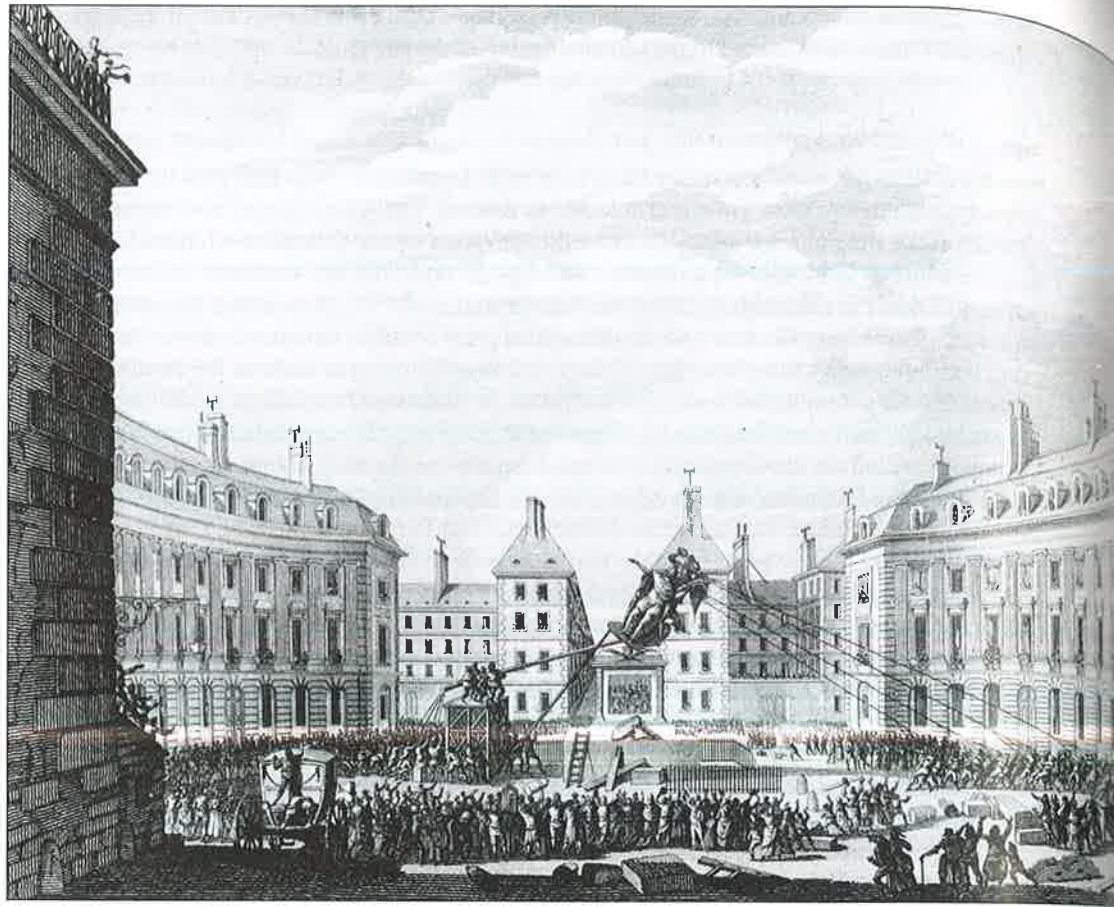
The Mountain now ruled in the Convention, but the Convention itself ruled very little. Not only were the foreign armies and the émigrés bent on destroying the Convention as a band of regicides and social incendiaries, but the authority of the Convention was also widely repudiated within France itself. In the west, in the Vendée, the peasants had revolted against military conscription; they were worked upon by refractory priests, British agents, and royalist emissaries of the Count of Artois. The great provincial cities, Lyons, Bordeaux, Marseilles, and others, had also rebelled, especially after the fugitive Girondins reached them. These “federalist” rebels demanded a more “federal” or decentralized republic. Like the Vendéans, with whom they had no connection, they objected to the ascendancy of Paris, having been accustomed to more regional independence under the Old Regime. These rebellions became counterrevolutionary, because all sorts of foreigners, royalists, émigrés, and clericals streamed in to assist them.

#### The Convention under attack

The Convention had to defend itself against extremists of the Left as well. To the genuine mass action of the sans-culottes were now added the voices of even more excited militants called *enragés*. Various organizers, enthusiasts, agitators, and neighborhood politicians declared that parliamentary methods were useless. Generally they were men outside the Convention—and also women, for women were particularly sensitive to the crisis of food shortage and soaring prices, and an organization of Revolutionary Republican Women helped to mobilize the sans-culottes in 1793 (until the suppression of women’s political clubs). All such activists worked through units of local government in Paris and elsewhere as well as in thousands of “popular societies” and provincial clubs throughout the whole country. They also formed “revolutionary armies,” semimilitary bands that scoured the rural areas for food, denounced suspects, and preached revolution.

As for the Convention, while it cannot be said to have had any commanding leaders, the program it followed for about a year was on the whole that of Maximilien Robespierre, himself a Jacobin but not one to go along forever with popular revolution or anarchy. Robespierre is one of the most argued about

#### Robespierre



A wave of popular violence in Paris in 1792 led to the fall of the monarchy and the proclamation of a new French republic. Angry crowds pulled down the symbols of the old regime, including this statue of Louis XIV.

(akg-images/Newscom)

and least understood figures in history. Persons accustomed to stable conditions dismiss him with a shudder as a bloodthirsty fanatic, dictator, and demagogue. Others have considered him an idealist, a visionary, and an ardent patriot whose goals and ideals were at least avowedly democratic. All agree on his personal honesty and integrity and on his revolutionary zeal. He was by origin a lawyer from northern France, educated with the aid of scholarships in Paris. He had been elected in 1789 to sit for the Third Estate in the Estates General, and in the ensuing Constituent Assembly played a minor role, though calling attention to himself by his views against capital punishment and in favor of universal suffrage. During the time of the Legislative Assembly, in 1791–1792, he continued to agitate for democracy and vainly pleaded against the declaration of war. In the Convention, elected in September 1792, he sat for a Paris constituency. He became a prominent member of the Mountain and welcomed the purge of the Girondins. He had always kept free of the bribery and graft in which some others became involved and for this reason was known as the Incorruptible. He was a great believer in the importance of “virtue,” a term that the philosophes had used in a specialized way. Both Montesquieu and Rousseau, for example,

had held that republics depended upon virtue, or unselfish public spirit and civic zeal, to which was added, under Rousseauist influence, a somewhat sentimentalized idea of personal uprightness and purity of life. Robespierre was determined, in 1793 and 1794, to bring about a democratic republic made up of good, virtuous, and honest citizens.

### *The Program of the Convention, 1793–1794: The Terror*

The program of the Convention, which Robespierre helped to form, was to repress anarchy, civil strife, and counterrevolution at home and to win the war by a great national mobilization of the country’s people and resources. It would prepare a democratic constitution and initiate legislation for the lower classes, but it would not yield to the Paris Commune and other agencies of direct revolutionary action. To conduct the government, the Convention granted wide powers to a Committee of Public Safety, a group of 12 members of the Convention who were reelected every month. Robespierre was an influential member; others were the youthful St. Just, the militant lawyer Couthon, and the army officer Carnot, “organizer of victory.”

To repress the “counterrevolution,” the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety set up what is popularly known as the “Reign of Terror.” Revolutionary courts were instituted as an alternative to the lynch law of the September massacres. A Committee of General Security was created as a kind of supreme political police. Designed to protect the Revolutionary Republic from its internal enemies, the Terror struck at those who were in league against the Republic and at those who were merely suspected of hostile activities. Its victims ranged from Marie Antoinette and other royalists to numerous early supporters of the Revolution, including the Girondin leaders and women such as Olympe de Gouges. Before the year 1793–1794 was over, some of the old Jacobins of the Mountain who had helped inaugurate the Terror also went to the guillotine.

