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# Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon

Course Guidebook

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Professor Desan’s love of teaching has been recognized by various awards, including the University of Wisconsin Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award (2007) and the UW–Madison Undergraduate History Association’s Professor of the Year Award (2013). She has sought out wider audiences for her teaching by participating in Wisconsin Public Radio’s *University of the Air*, the Chicago Humanities Festival, and seminars and workshops sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Professor Desan’s research has often probed how individuals experienced French revolutionary politics in their daily lives. She has especially tried to understand the Revolution’s impact on ordinary men and women and to analyze how they engaged in politics in households, churches, and villages. More recently, her writing has examined the international circulation of revolutionary ideas and practices and has explored the influence of foreigners on French politics and political culture.

Professor Desan has written or coedited *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France*; *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*; *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France*; and *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*.

Professor Desan has spent many happy hours delving into archives in France. Her research has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, American Philosophical Association, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Fulbright Program, and American Council of Learned Societies. ■

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# Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon

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## Scope:

**H**ow did the French Revolution lead to endless political experiments and contribute to the invention of modern democratic politics but also bring about the Terror? How did the Revolution affect ordinary citizens in surprisingly profound and widespread ways? What was the international impact of the Revolution as it spread both radical ideology and warfare? And why and how did Napoleon Bonaparte rise to power out of the Revolution and create a vast European Empire?

We begin the course by entering the Old Regime world of kings and nobles and asking how revolution could break out in one of the wealthiest, most powerful, and most traditional monarchies of Europe. After economic crisis and royal bankruptcy force Louis XVI to consider sharing power with elites, we witness a sudden explosion of popular politics as numerous groups jump into the fray: Revolutionary leaders declare that their new National Assembly represents France. Parisians force the king to comply when they storm the Bastille. Peasants attack the chateaux of their noble lords and bring down the age-old system of hierarchy and aristocratic privilege. The National Assembly produces the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, pronouncing all men equal before the law and laying out crucial freedoms. And all these events took place in just one year: 1789.

The early part of this course examines the inspiration for democratic politics drawn by the French from the Enlightenment; the American Revolution; their own hubbub of discussion in cafés, newspapers, and new political clubs; and frequent elections. We look at how ordinary citizens experienced the Revolution. Radical Parisian *sans-culottes* (prorevolutionary artisans and workers) pushed the Revolution to the left with their activism in the streets, political clubs, and neighborhood assemblies. Women across France organized clubs and produced pamphlets and petitions calling for rights; they gained the unprecedented right to divorce and share in equal inheritance. Jews won citizenship and rights. And in the French colony of Saint-

Domingue (Haiti), thousands of slaves launched the largest slave revolt in history and pushed the French to abolish slavery. In short, this course probes the far-reaching social and cultural impact of the revolutionary attempt to produce equality and invent political citizenship.

The course also asks: Why did the Revolution grow more radical and more riddled with conflict? How did going to war with Austria and Prussia in 1792 affect internal politics? By 1792, the French would overthrow their king and declare a Republic. We watch the infant Republic desperately try to survive the foreign war even while the revolutionaries introduce sweeping social and political changes. At their most radical, the Jacobins attempt to replace Catholicism with secular patriotic festivals, honoring goddesses of liberty and reason. They change the calendar, styles of dress, and codes of etiquette.

Fascinating personalities emerge: the indecisive Louis XVI, the much-maligned Marie-Antoinette, and a host of intriguing revolutionary leaders. What motivated Robespierre in his pursuit of the egalitarian Republic and political purity? How did he come into conflict with his bon-vivant fellow Jacobin, Georges Danton? Who was that ranter Jean-Paul Marat, and why did he win people's hearts? What role was played by women leaders, such as the feminist playwright Olympe de Gouges or the political *salonnières* Jeanne-Marie Roland and Germaine de Staël?

Then, we confront another wrenching question: Why does this attempt to create a democratic republic devolve into the Terror? The Terror refers to the period in 1793–1794 when the Jacobin leaders of the Committee of Public Safety (including Robespierre) suspended the constitution and took power into their own hands. They tried and executed about 35,000 people whom they saw as counterrevolutionaries. To understand this devastating turn of events, we watch as the fragile Republic faces repeated crises that tore the Revolution apart: foreign invasion, internal civil war as some areas rose up in counterrevolution, economic crisis, fear of conspiracy, and bitter factionalism among the leaders of the Revolution. After Robespierre and his fellow Jacobins were overthrown in July 1794, the French tried to restore order and invent a more moderate republic, called the Directory.

At this point, a new figure strides onto the revolutionary stage: Corsican-born Napoleon Bonaparte. He was only 20 in 1789. We see how he came of age with the Revolution and rose up through the military ranks. In 1796, he rockets to fame with his lightning-strike victories against the Austrians in Italy. We explore his brilliance as a military commander. His own story becomes intertwined with the international theme of the course as he spurs on the creation of sister republics in Italy. And the course explores the broader attempt of the revolutionaries to enlarge their territory and spread revolution abroad. The French even tried to convince the Americans to help them create sister republics in Florida, Louisiana, and Canada.

In 1799, Bonaparte seized power and made himself first consul. He presented himself as the heir, the son of the Revolution. And by 1804, he had crowned himself emperor. By 1808, he had extended his Empire across Europe from Poland to Spain.

Napoleon's stunning moves produce numerous questions: How did he convince the French to back him as consul and emperor—right after their revolutionary attempt to create a republic? He certainly ended the Revolution, but how did he somehow embody it, and what revolutionary innovations did he embrace, build on, and attempt to spread to other parts of Europe? We track Napoleon's armies to Egypt, Italy, Saint-Domingue, across central Europe and Poland, into Spain, and finally, to Russia. The course combines military and political history to explore the story of empire-building and analyze the Empire's impact on the lives of ordinary men and women.

After the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812, the European powers united to defeat Napoleon and send him to Elba in 1814. Irrepressible, he returned to resurrect his Empire. We follow him to Waterloo and, finally, to exile on Saint Helena. The last two lectures explore the longer-term international legacies of this momentous quarter-century of history. ■

# Introduction and the Old Regime Monarchy

## Lecture 1

**R**evolution broke out in France in 1789 and would last for 10 years. At first, the French planned to share power with their king, but eventually, they overthrew him and attempted to build a democratic republic in which every man held a share in power. The revolutionaries' attempt to institute representative democracy and equality was flawed, but it changed the modern Western world forever. This course explores this astonishing and pivotal period of European history, beginning in this lecture with an introduction to some themes of the course and a look at the French monarchy in the persons of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette.

### **The Fascination of Revolutionary France**

- The period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era had a cataclysmic and lasting impact on politics, social relations, religion, war, empire-building, and the intellectual and literary world. Europe would never be the same after the Revolution. Other parts of the world, especially the Caribbean and the Americas, also felt the impact.
- At the same time, this era intrigues because the actors dealt with timeless human problems. There is something deeply compelling about the rawness of this moment of history. It lays bare humanity at its most idealistic and its most tragic.
  - Almost nothing can match the zeal and heady optimism of the early revolutionaries, filled with fire to build the egalitarian Republic.
  - And almost nothing can match the tragedy of the Terror—that moment when the dreams of liberty and equality fell beneath the blade of the guillotine.
- The French Revolution did not produce a pantheon of heroes or a set of founding fathers, as the American Revolution did. Its legacy

is too divisive and too controversial for that. Napoleon perhaps comes closest, but he, too, was a deeply polarizing figure. At the time and later on, many idealized him and many hated him.

- This compelling era of history is deeply human and gripping in its drama. And it was pivotal in producing ideas, political models, and social experiments for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Politics and Political Creativity**

- Political changes occurred at a dizzying pace during the 25-year period of the Revolution and the Napoleonic era. And for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the revolutionary era introduced many political options and models, including constitutional monarchy, representative democracy, revolutionary dictatorship by committee, liberalism, conservatism, and upstart, authoritarian, one-man rule in Napoleon.
- The biggest political legacy was the sudden invention of democracy—the creation of a republic—in the largest, most populous monarchy in Western Europe. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century France—as in other powerful countries in continental Europe—a single monarch held, in theory, absolute power. But the Revolution opened up politics to thousands of new players.
- This opening up of politics produced violence, conflict, counterrevolution, and the Terror. It then generated a great paradox: A single individual first seemed to save the Republic from itself but then crowned himself emperor. In this course, we will ask how that occurred and how it transformed revolutionary political goals.

### **Impact of the Era on Everyday Life**

- The problem of democracy posed by the French Revolution was not just political but also social. How is equality created, and how are people remade as rights-bearing citizens? How can equality be wrung out of centuries of embedded hierarchy, aristocracy, and privilege?

- As the rest of Europe and even America looked on in shock, the revolutionaries introduced all kinds of astonishing social and cultural experiments, abolishing aristocracy and privilege, taking away the wealth and lands of the Catholic Church, and even trying to close down religious practice.
- The revolutionaries declared that all laws applied equally to all men. They gave Jews rights, let wives divorce their husbands, and abolished slavery after thousands of slaves rose up in revolt in their colonies. We will ask how these innovations affected people's lives.
- The Revolutionary era was significant because it posed the question of rights and equality acutely for the first time in Europe. And it had lasting power precisely because its actions were so radical. In France and beyond, people felt that a sea change had taken place. The natural order of things—such as God, church, king, and social hierarchy—was suddenly gone.

### **International Impact and Significance**

- The French Revolution drew inspiration from a transnational exchange of ideas. It also produced enormous international excitement. At the same time, among the crowned heads of Europe, the Revolution fell like a bombshell into European geopolitics. It unleashed 23 years of nearly nonstop warfare throughout Europe.
- The revolutionaries themselves tried to spread revolution abroad and to grab territory. At the height of revolutionary expansionism, they expanded France's borders and created eight sister republics in Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Napoleon, of course, would go much further and create a European Empire stretching from Holland to Croatia, from Poland to Spain.
- This era posed quintessential questions for modern empire-building: What is the relationship between democracy and the colonization of other peoples? How did Napoleon invent new and influential forms of empire—militarily, politically, and culturally?

## Changing Nature of the Monarchy

- Louis XVI was in the Bourbon family line, descended from the Capetian dynasty that had ruled France since 987. Over the centuries, French kings had expanded their territory through inheritance, conquest, and marriage. More recently, they had built a powerful bureaucracy of royal officials across the land.



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- In theory, the king's power was limited only by his own religious conscience and certain fundamental laws of the kingdom, although in practice, the great size and diversity of France imposed other limits. The Catholic Church also held great authority but supported the king.
- Since medieval days, French kings had two bodies: one mortal and one sacred. Louis XVI's mortal body stood at about six feet tall and was rather stout. He had blond hair, blue eyes, and a weak chin. Although the mortal body of the king would die, his sacred body would live on, because French kingship was eternal.
- The king's coronation in the cathedral at Reims acted out this sacred aspect for all of France to see. After his consecration, Louis XVI went out into the crowd and performed the "royal touch" to heal his subjects. But the Enlightenment had produced some questioning about the power of the sacred.
  - Enlightenment thinkers had suggested a new model of kingship—a model based not on divine right but on a social contract with the people. Many authors theorized that kings

**According to the divine right of kings, the mortal body of Louis XVI would die, but his sacred body would live eternally.**

should make policy by responding more to Enlightenment thinkers and experts.

- The cultural ferment of the Enlightenment put pressure on kings to reinvent themselves. Some decisive rulers, such as Frederick II of Prussia or Joseph II of Austria, took up the challenge and forged a new kind of enlightened absolutism.
- But Louis was caught between two tendencies. On the one hand, he welcomed advisors steeped in Enlightenment ideas about reform on behalf of the public good. But on the other, he saw himself as the sacred and ultimate guardian of tradition, privilege, royal authority, and the hierarchical society of church and aristocracy.

### **Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette**

- When Louis took the throne in 1774, he was only 19 years old. He was shy and taciturn, with awkward manners and little natural grace or personal flair. Many observers—both at the time and since—thought that his understated style was a sign of unintelligence. But he wasn't dumb so much as pathologically indecisive—a serious problem for a king.
- Louis sincerely tried to be benevolent and charitable toward his people. As a leader, he had a studious interest in issues of foreign policy and finance. He was well read in history and geography and learned German, Italian, and English.
- Many of his subjects liked the king's unpretentious style, but the press and the people were far less enthusiastic about his wife, Marie-Antoinette. She was pretty and lively, the 15<sup>th</sup> child born to the formidable Austrian empress Maria Theresa. She was only 14 when she married Louis, who was only 15 himself. The match had been made in hopes of cementing France's unpopular diplomatic alliance with Austria.

- But becoming a French queen was not easy for the Austrian princess. For one thing, she initially seemed unable to accomplish her most crucial mission as queen: producing an heir. Ultimately, she bore four children, including two boys, but her reputation never fully recovered from the early years of her marriage, and many of the French never forgave her for being Austrian.
- Marie did not exercise the wide patronage expected of a French queen. Instead, she alienated many by developing a separate, luxurious social world at the Petit Trianon and at her peasant hamlet at Versailles. She gained a reputation for frivolity, and rumors circulated that she took both men and women as lovers.

### **The Diamond Necklace Affair**

- The Diamond Necklace Affair, an incident that occurred in 1785, highlights the fact that attitudes toward the aristocracy, the court, and the world of privilege were becoming more critical in the 1780s.
- On the fringes of the court, a lesser noblewoman, the countess de la Motte, managed to swindle the aristocratic Cardinal de Rohan, who had hoped to win the queen's favor. The countess convinced Rohan to put a down payment on a magnificent diamond necklace, leading him to believe that the necklace would be given to Marie-Antoinette and the king would pay the outstanding cost. But la Motte's husband broke the necklace into individual diamonds and smuggled it to London.
- When the swindle became known, Louis XVI, instead of dealing with the situation behind the scenes, directed the highest court in the land to try Rohan, la Motte, and her accomplices. The countess was convicted, while the cardinal was found not guilty. Marie-Antoinette was not put on trial (and was, in fact, innocent), but in the court of public opinion, her name was dragged through the mud. Many thought that the queen had engaged in shady dealings or an illicit love affair to obtain the necklace.

- The king himself emerged from the affair looking weak or, at best, politically inept. Above all, to the ordinary French man or woman, the lustrous world of the high aristocracy at Versailles was clearly riddled with degeneracy, corruption, and lust for wealth and power.
- The Diamond Necklace Affair offers a small window into the growing climate of criticism in France in the mid-1780s. People were becoming dissatisfied with the wealth and privilege of aristocrats. And, perhaps, they even began to question the absolute power of the king.

### Suggested Reading

Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*.

Hardman, *Louis XVI*.

Lever, *Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*.

Price, *The Road from Versailles*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What does it mean to believe that a hereditary king is somehow sacred? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a political system built on the notion that its ruler is sacred?
2. Kings and queens have tremendous power but are also very much curtailed by circumstance. How did their own personalities and public expectations shape the lives and options of Louis and Marie-Antoinette? How do these factors shape the lives and options of other monarchs in history?

# Privilege—Old Regime Society

## Lecture 2

**B**y examining the social structure of Old Regime France, we can begin to suggest an answer to two important questions: Why did the Revolution become so radical in its social goals, and why did it take place, not in a poor country, but in one of the most economically dynamic countries of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe? In this lecture, we'll see that a complicated tension existed in Old Regime society in the decades before 1789. On the one hand, this was a world structured by privilege and hierarchy. On the other hand, it was a society of economic dynamism and openness to new ideas. That tension between the old and the new is crucial to unlocking the puzzle of the Revolution.

### The Marriage of Figaro

- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the theater could be a very political space, an avenue for playing with new ideas or even criticizing the crown. In 1778, the French playwright Beaumarchais wrote *The Marriage of Figaro*, a play so radical that it was initially banned from public production.
- But still, the play became secretly popular, and finally, in 1784, the royal censors decided to allow it to be performed in one of the main theaters of Paris. It became one of the biggest hits of the century.
- If we read *The Marriage of Figaro* today, it doesn't seem so subversive, but at the time, it was. Figaro is a feisty servant who constantly one-ups his master, but he also voices anger at the social system of privilege in France. Beaumarchais's play was profoundly egalitarian and anti-hierarchical. In the 1780s, it joined a chorus of public questioning and criticism of immoral aristocrats.

## The Old Regime and the Peasantry

- In the Old Regime—French society before 1789—hierarchy structured every relationship: the king over his subjects, lords over their peasants, men over women, masters over slaves in the colonies, and clergy over laypeople. At the time, even those on the bottom of this structure believed that hierarchy was natural—sanctioned by God.
- According to ideas dating back to medieval times, French society was made up of three estates, or orders: The First Estate was those who pray, the clergy; the Second Estate was those who fight, the nobility; and the Third Estate was those who work, everybody else, from the lowliest peasant or vagabond to the wealthiest non-noble merchant. The clergy and the nobility made up only about 1 percent of the population, while the Third Estate accounted for the rest.
- At the core of this hierarchical system of estates lay the defining principle of Old Regime France: privilege. Society was imagined not as individuals equal before the law but as groups, each with different legal statuses and functions. For example, only members of the glassmakers guild could make stained-glass windows. Only the church had the economic privilege of collecting the tithe. Only merchants in chosen overseas trading companies had the privilege of monopolizing certain forms of trade.
- The first two estates—the clergy and the nobility—were the most privileged of all. By law, they were free from almost all taxes, including the heavy tax on land. In fact, it was the peasants who paid more royal taxes than any other group in France.
- The nobles' economic privileges were most crushing for the peasants, who made up at least 80 percent of the population of France. Under a system known as seigneurialism, the noble landlords had the right to extract various dues, payments, and services from the peasants. The seigneur also controlled the local justice system that tried petty crimes and settled conflicts over property. Some lands



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To the seigneur, peasants owed a certain number of days of labor per year, along with baskets of wheat or rye, chickens or partridges, cash, and other tributes (*The Cart, or Return from Haymaking*, Louis Le Nain).

in France had no lord, but most peasants lived under the system of seigneurialism.

- The original version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” a French tale, highlights the brutality, the nearness of death, and above all, the scarcity of the lives of French peasants. Within the oral culture of the French peasantry, this fairy tale is about coping with a harsh world—a world with dangerous wolves in the forest and not enough bread on the table.
- Under seigneurialism, most peasants scraped out an existence by farming on small plots of land. Their acreages could not sustain

them in years of crop failure and famine, which had long dogged the French peasantry. In 1789, famine became all too real again.

- The 18<sup>th</sup> century experienced an economic boom, but as France got richer, the wealth was unevenly distributed to different regions and social groups. Further, most of the economic growth did not take place in agriculture but in trade and commerce, especially foreign trade and colonial commerce. Although a small group of high-level peasants, engaged in commercial farming, benefited from these changes, the average peasant did not.
  - Peasants owned less land in the 18<sup>th</sup> century than they had earlier. Wealthy investors—city people—bought up much of the best land to extract rising rents and seigniorial dues.
  - Lords embraced a modern entrepreneurial spirit to get more profit from the land. More and more owners lived far from their land and lost ties with the peasants. As one historian commented, “In the course of three centuries, the seigneurie had evolved from a personally ruled mini-state to an investment portfolio.” We can easily see why peasants resented their lords.

### **Wealth and Privilege among the Elites**

- Cities were growing in 18<sup>th</sup>-century France, fueled by dynamic population growth and new wealth, based in large part on colonial trade. In the cities, newfound wealth and luxury stood side by side with gut-wrenching poverty.
- The new system of wealth and the old system of privilege coexisted. Wealth from the midcentury boom was concentrated in particular areas and groups, including urban professionals and, above all, merchants, financiers, and businessmen.
- In Paris and other cities, the middle and upper classes had unprecedented access to a new world of consumer goods: sugar and coffee from France’s colonies in the Caribbean, fine calicos and muslins from India, Persian carpets, and porcelain from China.

France's own industrious artisans also poured out fancy domestic products: inlaid desks of deluxe hardwoods, wigs for every occasion, silk stockings, clocks, fans, and umbrellas.

- Some people were getting rich off this world of stuff. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, foreign trade quadrupled, and colonial trade grew 10 times. In France, the new hierarchy of money—the newfound wealth of silk merchants, financiers, and traders in slaves and sugar—sat rather uneasily with the old social hierarchy of privilege, based on birth, blood, and land.
- If the system of privilege no longer made sense, it still persisted powerfully. Members of the middle classes who made it rich still aspired to become nobles and could, in fact, buy their way into the nobility. Paradoxically, the nobility—defined by blue blood racing in one's veins—was up for sale.
  - But with boom times, as more merchants, businessmen, and lawyers tried to buy ennobling offices, the prices surged. By the end of the century, to buy a noble office cost two, three, or five times more than it had earlier, and there were not enough ennobling offices to go around.
  - Many of the merchant and professional classes also bought land so that they could begin to look like nobles. Others added a “de” to their names in hopes of sounding respectable if not noble.
- While bourgeois families were aspiring to privileged status, nobles were longing to tap into commercial wealth.
  - According to long tradition, nobles drew honor from owning land and fighting in wars. If they dirtied their hands by engaging in commerce or manufacturing, they would dishonor themselves and literally fall out of the Second Estate. They would then have to pay taxes like commoners.
  - How, then, could nobles share in the commercial riches? They might fund business ventures behind the scenes or, better yet, marry a son to the daughter of a financier or merchant. The

noble son could keep his title and his honor and gain the young lady's wealth.

- France's elites—noble and wealthy non-noble—had a foot in both the old hierarchy of privilege and the new hierarchy of commerce and exchange. They were invested in both systems, even though the systems essentially contradicted each other.
- But as this new elite emerged, it mixed old nobles, new nobles, and rich commoners. And the old hierarchy of privilege seemed to lose its validity. The new power of money, exchange, and capitalism called into question the old system of privilege.
- The Enlightenment unmasked the follies of privilege as just one aspect of the flawed Old Regime. The elite readers of Enlightenment texts avidly discussed the illogic of privilege and clapped loudly at *The Marriage of Figaro*.
- But even though privilege came to be seen as cheapened, or even ridiculous, and even though its ancestry seemed diluted, many members of the Second Estate clung to it all the more. Some liberal nobles eventually supported the early Revolution, but when push came to shove, most of the privileged orders defended the older system tooth and nail.
- Privilege was not so easy to undo. It was everywhere, affecting everything: laws, taxation, guild production, the distribution of wealth in the countryside, the status of nobles old and new, and the prominence and prestige of the church. In other words, inequality ruled life in Old Regime France, embedded in law and in practice in every way.
- As France grew richer and as the world of exchange created a new social world, this hierarchy—once so natural—began to lose its grip on the minds of the French. Figaro's anger at "nobility, fortune, rank, position" echoed powerfully in the 1780s. Perhaps the best

thing to do would be to uproot privilege, to wrench it out of the very fabric of society, and hurl it away.

### Suggested Reading

Beik, *A Social and Cultural History of Early Modern France*.

Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*.

Jones, *The Great Nation*.

Tocqueville (Elster, ed.; Goldhammer, trans.), *Tocqueville*.

### Questions to Consider

1. No society is ever purely equal. How do societies in different places and different historical periods decide what forms of inequality are acceptable, fair, or even necessary?
2. Why did inequality—especially the old system of privilege—start to seem so much less natural in France by the 1780s?

# The Enlightenment

## Lecture 3

The great cultural movement of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the Americas was known as the Enlightenment. This lecture will explore the ideas of some of its leading thinkers and examine the movement as one of the crucial origins of the French Revolution. The Enlightenment combined scathing criticism with tremendous optimism. Enlightenment thinkers—known as *philosophes*—exposed the flaws of the Old Regime monarchy, church, and society, but they also believed vibrantly in the possibility of reform; they thought it was possible to remake society according to rational and scientific principles. The Enlightenment was also a movement that sparked discussion among thousands of French citizens. For the revolutionaries, this heady combination of criticism, optimism, and public debate held great power.

### The Panthéon

- In 1791, two years into the Revolution, French leaders transformed a newly built church in the heart of the Latin Quarter into a secular monument, a burial place honoring the “great men” of the new nation. The church was renamed the Panthéon.
- Not surprisingly, some revolutionary political leaders were buried there, but the revolutionaries also went to northern France and disinterred two Enlightenment thinkers who had died before the outbreak of the Revolution: Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
- More than 100,000 Parisians lined the streets to watch the sarcophagus of Voltaire brought to the Panthéon. A similar parade was held when the remains of Rousseau were transferred three years later. The revolutionaries obviously found in these two men a fount of inspiration.

## The Rise of Literacy

- Over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, literacy rates in France doubled. By 1789, almost half of men and a third of women in France could read. Further, the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an outpouring of the printed word, including pamphlets, newspapers, and novels.
- Many writers barely grubbed out an existence, but some works hit it big. One of these was *Candide*, Voltaire's satirical tale about a naïve young man traveling around the world. His innocent observations highlighted the absurdity of religious intolerance and persecution, and his experiences exposed the evils of slavery and human greed.
  - The forceful combination of satire, philosophy, and social commentary in *Candide* made it a best seller. In its first year of publication, 1759, *Candide* went through 17 editions and sold 20,000 copies. The book was published clandestinely outside France because it contained subversive material.
  - In France, writers faced the real likelihood of being imprisoned for their work, and booksellers and printers faced imprisonment at even higher rates than authors.
  - Paradoxically, when the Old Regime state tried to repress scandalous, irreligious, or subversive works, their actions only fanned the flames. In many ways, the illegal nature of Enlightenment writings made them more desirable.
- Ordinary people developed fervent opinions about what they read and formed passionate attachments to certain authors. Voltaire and Rousseau, for example, had become cult figures long before the revolutionaries transported their remains to the Panthéon.
- In a nutshell, the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the formation of a new public sphere with a newly literate audience. Crucially, the locations for literate men and women to discuss and debate the ideas of the Enlightenment seemed to multiply in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: salons, provincial academies, Freemason societies, public lectures, scientific clubs, and cafés.

- The Enlightenment world was abuzz with people reading and talking. Some historians have argued that just the act of reading and debate stirred up the capacity for critical thinking and paved the way for Revolution.

### Voltaire and Natural Rights

- Over the course of his long life, Voltaire wrote in many genres: classical tragedy; epic poetry; novels, such as *Candide*; history; and above all, social commentary and satire. He became renowned for his acerbic pen and biting sense of humor.
- In some ways, Voltaire was an unlikely predecessor to Revolution. Politically, he believed in reform from above by enlightened kings. He was a friend and advisor to monarchs, especially Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia.
- The revolutionaries did not laud Voltaire for his political thought or egalitarianism but for his exposition of the inhumanity and injustice of the Old Regime state. Just as important, he was irreverent to the core. Feisty and combative, he attacked the wealth, political power, fanaticism, and “superstition” of the Catholic Church.
- In later life, Voltaire became known for taking up various *causes célèbres*. These famous court cases gripped the public imagination and targeted the flaws of the Old Regime state and society. The cases focused on one great issue of the Enlightenment and Revolution: natural rights, or human rights, a core concern for Enlightenment theorists and revolutionaries alike.



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**The irreverent Voltaire famously quipped, “I have made but one prayer to God, a very short one: ‘O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.’ And God granted it.”**

- The most famous of Voltaire's causes was the Calas affair.
  - The Calas family was Huguenot, that is, Protestant, a religious minority within Catholic France. In 1685, Louis XIV had attempted to force all Protestants to convert or leave France. By the 1760s, the remaining Huguenots lived side by side with Catholics peacefully, but they held a tenuous legal status and had to worship secretly in many areas.
  - In October 1761, Marc-Antoine Calas, the son of a cloth merchant, hanged himself. His family initially told the police that he had been murdered by an intruder but later testified unanimously that Marc-Antoine had committed suicide.
  - Within 24 hours, the Calas family was arrested, and the father, Jean Calas, was accused of murdering his son. Rumors began to spread that the father had killed his son to prevent him from converting to Catholicism.
  - Jean Calas was subjected to torture, and though he never confessed, was convicted and publicly executed, his body broken on the wheel.
  - The incident could have remained a minor provincial trial of an obscure merchant, but Voltaire found out about it, and it gripped his imagination. Surely, the Calas family had been ruined because of religion. For Voltaire, this was religious intolerance and fanaticism at its worst. Further, the barbarous treatment of Jean Calas exemplified the arbitrary despotism of Old Regime justice.
  - Voltaire became convinced that Calas was innocent, and he began to organize a crusade to have the verdict overturned. In this, we see that crucial characteristic of the Enlightenment as a movement: public discussion. Finally, in 1765, the verdict was overturned.

- Voltaire took on other court cases involving justice and human rights. Little wonder that the revolutionaries saw his potent use of the pen and his exacting language of rights as a precursor to their own project.

### **Diderot's *Encyclopedia***

- The revolutionaries admired Voltaire's quest for natural rights, religious freedom, and a better justice system. They also drew inspiration from the Enlightenment's confidence in the collective power of knowledge and education and the use of reason to improve daily life. One book embodied this project of the Enlightenment more than any other: the *Encyclopedia* of Denis Diderot.
- A massive project, the *Encyclopedia* would run to 28 volumes—17 volumes of text and 11 of illustrations. It took more than 20 years to complete, from 1751 into the 1770s. The aim of the book was to “collect all the knowledge scattered over the face of the earth.”
- This attempt to systematize knowledge on behalf of human progress was also illegal. Denis Diderot, the major editor of the *Encyclopedia*, had already been imprisoned for his earlier writings. The *Encyclopedia* was published clandestinely in Switzerland and smuggled into France and across Europe.
- The project was deeply political. It didn't just convey knowledge but criticized the Old Regime state, church, and social institutions. For example, an entry about the slave trade is a moral indictment of the practice of selling Africans.
- The *Encyclopedia* also used a clever system of cross-reference to make satirical political or anticlerical points. Under the entry for “Eucharist,” the communion in the Catholic mass, it reads, “see Cannibalism.”
- This debunking of religion entered into the way that the encyclopedists systematized their project. The book included a tree of knowledge with three main branches: (1) history, based on

memory; (2) philosophy, based on reason; and (3) poetry, based on imagination. In this tree of knowledge, theology had lost its pride of place; subordinated to philosophy (and, therefore, reason), theology was only a tiny twig.

- The *Encyclopedia* aimed to compile and preserve knowledge, to systematize it, even as it voiced political positions and satirized the Old Regime. The project also had another goal that would appeal to the revolutionaries: It popularized knowledge and revealed various forms of expertise that had traditionally been secret. Diderot and the encyclopedists believed in utilitarian knowledge, useful learning and discoveries for the progress of the human race.

### **Rousseau and Politics**

- Born 1712 in Geneva, Switzerland, Rousseau dazzled the Enlightenment public as a novelist and commentator on education and politics.
- In his essays, Rousseau claimed that when men moved from the state of nature to the state of society, they learned to pretend to be what they were not. Inequality crept into society and men lost their natural goodness, as well as their liberty. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau attempted to imagine a political system that would enable men to build a different kind of society.
- Rousseau's work posed a central question: How can we create a society in which people are equal, moral, and free and, at the same time, a society that is unified and acts for the good of all? *The Social Contract* left many parts of this difficult question unanswered, but it stressed three points.
  - First, the ideal society would be founded on a pact—a social contract—at the outset. Participants in this society did not surrender their liberty and sovereignty to a single ruler or even to representatives but to each other, to the collective group. Rousseau suggested that sovereignty (that is, the right to govern) rested in the people who had agreed to the contract.

- Second, society should be governed by something called the general will, the collective moral force that would govern society for the general good. The general will would be expressed through laws.
- Finally, this political system would work only if citizens were truly moral. True virtue would enable them to recognize and put into practice the general will for the good of all. Women should especially cultivate men's moral characteristics.
- The revolutionaries were swept up by Rousseau's project of creating free, equal, and virtuous citizens. Like Rousseau, they wanted to ensure that sovereignty rested in the people as a whole, who would somehow discover and mandate laws based on the general will for the good of the whole. It was an exciting project, but one that would be difficult to enact.

### Suggested Reading

Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*.

Outram, *The Enlightenment*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The Enlightenment took place during an explosion of literacy and the development of many new venues for exchanging ideas, such as newspapers, pamphlets, and the cafés, intellectual clubs, and salons of the new public sphere. Do you see parallels or comparisons between these new modes of communication and the explosion of the Internet and digital communication today? How does the mode of communication affect the nature of social and political relationships?
2. What made Enlightenment ideas so successful in ultimately undermining the legitimacy of the Old Regime state and society?

# France, Global Commerce, and Colonization

## Lecture 4

The 18<sup>th</sup> century marks the origins of today's globalized world economy. In the 1700s, it was possible to speak for the first time of "proto-globalization" or "early-modern globalization." The volume of international trade reached unprecedented levels, and economic production and consumption in remote corners of the earth became intertwined as never before. In this lecture, we will follow French ships to India, Africa, and the Americas and explore France's participation in a global circuit of trade and colonization. We'll also highlight three ways in which empire-building and international trade were tied to the French Revolution: (1) the upsetting of the social system of privilege, (2) the growing state debt, and (3) the abolition of slavery.

### Europe's Race for Goods and Lands

- In one of the 18<sup>th</sup> century's best sellers, the abbé Raynal observed about European colonization: "Never has any event been as important for the human race in general and for the peoples of Europe in particular... The passion for conquest engaged every nation."
- In Europe's race for goods and lands, initially France lagged behind, but by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the French finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, sought to overcome France's weak colonial track record and expand the nation's commerce both west and east.
- Colbert latched onto a savvy business invention of the Dutch: the joint-stock trading company. In such companies, merchants pooled their capital to spread the risky cost of overseas trade. Crucially, they also received a royal monopoly over goods exchanged in one area, such as the East or West Indies or the slaving coast of Africa. Theoretically, commercial ships from each nation could trade only with their own nation's colonies.

- This mercantilist system generated tremendous riches, a flourishing system of illicit trade, and militant competition among the major seagoing powers.

### French Trade in the East

- In Asia, European traders competed for access to pepper and spices, tea, coffee, tropical hardwoods, textiles, and porcelain. In competition with the Dutch and Portuguese, the French staked their claim to two tiny but useful colonies off the coast of East Africa near Madagascar: the Île de Bourbon and the Île de France. These islands produced mocha coffee and had ports for vessels crossing the Indian Ocean toward India, the Arabian Peninsula, or even China.
- The French had their eyes on a bigger prize: India. But they didn't dare to imagine introducing settler colonies there. In India, the French and the British emerged as major rival forces seeking to take advantage of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. The British would win out over France in the long term. But even after losing to the British in the Seven Years' War, the French managed to hang onto several outposts along the east coast: Pondicherry, Mahe, and Chandernagore.
- By mid-century, India produced about a quarter of the world's textile supply, and the cloth trade had outstripped the longstanding spice and pepper trade in volume and sales. India exported raw silk but above all, cotton, everything from brilliantly colored calicos to fine muslins to floral chintz.
- Indian cloth flooded the market so successfully that it threatened France's own production of silk, wool, and linen. To protect these industries, the French monarchy outlawed importing, producing, or even buying calico from 1686 to 1759. But demand did not disappear, and smugglers happily supplied as much as they could lay hands on.
- The royal ban on Indian cloth allowed it to be re-exported from France. Textile traders found a ready market for their Indian cloth

on the west coast of Africa, where they exchanged it for human cargo. And in the Caribbean, it was cheap Indian cotton that clothed the slaves.

### **The Slave Trade**

- Another product crucial to the slave trade and emblematic of this early global economy was cowrie shells from the Maldiv Islands off the Indian coast. These shells became valued in West Africa as currency or adornment. Indian merchants bought them from the Maldives for rice and traded them to Europeans for silver. European ships filled their holds with this valuable ballast and used it to buy slaves.
- By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European trade had become truly global. Spanish American silver bought cloth and cowries from the East. These goods were then traded for African slaves shipped to the Americas, where they produced sugar, cotton, coffee, tobacco, and indigo to bring back to Europe.
- At the core of this global dance lay the institution of slavery. The most lucrative colonial trade came from the plantations of the West Indies. The British, Spanish, Dutch, and Danes had all staked their claims there.
- But in the Caribbean, the French outdid their European rivals. They had smaller colonies, such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, and they held the Caribbean prize: Saint-Domingue, now known as Haiti, on the large island of Hispaniola. Saint-Domingue alone produced almost half of France's foreign trade. Producing sugar was devastatingly difficult work, and malnutrition, overwork, brutal treatment, and disease killed more than half of slaves within three to eight years of arrival.
- The slave trade formed one leg of a larger pattern of Atlantic commerce known as the triangular trade. In this triangular trade, slave outfitters descended from Europe carrying cloth, guns, cowries,

rum, and other goods to the West African coast, roughly between Senegal and Angola today.

- There lay a string of European military and commercial outposts. They served as trading company warehouses to hold goods and slaves brought to the coast by African entrepreneurs. In the Americas, the traders exchanged their captives for New World goods, such as sugar, coffee, or hides. Then, they completed the third leg of the triangular trade by heading back to Europe to start again.



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**Slaves on the sugarcane plantations died in large numbers from malnutrition, brutality, and disease; in 1782, one white colonist complained of the slaves, “They are always dying.”**

- Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, some 12.5 million Africans were forced onto ships bound for the New World. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century alone—the peak century of the slave trade—slave ships filled their holds with 6.5 million Africans. Brazil and the Caribbean consumed the most slaves.
- The 1731–1732 voyage of the *Diligent*, reconstructed by the historian Robert Harms, is a classic example of the triangular trade. The ship traveled down the coast of Africa, across the Atlantic to Martinique, and back to France, exchanging Indian cloth, cowrie shells, kegs of brandy, and guns and ammunition for 256 African captives. On the return voyage, the *Diligent* brought barrels of sugar

and bales of cotton to Nantes, where they were likely re-exported to the Baltic.

- The triangular trade could take other routes, running between Europe, North America, and the Caribbean.
  - In North America, until 1763, the French had laid claim to New France. This territory sprawled southwest from eastern Canada, down the St. Lawrence River Valley, through the Great Lakes Region, and down the Mississippi Valley to New Orleans.
  - In one version of the triangular trade, New France provided the French Caribbean islands with supplies, such as timber, dried fish, salted beef, and flour. The Caribbean shipped sugar to France, and then France sent manufactured goods back to the New World.
  - Any map of New France makes French control look far stronger than it really was. This was Native American territory, and New France was, as one historian put it, “a loose chain of isolated establishments.” Although the French crown tried to encourage emigration to New France, Canada held little appeal for French peasants and potential migrants.
  - Most immigrants farmed the land, but the most valuable commodities came from the fisheries off Newfoundland and from the furs gained in exchanges with the Algonquin and Iroquois people. The territory produced 80 percent of the hides and fur exported from North America, and its salted beef, dried cod, and grain fed the slaves on the Caribbean islands.
- France’s economy was fueled by this worldwide system of trade and took off by the 1730s and 1740s. Over the century starting in 1700, foreign trade grew fourfold. Trade within Europe was still a crucial source of wealth, but colonial trade multiplied 10 to 15 times over.

## The Cost of Defense

- France's colonies and global trade provided great riches to France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it cost the French state dearly to defend its colonies and its part in this global economic system.
- Great Britain, France's major rival, profited even more from its colonial trade and was eager to extend its empire at France's expense. Between 1689 and 1815, France and England engaged in seven major wars. At stake was dominance over Europe's commercial and colonial networks.
- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, warfare became distinctly global. Starting in 1756, in the Seven Years' War, France and Britain fought each other in India, in the Caribbean, on the west coast of Africa, on the plains of Canada, and in the Atlantic.
- The Seven Years' War involved all the major continental powers. The French—allied with Austria and Russia—were also fighting Prussia and the German state of Hanover on the continent. But the French could not afford to fight on such a scale, nor could they win.
- In 1763, when Britain won, France ceded all French territory east of the Mississippi, except for two small islands off Newfoundland. West of the Mississippi, the Spanish laid claim to France's territory of Louisiana and New Orleans. To be stripped of New France was deeply humiliating. The French were also left with a staggering war debt and a simmering resentment toward England.
- Competition over empire was expensive for the French state, but it also provoked dangerous questioning from the burgeoning Enlightenment movement.
  - In the 1770s and 1780s, the abbé Raynal produced a bestselling 10-volume exploration of the impact of European colonization and commerce on the history of the world.
  - Raynal and his anonymous coauthors engaged their readers by playing into the hunger for stories of exotic lands, but they

also posed big questions: Was it possible for the French state to grow rich and engage in commerce and colonization without practicing human cruelty? How should France adapt its political system to encourage trade without increasing despotism?

- These questions led to a second potent issue: What about slavery? Raynal condemned the cold calculus of the slave trade and called for an end to slavery.
- By the eve of the Revolution, France had a small but potent abolitionist movement. In 1788, several reformers founded the Society of the Friends of Blacks to lobby for abolition of slavery and the slave trade. No one knew that revolution in both France and Saint-Domingue lay on the horizon, but most of the founders of this society turned out to be future revolutionaries, ready to raise the issue of rights and slavery when the opportunity arose.

### Suggested Reading

Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

Harms, *The Diligent*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Global commerce and colonization had mixed or paradoxical effects on the French state and society. Why? And what were these paradoxical effects?
2. What similarities and differences do you see between 21<sup>st</sup>-century globalization and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century version?

# American Revolution and the Economic Crisis

## Lecture 5

In 1787, the French king went broke. France could not get a loan, and the king's ministers couldn't convince the French to change their inequitable and inefficient tax system in the middle of the economic downturn. Unable to run the state, by 1788, Louis XVI faced a dire political and financial crisis. At a loss, he opened the door to discuss sharing power with French elites. No one could have predicted the Revolution that then occurred. In this lecture, we'll look first at France's participation in the American Revolution—a decision with strong economic and political consequences for France—and then we'll turn to the financial and political crisis that broke the absolutist monarchy.

### Retaliation against the British

- As a young monarch in the 1770s, Louis XVI had two main geopolitical goals: first, to preserve diplomatic stability in Europe without getting too drawn into the machinations of Austria and, second, to retaliate against Great Britain for the humiliations France had suffered in the Seven Years' War that had stripped France of her North American colonies.
- Opportunity for revenge against the British presented itself in a surprising place: the rebellious American colonies. At first, the American revolutionaries didn't have much luck in persuading France to support their cause. They managed to convince the French to send only some contraband aid of gunpowder, arms, and provisions to the rebel colonies.
- But in 1776, Benjamin Franklin arrived in France and won over the hearts of Parisians. He became wildly popular because he represented the simplicity and morality of the New World fused with the enlightened power of reason and science. He influenced the climate of public opinion and made it more politically possible for the French government to side with the Americans.

- But it would take more than popularity and diplomacy for Franklin to convince the French king to enter the war on America's side. Late in 1777, the Americans soundly defeated the British at Saratoga, and the French gained confidence in the possible success of the American rebellion.
- In 1778, France promised military aid to the American revolutionaries. In return, the Americans offered the French most-favored-nation status in trade with the 13 colonies. Over the next few years, French aid helped the Americans defeat the British.