*The “Reign of Terror”*

Many thousands of people died in France at the height of the Revolution. Most deaths were in places that had openly revolted against the Convention, as in the Vendée in western France. Some resulted from acts of private vengeance. But if the Terror is understood to mean the official program of the government, which at one time decreed “terror the order of the day,” the number who died in it was not large by the brutal standards of the twentieth century, in which dictatorial governments attempted to wipe out not only their political opponents but whole social classes or ethnic groups. About 40,000 persons perished in the Terror thus defined, and many others were temporarily imprisoned. About 8 percent of the victims of the “official” Terror were nobles, but nobles as a class were not molested unless suspected of political agitation; 14 percent of the victims were classifiable as bourgeois, mainly of the rebellious southern cities; 6 percent were clergy, while no less than 70 percent were of the peasant and laboring classes. A democratic republic, founded on the Declaration of the Rights of Man, was in principle to follow the Terror after the war and the national emergency were over. Meanwhile, however, in 1793–1794, the Terror evolved into a kind of self-perpetuating revolutionary violence that was inhumane, expansive, irrational, and in some places a method for mass killings, as at Nantes, where 2,000 persons were loaded on barges and deliberately drowned. The Terror left long memories in France and created much of the enduring antipathy to the Revolution and to republicanism.

*Victims of the “Terror”*

To conduct the government in the midst of the war emergency the Committee of Public Safety operated as a joint dictatorship and war cabinet. It prepared and guided legislation through the Convention. It gained control

*The Committee of Public Safety*

over the “representatives on mission,” who were members of the Convention on duty with the armies and in the insurgent areas of France. It established the *Bulletin des lois*, so that all persons might know what laws they were supposed to enforce or to obey. It centralized the administration, converting the swarm of locally elected officials left over from the Constituent Assembly (who were royalists in some places, wild extremists, in others) into centrally appointed “national agents” named by the Committee of Public Safety.

To win the war the Committee proclaimed the *levée en masse*, calling on all able-bodied men to join the army and all other French citizens to serve the revolutionary nation in whatever ways they could. It recruited scientists to work on armaments and munitions. The most prominent French scientists of the day, including Lagrange and Lavoisier, worked for or were protected by the government of the Terror, though one, Lavoisier, “father of modern chemistry,” was guillotined in 1794 because he had been involved in tax farming before 1789. For military reasons also the Committee instituted economic controls, which at the same time met the demands of the *enragés* and other working-class spokesmen. The value of the *assignats* ceased to fall during the year of the Terror. Thus the government protected both its own purchasing power and that of the masses. It did so by controlling the export of gold, by confiscating specie and foreign currency from French citizens, to whom it paid assignats in return, and by legislation against hoarding or the withholding of goods from the market. Food and supplies for the armies, and for civilians in the towns, were raised and allocated by a system of requisitions, centralized in a Subsistence Commission under the Committee of Public Safety. A “general maximum” set ceilings for prices and wages. It helped to check inflation during the crisis, but it did not work very well; the Committee believed, in principle, in a free market economy and lacked the technical and administrative machinery to enforce thorough controls. By 1794 it was giving freer rein to private enterprise and to the peasants to encourage production. It tried also to hold down wages and in that respect lost the adherence of many working-class leaders.

In June 1793 the Committee produced, and the Convention adopted, a republican constitution that provided for universal male suffrage. But the new constitution was suspended indefinitely, and the government was declared “revolutionary until the peace,” “revolutionary” meaning extraconstitutional or of an emergency character. In other ways the Committee showed intentions of legislating on behalf of the lower economic classes. The price controls and other economic regulations answered the demands of the *sans-culottes*. The last of the manorial regime was done away with; the peasants were relieved of having to pay compensation for the obligations that had been abolished at the opening of the Revolution. The Committee busied itself also with social services and measures of public improvement. It issued pamphlets to teach farmers to improve their crops, selected promising youths to receive instruction in useful trades, opened a military school for boys of all classes, even the humblest, and certainly intended to introduce universal elementary education.

It was also at this time, in 1794, that the National Convention decreed the abolition of slavery in the French colonies, meaning chiefly Saint-Domingue, the modern Haiti, the richest of all the sugar islands in the Caribbean. Free blacks in the colonies had already received civic rights earlier in the Revolution; and the enslaved black plantation workers had in fact already liberated themselves in a massive rebellion that spread across Saint-Domingue in 1791. The revolutionary government in Paris sent new representatives to manage affairs in the colony, but these commissioners needed the support of emancipated black fighters to

Slavery abolished in French colonies

suppress both the counterrevolutionary white colonists and the English forces that invaded the island in the fall of 1793. The Jacobin commissioners therefore abolished slavery in Saint-Domingue even before the National Convention acted to abolish slavery in the wider French Empire. The revolution in Saint-Domingue and the expulsion of foreign armies thus depended on increasingly autonomous black military commanders, one of whom was the once-enslaved Toussaint Louverture. In the months after the revolutionary government’s official abolition of slavery, Louverture became a general in the French army that drove the Spanish and British from Saint-Domingue.

Amid the ensuing political and military conflicts Louverture became France’s governor-general in the colony, but his new government soon broke away from all French control. Under pressure from the slave-owning and commercial interests (and the European demand for sugar) the government of Napoleon in 1802 reestablished slavery in the French colonies and sent about 40,000 troops to reassert French authority in Saint-Domingue. The French captured Louverture and took him to France, where he died in prison. Other military leaders launched a new campaign for independence, however, and the French army was unable to defeat the armed rebellion of the mobilized black population. Most of the French troops on the island died in the fighting or perished of yellow fever, and the few survivors abandoned their operations late in 1803—becoming the first Napoleonic army to suffer a decisive military defeat after Bonaparte had seized political power. Haitian leaders, in 1804, established an independent Republic of Haiti, which also became the Atlantic world’s first postcolonial nation to abolish slavery. An unexpected consequence of the French defeat in Haiti was that Napoleon sold the remaining French possessions on the North American mainland (“Louisiana”) to the United States in 1803. Slavery was not effectively abolished in the French colonies until a later revolution in 1848.

At the climax of the Revolution within France itself, in 1793–1794, the Committee of Public Safety was determined to concentrate revolutionary initiative in itself. It had no patience with unauthorized revolutionary violence. With its own plan for a democratic program, it disapproved of the turbulent democracy of popular clubs and local assemblies. In the fall of 1793, at the time of its prohibition of revolutionary women’s organizations, the Committee arrested the leading *enragés*. Extreme revolutionary demands were expressed by Jacques Hébert, a journalist and officer of the Paris Commune. Robespierre called such people “ultra revolutionaries.” They were a large and indefinable group and included many radical members of the Convention. They indiscriminately denounced merchants and bourgeoisie. They were the party of extreme Terror; an Hébertist brought about the mass drownings at Nantes. Believing all religion to be counterrevolutionary, they launched the movement of Dechristianization and strongly supported the creation of a new republican calendar. The Convention adopted this calendar as part of its campaign to strengthen popular allegiance to the republic and to establish a new national organization of daily life that would replace the Christian cycle of Sundays, saints’ days, and holidays such as Christmas and Easter. The new calendar thus counted years from the founding of the French Republic, divided each year into new months of 30 days each, and even abolished the week, which it replaced with the 10-day *décade*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Though not adopted until October 1793, the revolutionary calendar dated the Year I of the French Republic from September 22, 1792. The names of the months, in order and corresponding to the seasons of the year, were Vendémiaire, Brumaire, Frimaire (autumn); Nivôse, Pluviôse, Ventôse (winter); Germinal, Floréal, Prairial (spring); Messidor, Thermidor, Fructidor (summer).



*The Revolution and religion*

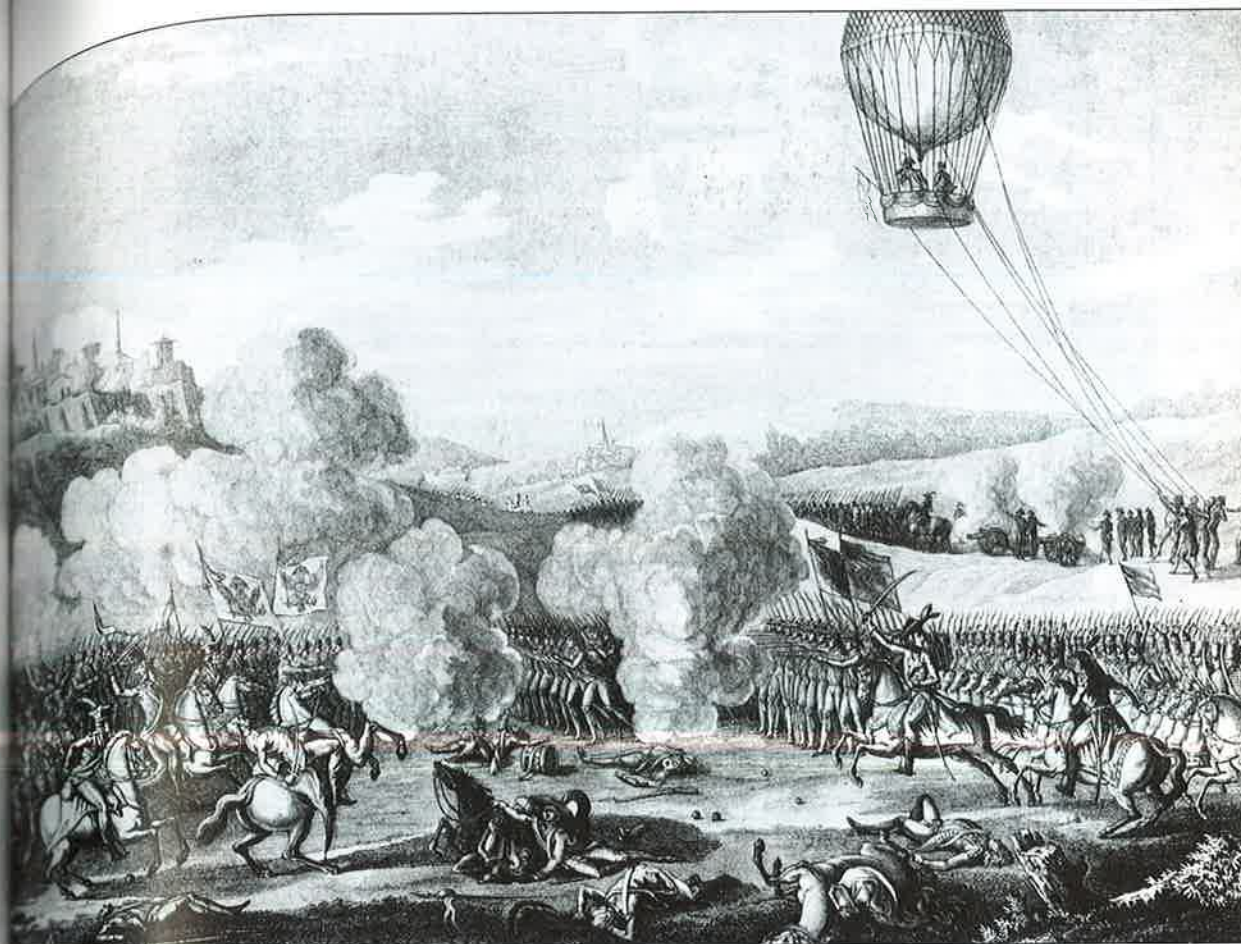
Dechristianization also contributed to the development of the cult of reason, which sprang up all over France at the end of 1793. In Paris the Commune put on ceremonies in the cathedral of Notre Dame, in which Reason was impersonated by an actress who was the wife of one of the city officials. But Dechristianization was severely frowned upon by Robespierre. He believed that it would alienate the masses from the Republic and ruin such sympathy as was still felt for the Revolution abroad. The Committee of Public Safety, therefore, ordered the toleration of peaceable Catholics, and in June 1794 Robespierre introduced the cult of the Supreme Being, a deistic natural religion, in which the Republic was declared to recognize the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Robespierre hoped that both Catholics and agnostic anticlericals could become reconciled on this ground. But Catholics were now beyond reconciliation, and the freethinkers, appealing to the tradition of Voltaire, regarded Robespierre as a reactionary mystery monger and would become instrumental in bringing about his fall.

Meanwhile the Committee proceeded relentlessly against the Hébertists, whose main champions it sent to the guillotine in March 1794. The paramilitary "revolutionary armies" were suppressed. The extreme Terrorists were recalled from the provinces. The revolutionary Paris Commune was destroyed. Robespierre filled the municipal offices of Paris with his own appointees. This Robespierist commune disapproved of strikes and tried to hold down wages, on the plea of military necessity; it failed to win over the ex-Hébertists and working-class leaders, who became disillusioned with the Revolution and dismissed it as a movement that no longer served their interests. Probably to prevent just such a conclusion, and to avoid the appearance of deviation to the Right, Robespierre and the Committee, after liquidating the left-wing Hébertists, also liquidated certain right-wing members of the Mountain who were known as Dantonists. Danton and his followers were accused of financial dishonesty and of dealing with counterrevolutionaries; the charges contained some truth but were not the main reason for the executions.

By the spring of 1794 the French Republic possessed an army of 800,000 men, the largest ever raised up to that time by a European power. It was a national army representing a people in arms, commanded by officers who had been promoted rapidly on grounds of merit and composed of troops who felt themselves to be citizens fighting for their own cause. Its intense political-mindedness made it the more formidable and contrasted strongly with the indifference of the opposing troops, some of whom were in fact serfs and none of whom had any sense of membership in their own political systems. The Allied governments, each pursuing its own ends and still distracted by their ambitions in Poland, where

the third partition was impending, could not combine their forces against France. In June 1794 the French won the battle of Fleurus in Belgium. The Republican hosts again streamed into the Low Countries; in six months their calvary rode into Amsterdam on the ice. A revolutionary Batavian Republic soon replaced the old Dutch provinces; but the opposite was occurring at this time in eastern Europe, where Russian and Prussian armies stamped out the attempted revolution that Kosciusko led in Poland. All Polish lands and people were finally merged into the eastern European empires in 1795.

Military success made the French less willing to put up with the dictatorial rule and economic regimentation of the Terror. Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety had antagonized all significant parties. The working-class radicals of Paris would no longer support him, and after the death of Danton the National Convention was afraid of its own ruling committee. A group in the Convention obtained the "outlawing" of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (July 27, 1794); he was