### **Impact of the American Revolution in France**

- The biggest immediate effect of the American Revolution on France was financial. Participation in the American cause cost France more than 1 billion *livres*, or French pounds.
  - Throughout the American Revolution, Jacques Necker, the French finance minister, engaged in expert maneuvers to borrow ever more money. He made himself popular with the French people by financing the war with loans rather than new taxes. He made himself even more popular by publishing a false budget, declaring that France was comfortably in the black.
  - The French were already deeply in debt from earlier wars, especially the Seven Years' War. Participation in the American Revolution pushed them over the edge and precipitated royal bankruptcy within a few years.
- It's harder to measure the ideological or political influence of the American Revolution on French minds. Without a doubt, the French, who were already aficionados of the Enlightenment, were intrigued by the American example.
- In 1784, just after the peace, the literary Academy of Toulouse sponsored an essay contest on the significance of the American Revolution. One French priest and Freemason wrote that the new United States "is the Festival of Equality. These people are still in the happy time when distinctions of birth and rank are ignored."

- His words suggest that when the French looked at the American case, they thought about themselves. They focused on the system of privilege and inequality in France and the tyranny and despotism of kings.
- The French and other Europeans thought America was unique. It was a distant place across the sea, a new land not weighed down by centuries of privilege and the towering presence of kings on its soil. But even if America was fundamentally “other” and unique, it showed Enlightenment ideas in action.
- Undoubtedly, French participation in the American Revolution paved the way for the French case. The French had already been primed by the Enlightenment, and the American Revolution encouraged them to question their own society and politics even more.
- Still, it was the French debt from aiding the Americans that mattered most. By pushing the French crown closer to the brink of bankruptcy, the American Revolution contributed to provoking a political crisis and a political opening.

### The Royal Debt

- In the aftermath of the American Revolution, France had two main economic problems: debt and downturn. France faced a crushing state debt and a severe crisis in the economy at large in the late 1780s.
- No exact figure exists for the royal debt at this time, but one thing was clear: Every year, France’s debt grew. In the peacetime year of 1786, it grew by 112 million *livres*. Each year, France had to expend half its revenue to pay the interest on existing loans. And because France looked increasingly like a bad credit risk, the cost of borrowing also grew.
- In 1783, France had a new finance minister: a witty and optimistic man named Calonne. He knew he had two choices: He could try to either increase taxes or to borrow more.

- Taxation in France on the eve of the Revolution was unevenly distributed across the population, inefficiently collected, and virtually impossible to reform. Not surprisingly, Calonne first decided to borrow more.
- In fact, he cultivated public spending and conspicuous consumption at court so that the French crown would appear to be well off.
- Calonne spent extensively on various projects. He poured money into urban building and development. He subsidized private industries, pumped up the royal navy, and constructed a new shipyard at the port city of Cherbourg in Brittany. But his policy of conspicuous consumption was a double-edged sword.
  - In the short term, Calonne was able to borrow 653 million *livres* in three and a half years.
  - But his policies were expensive, and some state expenditures severely undercut the creditworthiness of the French state.
  - Above all, in the minds of many French people, Calonne's spending became tied to resentment of the high-flown lifestyle at court. His strategy stirred up anti-aristocratic and anti-court feelings, aimed particularly at Marie-Antoinette.



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**Calonne's extensive spending stirred resentment of the extravagant lifestyle at court, represented by no one more than Marie-Antoinette.**

- The state's debt crisis dovetailed with escalating public criticism of privilege, luxury, and high living among the nobility.

### **Economic Downturn**

- The problem of the French debt was made worse by an economic downturn in the mid- and late 1780s. As we discussed in an earlier lecture, the French economy had actually been expanding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in colonial trade. Some sectors, such as trade in slaves, sugar, and silver, remained strong right up to the Revolution. But two significant areas faced crisis in the late 1780s: agriculture and industry, including textile production.
- In 1786, the French ministers Vergennes and Calonne decided to make a commercial treaty with England that would lead to a more open trade policy between the French and English. This was the moment in European history when economic thinkers were beginning to develop liberal economic theories favoring free trade (known as *laissez-faire*). These theories challenged the older, protectionist system known as mercantilism.
- But the timing of this free-trade treaty with England—the Eden Treaty—was bad for France. England was just beginning to benefit from the early Industrial Revolution, which meant that Britain was able to produce cloth much more cheaply than France was. British goods, including products from British India, flooded the French market.
- French industries went into shock. Merchant houses closed down. Unemployment skyrocketed, especially in northern France. If textile producers were hardest hit, other sectors, such as glass and earthenware production, also spiraled downward into crisis.
- To make matters worse, this industrial crisis occurred at the exact same moment as a series of bad harvests across France. These poor harvests trapped the French peasantry, who already lived close to the edge, and made life even more difficult for the weavers and

dyers who had just lost their jobs. Bread prices in cities shot up. Across the north, grain riots broke out.

- The crisis in industry and agriculture had serious implications. Economic despair among the people fueled anger and criticism of the court, and elites grew reluctant to lend money to the state in this tight economic climate.
- The downturn of the economy also narrowed other options for the king and his ministers. Crucially, it made tax reform virtually impossible. But because Calonne couldn't get any additional loans, he decided to try to stir up elite support for a program of financial reform.

### **Assembly of Notables**

- In February 1787, Calonne called an Assembly of Notables, which could act as a kind of advisory body to the crown. The 144 notables included high-ranking men, such as magistrates, bishops, and cabinet members, as well as 2 commoners.
- The linchpin of Calonne's proposed program was a single land tax to fall on all land alike, no matter who owned it. Even the clergy would owe land tax under his plan, as would nobles. He also called for a stamp tax on various commercial transactions. These proposals alienated large landowners, such as nobles and church leaders, as well as successful merchants.
- Even though Calonne had handpicked the members of the Assembly of Notables, they rejected his ideas out of hand and were stunned by the size of the deficit. Calonne also had the backing of the king, but many members of the royal family organized against the king at court.
- Calonne was soon hounded out of France. The elites were dead set against paying more taxes and surrendering their privileges. And now that everyone knew how bad the debt was, the king's chances of getting a loan completely disappeared. Many elites began to

demand that Louis do something that no king had done since 1614: call an Estates-General to ask the people of France for their opinion.

- King Louis XVI could claim to be absolutist, and by long tradition, his power came straight from God, but he could no longer run the state. The combination of expensive wars, crushing royal debt, and the refusal of the elites to cooperate with tax reform put him in a desperate situation. In 1788, he agreed that he would summon the Estates-General the next spring. Although no one knew it at the time, with that act, Louis opened the door to revolution.

### Suggested Reading

Jones, *The Great Nation*.

Schiff, *A Great Improvisation*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Historians disagree about the causes of the French Revolution. Some emphasize cultural factors, such as the Enlightenment. Others point to deep problems in the social structure. Still others highlight the economic and fiscal troubles or the global competition for empire. Some focus on the short-term crisis and ponder whether the king and his ministers could have made better choices. What do you think? Why did France stand on the brink of revolution in 1789? Was revolution inevitable?
2. In France in the late 1780s, society was deeply divided over issues of justice, privilege, and merit, making reform difficult. How do ideas about fairness shape the viability of economic reform in any era?

# The Political Awakening of 1789

## Lecture 6

In 1788, Louis XVI agreed to call the Estates-General, an assembly of elected deputies that, it was hoped, might offer solutions to France's economic crisis. It had been 175 years since a king had agreed to call an Estates-General, and much had changed in that time. The Enlightenment had introduced discussion and debate about the nature of political power and rights and had led to greater questioning about the traditional system of social hierarchy and privilege. When Louis XVI agreed to call the Estates-General, he opened the door to sharing power and stirred up further questioning: Who would have political power? How could France reform its abuses in finances, politics, and society?

### Political Discussion and Debate

- In the spring of 1789, all across France, people gathered to choose deputies to represent the three estates in the Estates-General. According to tradition, people in each estate would meet in village assemblies and draw up grievance lists for the deputies to bring with them to Versailles. By calling the Estates-General, the king was, in effect, asking people from all walks of life to tell him what was wrong with France.
- France was abuzz with political discussion, and in Paris, the liveliest place of political debate was the Palais-Royal, an outdoor arcade that belonged to Louis XVI's wealthy cousin Philippe, the duc d'Orléans.
  - Orléans would soon become engaged in revolutionary politics. In the next few years, he would abandon the title of duke and rename himself Philippe Égalité ("Philip Equality"). Eventually, as a left-wing deputy, he even voted for the death of his cousin the king.
  - But in 1788–1789, Philippe acted as a kind of political impresario of public opinion. In his Palais-Royal, a person

could find cafés, gaming houses, brothels, high-class shops, a wax museum, an outdoor exhibit area, and above all, print shops and publishing houses that produced a flood of pamphlets, newspapers, and broadsheets on politics.

- By 1788, royal censorship had collapsed, and in the last six months of the year, more than 1,500 pamphlets on politics appeared. Almost 2,700 new pamphlets flooded the market between January and April of 1789. The king was warned by his relatives about the dangers of this public debate.
- An obscure priest, the abbé Sieyès, wrote a pamphlet that especially captured France's imagination: "What Is the Third Estate?" Sieyès brilliantly defended the commoners of France as the core of the French nation, the most useful part of society. For Sieyès, it was not hierarchy but commerce and exchange that formed the fundamental bond of society.
  - Sieyès built on the Enlightenment emphasis on utility and useful citizens. He dismissed nobles as "useless," consumers who didn't produce anything. They were "foreigners" to the body politic who could not speak for France.



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Parisians rushed to the Palais-Royal to read or hear the latest political gossip.

- As Sieyès built his potent argument, he focused attention on the concept of the nation as sovereign. The nation wasn't located in the body of the king but in the many bodies of individual French citizens. In this new nation, individuals should be represented by deputies and governed by a legitimate rule of law.
- When Sieyès laid out his attack on privilege and his daring model of sovereignty resting in the nation, he crystalized public opinion. He also spoke directly to a specific question under vibrant debate: How would representative politics and voting work in the Estates-General? Many leaders of the Third Estate, including Sieyès, vociferously claimed that each single deputy should have his own vote.
- Not everyone agreed with Sieyès, but his ideas about individual political voice and national sovereignty became foundational principles of the French Revolution.

### Grievance Lists

- In the Third Estate, in the weeks leading up to the Estates-General, any male taxpayer over the age of 25 could take part in drawing up the grievance lists and voting for electors, as long as he wasn't an actor, a servant, or bankrupt. Some 60,000 grievance lists, known as *cahiers de doléances*, were drawn up across France in the spring of 1789.
- All three estates agreed that the days of absolutist monarchy were over. Everyone praised the king, but they expected a new form of constitutional monarchy. Everyone also agreed that the Estates-General should continue to meet regularly. The nobility and clergy even said that they would pay a little more in taxes. But in exchange, they demanded political voice in a representative body.
- The nobles of the Second Estate didn't all agree about a crucial question: whether to surrender some share of privilege. Some liberal nobles were willing to give up some privilege, but they faced opposition.

- Most nobles saw the meeting of the Estates-General as an opportunity: Perhaps they could regain some of the aristocratic political power that they had gradually lost to absolutist monarchs over the last 150 to 200 years.
- Most of them did not want to reform the seigneurial system that gave them dues and power over their peasants.
- The grievance lists from the Third Estate addressed three primary issues: burdensome seigneurial dues, the tithe collected by the church, and the unfair system of royal taxes. Peasants and urban dwellers called for varied reforms: primary schools for boys and girls, a common system of weights and measures, a more equitable justice system, and more.

### **Meeting of the Estates-General**

- At Versailles, a grand meeting hall had been fitted out for the assembly. On the opening day, May 5, 1789, Louis XVI took his place on a throne under a magnificent gold canopy, surrounded by his queen and high-ranking nobles. More than 2,000 spectators crammed into the balconies. On the main floor, the clergy sat on the right of the king and the nobility sat on his left. Much farther back sat the Third Estate, the commoner deputies.
- On the first day of the meeting, Jacques Necker, the finance minister, gave a tedious speech packed with technical details about the royal budget. Expectations were high, but it became clear that the king and his minister had no clear plan to solve the financial problems of France and no clear program for guiding political reform. The king was good at pageantry, but what about practical ideas?
- The next day, the deputies immediately deadlocked over the first procedure. The king wanted each estate to meet separately and verify its membership. The first two estates were happy to comply: This procedure would set a precedent of voting by estate and secure the dominance of the two privileged orders. But the Third Estate insisted that the entire assembly should verify its membership

collectively, with all the estates together. That procedure would imply voting by head, with every deputy having one vote.

- This procedural technicality may sound unimportant, but a great deal was at stake: Who represented the nation? Who expressed the desires and will of the people of France, and how could they voice that will in the Estates-General?
- Weeks passed and the deadlock deepened. The leaders of the first two estates grew more and more unwilling to compromise.
- The first two estates held their meetings behind closed doors, but the Third Estate opened the balconies to spectators. No single politician dominated, but some groupings and leaders emerged, including the abbé Sieyès. The delegation from Brittany had numerous radicals; among its followers was Maximilien Robespierre. A flamboyant figure who rose to prominence was Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, le comte de Mirabeau.
- In June, such men as Mirabeau, Sieyès, and the delegates from Brittany edged their fellow deputies toward a plan. First, they convinced a few parish priests, the poorest deputies of the First Estate, to abandon their assembly and join the Third. Then, on June 17, after several days of intense debate, the commoners voted to declare that their assembly represented the nation of France. The king's failure to lead made the Third Estate bolder.
- They searched for a name for this new assembly and finally settled on the National Assembly. Louis XVI dismissed the proclamation of this National Assembly to represent all of France, but it was, in fact, a revolutionary act, an act that laid the foundation for France's upcoming experiment in representative democracy.

### **National Assembly**

- The new National Assembly claimed to represent and speak for the nation. Further, the Assembly claimed sovereignty, transferring the political right to govern from the king to itself.

- To cement this claim and give it weight, at Mirabeau's suggestion, the National Assembly agreed to take on the burden of the national debt and tax collection. The deputies would be responsible for reforming the nation and solving its crisis.
- Three days later, on June 20, the commoner deputies of the National Assembly went to their usual meeting hall but found it locked. They feared a royal coup against their new Assembly, so they met in a nearby indoor tennis court. Fear gave way to anger, and anger to action. Swept up in fervor, the Assembly banded together and took an oath to God and the nation never to disband until they had written a new constitution for France.
- No one had yet posed the delicate question of the relationship of this new National Assembly with the centuries-old absolutist monarchy. The deputies imagined that their constitution would allow them to conduct politics together with the crown, though of course, no one knew exactly how.
- On June 23, Louis called all the deputies together in session. He refused to recognize the National Assembly or to consider any changes to privilege, tithes, or seigniorial dues. But he recognized that there was a financial and political crisis and agreed to set up a system for listening to the highest noble elites. Meanwhile, he also began massing royal troops around Versailles.
- The commoner deputies were stunned, but when the master of ceremonies asked them to leave the hall, Mirabeau leapt to his feet and bellowed: "We are here by the will of the people. We will not leave except at the point of bayonets."
- In the next few days, more clergymen and liberal nobles left the meetings of their separate estates and joined the National Assembly. The liberal nobles were led by the king's cousin Philippe. Finally, on June 27, the king told the clergy and nobles to join with the Third Estate in the National Assembly. That night, Paris was ablaze

with fireworks as the people celebrated that day's victory of the National Assembly.

- But beneath the surface lurked doubts. Louis seemed to have surrendered, but no one knew for certain. He had called 30,000 troops to assemble at Versailles. And every day of late June and early July, the cost of bread rose ominously. In other parts of France, bread riots had already broken out. What would the king do next? Would he smash the National Assembly? And what would the people of Paris do?

### Suggested Reading

Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution*.

Lefebvre (Tackett, ed.; Palmer, trans.), *The Coming of the French Revolution*.

Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why do people suddenly become “politicized” at certain historical moments, such as America in 1776 or France in 1789? How does politicization happen? How do contingent events or organizing combine with deeper structural issues to bring about sudden political awareness?
2. Some of the leaders of the National Assembly, such as Sieyès and Mirabeau, did not come from the Third Estate. Why might this have happened, and what does it tell us about the social fabric of France in 1789?

# July 14<sup>th</sup>—Storming the Bastille

## Lecture 7

On July 14, 1789, hundreds of ordinary Parisians poured over the drawbridge of the Bastille, the fortress-prison on the edge of Paris, in search of gunpowder; in the process, they changed the course of French history. On the very next day, men began to demolish the Bastille, taking apart the stones and chains and fashioning them into “relics of freedom”—miniature stone models of the fortress and key chains made from the iron chains. The Bastille itself became an icon of liberty and popular sovereignty. In this lecture, we’ll look at how and why the Bastille took on this symbolism and significance and what happened in Paris on July 14 that seemed to lay the foundations of liberty.

### A State Prison

- The Bastille had been built as a fortress in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and later transformed into a prison. By 1789, it had come to stand for the arbitrary and unjust actions of the king. It stood for injustice, not just of the criminal system but of monarchy itself.
- The Bastille was a state prison for the king’s enemies, who might be grain rioters, religious opponents, spies, or writers. Voltaire, the most famous novelist and philosopher of 18<sup>th</sup>-century France, was imprisoned there twice.
- Like so many political machinations of the crown, everything about the prison was draped in secrecy. Prisoners entered in carriages with drawn curtains, with the guards facing the other way so that they never knew the occupant’s identity. Jailers were allegedly forbidden to speak with inmates. Even the reason for an arrest was often secret.
- No prisoner more embodied this dreadful secrecy than the man in the iron mask. This unknown figure was possibly an illegitimate brother and rival to Louis XIV. He had been imprisoned in 1698.

He died five years later and became a skeleton still locked inside his mask of iron.

- The Bastille was a representation of the absolutist monarchy as unjust, but in fact, it was actually not as bad as it had been earlier. The worst dungeons were no longer used. Prisoners could pay for food and furnishings. Ironically, the richest prisoners ate better than the hungry Parisians who would storm the prison. And in July of 1789, the Bastille held only seven prisoners.

### **The Politics of Hope, Hunger, and Fear**

- At the end of June, King Louis XVI had reluctantly agreed to recognize the National Assembly. To many observers, matters seemed to have calmed down. But the king was also massing troops on the outskirts of Paris, about 30,000 men, many of whom were foreign mercenaries.



**The Bastille represented the tyranny and despotism of the Old Regime, and it stood right in the heart of one of the poorest neighborhoods in Paris.**

- What would happen next was not entirely clear: Would the absolutist king share power with a new legislative assembly and allow the deputies to write a new constitution? Would he crush the discussion of politics and smash any attempt to overhaul the state of France? In fact, Louis XVI himself did not have a plan.
- Ordinary Parisians watched the high-level politics with hope for social reforms, a more equitable tax system, and a solution to France's problems. But what mattered most to them was the price of bread.
  - The 1788 harvest had been dismal, and bread prices rose week by week in the winter and spring of 1789.
  - The spring of 1789 had seen scattered grain riots in the provinces and one major riot in Paris. Fear of hunger haunted the populace of France as they drew up the petitions of grievances for the Estates-General in the spring of 1789.
  - Rumors of an aristocratic plot to hoard grain circulated everywhere. And the false rumor arose that Marie-Antoinette had said, "If they have no bread, let them eat cake."
- The people of Paris knew that they had one hope beyond the National Assembly, one protector who could keep down the price of bread: the king's finance minister, Jacques Necker. He may seem like an unlikely popular hero, but without his presence, people feared that the National Assembly would be sent to the provinces or disbanded.
- On July 11, three days before the storming of the Bastille, the king fired Necker, perhaps because the minister wanted to negotiate with the National Assembly. As rumor of his firing spread from Versailles to Paris, people poured into the streets, heading for the Palais-Royal. A crowd of 5,000 took up Necker's bust from the wax museum and began to parade, chanting his name.

- The next day, different speakers at the Palais-Royal drew crowds. A skinny young man named Camille Desmoulins gave a rousing speech against the king for his actions in firing Necker: “To arms, to arms... I call on my brothers to seek liberty!” In the streets, the revolutionary mood of expectation and hope for reform was giving way to the politics of hunger and fear.

### **The Attack on the Fortress**

- The crowds in Paris swelled from July 12 to 14; they roamed the streets looking for both grain and arms to protect Paris with the newly formed citizen militia. Wild rumors circulated: that the king’s troops would occupy Paris, that the military governor of the Bastille had been directed to point the cannon into the surrounding neighborhood, and that the deputies of the National Assembly had already been locked into the dungeons in the Bastille.
- On July 12 and 13, people in the streets ransacked one monastery in search of bread. They freed inmates of several prisons. On the morning of July 14, they invaded the armory at the veterans’ hospital and captured a dozen cannon and 40,000 guns to supply the citizen militia. But strangely enough, they found no gunpowder. Word went out that the gunpowder had been moved to the Bastille.
- The prison was under the command of de Launay, a military governor. To guard the fortress, he had 32 Swiss soldiers and 82 veteran soldiers, many of whom sympathized with the people of the neighborhood. On the towers and ramparts stood 12 light cannon and 15 larger cannon. Another 3 heavy cannon loomed in the inner courtyard, but only one cannon shot would be fired from inside the Bastille that day.
- In hopes of maintaining the peace, the electors of Paris sent a delegation to meet with de Launay on July 14. But the negotiations went nowhere, and meanwhile, the crowds outside the prison grew: artisans, merchants, day laborers, and former soldiers, armed with pikes, knives, axes, and for some, muskets.

- The houses and shops of the neighborhood were built right up against the walls of the Bastille. As the impatient crowd pressed against the walls, several men climbed onto the roof of a perfume shop against the outer rampart and jumped down into the outer courtyard. They hacked through the pulleys of the drawbridge to the outer courtyard, which crashed down, killing one member of the crowd.
- A single cannon shot and a volley of musket fire rang out. No one knew why it had been fired, but the crowd was sure that de Launay had commanded it. The attackers surged over the drawbridge and began to exchange fire with the defenders. Underarmed, they brought in wagons of straw and set fire to them in hopes of creating a smokescreen for the attack. They were hoping to storm the inner gates.
- Around 3:00 in the afternoon, one militiaman convinced some 70 members of the French Guard (the royal troops) to join their forces and haul 5 cannons to the scene. They soon saw that cannon shots fired against the massive walls would make no impact, so they pointed the cannons at the gates of the inner courtyard. It became clear that the defenders would have to inflict heavy casualties to defend the Bastille.
- It was also clear that the royal troops were not entirely on the king's side, and de Launay knew that. He threatened to blow up the Bastille and the surrounding neighborhood, but his own soldiers, the veterans, convinced him otherwise. Around 5:00, de Launay surrendered and was killed by the mob. The Bastille had fallen.

### **Significance of the Fall**

- The fall of the Bastille made clear that Paris was solidly behind the Revolution and that some of the royal troops supported it, as well. The storming of the fortress set a pattern that would be repeated throughout the French Revolution: Paris pushing the Revolution forward; people in the streets radicalizing the Revolution, pushing it to the left.

- Paris may have led, but already the Revolution was nationwide. Other urban revolts and peasant uprisings swept France in late July. News of Necker's dismissal and the storming of the Bastille spread across France, and riots and demonstrations broke out in Caen, Strasbourg, Grenoble, and Bordeaux—the four corners of the kingdom.
  - In most towns, merchants and professional men—middle-class men who had long been excluded from politics—now seized power. They established permanent committees to run the cities.
  - They also called up local militias, made up of citizen volunteers. Soon, these militia would become known as the National Guard. For the young men of France, to serve in the guard—or, later, the revolutionary army—would be a way to participate in politics, to learn about citizenship and revolutionary ideas.
  - Back in Paris, the new city government—the Commune—chose a mayor and found a leader for its citizen militia: the marquis de Lafayette.
- Many of the high aristocrats watched these developments with growing alarm. The king's brother and some leading nobles decided to leave France, sparking a pattern of emigration that would only increase in the years to come.
- The fall of the Bastille also cemented the position of the National Assembly. In effect, it cleared space for the Assembly to attempt reforms that would reverse everything the prison stood for: the despotic power and arbitrary injustice of monarchy, inequality, and the system of privileges across the land. By July 16, the king withdrew his troops and reappointed Necker.
- Within four weeks, the National Assembly had begun to dismantle the system of feudal dues and privileges. Within six weeks, the deputies had written the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to establish equality before the law.

- The storming of the Bastille and the early Revolution gripped the attention of observers across Europe and the Americas. For the Americans, events in France seemed to validate their own Revolution. The British, too, welcomed this event. It looked as if the French would imitate the British form of government.
- But in France, matters were hardly settled. In late July, the countryside erupted in revolt. The peasants launched a revolution of their own.

### Suggested Reading

Godechot, (Tilly, ed.; Léon, trans.), *The Taking of the Bastille*.

Lüsebrink and Reichardt (Schürer, trans.), *The Bastille*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why did July 14 become France's national holiday? What does this choice suggest about how the French think about the Revolution and their history?
2. How and why do certain historical moments, such as the storming of the Bastille, take on such powerful symbolic status?

# Peasant Revolt and the Abolition of Feudalism

## Lecture 8

**O**n the night of August 4, 1789, something remarkable happened at the new National Assembly. Two noblemen stood up and called on their fellow members of the first two estates to give away their privileges. As the night wore on, one after another, aristocrats and clergymen surrendered their tithes, their hunting rights, and the seigneurial dues owed to them by the peasantry. By dawn, feudalism was crumbling. This night was the point when it became clear that the French Revolution was not just about sharing political power but about transforming society—pursuing the elusive dream of equality. This lecture examines the events surrounding the abolition of feudalism to understand the radical social turn of the Revolution.

### The Great Fear

- In late July and early August of 1789, France experienced a series of riots by peasants against their lords. Peasants stormed their lords' châteaux, dragged out lists of seigneurial dues, and tore down coats of arms and set them ablaze in the courtyards. This massive outburst of peasant violence was known as the Great Fear.
- The Great Fear lasted from July 20 to August 6, but it followed a series of riots and anti-aristocratic protests in the anxious spring of 1789. Remember that the peasants were already politicized by the writing of grievance lists that spring. They had been thinking about reforms and following news of events in Paris, including the fall of the Bastille.
- Among the peasants' primary fears was famine, caused by an aristocratic plot. It was believed that seigneurs, merchants, and tax collectors were hoarding grain until prices rose. This fear was made worse by news of the dismissal of Necker, seen as a champion of the cause of getting grain for the people.

- The fear of famine was mixed with terror about brigands, bandits, or vagabonds, who were said to be roaming the countryside. In the summer of 1789, these brigands were thought to be part of the aristocratic plot, prompted to steal grain before the peasants could bring in their own harvests.
- Further, rumors of foreign invasion spread in some areas: Perhaps British soldiers were invading in western provinces or Austrians from the north. News of the emigration of the king's brother and cousins only deepened this fear. Perhaps the comte d'Artois was in Spain or Turin; he might return to France with an army to overthrow the new National Assembly.



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**Unrest in the countryside was exacerbated by the dismissal of the finance minister Jacques Necker, whom peasants saw as a champion of the people amid the shortage of grain.**

- The fear of brigands, hoarding, and aristocratic plots was bound up with revolutionary politics. The peasants had recently drawn up their grievance lists. They counted on the National Assembly to help them out and protect their food supply. Just as there had been in Paris, there was a link in the popular mentality between the food supply and the new politics. But uncertainty was everywhere; rumors that the king would break up the National Assembly added to the panic.
  - News was transported from Paris through newspapers and letters from deputies. Postal carriages generally took about 10 hours to reach Chartres, three days to get to Dijon, six days to reach Bordeaux, and more than a week to travel as far as Marseille. It took much longer for news to spread to small villages.

- Peasants got their news by uncertain means, mostly by rumor transmitted orally in the countryside. Sometimes news was brought by a traveling peddler or someone who had been to market day in town. In this political moment, people were anxious for news and willing to believe anything.
- Rumors touched off repeated anti-seigneurial revolts. Peasants looted their lords' châteaux, dug out documents that stated the lords' feudal rights and burned them, and sometimes even placed their lords under "popular arrest." By and large, few targeted victims met their deaths in the Great Fear, but peasants didn't hesitate to scare or humiliate the nobles and clergymen who had ruled over their lives.
- The Great Fear grew out of a local impulse to protect the community from outsiders. This conservative desire to guard the community had roots in the deep past, but it now dovetailed with much more radical elements, with a radical social message heralding revolution.

### **The Death of Feudalism**

- While all this agitation was occurring in rural areas, fear seized members of the National Assembly. Some of the deputies met and began to plan for some liberal nobles to renounce their privileges in an orchestrated fashion. Perhaps this would calm the unrest in the countryside. The deputies also aimed to make some modest changes to the seigneurial system.
- On the night of August 4, a viscount, the brother-in-law of Lafayette, set the evening off with a scripted proposal to renounce his privileges. A duke followed up with a planned set of denunciations of feudalism. After that, all scripts were abandoned. The nobles took part in a chain reaction of spontaneous generosity. They tried to outdo one another in pro-peasant declarations.
- One nobleman argued that they should do away with the system of serfdom in Franche-Comté, an epicenter of peasant oppression. They should draw inspiration from what he called "English America" and get rid of all remnants of "feudalism." His words

inspired “noble enthusiasm.” Cascades of self-sacrifice poured forth from the elites; suggestions by at least 55 specific individuals were recorded, but probably hundreds of deputies took part in the outpouring of appeals for reform.

- Historians have struggled to explain the psychology of this moment. Some argue that the actions stemmed from fear. Others see the reforms engendered by generosity. The events undoubtedly grew out of a collective dynamic with a complex mix of motives.
- The Assembly would spend the next week codifying and toning down its abolition of feudalism. Many deputies regretted their generosity and lobbied to weaken the most dramatic reforms.
- Article 1 of the decrees of August 4–11 proudly proclaimed: “The National Assembly completely destroys the feudal regime.” This phrase was an exaggeration, but major changes were made.
  - The decrees abolished the right to certain annual feudal dues, such as fees for using the wine press and the communal bread ovens. They also eliminated seigneurial judicial courts and did away with the lords’ dovecotes and hunting privileges, the remnants of serfdom, and all forms of unpaid labor owed to lords.
  - Church privileges came under attack, as well. Abolition of the tithe was passed in principle, and a committee was set up to iron out the details.
  - In addition, the Assembly attempted to institute rules for a state bureaucracy based on merit and equality rather than birth or privilege. This notion grew very much out of Enlightenment ideology. The decrees abolished the Old Regime sale of bureaucratic offices and ruled that non-nobles could enter the officer ranks of the army, hold high positions within the church, and attain government offices.

- It is interesting to note that three particular suggestions made by the deputies were set aside: the suggestion of complete religious freedom for all Protestants, the abolition of slavery in the colonies, and the abolition of the nobility. These three suggestions would be debated and enacted later.

### **The Aftermath of August 4**

- Not surprisingly, the king refused for several months to agree to the decrees of August 4–11. It would take another popular uprising in the streets of Paris to push him into compliance.
- Within the Assembly, the events of August 4 cultivated a mood of generosity and optimism, but they also sparked the serious beginning of a right-wing party in France; various nobles and clergymen resented the turn that the Revolution was taking.
  - A new political group formed, aligned with the king and known as the Monarchiens. Like Louis, its members opposed the August decrees. They believed that strengthening the king and the high elites would best strengthen France.
  - In September, for example, the Monarchiens pushed without success to give the king absolute veto rights over legislation. They also tried, again without success, to set up a bicameral legislature, like the American Congress or English Parliament. Their left-leaning colleagues rejected this idea, wary of creating a new privileged class in the upper legislature.
- Outside the Assembly, the peasants' struggle and the abolition of feudalism resonated in the cities, as well as in rural areas. The Great Fear and the night of August 4 shone a spotlight on the social question of equality. August 4 also touched off a chord of generosity among the middle-class citizens of France, beginning a cult of national charity.
- When word of the decrees reached rural France, peasants everywhere celebrated. They hunted birds freed from the nobles' dovecotes and fished in formerly private ponds. But after the

early celebrations, reality set in. The feudal regime had not been fully abolished.

- Peasants were supposed to pay compensation for the right to stop paying dues, but many boycotted these dues. They also refused to pay the tithe, even though the harvest of 1789 was far better than that of 1788.
- It makes sense that we see a kind of dialogue—a negotiation—taking place in the early years of the Revolution between peasants and lords, citizens and legislators. Everyone was trying to figure out what the new France would look like.
- Over the next few years, outbursts of peasant uprisings attacked the remainders of the seigneurial regime. The peasants pushed the legislators toward finishing the act of dismantling the seigneurial system, and by July of 1793, seigneurial dues were finally abolished entirely. The tithe, too, was eliminated in 1791.

### **An Explosive Dynamic**

- The Great Fear and the abolition of feudalism show once again a central dynamic of the Revolution: the interaction of popular activism and lawmaking. This happened in Paris when the storming of the Bastille convinced the king not to try to disband the Assembly. Now, the peasants took their turn, pushing the Revolution forward.
  - The lawmakers played their part, too. The Great Fear made an impact because elite lawmakers at that very moment sought to remake France; they were drafting new laws and a new constitution.
  - The French Revolution repeatedly drew tremendous creative energy for change from this dynamic—the explosive interaction between the popular classes and the lawmakers.
- The night of August 4 also illustrates the fact that the political revolution became a social revolution from 1789 on. The peasants' attack on privilege cut to the heart of the social structure. The

French Revolution was much more contentious and socially radical than the American Revolution. The Americans had no embedded system of privilege to combat, but in the French case, this issue made it a social revolution from the outset.

### Suggested Reading

Lefebvre, (Rudé, ed.; White, trans.), *The Great Fear of 1789*.

McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–99*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How and why did the interaction between popular activism and law-making have so much power in 1789?
2. During the Great Fear and the night of August 4, both the peasants and deputies were motivated by powerful and complex emotions. What role do emotions play in bringing about political change in history?

# The Declaration of the Rights of Man

## Lecture 9

Three and a half years into the French Revolution, a group of pro-revolutionary women gathered at their political club to award medals and congratulations to a group of children. In unison, the children proudly recited what they had memorized so well: the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. This 17-article declaration was the foundational document of the French Revolution. It announced equality of all men before the law, enumerated crucial rights, and proclaimed the sovereignty of the nation. This lecture will explore the origins and significance of the declaration, treated as a sacred text throughout France.

### The Radicalism of Universal Rights

- In late August of 1789—just weeks after the fall of the Bastille and the dismantling of feudalism—the deputies of the National Assembly began to write France’s first constitution. They planned to establish a constitutional monarchy, but first, they believed it necessary to declare universal rights.
- The word “rights” in the Old Regime meant particular rights that people held because they belonged to particular social groups. There were no universal rights. For example, the clergy of the First Estate had the particular right to be exempt from royal taxes.
- No one in France had freedom of speech or the right to publish freely. No one had an automatic right to a fair trial before a court of law. In fact, no country in Europe recognized universal rights.
- Where did the French get the shocking idea of declaring universal rights? In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, various Enlightenment thinkers had theorized about the universal characteristics of natural law and natural rights. The Enlightenment had also questioned whether it made sense to think about society as made up of disparate groups

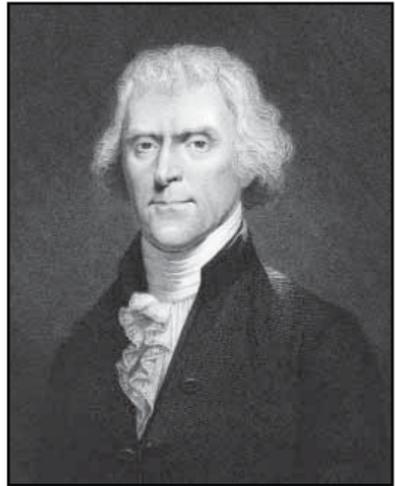
with differing sets of privileges. It raised the idea of conceptualizing a society of individuals, each bearing natural rights.

- But it would be the American example that would truly bring to the forefront the Enlightenment idea of rights. Between 1776 and 1783, French booksellers published nine translations of the American Declaration of Independence and five translations of state constitutions and bills of rights. Many French idealized the American colonists. They seemed to be inventing society and crafting government from scratch.

### **Restructuring Political Power in France**

- In the summer of 1789, the debate about rights was tied to controversy in the National Assembly about how to restructure political power in France.
  - The more conservative Monarchiens believed that the Assembly should reform France but not revolutionize it. They wanted to institute a bicameral legislature that would help to maintain a strong king, who would have absolute power to veto laws.
  - In contrast, the left-leaning patriots imagined a more radical path—something more like what the Americans seem to have done. They wanted to start from scratch to make a new social pact, like the one in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. They also wanted a unicameral legislature because they didn’t want their own version of an elitist House of Lords and a House of Commons.
- The key man for the patriots in the Assembly was the marquis de Lafayette, the French hero of the American Revolution. He was now the head of the new National Guard of Paris and a major leader of reform politics. In the National Assembly, it was Lafayette who introduced the idea of starting the constitution with a declaration of rights.

- The summer of 1789 was a moment of tremendous international excitement and optimism. An international dialogue took place about the possibilities of Enlightenment politics and rights ideology, with participants from different parts of the Atlantic world, including Thomas Jefferson and the British author Thomas Paine.
- To oppose this enthusiastic embrace of rights-declaring, the Monarchiens emphasized differences between France and the United States. A leader of the Monarchiens reminded the deputies that the United States was “an infant people announcing its birth to the universe.” In contrast, France was “an ancient and immense people.” For 1,400 years, it had possessed its own form of government. He also warned that declaring rights might encourage the people to make subversive demands or even rise up in violence.
- In the debate, the patriots eventually won out. By August 26, 1789, the French deputies had agreed on a preliminary draft of what would be the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. It became part of the Constitution of 1791.



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**Thomas Jefferson was in Paris as the U.S. minister to France in 1789 and met frequently with emerging revolutionaries behind the scenes.**

### Content of the Declaration of Rights

- The very title of the declaration—with the words “man” and “citizen”—suggested two key purposes. The word “man” emphasized universalism. French men, like all of mankind, had certain rights straight from nature. The word “citizen” spoke more

directly to politics. French men would be citizens participating in government rather than subjects of an absolutist king.

- The American Declaration of Independence had defined inalienable rights as “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” But the French declaration defined natural rights as “liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.”
- As they mandated the legal protection of various civil liberties, the French clearly were thinking of specific forms of Old Regime oppression, such as censorship, unfair taxes, and the king’s letters of imprisonment without trial. The document listed freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom from arbitrary arrest, with “every man being presumed innocent until judged guilty.”
- Like the earlier abolition of feudalism, the declaration attacked the Old Regime system of privilege. It promised “equal access to public offices and employments” and mandated equal taxation.
- The most hotly debated article had to do with religious freedom. Many deputies, especially the clergy, were afraid of instituting religious toleration. That move might undercut the religious and political power of Catholicism in France. Ultimately, the Assembly agreed to an ambiguous granting of religious freedom.
- In addition to providing legal protections, the declaration proclaimed the nation’s right to rule itself. The French weren’t, however, trying to break away from a distant king, as the Americans had done; at this point, the deputies sought to share power with the king.
  - The declaration claimed that sovereignty rested in the nation. It laid out the right of citizens to participate in making law. In fact, the declaration stated that the explicit purpose of government was to guard and preserve rights.
  - This point contrasts sharply with the American Bill of Rights. Rather than laying out the foundation for government, the

American Bill of Rights was written to protect individuals from an overly powerful government.

### **Impact of the Declaration**

- European kings and nobles were aghast at the declaration's claim to national sovereignty and equal rights. It was one thing for the Americans to make such proclamations, but how was such a challenge to the status quo possible in one of the oldest and most powerful monarchies of Europe?
- One of the most significant aspects of the Rights of Man was its explicitly universalist language. It claimed that nature guaranteed universal rights. It seemed to include everyone, but in fact, the document left open the question of who would get rights. Did it apply only to free white men with property? What about poor men, women, religious minorities, and others?
  - Historians have disputed just how radical the declaration really was. Some argue that it was inherently exclusionary. In their view, the rights of man were imagined from the outset as limited, especially curtailed by the lines of gender and race.
  - Other historians claim that declaring rights created a kind of inner logic that made it inevitable that rights would be granted to more and more sets of people when it became socially and politically thinkable to do so.
  - The story of implementing or winning those universal rights was rocky and hard fought. The idealistic declaration did not instantaneously produce all that it seemed to promise.

### **Rights for Religious Minorities**

- France was a predominantly Catholic country, and the crown drew strength from its alliance with Catholicism. Like virtually every country in Europe at the time, the French state limited the freedom of worship and the civil status of religious minorities.

- In its population of almost 28 million, France had about 40,000 Jews and somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Protestants. The Protestants were not allowed to worship in public, to appoint clergy, or to hold public offices or enter the teaching profession. Jews could publicly profess their faith, but they also faced numerous limits on their civil and political rights. The declaration of rights called these practices into question.
- On Christmas Eve of 1789, the National Assembly voted overwhelmingly to extend rights to all Protestants. In this, the Assembly began to separate the legitimacy of the state from Catholicism. The king drew his legitimacy straight from a Catholic God, but the National Assembly now claimed that its sovereignty came from the nation as a whole.
- The case of the Jews was far more controversial, and it would take two more years for them to win the rights of citizenship.
  - In the early days of the National Assembly, the deputies who argued against Jews' rights emphasized two points. First, they warned that granting rights to Jews would unleash popular violence against them in northeastern France; further, they claimed that Jews were dangerously different.
  - The deputies who supported Jewish emancipation pointed out that society was no longer imagined as separate legal groups, each one different before the law. They stressed that France was breaking down its system of social divisions and privileges to create a nation of individuals.
- Emancipation of all French Jews was finally decreed in September 1791. This was a strikingly modern move and caught the attention of Jews in western and central Europe and the Russian Empire. But emancipation came with certain limitations and opened up many questions.
  - Jewish men gained full rights of citizenship to participate in national and municipal politics. Some Jews, especially from Bordeaux, became major revolutionary leaders.

- But at the same time, at the local level, the Jews lost their communal autonomy and control over their own civil affairs. Emancipation opened up the questions of how and how much Jews should assimilate to broader French culture.
- To placate opponents, the emancipatory laws also placed economic regulations on the Jews that reinforced anti-Semitic perceptions of Jews as greedy and corrupt.
- The emancipation of the Jews leads us to reflect on the significance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Founding the sovereignty of the new nation on the principle of universal rights became a tremendous force for change in revolutionary France. It set a high and powerful standard for this young Revolution. But implementing rights came up hard against the forces of tradition, deeply held prejudices, and embedded social practices.

### Suggested Reading

Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*.

Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why did the French revolutionaries declare rights so early in the process of remaking France?
2. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen made a statement of legal principles. How does making a declaration of principles relate to practice? What determines how much power such a declaration will have to affect policy?
3. How did the different circumstances of the French and American revolutions affect how the two nations conceptualized rights?

# Paris Commands Its King

## Lecture 10

In October of 1789, an unexpected event took place—a massive demonstration known as the October Days. In this incident, the people of Paris took matters into their own hands and carried a message to the king, queen, and Assembly out at Versailles: Paris needed bread. The king promised to supply it and reluctantly agreed to the August decrees, the abolition of feudalism, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The October Days changed the dynamic of the Revolution, radicalizing it and, in the process, empowering the people of Paris. In this lecture, we'll look at the events of the last great uprising of the year 1789, the year known to the French as “year I of liberty.”

### The Mood of Paris, Fall 1789

- In September and October of 1789, Parisians were nervous. The king seemed hesitant to back the Revolution. He was clearly reluctant to agree to the August 4 decree abolishing feudalism and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The king was still held in high regard, but perhaps the aristocrats and evil ministers were tricking him. The idea began to circulate in Paris that it would be better for Louis to move to the city and live among his people.
- By mid-September, in the National Assembly, the Monarchiens and patriots had finally agreed that there would be a unicameral legislature. The deputies also granted the king a suspensive veto; that is, he could suspend and delay new legislation (by four years) by waiting to sign it.
- The mood in Paris grew darker when word arrived that the king had once again called troops to assemble in Versailles, just as he had in July. Would this new Flanders Regiment stage a coup against the National Assembly? Another problem on Parisian minds was the fact that the price of bread had gone down very little and was now

rising again, even though the harvest of 1789 had been much better than that of 1788.

- With censorship lifted, pamphlets were published by the dozens, and 140 new newspapers appeared in Paris alone. Among the band of vocal new journalists was the feisty Jean-Paul Marat, who accused the Commune—the municipal government of Paris—of plotting with Necker and the flour millers to hoard grain and force prices higher. Others joined in the accusations of hoarding.
- No one worried more about the price of bread than the wives and mothers of Paris. In the Old Regime, at moments of fear or famine, women had taken to the streets. They had led the Flour Wars of 1775, when tens of thousands of rioters across northern France demanded grain from merchants and municipal officers.
  - In the huge food market at the center of Paris, women dominated both the selling and the buying. Market women sold butter, eggs, fish, and vegetables to the growing population.
  - These market women of Paris—the *poissardes* (“fishwives”)—also had a political role to play. Every August 25, the feast day of Saint Louis, they marched out to Versailles to offer homage to the king on behalf of the people of France. And every time a French queen gave birth, the market women visited her, bringing her flowers and the compliments of the people. By longstanding tradition, the market women could whisper the true needs of the people into the ear of the king.
- The new National Guard, under the command of Lafayette, faced the job of policing the carts of grain and keeping the peace. The National Guard also had to defend Paris from attack. What if, for example, those suspicious royal troops out at Versailles chose to attack the city?
  - Like the journalists and market women, the guardsmen stayed on alert. By now, they numbered some 30,000 men, mostly volunteers who served a day or two every two to four weeks.

- Lafayette was only 32 years old, but he knew how to instill discipline and patriotism in this group. He drilled them and found ways to build esprit de corps.

### **March on Versailles**

- On the morning of October 2, the people of Paris awoke to rumors of a terrible incident at Versailles. The night before, the royal bodyguard and the Flanders Regiment had held a raucous banquet at the palace. The troops had sung a royalist song and toasted the king but not the new nation. Perhaps worst of all, the troops had trampled on the tricolor cockade, which had become the symbol of the revolutionary nation.
- On October 5, thousands of women assembled in the streets of Paris. Armed with brooms and kitchen tools, they swept into the City Hall and found some pikes. They also found two cannon, though they had no ammunition. They drafted one man, the guardsman Stanislaus Maillard, to lead them out to Versailles.
- Some 6,000 to 8,000 women marched the 12 miles to Versailles in the rain. When they reached the palace, some of them swarmed into the National Assembly. The deputies tried to conduct business as usual, but the women shouted down their speeches with cries for bread and disrupted the proceedings. The deputies were shocked.
- The king had been out hunting but was called back. He considered fleeing further from Paris, and Marie-Antoinette professed her readiness to go. But his ministers convinced the king that his flight would leave open the possibility for his cousin Philippe, the duc d'Orléans, to seize the throne.
- Finally, around 7:00 in the evening, Louis met with a small group of women and promised that he would supply Paris with grain. At around 10:00, he told the National Assembly that he would agree to the August decrees, the abolition of feudalism, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

- Back in Paris, about 20,000 troops of the National Guard had assembled at the City Hall. Lafayette faced a difficult decision. His troops insisted on marching toward Versailles, but he was afraid of leaving Paris open to attack from the royal troops. At last, he agreed to accompany the militia to the palace. A motley crew of civilians followed the National Guard, armed with muskets, pikes, and sticks. It was almost midnight when they arrived.
- Lafayette tried to convince the king that he must move to Paris, where Lafayette could protect him and the king could serve his people. But Louis made no more decisions that night.
- Early the next morning, the crowd made its way into the courtyard of Versailles. To this day, no one knows exactly what happened, but it seems that a nervous royal guardsman from inside the palace fired a shot, killing a teenage boy. The enraged crowd, led by men now, swarmed into the palace and killed two royal guardsmen.
- In the midst of the uproar, Lafayette made his way back into the palace. He managed to get his National Guard to restore order and made his way to the king's rooms. Now Lafayette appeared on the king's balcony, accompanied by the royal family. Louis promised to go to Paris. Lafayette emerged from the October Days as the king's protector, the peacekeeper of Paris, and a major mediating force of the early Revolution.



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**Lafayette attempted to mediate among the different forces at Versailles: the king, the deputies, the National Guardsmen, the royal guard, ever-more rambunctious journalists, and the hungry people of Paris.**

- A remarkable procession back to Paris took place that afternoon. Tens of thousands of women, men, and National Guardsmen formed a long column. Several men carried the heads of the slain royal bodyguards on pikes. The National Guardsmen marched ahead of 60 cartloads of flour from the palace.
- In the middle of the crowd rolled the royal carriage, bearing Louis, Marie-Antoinette, and their children. Lafayette rode alongside. The royal bodyguards, courtiers, deputies, and more citizens and National Guardsmen followed. The mood was triumphant. Once again, the crowd from the streets of Paris had changed the course of the Revolution.

### **Impact of the Demonstration**

- The October Days once again demonstrated that the power of the Revolution lay in the dynamic back-and-forth between the streets of Paris and the National Assembly.
  - Ordinary Parisians, and this time women above all, forced the king to agree to the all-important August decrees. Reluctantly, he also agreed to the plans for a single-chamber legislature and a suspensive veto.
  - Within days, the National Assembly decided to move to Paris, as well. Now, both the king and the Assembly were under the watchful eyes of the Parisians.
- But the October Days also gave the king a new opening. The people gave him the benefit of the doubt. He was filling his role as a father figure who would bring bread to Paris, and the Parisians seemed overjoyed to have the royal family in the city.
- The ordinary women of Paris also emerged with newfound confidence in their ability to take to the streets and bring about political change. They became a force to be reckoned with in the months and years to come.

- No doubt, Louis XVI could have done more with the goodwill offered to him by the Parisians. At this point, the French still loved their king, but from this point forward, Louis was playing a double game. On the outside, he appeared to support the Revolution, but behind the scenes, he pursued a set of goals aimed at undercutting it. The royal family withdrew into the palace of the Tuileries and rarely went out. The king played almost no role in the Assembly's moves to reform France from top to bottom.
- The October Days also had made it much easier for the people of Paris to influence debates in the National Assembly. Now, the deputies met in an old riding stable next to the Tuileries Palace, in the heart of the city. Every day, ordinary citizens marched into the assembly hall to voice their opinions. During the coming decade, the working people of Paris sometimes stormed the legislature in anger.
- In the Assembly, the October Days and the move to Paris exacerbated the divisions between left and right. The power of the Monarchiens was substantially reduced, while the patriots saw the need to organize.
  - As the Jacobins, the left broadened its membership beyond deputies in the National Assembly. Soon, this group included hundreds of journalists, men of letters, merchants, bankers, liberal noblemen, and priests.
  - Men and women from the streets of Paris regularly sent delegations to the Jacobin club, and it developed a reputation of being the voice of the people. A network of clubs emerged across France.
- Without a doubt, the October Days radicalized the Revolution and empowered Paris. It also marked the last big uprising of 1789, that amazing year that the French referred to as “year I of liberty.”

## Suggested Reading

Applewhite, Johnson, and Levy, eds., *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*.

Gottschalk and Maddox, *Lafayette in the French Revolution*.

Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why was it so important to Parisians to have the king in Paris?
2. During the October Days, consider how the market women, the National Guard, the deputies, the king, and Lafayette all acted from different sets of motives. How do groups with different motives produce major political change?

# Political Apprenticeship in Democracy

## Lecture 11

As the deputies of the National Assembly worked on their constitution, they began to introduce other changes throughout everyday life. They set out to overhaul religion, taxes, education, marriage, love, family life, language, and the justice system—nothing would be left untouched. But in the process of turning a kingdom of diverse provinces into a unified nation ruled by its citizens, it was necessary to redistribute political power. Not surprisingly, the drastic actions of the revolutionaries began to divide France. For some people, the new politics produced tremendous excitement and enthusiasm, but for those who lost out, it stirred up opposition and deep resentment.

### Principles of Reform

- As the deputies embarked on reforming France, several principles guided their work. First, they sought to disperse and decentralize the power of the central state. Power should rest in the hands of voting citizens.
- Second, even as they worked to give political voice to citizens everywhere, the deputies also wanted to build a unified France and do away with provincial differences. Inspired by the Enlightenment, they hoped to make the workings of the state, politics, and the justice system more rational, efficient, and scientific.
- Before the Revolution, the elements that governed the relationship between the state and its regions or provinces included key characteristics of the Old Regime: privilege, tradition, hierarchy, and diversity.
  - The different provinces of France each had unique histories, languages, and peoples. They paid different amounts in taxes, and civil law codes varied wildly from place to place.

- The provinces and their internal areas were also governed by royal officials who had been appointed, not elected. Some royal officials had bought their bureaucratic offices or inherited them.
- In the name of merit and greater equality, the decree of August 4 had already done away with the practices of buying or inheriting offices. Now, the revolutionaries set out to make the new system rational and unified—and to give power to the citizens.

### **Redrawing the Administrative Map**

- The first action of the deputies was to redraw the administrative map of France. There were 30-odd provinces, some, huge and rambling; others, tiny. They would now become 83 departments, each roughly the same size and small enough that a citizen could reach the capital of a department in one day's journey.
- The revolutionaries did their best to embrace the departments, but the provinces persisted as sources of regional and linguistic identity, rather than as government units.
- The deputies tried to carry out logical principles of decentralization, efficiency, and local power. Each department was made up of districts, the districts were made up of cantons, and the cantons were made up of communes. The 44,000 communes became the core units of local power. They should act together to make up the new nation of citizens.
- Redrawing the map, forging national unity, and building a new power structure sounded good, but these actions also generated controversy. Competition broke out as towns vied to become the capitals of districts or departments.
  - More than 1,000 towns sent delegations or petitions to the National Assembly to make their claims to become the seat of a law court or the district administration. They emphasized their

central locations, their vibrant markets, the training of their local lawyers, and even their ability to collect taxes.

- Local rivalries could be bitter. Marseille was shocked and humiliated when Aix-en-Provence was chosen as department capital.
- In restructuring the nation, the revolutionaries also sought to create a frame for instituting egalitarian laws across France, particularly equal taxes. The deputies threw out the ancient and complicated hodgepodge of royal law courts, ecclesiastical jurisdictions, and administrative units and rewrote the penal code. They instituted trial by jury for criminal cases and established elected justices of the peace, who quickly became popular local mediators.
- More was involved in this redistribution of power than administrative or judicial structures or even regional loyalties. The revolutionaries aimed to craft a new psychology and a new attachment to the nation of France. Without saying it in so many words, they were essentially inventing modern nationalism. Crucially, the deputies sought to balance national unity with a wider distribution of power.

### **Elections and Voting**

- At the very heart of the reconstruction of France stood the principle of local power and voting. The revolutionaries aimed to replace the king's bureaucracy with new men, elected by qualified citizens.
- What positions would be open for election? The list is stunningly long: mayors, town council members, local officials, the commanders of National Guard units, judges, public prosecutors, department leaders, and of course, legislative deputies. So crazed did the French become with elections that even priests and bishops were put up for the vote.
- In October 1789, the Assembly debated the question of which men would get the vote. Right-wing and moderate deputies, who

held a strong majority, argued that the vote should go only to men who paid a certain amount in taxes. But radical French deputies pushed for universal manhood suffrage.

- In the end, the National Assembly decided to make a distinction between “active” and “passive” citizens.

Active citizens included all French men who each year paid direct taxes equivalent to three days’ wages. These men could vote. A man had to pay

slightly higher taxes to run for local office and much, much higher taxes to become a national deputy. By 1792, the French eliminated qualifications for voting and running for office. They extended the franchise to all adult men over 21, unless they were servants, vagabonds, or slaves in the colonies.

- The process of elections combined elements of traditional communal assemblies with a more modern concept of individual voting and the secret ballot. There were no officially declared candidates, but the electoral assemblies quickly became an arena for contests between old elites and new men.
- Voting also took time and required work to learn how to do it. Voting for communal positions was easiest and most immediate. But to participate in cantonal or national elections, citizens usually had to walk to a different town. And they might have to stay away



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**Camille Desmoulins, the fiery speaker of the July Revolution, spoke out against the idea of “active” and “passive” citizens and was incensed about the tax requirements to run for high office.**

from their homes for days, because it took multiple ballots to fill local posts or to choose electors for regional and national leaders.

- Voter turnout was highest early in the Revolution. In 1790, more than half of eligible voters took part. In the countryside, participation reached 80 or 90 percent. But given the difficulties of voting, turnout soon declined and became markedly uneven in different parts of France.
- Over the course of the Revolution, 1 million or more men were elected to public offices. Sometimes, older elites won elected offices, but increasingly, leadership positions went to new men—merchants and businessmen, doctors, lawyers, well-off peasants, new landowners, and later, artisans and small shopkeepers.

### Development of Political Clubs

- Enthusiastic citizens founded political clubs across France, in the smallest communes and the largest cities. Many of these were affiliated with the Jacobin club of Paris. By 1792, there were about 1,500 clubs associated with Jacobinism throughout France.
- Political clubs met wherever they could find space, in churches, monasteries, granaries, taverns, theaters, or Masonic lodges. Usually, they first set up a rostrum for speakers and, over time, decorated their meeting halls with busts or portraits of Rousseau, Voltaire, and sometimes Louis XVI; a map of the departments of France; and often, the tablets of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.
- In these political societies, the new citizens in France learned the workings of politics. They elected officers, wrote bylaws, kept agendas and minutes of meetings. In some cases, they became involved in local electioneering. They gave speeches endlessly and flamboyantly and organized festivals and fraternal banquets.
- Jacobin clubs paid attention to the intriguing new United States and grew ever more engaged in national politics. They deluged the

National Assembly with petitions on issues ranging from the local grain trade to the fate of the aristocracy.

- From the outset, the club members avidly devoured newspapers. The patriotic press and political societies grew up in tandem in revolutionary France. Often, political societies timed their meetings for the arrival of the postal carriage bearing newspapers from Paris. These newspapers had strong political associations.
- The press, political clubs, and elections became the three pillars of democratic, revolutionary politics, but they also divided France. As the revolutionaries—both the leaders in Paris and local actors everywhere—became bolder, people began to choose sides.

### **Opposition to the Revolution**

- As early as 1790, signs of discontent and division emerged across France. It became clearer that revolutionary change meant that certain individuals, especially Old Regime elites, would lose power and status.
- The Revolution also had a negative economic impact—and not just for those at the top of the social scale. As nobles left France or became less showy in their dress, unemployment hit the luxury trades, such as wigmakers and lace makers.
- In the spring of 1790, some deputies organized the Monarchist club in opposition to the Jacobins. The Monarchists agreed with the Jacobins that there should be a constitutional monarchy, but they had a more authoritarian political philosophy. They wanted to stop the Revolution where it stood, maintain the sacredness of the king, and secure power for the elites.
- In the provinces, citizens with conservative views also began to organize Monarchist clubs, and some became adept at local politics. As it did on one occasion in Aix-en-Provence, the face-off between the Jacobins and the Monarchists sometimes took an ugly turn.

There, the killing of two noblemen highlighted the growing fissure between opposing camps.

- Remaking France was an act of hope, but it was also profoundly divisive. At stake was a traditional way of life pitted against the hope of some citizens for a new system that distributed power and resources much more widely than ever before.

### Suggested Reading

Woloch, *The New Regime*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How does the administrative organization of space—into provinces, departments, American states, and so on—affect the nature of politics and identity?
2. Would it have been possible to make a revolution in France without producing opposition or, at least, with less opposition? Or were opposition and deep division inevitable?

# Religion and the Early Revolution

## Lecture 12

**W**hen the revolutionaries set out to remake France, inevitably, they turned their eyes to the Catholic Church, the wealthiest and most powerful institution other than the king. Catholic teaching underpinned the notions of hierarchy that the revolutionaries were attacking in the name of the equality. But when they began to reform the church, the revolutionaries were playing with fire. Catholicism was certainly embedded in Old Regime privilege, but its beliefs also offered people hope and comfort. In this lecture, we will see how the revolutionaries sought to enlist Catholicism in the revolutionary project and make a national church. As usual, the revolutionaries moved boldly; in the process, they further divided the country.

### **The Festival of Federation**

- In early July of 1790, tens of thousands of Parisians from all classes and backgrounds assembled on the Champ-de-Mars, the field where the Eiffel Tower stands today. They worked night and day to build a giant outdoor amphitheater for the Festival of Federation, a celebration to take place on the one-year anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.
- On July 14, a military parade of 50,000 National Guardsmen from all 83 departments wound its way across Paris to the Champ-de-Mars, and 300,000 spectators flooded onto the grounds. At the center of the huge arena was a new Altar of the Nation, where a Catholic mass was celebrated by the bishop of Autun, Talleyrand.
- Next, General Lafayette led his National Guardsmen in an oath of loyalty to the nation. King Louis XVI then rose from his seat and swore to uphold the constitution. Marie-Antoinette, in a spontaneous gesture, stood and lifted her son for the people to behold. The crowd broke into cheers. The Festival of Federation was the greatest ceremony of fraternal unity that France had ever seen.

- In this moment, the Revolution and Catholicism worked together—and why wouldn't they? Catholicism acted as the fundamental cultural glue of France. Almost everyone in France was Catholic, and Catholicism was woven into the fabric of daily life.
  - Through the sacraments, the mass, and frequent holy days, parish priests guided their parishioners through the sacred rhythms of everyday life and helped them with their ties to the divine.
  - In most villages, the parish priest stood at the core of the community. He blessed the crucial turning points of life: birth, marriage, and death. Then, he recorded them in the parish register, because he represented both church and state.

### Changing Religious Belief

- Over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, religious practice in France seems to have declined, especially among urban elites and middle classes. The vast majority of people still practiced their faith, but some seemed less zealous.
- The Enlightenment, which was profoundly anticlerical in France, undoubtedly contributed to this pattern among the urban middle classes. Only a few *philosophes* were atheists, but they often targeted religious practices and beliefs as superstitious. Enlightenment writers also routinely satirized the wealth of the church.
  - Monks came under special attack because they seemed to own a lot and consume a lot but not produce much. Many parish priests actually shared this view and criticized the hierarchy and the uneven division of wealth among their superiors. For many priests, the Revolution seemed to offer hope for creating a more just and enlightened church.
  - Before 1789, Enlightenment thinkers had also begun to re-envision the role of the church according to the principles of usefulness, worldly happiness, and reason. Perhaps the clergy should worry less about saving souls in the afterlife and more about improving life on earth.

- On the eve of the Revolution, Catholicism was in a complex position. It played a vital role in the lives of ordinary people, but at the same time, religious practice and belief had begun to erode, and the Enlightenment had called the clergy's wealth, power, and teachings into question.

## Revolutionary Reforms

- The early revolutionaries certainly didn't set out to make revolution against the church, yet it's no surprise that the church came under scrutiny. It was tightly bound to Old Regime hierarchy and privilege and to the monarchy.
- Early on, the revolutionaries shared the Enlightenment view that the church should serve society and be useful. They also wanted to make sure that the church would serve the new politics. Why not nationalize the church hierarchy, make the church subordinate to the state, and enlist all the clergy in the patriotic project of building the new nation?

- Already in 1789, the revolutionaries had undercut the position of the church. It was no longer so sacrosanct or privileged. On the night of August 4, the deputies had abolished the tithe, along with seigneurial dues, but the church still had considerable wealth.



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- At the end of the year, when the National Assembly began casting about for a way of dealing with the national debt, an idea popped up for discussion: Didn't the tremendous wealth of the

**Talleyrand voiced the prevalent Enlightenment notion that the church should work for the public good; his fellow clergy denounced him as a veritable minister of Satan.**

church belong to the nation, and shouldn't it work for the public good? The nation should nationalize and sell church lands to pay off the public debt. Interestingly, it was Talleyrand, the flashy bishop of Autun, who laid out this proposal.

- Deputies on the right objected strenuously to the nationalization of church lands, but the left carried the day. Church land was nationalized and put up for sale. Over the next 10 years, perhaps six to seven percent of the land in France changed hands. Buying church land became a rich opportunity for well-off peasants and, above all, for eager bourgeois city-dwellers with their eyes on an economic opportunity.
- Once the revolutionaries had nationalized church lands, they began to criticize the lifestyle of monks and nuns; the contemplative orders especially seemed expensive and useless. In February of 1790, monastic vows were abolished, and monks and nuns were urged to return to secular life. In the name of utility, an exception was made for those monks and nuns who taught or cared for the sick or the poor.
- Next, the Assembly conducted a sweeping reorganization of the Catholic Church in France. They sought to create a national church, supported by and tied to the nation. They attempted to enact an Enlightenment vision of church-state relations. In this view, perhaps the church could aid people with salvation, but its primary mission would be to serve society and offer moral glue and guidance on earth. It did not need vast sums of wealth, and its leaders should not live draped in ostentatious luxury.
- The Assembly passed a major reform, known as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Under this legislation, the state would pay the salaries of all clergymen. For many lower-level priests, the new stipend meant a raise. For bishops—who were all of aristocratic background—it invariably meant a pay cut.

- Most controversial of all, now active citizens would elect the clergy. In the new system, the electoral assemblies of each department would select priests and bishops. Such a challenge to the authority of the church hierarchy took many people aback.

### **The Oath of Loyalty**

- The fateful decision regarding the church that most divided France was this: The National Assembly required all clergy to take an oath of loyalty “to the nation, the law, and the king.”
- For many deputies in the National Assembly, the oath made logical sense. After all, other civil servants of the French state, from health officers to deputies, took an oath of loyalty.
- But across France in the winter of 1791, priests faced the agonizing decision of whether or not to take the oath. Should they remain loyal to the Revolution and France or to God and the pope? By March 1791, the pope condemned the oath and warned priests against the “insidious voices of this secular sect.”
- Only seven bishops took the oath, but roughly half the priests in France swore their loyalty. They became known as constitutional clergy or jurors. Those who refused came to be called non-jurors or refractory clergy. Constitutional clergy tended to see themselves as citizen-priests, servants of the people, while non-jurors tended to see themselves as servants of God.
- In deciding whether or not to take the oath, priests sought out the opinions of their parishioners, who did not hesitate to voice their thoughts. Popular reaction to the oath divided communities and divided France. In some regions, citizens saw the oath as an assault on the community and their traditional religious beliefs. In other cases, pro-revolutionary citizens believed that priests who refused the oath were counterrevolutionaries.
- In requiring the oath of loyalty, the deputies of the National Assembly had made a mistake. In half of France, the priests agreed

to take the oath and laypeople tended to support the Revolution. In the other half, priests refused the oath, and in the coming years, their parishioners often also rejected the Revolution.

- In parishes with non-jurors, new priests had to be found, who were often treated as usurpers. Outgoing non-jurors stirred up their flocks against the new constitutional clergyman. Many non-jurors became local spiritual heroes and conducted clandestine masses even after they were outlawed in 1792. On the other side, many constitutional clergymen and laity believed that the Revolution was God's work. Some hoped that the constitutional church could help the Revolution move France closer to the egalitarian ideals of primitive Christianity.

### **The Move to Secularism**

- The constitutional church had high hopes for success in France. At least in those areas where priests took the oath and supported the Revolution, perhaps Catholicism and revolutionary ideology could work in tandem. But already in 1791, there were other signs, besides the divisive oath, of the Revolution moving away from Catholicism.
- In July 1791, a procession wound through the streets of Paris to bring Voltaire's remains to the Panthéon and bury him in the new national mausoleum. That procession and burial had no religious element, no priest, no blessing, no references to a Catholic God. Perhaps this secularism was appropriate for honoring such an anticlerical forerunner to the Revolution.
- But this event, above all, gives a hint of the direction that the Revolution would turn: toward inventing an alternative secular culture and creating a set of festivals and beliefs to celebrate revolutionary ideals and the nation without the help of Catholicism at all.

## Suggested Reading

Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*.

McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*.

McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–99*.

## Questions to Consider

1. At this early stage of the Revolution, most religious reforms had little to do with religious belief. They involved church wealth and organization and the clergy. But lay parishioners reacted strongly to these changes. Why? More broadly, in different religions, how does the laity's interaction with religious leaders and religious organization influence day-to-day religious experience?
2. In contrast to the Americans, the early French revolutionaries—with their quite different history—did not attempt to separate church and state. What are the advantages and disadvantages of separating church and state, and what historical factors shape the nature of the relationship between religion and politics in different places?

# The Revolution and the Colonies

## Lecture 13

In the fall of 1789, Julien Raimond and Vincent Ogé, both wealthy men from the French colony of Saint-Domingue, petitioned the National Assembly to end racist laws. Because Raimond and Ogé each had an African grandparent, they were considered “free people of color.” It was inevitable that the Revolution in France would stir up questions for the colonies, especially the wealthy sugar islands of the Caribbean. In this lecture, we’ll begin to address two significant issues: Would the Revolution abolish the slave trade or even end slavery itself, and would the Declaration of the Rights of Man grant full rights to free people of color in the colonies?

### Abolition in the Early Revolution

- In 1788, right before the Revolution, French abolitionists had organized an abolitionist society in imitation of their English colleagues. First, they wanted to end the slave trade and then gradually abolish slavery itself. The Society of the Friends of Blacks had only a few hundred members, but its founders and leading members, including Mirabeau, Lafayette, and others, quickly became revolutionary activists.
- With the calling of the Estates-General, the Society of the Friends of Blacks kicked into high gear, circulating a pamphlet to every district electing deputies. Written by the *philosophe* Condorcet, the pamphlet laid out a program for abolishing the slave trade and proposed the gradual freeing of slaves over a seven-year period. Condorcet envisioned a transition to a system of small cultivators who would produce sugarcane or coffee for sale to planter-manufacturers.
- At first, it seemed as if the society might meet with some success. Almost 50 of the 500 district-level grievance lists condemned slavery or the slave trade. When the Estates-General opened, the king’s finance minister, Necker, even urged the Assembly to

condemn the harsh treatment of African slaves. But the society faced massive opposition, primarily because Saint-Domingue and the other French colonies brought so much wealth to France.

- The white planters of Saint-Domingue also organized for the Estates-General. Although it was not clear how the colonies would be represented in this traditional French body, groups of white planters met, elected deputies, and drew up their grievance lists in 1789. Of course, they prevented free men of color from participating.
- The planters sent 17 deputies to Paris, uninvited. Their presence immediately produced a debate over how the colonies should be represented. The planters argued that the 600,000 slaves of the Caribbean counted as part of the population, which meant that the colonies should have numerous deputies. Ultimately, the Assembly agreed to admit 6 deputies from Saint-Domingue and 17 from all the French colonies.
- This early in the Revolution, the Friends of Blacks did not manage to get a full debate of the slave trade onto the Assembly floor. White colonists and port merchants formed their own club, the Club Massiac, to defend the colonial system. This club became a highly effective lobbying group to defend the rights of French planters and the system of slavery.
- In the fall and winter of 1789, white planters also worried about the Revolution's impact in the colonies. Could it possibly stir up a slave revolt? It could, and it would, but not yet.
- On the sugar islands, the Revolution opened up yet another issue: Did the rights guaranteed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man apply to free people of color? Unlike slaves, they were citizens, after all.
  - In Saint-Domingue, free men of color had tried repeatedly to participate in political assemblies, but almost everywhere,

whites succeeded in blocking their entry. At times, the dispute grew violent.

- The question of the rights of free people of color would provoke ample debate in the National Assembly. Didn't the Rights of Man apply to these people, just as it eventually would to Jews and Protestants?

### **Free People of Color in the Colonies**

- Some free people of color in the French colonies had only African ancestry, but most were of mixed African and European descent. Some were former slaves who had managed to buy their freedom; others were the children of white planter fathers and enslaved African mothers. The more established free people of color came from mixed-race families who had lived on the island since the 1600s, before the plantation system got going.
- In Saint-Domingue, there were almost as many free people of color as there were free whites: more than 25,000 free people of color and about 30,000 whites, living alongside 500,000 slaves.
- Some free people of color held considerable power and wealth. Like Julien Raimond, the richest were plantation owners and owned slaves themselves. In fact, free people of color owned a third of the plantations and a quarter of the slaves on Saint-Domingue. Most of them, though, were much poorer, working as day laborers, sailors, small-scale farmers, or artisans.
- In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, among the free population, the lines of race were not harshly drawn. Legal documents rarely mentioned race, and free men of color could work as doctors and militia commanders. Starting in the 1760s, however, white leaders of the colony increasingly instituted laws and practices that discriminated against free people of color. They were prevented from taking up various professions, riding in carriages, owning certain kinds of furniture, and wearing upscale clothing.

- Why did Saint-Domingue suddenly institute additional policies of racial discrimination? After the loss of New France in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years' War, the Caribbean Islands became the primary destination for French immigrants seeking their fortune. Economic competition increased, and poor white men resented the wealth and stature of some free people of color.
  - At the same time, ships delivered greater numbers of enslaved Africans, and new allegedly scientific theories of racial difference began to come from the mainland.
  - To the leaders of the colony, drawing tighter lines of racial difference and hierarchy seemed to be one good way to maintain social order.
- The outbreak of revolution in France quickly exposed just how tenuous that fragile social order was. The Revolution heightened the new ideology of equal rights at the same time that it hardened colonial traditions of racial hierarchy; a clash was bound to occur.

### **The Case of Raimond and Ogé**

- Raimond and Ogé first tried to convince their white compatriots at the Club Massiac to recognize the rights of well-off free people of color. Neither man wanted to abolish slavery. In fact, they tried to convince the white planters and merchants that free planters of color would make good allies against a slave revolt. The Club Massiac scorned their proposals.
- Raimond and Ogé then began to organize in Paris with a group of activists, free people of color who were mostly artisans and domestics. The group called itself the Society of American Colonists and began to work with the Society of the Friends of Blacks.
- Henri Grégoire, a revolutionary priest from Alsace who had worked primarily on Jewish rights, published a pamphlet demanding that the Assembly grant five deputies to free people of color. Just as he had exposed anti-Semitism, Grégoire indicted the humiliating

treatment of free people of color on the sugar islands. He also predicted a slave revolt.

- Most deputies in the National Assembly did not share Grégoire's radical views, but they recognized that they had to decide whether their foundational ideology of the Rights of Man applied in the colonies.
- The Colonial Committee took up the issue. The committee emphasized the commercial importance of the plantation system for generating wealth for France. To disrupt the internal practices of the French colonies in any way could give an edge to Britain in the global competition for wealth.
  - The members of the committee also worried that the white planter elites of Saint-Domingue might try to secede from France if the revolutionaries instituted policies that disrupted traditional hierarchies in the Caribbean.
  - But what about the Declaration of the Rights of Man? Didn't it apply in the colonies, which were, after all, part of France? The committee solved this problem by deciding that the constitution did not apply to the colonies, which also meant that they were exempt from the Declaration of Rights.
  - The Assembly also allowed the colonies to decide for themselves how to conduct elections, sidestepping the question of race and the rights of free people of color. In 1790, the electoral assemblies in Saint-Domingue deliberately prevented free people of color from participating as citizens.
- In the meantime, Vincent Ogé grew tired of waiting for the revolutionaries to follow their own rights ideology and improve the situation for free people of color. In July 1790, he made his way back to Saint-Domingue, acquiring arms on the way.
  - Back home, he tried to convince the colonial authorities to allow free people of color to vote. When that attempt failed,

he began to organize an armed resistance in October 1790, gathering an army of about 300 free people of color.

- Ogé and his army managed to occupy the town of Grande Rivière. But before long, outnumbered by royal troops, they had to escape across the Spanish border into the neighboring colony of Santo Domingo, now known as the Dominican Republic.
- Early in 1791, Ogé and his companions were extradited back to Saint-Domingue, and Ogé and 23 of his followers were put to death.



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**In trying to convince the colonial authorities to allow free people of color to vote, Ogé drew parallels with the Third Estate: Were the “nobles and clergy” consulted in “redressing the thousand and one abuses that existed in France”?**

- Back in France, the harsh reaction of colonial authorities to the resistance made it harder for revolutionary leaders to ignore the issue of rights for free people of color. Jacobin clubs began to lobby the National Assembly to “break the chains of the mulattoes.” Jacobin leaders in the National Assembly denounced racial discrimination and declared that white planters had created an “aristocracy of the skin.”
- Finally, in May 1791, the Assembly voted to grant full citizenship rights and the vote to free men of color who were born of two free parents. Later, the deputies would eliminate the stipulation about parentage.

- But the new laws on behalf of free people of color never took full effect. The royal governor reported that it would be impossible to enforce the decree. Enraged white colonists refused to comply, and some threatened to break away from France and align the colony with Britain.
- In August 1791, thousands of enslaved people in Saint-Domingue rose up against their masters—the largest slave revolt in history. It was this uprising that would eventually convince the French revolutionaries to abolish slavery.

### Suggested Reading

Drescher, *Abolition*.

Garrigus, *Before Haiti*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The status of free people of color cut across lines of race and class in a way that both reflected and differed from the Old Regime system of privilege. How did the system of privilege in the colonies compare to that on the mainland, and how did the complicated dynamics of race and class have an impact on the attempt of free people of color to win rights?
2. Why did revolutionary change in France affect the colonies?

# Women's Rights in the Early Revolution

## Lecture 14

In the Old Regime, an individual woman, such as a queen, might wield political power, but until the Revolution, virtually no one in France thought that women as a group should have rights as citizens. Why did this idea burst onto the scene in the 1790s? Part of the answer lies in the power of rights ideology to raise the same questions about different groups: Who counts as a citizen? What does “universal rights” mean? In addition, women’s public activism during the Revolution played a crucial role. In this lecture, we’ll see how women took part in the public politics of the early Revolution, and we’ll look at how two feminists framed their demands for women’s full political rights.

### Venues of Activism for Women

- As we’ve seen in earlier lectures, the Revolution produced an explosion of publishing. Censorship had ended, and the high pitch of political excitement meant that booksellers and street hawkers had no trouble selling pamphlets, broadsheets, and newspapers.
  - The Old Regime had female authors, especially novelists, but during the Revolution, the number of women in print skyrocketed.
  - Many female authors made explicit demands for rights and were concerned with women’s issues, including education, prostitution, and poverty. They also focused on family matters, such as divorce, unfair inheritance laws, and what they called “marital despotism,” men’s authority in the household.
- Of course, most women couldn’t write, but many voiced their opinions simply by taking to the streets. As we saw in the lecture on the October Days, women changed the course of the Revolution by bringing the king, queen, and Assembly back to Paris.

- Both men and women recognized that women had a special right to speak out about certain issues, particularly religion and bread or anything to do with subsistence.
- During the Revolution, these two issues cut to the heart of crucial political questions: the cultural remarking of France and the economic survival of the people.
- Some revolutionaries even argued that women's support of the Revolution earned them greater rights.
- Most Jacobin men's clubs did not allow women to become official members, but dozens of co-ed fraternal societies formed, and women founded their own political clubs in more than 60 towns. Like their male counterparts, these revolutionary societies for women went through a phase of political apprenticeship, learning how to run a formal association. They developed agendas and voting policies, learned to speak from the rostrum, and plotted strategies for their petitions.

### Reactions to Women's Activism

- Inevitably, the question of women's public role in politics came up, and the women shared their opinions with revolutionary men. Elizabeth Lafaurie, a 22-year-old mother of four, gave a speech to the Jacobin men's club of Saint-Sever entitled "Discourse on the State of Nothingness in Which Women Are Held, Relative to Politics." She argued that the denial of a political voice to women was "unjust, because the total mass of women is subject to laws that they have not been able to refuse or approve."
- Male revolutionaries reacted in a variety of ways. Some men definitely resented such a public role for women. One male journalist called women's political clubs "a plague to the mothers of good families" and urged women to stay home. Other men encouraged the female club members and hoped to influence and teach them.

- Some men realized that women's clubs could offer practical help on the local level. In fact, women's political societies often combined charitable activities with politics. They ran workshops to employ poor women and took up donations to pay off the national debt and aid the poor.
- Once France went to war in 1792, women's clubs became veritable hives of activity, making uniforms, tearing cloth into bandages, and orchestrating festive sendoffs for young soldiers.
- When the Assembly closed down convents, female societies stepped in to replace the nuns in running hospitals or caring for the poor. Also, in the local battles over the constitutional church, Jacobin women's clubs rallied support for oath-taking priests.



© Augustin Challamel, *Histoire-musée de la république Française, depuis l'assemblée des nobles*, Paris, Delloye, 1842, Wikimedia Commons/public domain.

**Women marchers and rioters repeatedly strode into the Revolution and were recognized as having a special prerogative over such issues as religion and subsistence.**

## Local Festivals and Public Forums

- Women's societies often orchestrated local festivals, and women in general played a key role in the festive rituals of the new nation. In the early Revolution, women helped enact the most pervasive political ritual of the early 1790s: planting or dedicating liberty trees.
  - During revolts against the local lords in southern France, peasants began to hang revolutionary slogans on trees. These "liberty trees" soon spread across France.
  - By 1792, 60,000 towns and villages had liberty trees, symbols of revolutionary allegiance and optimism. Because mothers and children embodied fertility and new growth, they were in charge of caring for the newly planted trees.
- Festivals were excellent forums for women and men to stir up the revolutionary spirit, talk politics, and educate the young. Men predominated at the podiums, but plenty of women gave speeches, too.
- Sometimes, revolutionary women turned to the question of women's rights. For some, their very activism demonstrated that women deserved recognition and rights.
  - For example, one co-ed political society in Paris organized an extensive campaign for women's rights, especially their civil rights within families.
  - One member lobbied the deputies to legalize divorce, recognize women over 25 as full adults, and establish national primary schools for girls. Last but not least, she urged them to decree that "political liberty and equality of rights be common to both sexes."

## Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges

- Two French individuals outlined and published the most forceful arguments in favor of giving women full political rights. One was a man, the mathematician Condorcet; the other, a woman, the writer Olympe de Gouges.

- These two people could not have been more different. Olympe de Gouges was the self-educated daughter of a butcher. She was a struggling playwright who lived on the fringes of Enlightenment society, while Condorcet was a well-known Enlightenment thinker with ancient noble blood.
- By 1789, the brilliant mathematician and social theorist Condorcet had written on the influence of the American Revolution in Europe and was a member of the Society of the Friends of Blacks. Elected as a deputy in 1791, Condorcet soon became a prominent force in revolutionary politics.
  - In 1790, Condorcet stunned readers with his essay entitled “On Giving Women the Right to Citizenship.” He argued that men had natural human rights because they were “feeling beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning about these ideas.” Since women had the same human characteristics, how could a revolution built on equal rights deny them to half the population? Either everyone had rights or no one did.
  - Condorcet knew that he had to address the classic counterarguments about women’s particular physiological and emotional characteristics. He asked why pregnancy should disqualify women from voting when no one would dream of denying the vote to a man who had gout every winter or caught colds too easily.
  - Although women were not fully ready to become informed voters, Condorcet blamed this flaw on their lack of education rather than on women’s inherent nature or lack of reason.
  - Condorcet’s feminist argument was lucid and powerful. He grounded his case in the formidable universal rights discourse of the day and stayed true to his rationalist aspirations. He systematically named and then countered the prominent arguments against female citizenship: woman’s physiology, her emotionalism, her alleged irrationality and lack of mental capacity, and her domestic duties.

- Olympe de Gouges came from southern France and was a master of self-invention. Her real name was Marie Gouze, and she had been married off against her will at the age of 17. When her husband died, she gave herself a new name and followed a lover to Paris. She had, as she put it, “a craze to write” and, after 1788, published with remarkable boldness and frequency, pouring out pamphlets and plays.
  - De Gouges wrote against slavery and in favor of divorce and the rights of illegitimate children. She called for a national theater and a theater performing plays written only by women. She suggested regulating prostitution and developing a luxury tax to raise money for the poor.
  - Favoring a constitutional monarchy, de Gouges also attended the galleries of the Assembly and Jacobin club. She plastered the walls around Paris with posters and manifestoes on politics.
  - De Gouges published “The Rights of Woman” in the fall of 1791. The pamphlet was rambling, imaginative, and bold. She made the effective rhetorical move of substituting the word “woman” for “man” in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.
  - In this society where married women had no legal control over the couple’s property, de Gouges called for full property rights for all women. On every level, point by point, she laid out women’s right to equality before the law, freedom of expression, and full political representation.
  - Like the male revolutionaries, she appropriated Rousseau’s famous idea of the general will to argue that women should participate in running the nation for the collective good. De Gouges even declared that women had the right to become public political leaders. She discussed family issues and proposed a version of marriage as a voluntary union in which men and women had identical financial and legal powers and equal access to communal property.

- In the spring of 1793, the deputies finally took up the issue of woman's suffrage. By that point, they had already done away with property qualifications for male voters, but the idea of women's suffrage didn't have a chance.
  - In this century devoted to the Enlightenment principle of reason, women were not considered to be fully rational. Many revolutionaries believed that women could most effectively serve the Revolution as a moral force for patriotism in the household or the street, rather than as voting citizens.
  - Further, in the cultural imagination and in legal practice, women were not considered to be full individuals. They were always conceptualized as dependent on husbands, fathers, or brothers.
- Although revolutionary leaders did not grant women full political rights, they did give them unprecedented access to civil rights. New family laws granted women more independence, power, and rights inside households. And in its first attempt to institute public education, the French nation tried to provide girls and boys with equal access to free, secular primary schools, taught by members of the laity.
- For the longer term, the revolutionary activists had begun to show how the language of rights, equality, and sovereignty could be used to argue for women's full political rights. Nineteenth-century feminists would build on many of their arguments and practices, but it would be a long haul: French women didn't get the vote until 1944.

### Suggested Reading

Godineau (Streip, trans.), *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*.  
 Moore, *Liberty*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What factors do you think influence the issue of women's status and rights in different eras and places? What factors are most important in changing women's status and rights?
2. Historians sometimes argue against portraying history as a "march of progress," but certain topics—such as the history of medical innovations or the slow spread of rights to more groups of people—seem to suggest progress. Is it problematic to conceive of history as progress? Why or why not?

# The King's Flight

## Lecture 15

**O**n the morning of June 21, 1791, the servants in the royal palace were met with a shock: The king, queen, and royal children were missing. Rumors had circulated for months that someone might kidnap the king. Perhaps counterrevolutionaries, aristocrats, or foreign agents had carried out such a plot. Within hours, Lafayette and the National Assembly officially declared that Louis had been kidnapped. Orders were sent across France that his abduction must be foiled. But in fact, the king had fled. With his family and a few servants, he now traveled in disguise, hoping to escape into the Austrian Netherlands. In this lecture, we'll see how the king's flight profoundly altered the national mood and radicalized the Revolution.