*Fall of Robespierre*

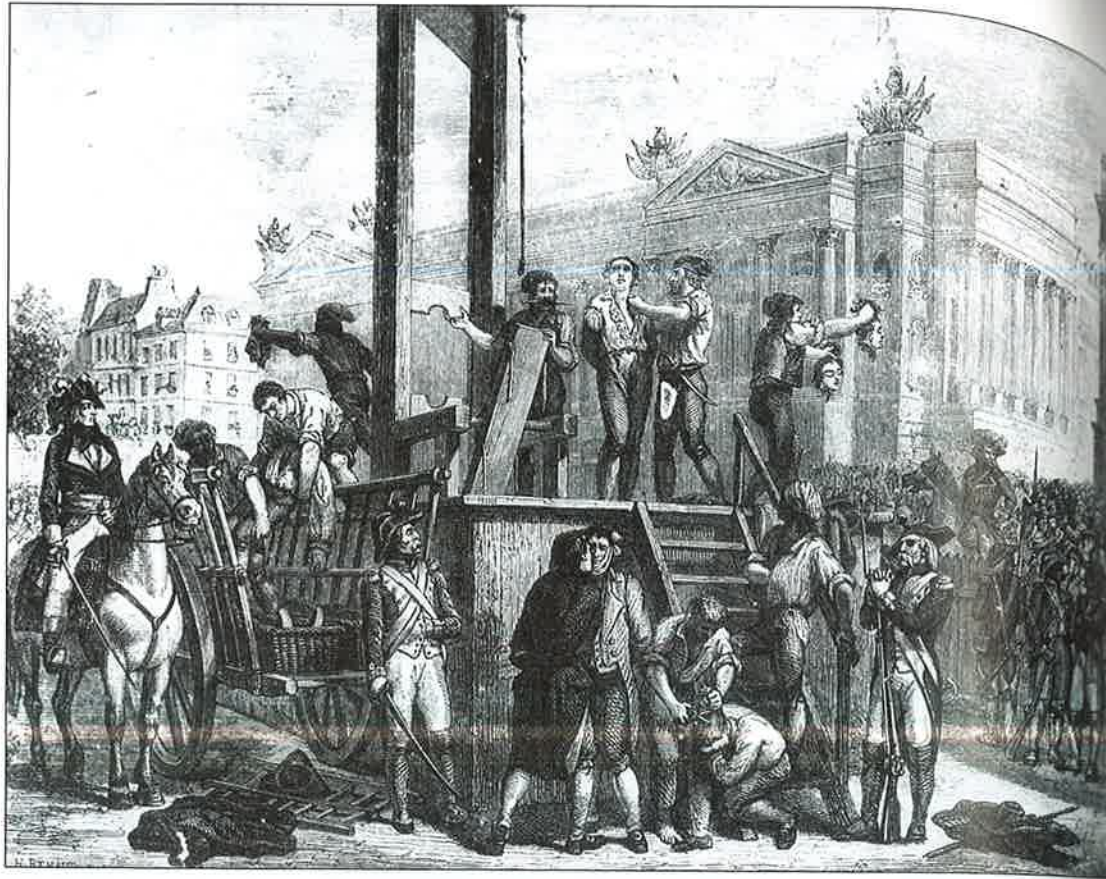
The French army won a great victory at the battle of Fleurus in June 1794, thus opening the way for republican troops to enter the Low Countries and easing the external threats that had pushed the Revolution toward internal repression and the Terror. This picture shows how the French used a balloon to observe enemy forces during the battle, but the results must have been disappointing, because balloons were not thereafter used by either side.

(The New York Public Library/Art Resource, NY)

guillotined with some of his associates on the following day. Many who turned against Robespierre believed they were pushing the Revolution farther forward, as in destroying the Girondins the year before. Others thought, or said, that they were stopping a dictator and a tyrant. All agreed, to absolve themselves, in heaping all blame for the recent revolutionary excesses upon Robespierre. The idea that Robespierre was an ogre originated more with his former colleagues than with conservatives of the time.

*The Thermidorian Reaction*

The fall of Robespierre stunned the country, but its effects manifested themselves during the following months as the "Thermidorian reaction." The Terror subsided. The Convention reduced the powers of the Committee of Public Safety, and it closed the Jacobin club.



The guillotine was used during the most radical phase of the Revolution to execute persons judged to be enemies of the republic. First adopted as a more humane way of inflicting capital punishment, it became a permanent symbol of revolutionary violence, and it claimed victims from every part of the Revolution itself. This picture illustrates the execution of Robespierre and four others who were denounced as conspirators against liberty and sent to the guillotine in July 1794.

(Bettmann/Corbis)

Price controls and other regulations were removed. Inflation resumed its course, prices again rose, and the disoriented and leaderless working classes suffered more than ever. Sporadic uprisings broke out, of which the greatest was the insurrection of Prairial in the Year III (May 1795), when a mob all but dispersed the Convention by force. Troops were called to Paris for the first time since 1789. Insurrectionists in the working-class quarters threw up barricades in the streets. The army prevailed without much bloodshed, but the Convention arrested, imprisoned, or deported 10,000 of the insurgents. A few organizers were guillotined. The affair of Prairial gave a foretaste of modern social revolution.

The triumphant element after 1794 consisted mostly of the bourgeois or professional classes of the former Third Estate, which had guided the Revolution since the Constituent Assembly and had not been really unseated even during the Terror. It was not mainly a bourgeoisie of modern capitalists, eager to make a financial profit by developing new factories or

Politics and society  
after Thermidor

## Historical Interpretations and Debates

### The Political and Social Significance of the French Revolution

*Historians have proposed numerous and often conflicting political, economic, social, and cultural explanations to describe the historical significance of the French Revolution—though most agree that the Revolution contributed decisively to the emergence of modern European institutions and ideas. The influential interpretations of Albert Soboul and Lynn Hunt exemplify different economic and political explanations for the historical meaning of the Revolution and suggest why the debate about the French Revolution never ends.*

#### Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793–4* (1959)

We need to remember that the Revolution was fundamentally a struggle between the European aristocracy and the Third Estate as a whole. In this struggle, it is hardly surprising that the French bourgeoisie should have played the leading role. The Revolutionary Government, founded upon an alliance between the Montagnard bourgeoisie and the Parisian sans-culotterie, had been given the task of defending the Revolution against the aristocracy both within France and beyond her borders. . . .

Without the Parisian sans-culotterie, the bourgeoisie could not have triumphed in so radical a fashion. . . .

The success of the popular movement . . . led to the organization of the Terror which struck such an irreparable blow to the old social order. The upper bourgeoisie of the *ancien régime*, founded on commercial capital and linked in some ways with the old social and political system of the feudal aristocracy, failed to survive the upheaval . . . The Terror had cleared the way for the introduction of new relationships of production. In the capitalist society born of the Revolution, industry was destined to dominate commerce: the function of commercial capital, against which the sans-culottes had fought so bitterly in the Year II, would be subordinated henceforth to the sole productive form of capital— industrial capital.

#### Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (1984)

The Revolution showed how much everything depended on politics. . . . The structure of the polity changed under the impact of increasing political participation and popular mobilization; political language, political ritual, and political organization all took on new forms and meanings. . . .

Revolutionary political culture cannot be deduced from social structures, social conflicts, or the social identity of revolutionaries. Political practices were not simply the expression of “underlying” economic and social interests. Through their language, images, and daily political activities, revolutionaries worked to reconstitute society and social relations. . . .

The chief accomplishment of the French Revolution was the institution of a dramatically new political culture. The revolution did not startle its contemporaries because it laid the foundations for capitalist development or political modernization. . . . Revolution in France contributed little to economic growth or to political stabilization. What it did establish, however, was the mobilizing potential of democratic republicanism and the compelling intensity of revolutionary change. The language of national regeneration, the gestures of equality and fraternity, and the rituals of republicanism were not soon forgotten. Democracy, terror, Jacobinism, and the police state all became recurrent features of political life.

Sources: Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793–4*, translated by Gwynne Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 249, 260–261; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 2, 12, 15.

machinery. The political victors after Thermidor were bourgeois in an older social sense, those who had not been noble or aristocratic before 1789 yet had held secure positions under the Old Regime, many of them lawyers or officeholders and often drawing income from the ownership of land. There were also new elements produced by the Revolution itself, parvenus and *nouveaux riches*, who had made money by wartime government contracts or had profited by inflation or by buying up former church lands at bargain prices. Such people, often joined by former aristocrats, and in reaction against Robespierriest virtue, set an extravagant and ostentatious style of living that gave a bad name to the new order. They also unleashed a "white terror" in which many ex-Jacobins were simply murdered.