### The King's Dangerous Game

- Ever since October 1789, when the market women had forced Louis and Marie-Antoinette to return to Paris, the king had played a double game. On the outside, he went along with the Revolution. He appeared periodically before the National Assembly and even took an oath of loyalty to the future constitution. But in secret, he plotted with his advisors to slow the Revolution and regain at least part of his absolutist power.
- Marie-Antoinette didn't even pretend to like the Revolution. She corresponded secretly with the courts of Europe, hoping to get them to intervene. But even her brother, the Austrian emperor Leopold II, initially took no action. Perhaps he preferred a weakened France, a longtime rival of Austria.
- On Easter Sunday of 1791, the royal couple was prevented from attending a mass said by a non-juror priest. Afterward, Count Axel von Fersen, a Swedish aristocrat, began to help the king and queen with detailed plans for escaping the palace. He visited the Tuileries repeatedly to plan logistics and helped the queen smuggle out her

diamonds, cosmetics, much of her wardrobe, and even a few pieces of furniture.

### **Flight of the Royal Family**

- Around midnight on June 20, the king and queen, their two children, the king's sister, and several servants climbed into a specially constructed carriage and slipped out of Paris. They traveled in disguise as ordinary citizens.
- Along the way, the coach stopped several times to change horses. As the royal family relaxed, the king took to stepping out and talking with country people about the harvest. Several times, people recognized the king, but no one quite knew what to do about it.
- Meanwhile, at the border near Metz, a royalist general orchestrated a movement of troops to meet the king and protect his final escape across the border. These troop movements put the peasants and townspeople of northern France on edge. They suspected a conspiracy against the Revolution or, perhaps, an invasion by Austrians. In fact, Leopold II had agreed that Austrian troops would meet the royal party if they actually crossed the border and abandoned the Revolution.
- The king's own plans were somewhat unclear. He may have hoped to negotiate with the National Assembly to restore greater monarchical power and overturn the most revolutionary reforms. He naïvely expected people outside of Paris to back him spontaneously as he rolled back the Revolution. Had the king succeeded in escaping, his flight surely would have unleashed civil war and, quite possibly, an international war.
- But Louis never managed to leave France. In the town of Varennes, about 30 or 40 miles from the border, the coach ground to a halt, stopped by a group of National Guardsmen. A stable master had recognized the king, and his identity was confirmed by a local judge who had once visited Versailles.

- Louis told the municipal officers that he had fled Paris for his own safety. He promised that he never intended to leave the country but planned to restore order from a French fortress at the border. His dramatic story nearly convinced the officials.
- But soon, people began to make sense of all the recent movements of foreign mercenaries. Clearly, some kind of conspiracy was afoot. The patriotic town of Varennes would not let the king be abducted or slip away.
- By dawn, two couriers arrived from Paris with the decree from the National Assembly—a clear order that the kidnapped king should be detained. The carriage was sent back to Paris, accompanied by thousands of National Guardsmen.
- It took four days for the royal cortege to reach Paris. The accompanying crowd grew to more than 30,000 people, with at least 6,000 guardsmen. The mood was festive, but an undercurrent of fear and anger washed through the crowd.
- Rumors of the king's flight and a possible invasion by Austria had spread out in waves from Paris, sending shivers of terror across France. There were also rumors that internal aristocratic enemies had plotted the king's flight and now planned to spirit him away. Panic spiraled across France.
- Inside the carriage, the king and queen were exhausted, distraught, and stunned. Finally, to their great relief, three deputies arrived and then Lafayette. These men would ensure the safety of the royal family and escort them to Paris.

### **Reaction of the National Assembly**

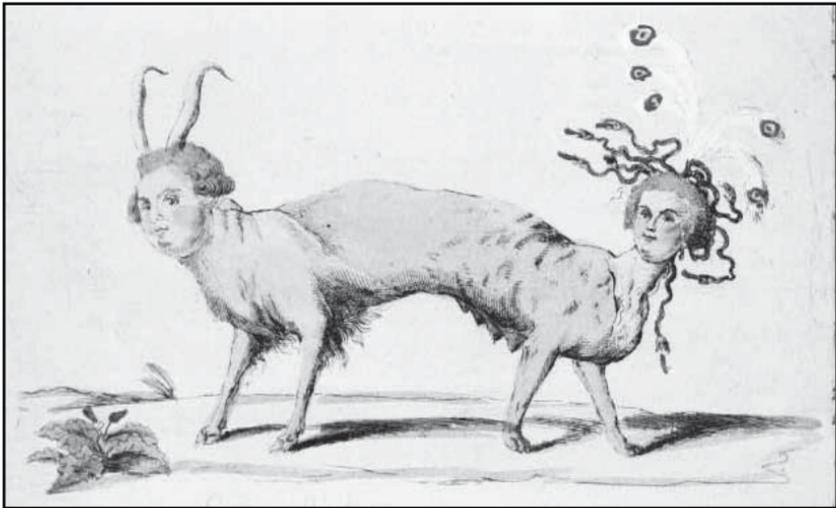
- On discovering the king's flight, the National Assembly had struggled with the question of what to do in this unprecedented moment. When it ordered that the kidnapped king must be stopped, the Assembly had essentially stepped up its own powers as an

emergency government. Never before had law been made in France without the king.

- Once the king was brought back to his palace, the deputies faced the loaded question of what to do with this ruler who had run away. The king's actions had certainly not helped his case. When he fled, he left behind a handwritten declaration, detailing his criticism of the Revolution and protesting bitterly about his loss of power, prestige, and revenue.
- Left-wing deputies demanded that Louis immediately be put on trial. But moderate leaders argued that they could keep order only by supporting the king and claiming that he had been abducted against his will. One moderate leader argued compellingly that it was time to end the Revolution, promulgate the constitution, and back the king.
- On July 15, the National Assembly announced the definitive results of its investigation: Backed by a letter from the royalist general who had assisted the king, the Assembly determined that Louis had been kidnapped. No one in France was convinced, but at least the king had returned.

### Call for a Republic

- The primary impact of the king's attempted flight was to radicalize the Revolution. Louis's action made it possible to imagine France as a republic—with no king at all. The French people had continued to feel loyalty, even reverence, for their king as the Revolution got underway, but when he fled, something fundamental shifted.
  - Timothy Tackett, the premier historian of the king's flight, has uncovered masses of evidence from across France of a sudden and deep disillusionment with the king. Personal letters and diaries, petitions, the press, the minutes of political clubs and town meetings—all reiterate a sense of betrayal, puzzlement, and disbelief.



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**Initial panic at the king's absence gave way to anger at his betrayal when he returned to Paris; caricatures circulated that satirized the king and queen as animals with human faces.**

- When they heard that the king had left behind a declaration attacking the Revolution, people became angry. Letters to the Assembly poured out epithets against Louis's hypocrisy. Parisians tore down symbols of royalty on public buildings. In the press, caricatures depicted the king and queen as animals, often as pigs with human faces.
- A radical idea began to percolate in the summer of 1791: Did France really need a king? Perhaps the nation should become a republic. The most radical revolutionary leaders began to work toward that goal. The Cordelier Club, a political society, became the epicenter of agitation for a republic, organizing a lively campaign against the monarchy.
- When the Assembly declared on July 15 that the king had been kidnapped, everyone knew it was a lie. The Cordelier Club and the "sections" (electoral units) of Paris sprang into action. On July 17,

thousands of men and women marched to the Champ-de-Mars, and 6,000 signed a petition that denounced Louis's actions and called for the immediate election of a new legislature.

- The demonstrators were unarmed, and the day began peacefully. But not surprisingly, the National Guard was on edge. Lafayette and the mayor of Paris declared martial law. When some demonstrators hurled rocks and insults at the guardsmen, the soldiers fired into the crowd. Panic broke out as the demonstrators turned and fled.
- The next day, the mayor reported an official death tally of 2 soldiers and 12 demonstrators, but about 50 Parisians had actually been killed, and many more had been wounded.
- The Champ-de-Mars massacre shocked and polarized the people of France. Some blamed the republican petitioners for daring to question the monarchy and stir up disorder. Others indicted Lafayette and the National Guard.
- Moderates in the National Assembly put the blame on republican “troublemakers.” The Assembly reestablished the Old Regime system of police spies, hounded radical journalists, and arrested suspects. In hopes of bringing this agitated period to a close, the Assembly finally sent the constitution to the king. At this point, Louis had little choice but to agree. On September 13, he formally accepted the Constitution of 1791.
  - The constitution established a delicate balance between king and legislature. The single-chamber legislature would initiate lawmaking and govern financial matters. The king would have a suspensive veto, the power to declare war, and the right to appoint ministers and diplomats.
  - One of the authors of the constitution commented, “The constitution was a veritable monster; there was too much republic for a monarchy, and too much monarchy for a republic.” In fact, in less than a year, the monarchy would be overthrown altogether.

- In the aftermath of the king's attempt to escape France, only a minority of the population believed in the idea of a republic, but for some, it became a real possibility.
  - At the same time, the flight had unleashed panic across France, making it all the more possible for later events to precipitate fear and paranoia.
  - The king's flight deepened the dread of those who opposed revolutionary changes and provoked thousands of nobles, including many officers in the royal army, to leave France entirely.
  - Finally, their own flight left the king and queen in an even more tenuous position. They continued more than ever to play a double game and to hope for rescue from abroad. The kings of Austria and Prussia issued a joint declaration, calling on European sovereigns to restore the French monarchy.

### Suggested Reading

Price, *The Road from Versailles*.

Sutherland, *When the King Took Flight*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How were French people different in 1791 than they had been in 1789? In other words, what enabled a stable master and a green grocer to halt the king, and what enabled some people to imagine France with no king at all?
2. How can we imagine and make sense of Louis's psychology at this time? (Answering this question is difficult for historians because Louis, unlike Marie-Antoinette, left behind few letters or writings from the early revolutionary era.) What factors, other than his indecisive character, may have made it difficult for Louis to know what to do?

# Foreign Reactions—A Divided Europe

## Lecture 16

In June of 1790, a Prussian named Jean-Baptiste Cloots appeared in the National Assembly in Paris, leading a delegation of 35 foreigners. Cloots congratulated the French revolutionaries for inspiring people across the globe and exhorted them to spread the light of liberty and revolution to all countries. Cloots and his band of foreigners represented one international response to the Revolution, but not everyone was so enthusiastic. In fact, the early Revolution split Europe in two. This lecture explores the international repercussions of the French Revolution throughout Europe, including the emergence of the debate between liberals and conservatives that still exists in modern politics and the human diaspora that overtook Europe in the wake of the Revolution.

### Reaction in Britain

- Great Britain, France's commercial rival and frequent enemy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, watched the early events of the Revolution with great interest. Initially, the British had a favorable response. Great Britain stood out as Europe's premier constitutional monarchy, and at first, the French seemed to be following in the footsteps of the British.
- The English had experienced revolution twice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 100 years since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, they had come to pride themselves on their stable government, with its balance of power between king and Parliament.
- Still, some Britons complained that power was concentrated in the hands of a few. Most men could not vote, and the House of Commons certainly did not represent British citizens as a whole. The American revolutionaries had just shone a light on the flawed British system of representation.
- In the 1780s, British radicals were already lobbying for parliamentary reform of the electoral system. Events in France

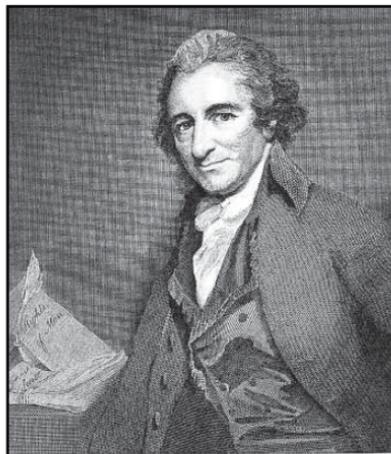
inspired them further. Political clubs organized the middle and working classes in this campaign. They demanded voting rights for all men, and some reformers also argued for religious toleration and the abolition of slavery.

### **Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine**

- In January of 1790, the Englishman Thomas Paine wrote to his acquaintance Edmund Burke: “The Revolution in France is certainly a forerunner to other revolutions in Europe.”
  - But Burke sincerely hoped that Paine was wrong. In fact, these two men soon became the leading voices in a battle over the Revolution’s implications for Britain and beyond.
  - Their struggle played an integral role in defining modern democratic politics. Burke would become known as the father of modern conservatism, while Paine became the iconic figure of the transatlantic age of revolution.
- Burke had not wanted the Americans to break from Britain, but he had supported their demands for fair representation and more equitable taxation. Still, in November of 1789, he fired off a treatise attacking the French Revolution and defending the existing British system.
  - Burke believed that hierarchy and tradition held society together, and he attacked egalitarian individualism as egotistical and greedy. He also dismissed the new rights ideology, arguing that government was meant to control people for their own good. Burke was not opposed to reforms, but he warned against abrupt changes in government.
  - Burke’s book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, captured a pervasive unease with France’s fast-moving Revolution and became an instant best seller. Not surprisingly, kings and nobles loved the work, and it was widely translated across Europe. At home, Burke’s treatise helped turn British sentiment against the French Revolution, but it also proved deeply divisive.

- Over the next two years, some 600 pamphlets appeared, debating the questions raised by Burke: innovation versus tradition, republic versus monarchy, equality versus hierarchy, and so on. By far, the most famous and influential response to Burke came from Thomas Paine in his 1791 treatise *Rights of Man*.

- The *Rights of Man* simultaneously defended the French Revolution, criticized the British system, countered Burke's vision, and laid out an audacious program of political and social reform. Paine advocated innovation and revolution rather than tradition and declared that each generation had the right to make government for itself.



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Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* had inspired the American colonists with its lively attack on hereditary monarchy; in 1791, the *Rights of Man* defended the French Revolution.

- Paine defended the concept of equal and universal natural rights at length and called for a representative government system to protect civil rights and enact popular sovereignty. He compared the promising new French constitution with the deep inequities in the British electoral system.
- In Part II of his treatise, Paine called on the state to support equality. If taxation became more progressive, the state could offer poor relief, pay for public education, establish public works for the unemployed, and grant pensions to the elderly and to veterans.

- Paine had an electric influence, but his treatise did not make him popular with the government. He was accused of seditious libel, fled to France, and was tried and sentenced to death *in absentia*.
- France welcomed Paine and offered him citizenship. He was elected to the legislature and became a leading revolutionary. But he faced 10 months of imprisonment in 1794 during the Terror. Just before his imprisonment, he produced another controversial work, *Age of Reason*.
- Both Burke and Paine had tremendous long-term influence, but in the short term, Burke's position was stronger in Britain.
  - By early 1793, British support for the French Revolution had soured. The British were appalled when the French executed their king. By February 1793, the two countries were at war.
  - War and fear of revolution at home produced a conservative backlash in Great Britain, and the government took decisive steps to squelch the growing radical movement.

### **The Age of Revolution**

- In the early 1790s, Paris became a cosmopolitan mecca for rabble-rousers from across Europe and the Americas. Some of the most vocal groups of foreigners were refugees from revolutions of their own, especially the Dutch patriots, the Swiss, and the Belgians.
- In this era, often called the age of revolution, the American and French Revolutions are well known. Less well known are keys revolts in smaller lands, including Switzerland, the Dutch Republic, and the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium). The leaders of these revolts—like the French and the Americans—took inspiration from the Enlightenment dialogue about political reform and popular sovereignty.
- The Dutch Republic had no king, but the prince of the House of Orange traditionally held a great deal of power. Alongside the

prince, powerful commercial leaders with aristocratic status largely ruled politics.

- Seven years before the French Revolution, many middle-class and artisanal city-dwellers in the Dutch Republic pushed for a greater political voice. They formed citizen militias and successfully pressed for elections to replace Orangist leaders.
- But five years later, the king of Prussia brought in troops to support the prince of Orange. The Prussians and Orangists crushed the revolt, and 10,000 Dutch patriots fled to France in the late 1780s. These political refugees followed French revolutionary events and hoped for French assistance to spark revolution in the Netherlands.
- In the same year as the Dutch revolt, democrat rebels demanded a broader franchise in Geneva, in the Swiss confederation of cantons. When the patricians repressed them, the Swiss revolutionaries also fled to France.
- In the 1780s, the Belgians, too, attempted revolution against their Austrian occupiers. Austria, ruled by Joseph II, was a formidable power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Joseph had become an aficionado of the Enlightenment and believed that monarchs should institute modernizing reforms from above. In the early 1780s, he tried to streamline and centralize the administration and justice system according to Enlightenment ideas of efficiency. Then, he introduced religious reforms that infuriated Catholic Belgium.
  - In 1788, the Belgians rebelled against Joseph, and by December 1789, the Belgian patriots had driven the Austrian troops out of most of the Austrian Netherlands. In early 1790, delegates from the 10 provinces of Belgium proclaimed their sovereignty.
  - But within months, the new Austrian emperor, Leopold II, ousted the Belgian revolutionaries, who naturally went south, over the border to France.

- All these foreign radicals engaged in French revolutionary politics in various ways. Many became journalists or members of French political clubs, but they also formed national political organizations and produced newspapers of their own. At first, the French revolutionaries avoided the international causes of the foreign revolutionaries, but later, some began to call for a war of liberation and transnational revolution.

### **Flight from France**

- Excitement about revolutionary politics had transformed Paris into a cosmopolitan center for radicals from around the world, but at the same time, the new politics drove many French opponents of revolution out of the country.
- Perhaps 160,000 French would eventually go into exile, fleeing to various European countries and even the New World. These émigrés came from all social classes, but aristocrats and clergy departed in disproportionate numbers.
- The émigré nobles in exile congregated in the German town of Koblenz, not far from the border with France. There, they set up a shadow government and plotted counterrevolution. The king's cousin, the prince de Condé, organized an army of perhaps 20,000. Despite their noble heritage, they were a ragtag bunch and poorly equipped.
- The émigrés dreamed of restoring the Old Regime in all its glory, complete with an absolutist monarch, privileged aristocrats, and an all-powerful church. Unable to help the king escape or provoke insurrection in France, they hoped to convince European monarchs to intervene in France on Louis's behalf.
  - Some of the princelings and bishops of the Holy Roman Empire happily backed the counterrevolutionary émigrés. They hated the French revolutionaries, who had taken away some of their lucrative seigneurial rights in Alsace.

- Gustavus III, the king of Sweden, also offered his support, but Sweden was distant and not terribly strong. Catherine the Great of Russia sent financial support, because a war among the western and central European powers might distract them from her attempts to snatch Poland.
- The French émigrés tried hardest to get the backing of Prussia and Austria, the two great rival powers of central Europe. For their part, the Prussian and Austrian rulers disliked all this revolutionary activity and remained leery of intervening in a country as powerful as France.
  - But when Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were humiliated in Paris after their attempted escape, the rulers listened more willingly to Louis's two brothers in exile.
  - Two months after the French king's flight, Prussia and Austria issued a warning to the French revolutionaries, known as the Declaration of Pillnitz. Their joint action was all the more striking because these two nations had been at war on and off for decades. Now, the two rival kings joined together to call on the crowned heads of Europe to restore liberty and power to the king of France.
  - The Declaration of Pillnitz was more a bluff than a real threat of action, but the French revolutionaries would not forget it in the coming months, when they debated whether to go to war to save the Revolution.

### Suggested Reading

Hampsher-Monk, ed., *The Impact of the French Revolution*.

Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*.

———, *The World of the French Revolution*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Political actors in other countries, such as Great Britain, saw French revolutionary politics through the lens of their own history and national issues. How does domestic politics shape the interpretation of political events elsewhere?
2. What factors seemed to make the French Revolution into such a hot topic internationally?

# The Path to War with Europe

## Lecture 17

In April of 1792, France declared war on Austria. Soon, Prussia and other countries jumped into the fray against France. In fact, France would be at war almost continuously over the next 23 years. This series of wars had tremendous consequences. It transformed the revolutionary dynamic, contributing to the overthrow of the king and the creation of a republic, and it played a crucial role in generating the Terror. War also lifted a little known general, Napoleon Bonaparte, into power and, in the end, just as surely destroyed him. In this lecture, we'll see why France went to war in 1792. What was the international situation, and why did some political groups in France want war?

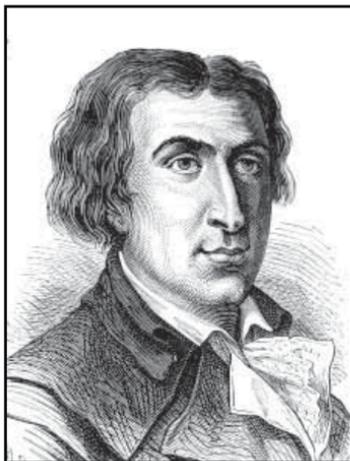
### Legislative Assembly

- The original National Assembly of France had completed its work, and in October 1791, a newly elected legislative body began to govern France, along with the king. The 745 deputies of the Legislative Assembly were all new men; none had served in the National Assembly of the last three years.
- The new legislature was composed of middle-class men, lawyers, and middle-rank professionals. Few of the deputies had ever been to war. Younger and less wealthy than their predecessors, they were the offspring of the Revolution. Many had cut their teeth on local revolutionary politics in districts and departments across France. They had experienced the joys and frustrations of trying to implement the Revolution on the ground.
- The new deputies came to Paris eager to rebuild the nation. About half of them had no clear-cut political affiliation, but the other half was sharply split. The Jacobins favored a republic. The moderates backed the constitutional monarchy; they hoped to bring the Revolution to a close.

- These moderates faced a tough task. Clearly, they were backing a dubious king. Louis had formally accepted the constitution, but everyone remembered that he had run away. As usual, no one knew exactly where the king stood. When the deputies settled down to work, the issue of war began to loom larger. This possibility would undercut the moderates in their attempts to stabilize the monarchy.

### Motivations for War

- Late in 1791 and into 1792, some deputies began to call for a preemptive strike on Austria. One of the loudest and earliest voices for war was Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the ringleader of the pro-war faction and founder of a left-wing newspaper, *The French Patriot*. Brissot was elected as a deputy to the new Legislative Assembly in 1791. Ambitious, he sought to use war to reveal the king's true game.
- In October of 1791, in the Assembly, Brissot painted a dire picture of a vast international conspiracy against the Revolution that included counterrevolutionary émigrés, German princes and perhaps other crowned heads of Europe, and above all, Austria. In fact, Austria was not on the verge of invading France, but as we'll see, Austrian threats gave the French reason to fear a conspiracy.
- Brissot and his allies, known as the Girondins, linked war to saving the Revolution at home. War would create unity and flush out the counterrevolutionaries within France. And Brissot thought that going to war would force the king to show his hand. Repeatedly, the Girondins tied



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**Jacques-Pierre Brissot, a pro-war ringleader, had spent six months in the United States and idealized American egalitarianism as the foundation of democracy.**

the external conspiracy of émigrés and monarchs to the internal threat from aristocrats and non-juror priests.

- With time, the proponents of war also began to speak of a “crusade for universal liberty,” spreading like wildfire across Europe. Cloots, the ringleader of radical foreigners in France, promised the Legislative Assembly that 20 nations would embrace the revolutionary tricolor cockade within a month of the outbreak of war.
- Within the Assembly, many of the moderates were initially skeptical about the war. But among the moderates, the Girondins had a small number of allies: the Fayetteists, a group of politicians allied with Lafayette. These men supported the constitutional monarchy and believed that war would unify the country behind the king.
- Thus, in a strange tangle of motivations, the Girondins wanted war to expose and weaken the king. The Fayetteists wanted war to strengthen the king. And the king himself wanted to go to war so that he would lose and be rescued.
  - Marie-Antoinette lobbied for military intervention in secret correspondence to her brother Leopold, the Austrian emperor. She claimed that only armed intervention by the European powers could save the French monarchy from overthrow by republicans.
  - Louis waffled at first. He mistrusted his brothers in exile and resented their desertion. He urged them not to stir up war on France but to let the Revolution fall apart on its own. By winter, however, he was secretly lobbying for a European congress with armed forces to intervene in France.

### Opposition to War

- Night after night at the Jacobin club, one man spoke repeatedly and powerfully against the war: Robespierre. He pointed out that the Revolution was too young, too unstable to fight a war. First, the revolutionaries needed to consolidate their gains at home. He argued

that the real counterrevolution, the true enemies of France, lay inside the country, not outside. Besides, French armies were in disarray.

- Like Brissot, Robespierre believed in the moral power of republicanism, and he wanted to weaken the crown, but he feared that war would make the king stronger. In an eerie forecast of the future, Robespierre warned that war could lead to “a kind of dictatorship” and could “frighten newborn liberty.” It could distract people from their concerns with civil and political rights. Robespierre’s most insightful argument was that people in other nations might not automatically rise up against their tyrants when French troops arrived.
- Some other Jacobins, including the journalists Marat and Camille Desmoulins, joined Robespierre’s opposition to the war. They reminded the deputies that in 1790, the National Assembly had decreed that France rejected conquest and would never take up arms to conquer another territory.
- But the antiwar faction was not large or powerful enough to gain traction. Most of these war critics weren’t deputies or ministers of the king. Rather, they were journalists or speakers at the Jacobin club. In the Assembly, the pro-war faction grew increasingly convincing, especially as Austria and Prussia amplified their intimidating tactics.

## **Escalation**

- The Austrians and Prussians watched the French debate over war and decided to take action. In December 1791, when Leopold II heard that the French had ordered the German princes to disperse the émigrés in their territories, his minister threatened that they would retaliate against France.
- In February of 1792, Austria and Prussia formalized their alliance, clearly with war in mind. Prussia hoped to be rewarded by expanding its territory in the Rhineland. Austria thought that a grateful French

king might help it gain lands around the Austrian Netherlands. The Austrian minister fired off another threat to France.

- Back in France, Brissot and his allies had now begun to speak of the so-called Austrian Committee. Rumor had it that a large committee, headed by Marie-Antoinette, had long plotted to spread despotism in France and beyond. This conspiracy allegedly included France's ambassadors in every court abroad, foreign spies inside France, the émigrés, and secret emissaries moving between Paris, Koblenz, and Vienna.
- The economic situation in France had deteriorated, making the people ready to believe talk of foreign conspiracies and counterrevolutionary plots. The harvest of 1791 had been dismal, and grain prices shot upward. As we'll see in a later lecture, across the Atlantic in Saint-Domingue, tens of thousands of slaves had risen in revolt, causing sugar prices in Paris to skyrocket. Inflation of the paper money—the *assignat*—only made matters worse.
- According to Brissot, there seemed to be no problem that war could not solve. He argued that while the émigrés plotted counterrevolution, they undermined the Revolution's credit—both monetary and political. But he claimed that French victory would send strengthened *assignats* across Europe.
- At the same time, food riots spiraled across the countryside in northern France. In the south, peasants revolted against their lords, angry because feudalism was not being abolished fast enough. Peasants feared that counterrevolution would overturn their hopes of benefiting from revolutionary changes.
- In March of 1792, Leopold II died suddenly. His son, Francis II, hated France and liked the idea of war, and events had already pushed the current strongly in that direction. Via her intermediaries, Marie-Antoinette reported to Francis that the French people would welcome the Austrians as liberators if they supported Louis as constitutional monarch. She claimed, falsely, that the French were

about to declare war. On April 12, the Austrians ordered 50,000 reinforcements to the frontier.

- Meanwhile in France, Louis XVI finally agreed to oust his moderate and cautious ministers and replace them with more bellicose men. The French still believed that Prussia would not join the war. They were also confident of speedy victory. Their opponents were equally overconfident.

### **Declaration of War**

- Although the Legislative Assembly was in charge, the French king still had the right to make decisions about war and peace. On April 20, 1792, he signaled to the Assembly: France declares war against “the king of Bohemia and Hungary,” as the Austrian ruler was called. By this point, war seemed like a foregone conclusion. Only seven deputies voted against the war.
- Two days before Austria received news of the French declaration of war, the Austrian council of state had resolved to invade France. The British ambassador in Paris agreed that “a war of some sort was necessary” to put an end “to the rapid increase of anarchy.”
- No sooner had the war begun than things began to go badly for France. General Dumouriez, the minister of war, had a plan for striking Austria by invading the Austrian Netherlands. The French revolutionaries optimistically predicted that the Belgians would rise up and aid them.
  - France’s three main generals—Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Luckner—were all experienced veterans of the American Revolution. Within a month, they were urging Dumouriez to make a truce, but that was not politically possible.
  - Although France had initially declared war only on Austria, Prussia now backed up her new ally and declared war on France. By July, Prussia was preparing to invade.

- The war had a tremendous impact on French revolutionary politics. First, it raised the hopes of counterrevolutionaries within France, although the wartime climate made it harder to oppose the French Revolution. Second, France's lack of military success exposed the weaknesses and uncertainties of the constitutional monarchy. Who needs a king who only wants to lose the war? Above all, the war galvanized popular politics and gave life and energy to cries for a republic.

### Suggested Reading

Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars*.

Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*.

Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Internal political rivalries and goals of various groups definitely influenced France's decision to declare war. Compare this French case to other instances of countries going to war: How did internal politics influence the choice to go to war in each case?
2. Why do revolutionary wars begin? Would it have been possible to avoid war in 1792?

# Overthrowing the Monarchy

## Lecture 18

**A**s France's enemies massed troops at the border, young volunteers (the *fédérés*) poured into Paris by the hundreds throughout July of 1792 to protect the city from invasion. In August, the volunteer soldiers and the working people of Paris stormed the Tuileries Palace and overthrew the monarchy. The king and queen became captives of the people, and France became a republic. As these events suggest, the French Republic was born at war in an outpouring of patriotic fervor and popular insurrection. In this lecture, we'll look at how and why the French overthrew their king and embarked on the Republic. What were ordinary citizens and revolutionary leaders thinking about democratic politics? What did they imagine a republic might be?

### Humiliation of the King

- By the summer of 1792, France was losing the war that it had declared only four months earlier. Many people believed that Louis and Marie-Antoinette were in league with the Austrians. Why else would France be losing so badly? Undoubtedly, non-juring priests and aristocrats were also in on the plot.
- Under pressure, the Legislative Assembly issued a decree calling for 20,000 National Guardsmen from the provinces to protect Paris. The regular troops were at the frontier, and attack seemed imminent. In response to news that non-juring priests were fomenting counterrevolution, the Assembly also passed a law threatening any non-juring clergyman with deportation if he was denounced by 20 local citizens. Louis vetoed the new laws.
- On June 20, thousands of people took to the streets in Paris, planning to plant a liberty tree in the gardens of the Tuileries Palace. But they were also furious at the king's vetoes. The crowd first filed into the Legislative Assembly and then the palace itself. They cornered the king, and under duress, he drank a toast to the health of the nation.

The people left the palace peacefully, but everyone knew that the king had been threatened and humiliated.

- On hearing of the incident, Lafayette traveled back to Paris from the front to rally his National Guard to support the king. He demanded that the Assembly close down the Jacobin club and suppress the radical press. He wanted to save the monarchy despite itself, but suspicion of Lafayette surged through Paris. Why was he trying to suppress the radical voices in Paris and political clubs across France?

### Political Alignments in Paris

- Three years into the Revolution, Paris had changed. More people in Paris than in other parts of France knew how to read, and Parisians devoured revolutionary newspapers and pamphlets. Parisians were less religious than the rest of France, more cosmopolitan, and accustomed to an influx of outsiders to the city. The summer of 1792 marked three years of political apprenticeship for Parisian leaders.
- In the last year or so, people had begun to call Parisian revolutionary activists by a new name: *sans-culottes*, meaning “without knee breeches.” The term referred to men who wore the long trousers of the workingman, not the soft knee breeches and fancy silk stockings of a nobleman.
- In the evenings, the most fervent of the *sans-culottes*



© Augustin Challamel, *Histoire-musée de la république Française, depuis l'assemblée des notables*, Paris, Delloye, 1842/Wikimedia Commons/public domain.

The *sans-culottes* were artisans, small shopkeepers, and skilled workers; their female counterparts were the *sans-jupons*, “without petticoats.”

attended meetings of their sections (official neighborhood assemblies of Paris) or their political societies. There, they drew up petitions for the Assembly and gathered weapons to defend Paris. It would be the sections, together with radical political clubs, that would organize the overthrow of the king.

- The sans-culottes were starting to develop a political vision rooted in hatred of inequality and the old aristocratic ways. At the same time, they worked out a politics of direct democracy. Why should the king or even the Assembly have all the power? Why give the people's power away to elected representatives? For the sans-culottes, no law was legitimate without their consent.
  - The sans-culottes took popular sovereignty quite literally. They should have the right to direct their deputies and to recall elected officials. All men, not just taxpayers, should vote. Soldiers should elect their officers.
  - Further, the sans-culottes believed that voting, petitioning, and demonstrating might not always be enough. Sometimes, citizens had to arm themselves and take more direct action. Insurrection was the ultimate exercise of popular sovereignty.
- These ordinary people weren't the only group supporting a republic. Revolutionary leaders, such as Brissot and Condorcet, had raised the idea of a republic at the time of the king's flight, although they stopped openly pushing for republicanism when the National Assembly began to repress radical activism in the aftermath of the Champ-de-Mars massacre.
- Once the king had signed the constitution, the Girondins developed their ideas about a republic in private discussions, imagining the Roman Republic as a model. From antiquity, they took the core notion that a republic meant, above all, a moral community that acted for the collective public good. They believed strongly that citizens had to be virtuous in order to make a republic and that virtue was acquired through education.

- Unlike the sans-culottes, the Girondins believed that the people should delegate their authority to representatives. In fact, they deeply mistrusted popular activism. As much as the Girondins suspected the king, they wanted a more orderly transition to a republic. As Paris began to heat up that summer, the divide deepened between the Girondins and the sans-culottes.

### Storming of the Palace

- At the frontier that July, the Prussians, Austrians, and émigrés worked to coordinate their plans for invasion. In Paris, on July 11, the Assembly declared that the homeland was in danger and assumed emergency powers. Meanwhile, the *fédérés* began arriving in Paris. They planned to defend the city and take part in the third Festival of Federation on July 14. Then, they'd march to the front.
- These volunteers burned with patriotism and bristled with anger at the king. The *fédérés* paraded in the streets and fraternized with their fellow sans-culottes. By night, they drank to the health of the nation; by day, they sent delegations to the Assembly, calling for the removal of the king and the impeachment of Lafayette.
- In the midst of this ferment, Lafayette planned one last-ditch effort to save the king and the constitutional monarchy. He wanted to rally his soldiers to march against Paris and then escort Louis to safety in northern France. Louis was cautiously interested, but Marie-Antoinette nixed the plan and even leaked it to the revolutionaries.
- Meanwhile, the sections had begun to meet virtually every night. In open defiance of the constitution, they allowed all so-called "passive citizens" to join in their deliberations and voting. On July 29, 47 of the 48 sections of Paris presented an ultimatum to the Legislative Assembly, demanding a vote to dethrone the king. The legislators sent the sections' petition to a committee.
- That night, Robespierre addressed his fellow members at the Jacobin club. He had defended the constitution for a long time and

had been wary of demanding a republic outright. But now he called on the Assembly to remove the king.

- The next day, word circulated that the duke of Brunswick, the commander of the Prussian forces, had issued an official threat. He warned that his troops would annihilate anyone who resisted their advance and vowed that if anyone in Paris harmed the royal family, he would decimate the city.
- In the midst of this turmoil, the Girondins who led the Legislative Assembly dithered; they refused to vote to suspend the king and monarchy. On the night of August 9, the leaders of the sections and the Cordeliers Club grew tired of waiting. At midnight, they began to ring the bells of Paris, calling people to action.
- By dawn, two columns of *fédérés* and armed sans-culottes—more than 2,500 men—marched toward the Tuileries. The palace had some 800 Swiss Guardsmen, 200 royalist volunteers, and about 1,250 National Guardsmen to defend the king. The king and queen sought refuge in the Legislative Assembly.
- When they saw Louis leave, the insurgents poured into the courtyard. They urged the Swiss to disarm and join them, but the guardsmen refused. The Swiss Guard opened fire first, throwing the attackers into disarray in the courtyard, but the Swiss and the king's guards were outnumbered.
- Some of the street fighters and the *fédérés* led a suicide charge into the palace. Hand-to-hand fighting broke out in the stairwells and halls. By 3:00 pm, the revolutionaries had taken the palace. Some 800 defenders and more than 400 of the attackers lay dead.

## **A Second Revolution**

- August 10, 1792, marked a second revolution. The French monarchy had fallen. At the town hall, the radical leaders of Paris had taken charge and declared a new insurrectionary commune, set on creating a republic.

- The Legislative Assembly had lost control of the Revolution. Now, the deputies could only bow to popular pressure and to the new power in town, the Paris Commune. The Assembly voted to suspend the king and sent the royal family to the Temple, a small prison in eastern Paris.
- The deputies also voted to hold elections for a new National Convention to write a new constitution. For the first time, they agreed that this new legislature would be elected by universal manhood suffrage.
- Six weeks later, when the National Convention met, France would become a republic. For now, the Paris Commune and the weakened Legislative Assembly shared power in an uneasy balance.
- Into this moment of political uncertainty strode Georges Danton, a lawyer who had thrown himself into republican politics. He was appointed minister of justice and galvanized the search for arms and the recruitment of soldiers, calling for 30,000 volunteers to defend Paris.
- The Prussians crossed the eastern border and, in early September, took the town of Verdun, only 150 miles from Paris. As the Prussians advanced, panic gripped the population. Rumors circulated that inmates in the prisons of Paris were conspiring with the Prussians and counterrevolutionaries. In a wave of hysteria, Parisians attacked the prisons, unleashing several days of violence and slaughter. About 1,200 prisoners met their deaths.
- The September Massacres cast a dark shadow over the birth of the first French Republic. Despite the horror of the event, most of the revolutionary newspapers and, at first, most of the leaders accepted this outburst of panicked violence as necessary to save the Revolution. Later on, the Girondins would accuse the Jacobins of having fomented the massacre.

- For now, all eyes turned toward the front. On September 20, at the Battle of Valmy, about 125 miles from Paris, the French forces would meet the Prussians in a desperate battle to save the Revolution. The very next day, the National Convention officially declared France a republic.

### Suggested Reading

Jones, *The Great Nation*.

McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*.

Soboul (Hall, trans.), *The Sans-Culottes*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Looking back over the first three years of the French Revolution, what factors seem most important in explaining why the king fell from power and why the model of a moderate constitutional monarchy failed?
2. No single figure orchestrated the August 10, 1792 uprising, yet it was not as spontaneous as the 1789 storming of the Bastille. How do collective dynamics, ideas, and local institutions all contribute to moments of direct political action, in this case or other ones?

# The King's Trial

## Lecture 19

On September 21, 1792, the new National Convention met for the first time and, in its first act, officially abolished the monarchy and declared a republic. For the first time, France would rule itself without a king, but what should be done with the former monarch? This lecture first sets up the political alignments of the new Republic, with particular focus on Maximilien Robespierre, and then focuses on the trial of Louis XVI. As we'll see, the bold action of the Republic in executing the king put it on a dangerous path—toward civil and international war.

### Factions at the National Convention

- At the birth of the Republic, there was certainly cause for optimism and excitement. Only the day before the Republic was declared, the new patriot army, under the command of General Dumouriez, had routed the Prussians and Austrians at the Battle of Valmy. The French army now marched toward Belgium and the Rhineland in hopes of spreading revolution abroad.
- Earlier in September, the French citizens had assembled to elect new leaders. With virtually universal manhood suffrage, France had abruptly become the most democratic nation on earth. Voters chose primarily middle-class men to represent them at the National Convention: lawyers and businessmen. The 749 deputies faced the task of writing a new constitution for the second time in just a few years. They would also debate the fate of the king.
- Two main factions competed to lead the Convention: the Girondins and the Jacobins. Most deputies didn't have clear-cut allegiances to either group. These unaligned deputies were called the Plain or le Marais, "the Marsh."
  - The Girondins had dominated the old Legislative Assembly and had pushed hard for the war. Although they liked the abstract idea of a republic, they had dragged their feet on

the overthrow of the king. They mistrusted the sans-culottes and feared egalitarianism, believing in the power of property and order.

- There were fewer Jacobins, but they were strong supporters of the new Republic. The far left of the Jacobins sat high up in the seats of the hall where the Convention met. These hardcore deputies became known as the Mountain, or Montagnards. Many of them had helped to orchestrate the August 10 overthrow of the king. They saw the sans-culottes as their allies and the driving force of revolution. Paris had overwhelmingly chosen Jacobins as deputies.

## **Robespierre**

- In the fall of 1792, one man emerged as a leading force among the Jacobins: Maximilien Robespierre. Born in 1758 in the northern town of Arras, Robespierre's mother had died when he was six, and his father, a down-on-his-luck lawyer, had left town shortly thereafter. Robespierre probably never saw him again.
- As a teenager, Robespierre won a scholarship to a prestigious secondary school in Paris, where he immersed himself in the Greek and Roman classics. Study of the Roman Republic doubtless inspired his later dreams of a political utopia. He was known as a serious boy, hard-working, intelligent, solitary, and ambitious.
- Back in Arras as a young lawyer in the 1780s, he developed a reputation as an effective barrister. He became enamored of Rousseau and moved in local Enlightenment circles, joining two intellectual clubs and composing poetry, speeches, and essays.
- In 1789, when Robespierre represented the Third Estate in the Estates-General at the age of 31, he didn't particularly stand out from the pack; he was simply a provincial participant in Enlightenment causes. Still, he possessed a serious intensity, an unwavering commitment to the democratic regeneration of France. He began to earn a reputation for consistency and principled stances. What he

lacked in charisma, he made up for with his compelling resolve and lucid arguments.

- With each turn of the Revolution, Robespierre could be counted on to stake out leading positions of the left and embrace egalitarian causes: against the king's right to veto laws in the new constitutional monarchy, against depriving poorer men of the right to vote or serve in the National Guard, in favor of nationalizing church lands and according rights to free people of color.
- Robespierre gained admirers, but he also made enemies. His style was self-righteous. He saw the danger of counterrevolution everywhere and acted as though he alone could speak for the Revolution. The Girondins especially grew to hate Robespierre. In November of 1792, a little-known Girondin accused Robespierre of stoking popular violence (a reference to the September Massacres) and aspiring for "supreme power."
- The battle lines were drawn, and the Girondins and Jacobins would fight one of the epic contests of the Revolution: what to do with the king.

### **Debating the King's Fate**

- Already in October, Jacobin members of the Mountain called for trying the king, but the Girondins were reluctant. They saw him as a hedge against the radicals of Paris. Perhaps they could use him as a diplomatic pawn in the game of war. They may even have toyed with the idea of returning him to the throne as a kind of puppet under their power. Above all, the Girondins wanted to use the king's fate to take down the Jacobins.
- In mid-November of 1792, the Convention finally turned to the issue of what to do with Louis. The Legislative Committee proposed that the Convention itself put the king on trial. One speaker, a closet royalist, argued against the trial. He pointed out that the Constitution of 1791 stated, "the person of the king is inviolable and sacred."

- At this moment, the youngest deputy of the Convention, the 25-year-old Antoine Saint-Just, rose to speak. This Jacobin and admirer of Robespierre indicted the king without mercy. Saint-Just dismissed Louis as “the assassin of the people” and argued that as an enemy of the nation, he didn’t even merit a trial. He uttered the famous line: “No one can reign innocently.”
- The very next week, a new discovery seemed to vindicate Saint-Just’s words. In the Tuileries Palace, behind a wooden panel, an iron safe had been found containing extensive evidence of the king’s duplicity: letters attempting to bribe deputies and clandestine plans proposed to counterrevolutionaries.
- In early December, Robespierre took to the podium to amplify Saint-Just’s arguments. To put the king on trial would be to try the Revolution itself. To keep Louis imprisoned or send him into exile might encourage royalist counterrevolution and the continuation of war by other European kings. Reminding the Convention that he had earlier opposed the death penalty, Robespierre called for the execution of Louis.
- Robespierre’s words unleashed a frenzied debate. He didn’t convince his fellow deputies to condemn the king without trying him first, but he persuaded them that with the king in limbo, the Republic could not go forward. The deputies voted that the Convention itself would judge the king.

### **Trial and Execution of the King**

- The formal accusation reduced Louis to an ordinary citizen and gave him the last name Capet, the name of French medieval kings. The accusation read: “Is Louis Capet guilty of conspiring against the liberty of the people and of trying to undermine the security of the state?”
- Eventually, Louis was granted a lawyer and was allowed to appear twice in his own defense. But the king could not defend himself and still tell the truth. He blamed his ministers, claimed to remember

nothing, and denied recognizing his own handwriting on his perfidious letters. But his answers didn't really matter; the only real question was whether to imprison the king, exile him, or execute him.

- On January 14, 1793, the deputies began a series of votes on the king's fate. In Paris, the galleries of the Convention were packed. The deputies voted unanimously that the king was guilty. On the issue of what to do with him, they voted 387 to 334 in favor of execution.
- During the trial, Louis and his family had been imprisoned in a medieval tower in eastern Paris. After hearing the news of his fate, Louis spent the afternoon with his confessor and the evening with his family. Marie-Antoinette would live on until she faced her own trial nine months later.
- On January 21, 1793, at the Place de la Révolution, now known as the Place de la Concorde, Louis mounted the scaffold where the newly installed guillotine stood. Tens of thousands of people and guards filled the square. Louis stood at the edge of the platform and began to profess his innocence. A drum roll drowned out his last words. After the blade of the guillotine fell, the executioner lifted the king's head high. A cry went up from the crowd: "Long live the Republic! Long live liberty!"



**With the execution of King Louis XVI, France had made itself irrevocably a republic; one member of the Convention wrote, "We are on our way, and the roads are cut off behind us."**

- Why did France execute its king? Why did so many members of the Plain and some Girondins who had argued against his death vote to execute him in the end? Why not simply send him into exile?
  - It is hard from the distance of centuries to understand just how sacred the monarchy was. It is impossible to fathom how powerfully the centuries of kingship and deference gripped the French psyche, whatever the bumbblings and betrayals of a single man, whatever the excitement of a revolutionary vision.
  - But the revolutionaries understood the tremendous power of the king, whose very body held the sacred essence of France. On a gut level, they knew that they could never found the Republic without slaying the king. Louis became a ritual sacrifice. By his death, he made way for an act of creation: that of the Republic.
  - To purge the king from the body politic was to purify the Republic. Here is one truth of the Revolution: Destruction and creation were inextricably intertwined.
- The deputies who voted for the death of the king knew the power of their act, and they spoke little about it. By and large, the press, too, reported the event in understated terms. Indeed, across France, the response was muted, as if everyone was stunned by the sheer gravity of the act.
- The new French Republic, which had acted so boldly, would soon be hanging by its fingertips. Divisions in France had deepened dangerously, and within a few months, some areas would explode into royalist counterrevolution and open warfare against the young Republic. The king's trial had also increased the rivalry between the Jacobins and the Girondins. Finally, many European and American supporters of the Revolution now turned against France.

## Suggested Reading

Jordan, *The King's Trial*.

———, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*.

McPhee, *Robespierre*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Was it necessary for the French to execute their king? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think certain individuals, such as Robespierre, become ardent revolutionaries? Is it a question of temperament, youthful experiences, the thirst for power, the pressure and politics of the moment, the alignment of friends and factions, or some particular openness to an idealistic ideology or utopian vision?

# The Republic at War

## Lecture 20

**F**ar to the north of Paris, in Stockholm in mid-March 1792, the Swedish King Gustavus III was assassinated at a masked ball. The assassin, Anckarström, acted for a conspiracy of noblemen who loathed the absolutist Gustavus. The conspirators were inspired by the French. They hoped to set up a regency and write a new constitution. The assassination of Gustavus reminds us starkly of how France's attack on traditional monarchy polarized Europe and reconfigured thinking about politics everywhere. In this lecture, we'll turn to international issues and follow France in its war. We'll watch the French face the Prussians, build a citizen army, and try to spread revolution abroad.

### **Battle of Valmy**

- In September of 1792, the French had just overthrown their king and held elections for the new Republic. The Prussians and émigrés, under the command of the duke of Brunswick, had taken the fortress town of Verdun and were marching toward Paris. Two experienced generals, Dumouriez and Kellermann, led the French.
- Dumouriez was desperate to block the Prussian advance. He hastened east to make a stand in the hills of the Argonne, a thickly forested area and the last natural obstacle between the Prussians and Paris.
- Brunswick had slowed down his invasion. Two-thirds of his men had dysentery, and they were waiting for supplies. During this crucial delay, Dumouriez and Kellermann drew their forces together near the village of Valmy, about 25 miles west of Verdun.
- The Prussian king, Frederick William II, convinced Brunswick to try to swoop behind the French from the southwest and force them into battle. On the morning of September 20, the Prussians and

émigrés advanced, but they faced a huge mass of French troops. Their cannons could not fully dislodge the French battery.

- At around 1:00 in the afternoon, Brunswick finally decided on a frontal assault. He drew up his infantry in three columns, marched them to within 1,700 yards of the French, and fanned them out into attacking lines. Facing the assault, General Kellermann stood up in his stirrups, brandished his sword, and shouted, “Vive la nation!”
- The Prussians pushed uphill into smoke and deadly firepower, but then abruptly, Brunswick ordered a retreat. To this day, military historians disagree about what forced Brunswick’s hand: the murderous artillery fire, the weakened state of his troops, or the valiant battle cry of the French. The two sides exchanged artillery fire into the evening, but with the Prussian infantry in retreat, the battle had already reached its climax. The French had won.
- Valmy wasn’t a striking victory, but it was a turning point. The Prussians would not press on, occupy Paris, or save Louis XVI. Why had the invasion failed?
  - The Prussian and Austrian commanders had too eagerly believed the émigrés’ predictions that French peasants would instantly join their attack on the Revolution.
  - They also underestimated the task at hand and didn’t devote enough troops or resources to the invasion. Crucially, Catherine the Great’s invasion of Poland distracted them.
  - But the French soldiers also fought hard to save the Revolution and protect their homeland. The Battle of Valmy gave birth not only to the Republic but also to the revolutionary army.

### The Citizen Army

- When the Assembly had declared the homeland in danger a few months earlier, at least 120,000 volunteers had joined the French army. The army soon became a hotbed of revolutionary propaganda

and nationalist support for the Revolution, and revolutionary leaders encouraged a new phenomenon: the citizen-soldier.

- Even the enemy agreed that the new French recruits had the force of politics and patriotism on their side. One Prussian observer noted that his soldiers were more polished, well trained, and skilled, but the French “knew for whom and for what they were fighting.... The only alternatives they knew were liberty or death.”

- Building a citizen army wasn't easy. French military leaders faced the task of fusing the old line army with thousands of new recruits.

- The old army was in rough shape; talk of liberty had eroded discipline, and emigration had decimated the officer corps. At the same time, most of the new recruits were raw and untrained, and tension was rife between the two groups.



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**Many men volunteered for the French army simply because they needed work and pay, but some brimmed with patriotic enthusiasm.**

- Further, military leaders faced questions posed by revolutionary ideology and mentality: How did the inevitable hierarchy of the military fit with new ideas of equality? With the nobility abolished, what would replace the old system of recruiting officers? The soldiers had just gotten rights and the vote; how could one expect them to dutifully obey?
- Gradually, the French created a new kind of army: an army of citizens. Although the Revolution produced the context for this army, its creators used Enlightenment ideas when they reformed the military. Among other things, Enlightenment military thinkers had suggested reducing reliance on mercenaries and cultivating

the loyalty of patriotic citizen-soldiers with better pay and better treatment.

- The military historian John Lynn has argued that with time, the French system produced an army that was tactically rough but had high morale and motivation. It especially worked to the French advantage in the frequent minor clashes and small-scale actions of the era.
- The citizen army also became a political space. To put it simply, a good revolutionary army should be an army of revolutionaries. Some of the volunteers arrived already committed to the cause, and military leaders did everything possible to convert the rest.
- A draft bulked the army up to 650,000 men by late 1793 and more than a million by late 1794—the largest army Europe had ever seen. But conscription also alienated some of the French and provoked counterrevolution.

### **Spreading the Revolution Abroad**

- The victory at Valmy injected optimism into the French battle plan. French forces planned to hit back at Prussian and Austrian enemies by striking northeast into the Rhineland and north into the Austrian Netherlands.
- With a third army, the French invaded into the region called Savoy. This territory formed part of the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, and its ruler had aided the king's brothers and the émigrés. The Piedmontese military put up little resistance. In French-speaking Savoy, assemblies voted to break away from Italy and join the French Republic.
- Meanwhile, to the north, General Custine led his army of some 10,000 infantrymen, 4,000 cavalry, and 40 cannons into the Rhineland. Within three weeks, he had taken Mainz and Frankfurt.

- In the third prong of France’s attack, Dumouriez invaded the Austrian Netherlands. In a crucial victory, the French defeated the Austrians at Jemappes in Belgian territory on November 6. Within a month, they had successfully occupied most of Belgium.
- These early successes of the French armies raised the question: What should France do with the conquered territories? Would France annex these territories into the French Republic or, following the principle of popular sovereignty, allow these peoples the right to determine their own national status? These questions were hotly debated in the National Convention and in the press.
  - Two positions began to emerge. On the one side, some deputies wanted to break away from the brutal history of conquest carried out by the greedy tyrants of the past. They reminded the Convention that only two years earlier, France had embraced the pacifist language of some Enlightenment thinkers and renounced all conquest.
  - On the other side, a growing chorus advocated revolutionizing Europe and purging it of despotic kings.
- In this mood of impatience and escalating confidence, Cloots, the Prussian-radical-turned-French-revolutionary, laid a compelling idea before the Convention: France should extend its Republic to its “natural frontiers,” the mountains, oceans, and rivers at its natural boundaries: the Atlantic and Mediterranean, the Pyrenees in the south, the Alps in the southeast, and the Rhine River in the northeast.
- On November 19, the Convention issued the Edict of Fraternity, promising that the French nation would “grant fraternity and assistance to all peoples who wish to recover their liberty.” The decree had crucial repercussions.
  - The British had stayed neutral while they watched the continental powers clash. But the November decree and the

French success in Belgium prompted England to contemplate war with France.

- The November decree also made the French bolder about spreading revolution. In mid-December of 1792, the victorious French announced revolutionary changes in the occupied territories, especially Belgium, where they abolished the nobility, feudal dues, old taxes, and tithes and introduced a French taxation system and currency. Most locals were less than enthusiastic.
- The French were carried away by their own triumphalist rhetoric and the sudden success of their armies, but their success wouldn't last long. By the winter of 1792–1793, French power and radicalism were alienating too much of Europe, including England and Spain. By the spring of 1793, France was at war with Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, Spain, the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, Austria, Prussia, and the Holy Roman Empire.
  - Far to the east, the Poles had gone down in defeat, and the Prussians and Russians had each taken a further chunk of Polish territory. That meant that now, the Prussians could turn their efforts back to the west. The Austrians also began to regroup.
  - Facing a growing coalition, the overconfident French promptly began to lose. Dumouriez invaded the Dutch Republic, but the Austrians kicked him out and then defeated his forces in Belgium in mid-March.
  - By the summer of 1793, France had lost Belgium and the Rhineland. The Republic was once again facing invasion, just as it had been a year earlier.
- France would not give up on revolutionizing Europe, but it had to survive to do so. The nation's first foray into international revolution highlights questions and tensions that would come up again when France bounced back.

- Were the French to be conquerors or liberators? How should they balance seizing territory with carrying out revolutionary ideology and enacting egalitarian reforms? And whose ideas held sway: the French revolutionaries' visions of reform or the ideas of local patriots?
- These questions would return in the later 1790s and into the Napoleonic era. But for now, after early victories, France's military fortunes had taken a spectacular turn for the worse. The French Republic was down but not out.

### Suggested Reading

Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*.

Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787–1802*.

Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How did revolutionary ideology and more traditional geopolitical goals mix in the case of the French revolutionary wars? More broadly, how do you see political ideals informing warfare, and what difference do they make—on the ground in occupied territory, in the ability of forces to fight, or in the justifications for war?
2. The French were convinced that they had to restructure their army to reflect their new politics and to boost patriotic morale. Do you think these kinds of reforms improve military effectiveness, or does that depend on other factors?

# Revolutionary Culture and Festivals

## Lecture 21

**A**s we saw in our first lecture, the king and church were the sacred center of the Old Regime, but the revolutionaries sought to stamp out the cosmic and sacred power of religion and monarchy. At the most extreme point, radical revolutionaries literally tried to “dechristianize” France. Still, their goals weren’t purely destructive. They knew they had to regenerate and remake people on the inside: How could they transform subjects of the king into citizens, ready to make important political decisions on behalf of the nation? In this lecture, we’ll watch the revolutionaries invent a different set of symbols, rituals, and ideas to remake France—everything from a republican calendar to festivals with goddesses of liberty and reason.

### Inspiration for a New Culture

- When the revolutionaries began piecing together a new culture, they drew inspiration from two sources: the Enlightenment and, paradoxically, Catholicism.
- The Enlightenment had given revolutionaries profound confidence in the power of education to remake people.
  - The late-17<sup>th</sup>-century political theorist and philosopher John Locke had famously argued that human beings were like a blank slate at birth. Human minds would be shaped by their experiences and sense impressions.
  - For the revolutionaries, this Lockean notion of human malleability offered tremendous hope for their project of reshaping citizens, if only they could give people the right education, the right language, the right sense experiences, and the right images.
- The revolutionaries were sons and daughters of the Enlightenment, but they had also grown up in the deeply ritualized world of Catholicism. They knew about the power of collective ceremonies

and sacred experiences in everyday life. Instinctively, they tried to transfer the holiness of religion to the new world of nation, reason, and revolution.

### **The Remaking of Time**

- As a first step in reinventing French culture, the revolutionaries chose to remake time itself. With extraordinary bravado, they decided to replace the Gregorian calendar with a new republican one.
  - The old calendar began with the birth of Christ and marked out the year in the liturgical rhythm of religious holidays.
  - But the revolutionaries believed that science and republican politics, not religion, should structure time. Thus, the new calendar began with the birth of the Republic. Year I started on September 22, 1792.
- At the same time, the revolutionaries were starting to invent the metric system to standardize weights and measures around decimal units of 10. Why shouldn't time be rational, too?
  - Weeks were religious, built around Sunday. The revolutionaries set up 10-day units called decades instead of weeks. Three decades made up a month.
  - The months were named after the weather of the season. Late April to early May, for example, became Floréal, the month of flowers. Each day was dedicated to nature or agriculture.
- The calendar sounds almost playful, but it reveals the true depth of the revolutionaries' ambition to transform ordinary life. To remake citizens, they hoped to alter the very rhythms of daily life.
- The calendar didn't only eliminate Sunday, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and saints' days, but it also became a platform for introducing new festivals that commemorated the Revolution or inculcated patriotic virtues.

- The new calendar was instantly controversial. It challenged both secular and religious habits. When would merchants hold their market days? Were people supposed to rest every 10 days instead of 7? Redefining time probably alienated more people than it won over for the Revolution.
- The new calendar broke with the past in the most compelling way possible. It literally lifted the Revolution outside of history and outside of ordinary time; the calendar persisted through 1805.

### Secular Festivals

- The revolutionaries introduced politics and equality everywhere in daily life, including language and fashion. Even on playing cards, the king, queen, and jack were replaced by the *philosophes* Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. But it was in the realm of festivals that the revolutionaries truly came into their own.
- Early on, revolutionary ceremonies included Catholic elements, such as the mass. But as the Revolution radicalized, a deep divide grew between the church and the new Republic. By 1792, many revolutionary festivals were purely secular, operating alongside Catholic rituals.
- For local Jacobins and enthusiasts, the Revolution became a canvas for inventing new celebrations to edify, inspire, and regenerate the people. These events took many forms: banquets, dances, speeches, and civic festivals.
- Festivals of liberty held particular cachet. To make the idea of liberty real, villages chose one of their most beautiful and patriotic young women to represent it. Sometimes the villagers dressed statues of the Virgin Mary to represent liberty, reason, or justice.
- Festival planners frequently held their rituals outside in nature, freed from the dark interiors of churches. In Old Regime Catholic processions, participants marched in order of privilege, with clergy

and nobles in the lead, followed by a hierarchy of professions, but revolutionary parades featured groupings by age.

- Some festivals became elaborate orchestrations, especially in the big cities. In Paris in the summer of 1793, revolutionary leaders appointed the painter Jacques-Louis David to plan a secular festival on August 10, the one-year anniversary of the overthrow of the king. This pageant, honoring unity and indivisibility, aimed to transcend the deep divisions within France.
  - In the Old Regime, David had made his name as a neoclassical painter, but he became a diehard Jacobin. Now, he drew on his classical repertoire to become the pageant-master of the Republic.
  - In 1793, David designed a spectacular festival, saturated with symbolism—a parade that unrolled majestically across Paris. The procession started at the Place de la Bastille and traversed the square where the king had faced execution. Then it wound its way past various stations celebrating the history of the Revolution.

### **Marianne, Symbol of the Republic**

- To regenerate the people and invent the Republic, the revolutionaries needed a new symbol to replace the king and represent France itself. They eventually chose a female figure, who came to be known as Marianne.



**Liberty or the French Republic itself was often represented as a simple peasant woman; she appeared in artwork, on official documents, and as a figure at parades and festivals.**

- Her inventors drew on the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, which frequently used female figures as allegories of abstract virtues, such as justice or liberty. In this Catholic country, the deputies also hoped that the French would be open to a figure who resembled the Virgin Mary.
- Marianne appeared on official seals and letterhead, on coins, and in paintings. In fact, she continues to represent the French Republic in the modern era.

### The Dechristianization Campaign

- The most controversial and radical movement of the revolutionary culture makers was the dechristianization campaign. In this campaign, zealous Jacobins tried to put an end to Catholicism forever.
- One notorious event has gone down in history as the emblem of this campaign: the Festival of Reason held inside the cathedral of Notre Dame on November 10, 1793.
  - Inside the cathedral, a small temple was constructed and dedicated to philosophy. Sculptures of the *philosophes* adorned the temple, and a beautiful young woman personified liberty. A simple flame burned to represent the power of reason.
  - People were stunned by the idea of transforming the cathedral into a temple of reason and shocked that the female representation of liberty might actually be a goddess of reason.
- Although this controversial festival took place in Paris, the dechristianization campaign began in the provinces. It was led by local Jacobins, zealous city officials, soldiers in the revolutionary armies, and active representatives from the National Convention. They closed down churches, forced priests to resign, and used blasphemy to chase religion away.
- The National Convention never endorsed dechristianization as an official package, and Jacobin leaders disagreed deeply about

it; Robespierre, for example, opposed it. But in the fall of 1793, many radical revolutionaries saw Catholicism as evil incarnate. In their eyes, its superstitious beliefs held people back from becoming rational and loyal citizens, and in many areas, its non-juring priests were working behind the scenes to foment counterrevolution.

- In Catholic belief, the sacred had a physical presence. Certain spaces, churches, and objects held supernatural power. Dechristianizers wanted to destroy and defy that power; thus, they invaded the churches, dragged down statues of saints, ripped holy paintings from the walls, and melted down sacred objects to produce metal for the war effort.
- Repeatedly, rhetoric linked dechristianization to France's international war against kings, and some radicals clearly expressed glee at bringing down the privileged of the church.
- The Convention allowed communes to decide whether to close down religious services. At its peak, the dechristianization movement closed churches in most of France and gave them new uses; they became storehouses for weapons or grain or stables for horses.
- As they closed down the churches, revolutionaries often engaged in rituals satirizing Catholicism. They danced on the altar and guzzled the communion wine. Many villages dressed up a donkey as a bishop, complete with a miter. In some places, dechristianizing rituals drew on the carnivalesque and satirical practices of popular culture.
- The dechristianization campaign included another crucial element: Jacobins put tremendous pressure on priests to resign and, better yet, even get married.
  - It wasn't easy to be a priest in France during the Revolution. In 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had demanded that priests swear an oath of allegiance to the new nation. In 1792, they'd been threatened with deportation or imprisonment.

- Now, at the height of the radical Revolution, in some parts of France, dechristianizers demanded that clergymen give up their vocations entirely. Ideally, they should issue a denial at a public festival and perhaps burn their letters of priesthood.
- Close to 20,000 priests—about one-sixth of the clergy of France—resigned. About 6,000 of these men married, as did hundreds of nuns. Others chose to emigrate or go into hiding rather than renounce their vocations. In a small number of cases, priests embraced dechristianization with fervor and enthusiasm.

### Impact of Cultural Changes

- Did the revolutionaries' crusade to create a secular republican culture work? Given the immense diversity of France, this question has no simple answer. Overall, it was not so easy to remake people's interior beliefs and age-old religious practices. Early revolutionary festivals often generated large crowds and excitement, but revolutionaries didn't succeed in transforming this initial enthusiasm into a regular practice of civic festivals.
- Dechristianization sharpened the divide between supporters and opponents of the Revolution. Many people tried to fuse their old religious allegiances with new loyalty to the Revolution and its principles.
- In the long term, without a doubt, the Revolution and the dechristianization movement had a secularizing impact on France. Strong differences in religious practice—both gender and regional differences—appeared after the Revolution and continue to this day in modern France.

### Suggested Reading

Corbin, *Village Bells*.

Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*.

Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*.

McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–99*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The revolutionary calendar raises thought-provoking questions about how different experiences and rhythms of time affect people's lives, expectations, and practices. Discuss the impact of time on life experience, considering such factors as how time is measured, whether it is standardized, how it is divided between work and leisure, how much time it takes to get news or to reach a location, and so on. Does our attitude toward and experience of time define what it means to be “modern”?
2. The revolutionaries tried to sacralize their new politics. How have various nations and peoples tried to make politics—or the nation—sacred in some way?

# Family and Marriage

## Lecture 22

In this lecture, we'll look at how the revolutionaries tried to introduce new ideals of liberty and equality into family relationships. We'll see how family members came to view their most intimate relationships through the lens of politics. As one daughter commented when she was lobbying for equal inheritance: Don't all children "have an equal right to paternal tenderness"? In the name of liberty, equality, and individual rights, revolutionary lawmakers introduced ambitious reforms, such as divorce, egalitarian inheritance, and a reduction in the traditional authority of fathers. As we'll see, these reforms had a controversial and far-reaching impact. At the same time, the revolutionaries hoped that families would become political places, intimate arenas for forging patriotic and useful citizens.

### Families in the Old Regime

- In the Old Regime, everyone knew that the family and monarchical politics should mirror each other. Old Regime culture saw a correlation among the authority of God the father, the king as the father of his people, and the authority of fathers within families.
- Because inequality structured all of society, no one expected equality to reign within households. Husbands had the right to manage the family property; wives did not. Fathers had authority; children, even adult children, did not.
- Of course, some decision making was negotiated, but the concepts of individualism and liberty didn't really apply in households. Everyone was expected to make sacrifices for the survival of the family. The success of the family line mattered deeply.
- When the Revolution began to undermine the authority of the king and aristocrats, it opened up the issue of power dynamics and inequality within families. One pamphlet written by women in Normandy demanded, "If we finally accept as an organizing

principle that the strong will no longer impose laws on the weak in the great family of the State, why would we allow it in our own families?"

- At the same time, revolutionary lawmakers began to define citizens as legal individuals, equal before the law. This raised the question of the status of individuals within households. For example, how could an adult son have the right to vote as a citizen but still not be able to manage his own property or choose a wife?

### **Marriage and Divorce**

- The discussion of marriage among revolutionaries focused most on two issues: arranged marriages and lack of divorce. Among the propertied classes, parents commonly arranged their children's marriages, and divorce didn't exist in Old Regime France. As they demanded divorce and the end of arranged marriages, pamphleteers and petitioners envisioned marriage rooted in liberty. People should be free to love and free to marry.
- The Old Regime had classified marriage as both a sacrament and a contract. Now, marriage critics pushed to define it only as a civil contract. Each citizen—male or female—should be free to make or break this contract at will.
- Both male and female revolutionaries painted an ideal picture of marriage as a relationship of companionship and affection. Marriage critics also theorized a link between liberty and love. They argued that if people were free to marry and free to divorce, they'd love each other more.
- Some pro-divorce authors argued powerfully that liberty and happiness within marriage had a political payoff. Happy couples would produce more children, and above all, they would cultivate each other's patriotism and virtues. They would offer the Republic valuable social and moral cement.

- A small group argued against divorce, which contradicted religious teachings. It could harm children and produce social instability and disorder. But opponents of divorce were outnumbered in print by at least five to one.
- In September of 1792, the Legislative Assembly passed a remarkably liberal divorce law. Couples could petition for divorce based on mutual consent, incompatibility, or one of seven grounds, such as insanity, cruel abuse, long-term absence, or emigration. Access to divorce became relatively cheap and easy through new arbitration courts called family tribunals. Divorced spouses were free to remarry. This law lasted for 11 years, until Napoleon made divorce much more difficult.
  - Women and men had equal access to all forms of divorce, but in every region of France studied so far, women initiated two-thirds to three-quarters of all divorces, often claiming abandonment or domestic abuse. The phrase “marital despotism” tied the personal experience of some women to the anti-monarchical politics of the day.
  - Access to divorce was uneven in France. City people divorced more often, especially artisans, shopkeepers, and middle-class couples. Divorce was rare in the countryside and uncommon among the very rich and the very poor.
- On the same day that it legalized divorce in September of 1792, the legislature passed a second law allowing any young man or woman, age 21 or older, to marry without parental consent. Clearly, this practice undercut paternal authority and attacked the tradition of arranged marriage.
- Marriage rates rose during the Revolution, partly because young men might be able to avoid conscription by marrying. But the Revolution also brought a more egalitarian and free atmosphere and greater social mobility. In the more open marriage market, couples tended to wed younger and to choose spouses from a wider range of social backgrounds.

- Another remarkable change of the Revolution was the transfer of responsibility for civil recordkeeping from priests to elected government officials.
  - This may sound like a minor technical detail, but in fact, it marked a pivotal shift. It clarified the legal validity of Protestant and Jewish marriages and demonstrated that the Republic, not the church, had authority over family matters.
  - Priests still blessed most marriages, but only government officials could give them legitimacy.

### **Family Life**

- To strengthen the tie between the secular Republic and the family, revolutionary festivals promoted family life as a patriotic cause. At one spring celebration in La Rochelle, for example, an older couple renewed their nuptial vows after 50 years, a young mother adopted an orphan, and a soldier married the citizeness of his dreams.
- More was at stake than symbolism and ceremony. The revolutionaries had great political hopes for the family and marriage. In the name of individual rights and equality, the Revolution had torn down old sources of collective identity, such as the three estates, the guild system, regional differences, and above all, the church. In the midst of so much change, the revolutionaries hoped that the family would help hold the Republic together.
  - On the most basic level, marriage could be useful and productive. Married citizens produced children for the Republic, all the more important in a time of war.
  - Further, families should become political. Parents should bring up their children as virtuous citizens of the Republic, teaching them the new principles of equality, liberty, and citizenship from birth.
  - Inside families, republican women should also win over men for the Revolution. According to ideas about gender at the time, men were more energetic and rational than women but

too hardhearted. If they were going to vote and make political decisions, they had to develop humane and caring hearts in order to act on behalf of the common good. Revolutionaries believed that the love and tenderness of virtuous women had political power to awaken men's compassion and make them into good citizens.

### **Egalitarian Inheritance**

- In Old Regime France, each region treated family property differently. A few regions—and aristocrats everywhere—followed the principle of primogeniture. They passed land down only to the oldest son. In parts of western France, family property was divided equally, but in the south, it wasn't unusual for a father to control the property of an unmarried adult son until he was into his 30s or even older.
- When the Revolution began to focus attention on equality, books, pamphlets, and broadsheets attacked paternal authority and the unfair distribution of family property. Thousands of younger sons and daughters sent petitions to the legislature, asking for equality between siblings. Illegitimate children—and sometimes their parents—denounced the cruel stigma of bastardy.
- Over the course of the early 1790s, revolutionary lawmakers chipped away at the traditional authority of fathers.
  - By March of 1790, the National Assembly had abolished primogeniture and taken away the power of fathers to imprison disobedient children or wayward wives.
  - Between 1791 and 1794, the legislature passed laws that prevented parents from writing wills that favored one child over the others. Parents had to pass on their goods equally to all children, regardless of sex or birth order. Even illegitimate children should receive a share, as long as their fathers had recognized them as their own.

- The historian Lynn Hunt has made an intriguing psychological argument about this attack on fathers. She suggests that revolutionary politics itself had a family dynamic: Young men made the Revolution as a band of brothers against their father, the king. Once they had killed the king, the sacred father, it became possible for the revolutionaries to imagine taking away the authority of real fathers.
- Some families followed the new inheritance laws, but the reforms generated significant controversy, especially because the deputies made the laws retroactive to 1789. Families sometimes had to redivide property that they had already split up.
  - The arbiters of family courts did their best to balance the new equality with a fair assessment of past work. Older brothers had often invested years of labor improving the family lands they would inherit.
  - Opponents claimed that the new laws wreaked emotional havoc, tore families apart, and made property uncertain. They also pointed to article 17 of the Declaration of Rights, which guaranteed the right to property. Social order and justice should win out over absolute individual liberty and equality.



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### A Microcosm of the Revolution

- During these times, the family became a microcosm of the Revolution as a whole. Some people resisted the changes, but revolutionary reforms

**Revolutionary laws allowed divorce, equal inheritance, and marital choice—civil rights that women had not enjoyed in the Old Regime.**

wrenched France toward a modern ideal of more egalitarian and affectionate families. Families should somehow balance individual liberty and equality with the collective goals of the family members.

- The Revolution weakened fathers and the old patriarchal family. It undercut the power of the family line down through the generations and encouraged couples to focus on the nuclear unit.
- Although individual women could be winners or losers in family contests, revolutionary family laws also recognized women's civil rights as never before. Divorce, equal inheritance, and free marital choice enabled some women to gain power, property, and independence.
- As we'll see later in the course, when Napoleon introduced his civil code, he reacted against some of these trends and especially cut back the new liberties given to women by the Revolution. But his code nonetheless built on revolutionary innovations. As the historian Jacques Poumarède commented, "The wind of equality had risen up, and it would never die down."

### Suggested Reading

Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*.

Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*.

Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The revolutionaries thought that a different kind of politics—a democratic republic instead of a monarchy—should have a different kind of family, a more egalitarian one if possible. How do different societies articulate and negotiate the relationship between politics and ideal visions of the family?

2. Why did the French revolutionaries try so hard to reform intimate relationships within families? Could or should they have avoided addressing such a controversial topic?

# Slave Revolt and the Abolition of Slavery

## Lecture 23

In 1783, the marquis de Rouvray wrote from his plantation on Saint-Domingue: “A slave colony is like a city threatened by attack. We are treading on powder kegs.” He had no idea that eight years later, in the midst of the French Revolution, tens of thousands of enslaved Africans would rise up in revolt. They unleashed the largest slave uprising in history and precipitated the abolition of slavery by the French revolutionaries. Their actions eventually led to the breakaway of Saint-Domingue from France and the creation of modern Haiti. This lecture describes the revolt itself and how it was made possible by the French Revolution’s exposure of deep divisions in French colonial society.

### Fault Lines in Colonial Society

- News of the French Revolution across the sea captured everyone’s attention in Saint-Domingue and sparked conflicting hopes among different segments of colonial society.
- In May of 1791, some free people of color had won the rights of citizenship, but only after the brutal repression of Vincent Ogé’s revolt. Many whites opposed putting those rights into effect. Poor whites had seized on the Revolution to get a leg up and resented the notion of equality for free people of color.
- The more well-off white merchants and planters hoped that the Revolution would end various royal controls over trade and grant the white colonists greater political autonomy. Some planters even thought the Revolution might be an opening for them to break away from France and declare their independence, just as the Americans had done.
- At the same time, slave owners worried about the impact of revolutionary ideology on slaves. The events of 1789 intensified the perennial fear of rebellion.

- Among the slaves, news of the Revolution seemed to reinforce rumors already circulating that the king himself had intended to improve slave conditions. By the late 1780s, slaves had also heard rumors about abolitionist talk in Britain and about a new decree from the Spanish king, lightening the workload of fellow slaves just across the border in Santo Domingo.
  - When the French Revolution broke out, enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue had reason to believe in optimistic hearsay, although plantation owners tried to shield slaves from revolutionary ideas or symbols.
  - The enslaved Africans of Saint-Domingue didn't need French revolutionary ideology to teach them the importance of liberty. But the Revolution destabilized colonial society and provided an opening for slave revolt.

### **Uprising on Saint-Domingue**

- At 10:00 on the night of August 22, 1791, in the parish of Acul on the northern plain of Saint-Domingue, slaves began to gather at a fixed meeting point. For weapons, they had fire, machetes, and surprise.
- Their numbers swelling, bands of slaves moved from plantation to plantation, leaving behind a trail of destruction. They set vast fields of sugarcane on fire and stormed into plantation homes. They killed whites and smashed sugar mills.
- By the following morning, nearly 2,000 slaves had joined the rebels. Within a few more days, they numbered 10,000. Some whites managed to fight back, especially if their own slaves refused to join the rebellion, but many fled to Le Cap-Français, the former capital city.
- Within two weeks, enslaved Africans had risen up in 23 of the 27 parishes of the northern province. They had decimated more than 200 sugar plantations and 1,200 coffee estates. By late September,

they had become a powerful army of insurgents, at least 20,000 strong.

- The slave rebellion of Saint-Domingue was not a spontaneous uprising. For weeks ahead of time, its leaders had gathered secretly to plan insurrection. Many leaders were high-ranking slaves, including a man named Boukman, said to have stirred up his fellow slaves with a religious ceremony.
- The uprising was striking for its massive size and speed, but it also stood out for combining inspiration and military methods from multiple sources. The insurgents declared that they fought in the name of the French king and in the name of liberty while using guerilla-like tactics of warfare learned in the Kongo.
- In the first four months of fighting, about 400 white soldiers lost their lives. The black insurgents were less well armed; 4,000 of them were killed, and another 4,000 were taken prisoner. They nonetheless hung on, retreating to the mountains when necessary. A stalemate set in on the plains in the north.
- The insurgents, including the new rebel leader Toussaint Louverture, set up camps that were, in effect, the beginnings of an independent society. A new elite of black leaders ran the show, while ordinary blacks farmed the land for food. Some of the military commanders would later become the governing class of independent Haiti.



**Myths surround Toussaint Louverture, the most important leader in Saint-Domingue; the last name he adopted means “the opening,” perhaps the opening toward freedom.**

## **Reaction in France**

- It would take two months for news of the insurrection in Saint-Domingue to reach French shores, and the French were occupied with their own problems in 1791–1792, such as whether to go to war and what to do about their reluctant king.
- Still, news of the slave revolt helped free people of color. In April of 1792, the Assembly and the king agreed to grant political rights to all free men of color, but they had no intention of abolishing slavery.
- In the summer of 1792, the French sent troops to Saint-Domingue, along with three commissioners to restore order. To northern Saint-Domingue, they sent Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, a 29-year-old supporter of the Revolution and an abolitionist. Sonthonax was charged with implementing the new law granting full political citizenship to free people of color. He also had another assignment: to crush the rebellion and restore slavery.

## **International Warfare and the Attack on Le Cap**

- When Sonthonax arrived in Saint-Domingue to reestablish order, the white planters mistrusted him. He set about forging alliances with free men of color. He managed to make some headway against the slave rebels, but when his troops were victorious, the insurgents retreated to the mountains and hung on.
- International warfare soon made Sonthonax's task more complicated. In early 1793, after the execution of the king, France went to war against Great Britain and Spain. These perennial rivals relished the opportunity to strike at France in her wealthy colony.
- From across the border, the Spanish in Santo Domingo had already been supporting rebel slaves. Now that war with France was officially declared, the Spanish began actively recruiting the slave insurgents into their army, promising both land and freedom. By late spring of 1793, insurgent leaders had brought more than 10,000 soldiers into the Spanish camp, including Toussaint Louverture.

- Meanwhile, Great Britain also had its eye on Saint-Domingue. French planters in exile in London and in the British colony of Jamaica urged the British to invade Saint-Domingue. They saw the British as their best bet for reestablishing the plantation system. That summer, the British laid their plans.
- As if fighting the Spanish and the slave insurgents weren't enough, Sonthonax also faced a new French rival: François-Thomas Galbaud, the new governor of Saint-Domingue, who immediately began to forge alliances with the white planters who mistrusted Sonthonax.
- Sonthonax had Galbaud arrested and locked up on a ship in the harbor of Le Cap. But Galbaud discovered that the sailors shared his hostility toward Sonthonax. On June 20, Galbaud and the sailors launched a surprise attack on Le Cap and seized the arsenal.
- Sonthonax and the other commissioners fled the city. Then, Sonthonax declared that he would grant freedom to any insurgents who fought on the side of the Republic. Two major rebel commanders led more than 2,000 men down from the hills. Within the city, the prisons were opened, releasing hundreds of black insurgents.
- Chaos and panic gripped Le Cap. Galbaud himself and many residents scrambled onto the ships in the harbor. In the midst of the chaos, Le Cap was engulfed by fire.

### **The Abolition of Slavery**

- These days in June of 1793 were a major turning point. Sonthonax expanded his promise of emancipation. Black soldiers could claim freedom by joining the French side. In July, Sonthonax issued a decree emancipating the wives and children of insurgents who fought for the French Republic.
- But emancipation was not yet complete. Some slaves drafted a white official to write a petition on their behalf, invoking the Declaration

of the Rights of Man. On August 19, 1793, anxious to win all the insurgents to his side, Sonthonax finally took the dramatic step of abolishing slavery entirely in the northern province.

- Sonthonax's emancipation proclamation was bold and dramatic, but it tempered its promise of liberty (requiring ex-slaves to work on their plantations for pay), and it didn't succeed in convincing all the black insurgent leaders to desert the Spanish. It would be eight months before Toussaint Louverture joined the French republicans.
- In the meantime, though he was allied with the Spanish, Toussaint acted with increasing independence to build up his own forces and command a swath of territory across Saint-Domingue.
  - In the coming months, the French could have used Toussaint's military genius and his soldiers. In September of 1793, the British invaded and occupied from the south and west. The Spanish continued to fight the French on the northern plains.
  - Finally, in May of 1794, Toussaint shifted his allegiance to the French and tipped the balance of power in their direction. He brought 4,000 loyal soldiers to help the French hold off the British and Spanish.
- When he switched sides, perhaps Toussaint made a military calculation, or perhaps he had heard word of what had happened three months earlier in France: the abolition of slavery in all French territory by the National Convention and the granting of full rights of political citizenship to the formerly enslaved. Why had the revolutionaries taken such a radical step?
  - On one level, emancipation was a contingent event. The June 1793 crisis in Saint-Domingue created a situation that allowed Sonthonax to put his abolitionist principles into practice. He needed to win insurgents to his side and hang onto the colony.
  - On a deeper level, the abolition of slavery grew out of the combination of revolutionary ideology and direct action by the slaves themselves. The French revolutionaries had no real

intention of enacting the principles of liberty and equality in the colonies, but the slave insurgents of Saint-Domingue demanded it.

- The official abolition of slavery was only one step on the long road toward full liberty. Saint-Domingue was still wracked by warfare, and a mixed system of emancipation and coerced labor kept the plantations operating.
- Over the next six years, Toussaint increasingly came to dominate Saint-Domingue. He ousted the British, annexed the Spanish half of the island, and defeated rival generals for control of the island. Although Saint-Domingue was still part of France, by 1801, Toussaint had virtually consolidated his control over the island.

### Suggested Reading

Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848*.

Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What was the relationship between the French Revolution and the Saint-Domingue (or Haitian) Revolution?
2. This era of history is sometimes called the age of revolution. Are certain historical moments especially “ripe” for revolution? Why?

# Counterrevolution and the Vendée

## Lecture 24

In the spring of 1793, a counterrevolutionary uprising wracked the western part of France in the region known as the Vendée. Tens of thousands of peasants and rural artisans made war on their pro-revolutionary brothers and on the French Republic. To understand the course of the French Revolution, we also need to understand counterrevolution. Only then will we be able to comprehend why France eventually turned to the Terror, that violent attempt to root out the enemies of the Republic. This lecture asks why some people became counterrevolutionaries. We'll especially focus on the Vendée, a term that refers both to the region and to the devastating war that tore the Republic apart.

### Early Antirevolutionary Activism

- Although it wouldn't produce an all-out civil war of counterrevolution until 1793, the Revolution had always provoked some opposition. As it re-juggled local power dynamics, the early Revolution stirred up conflicts.
- As early as 1790, the new politics of revolution inflamed old disputes between Protestants and Catholics in parts of the south of France. Religious toleration and the new electoral politics meant that Protestants could win local power, which frightened Catholics. In the town of Nîmes, for example, in June 1790, when wealthy Protestant merchants flexed their political muscle, a major brawl broke out, and several hundred people were killed.
- Early on, opposition didn't move beyond localized outbursts like the one in Nîmes. Given the small number of Protestants in France, sectarian violence between Protestants and Catholics wasn't common during the Revolution. More often, these local clashes pitted Catholics against Catholics. Sometimes, antirevolutionary activism grew out of anger over the clerical oath, and sometimes

it grew out of other longstanding divisions: town versus country or rich versus poor.

- Of course, the Revolution had also created institutions, such as elections, clubs, and newspapers, that disgruntled citizens could use to channel their demands. Opponents of the Revolution often voiced their criticisms through the very mechanisms that the Revolution itself had created.
- And from abroad, the émigrés continued to enlist local organizers to foment grassroots counterrevolution. They wanted locals to support a possible invasion by émigrés. But the émigrés' conspiracies for instigating counterrevolution in 1790–1791 never gelled. They didn't have the resources, and they couldn't recruit enough counterrevolutionary followers.