But the Thermidorians, disreputable though a few of them were, had not lost faith in the Revolution. Democracy they associated with red terror and mob rule, but they still believed in individual legal rights and in a written constitution. Conditions were rather adverse, for the country was still unsettled, and although the Convention made a separate peace with Spain and Prussia, France still remained at war with Great Britain and the Habsburg Empire. But the members of the Convention were still determined to make another attempt at constitutional government. They set aside the democratic constitution written in 1793 (and never used) and produced the Constitution of the Year III, which went into effect at the end of 1795.

#### 45. THE CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC: THE DIRECTORY, 1795–1799

##### *The Weakness of the Directory*

The first formally constituted French Republic, known as the Directory, lasted only four years. It was politically weak and vulnerable because it rested on an extremely narrow social base and it presupposed certain military conquests. The new constitution applied not only to France but also to Belgium, which was now regarded as incorporated constitutionally into France, though the Habsburgs had not yet ceded these "Austrian Netherlands," nor had the British agreed to accept French occupation. The constitution of 1795 thus committed the republic to a program of successful expansion. At the same time it restricted the politically active class. It gave almost all adult males the vote, but they voted only for "electors." Persons chosen as electors were usually men of some means, able to give their time and willing to take part in public life; this in effect meant men of the upper middle class, because the old nobility was disaffected. The electors chose all important department officials and also the members of the national Legislative Assembly, which this time was divided into two chambers. The lower chamber was called the Council of Five Hundred; the upper, composed of 250 members, the Council of Ancients—"ancients" being those over 40. The chambers chose the executive, which was called the Directory (from which the whole regime took its name) and was made up of five Directors.

The government was thus constitutionally in the hands of substantial property owners, rural and urban, but its real base was narrower still. In the reaction after Thermidor many people began to consider restoring the monarchy. The Convention, to protect its own members, had ruled that two-thirds of the men initially elected to the Council of Five Hundred and Council of Ancients must be ex-members of the Convention. This interference with the freedom of the elections provoked serious disturbances in Paris, instigated mainly by royalists. The Convention, having now accustomed itself to using the army, instructed a young general named Bonaparte, who happened to be in Paris, to put down the royalist

The constitution of  
1795

mob. He did so with a "whiff of grapeshot." The new constitutional republic thus made itself dependent on military protection at the outset.

The regime had enemies to both Right and Left. On the Right, undisguised royalists agitated in Paris and even in the two councils; and they were in continuous touch with the late king's brother, the Count of Provence, whom they regarded as Louis XVIII (Louis XVI's son, who died in prison, was counted as Louis XVII). Louis XVIII had installed himself at Verona in Italy, where he headed a propaganda agency financed largely by British money. The worst obstacle to the resurgence of royalism in France was Louis XVIII himself. In 1795, on assuming the title, he had issued a Declaration of Verona, in which he announced his intention to restore the Old Regime and punish all involved in the Revolution back to 1789. It has been said, correctly enough in this connection, that the Bourbons "learned nothing and forgot nothing." Had Louis XVIII offered in 1795 what he offered in 1814, it is quite conceivable that his partisans in France might have brought about his restoration and terminated the war. As it was, the majority of the French adhered not exactly to the republic as set up in 1795, but to any system that would shut out the Bourbons and privileged nobility, prevent a reimposition of the manorial system, and secure the new landowners, peasant and bourgeois, in the possession of the church properties that they had purchased.

The Left was made up of persons from various levels of society who still favored the more democratic ideas expressed earlier in the Revolution. Some of them thought that the fall of Robespierre had been a great misfortune. A tiny group of extremists formed the Conspiracy of Equals, organized in 1796 by "Gracchus" Babeuf. His intention was to overthrow the Directory and replace it with a dictatorial government in which private property would be abolished and equality would be decreed. For these ideas, and for his activist program, he has been regarded as a political precursor to modern communism. The Directory repressed the Conspiracy of Equals without difficulty and guillotined Babeuf and one other. Meanwhile it did nothing to relieve the distress of the lower classes, who showed little inclination to follow Babeuf even though they suffered from the ravages of scarcity and inflation.

##### *The Political Crisis of 1797*

In March 1797 occurred the first really free election ever held in France under republican auspices. The successful candidates were for the most part constitutional monarchists or at least vaguely royalist. A change of the balance within the Five Hundred and the Ancients, in favor of royalism, seemed to be impending. This was precisely what most of the republicans of 1793, including the regicides, could not endure, even though they had to violate the constitution to prevent it. Nor was it enduring, for other reasons, to General Napoleon Bonaparte.

Bonaparte was born in 1769 into the minor nobility of Corsica, shortly after the annexation of Corsica to France. He had studied in French military schools and been commissioned in the Bourbon army but would never have reached high rank under the conditions of the Old Regime. In 1793 he was a fervent young Jacobin officer who had served the revolutionary cause by driving the British from Toulon and who was consequently made a brigadier general by the government of the Terror. In 1795, as noted, he rendered valuable service to the Convention by breaking up a demonstration of royalists. In 1796 he received command of an army, with which, in two brilliant campaigns, he crossed the Alps and drove the Austrians from north Italy. Like other generals he soon became independent from the government in Paris, which was financially too

Napoleon Bonaparte

harassed to pay his troops or to supply him. He lived by local requisitions in Italy, became self-supporting, and in fact made the civilian government in Paris dependent on him.

He developed a foreign policy of his own. Many Italians had become dissatisfied with their old governments, so that the arrival of the French republican armies threw north Italy into turmoil. The Venetian cities revolted against Venice, Bologna against the pope, Milan against Austria, and in Piedmont the Savoy monarchy was threatened by uprisings of its own subjects. Combining with some of these revolutionaries, while rejecting others, Bonaparte established a "Cisalpine" Republic in the Po Valley, modeled on the French system, with Milan as its capital. Where the Directory, on the whole, had originally meant to return Milan to the Austrians in compensation for Austrian recognition of the French conquest of Belgium, Bonaparte insisted that France hold its position in both Belgium and Italy. He therefore needed expansionist republicans in the government in Paris and was perturbed by the royalist victories in the elections of 1797.

The Austrians negotiated with Bonaparte because they had been beaten by him in battle. The British also, in conferences with the French at Lille, discussed peace in 1796 and 1797. The war had gone badly for England; a party of Whigs led by Charles James Fox had always openly disapproved it, and the pro-French and republican radicals were so active that the government suspended habeas corpus in 1794, and thereafter imprisoned political agitators at its discretion. Crops were bad and bread was scarce and costly. England too suffered from inflation, for Pitt at first financed the war by extensive loans, and a good deal of gold was shipped to the Continent to finance the Allied armies. In February 1797 the Bank of England suspended gold payments to private citizens. Famine threatened, the populace was restless, and there were even mutinies in the fleet. Ireland was in rebellion; the French came close to landing a republican army there, and it could be supposed that the next attempt might be more successful. The Austrians, Britain's only remaining ally, had been routed by Bonaparte, and at the moment the British could subsidize them no further. The British had every reason to make peace.

#### Prospects for peace

Prospects for peace therefore seemed good in the summer of 1797, but, as always, it would be peace upon certain conditions. It was the royalists in France that were the peace party, because a restored king could easily return the conquests of the republic and would in any case abandon the new republics in Holland and the Po Valley. The republicans in the French government could make peace with difficulty, if at all. They were constitutionally bound to retain Belgium. They were losing control of their own generals. Nor could the supreme question be evaded: Was peace dear enough to purchase by a return of the Old Regime, such as Louis XVIII had himself promised?