### **Increasing Polarization in France**

- In 1793, two things happened that increased polarization in France: (1) The Revolution radicalized, and (2) France went to war.
- As the Revolution grew more radical and more ambitious, it made more enemies. Killing the king was shocking, but it alienated fewer people than revolutionary reforms in the realms of religion, the economy, and local politics.
- Further, going to war escalated the stakes of revolutionary politics. To oppose the Revolution now seemed like an attack on patriotism and on France itself. The war pitted good, loyal citizens against evil counterrevolutionaries, conspirators, and spies.
- The war also put a tremendous economic strain on the nation. To fight the war, the National Convention collected higher taxes and requisitioned grain, horses, and carts. The Republic demanded church bells to melt down for their valuable metal.
- Finally, war required that people offer up their sons. When the volunteers of 1792 began to drift home, the Convention instituted

forced recruitment with its levy of 300,000 in February 1793. In western Normandy and Brittany, forced recruitment sparked resistance and guerilla warfare. In the Vendée, conscription triggered conflict that escalated into all-out civil war.

### **Counterrevolution in the West**

- Why did counterrevolution take hold among some groups in Brittany, Normandy, and the Vendée?
- For centuries, because of the patchwork nature of Old Regime privilege, peasants in the west had benefited from a lighter tax burden. Paradoxically, revolutionary tax reforms meant that western peasants actually had to pay more than they had before.
- Abolishing seigneurial dues and the tithe to the church also benefited many peasants across France, but once again, local differences mattered. In the Vendée, seigneurial dues had been relatively light. Now, impoverished sharecroppers were outraged when their distant urban landlords started to add onto their rents the cash equivalent of the old tithe and the old dues.
- Further, rural artisans, weavers, and peasants seethed with resentment as they watched members of the small-town bourgeoisie buy up nationalized church lands. These men were winning economic opportunity from the Revolution; they often swept into office as elected officials and wielded power over the countryside.
- The issue that infuriated people the most, however, was religion. In the Old Regime, religious devotion ran deep in western France. When the Vendée rebellion broke out in March of 1793, the big push for dechristianization had not yet started in France, but already, many Vendéans saw their religion under attack.

### **Uprising in the Vendée**

- On the morning of March 11, 1793, a throng of perhaps 2,000 peasants, angry over conscription, stormed the town of Machecoul in western France. A small group of National Guardsmen faced off

against the peasants, but they couldn't hold and soon ran for their lives. The peasants rang a church bell to call more comrades in from the countryside.

- The crowd killed the recruitment officer first with a single pike thrust to his heart. Next, they turned on the constitutional clergyman, stabbing him in the face. They rounded up multiple revolutionaries, tied them together in a chain, then shot them and dumped their bodies in a moat.
- In this region where the Revolution hadn't won enough allies, the local patriots and National Guardsmen couldn't hold off the mounting anger of their opponents. In several towns near Machecoul, counterrevolutionary Vendéans unleashed their fury on local patriots. What began as a small cluster of uprisings snowballed into a mass movement.
- We have seen that the Vendéans had real grievances against the revolutionary state, but in many ways, the style and the violence of the early uprising in the Vendée echoed centuries of peasant rebellions in France. In the Vendée, peasants hoped to repeat the pattern of the *jacqueries* (peasant rebellions of the past) and push back the intrusive state.

### **The Whites versus the Blues**

- Within weeks, the insurgents of the Vendée formed an army of about 40,000 peasants, weavers, and rural artisans. They stole many of their weapons from their opponents. They donned the white cockade of the Bourbon monarchy and became known as the Whites fighting the Blues of the Republic.
- Why couldn't the armies of the Republic put the Whites down quickly? The terrain played an important role. The Vendée region sprawled across four departments, but its heart lay in the *bocage*, a region of wet, dense, and hilly terrain. One revolutionary general called the *bocage* "a deep, dark labyrinth," and the insurgents knew it intimately.

- On March 19, 1793, General Marcé and 2,400 republican soldiers ventured into the Vendéan *bocage* to crush the upstart revolts. While Marcé and his men pitched camp that evening, hundreds of insurgents slipped into the hedges along the narrow roadside. As darkness fell, the Vendéans opened fire onto the front of Marcé's column. At least 500 republican soldiers fell, and the next day, Marcé withdrew his troops back to La Rochelle on the Atlantic coast.
- In the coming months, the Vendéans became known for their ambushes, crazed charges, and sudden withdrawals. Again and again, they defeated the Blues, both the local republicans and the revolutionary soldiers. Conventional pitched battle had little role to play in the *bocage* of the Vendée.
- But beyond the terrain and the guerrilla tactics of the Vendéans, another factor played a key role in allowing this uprising to become a full-scale rebellion and civil war: Revolutionary leaders in Paris did not at first grasp the full potential of peasant bands to resist the regular army.
  - In late March, the Convention decreed the death penalty for anyone convicted of wearing the white cockade or taking up arms against the Republic. But the deputies didn't realize how deep the resistance ran. The Convention and the war ministry had other problems on their mind.
  - On March 18, 1793, the day before Marcé's loss to the Whites in the *bocage*, General Dumouriez had lost a decisive battle to the Austrians in Belgium. It was a crucial turning point in the foreign war. Within two weeks, Dumouriez had withdrawn his troops from the Netherlands and Belgium entirely.
  - The French army faced the real possibility of invasion from the north. Resources were diverted away from the Vendée.
- By mid-June of 1793, the Vendée rebels had taken the towns of Saumur and Angers on the Loire River. They could have marched

straight up the Loire to get within striking distance of Paris. But the Vendéan generals worried that their forces could only operate well close to home. They chose to turn west and lay siege to Nantes, but the port city held out and the siege failed.

- Still, that summer of 1793, the Blues couldn't take territory from the rebellious Whites. From their point of view, the Whites fought to defend a deeply threatened way of life. On the other side, the Blues saw counterrevolution in the Vendée as the darkest of betrayals. They thought that the Vendéans were stabbing them in the back when the Republic was at its most vulnerable.
- In August of 1793, a deputy at the Convention called for the extermination of the Vendée, and in the coming months, the Republic struck without mercy. Late that fall, after a crucial battle loss, some 80,000 Vendéan men, women, and children crossed the Loire River to the north, hoping to rendezvous with Norman counterrevolutionaries and British allies. Instead, they faced destruction from revolutionary armies.
- The counterrevolution in the Vendée didn't spring from any great plots or émigré conspiracies, and it wasn't really sparked by the overthrow of the king. Instead, counterrevolution surged up out of grassroots anger at revolutionary reforms that tore at the fabric of day-to-day life.
  - Counterrevolution coalesced into civil war in this region where the Revolution had upset the balance of local power. It had invaded the parish church, brought more taxes and few economic benefits, and then called on young men to lay down their lives.
  - The Vendée—both the war and the region—took on a life of its own in French memory. Long after the Revolution was over and the French struggled to deal with its divisive legacy, the Vendée was both romanticized and hated. For conservatives, it would forever represent the valiant defense of tradition, God, and king. For republicans, the Vendée stood for betrayal and

the irrational attachment to an archaic world of oppression, ignorance, and superstition.

### Suggested Reading

Bell, *The First Total War*.

Sutherland, *France, 1789–1815*.

Woell, *Small-Town Martyrs and Murderers*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Was counterrevolution inevitable in France?
2. Historians often suggest that modern national identity emerges at the expense of regional or local identities, but perhaps the relationship between the two is more complex. How do national and regional identities interact? More particularly, how does the history of civil war shape the balance of regional and national identity in large nations?

# The Pressure Cooker of Politics

## Lecture 25

**T**he French Revolution presents a difficult problem: Why did France's attempt to create liberty, equality, and democracy devolve into the Terror? Why did French revolutionary leaders find it necessary to suspend the democratic constitution and concentrate power in the hands of a few? Why use state violence to suppress counterrevolution? There are no easy answers to these questions, but we can begin to understand by looking at the situation in France in the spring of 1793. In this lecture, we'll watch leading revolutionaries in Paris wrestle with economic crisis, military losses, and the fear of conspiracy and counterrevolution. We'll also look at the increasing hostility between the two leading groups of revolutionaries: the radical Jacobins and the moderate Girondins.

### Economic Crisis

- In the winter of 1792–1793, a new problem stalked France: inflation. Fighting the war was expensive, and the revolutionaries weren't able to collect as much in taxes as they had hoped. To pay for the war, the Convention printed ever more *assignats*, the Republic's paper money. By February 1793, an *assignat* was worth only half of its face value.
- At the same time, shortages of basic foodstuffs and necessities, such as candles and firewood, plagued the people. In Saint-Domingue, slave revolt and warfare had caused the production of sugar and coffee to plummet. The war had also disrupted supplies of grain.
- In the Convention, the deputies debated the issue of price controls on food and necessities. The Girondins vigorously defended the concept of free market and free trade. They warned against sacrificing or limiting the freedom of commerce in the name of an elusive equality. Further, the right to own property must be staunchly defended.

- Jacobin leaders shared some of the Girondins' qualms about price controls, but they were much more open to the demands of the popular classes than the Girondins were. Robespierre, in particular, began to build a philosophy of social egalitarianism. For him, the pressing need to feed the people took precedence over the right to private property.

### **The Enragés**

- Inflation and shortages grew worse over the winter of 1792–1793. A new group of agitators arose and began to speak out at the section meetings in Paris. These ultra-revolutionaries were called the Enragés, “enraged ones.”
  - Leaders of the Enragés argued that the French countryside could, except in the direst of moments, produce an abundance of goods and grain.
  - Thus, scarcity could only be caused by greed, plotting, and hoarding. Further, hoarders deserved punishment—even death—if they continued to starve the people.
- In February of 1793, a deputation from all 48 sections of Paris came to the Convention and made the point clear: “Where there is no bread, there are no laws, no liberty, no Republic.” A few days later, two groups of women appeared in the legislature, calling for bread and soap and demanding the death penalty for speculators and hoarders. The deputies adjourned the issue until two days later, and Paris erupted in riots.
- In response, the deputies agreed to subsidize the price of bread, but they dismissed the uprising for now. Even Robespierre scolded the popular classes for focusing on what he called “paltry merchandise.”
- The deputy Vergniaud, the most gifted of the Girondin orators, denounced the section militants of Paris and berated the Jacobins for stoking popular anger. He warned that despotism lurked in the wings if the Jacobins didn't join the Girondins in crushing anarchy

in Paris. The Enragés and the sans-culottes lashed back, demanding that the Girondins be ousted from the Convention.

- Deeper divisions also emerged among the revolutionaries themselves. The Jacobins and Girondins had been at each other's throats over the war and the king's trial, but now, their mutual animosity began to take on a darker edge. The Jacobins needed the sans-culottes of Paris as their allies and saw the Enragés as irritating rivals for the people's loyalty.
- The economic crisis—inflation and the shortage of basic necessities—was real, but it became entangled with the politics of anger and the escalating language of brutality, violence, and fear.

### **Military Losses**

- Perhaps the economic crisis and the infighting among the Girondins, Jacobins, and the sections wouldn't have mattered so much if the month of March 1793 hadn't been so devastating for the young Republic.
- In the west, the attempt to recruit soldiers for the Republic stirred up deeper resentments among some sectors of the peasantry. Counterrevolutionary revolts broke out, and in the Vendée, they coalesced into all-out civil war. Every loss brought suspicion. How could General Marcé allow the soldiers of the republican army to be defeated by a band of counterrevolutionary peasants? Commissioners with the army suggested that he was guilty of "cowardly ineptness" or perhaps even treason.
- The foreign war also spiraled toward calamity in March of 1793. The Republic's enemies now included not just Austria, Prussia, and Sardinia-Piedmont but also Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, and the Holy Roman Empire.
- In February of 1793, General Dumouriez, intent on striking the Dutch, had led part of his army into the Netherlands. The offensive began well, but on March 1, 40,000 Austrian soldiers marched

into Belgian territory and began to push back the remaining French troops.

- Dumouriez raced back to take command of the French armies to the south, only to face defeat by the Austrians near the village of Neerwinden in Belgium.
- Dumouriez might have regrouped his armies, but he chose instead to betray the Republic. He urged his troops to march with him on Paris and break the Revolution. The soldiers refused.
- In early April, with some of his own men firing on him, Dumouriez and some of his staff fled across enemy lines and defected to the Austrians.
- Dumouriez's retreat and betrayal undermined the position of the French armies that were occupying the Rhineland under the command of General Custine. The Prussians redoubled their offensive and began to push Custine back toward the south. Around the same time, the Spanish began invading through the Pyrenees, finding allies among French peasants who had turned against the Revolution.
- The news of the defeat and betrayal of Dumouriez devastated Paris. Only a few months earlier, he had saved the Republic at Valmy and brought the Revolution to Belgium; now, he was a traitor. Everyone suspected that his action was part of a grander plot, perhaps engineered by the Girondins, with whom Dumouriez had been tightly connected. By mid-April, 35 of the 48 sections of Paris called for purging the Girondins from the Convention.

### **Revolutionary Tribunal**

- During March and April of 1793, the Convention began to take some emergency measures, including creating a dangerous institution, the revolutionary tribunal.
  - The tribunal would have 12 jurors, a public prosecutor, and judges, and it would wield the power to convict

counterrevolutionaries of political crimes and condemn them to death without appeal.

- The Convention also inaugurated the Committee of Public Safety to coordinate France's war efforts. Step by step, the deputies were setting up the institutions that would direct the Terror.
- Girondin deputies acted first to make use of the revolutionary tribunal. In their anger at the Jacobins and the sans-culottes, they accused the journalist Jean-Paul Marat, who had made a name for himself as the watchdog of the people. His newspaper, *The Friend of the People*, had fused revolutionary ideals with the need for violence.
  - Relations between Marat and the Girondins grew ever more bitter. He had opposed the war they wanted and berated them for weakness in dealing with the king. They claimed that he had fomented the September Massacres and stirred up the most recent food riots.
  - In April of 1793, the Girondins got a majority of deputies to impeach Marat for sedition against the Convention. He would be tried by the revolutionary tribunal.
- The Girondins had made a grave miscalculation. On the day of Marat's trial, the courtroom was packed with spectators who had come to support the champion of the people.
  - Marat defended himself with eloquence, and the



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**The journalist Jean-Paul Marat became known for unmasking the enemies of France; in so doing, he spoke the language that would fuel the Terror.**

spectators cheered him. He was acquitted and carried out of the courtroom in triumph.

- By assailing Marat, the Girondins had only succeeded in firing up the sans-culottes and increasing the level of vitriol of revolutionary politics. And they had taken away the immunity of a deputy of the Convention—a dangerous precedent.

### **Uprising of the Sans-Culottes**

- In the following weeks, the Jacobin Montagnards allied themselves more and more with the sans-culottes of Paris. Jacobin leaders now openly embraced the attack on hoarders and the call for price controls. In early May, the Jacobin Mountain pressed through the first “maximum,” a top limit on the price of bread and grain.
- By May of 1793, tension mounted between the Girondins and their adversaries. The Girondins had alerted their constituents across France that they faced accusations in Paris and even risked “the knives of assassins.”
- Then, one of the Girondins shocked everyone by threatening to annihilate Paris if the sans-culottes continued to stir up trouble.
  - Sans-culottes militants had already established an insurrectionary committee and secretly organized some militia units. On May 31, 1793, they invaded the National Convention, crowded onto the benches on the main floor, and called for a purge of Girondins.
  - Two days later, they surrounded the legislature with a force of at least 20,000 armed men and 150 cannon. Inside the Convention, paralysis set in. Under duress, the legislature agreed to proscribe 29 Girondin members, but instead of being sent to prison, they were put under rather lax house arrest; 9 managed to escape to the provinces.
- This uprising of early June 1793 marked a turning point in the Revolution. Remarkably, no shots had been fired, but the powerful

threat of violence had coerced the Convention to purge its own members.

- The uprising demonstrated that the Jacobin Mountain was now allied with the sans-culottes of the streets of Paris. The Jacobins had not orchestrated this action, but they had benefited by it. Now, as the Jacobins moved to consolidate authority in the Convention, they would need to negotiate with their allies in the streets.
- The June uprising also set a dangerous precedent by purging the Convention of some of its own members.
- Finally, the uprising that divided the Convention also divided France. About 50 departments wrote protests against the arrest of the deputies. Far worse, the purge of the Girondins spurred violent outbursts of opposition, including major rebellions in Caen, Bordeaux, Lyon, and Marseille that became known as the federalist revolts. The success of the Revolution hung in the balance.

### Suggested Reading

Jones, *The Great Nation*.

McPhee, *Robespierre*.

———, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How did economic factors affect the course of the French Revolution?
2. Why was the conflict between the Jacobins and Girondins so fraught?

# Revolution in Crisis—Summer 1793

## Lecture 26

**A**s one historian of France has said, “There are few crises in modern history comparable to that of the summer of 1793.” This lecture focuses on that crisis summer. In the fragile Republic, political power and the direction of the Revolution were up for grabs. We’ll see the Jacobins struggling to hold the Republic together. The federalist revolts had pitted not counterrevolutionaries or royalists but revolutionaries against the Revolution and showed just how hard it was to create democracy on the ground and share power among all classes. As we’ll see, the revolts also sent Charlotte Corday to the door of Jean-Paul Marat—with tragic results.

### A New Constitution and Conflict

- On June 2, 1793, the same day that the Jacobins purged 29 Girondins out of the Convention, the deputies vowed to debate and draft a new constitution as fast as they could. Earlier, the war, the trial of the king, and the feud between the Girondins and the Mountain had made it impossible to get the constitution done.
- Now, however, the task seemed urgent. The Jacobins wanted to claim a legitimate foundation for the precarious Republic. Perhaps pronouncing France’s commitment to a rule of law would help to rein in the opposition.
- The deputies produced a radical constitution that included universal manhood suffrage and direct elections by the people. France would be governed by a national legislature and local elected officials. The constitution also guaranteed the people’s right to education and subsistence. It promised to either find work for the poor or offer them aid.
- All the adult men of France voted on the new constitution in a national referendum held in July and August, and it won overwhelming support. But back in Paris, Jacobin leaders knew that

they couldn't implement the constitution yet. France was torn apart by conflict, and they had to direct their full energies to solving the national emergency.

### **Federalist Revolts**

- As we saw in the last lecture, right after the arrest of the Girondins, revolutionary leaders in some parts of France objected. A series of disconnected local conflicts and uprisings took place, known as the federalist revolts. This was a new kind of conflict for the shaky Republic. The leaders of the revolts were not counterrevolutionaries or royalists but revolutionaries.
- The federalist rebellions had two key elements: First, their leaders resisted Paris and resented centralized power, seeking increased local power. Second, these local conflicts were focused on who would exercise power on the ground in such cities as Lyon, Bordeaux, and Marseille. Who would gain power from the revolutionary expansion of politics?
- The leaders of the federalist revolts were moderate republicans. Often, they were merchants or solid members of the middle class who expected to benefit from the Revolution. They wanted to seize power back from local Jacobins, who played to the popular classes.
- In 1792, right after the overthrow of the king, the new Republic had given the vote to almost every man in France. As more men began to vote and join political clubs, the makeup of town councils shifted, from merchants and businessmen to artisans, shopkeepers, and men of more modest means.
  - This democratization of politics was, in many ways, a great achievement of the Revolution, but in some cases, it generated local conflict. Contention grew especially strong in big cities, where food shortages and unemployment plagued the poor.
  - The expansion of politics also took place in the midst of a strong egalitarian movement whose rhetoric often included bitter attacks on men of property.

## The Case of Lyon

- Lyon was the second-largest city in France and the place where the federalist revolt had the most divisive and tragic consequences. For centuries, it had been a dynamic center of trade and textile production, but in 1789, on the eve of the Revolution, it was hard hit by the economic crisis. More than 22,000 weavers were unemployed in this city of 150,000 people.
- The Revolution brought down Lyon's aristocratic elites and offered political opportunities to the local silk merchants. But the merchants could not monopolize their newfound political power for long. The Revolution opened up political office to artisans, shopkeepers, and others who represented the popular classes. The merchant elites of Lyon watched the new revolutionary power slip out of their hands.
- At the same time, the Revolution brought émigré plots, religious divisions, and sporadic uprisings to Lyon. It also produced a slump in demand for fine silks and fancy cloths.
- A former teacher named Joseph Chalier and his radical Jacobin allies rallied the popular vote and won office in the spring of 1793. These men began to institute their economic vision, including price controls and the judicial pursuit of hoarders and speculators. They drafted a new revolutionary militia and threatened to install a guillotine.
- More moderate republicans, many of them merchants, decided to take action. Some less well-off citizens, anxious at the turmoil, were willing to join the moderates.
- Meanwhile, both sides began to arm themselves, and in May of 1793, economic disorders roiled the city. It seemed impossible to implement the new maximum, the price control on bread prices. Deputies from Paris prepared to bring in armed forces to restore order.

- The same week in May that the sans-culottes forced the expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention, the moderates in Lyon rallied their supporters and imprisoned the rabble-rouser Chalier and his fellow Jacobins. In their view, the Revolution had gone far enough. Lyon joined the federalist revolt.
  - Moderate republicans in Lyon, Marseille, and Bordeaux refused to adhere to the Jacobin leadership of Paris. They resisted the idea of a more centralized state and worried about popular anarchy. And they didn't hesitate to turn to violence themselves.
  - It's interesting to note that ever since 1789, revolutionary leaders had depended on the bold actions of rioters and protesters. In fact, without the power of popular violence, there was no French Revolution, no overthrow of privilege, and no Republic. But at the same time, many revolutionary leaders mistrusted the explosive potential of the crowd.
  - The Revolution created a new relationship between the crowd and the propertied classes. The death of the king had created a power vacuum in France. The revolutionary crowd and the lawmaking elites both entered that vacant space and shared it uneasily.
  - In 1792, as France constructed a Republic and instituted universal manhood suffrage. Suddenly, the popular classes didn't just represent the threat of disorder; they were rivals in the legitimate exercise of public power.
  - In Paris, the Jacobins drew power from allying with the popular classes, but the Girondins feared anarchy and the threat of mob violence. Out in the provinces, moderate republicans shared their fears.
- Unlike the case of the Vendée, the federalist revolts never gained a strong popular following, but the threat held terrifying power during the summer of 1793.

## Charlotte Corday

- At the time of the federalist revolts, Charlotte Corday was 24 years old and an arresting beauty. Though noble blood ran in her veins, she embraced the Girondins' version of a moderate Republic.
- Politics in her town of Caen were on the boil. Several Girondins had raced into hiding there, and Caen had joined the federalist revolt. Attacks on Jacobins circulated freely, and the most hated Jacobin was Marat.



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- The federalists in Caen could barely recruit any soldiers to march on Paris and the Jacobins. But Charlotte Corday believed that she must act to save the Republic. She journeyed to Paris alone on July 12, 1793.
- The next morning, Corday bought a kitchen knife with a five-inch blade and sought out Marat, first at the Convention and then at his apartments on the Left Bank. When she was finally admitted to see him (as he soaked in the bathtub), the two talked for about 15 minutes before she leapt to her feet and stabbed him. The blade sank deep into his lungs.
- Corday was immediately arrested, but no one thought that this young woman could possibly have acted alone. Her interrogators pressed to find a conspiracy of male Girondins and federalists behind her, but there was no one.
- In prison, Corday penned an address, calling on the French to rise up against the Jacobin Mountain, and she defended her deed as an

**Though she is often misremembered as a royalist, Charlotte Corday was, in fact, a revolutionary.**

act of duty. At her trial, she spoke the language of martyrdom and sacrifice, echoing Marat's own language and style.

- Only four days after the murder of Marat, Corday's head fell beneath the blade of the guillotine. Her death gripped the imagination of many, but the people of France didn't agree on which figure in the drama could claim the mantle of martyrdom—the beautiful young woman or the radical journalist. Marat himself was immortalized by the painter Jacques-Louis David.

### **Beginning of the Terror**

- Within days of his murder, a cult of Marat sprang up. On the evening of July 15, thousands of Parisians filed past Marat's body, lying in state in the Cordeliers' church. The crowds glorified Marat as a prophet and a martyr who had died to save the Republic. In life, Marat had embodied the people's anger and vigilant power. In death, he personified all their fears and the breakdown of the Republic. His wound issued a call for purifying France through blood.
- Calls for vengeance and fear of plots spiraled through the streets, in the press, and in the halls of the Convention. Other Jacobin leaders feared that they, too, might be assassinated. Traitors everywhere could be trying to silence the patriots forever.
- In the Vendée, the counterrevolutionary insurgents fought on, and in Lyon, the federalist leaders knew that the Convention was sending armed forces in their direction. They hastily tried and guillotined the Jacobin Joseph Chalier. Negotiations between the federalists and the Convention broke down. In August, French troops laid siege to Lyon.
- In the occupied Rhineland, the town of Mainz fell to the Prussians on July 23. On July 26, the besieged town of Valenciennes surrendered to Austrian and British forces. General Custine, whose armies were losing in the north, was arrested on July 22, suspected of being the next Dumouriez; he faced the guillotine a month later.

The Spanish had infiltrated the eastern end of the Pyrenees and occupied a key river valley. Finally, federalists in the coastal town of Toulon handed over their shipbuilding city to the British navy.

- France was truly in crisis. A few days later, thousands of Parisians surrounded the Convention, calling for sharper controls on the price of bread and demanding the all-out suppression of counterrevolution that would be called the Terror.

### Suggested Reading

Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution*.

McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Rifts among the revolutionaries raise the question of the relationship between democracy and class or social status. How does socioeconomic inequality operate in dialogue with democratic politics?
2. The Revolution seemed to produce martyr-like figures, both famous ones, such as Louis XVI, Marat, and Charlotte Corday, and less well-known ones, such as Joseph Chalier and Jacques Cathelineau. Why? How do you think martyrdom affected the course of revolutionary politics and the memory of the Revolution?

# Terror Is the Order of the Day

## Lecture 27

**O**n September 5, 1793, inside the National Convention, tension was at a fever pitch. A huge throng of Parisians had poured into the assembly hall, certain that counterrevolutionaries and foreign invaders were destroying the Republic and preventing Paris from getting grain. The sans-culottes demanded—at all costs—the repression of counterrevolution and its hoarders and speculators. “Food,” cried out one of their leaders, “and to get it, the full force of the law!” Another read a petition, uttering the words that have gone down in history: “Place terror on the order of the day.” Indeed, September 5 became the day remembered by many as the beginning of the Terror.

### Key Elements of the Terror

- The Terror had three key elements. First, because France faced crisis on every front, the Convention agreed to suspend democratic politics, centralize power, and give great authority to the Committee of Public Safety as a war cabinet. Robespierre sat on that committee.
- Second, the revolutionaries agreed to use the full force of the law to punish traitors and enemies of the Revolution. This was the terror of the guillotine that lives most strongly in popular memory.
- The third element—a more constructive one—was the revolutionaries’ persistent attempt, in the midst of crisis, to build the Republic, save the economy, rescue France from war, institute social programs, and regenerate the nation.

### The Jacobins: Engineering the Terror

- In the weeks following September 5, 1793, the deputies of the Convention enacted a number of measures that indeed made terror the order of the day.

- They agreed to the crowd’s demand for special military forces to root out counterrevolutionaries and secure food from the countryside for the cities and the armies.
- To deal with the economic crisis, the deputies set in place another crucial piece of the Terror: the general maximum, which set prices on 39 commodities, everything from salted fish and soap to leather and iron. The maximum was meant to help the poor survive and to make it possible for the war ministry to afford supplies for the armies.
- In mid-September, the Convention also issued its fateful law of suspects. This law directed every commune in France to set up surveillance committees and arrest suspects— anyone who had family ties to émigrés or nobles, supported royalism or federalism, or acted as an enemy of liberty.
- Given that they faced war on so many fronts, in early October, the deputies pronounced that the government was “revolutionary until the peace.” They definitively suspended the democratic Constitution of 1793.



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**Robespierre was an adept politician and strategist, and it was he who most often theorized about the Terror and spoke in its defense.**

- The Convention also stepped up the power of the Committee of Public Safety. This war cabinet would now oversee armies, supervise the economy, and mobilize manpower and supplies. Two months later, the Convention granted it even more power, including the ability to suspend local elections and appoint national agents to influence provincial politics. Although

Robespierre became the animating spirit of the committee, no single figure ever dominated. Robespierre believed that he needed to guard against counterrevolution everywhere, and other Jacobins shared his mental universe.

- As we've seen, France was wracked by violence even before the Terror began. And this was not just the comprehensible violence of wartime invasion but the devastating acts of the nation tearing itself apart from within. To deal with this desperate crisis and to somehow control the pervasive violence, the Jacobins embraced legal mechanisms of violent repression.
  - The Terror is deeply difficult to understand, but it was not simply a power grab from above or the action of a strong state stuffing revolution down the throats of its people. In fact, the Jacobin Republic was a splintered state, not a strong one.
  - Without a doubt, the Terror violated the ideals of liberty and equality that it sought to rescue. It tragically spun out of control and created a deathly dynamic of its own. It narrowed down the definition of a true revolutionary patriot and simultaneously made violence all too legitimate.
- The Terror turned its wrath on individuals suspected of counterrevolution or of plotting with the enemy and, paradoxically, on leading revolutionaries. Although the Terror is often remembered as a crusade against aristocrats, only about 8 percent of the victims were nobles; 85 percent were ordinary citizens who often simply had the bad fortune of living in areas of counterrevolution or federalist resistance.

### **Marie-Antoinette and the Girondins on Trial**

- One woman incarnated betrayal more than anyone else: Marie-Antoinette, still imprisoned in Paris. The queen had long faced vilification in the French revolutionary press, but one journalist, Jacques-René Hébert, pursued her with particular imagination and virulence.

- In the panic-ridden summer of 1793, Hébert and others fired up hatred of Marie-Antoinette to a fever pitch. She became a sexualized icon of treason, deception, and immorality.
- Hébert and the Enragé leaders warned the Jacobins that only the trial of Marie-Antoinette and the Girondins could satisfy the militant sans-culottes and cement the alliance between the streets and the Convention.
- The former queen herself had fallen into depression after the king's death in January of 1793. In early September, news leaked of an attempt to rescue Marie-Antoinette. Robespierre had been dragging his feet on trying both the Girondins and the queen, but after hearing of the aborted rescue plot, the Jacobins felt they couldn't delay any longer. In October, first the queen and then the Girondins faced the revolutionary tribunal.
- When Marie-Antoinette entered the courtroom, she faced five judges; behind them sat a jury of ordinary artisans and one ex-nobleman who favored the Revolution. Spectators lined the galleries. Although the queen was allowed a lawyer, the outcome was never in doubt.
- The notorious lead prosecutor of the tribunal, Fouquier-Tinville, made 35 accusations against the queen. She had squandered the nation's money, conspired with the enemy, and taught the king to lie. Marie-Antoinette defended herself with composure. She presented herself as a loyal wife and mother and carefully denied any true political involvement.
- The jury unanimously found Marie-Antoinette guilty of high treason. The next morning, October 16, 1793, she was driven to her execution in an open cart. The Jacobin artist Jacques-Louis David was in the crowd and sketched her portrait with a few stark strokes. He shows her grim and straight-backed in the cart, wearing a simple white dress and cap—abruptly brought down to the level of the most common of citizens facing death.

- The next to face trial would be some of the revolutionaries themselves, Brissot and 21 of his allies who had been imprisoned in early June.
  - Divisions between the Jacobins and the Girondins ran deep, but the catastrophic fate of these revolutionaries might have been avoided if it hadn't been for the federalist revolts and France's desperate war losses.
  - The Girondins on trial defended their actions in vain; on October 30, the death sentence was read out against them, and some sang the Marseillaise on the way to the guillotine.
  - Interestingly, the guillotine had been adopted in France earlier in the Revolution as an attempt to make executions more humane, but no one at the time had imagined the Terror. As the Terror approached its end in 1794, the government moved the guillotine to the outskirts of Paris.

### **The Terror in the Provinces**

- Most victims of the Terror lived in the provinces, especially in areas wracked by rebellion and counterrevolution.
  - In all of France, 16,594 people were sentenced to death, including some 2,600 in Paris. But about 35,000 people died in the Terror overall, including those who died in prison or who were executed without a trial, especially in the western part of France.
  - The Terror took its greatest toll—three-quarters of the total executions—in two major parts of France: the counterrevolutionary Vendée and the zones of federalist revolts in the south.
  - Many regions in France largely escaped the violence. Thirty-one departments had fewer than 10 executions, and six had none at all. Local conflicts and the behavior and choices of the deputies sent out from Paris had a significant impact on how the Terror played out locally.

- The National Convention had sent deputies across France to suppress revolts against the Republic, recruit soldiers, and mobilize the economy to win the war and feed the people. In the more peaceful regions of the country, these deputies also focused their energies on social reforms.
- When they arrived in a region, the deputies on mission first met with local Jacobins and revolutionary surveillance committees. The better deputies did their best to sort out local politics with some combination of mediation and repression, although that task wasn't easy.
- Sometimes, local terror didn't grow out of true political differences. Sometimes, people denounced each other based on old feuds and rivalries. How could a true Jacobin assess one neighbor's denunciation of another or weigh the pent-up anger of the poor against the rich?
- Back in Paris, Robespierre warned against those local officials who made wrongful arrests, but the Committee of Public Safety couldn't control the dynamic of violence. A great deal depended on the men on the spot, and even areas of serious resistance had varying experiences.
  - In Caen, for example, the deputy on mission chose to conciliate the federalists. The tribunal sent only two rebels to their deaths, even though the insurgents had held the representatives on mission hostage for six weeks.
  - At the other end of the spectrum, Lyon stood out for its brutal repression. In October, the rebel city surrendered after two months of siege. The Committee of Public Safety decided to make an example of the treasonous rebels of Lyon. Almost 1,900 people were put to death.
  - At Nantes, the Terror perpetrated its most notorious atrocity. Prisoners from the Vendée wars packed the jails of the town to overflowing. The representative on mission, Jean-Baptiste Carrier, didn't want to wait for the military commission to

put all of them on trial. Instead, he had more than 2,000 counterrevolutionaries strapped onto the decks of barges and drowned in the Loire River.

- For two centuries, historians have argued over how the Revolution of liberty and equality reached the point of the Terror.
  - Perhaps there was something dangerous in the idea of democratic unity at all costs. Or perhaps the explanation could be found in the revolutionaries' fear of conspiracy, the fury of the Enragés and the sans-culottes, the circumstances of war, or the economic crisis.
  - In the words of one deputy in the aftermath: "It established itself by force of circumstances.... Nobody had dreamed of establishing a system of terror."

### Suggested Reading

Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*.

Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*.

McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799*.

Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the Terror happened?
2. Why did Marie-Antoinette come to represent such an evil force? What do you think of her as a historical figure? Why do you think British and American audiences have found her a more compelling figure than the French themselves have?

# The Revolution Devours Her Children

## Lecture 28

**D**uring the period of 1793–1794, the time of the Terror, the French revolutionaries, against all odds, continued to build a stronger Republic. They introduced dozens of new policies in a desperate attempt to simultaneously create a more egalitarian society, save the Revolution, and win the war. But this project was hampered by internal conflict and foreign enemies. In this lecture, we'll look at both Jacobin attempts to institute social reforms and feed the poor and deadly political disputes in Paris and the escalation of violence. The disconnect we sense between these two extremes of undertakings was real during the Terror. The radical Revolution of 1793–1794 was riddled with contradiction.

### Deputies on Mission

- In the last lecture, we looked at the representatives on mission, the men who carried out the Terror and revolutionary programs across France. These men were sent by the National Convention to mobilize resources for the war, suppress counterrevolution, and institute revolutionary reforms.
- Some of these deputies became notoriously brutal figures, but most were not extremists. Many of them concentrated on working with local Jacobins to bring about social and economic reforms in an effort to rescue the war effort and help feed the poor.
- The deputies' first responsibility was to carry out France's forced recruitment program, and they succeeded; the army grew to 750,000 men by the end of 1793. The deputies then addressed the economy, working to merge their political vision of social equality with the need to gain resources for the armies.
  - The deputies instituted controversial taxes on the richest citizens, set up arms factories to employ the jobless and create weapons to defend France, opened textile workshops to employ destitute women and supply the armies, built storehouses of

grain and public bread ovens, and carefully managed food rationing and distribution.

- With such programs and policies, the Jacobins sought to create a more egalitarian world of “fair shares for all.” They believed that democratic politics could work only if wealth were distributed more equally.
- We can’t understand the complex and contradictory legacies of the Revolution without realizing how boldly the revolutionaries in 1793–1794 continued to try to create the egalitarian Republic.
  - During the year of the Terror, the revolutionaries eliminated the last vestiges of seigneurial dues, abolished slavery abroad, and instituted egalitarian inheritance and other radical family reforms.
  - To remake citizens, deputies promoted the revolutionary calendar and closed down churches. For the first time in French history, they experimented with secular, free primary schools for both boys and girls.
  - In Paris, the Convention had ruled that lands confiscated from the church and from émigrés should be sold in small lots to make them affordable for poor families. And the deputies gave peasants the right to vote to divide up common lands among all the villagers.
  - Even in the midst of the crisis of 1793–1794, the Jacobins tried to launch nationwide programs of state-run welfare and poor relief. In many areas, they succeeded in supplying small pensions to soldiers’ families, the very old, paupers, widows, and abandoned mothers with children.
  - At the height of the Terror, the Convention introduced a new rural program called the Great Book of National Benevolence to record and fulfill the needs of the poorest peasants.

- The revolutionary state couldn't possibly pay for everything, but still, the Jacobin programs contributed to a lasting expectation that individuals had social rights and that a republic needed to care for the poor and offer education, just as the Constitution of 1793 had promised.
- In the short term, the economic programs of the representatives on mission succeeded in reversing the worst-case scenario. The *assignat* even gained somewhat in value. Above all, the deputies were most successful in recruiting soldiers and marshaling France's economic resources for the war. Indeed, in the fall and winter of 1793, France's armies began to win.

### **Debate and Conspiracy in Paris**

- Although the Convention gave the Committee of Public Safety greater power in December of 1793, the Terror was never fully unified. The Jacobins fought continually. A dark struggle arose: To save the Revolution, should the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety step up the repressive aspects of the Terror, or should they slow the Terror down?
- To control the most militant sans-culottes, the Convention had arrested the Enragé leaders, closed down the vocal women's clubs, and limited the number of section meetings that were held. But the militant sans-culottes tuned in to the leadership of the journalist Jacques Hébert, a man hated by Robespierre. The Hébertists pressured the Jacobins to feed Paris and hunt out counterrevolutionaries, mixing their demands for bread with calls for blood.
- On November 14, a Jacobin named François Chabot brought news to Robespierre of a foreign plot to bring down the Republic by causing the revolutionaries to turn on one another. According to Chabot, British and Austrian enemies had secretly recruited some leading revolutionaries to attack the Jacobins from within and destroy the Convention. Chabot implicated Hébert, a group of foreign bankers, and others.

- In the superheated atmosphere of fear and crisis, the revolutionaries, including Robespierre, felt genuinely threatened by the foreign plot. It held all the more power because it also involved a financial scam, and the revolutionaries believed that financial corruption led to political corruption.

### The Indulgents and the Hébertists

- Among the revolutionary leaders at this moment, only the lawyer Georges Danton could compare with Robespierre in stature and personal pull. Along with the journalist Camille Desmoulins, Danton was a leader of a group known as the Indulgents that was trying to slow down the Terror.
- Danton had a towering presence and charismatic powers of oratory. It's also true that he was, to some extent, financially corrupt. Some of his closest friends were implicated in the foreign plot and the associated financial scam related to liquidating the East India Company, a French trading enterprise. Danton and Robespierre did not agree on the central role of personal virtue in creating the Republic.
- In late November of 1793, Danton began urging moderation at the Convention. He supported the Terror, but he warned, "We must be careful to distinguish between error and crime." Danton had allies who also favored moderation, including the writer Fabre d'Eglantine and Desmoulins.
- *The Old Cordelier*, a newspaper put out by Desmoulins, began to attack the Hébertists, the Terror, and the dechristianization campaign. At first, Robespierre tolerated and supported this move toward moderation. He and the Committee of Public Safety had some Hébertists and some of the most brutal terrorists arrested. But then, Desmoulins attacked the Committee of Public Safety; his criticisms were widely read and applauded in Paris.

- Collot d’Herbois, an ultra-revolutionary and a member of the Committee of Public Safety, spoke persuasively against the Indulgents.
  - Robespierre stood between the two factions. He knew that if he sided with the Indulgents, the committee would split down the middle, and the revolutionary government would fail. Then, news came in that Fabre d’Eglantine, one of the Indulgents, was deeply implicated in the East Indies scandal of the foreign plot.
  - Robespierre was stunned. He had believed Fabre’s claims of innocence, but now corruption had burrowed deep into the Jacobin Mountain. The foreign plot and the involvement of the Indulgents seemed all too real. Robespierre saw the Indulgents’ call for moderation as a ploy to weaken the revolutionary government and the Republic. But he couldn’t let the Hébertists gain the upper hand and drench the Republic in more blood.
- Over the coming weeks, Robespierre made two choices: (1) To hold the Revolution together, he would thread a path between the Hébertists and the Indulgents (although eventually, he would decide to take down both factions), and (2) he would work to defend the Revolution from all that had corrupted and divided it.
- In February of 1794, Robespierre rose before the Convention to deliver one of his most famous speeches, a justification of the Terror as a step toward the Revolution’s true goals: “the peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality.”
  - He was certain that the Republic was under attack by corrupt men and traitors, and he argued that the true politics of the Republic must be rooted in virtue. He defined virtue as a love of country above all else.
  - Then, he made his most memorable and terrifying statement, linking virtue to terror: “If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amidst revolution, it is at once virtue and terror.”

- Other Jacobin leaders had enacted the Terror with far more virulence and bloodthirstiness than Robespierre, but those men do not embody the Terror the way he does, because Robespierre was the man who justified the Terror as the pursuit of an impossible purity.
- Robespierre's speech marked a climax and carried the seeds of his fall. Who could determine the narrow path of virtue? His single-minded vision held power, but it also threatened his fellow revolutionaries.

### Mutual Destruction

- In the winter of 1794, the cauldron of crisis and mutual suspicion had produced a deadly dynamic of factionalism. The group that could claim to be true revolutionaries shrank daily as more patriots fell under suspicion. First, the Girondins had come under attack, then the Enragés, and now the Hébertists and the Indulgents, all of them patriots who had tried to build the Republic, all of them fallen in the deadly logic of mutual destruction.



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The Terror had two corrosive elements: It legitimized violence as a means to gain power, and it took place within a cauldron of fear and suspicion.

- In the weeks to come, the Committee of Public Safety moved to arrest first the Hébertists and then the Indulgents. On March 24, 1794, key Hébertist leaders fell beneath the blade of the guillotine alongside several prominent foreigners.
- Once the Hébertists had been suppressed, Collot d'Herbois and other ultra-revolutionaries on the Committee of Public Safety warned that the committee would lose out to the countervailing faction, the Indulgents, and the revolutionary government would fall apart. Ultimately, Robespierre signed the warrant for the arrest of his friends Desmoulins and Danton, who were sent to the guillotine on April 5.
- When the Committee of Public Safety turned against the Hébertists and the Indulgents, it destroyed the most vocal opposition, but these executions made it clear that the Revolution was on a path to self-destruction. They alienated the Parisian sans-culottes and ruptured the crucial alliance between the Jacobins and the streets. In the Convention, fellow deputies viewed the committee with growing suspicion.
- The Terror began as an attempt to rescue the Revolution from crisis, foreign invasion, and internal civil war, but it devolved into a brutal power struggle and a violent dynamic of mutual destruction.

### Suggested Reading

Gross, *Fair Shares for All*.

McPhee, *Robespierre*.

Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*.

Scurr, *Fatal Purity*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What is your view of Robespierre? What made him tick? Could he have chosen a different course of action, or was he trapped in a dynamic much larger than himself?
2. Why did the revolutionaries turn on one another?

# The Overthrow of Robespierre

## Lecture 29

One day in May of 1794, the police found a young woman, Cécile Renault, lingering outside Robespierre's front door. She claimed that she just wanted to see what a tyrant looked like, but she was carrying two small knives. No doubt, she planned to assassinate Robespierre. Only the day before, a man had waited hours to take his shot at the Jacobin leader. Both would-be assassins faced execution, and Robespierre escaped unscathed, but in the climate of violence and suspicion that spring, the public mood was turning against him. This lecture focuses on the fall of Robespierre. How was he overthrown? And how did the revolutionaries put an end to the Terror?

### The Mood in Paris, Summer 1794

- In the spring of 1794, Robespierre had proposed a cycle of festivals to honor revolutionary values. Like the Enlightenment *philosophes*, he mistrusted the church, but he also believed in the moral and social power of civil religion. He was certain that a revolutionary cult of the Supreme Being would work much better than dechristianization to “wean the people away from prejudice.” On June 8, Paris was scheduled to celebrate his festival of the Supreme Being.
  - On the day of the celebration, a mood of release swept the capital. People seemed to genuinely believe, as one observer put it, that Robespierre was going to “close the abyss of the Revolution.”
  - But police reports also noted murmurs of discontent about Robespierre. Although he seemed to be at the height of his power, the Jacobin leader was growing unpopular.
- A year earlier, the Jacobins of the Mountain had built their power through an alliance with the sans-culottes of the Paris sections. But now that alliance had grown weak.

- The militant sans-culottes had pressed hard for the Terror to repress counterrevolution, procure food, and win the war. But when they got the Terror they demanded, the people actually lost power.
- To institute the Terror, the Jacobins had centralized authority and suspended democracy. That meant that the Jacobin deputies had also chipped away at the power of the streets, the sections, and the grassroots clubs.
- For the sans-culotte militants, the execution of their Hébertist leaders in March of 1794 only proved what they already knew: They could no longer trust their old Jacobin allies, especially Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety.
- At the same time, the Terror began to look far less necessary as a vital defense of the Republic.
  - By the summer of 1794, France no longer faced a serious counterrevolutionary threat. Royalist guerillas still stirred up trouble in Normandy and Brittany, but the federalists had been suppressed, and the revolt in the Vendée had been decimated.
  - And in the foreign war, the efforts to galvanize the economy and the troops were paying off. In the south, French troops had pushed the Spanish back in the Catalonian Pyrenees. On the high seas, the French navy had managed to sneak through the British blockade with a convoy carrying foodstuffs from the Caribbean and the Americas. And on June 26, a decisive defeat of the Austrians in Belgium cleared the way for a French march on Brussels.
- Even though France was winning the war, the Terror persisted. In fact, it intensified in Paris. Two weeks before the victory against the Austrians, Robespierre and his allies took a deadly step: They pressed through the law of 22 Prairial (June 10 by the old calendar). This law stripped defendants of all their rights and pushed the Terror into its devastating end game.



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**At the Battle of Fleurus in Belgium, the French army decisively defeated the Austrians, a sign to some that the Terror was no longer necessary as a defense of the Republic (Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse, *Battle of Fleurus*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1794).**

- The Convention had decreed that all suspects must come to the capital for trial. That June, the prisons of Paris were packed with more than 7,500 suspects.
- Over the course of the Terror, the vast majority of suspects had been found innocent and let go, but that was no longer true. In late June and July of 1794, the revolutionary tribunal found nearly 80 percent of its suspects guilty. During the last six weeks of the Terror, more than 1,300 executions took place.
- France had suspended the constitution and used government-by-committee to rescue the Republic and win the war. But with France now winning the war, many deputies and sans-culottes began to question the power of the Committee of Public Safety and the Terror.

## Fear in the Convention

- Robespierre and the committee could imagine no way out of the Terror, no clear path back to the democratic Republic. The execution of Danton and Desmoulins in April had struck fear in the hearts of the deputies, and the law of 22 Prairial only made them more afraid. Every legislator asked himself: Who would face accusation next? The deputies armed themselves with pistols and daggers. Robespierre himself walked out only with a bodyguard.
- Several groups of deputies had particular reason to fear for their lives. Some of these men would soon lead the coup against Robespierre. First on the list were the moderates, old allies of Danton and Desmoulins. A second group stood at the other end of the spectrum: the extreme terrorists, the men recalled from their provincial posts because they had acted with excessive viciousness. Word had it that a list of such deputies had been drawn up for arrest.
- Meanwhile, the Committee of Public Safety quarreled with the second most powerful committee in the Convention, the Committee of General Security. And within the Committee of Public Safety itself, rifts and tensions were growing. In late June, two ultra-revolutionaries on the committee berated Robespierre as a dictator. In response, Robespierre withdrew from public politics for three weeks; his withdrawal amounted to political suicide.
- On July 26, Robespierre returned to the Convention. He delivered a vague and rambling two-hour speech that called for punishing individuals who were conspiring against liberty in the Convention and even in its committees. Robespierre made the mistake of refusing to name names, which stepped up the fears of the deputies.

## The Thermidorians

- On the ninth day of the revolutionary month of Thermidor, year II of the Republic, Jean Tallien and others rose in the Convention to denounce Robespierre. Thirty-five deputies spoke against him, one by one. Each time he tried to defend himself, a group of deputies—

as planned—drowned him out with their shouts: “Down with the tyrant!”

- The Convention voted to arrest five men, including Robespierre and his closest allies on the Committee of Public Safety, Louis Saint-Just and Georges Couthon. Robespierre’s brother Augustin shouted that he, too, wanted to be indicted and die by his brother’s side.
- Many members of the Paris Commune still backed Robespierre. The Commune called on the sections to defend Robespierre and rise up in insurrection against the Convention. But the sans-culottes had lost faith in Robespierre and didn’t rally to his defense.
- At around 2:00 am on July 28, the Convention stormed the town hall to seize the prisoners. In despair, Robespierre’s brother Augustin leapt from the window and broke his thigh. One of the other arrested deputies shot himself, and Robespierre suffered a gunshot wound to his jaw. That very evening, Robespierre and the others were guillotined. Over the coming days, almost 100 Robespierrists, mostly men of the Paris Commune, followed them to the scaffold.
- The Terror was reaching its end, but the leaders of Thermidor didn’t realize it. In fact, ending the Terror hadn’t even been their plan. They wanted only to purge the Robespierrists. The main leaders who orchestrated Robespierre’s arrest were Jacobins, mostly from within the Mountain. Many of them had acted far more ruthlessly as terrorists in such places as Lyon and Bordeaux than Robespierre had in Paris.

### **The End of the Terror**

- Initially, the Thermidorians had no intention of ending the Terror, but it quickly became clear that no one in France wanted it to continue. The Convention began to dismantle the legal mechanisms of the Terror, repealing the 22 Prairial law, draining the power of the Committee of Public Safety, and freeing some 4,300 prisoners.

- But ending the Terror wasn't simply a matter of freeing prisoners and restoring power to the Convention. Ending the Terror was not an act but a process, a process of wrestling with this horrific past and trying to move forward.
- The Terror had wrenched French society to the core, and it wasn't easy to recover. Further, the Thermidorians and the Convention hadn't just participated in the Terror, but they had made it themselves. How could they distance themselves from the violent dynamic they had created? How could they claim to exercise legitimate power?
- At first, the Thermidorians piled guilt for the Terror onto one man: Robespierre. Within days of his death, Thermidorian leaders planted rumors that Robespierre had secretly wanted to be king. By pinning responsibility onto Robespierre's shoulders, France and her leaders could avoid fully dealing with the trauma of the Terror.
- But it wasn't enough to denounce Robespierre and leave his followers, the Jacobins, alone. In a few weeks, the Thermidorians—former Jacobins themselves—succeeded in erasing memories of any good work the Jacobins had carried out in the name of the Republic. The Thermidorian press crafted a lasting image of all Jacobins as “drinkers of blood,” “cannibals,” and “vandals.”
- Meanwhile, inside the Convention, the deputies also participated in the debate over their own recent history. What story could they possibly tell about the Terror?
  - One deputy urged the Convention not to forget that France had been trapped in crisis. France's leaders had sometimes made errors, but the Revolution had triumphed by ending the Terror. That deputy thought that members of the Convention should put the Terror behind them and move on.
  - But Jean Tallien didn't agree. He argued that the Terror had been a “system”—a calculated and systematic means of gaining power through fear. He worked to erase any memory

of the Terror as an attempt to rescue the Republic or liberty. Instead, he essentially called for settling scores against the perpetrators of the Terror.

- Like Tallien, the other deputies also wanted to absolve the Convention of all guilt for the Terror. Rather than recognize their own complicity, it seemed much more appealing to find a few men guilty of creating a so-called “system of the Terror.” In effect, in the months after Thermidor, the leaders of the Convention engaged in a complicated political dance over who would emerge unscathed and who would take the blame.
- Ending the Terror was a wrenching process for France. It involved confusion, backlash, opportunism, and violence of its own. The Thermidorian spin job also played a pivotal role in inventing our memory of the Terror, the Jacobins, and Robespierre.

### Suggested Reading

Baczko (Petheram, trans.), *Ending the Terror*.

Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*.

Scurr, *Fatal Purity*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The Thermidorians had a major influence on the memory of the Terror. How so? And how do various peoples construct their memories about traumatic periods of history? How do these memories evolve, and what purpose do they serve? How do these kinds of memories relate to writing history?
2. Why and how did the Terror end?

# The Thermidorian Reaction

## Lecture 30

The Revolution didn't end with Robespierre but lived on for five more years, until 1799. This lecture focuses on the roughly 15 months in 1794–1795 after Robespierre's fall. This period is often called the Thermidorian reaction because many revolutionary leaders reacted harshly against Jacobin policies. Politics lurched to the right. In this lecture, we'll see how that shift to the right took place and who was reacting against the radical politics of the Jacobins. But thinking of Thermidor only as reaction or backlash doesn't quite capture the whole situation. The Thermidorians also wanted to somehow rescue the Revolution. Could they find a moderate path between the Terror and royalism, a way to end the Revolution without destroying it?

### The Gilded Youth

- Soon after the fall of Robespierre, the high society of Paris flocked to the theater and opera and, above all, began to dance. Paris was swept up in a swirling, whirling cathartic mania. According to some stories, people who had lost family members to the guillotine even held special victims' balls. Like everything in the Revolution, this mood of release was tied to politics, and in this case, it had an ugly edge.
- The dance leaders were young men known as the gilded youth. They were the sons of the bourgeoisie and were themselves shopkeepers, government clerks, and bank employees. They came from a different social class than the Jacobins and the sans-culottes—whom they hated—and had conservative, reactionary politics.
- The gilded youth showed their contempt for the Revolution in their clothing. They rejected the rough style of the sans-culottes and, instead, dressed flamboyantly. But this decadent Thermidorian world was not just about fashion; the gilded youth also stalked the streets of Paris carrying sticks. They became the shock troops of the anti-Jacobin Thermidorian reaction.

- The gilded youth harassed Jacobins and former militants from the sections; in some neighborhoods, they took over the sections. They smashed revolutionary symbols across Paris, particularly targeting images of Marat, the martyr of the sans-culottes.
- The gilded youth had tight ties to the newly conservative Thermidorian leaders in the Convention. In fact, these deputies often directed the actions of the young men behind the scenes.
- Prominent Thermidorian leaders, including Jean Tallien, also moved in this new social scene of luxury and sumptuous decadence. They lived high on the hog and rejected the egalitarian, populist politics of the Jacobins. Tallien's wife hosted one of the fancy salons that became the new epicenters of politics, replacing the political clubs of the radical Revolution.



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**The female counterparts of the gilded youth were called the *merveilleuses*, or “marvelous ones”; they wore light, high-waisted gowns made of gauzy fabrics.**

### **Attack on Jacobin Politics**

- Some left-wing deputies defended radical Jacobin policies, but the mood had shifted. Many Thermidorians wanted to distance themselves from their Jacobin past and from the Terror. By December 1794, the deputies agreed to reintegrate former Girondins, the old enemies of the Jacobins.
- The Jacobins had created a controlled economy in their effort to win the war and feed the poor, but the Thermidorians decided to dismantle

the economic controls. They acted in the name of freeing the economy, aiming to placate the merchants and satisfy the large peasant producers in the provinces. The deputies laid off munitions workers, closed down public workshops, and put an end to price controls.

- Suddenly, prices shot up. The harvest of 1794 had been weak, and the cost of bread skyrocketed. In fact, the price of food and fuel spiraled out of control; runaway inflation made the paper money, the *assignat*, almost worthless.
- By a cruel twist of fate, the winter of 1794–1795 was bitterly cold. The Seine froze over, and barges couldn't make their way up the river to bring enough grain and fuel to the capital city. Starvation stalked Paris.
- Imagine the reaction of the poor to the gilded youth and those who attended the new salons. Where was the dream of equality now? The year of the Terror and the memory of the Jacobins began to look good. Some sans-culottes women dared to whisper, “When the guillotine worked, we had bread.”
- The sans-culottes knew that the Thermidorians were trying to end the Revolution. In the streets, people began to speak of the Constitution of 1793. Its declaration of rights had promised social rights to the people: work, subsistence, and the right to insurrection.

### The Prairial Uprising

- On the morning of 1 Prairial, year III (May 20, 1795), the last great uprising of the French Revolution took place. At around 11:00 in the morning, one deputy was busy warning the Convention about a dangerous new pamphlet that called for an uprising. In the galleries, women taunted the deputies, shouting “Bread!” over and over.
- Just then, a crowd of protesters smashed through the Convention door and poured into the assembly. Sans-culotte women were in the lead, just as they had been in the October Days march to Versailles in 1789. Just as it had in that march, this uprising had its roots in both politics and food.

- Men, egged on by their wives, began to join the protest, and the crowd swelled. Police rushed to the scene, but they weren't in time to save one little-known deputy whom the rioters mistook for a prominent Thermidorian leader of the gilded youth. When he blocked their way, the rioters shot him and cut off his head.
- Some hardcore Jacobin deputies jumped up to support the demands of the crowds. They called for price controls, better bread rations, the release of patriot prisoners, and above all, the restoration of the Constitution of 1793.
- The insurrection lasted for three days and contrasted with earlier, more successful uprisings in Paris. The crowd didn't have clear leadership and few allies inside the Convention. The old revolutionary coalition between the streets and the Convention had been weakened during the Terror; now, it was dead. In fact, conservative Thermidorian leaders even arrested six Jacobin deputies who supported the crowd in this Prairial Uprising.
- The Convention grew wary of the crowd and began to pass laws to rein in the people. Because women had led the insurrection, the deputies immediately passed a law that no women could attend the galleries of the Convention. Further, women couldn't congregate in groups of more than five.
- Police arrested several thousand suspect Jacobins and sans-culottes. Only about 150 faced trial, but 13 sans-culottes leaders were guillotined. The Convention also disarmed Jacobins and closed down political clubs in Paris and across France. Clearly, the Convention was steering France to the right.

### **The White Terror**

- As the Thermidorian reaction pushed the Revolution to the right, in some parts of France, especially the south, brutal attacks on Jacobins took place. In this White Terror, some opponents of the Jacobins organized into paramilitary groups, intent on exacting revenge.

- The name “White Terror” suggests royalist leanings, but these anti-Jacobins engaged more in vendetta than in a political movement. They created an ugly campaign of intimidation, assassination, and in several cases, bloody massacres of Jacobins.
- As France lurched to the right, royalists and counterrevolutionaries felt their hopes rising. At the very least, perhaps France could return to a constitutional monarchy in which the legislature shared power with the king. However, the death of Louis XVI’s son—a 10-year-old still in prison in Paris—put an end to easy royalist fantasies.
- When little Louis died in 1795, Louis XVI’s brother, the count of Provence and leader of the émigrés, immediately proclaimed himself Louis XVIII. In exile in northern Italy, he issued a declaration promising to restore the Old Regime—the absolute power of the king, the privileges of the nobility, and the full grandeur of the Catholic Church. But the Thermidorians would not allow any resurgence of royalism.
- At about the same time, on the southern coast of Brittany, the British navy had landed several thousand troops of French émigrés. These royalists were attempting to join up with counterrevolutionary guerrilla forces in Brittany. Within two weeks, the republican forces had put down this émigré invasion, but the royalist landing still sent fear through the revolutionaries in France, including the Thermidorian leaders in the Convention.

### Constitution of 1795

- To squelch royalism and bring stability to France, Thermidorian leaders in the Convention strove to come up with a moderate plan that would win the support of men of property—merchants, large farmers, and middle-class men who supported the Revolution but didn’t need its most egalitarian features.
- In the summer of 1795, a deputy named Boissy d’Anglas rose to prominence with a new vision.

- He dared to say what many French people of property wanted to hear: “Absolute equality is a chimera.... We should be governed by the best among us.” By “the best,” d’Anglas meant well-educated, law-abiding, property-owning men.
- He urged his fellow deputies to surrender unrealistic dreams of social or political equality; civil equality was enough. He warned against granting political rights to men without property, claiming that their taxes and social policies would be disastrous for commerce and agriculture.
- Thermidorian leaders decided that they would sacrifice a little of France’s precious new equality to pursue stability and social order. Under Boissy’s guidance, the Convention wrote a new constitution for the third time in four years. This Constitution of 1795 took a distinctly conservative turn.
  - The constitution declared that all adult men had voting rights, but real power lay in the hands of electors, who would attend electoral colleges and choose deputies. Only the wealthiest taxpayers could become electors—some 30,000 men in all of France.
  - In its declaration of rights, the new constitution abandoned promises of social rights, and the deputies added a declaration of duties, urging people to respect the law, property, and family.
  - The Constitution of 1795 also established a bicameral legislature for the first time in France and set up an executive of five men, known as directors.
  - Voters across France approved the constitution by a significant margin, although some protested the new order.

### **Understanding the Thermidorian Reaction**

- In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the French and their historians wrestled with the question of how to interpret and understand the Thermidorian reaction. Had the Thermidorians betrayed the

Revolution? Revolutionaries in other lands feared that they would repeat Thermidor and lose the fire of revolution.

- One historian of Thermidor has pointed out that all revolutionaries fear Thermidor, not so much because the Thermidorians somehow betrayed or destroyed the Revolution, but because they acknowledged that it had grown older, diminishing the revolutionary power of the myth of eternal youth.
- Ending a revolution is difficult. Every revolution through history seems to struggle with that moment: how to return to ordinary life and peaceful politics after the initial excitement has worn off. In the next lecture, we'll watch the revolutionaries try out their repaired Republic.

### Suggested Reading

Baczko (Petheram, trans.), *Ending the Terror*.

Jones, *The Great Nation*.

Lyons, *France under the Directory*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Historians debate when the Revolution really ended: 1794, 1799, or 1815. Some claim that the Revolution ended with the fall of Robespierre. Why would they argue that the Thermidorian period was no longer part of the Revolution? What is at stake when historians disagree over when the French Revolution ended?
2. The Thermidorian era is psychologically fascinating. Recently, historians have invented a new field called the history of emotions. What emotions were in play among different groups in Thermidorian France, and what difference did they make for political and social change?

# The Directory—An Experimental Republic

## Lecture 31

In 1795, the writer Germaine de Staël—the stunning and brilliant daughter of Louis XVI’s finance minister, Jacques Necker—returned to Paris and reopened her fashionable salon. There, journalists, men of letters, diplomats, politicians, and women of high society debated the most pressing political issue of the day: How could the moderate new republic of the Directory build on the Revolution? In this lecture, we’ll explore the Directory and its attempt to carry out the promises of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. In particular, we’ll look at the expansion of French territory and the attempt to spread revolution abroad, as well as the revolutionary experimentation that took place in the Directory—the effort to find lasting stability.

### Challenges on the Left

- With the Jacobin club gone, loyal Jacobins founded a new political society, the Panthéon Club. Here, they debated how to reignite the Revolution and combat directorial politics that limited power to men of property. Above all, they explicitly called for a return to more egalitarian practices.
- The Revolution had destroyed the old social elite of nobles, but a new elite was rising up in France. Some individuals had suddenly amassed huge fortunes through speculating. Some had grown rich by buying up nationalized lands at low prices. Rampant inflation benefited these men and hurt the poor.
- In the Panthéon Club, Gracchus Babeuf, a journalist, attacked the injustice of this kind of society: “What is the French Revolution? An open war between patricians and plebeians, between rich and poor.”
  - Babeuf had grown up poor on the plains of northern France. Before the Revolution, he had a job collecting seigneurial dues

for a lord, but once the Revolution started, Babeuf organized against the dues he had worked to collect.

- Babeuf knew about grinding poverty. In the brutal famine of 1795, while Babeuf was in prison for attempting to incite insurrection, he learned that his own daughter had starved to death in Paris.
- Babeuf had a vision: Equality before the law was not enough. What the Directory had promised was not enough. France needed to resurrect the Constitution of 1793 and direct democracy, as well as Jacobin programs of poor relief and universal education. Further, France needed to redistribute property to create equality and happiness.
- In Babeuf's plan, common storehouses would distribute the fruits of the earth to all workers. Private property would give way to communal ownership of the land. In short, he imagined a kind of agrarian proto-communism as a new ideal, a revolutionary utopia.
- The directorial leaders saw this plan as a direct threat. In February of 1796, they closed down the Panthéon Club because Babeuf and others had taken to calling for the overthrow of the moderate Republic.
  - Babeuf and his followers decided to take their movement underground. They called themselves the Conspiracy of Equals and plotted insurrection in secret.
  - They also developed an idea that inspired future revolutionaries much later on: the revolutionary cell. That is, they organized a tight group of leaders who strategized revolution in secret and directed a wider network of agents.
- The Equals faced two problems. First, their plot rested on the ability to energize the crowds at a key moment to take to the streets. But in Paris, repression had been intense, especially after the Prairial

Uprising; popular politics had lost its voice and organizational power. Second, police spies infiltrated Babeuf's organization. In May of 1796, Babeuf and his fellow Equals were arrested.

### **Jacobinism on Trial**

- The directors wanted to use Babeuf and the Equals to put Jacobinism itself on trial, exposing the movement as dangerous once and for all. Fearing an uprising, the Directory delayed the trial and moved it outside of Paris.
- Babeuf and the Equals turned the trial into a powerful soapbox for their ideas. Babeuf drew eloquently on the work of Enlightenment *philosophes* and reminded everyone of the principles and promises of 1789.
- The press on both sides gave endless attention to the trial. In the end, almost everyone was acquitted, but seven men were deported or imprisoned, and Babeuf and one co-conspirator were condemned to the guillotine.
- Babeuf's conspiracy and his ideas had great impact after his death. Early socialists and Karl Marx saw him as an intriguing forerunner, even though Babeuf's vision was rooted in an agricultural world, not an industrial one. Later revolutionaries, including Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks, inherited his concept of a cell of revolutionary organizers.
- The Directory made a mistake in paying too much attention to the Conspiracy of Equals. The well-publicized trial polarized France, deepening divisions between the left and right. The trial of Babeuf only made it harder for the Republic to find a middle way.

### **Challenges on the Right**

- In 1795, in the name of liberty, the government had partially relaxed the laws restricting religious worship, and a massive revival of Catholicism took place across France. Constitutional clergymen

and parishioners could petition to reopen their churches, although many aspects of Catholic practice remained illegal.

- Many Catholics continued to support the Revolution, but in some regions, it was hated. In Brittany, Normandy, and the Vendée, Catholic royalists engaged in guerrilla activity against the Directory.
- During the Directory, small-scale religious riots broke out in every department of France. Parishioners broke into churches and disrupted revolutionary festivals. The leaders of the Directory feared that it was but a small step from religious activism to royalism.
- But like the early revolutionaries, the members of the Directory still had faith in the power of civic festivals and education to reform the people. The Directory had particular confidence in the power of elite thinkers to figure out how to bring republicanism and enlightened ideas to the countryside.
  - The Thermidorians founded specialized universities focused on training teachers, doctors, industrial experts, and civil and military engineers. To this day, these *grandes écoles* stand at the heart of the French elite educational system.
  - The Directory also launched the National Institute, a cross between an intellectual club and a research institute. The institute's members included philosophers, mathematicians, biologists, social theorists, and naturalists.
- The directorial leaders and the thinkers of the institute also decided to create a civil religion to compete with Catholicism and give France moral grounding. A bookseller named Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès came up with the idea of a universalist religion called theophilanthropy, meaning “love of God and man.”
  - This new religion drew on Enlightenment thinkers known as deists. Those *philosophes*, including Voltaire, wanted to strip religion down to simple beliefs: God had created the universe. Nature displayed his handiwork. Like a clockmaker, God set

the laws of nature in motion and then left humans to their own devices.

- Theophilanthropy could put a patriotic spin on deism and emphasize a simple moral code: “Adore God, love your neighbors, make yourself useful to the nation.”
- Theophilanthropists had no clergymen. Instead, fathers led groups of families in worship. They sang hymns, said prayers for the nation, and read inspirational texts from an eclectic range of sources.
- At its peak, theophilanthropy was practiced in at least 16 churches in Paris, but it won only small numbers of followers in the provinces. Theophilanthropists and Catholics were supposed to share church time, but they sometimes engaged in ritual battles.
- In the face-off between theophilanthropy and Catholicism, we see some of the problems of the Directory.
  - First of all, the Republic faced the ongoing issue of how to deal with resilient Catholic faith and practice. Civil religion and republican festivals seemed even less powerful now than in the heady days of the early Revolution.
  - Second, the Directory had a social problem. It was committed to a republic led by elites, but it had a difficult time gaining the grassroots backing of the people.

### **Republican Education**

- From 1789 on, education had been the great dream of the revolutionaries. In the Old Regime, the church was in charge of education, and certain groups of people had much more access to education than others. But the revolutionaries believed that schools would create rational, equal, and patriotic citizens, ready to take part in politics.

- In the early years of the Revolution, reformers began to propose universal, secular, state-run education for the first time, but these plans were repeatedly interrupted by the rush of revolutionary events. Some deputies on mission, such as Joseph Lakanal, managed to conduct successful experiments in providing primary education.
- During the Thermidorian era, the Convention had passed Lakanal’s proposal for secular primary education and began to put his plan into action.
  - Local officials attempted to hire one male and one female teacher in each commune with more than 1,000 people. The state paid their salaries. In addition to reading, writing, and math, teachers taught students political principles and republican morals.
  - On the ground, the new education system operated unevenly, but the locals did their best. Rural areas were especially plagued by the lack of teachers, and in the runaway inflation of 1795, the promised salary turned out to be a joke.
- The Directory built on this base begun by the Thermidorians. In fact, the Constitution of 1795 stipulated that after the year XIII (1804), men would have to pass a literacy test to vote. The moderate republicans of the Directory believed that expertise and knowledge were the keys to running revolutionary politics.
  - The directorial leaders continued experimenting with primary schools, but they focused more on secondary schools for those boys—the sons of stable, property-owning men—whom they believed would become a source of stability for the Republic.
  - Every department set up an *école centrale*—a “central school,” similar to a high school. These schools were notably successful. The teachers established an ambitious program of study, with emphasis on science, math, history, and philosophy. The writings of the Enlightenment *philosophes* received careful attention.

- Grade schools continued to struggle during the Directory, particularly with the issue of religion. Republican teachers tried out catechisms based on deistic principles, but they were pressured by local parents to teach Catholicism. Sometimes a hybrid approach emerged, but often, parents sent their children to private schools run by former nuns, monks, and priests.
- Ultimately, the Directory gave up on making public education universal or obligatory for everyone, but their efforts at schooling had a significant influence on 19<sup>th</sup>-century French educators. In the short term, the Directory's new systems of education, civil religion, and festivals couldn't overcome the fact that France remained deeply divided about politics.

### Suggested Reading

Babeuf (Scott, ed.), *The Defense of Gracchus Babeuf before the High Court of Vendôme*.

Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred*.

Lyons, *France under the Directory*.

Woloch, *The New Regime*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Babeuf had a striking influence on the emergence of socialism and later revolutionary movements. Why and how do earlier revolutions influence later ones?
2. The revolutionaries' attempt to reform education marks yet another arena where they failed in the short term yet had a long-term impact. Why do you think most modern Western nations have instituted education systems that are secular, universal, and public?

# Young Napoleon

## Lecture 32

Certain images of Napoleon are prevalent in popular culture. We imagine him sitting on a white horse, a stunning military leader; we envision him as a political leader, crowning himself emperor; and we see him in his trademark pose, standing with his hand inside his jacket. This lecture looks at younger versions of these Napoleons—both the military man and the politician. We will also look at another, less well-known image of him as a romantic, a sentimental man of his times.

### **Napoleon's Family and Background**

- When he was born in 1769 on the Italian-speaking island of Corsica, Napoleon's parents gave him the name Napoleone Buonaparte, which he "Frenchified" in the mid-1790s.
- Napoleon came from a minor noble family. His father, Carlo Buonaparte, was a lawyer and something of a social climber. He tried out numerous business ventures with mixed success. He died at an early age and in debt in 1785.
- Napoleon's mother, Letizia, was a formidable woman. She was spirited, energetic, and demanding of her children, and she passed these dynamic traits on to the young Napoleon.
- Little Napoleone had a close relationship with his older brother Giuseppe, or Joseph, a mild-mannered child, very different from the lively and assertive Napoleon.

### **Military Education**

- Corsica was part of France, and noble families there could advance themselves by sending their sons to France for school and a career. In December of 1778, Joseph and Napoleon were taken to France to study for the priesthood and the military, respectively.

- By all accounts, Napoleon had a tough time during his six years at a military academy at Brienne in Champagne. The lifestyle was Spartan and the hours of study were long. Napoleon was a scholarship student, an outsider, and he could barely speak accented French. Still, he excelled at math and loved ancient history and geography.
- Napoleon studied next at the elite military academy in Paris. He was the first Corsican to graduate and was rewarded with a position as an officer in the artillery in 1785.
- As a young officer stationed in the south of France, he got plenty of practical training, but he was also an avid reader, devouring the work of Enlightenment military theoreticians and political thinkers.

### **Politics in Corsica**

- In 1769, just months before Napoleon was born, the French had seized Corsica and crushed its independence movement, a movement in which Napoleon's father had fought. The youth grew up hearing stories of Corsican heroism and became obsessed with Corsican politics as a student and young soldier. In youthful writings, he waxed poetic about his homeland and ranted against despotic government.
- When the French Revolution came, Bonaparte hoped he could bring revolutionary politics to his homeland. He returned to Corsica, helped to found a political club, and backed his brother Joseph for political office. By 1792, he was elected as the lieutenant colonel of the National Guard.
- But Napoleon and the Bonaparte family had clashed with Pasquale Paoli, the leading Corsican politician. Paoli had led independent Corsica from 1755 to 1769. Now, he had returned from exile and won back his power on the island. He targeted the Bonapartes as enemies—pro-French and anti-Corsican—and drove them from their home.

- Napoleon had been naïve and unrealistic in his approach to Corsican politics, and he underestimated resistance to radical revolutionary reforms. After his experience with Paoli, he grew more savvy, cynical, and pragmatic.
- Some historians see his flight from Corsica as the moment Bonaparte became French. But in a way, this moment cemented his status as an outsider. He lost his Corsican ties and dreams, but he couldn't be wholly French. This status as an outsider drove him—and enabled him—to reinvent himself continuously and strikingly.

### **Lessons from the Revolution**

- By chance, Napoleon was in Paris in the summer of 1792 and witnessed the August 10 uprising and the fall of the king. He wouldn't forget the violence of the crowd. In a letter to Joseph, he observed, "...the crowd is hardly worth the great effort one takes to curry its favor." Just as revealing, he also wrote, "If Louis XVI had climbed on a horse, victory would have been his."
- But there were things about the Revolution that drew the young soldier. He became a Jacobin and a backer of Robespierre. The energy and forcefulness of the Revolution, its ideology of possibility, and the toughness of the Jacobins all appealed to Napoleon. And the Revolution glorified war and honored successful soldiers.
- The Revolution also made it possible for a bold soldier to rise up through the ranks on the basis of merit. Many elite officers had emigrated, leaving openings in the officer corps. The army had a new, more open and egalitarian structure.

### **The Siege of Toulon and Royalist Insurrection**

- In the fall of 1793, Napoleon got the chance to make a name for himself in this new system at the town of Toulon on the Mediterranean coast. In late August, the occupants had surrendered the town to the British. The French laid siege to Toulon and its British occupiers.

- With the backing of a Corsican patron, Napoleon was put in charge of the artillery of the French siege. He spent weeks rounding up equipment and worked hard to convince his superiors to try his battle plan. He saw that the key to retaking the harbor rested on seizing one particular point of high ground to the south: l’Eguillette, “the Needle.” From there, Bonaparte knew that he could bombard ships in the harbor and Toulon across the way.
- On December 17, 1793, 6,000 infantrymen stormed Fort Mulgrave, which protected l’Eguillette. Bonaparte’s batteries rained down crossfire as cover.
  - In the fighting, Bonaparte had his horse shot out from under him and took a bayonet wound to the thigh, but within a few hours, he had captured two important high points, including l’Eguillette.
  - Bonaparte had barely begun to open fire when the British admiral Lord Hood ordered his ships out of the inner harbor. Some 7,500 occupants of Toulon fled on British ships.
- Bonaparte hadn’t been in charge of this successful operation, but he had been the mastermind behind it. His persistence and his tactical clarity of vision had made the difference. A few days later, he was promoted to brigadier general.
- During the Thermidorian era, Napoleon moved to Paris and hung around the edges of high salon society. In early October of 1795, he was tapped by the Convention to help put down a royalist insurrection and secured a promotion to major general. Bonaparte was making a name for himself—both politically and militarily.

### **Napoleon the Romantic**

- The era of the Revolution validated the open expression of sentiment, including by men, and the passionate young Napoleon became totally immersed in this world. He consumed Enlightenment literature and wrote a surprising number of works himself, including at least the start of a novel.

- When Napoleon moved into Paris high society around 1795, he met Rose de Beauharnais, whom he called Josephine.
  - Josephine was six years older than Napoleon, attractive, and elegant. Originally, she came from Martinique, where her aristocratic father owned a sugar plantation. She had married a French general, an aristocrat who was guillotined during the Terror. Josephine herself spent a few months in prison.
  - In the Thermidorian era, she joined salon society and had no trouble attracting lovers, including a general and one of the directors, as well as Bonaparte. Napoleon pursued her ardently, pouring out passionate letters.



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**Napoleon's love letters to Josephine don't fit with our Machiavellian image of him, but he lived in an era that validated the open expression of sentiment, including by men.**

- By all accounts, Josephine was nowhere near as smitten as Napoleon was, but she found him intriguing and impressive. In March of 1796, the couple married in Paris at a civil ceremony. Two days later, he headed south to Nice to take command of the army of Italy. By later that spring, Josephine was having an affair with a young officer in Paris.

### The International Position of France

- Toward the end of the Terror in the summer of 1794, the war had begun to turn in France's favor. By 1795, Spain had agreed to switch sides and ally with France. The Prussians, too, made peace with France.

- France's armies had also pushed the Austrians out of the Austrian Netherlands and were knocking on the door of the old Dutch Republic. This success raised an earlier issue: Would France spread Revolution abroad?
- The Netherlands was already a republic, but the powerful noble House of Orange dominated its politics. Dutch patriots had rebelled against this system in the 1780s, and some of these rebels went into exile in Paris. They begged the French to ignite revolution in their land.
  - When the French headed north in 1794–1795, talk of democratic politics took fire in the Netherlands. And when the French marched into Amsterdam, the prince of Orange fled for England. Dutch revolutionaries proclaimed the Batavian Republic, after the Roman name for their land.
  - This was the first French sister republic. Back in Paris, Bonaparte was no doubt paying attention. The Dutch wrote a new constitution, with the French sometimes urging them on. It took the Dutch three years to agree on their new constitutional system, but when they did, it marked a turning point and a model for the future. The constitution promised various social rights and laid the foundations for a much more centralized and democratic political system.
  - French forces had chased out the House of Orange and made the opening for the Dutch to create the Batavian Republic. But France also demanded reparations from the defeated Dutch in the new sister republic: 100 million florins.
- By the mid-1790s, revolutionary warfare and ideology had combined to destabilize old power structures in Europe. Local patriots in the Netherlands—and elsewhere—jumped into the opening. They seized the opportunity for making independent republics within the cauldron of revolutionary contestation.
  - But when the French helped set up these republics, they did not act purely out of revolutionary idealism. Those goals gave way

to more everyday to traditional geopolitics, the quest for raw power, and the hunt for booty.

- The French wanted to make client states and expand their territory and influence. And if they were going to make republics, the republics should pay for the services of the French armies. As one Italian revolutionary put it a few years later: “Revolutions are prepared by philosophers and decided by bayonets.”

### Suggested Reading

Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power*.

Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life*.

Stuart, *The Rose of Martinique*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Napoleon Bonaparte was the master of self-invention. How do you see him inventing himself in various ways as a young man?
2. Historians and biographers debate how to assess the youthful lives of men or women who later become important leaders. Even those who claim to avoid psychology still look for ways to figure out what makes a prominent figure tick. What approaches to or questions about a person’s youthful experiences seem most fruitful in trying to understand why one individual becomes exceptional?

# The Italian Campaign and the Sister Republics

## Lecture 33

In mid-May of 1796, only six weeks after he entered Italy, Napoleon Bonaparte led his troops into the city of Milan. He had chased away its Austrian rulers and promised freedom to the Milanese. In Paris, the directors heard the news with astonishment, and in northern Italy, people were on fire with revolutionary fervor. A Venetian playwright named Ugo Foscolo wrote, “Who would not want Bonaparte for legislator, captain, father, and spiritual chief?” This lecture focuses on Napoleon’s Italian campaign of 1796–1797. We’ll also explore how he became involved in Italian politics and worked to create sister republics in Italy.

### Revolutionary Agitation in Italy

- Before Bonaparte arrived, Italy was a patchwork of small states with different forms of government. For example, monarchs ruled Piedmont in the northeast and the Kingdom of Naples in the south. The Venetian Republic and the Duchy of Tuscany were independent, but Austria dominated the Duchy of Milan in the north.
- The Revolution in France had provoked great excitement in Italy. Peasants in the Kingdom of Naples organized and threatened to “act like the French.” In such cities as Milan and Venice, the French Revolution gripped the imaginations of intellectuals, government workers, journalists, and others.
- Patriotic societies sprang up, and everywhere, revolutionary pamphlets, newspapers, and translations of Robespierre’s speeches circulated. Italian rulers worked to suppress this circulation of revolutionary ideas, but it was difficult to keep a lid on the excitement.
- In 1796, Filippo Buonarroti, an Italian follower of Babeuf, tried to convince the directors in Paris that Italy was ripe for revolution. At the same time, the leading revolutionaries of the Directory were

debating foreign policy: Should they work with local patriots and revolutionaries to establish republics around France's borders?

- For the moment, the directors officially answered no. France had already annexed Belgium and was occupying the Rhineland. The French needed to consolidate and republicanize these lands inside France's so-called natural frontiers. Further, the Italians didn't seem quite ready for revolution. The decision was made not to create sister republics in Italy.

### **The Italian Campaign: Background and Overview**

- By 1796, France was still at war with Great Britain, Austria, and various Italian territories, including Piedmont. The Directory had a grand strategy for these wars: a naval expedition to Ireland to spark revolt against the British, two armies to march into Austria's Holy Roman Empire, and a third army to tackle Piedmont and Austrian possessions in northern Italy.
  - The directors imagined that the battles in the Italian arena would just be diversionary, keeping Austrian troops busy.
  - As it turned out, the armies in the German campaign got bogged down, and the French were forced to abandon their expedition to Ireland. But Bonaparte had his own plans in Italy.
- In March of 1796, Bonaparte journeyed to Nice to take over the French army that would invade Italy. He was 26 years old and had never commanded a division in battle, let alone an army. The press and his fellow generals weren't terribly impressed with him, but Bonaparte proved his doubters wrong.
- In April of 1796, Bonaparte led his army in a lightning attack. Within two weeks, he had forced Piedmont to surrender and, by mid-May, had marched into Milan. Italian patriots welcomed him with cheers.
- Over the next few months, Bonaparte seized control of much of the Italian territory north of Rome, but it would take him longer to

convince the Austrians to withdraw. He won a string of victories and then chased the Austrians to within 100 miles of Vienna. He drove Austria to her knees, set up two sister republics in Italy, and astonished Europe.

### **Napoleon's Military Trademarks**

- The French army that would invade Italy had about 37,000 troops. When Bonaparte took command, it was short on cavalrymen, horses, and equipment. In this situation, Bonaparte did two things: (1) cultivated his relationship with the soldiers and (2) paid close attention to the logistics of supplying the army.
- Bonaparte quickly developed a reputation for treating his soldiers as equals. He also cultivated their sense of honor, urging them to share in the glory of his destiny.
- Above all, Bonaparte paid attention to material matters. He paid his soldiers in cash and made sure they had bread and meat. His opponents relied heavily on their supply trains, but Bonaparte counted more on his soldiers to forage locally. This system of foraging played a crucial role in Napoleon's ability to move his armies quickly.
- The "mixed order" system that had been developed in the French revolutionary army perfectly suited Bonaparte. This system deployed two attack columns connected by troops in line formation. In his first weeks in Italy, Bonaparte demonstrated his great ability in this evolving style of warfare.
  - He favored certain maneuvers that enabled him to use his speed effectively. For example, in the *manoeuvre sur les derrières*, his men would skirt around to the rear of an enemy army and cut off its supply lines. And Bonaparte repeatedly sought to seize the central position between two armies.
  - In the first part of the Italian campaign, these moves enabled Bonaparte to drive a wedge between Piedmontese and Austrian forces and force Piedmont to surrender.

- Bonaparte's next move was to march his forces across the plains of Lombardy toward Milan; in this, he showcased another of his key military aptitudes: his ability to read the terrain and use it to his advantage. He avoided the obvious crossing at the Po River to outflank the Austrians and cut off certain supply lines, forcing them to fall back.

### Battle of Lodi

- On the morning of May 10, 1796, the French were chasing the retreating Austrian army. At Lodi on the Adda River, the French suddenly found themselves called up short. Before them stood a narrow wooden bridge about 500 feet long. On the opposite shore sat the Austrians, blocking their passage.
- Bonaparte pointed his light guns at the Austrians, and the two sides launched into an artillery duel. He also sent cavalrymen to the north and south to look for another spot to ford the river and make a flanking maneuver. Around 6:00 that evening, Bonaparte roused his soldiers with a patriotic speech and sent them charging across the bridge in the face of Austrian grapeshot.
- Decimated, the French grenadiers made it only halfway and began to fall back. But some of Bonaparte's senior officers urged the troops on. Meanwhile, the French cavalry had found another crossing and surprised the Austrians on their southern flank. At the day's end, the Austrians withdrew, and Bonaparte began to trumpet his victory—soon known across Europe.