#### The coup d'état of Fructidor

The coup d'état of Fructidor (September 4, 1797) was a forceful attempt to resolve all these internal and external issues. It was the turning point for France's constitutional republic, and it became a decisive event for all Europe. The Directory asked for help from Bonaparte, who sent one of his generals, Augereau, to Paris. While Augereau stood by with a force of soldiers, the councils annulled most of the elections of the preceding spring. On the whole, it was the old republicans of the Convention who secured themselves in power. Their justification was that they were defending the revolution, keeping out Louis XVIII and the Old Regime. But to do so they had violated their own constitution and quashed the first free election ever held in a constitutional French republic. And they had become more than ever dependent on the army.

After the coup d'état the "Fructidorian" government broke off negotiations with England. With Austria it signed the treaty of Campo Formio on October 17, 1797, incorporating

## CHRONOLOGY OF NOTABLE EVENTS, 1789–1804

May 1789	Estates General convenes at Versailles
June 1789	The Third Estate declares itself to be the National Assembly
July 1789	Crowd assaults and captures the Bastille fortress in Paris
August 1789	National Assembly issues "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" and abolishes "feudal privileges"
September 1791	New French Constitution establishes a constitutional monarchy
April 1791	France declares war on Austria and Prussia
September 1792	New National Convention meets in Paris; France becomes a republic
January 1793	King Louis XVI is executed in Paris
1793–1794	The Radical Revolution and the Reign of Terror
July 1794	Robespierre and his Jacobin allies are executed
1795–1799	Republic called "the Directory" governs France and sends armies to spread revolutionary republicanism in Europe
November 1799	Napoleon Bonaparte seizes power in a coup d'état
1799–1804	Napoleon is "First Consul" in French government called the Consulate; laws are codified in Napoleonic Code
1801	Napoleon's Concordat with the Roman Catholic Church
1803–1804	Independent Republic of Haiti is established after French forces are defeated in Saint-Domingue
1804	France becomes an empire under Emperor Napoleon I

Bonaparte's ideas. By the new treaty Austria recognized the French annexation of Belgium (the former Austrian Netherlands), the French right to incorporate the Left Bank of the Rhine, and the French-dominated Cisalpine Republic in Italy. In return, Bonaparte allowed the Austrians to annex Venice and most of mainland Venetia.

In the following months, under French auspices, revolutionary republicanism spread rapidly through much of Italy, creating new republics with classical names. The old patrician republic of Genoa turned into a Ligurian Republic on the French model. At Rome the pope was deposed from his temporal power and a Roman Republic was established. In southern Italy a Neapolitan Republic, also called Parthenopean, was set up. In Switzerland at the same time, Swiss reformers cooperated with the French to create a new Helvetic Republic.

The Left Bank of the Rhine, in the atomistic Holy Roman Empire, was occupied by a great many German princes who now had to vacate their lands. The treaty of Campo Formio provided that they be compensated by church territories in Germany east of the Rhine and that France have a hand in the redistribution. The German princes turned greedy eyes on the German bishops and abbots, and the almost 1,000-year-old empire, hardly more than a solemn political abstraction since the Peace of Westphalia, sank to the level of a land rush or real estate speculation, while France became involved in the territorial reconstruction of Germany.

#### Revolutionary republicanism spreads



**THE FRENCH REPUBLIC AND ITS SATELLITES, 1798-1799**

By 1799 the French Republic had annexed Belgium (the Austrian Netherlands) and the small German bishoprics and principalities west of the Rhine, and had created, with the aid of native sympathizers, a string of lesser revolutionary republics in the Dutch Netherlands, Switzerland, and most of Italy. With the treaty of Campo Formio between France and Austria in 1797, the Holy Roman Empire began to disintegrate, for the German princes of the Left Bank of the Rhine, who were dispossessed when their territories went to France, began to be compensated with territory of the church-states of the Holy Roman Empire. These developments were carried further by Napoleon (see map, p. 423).

*The Coup d'État of 1799: Bonaparte*

After Fructidor the idea of maintaining the republic as a free or constitutional government was given up. There were more uprisings, more quashed elections, more purgings both to Left and Right. The Directory turned into an ineffective dictatorship. It repudiated most of the assignats and the debt but failed to restore financial confidence or stability. Guerrilla activity flared up again in the Vendée and other parts of western France. The religious schism became more acute; the Directory had to take severe measures toward the refractory clergy.

Meanwhile Bonaparte waited for the situation to ripen. Returning from Italy a conquering hero, he was assigned to command the army in training to invade England. He concluded that invasion was premature and decided to strike indirectly at England, by threatening India in a spectacular invasion of Egypt. In 1798, outwitting the British fleet, he landed a French army at the mouth of the Nile. Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire, and the French occupation of Egyptian territories alarmed the Russians, who had their own designs on the Middle East. The Austrians objected to the French rearrangement of Germany. A year and a half after the treaty of Campo Formio, Austria, Russia, and Great Britain formed an alliance known as the Second Coalition. The French Republic was again involved in a general war. And the war went unfavorably, for in August 1798 the British fleet cut off the French army in Egypt by winning the battle of the Nile (or Aboukir), in October the people of Cairo rose in revolt against the French occupation of Egypt, and by 1799 Russian forces, under Marshal Suvorov, were operating as far west as Switzerland and north Italy, where the Cisalpine Republic went down in ruin.

Recognizing the multiple threats to France's revolutionary Republic, General Bonaparte decided that his opportunity had now come. He left his army in Egypt and, slipping through the British fleet, reappeared unexpectedly in France. He found that certain civilian leaders in the Directory were planning a change. They included Sieyès, of whom little had been heard since he wrote *What Is the Third Estate?* in 1789, but who had sat in the Convention and voted for the death of Louis XVI. Sieyès' formula was now "confidence from below, authority from above"—what he now wanted of the people was acquiescence, and of the government, power to act. This group was looking about for a general, and their choice fell on the sensational young Bonaparte, who was still only 30. Dictatorship by an army officer was repugnant to most republicans of the Five Hundred and the Ancients. Bonaparte, Sieyès, and their followers therefore resorted to force, executing the coup d'état of Brumaire (November 9, 1799), in which armed soldiers drove the legislators from the chambers. They proclaimed a new form of the republic, which Bonaparte entitled the Consulate. It was headed by three consuls, with Bonaparte as the First Consul.

*The Directory turns to Bonaparte*

**46. THE AUTHORITARIAN REPUBLIC: THE CONSULATE, 1799-1804**

The next chapter takes up the affairs of Europe as a whole in the time of Napoleon Bonaparte, the purpose at present being only to tell how he closed, in a way, the Revolution in France.

It happened that the French Republic, in falling into the hands of a general, fell also to a man whom many of his contemporaries and some later historians viewed as a "genius" or "great man" in European history. Bonaparte was a short man who would never have looked impressive in civilian clothing.

*Napoleon's "genius"*

His manners were rather coarse; he lost his temper, cheated at cards, and pinched people by the ear in a kind of formidable play—he was no “gentleman.” A child of the Enlightenment and the Revolution, he was entirely emancipated not only from customary ideas but from moral scruples as well. He regarded the world as a flux to be formed by his own mind. He had an exalted belief in his own destinies, which became more mystical and exaggerated as the years went on. He claimed to follow his “star.” His ideas of the good and the beautiful lacked nuance, but he was a man of extraordinary intellectual capacity, which impressed all with whom he came in contact. “Never speak unless you know you are the ablest man in the room,” he once advised his stepson, on making him viceroy of Italy, a maxim that, if he followed it himself, still allowed him to do most of the talking. His interests ran to solid subjects, history, law, military science, public administration. His mind was tenacious and perfectly orderly; he once declared that it was like a chest of drawers, which he could open or close at will, forgetting any subject when its drawer was closed and finding it ready with all necessary detail when its drawer was opened. He had all the masterful qualities associated with leadership; he could dazzle and captivate those who had any inclination to follow him at all. Some of the most humane men of the day, including Goethe and Beethoven in Germany, and Lazare Carnot among the former revolutionary leaders, at first looked on him with high approval. He inspired confidence by his crisp speech, rapid decisions, and quick grasp of complex problems when they were newly presented to him. He was, or seemed, just what many people in France were looking for after ten years of upheaval.

Under the Consulate France reverted to a form of enlightened despotism, and Bonaparte may be thought of as the last and most eminent of the enlightened despots. Despotic the new regime undoubtedly was from the start. Self-government through elected bodies was ruthlessly pushed aside. Bonaparte delighted in affirming the sovereignty of the people; but to his mind the people were a sovereign, like Voltaire’s God, who somehow created the world but never thereafter interfered in it. He clearly saw that a government’s authority was greater when it was held to represent the entire nation. In the weeks after Brumaire he assured himself of a popular mandate by devising a written constitution and submitting it to a general referendum or “plebiscite.” The voters could take it—or nothing.

They took it by a majority officially reported as 3,011,007 to 1,562.

The new constitution set up a make-believe of parliamentary institutions. It provided for universal male suffrage, but the citizens merely chose “notables” who were then appointed by the government itself to public position. The notables had no powers of their own. They were merely available for appointment to office. They might sit in a Legislative Body, where they could neither initiate nor discuss legislation but only mutely reject or enact it. There was also a Tribunalate that discussed public policies but had no enacting powers. There was a Conservative Senate, which had rights of appointment of notables to office (“patronage” in American terms) and in which numerous storm-tossed regicides found a haven. The main agency in the new government was the Council of State, imitated from the Old Regime; it prepared the significant legislation, often under the presidency of the First Consul himself, who always gave the impression that he understood everything. The First Consul made all the decisions and ran the state. The regime did not openly represent anybody, and that was its strength, for it provoked the less opposition. In any case, the political machinery just described fell rapidly into disuse.

Bonaparte entrenched himself also by promising and obtaining peace. The military problem at the close of 1799 was much simplified by the attitude of the Russians, who in effect withdrew from the war with France. In the Italian theater Bonaparte had to deal only with the Austrians, whom he again defeated, by again crossing the Alps, at the battle of

#### Bonaparte as First Consul

After repeatedly winning battles against all the powers of Europe, Napoleon developed even more grandiose ideas of himself and the imperial power of France. This painting was completed in 1806 by Jacques-Louis David, the aging revolutionary whose work had once portrayed the Tennis Court Oath and the faces of common people in Paris. Here he presents an idealized image of Napoleon as a young republican hero who crossed the Alps in 1800 to defeat the Austrians at the battle of Marengo.

(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)



Marengo in June 1800. In February 1801 the Austrians signed the treaty of Lunéville, in which the terms of Campo Formio were confirmed. A year later, in March 1802, peace was made even with Britain.

Peace was made also at home. Bonaparte kept internal order, partly by a secret political police but especially through a powerful and centralized administrative machine in which a “prefect,” under direct orders of the minister of the interior, ruled firmly over each of the regional departments that the Constituent Assembly had created early in the Revolution. The new government put down the guerrillas in the west. Its laws and taxes were imposed on Brittany and the Vendée, and a new peace settled down on the factions left by the Revolution. Bonaparte offered a general amnesty and invited back to France, with a few exceptions, exiles of all stripes, from the first aristocratic émigrés to the refugees and deportees of the republican coups d’état. Requiring only that they work for him and stop quarreling with each other, he picked reasonable men from all camps. His Second Consul was Cambacérès, a regicide of the Terror; his Third Consul was Lebrun, who had been Maupeou’s colleague in the days of Louis XV. Fouché emerged as minister of police; he had been an Hébertist and extreme terrorist in 1793 and had done as much as anyone to bring about the fall of Robespierre. Before 1789 he had been an obscure bourgeois professor of physics. Talleyrand reappeared as minister of foreign affairs; he had spent the Terror in safe seclusion in the United States, and his principles, if he had any, were those of constitutional monarchy. Before 1789 he had been a bishop, and he descended from an old and famous aristocratic lineage—no one who had not known the Old Regime, he once said, could realize how pleasant it had been. Men of this kind were now willing, for a few years beginning in 1800, to forget the past and work in common toward the future.

Disturbers of the new order the First Consul ruthlessly put down. Indeed, he concocted alarms to make himself more welcome as a pillar of order. On Christmas Eve, 1800, on the

way to the opera, he was nearly killed by a bomb, or “infernal machine,” as people then called such bombs. It had been set by royalists, but Bonaparte represented it as the work of Jacobin conspiracy, being most afraid at the moment of some of the old republicans; and over 100 former Jacobins were deported. Contrariwise, in 1804, he greatly exaggerated certain royalist plots against him, invaded the independent state of Baden, and there arrested the Duke of Enghien, who was related to the Bourbons. Though he knew Enghien to be innocent, he had him shot. His purpose now was to please the old Jacobins by staining his own hands with Bourbon blood; Fouché and the regicides concluded that they were secure so long as Bonaparte was in power.

### *The Settlement with the Church, Other Reforms*

For all but the most convinced royalists and republicans, reconciliation was made easier by the establishment of peace with the church. Bonaparte himself was a pure eighteenth-century rationalist. He regarded religion merely as a social convenience or as a useful component of political order. But a Catholic revival was in full swing, and he saw its importance. The refractory clergy were the spiritual force animating all forms of counterrevolution. “Fifty émigré bishops, paid by England,” he once said, “lead the French clergy today. Their influence must be destroyed. For this we need the authority of the pope.” Ignoring the horrified outcries of the old Jacobins, in 1801 he signed a concordat with the Vatican.

#### *Concordat with the Vatican*

Both parties gained from the settlement. The autonomy of the prerevolutionary Gallican Church came to an end. The pope received the right to depose French bishops, because before the schism could be healed both constitutional and refractory bishops had to be obliged to resign. The constitutional or pro-revolutionary clergy came under the discipline of the Holy See. Publicity of Catholic worship, in such forms as processions in the streets, was again allowed. Church seminaries were again permitted. But Bonaparte and the heirs of the Revolution gained even more. The pope, by signing the concordat, virtually recognized the Republic. The Vatican agreed to raise no question over the former tithes and the former church lands. The new owners of former church properties thus obtained clear titles. Nor was there any further question of Avignon, an enclave within France, formerly papal, annexed to France in 1791. Nor were the papal negotiators able to undermine religious toleration; all that Bonaparte would concede was a clause that was purely factual, and hence harmless, stating that Catholicism was the religion of the majority of the French people. The clergy, in compensation for loss of their tithes and property, were assured of receiving salaries from the state. But Bonaparte, to dispel the notion of an established church, put Protestant ministers of all denominations on the state payroll also. He thus checkmated the Vatican on important points. At the same time, simply by signing an agreement with Rome, he disarmed the counterrevolution. It could no longer be said that the Republic was godless. Good relations did not, indeed, last very long, for Bonaparte and the papacy were soon at odds. But the terms of the concordat proved lasting.

With peace and order established, the constructive work of the Consulate turned to the fields of law and administration. The First Consul and his advisers combined what they conceived to be the best of the Revolution and of the Old Regime. The modern state took on clearer form. It was the reverse of everything feudal. All public authority was concentrated in officially employed agents of government, no person was under any legal authority except that of the state, and the authority of government fell on all persons alike. There were no more estates, legal classes, privileges, local

#### *Consulate reforms*

liberties, hereditary offices, guilds, or manors. Judges, officials, and army officers received specified salaries. Neither military commissions nor civil offices could be bought and sold. Citizens were to rise in government service according to their abilities rather than their wealth or privileged birth.

This was the doctrine of “careers open to talent”; it was what the ambitious professional classes of the Third Estate had wanted before the Revolution, and a few persons of quite humble birth profited also. For sons of the old aristocracy, it meant that family pedigree was not enough; they must also show individual capacity to obtain employment. Qualification came to depend increasingly on education, and the secondary and higher schools were reorganized in these years, with a view to preparing young men for government service and the learned professions. Scholarships were provided, but it was mainly the upper middle class that benefited. Education, in fact, in France and in Europe generally, came to be an important determinant of social standing, with one system for those who could spend a dozen or more years at school, and another for those who were to enter the work force at the age of 12 or 14. Meanwhile, French intellectual life was strictly regulated and censored. When a few professors at the National Institute began to question certain government policies, for example, Bonaparte suppressed both their writings and the section of the Institute in which they worked; and when the liberal critic Germaine de Staël published books that displeased the First Consul, she was sent off to exile in Switzerland. Creative, critical intellectual debate thus became impossible in France during these years, though Bonaparte satisfied many of the popular demands for education and professional advancement.

#### *“Careers open to talent”*

Another deep demand of the French people, deeper than the demand for the vote, was for more reason, order, and economy in public finance and taxation. The Consulate gave these also. There were no tax exemptions because of birth, status, or special arrangement. Everyone was supposed to pay, so that no disgrace attached to payment, and there was less evasion. In principle these changes had been introduced in 1789; after 1799 they began to work. For the first time in ten years the government really collected the taxes that it levied and so could rationally plan its financial affairs. Accounting methods were improved, so there was a new order in both the receipt and the expenditure of government revenues. There was no longer a haphazard assortment of different “funds” on which various officials drew independently and confidentially as they needed money, but a concentration of financial management in the treasury and even in a kind of budget. The revolutionary uncertainties over the value of money also dissipated. Because the Directory had shouldered the odium of repudiating the paper money and government debt, the Consulate was able to establish a sound currency and public credit. To assist in government financing, one of the banks of the Old Regime was revived and established as the Bank of France.

Like all enlightened despots, Bonaparte codified the laws, and of all law codes since the Romans the Napoleonic codes became the most famous. To the 300 legal systems of the Old Regime and the mass of royal ordinances were now added the thousands of laws enacted but seldom implemented by the revolutionary assemblies. Five codes emerged—the Civil Code (often called simply the Code Napoleon), the codes of civil and of criminal procedure, and the commercial and penal codes. The codes made France legally and judicially uniform. They assured legal equality; all French citizens had the same civil rights. They formulated the new law of property and set forth the law of contracts, debts, leases, stock companies, and similar matters in such a way as to create the legal framework for an economy of private enterprise. They repeated the ban of all previous regimes on organized labor unions and

#### *The Napoleonic Codes*

were severe with individual workers, their word not being acceptable in court against that of the employer—a significant departure from equality before the law. The criminal code was somewhat freer in giving the government the means to detect crime than in granting the individual the means of defense against legal charges. As for the family, the codes recognized civil marriage and divorce but left the wife with very restricted powers over property and the father with extensive authority over minor children; the legal system codified a paternalistic view of all family relations. The codes reflected much of French life under the Old Regime. They also set the character of France as it has been ever since, socially bourgeois, legally egalitarian, and administratively bureaucratic.

In France, with the Consulate, the Revolution was over. If its highest hopes had not been accomplished, many of the worst inequities and inefficiencies of the Old Regime had at least been cured. The beneficiaries of the Revolution felt secure. Even former aristocrats were beginning to accept the new system. The working-class movement, repeatedly frustrated under all the revolutionary regimes, now vanished from the political scene to reappear as a new socialism 30 years later. What the Third Estate had most wanted in 1789 was now both codified and enforced, with the exception of parliamentary government, which after ten years of turmoil many people were temporarily willing to forgo. Moreover, in 1802, the French Republic was at peace in Europe with the papacy, Great Britain, and all Continental powers, though a French army was still at war in Saint-Domingue. France reached to the Rhine and had dependent republics in Holland and Italy. So popular was the First Consul that in 1802, by another plebiscite, he had himself elected consul for life.

A new constitution, in 1804, again ratified by plebiscite, declared that “the government of the republic is entrusted to an emperor.” The Consulate became the empire, and Bonaparte emerged as Napoleon I, Emperor of the French.

From Consulate to empire

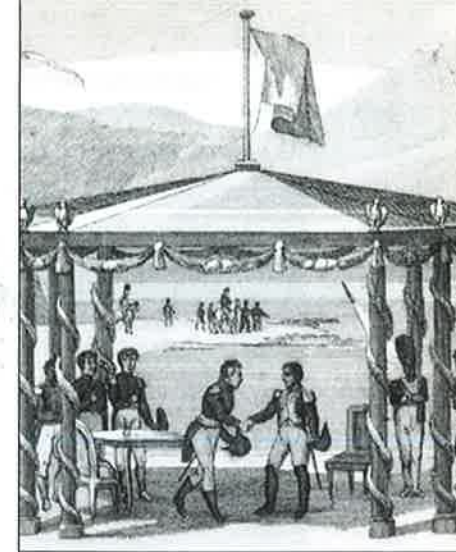
But France, no longer revolutionary at home, was a revolutionary force outside its borders. Napoleon became a terror to the patricians of Europe. They called him the “Jacobin.” And the France that he ruled, and used as his arsenal, was an incomparably formidable state. Even before the Revolution it had been the most populous in Europe, perhaps the most wealthy, in the front rank of scientific enterprise and intellectual leadership. Now all the old barriers of privilege, tax exemption, localism, and caste exclusiveness had disappeared. The new France could tap the wealth of its citizens and put able men into positions without inquiring into their origins. Every private, boasted Napoleon, carried a marshal’s baton in his knapsack. The French looked with disdain on their caste-ridden adversaries. The principle of civic equality proved not only to have the appeal of justice, but also to be politically useful, and the resources of France were hurled against Europe with a force that for many years no other nation or balance of powers could successfully oppose.



For suggested further readings and useful Web sites, interactive exercises, glossary, chronologies, and more, go to the *Online Learning Center* at [www.mhhe.com/palmerhistory11e](http://www.mhhe.com/palmerhistory11e).

## Chapter 10

# NAPOLEONIC EUROPE



47. The Formation of the French Imperial System
48. The Grand Empire: Spread of the Revolution
49. The Continental System: Britain and Europe
50. The National Movements and New Nationalist Cultures
51. The Overthrow of Napoleon: The Congress of Vienna

*The repercussions* of the French Revolution had spread throughout Europe since the fall of the Bastille, and even more definitely after the outbreak of war in 1792 and the ensuing victories of the French republican armies. They became even more evident after the republican General Bonaparte turned into Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, King of Italy, and Protector of the Confederation of the Rhine. Napoleon surpassed all previous European rulers in imposing a broad political unity on the European continent. Although his imperial power collapsed in less than 15 years, his military campaigns and political ascendancy transformed both international relations in Europe and the internal development of the various European peoples.

The French impact on other nations, though based on military success, represented more than mere forcible subjugation. Many of the legal and social innovations that came to France through revolution were brought to other countries in the early nineteenth century by administrative decree. There were for several years Germans, Italians, Dutch, and Poles who worked with the French emperor to introduce the changes that he demanded, and that they themselves often desired. In Prussia it was the resistance to Napoleon that gave the incentive to internal reorganization and fostered the emergence of a new German nationalism. Whether by collaboration or resistance, Europe was transformed.

It is convenient to think of the fighting from 1792 to 1814 as a “world war,” as indeed it was, affecting not only all of Europe but also places as far away as Latin America, where the wars of independence began, or the interior of North America, where the United States purchased Louisiana in 1803 and attempted a conquest of Canada in the War of 1812. But it is important to realize that this world war was actually a series of wars, most of them quite short and distinct. Only Great Britain remained continually at war with France, except for

Chapter emblem: Detail from a nineteenth-century illustration of Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I meeting on the Niemen River in 1807. (Rare Book Collection, University of North Carolina)