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One especially stunning piece of propaganda to come out of the Italian campaign was Antoine-Jean Gros's painting *Napoleon Bonaparte on the Bridge at Arcole*.

- The Battle of Lodi revealed another key characteristic of Bonaparte: the centrality of war to his very identity. As the Prussian war theorist Carl von Clausewitz said, “War is not waged by reason alone... It is the whole man who wages war.” Napoleon’s single-minded drive energized his men.
- Bonaparte immediately turned Lodi into a victory much greater than it was. He publicized it back in France as “the most brilliant of the entire war.”

### **End of the Italian Campaign**

- Just a few days after his victory at Lodi, in mid-May of 1796, Bonaparte occupied Milan. Then, on the orders of the Directory, he turned south, seeking to fill the coffers of the French Republic. Almost 46 million francs in cash and more than 12 million in gold, silver, and jewels would be taken from Italy that year, along with precious artworks.
- Meanwhile, up north in Lombardy, the Austrians clung to the fortress town of Mantua with some 13,000 men. In four successive attempts, they tried to seize back their territory in Lombardy, but Bonaparte held them off with a string of victories.
- Finally, in February of 1797, Mantua fell after Napoleon turned back the Austrian reinforcements at the Battle of Rivoli. Then, he pressed northeast through the Tyrol toward Austria. When he was within 100 miles of Vienna, the Austrians finally sued for peace. Bonaparte had triumphed.

### **Napoleon’s Politics**

- When the French invaded Italy, ousted the Austrians, and defeated other local rulers, they created an opening for Italians to build sister republics. Bonaparte played a key role here but a complicated one.
  - On the one hand, he defied the Directory and encouraged the local patriots in their plans for republics. Although we think of him mainly as a military leader, he also wanted to conduct political experiments in state building.

- On the other hand, Bonaparte was leery of any Italian Jacobins who seemed too radical. He wanted to control the political process and keep the republics as moderate as possible.
- In the fall of 1796, Bonaparte met with Italian patriot leaders from the Emilia-Romagna region. With his backing, they defied local rulers and created the first Italian sister republic.
- In Milan, Bonaparte had also eliminated the Austrian rulers, and Italian patriots had been waiting for this opportunity. In 1796, radicals and Jacobins flocked to Milan to take part in the swirl of political debate and experimentation. With Bonaparte, the Italians in Milan created the Cisalpine Republic.
- These republics posed the question of Italian unification and launched crucial experiments in social and cultural reform. But the Italian patriots had a hard time winning full popular support. Further, the patriots soon discovered that France's commitment to the Italian republics didn't run deep.
  - On his own in late 1797, Bonaparte negotiated the Treaty of Campo Formio with the Austrians. They agreed to give up Lombardy and recognize two new Italian sister republics; in exchange, Napoleon surrendered the city-state of Venice to Austrian control.
  - Republicans across Europe were shocked at this move. Venice had been an independent republic for centuries. How could the liberator betray this ancient republic?
  - The Italian revolutionaries were disillusioned, but they didn't give up easily. Over the next few years, they worked with the French to create three more sister republics, in Naples, Rome, and Lucca.
- For revolutionary France, the Italian campaign made clear that the commitment to spreading revolutionary ideology abroad had taken a backseat to other, less idealistic war goals. The French, like any

other powerful nation, also aimed to create client states, expand territory, increase French hegemony on the Continent, and milk occupied territories for booty.

- Bonaparte's victories in Italy also changed the balance of power in France. The Directory was becoming more dependent on generals, especially to maintain the uneasy balance between left and right.
- The Italian campaign laid the foundation of Bonaparte's fame and fired his ambition. It also gave Europe its first real view of this astonishing individual: a bold politician, wily diplomat, and brilliant military commander.

### Suggested Reading

Asprey, *The Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte*.

Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*.

Doughty, ed., *Warfare in the Western World*, vol. 1.

Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What connections do you see between the political and the military aspirations of General Bonaparte?
2. Sometimes nations succeed at exporting political systems; sometimes they don't. What factors seem to influence or determine how well an invading nation can export a political system?

# Sister Republics? France and America

## Lecture 34

In the mid- to late 1790s, France set up eight sister republics in Europe, but she already had a natural sister republic across the sea: America. In 1789, France and America loved each other, but by 1798, they were virtually at war on the high seas. By then, many Americans agreed with this preacher's words: "Behold France... converted into one great theater of unspeakable degradation and misery." This lecture looks at Franco-American relations across the 1790s. We'll ask how the republican politics of the two nations collided with geopolitics in this revolutionary era.

### French and American Views in the Early 1790s

- The French drew strongly on American examples when they wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789, but over time, the American model came to seem less relevant. After all, the Americans hadn't dealt with a king, a powerful church, or an ancient system of privilege. And the French were hurtling toward a much more radical social revolution.
- Already in 1792, Robespierre had announced, "America's example, as an argument for our success, is worthless, because the circumstances are different." But the Girondin leaders, especially Brissot, felt a strong bond with the Americans.
- For their part, most Americans embraced France's new politics, which seemed to follow in American footsteps. The French Revolution validated the Americans' republicanism. As the Revolution grew more radical, however, Americans became more divided in their opinions about France.
- It's important to note that the Americans were just figuring out their own path to republicanism. The French Revolution helped the Americans define their own political views and invent the two-party system.

- In the 1790s in America, two groups began to emerge: the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans.
- By and large, the Federalists believed in a stronger central government, and they wanted elites to maintain control of politics. Their leaders, such men as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, didn't trust France's drive for equality. They admired the stable, hierarchical society of Britain and wanted to cultivate commercial relations with England.
- In contrast, the Republicans didn't like England, and their leader, Thomas Jefferson, adored France. The Republicans pushed for broader democratic participation in politics and for more power at the state level. They saw a parallel between their own class politics and action in France.

### **Genêt's Diplomatic Mission**

- In 1793, a French diplomat named Edmond-Charles Genêt walked into the middle of this political divide. His mission to the United States became a crucial turning point in Franco-American relations.
- Genêt had been sent to America by the Girondins, who led French foreign policy at the time. He had several diplomatic goals: to induce the Americans to pay their debt from the American Revolution and urge them to officially reiterate their alliance with France. He might also try to negotiate a stronger commercial treaty with President Washington. As soon as he landed, Genêt began to work toward additional French goals.
  - In the spring of 1793, France had just gone to war with Spain and England. The United States was trying to stay neutral, but Genêt enlisted aid for the French efforts from the governor of South Carolina and the French consul.
  - The Girondins also hoped that they could ignite revolution in the Americas outside U.S. borders, specifically, in the Spanish territories of Florida and Louisiana and the British colony of

Canada. As soon as he set foot on American soil, Genêt began to arrange an expedition into Spanish Florida.

- The Girondins had not considered the delicate strategic position of the United States. France and England were at war, but the United States didn't want to choose sides and risk another war. At about the time that Genêt arrived, Washington issued a formal proclamation of neutrality.
- Meanwhile, Genêt traveled up the East Coast. Everywhere he went, the Democratic-Republican societies and pro-French crowds welcomed him with wild enthusiasm. But this response fatally misguided Genêt. He assumed that America was like revolutionary France, where people in the streets drove politics. Washington, however, hated the Republican societies, which he believed could stir up too much trouble.
- When he reached Philadelphia, Genêt began to negotiate with the president and his divided cabinet—and the negotiations didn't go well. Hamilton attacked Genêt and the French, while Jefferson tried to advise the French diplomat about divisions within the American cabinet. Washington and the Americans rebuffed Genêt's demands for debt repayment or for a new commercial treaty with the United States.
- Behind the scenes, Genêt pushed forward with his plan to stir up insurrection. His ideas might sound outrageous, but control of the territory west of the Appalachian Mountains was still up for grabs. Genêt might well be able to recruit American adventurers to back his idea of seizing New Orleans from the Spanish and making an independent republic.
- Genêt grew frustrated with his inability to get any concessions on the debt or commercial treaty from Washington and his cabinet. On his own, he pressed ahead with arming privateers against the British, insisting that the Americans should help him in accordance with their 1778 treaty.

- Then, Genêt made a bad move. He angrily threatened to appeal to the American people over the head of Washington. He misjudged where power lay and insulted the American president. Even Jefferson grew exasperated.
- More bad news arrived for Genêt in the form of white refugee planters from Saint-Domingue, who landed in Philadelphia. These royalists hated the French Revolution, blaming it for the destruction of slave society. The refugee planters reminded American slave owners, including Washington and Jefferson, that the French Revolution was producing disorder everywhere.
- Genêt's days as a diplomat were already numbered, but he made one last stab at carrying out his plans. He ordered the French fleet that had brought the refugees from Saint-Domingue to attack the British at Halifax. Then, it should head south to take part in the planned insurrection on the coast of Spanish Florida. But once the fleet set out, the sailors convinced their commanders to just sail home to France.
- Genêt's attempt to negotiate with the Americans had failed, as had the dream of spreading revolution and sister republics across North America.

### **Lessons Learned from Genêt's Mission**

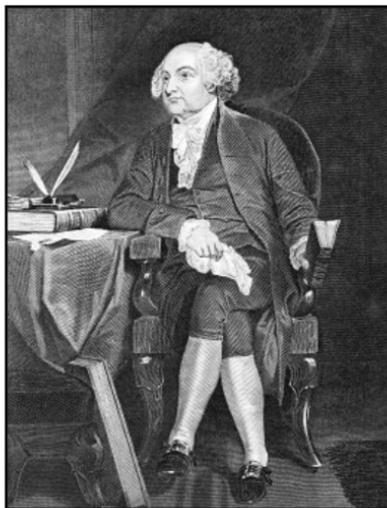
- The Genêt episode offers us another window into the international impact of the French Revolution. Repeatedly, French revolutionary ideology—the desire to spread revolution abroad—became entangled with geopolitics, warfare, and empire-building. In the North American case, revolutionary expansionist zeal fell flat on its face.
- But the Genêt episode fits within a broader story. The French Revolution didn't spread only ideas for political and social reform. Instead, it spread a messy combination of war and explosive ideas. It had a significant geopolitical impact, repeatedly reconfiguring empires and boundaries.

- The United States benefited from revolutionary instability in the Atlantic world. For one thing, it made it easier for the Americans to expand on the western side of the Appalachian Mountains, because France, Spain, and England were all distracted by fighting one another in Europe and the Caribbean.
- Genêt's mission also pushed the Americans to figure out how to operate as a fragile new nation in the international arena. American leaders began to tease out an ideology of neutrality, at times, shading into isolationism. This diplomatic stance held tremendous appeal in the decades ahead and perennially raises its head to this day.
- The Genêt affair gave Hamilton and the Federalists ammunition in their pursuit of anti-French, pro-British policies. It threw a spanner into Franco-American relations and made clear that they held different interests.
- In 1794, the United States cozied up to England with the Jay Treaty. This treaty promoted British-American trade, but it refused to recognize the right of America as a neutral power to trade with any nation it wanted to—that is, trade with France. Republicans in the streets and Congress objected loudly, but the Federalists in the Senate ratified the treaty. When the French learned of the Jay Treaty, they declared that the United States had betrayed republicanism and sold out to their former rulers.

### **The XYZ Affair**

- The new U.S. president, John Adams, was a Federalist who deeply distrusted France. In 1797, he sent three envoys to Paris to urge the French government to halt the actions of French privateers who had been harassing American merchant ships trading with Britain. The American diplomats would deal with the new French foreign minister, Talleyrand. This aristocrat had spent two years in the United States as an émigré during the Terror and had a poor impression of the new nation.

- Talleyrand angled to get an American loan and an apology for Adams's belligerent stance. He also requested what the French call *une douceur*, "a sweetening"—a bribe. The American diplomats refused, and Adams became infuriated. When he told Congress about this insult, he identified Talleyrand's agents by the letters X, Y, and Z. Soon, news of the XYZ Affair was all over the American press.



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**For John Adams, France epitomized the social disorder that he feared could happen in America; he wrote, "Dragon's teeth have been sown in France and come up monsters."**

- Adams and the Federalists in Congress launched what came to be called the Quasi-War. They cut off trade with France and empowered American privateers to raid French vessels. The Americans expanded their military, constructed war ships, and set up a navy department. Neither side declared war, but French and American ships were more or less at war for the next two years.
- The Federalists used the confrontation with France to attack the Republicans at home. In 1798, they pushed through the Alien and Sedition Acts, laws targeting suspicious immigrants and vocal Republicans. They also launched a massive popular campaign to foment anti-French sentiment.
- But the harsh laws and extreme rhetoric backfired on the Federalists. As the elections of 1800 approached, the Republicans, backing Jefferson, were able to portray the Federalists as divisive and extreme. Even John Adams changed course. By 1800, France and the United States had negotiated a peace agreement and reopened trade.

## Complicated Relations

- As new republics, France and the United States had a natural affinity for each other, but they faced different situations.
  - France chose a radical revolution to free itself from its past and tried to combine the spread of republicanism and revolution with expansion of its own colonial and geopolitical power.
  - In contrast, by the 1790s, the United States was done with revolution. Americans were figuring out how to work their new republic, and the Federalist politicians in power feared social disorder. U.S. interests were better served by avoiding involvement in European war or more revolution.
- Both nations claimed that their contributions proved key to the invention of modern democracy in the West. In the 1790s, France and the United States began a dance of cultural exchange and competition, attraction and refusal, that continues to this day.

## Suggested Reading

Ammon, *The Genêt Mission*.

Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*.

Zahniser, *Uncertain Friendship*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Did Genêt fail because he was a misguided diplomat or because of structural reasons beyond his control? What factors might have made it difficult for him to succeed?
2. How does geography interact with politics? How did the geographic positions of France and the United States (among other factors) influence the attempts of each nation to create republicanism and their interactions with each other?

# Bonaparte in Egypt

## Lecture 35

In the winter of 1797–1798, Bonaparte was just back in Paris after his triumphant invasion of Italy, assigned the dreary job of investigating whether France should invade England. But Bonaparte had a better idea: Get at Britain by attacking Egypt. A few months later, in May of 1798, Bonaparte set sail for Egypt with a fleet of more than 300 ships and 30,000 men. Much later on, one of the directors commented that they were not sorry to see this politically ambitious general leave France. This lecture follows Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt and his attempts to make it part of what the directors were now calling La Grande Nation, the “great nation” of France.

### Colonial Expansion in Egypt

- In 1763, after France lost North America and most of its possessions in India, the French foreign office had toyed with the dream of colonial expansion into Egypt. In July of 1797, the French foreign minister, Talleyrand, began to build on this older dream. He was looking to create a modern form of colonialism, and he was worried that France might lose Saint-Domingue. In his eyes, Egypt could be the new sugar-producing colony for France.
- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt lay within the sprawling Ottoman Empire, a longtime French ally. Although the Ottomans had conquered Egypt, it was the Mamluk dynasty that ran the government on the ground. To Talleyrand, the Ottomans’ hold over Egypt seemed tenuous.
- For the French, Egypt also offered interesting commercial possibilities. Merchants from Marseille already conducted a lively trade with Egypt, and some French merchant families had lived there for decades. These families resented trade restrictions imposed by the Mamluk rulers and denounced them as tyrants. Some of the French in Egypt even called on France to invade.

- Both Bonaparte and Talleyrand recognized that Egypt had strategic value against Britain. Perhaps the French could cut England off from one trade route to India. And from Egypt, it might even be possible to send support to Indians who were resisting British rule by the East India Company.
- In addition, Egypt held romantic allure for Bonaparte and other Europeans. It was the cradle of civilization, which made it seem all the more important to institute republicanism there.

### **The Invasion of Egypt**

- The expedition that set out in May of 1798 was a massive undertaking. In addition to thousands of soldiers, Bonaparte brought along a team of 167 scientists, engineers, archaeologists, writers, and artists.
- When Bonaparte's troops reached Alexandria, he had his men distribute a proclamation to the Egyptian people, promising that the French had come to destroy the Mamluk oppressors. Hoping to gain the allegiance of educated elites and Muslim clergy, the proclamation also tried to convince the Egyptians that the French didn't hate the Muslim religion. The Egyptian elites were unimpressed.
- In Cairo, 140 miles south of Alexandria, two Mamluk leaders met with the Ottoman viceroy to make plans for defense. They rapidly assembled forces to face off against the French. For their part, Napoleon's forces set out on what seemed like a march through hell: a desert of sandstorms and sudden attacks by Bedouins and, above all, hunger and thirst.
- The French finally reached the Nile near Rahmaniya. Several days later, in mid-July, Bonaparte got what he wanted: a major battle against the Mamluk cavalry. It took place near the village of Imbaba. In reports back to France, Bonaparte gave this encounter a romantic name: the Battle of the Pyramids.

- The Mamluks had 12,000 foot soldiers and 6,000 men on horseback, consummate horsemen armed with carbines, pistols, and curved sabers. But the French had 25,000 well-drilled men, armed with muskets, bayonets, and light artillery. Their generals ordered them into the now-classic formation for resisting a cavalry attack: tightly packed squares of infantrymen six lines deep with cannon at the corners between the squares. The Mamluks charged repeatedly but couldn't break the squares. Three days later, the French occupied Cairo.
- Back on the Mediterranean coast, the French ships in Aboukir Bay near Alexandria sighted an approaching British fleet. The French admiral, Brueys, knew that he couldn't easily put out to sea because too many of his supplies were on shore. Instead, he deployed his 13 ships in a C-shaped arc about a mile long in the bay and about a mile and half from shore. He was confident that the British wouldn't sail between his fleet and the shore and risk running aground on the shoals.
- But Admiral Nelson stunned the French by attacking at about 6:30 that evening with his own 13 ships of the line. They sailed directly toward one end of the French deployment. Then, in a bold move,



**Napoleon later recorded that he inspired his men at the Battle of the Pyramids with these words: "Soldiers! From the heights of these pyramids, forty centuries are looking down on you!"**

the British fleet split and raked the French vessels from both sides. By 7:30, Brueys was dead. By the next morning, the French had surrendered 9 ships of the line and 3,200 men. Another 1,700 had been killed or drowned.

- The French Mediterranean fleet had been decimated. Bonaparte and his troops were now stranded in Egypt, cut off from supplies and reinforcements. The naval loss at Aboukir Bay meant that—whatever his original plans—Bonaparte’s forces would be staying in Egypt for an indefinite occupation.

### **Overhaul of the Egyptian Delta**

- Bonaparte appeared to be undaunted. He set out not just to rule the Egyptian delta but to remake it, launching ambitious political and social programs. He set up government councils, called divans, with the goals of co-opting the local elites and getting their help in bringing about his reforms. To serve on the divans, Bonaparte appointed legal scholars and religious leaders, both Muslims and Coptic Christians.
- Bonaparte worked hard to convince Egyptian Muslims that he wasn’t interested in christianizing them. But his attempts to use Islamic imagery and rhetoric failed; the Egyptian Muslims weren’t convinced. Still, his experiments in Egypt represent a step toward modern forms of European colonization.
- Although he didn’t bring Christianity, Bonaparte still had a missionary vision—one that would only grow stronger among 19<sup>th</sup>-century European colonizers. He wanted to export Enlightenment rationalism and European assumptions about civilization and science. The intellectuals brought along on the expedition opened a think tank in Cairo known as the Institute of Egypt; they set up a major library, several laboratories, and scientific collections.
  - The French experts studied everything from fish skeletons to Egyptian antiquities. One engineer discovered the Rosetta Stone.

- With Egyptian labor, these French engineers and scientists tore down buildings and broadened boulevards in Cairo. They installed bread ovens and constructed windmills, set up printing presses, hospitals, a mint, a postal service, a new judicial system, and a reformed taxation system.
- This whirlwind of activity met with a mixed reception. A few public works were well received, but most Egyptians resented the French presence.
- Napoleon ruled with a mixture of conciliation and brute force. When Cairo rose up in revolt against new taxes and French rule in October of 1798, he turned his cannons onto the city.

### **The Syrian Campaign**

- Meanwhile, the international situation had become more complicated. It's not entirely clear why the French thought the Ottoman rulers would tolerate this invasion of their empire. The French ambassador in Constantinople was supposed to convince the Ottoman sultan that Bonaparte meant only to oust the Mamluks; he didn't really intend to seize Egypt.
- Not surprisingly, the Ottomans were not convinced. The British and Ottoman Turks planned to make a two-pronged movement on Egypt. One army would march down through Syria, and another would attack by sea near Aboukir Bay.
- In February of 1799, Bonaparte set out toward Syria. He led 13,000 men east across the Sinai and along the Mediterranean through what is now Israel, heading north toward Syria. He hoped to make a preemptive strike against the Ottomans and to remove another threat: Ibrahim Bey, one of the Mamluk leaders, who had retreated in that direction.
- When the town of Jaffa refused to surrender, Bonaparte unleashed his fury on it. But at the fortress town of Acre further north, he met his match. The city refused to surrender, and the French laid siege to

it. Because Acre sat on a small promontory into the Mediterranean, British ships were able to provide it with food, munitions, and Turkish troops.

- After two months and an outbreak of plague among his men, Napoleon turned his forces back toward Cairo, fighting the Ottoman Turks as they went. Hardly had the troops returned to Cairo than they were forced to march to Aboukir to ward off a Turkish landing from the other direction.
  - There, Napoleon's officers laid hands on British newspapers with definitive word about military and political events in Europe. The Directory was in a shaky situation.
  - The Russians, British, Ottomans, and Austrians had formed a second coalition against France. Russian and Austrian forces were driving the French out of Italy. The French were losing in the German arena, as well.
- In late August of 1799, Bonaparte set sail from Alexandria. Two French frigates slipped through the British blockade, heading toward France. Bonaparte left behind two of his generals in charge of the army and the occupation attempt. He was certain that he could be more useful in France at that moment than in Egypt.

### **Impact of the Egyptian Expedition**

- Six weeks later, Napoleon landed on the southern coast of France and was welcomed as a hero. His mission to Egypt had captured the popular imagination; he seemed to be spreading La Grande Nation to far-off lands. Paradoxically, although he didn't achieve great success in Egypt, Bonaparte's expedition there helped to create his glory.
- Back in Egypt, the French army hung on for two more years. Finally, in 1801, a combined British and Ottoman force booted it out.
- Historians disagree about the impact of the expedition on Egypt. Older historiography emphasized modernizing influences from France. But Egyptian historians now stress the harsh economic

impact of the French occupation and the disruption of local social and political systems. The French occupation had hastened the downfall of the Mamluk ruling elite, but the Ottomans hung on to their colony.

- For Napoleon, the Egyptian adventure gave him his first opportunity for direct rule. His experiences there influenced him as a political actor and thinker. In exile many years later, Bonaparte remembered Egypt this way: “In Egypt, I was full of dreams. I saw myself founding a religion, marching into Asia, riding an elephant, a turban on my head, and in my hand a new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs.... The time I spent in Egypt was the most beautiful of my life because it was most ideal.”

### Suggested Reading

Asprey, *The Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte*.

Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*.

Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*.

Tracy, *Nelson's Battles*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What similarities and differences do you see between Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt and the creation of sister republics in Italy and the Netherlands?
2. Is colonization ever a good thing?

# Bonaparte Seizes Power

## Lecture 36

In 1789, the abbé Sieyès had made his name by writing the pamphlet “What Is the Third Estate?” Ten years later, as one of the directors, he sought a general to stage a coup d’état against the Directory. When Sieyès heard that Bonaparte had returned from Egypt, he knew he had his man. Although the two men were very different, they shared a political goal: to eliminate the Directory. Sieyès and his followers wanted to institute a more stable and authoritarian system. In November of 1799, Napoleon helped Sieyès overthrow the Directory. Before long, he had become first consul of France and, in less than five years, had made himself emperor. In this lecture, we’ll look at how Napoleon seized power.

### Trouble in the Republic

- The Directory lasted longer than any other form of government during the era of the Revolution, from 1795 to 1799. It conducted key experiments and reforms, especially in education, political and intellectual culture, and the financial realm. But many people were discontent with the religious policies of the Directory and a new, more permanent round of conscription.
- The Directory also faced a significant political problem: It was difficult to form a unified republic so soon after the Terror. Razor-sharp political differences tore France apart, pitting right against left and royalists against neo-Jacobins.
- The Thermidorians who invented the Directory tried to make a moderate and stable republic by restricting political power to men with property. But depriving the popular classes of full political voice alienated many citizens. And political emotions ran hot after the divisive experience of the Terror.
- Electoral politics didn’t work well under the Directory, and frequent electoral assemblies kept deep animosities alive. Further, the

government undermined its own legitimacy—its own claim to be a representative Republic—by overturning elections several times in order to guarantee stability. In 1797, the Directory called on troops to oust newly elected royalist deputies, and in 1798, it used legal maneuvering to annul the electoral victories of neo-Jacobins.

- In the late 1790s, the Directory was clearly in trouble. It couldn't claim full legitimacy if it repeatedly overthrew its own electoral system and violated its own constitution. Further, the Directory had narrowed its power base too much. It had lost popular support, and the propertied classes disliked its instability.
- In the summer of 1799—the moment when Napoleon returned from Egypt—things looked especially bad. Royalist uprisings plagued the south and west, and foreign enemies were on the verge of invading France.
  - The Russians and Austrians had pushed France out of most of northern Italy and were winning in the Swiss Alps, as well. At the same time, a combined Russian-British force prepared to invade France via Holland.
  - Luckily for France, in the fall of 1799, key French victories in Switzerland gave the Republic a chance to catch its breath. Russia ended up withdrawing from the Second Coalition against France, and the attack from Holland fell apart.
- But the mood in France was tense. And, at this crisis moment, neo-Jacobins surged in popularity. They instituted a new tax on the rich and passed a law concerning suspicious relatives of émigrés or nobles. In response, conservatives warned that France ran the risk of returning to the Terror.
- In fact, there was no real threat of a return to the Terror, but the crisis atmosphere gave an opening to the men who wanted to eliminate the weak Directory. The time had come for Bonaparte to seize power.

## The Coup of 18 Brumaire

- On the revolutionary calendar, 18 Brumaire, year VIII, was November 9, 1799. At first, the coup went just the way Sieyès and Bonaparte had planned. As agreed, fellow conspirators in the upper chamber of the legislature stirred up fears of a fabricated neo-Jacobin plot. As an emergency measure, they pushed through a vote to relocate both chambers away from Paris and its unpredictable population. The deputies made Bonaparte commissioner of Paris, and three of the directors resigned, paving the way for the coup.
- The next day, when the legislatures met at Château Saint-Cloud, things didn't go smoothly. Everyone in Paris suspected that something was afoot, and thousands went to Saint-Cloud. Bonaparte ordered his troops there, as well. Some of the deputies were in on the plot, but others, especially the neo-Jacobins, were alarmed to see thousands of soldiers surrounding the château.
- The neo-Jacobins began to denounce the possibility of a dictator: "We are free here; bayonets do not frighten us!" Then, they decided to take an oath to defend the constitution. Outside, Bonaparte grew restless. At 4:00 in the afternoon, he stormed into the upper chamber, hoping to rally support. When some deputies challenged him and claimed to defend the constitution, he grew angry and inarticulate.
- In the end, it was Napoleon's brother Lucien who saved the day. Lucien had become a revolutionary politician of fire and ambition. He had managed to get himself elected president of the Council of Five Hundred.



Pointing his sword at Napoleon, Lucien Bonaparte proclaimed, "I vow to plunge this into my own brother's chest if he ever threatens the liberty of the French!"

Lucien followed his brother as he retreated outside and gave a resounding speech. He convinced the soldiers that Napoleon was no threat to liberty. Indeed, he was a defense against a return to the Terror.

- Bonaparte called his men to arms, and the soldiers stormed en masse into the legislative chamber. Facing bayonets, the neo-Jacobin deputies fled. In the aftermath, the rump members of the upper chamber voted the Directory out of existence. It's important to note that Napoleon did not simply grab power by threat of violence. The coup was modern in that it included an overlay of legality, an imprimatur from the legislature.
- A temporary committee of three men, including Bonaparte and Sieyès, was installed to govern. These three would be called consuls, named after high officials of ancient Rome.
  - Paris remained quiet that night. Earlier coups during the Directory had made Brumaire seem less dramatic. Indeed, in Paris the next day, the stock market rose 10 percent.
  - In the provinces, reactions to the coup were mixed. Some towns sent congratulations, while others were strongly opposed. Many towns sent no response at all. Overall, Bonaparte and his allies benefited from a general weariness about politics, a kind of fatigue with the left-right swings and uncertainty.

### **The Consulate**

- Meanwhile, Napoleon sprang immediately into action. He seized the initiative, but he did not institute a military dictatorship. Instead, he urged his colleagues to produce a new constitution as quickly as possible. He drew his fame from war, but he would rule as a civilian.
- In just a few weeks, Bonaparte, Sieyès, and a commission hammered out the Constitution of the Year VIII, the fourth constitution produced by the French in less than 10 years. This constitution marked a clear departure from earlier revolutionary constitutions.

It had no Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and it centralized power in the hands of a strong executive.

- There would be three consuls for a 10-year term, but Napoleon would serve as first consul and lead decision maker. The two other consuls were Jean-Jacques Régis de Cambacères and Charles-François Lebrun. They played an advisory role and received one-fourth as much salary.
- Sieyès, perhaps wisely, opted out of becoming second consul. He told Bonaparte that he didn't want to be merely a military assistant.
- The new constitution put an end to the Revolution's 10-year experiment in representative democracy. It set up a bizarre legislative system, appointed from above, not elected.
  - There were two main chambers. One body, called the Tribune, could discuss and debate laws but could not vote on them. The other chamber, called the Legislative Body, could not discuss the bills but could vote on them.
  - Neither chamber could initiate legislation. All bills—all potential laws—came from the consuls or the Council of State, a body of advisors chosen by Napoleon.
  - Finally, Sieyès insisted on adding a new institution: the Senate. Its 60 members were appointed for life by the consuls. Their job was to name the members of the two chambers. The Senate also could judge whether laws were constitutional, and above all, it bestowed a certain prestige and legitimacy on Napoleon's lawmaking.
- The new system drained the power out of electoral politics. Adult men didn't elect local officials, as they had during the Revolution. They elected lists of property-owning men who could be appointed to office from above. Key positions, such as mayors, legislators, or prefects, would be appointed, in some cases by the consul himself. The point of the system was to centralize power and eliminate

messy democracy. The Consulate aimed to create a solid power base among the social group known as notables.

- But Bonaparte didn't totally surrender the notion of popular sovereignty and the people's voice. He put the constitution up for a vote to almost all adult men, and it won by a huge margin. A substantial portion of France was content to have Napoleon have a go at running the country.

### **An Effortless Coup?**

- Why was Napoleon able to gain power with relative ease? Without a doubt, he benefited from the weaknesses of the Directory. Having five men share executive power didn't make for strong leadership. Further, the revolutionaries could not find a way to balance out and negotiate deep political differences within a stable political structure. It's always difficult to recover from revolution, and France remained devastatingly torn.
- Bonaparte brilliantly positioned himself as a man above factions, as the embodiment of unity. He immediately followed policies that lifted the new republic of the Consulate above the old, bitter divisions. For example, he reversed some of the most controversial laws, such as the law concerning suspicious relatives of émigrés and nobles, and cancelled the new surtaxes on the rich. He rejected the Neo-Jacobin pursuit of economic egalitarianism and reassured the property-owning classes. Napoleon equaled stability.
- It's also true that France was, in some ways, hungry for a national hero, a position not filled by anyone during the Revolution. Further, Napoleon had a unique relationship to the Revolution. He both embodied the Revolution and had ended it. Right after the coup, he announced, "I am the Revolution." Then he added, "The Revolution is over." For him, the statement was not a contradiction.

## Suggested Reading

Crook, *Napoleon Comes to Power*.

Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why are revolutions so difficult to end?
2. Were there elements in the French Revolution—either positive or negative—that might have prepared people to welcome back the rule of a single leader?

# Building Power—General and First Consul

## Lecture 37

From 1799 to 1804, the French Republic was called the Consulate, and Bonaparte served as first consul. This lecture focuses on the early Consulate, from roughly 1800 to 1802, to show how Napoleon built his power at the beginning step by step. Why was France—land of Revolution and the promises of democracy—willing to let Napoleon increasingly run the show? Why did it allow him to move toward one-man rule? A large part of the answer is that he combined military glory with political acumen, and he fused some revolutionary gains with reassuring conservatism. In short, he threaded his way between left and right to occupy the center. He repressed with one hand and conciliated with the other.

### Battle of Marengo

- When Bonaparte seized power in 1799, France's international situation was far from secure. Her generals had managed to win in Switzerland and oust Russia from the war, but France had lost almost all of Italy. Further, Great Britain and Austria remained at war against the Republic.
- In the spring of 1800, Bonaparte decided that it was time to take out Austria. At that point, France had one army on the Italian coast under General Masséna and a second army under General Moreau in the Rhineland and Switzerland. Bonaparte assembled a third army in eastern France, not too far from the Alps.
- The Austrians had some 93,000 men in Italy under the command of General Mélas. In Italy, Mélas attacked the French at Genoa. The Austrians hoped to march up along the Mediterranean coast, invade southeastern France, and rendezvous with the British navy.
- In response, Bonaparte came up with a bold strategy. He sent 50,000 men straight over the alpine passes and down toward Milan. He planned to execute a great *manoeuvre sur les derrières*, cutting

off the supply lines of the Austrians on the plains of northern Italy. The crossing of the Alps was trademark Bonaparte: unexpected and dazzling in its boldness.

- In early June, the Austrian enemy defeated Masséna and the French at the siege of Genoa. From Milan, Bonaparte set out toward Genoa, but he made an uncharacteristic mistake: He underestimated the Austrians.
  - About 15,000 of the French troops were camped on a riverbank on the plains near the village of Marengo, roughly halfway between Genoa and Turin.
  - At dawn on June 14, the Austrians crossed the river with 100 cannon and hit the French head on with 31,000 men. By 11:00 am, Bonaparte arrived on the scene and realized—belatedly—that the attack was real. The French right flank was peeling back. Bonaparte called up his consular reserves to shore up the right.
  - By 3:00 pm, the Austrian general Mélas was so confident of victory that he turned over command to his chief of staff. At that same time, General Louis Desaix, who had been Napoleon's right-hand man in Egypt, arrived. He and another young general, François-Etienne Kellermann, managed to turn the tide against the Austrians.



**The crossing of the Alps allied Napoleon in the popular mind with Hannibal and Charlemagne—other great men who had crossed the Alps.**

- In the end, the French sustained more than 6,000 casualties, including Desaix, and the Austrians, some 14,000. Within two days, Mélas agreed to an armistice to withdraw Austrian forces out of Genoa and Lombardy.
- Much ink has been spent assessing Bonaparte's mistakes at Marengo, but the bottom line was that he'd won again, and this victory secured his hold on political power at home. All France was swept up in rejoicing.

### **Napoleon as Peacemaker**

- Napoleon's political power always rested on his military prowess and glory, but it also rested—especially at this moment—on his ability to make peace. Between 1800 and 1803, Bonaparte negotiated treaties with Bavaria, Naples, Spain, Portugal, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, the United States, and above all, Britain and Austria.
- Bonaparte received some vital help in achieving peace with Britain and Austria in December 1800. In a crucial victory, the French general Moreau smashed the Austrians at Hohenlinden near Munich. French victories in northern Italy and at Hohenlinden meant that Bonaparte could make peace with the Austrians and the British in two separate treaties, at Lunéville in 1801 and Amiens in 1802. For the first time in 10 years, all Europe was at peace.
- Significantly, the treaties acknowledged that France held hegemony over western Europe, including control over much of northern Italy, Belgium, and the left bank of the Rhine. The Austrians also recognized France's satellite republics in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy.
- Peace would not last much longer than a year, but it served the first consul well in 1802. Much later, in exile on St. Helena, Napoleon said, "We have drowned the Revolution's earlier shame in floods of glory."

## Bonaparte's Model of Politics

- Bonaparte had a fundamentally different model of politics than the revolutionaries had had. He believed that politics and decision making should come from the top, not the bottom. The purpose of government was to administer France and bring stability and order—to get things done.
- Bonaparte also had tremendous confidence in his own abilities and energies. The first consul should embody the unity of the nation. He incarnated popular sovereignty, and he should run France. But Bonaparte didn't simply leap onto the imperial throne. Instead, he worked step by step to create his vision of stability and to deal with opponents.
- In February of 1800, Bonaparte moved into the Tuileries Palace, but he presented himself as an ordinary man of the people, the product of the Revolution and a man working hard to secure the Republic.
- In the early Consulate, Bonaparte engaged in what historians usually call depoliticizing France. He aimed to bring order and calm to France by tamping down all the political talk, agitation, and conflict.
  - The political clubs that had revived under the Directory were no longer allowed in Napoleonic France. Bonaparte booted out two-thirds of the members of the Paris municipal government, and soon, he would purge the Tribunate of oppositional voices. Right after the Brumaire coup, Bonaparte also began to close down the press.
  - Given the dreams and conflicts of the recent years, politics didn't quite disappear but smoldered underground.

## The Christmas Eve Plot

- On Christmas Eve of 1800, Napoleon narrowly missed being killed by an explosion on his way to the theater. Police later conclusively determined that the explosion was the result of a royalist plot to kill the first consul. But Bonaparte disagreed. He insisted that

“anarchists” had planted a bomb to kill him. By anarchists, he meant Jacobins.

- In the Consulate, despite the depoliticizing atmosphere, Bonaparte still had some vocal critics and opponents.
  - The list included disillusioned intellectuals, such as Madame de Staël; some rival generals; some leading liberals, including members of the legislature; and of course, the royalists and Jacobins at the two ends of the political spectrum.
  - Of all these critics, Bonaparte mistrusted the Jacobins the most. He knew that they’d never surrender their old beliefs and take his side. To him, they disrupted both the social order and his will to power.
- Ultimately, 11 men were executed—2 royalists who were, in fact, guilty and 9 Jacobins who were not. But Bonaparte also decreed the deportation of some 130 Jacobins without trial or even a specific accusation. Liberal advisors in the Council of State balked at arresting men based on the vaguest of charges, but in the end, they supported Napoleon.
- As the historian Isser Woloch has pointed out, the liberals’ willingness to follow Napoleon helps answer a key question: Why were former revolutionaries willing to surrender notions of rights and instead back a more authoritarian regime? The answer is that they made a tradeoff of stability and order over uncertainty and the defense of rights.
- In the aftermath of the attack, in February 1801, Bonaparte also stepped up his system of military and special tribunals, particularly in parts of southern and western France that were especially unruly. These tribunals put on trial, executed, or imprisoned hundreds of brigands, draft-dodgers, and political opponents of the Consulate.
- Still, Bonaparte knew how to combine conciliation with repression and the pursuit of order. Already in early 1800, he opened the door

to the return of the émigrés, welcoming back any who were willing to aid his cause.

### **Royalists and Religion**

- At first, some royalists thought that Napoleon's rise to power might provide an opening. In early 1800, Louis XVI's brother, still in exile, sent Bonaparte a feeler about restoring the monarchy. Napoleon let months pass before he even replied, and then he wrote, "Monsieur, you must not hope for your return to France."
- But royalism inside France was far from dead. The Vendée and other parts of the west had never made their peace with the religious and political policies of the Republic. In 1799, when Bonaparte came to power, royalist guerillas in the Vendée, Brittany, and Normandy fought determinedly against the French Republic. The British offered these rebels behind-the-scenes support, and Bonaparte sent in one of his toughest generals to crush the revolt.
- However, Bonaparte also met with prominent royalist leaders and urged them to join his cause. He recognized that the best way to rally royalists to his side was to solve the religious problem left behind by the Revolution.
  - The Directory had never made peace with the church. Further, in 1798, when the French invaded Rome and set up the Roman sister republic, they had kidnapped Pope Pius VI, who later died in captivity.
  - Bonaparte was not a spiritual man, but he valued the social and moral usefulness of religion. If he could reach an agreement with the new pope, Pius VII, to regularize the position of the Catholic Church in France, he knew he would defuse the biggest reason for opposition to the government.
  - Pius VII also wanted to reestablish the Catholic Church in France. Negotiations began in secret in 1800. The resulting agreement, known as the Concordat, would govern France's relationship with the church until 1905. Napoleon agreed to

recognize Catholicism as the religion of the majority of French cities, and Pius surrendered any claim to the church lands the revolutionaries had nationalized and sold over the last 10 years.

- The Concordat shows us a striking side of Bonaparte: his ability to negotiate between the modern and the traditional, the Revolution and the past. Only three weeks earlier, Bonaparte had brought an end to the war with his treaty with Britain. With the Concordat, he had made another kind of peace. In August of 1802, he was elected first consul for life.

### Suggested Reading

Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*.

Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life*.

Herold, *The Age of Napoleon*.

Jordan, *Napoleon and the Revolution*.

Woloch, *Napoleon and His Collaborators*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How do popular attitudes toward leaders combine judgments about the leaders' international actions and domestic moves? Why do you think international success seems so pivotal to popular approval of political leaders?
2. Why was Napoleon successful at consolidating power and making himself consul for life by 1802?

# Napoleon Becomes Emperor

## Lecture 38

**B**y 1802, when Napoleon became first consul for life, everyone noticed changes in his behavior and surroundings. He had grown less accessible and more distant, and his very presence seemed to demand more deference. This new remoteness and formality were becoming part of his mystique of power. Clearly, France was changing during the Consulate, and by 1804, Napoleon would become emperor. Why were French people of different backgrounds willing to accept this change? To answer that question, we'll return to Bonaparte's relationship to the Revolution. As Napoleon built his more monarchical style, his family played a pivotal role; thus, we'll begin this lecture with a look at Josephine and the Bonapartes.

### Napoleon's Wife and Siblings

- Napoleon and Josephine seemed at their happiest in the early 1800s. When he came back from Egypt in 1799, he'd been set on divorcing her because of the affair she'd been having, but when she begged his forgiveness, he backed off. Now, the couple seemed to develop a real tenderness for each other. And at his new court, Josephine was resplendent and gracious—and politically capable.
- Like a monarch, Bonaparte promoted members of his family—four brothers and three sisters—to positions of power. But as he grew more ambitious, he worried that he had no heir. In 1802, he and Josephine convinced Hortense, Josephine's daughter from her first marriage, to marry Napoleon's third brother, the moody Louis. Perhaps this marriage would bring the families together and produce an heir or even a successor.
- Napoleon relied most on his older brother, Joseph, who had negotiated the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. He had a harder time getting along with his second brother, Lucien, who was more hot-headed, pro-revolutionary, and critical of Napoleon's increasing

authoritarianism. Napoleon also spent time trying to discipline and rein in his youngest brother, Jérôme.

- The Bonaparte clan squabbled continuously, but Napoleon counted on his siblings, and they would gain a great deal from his ascent to power.

### **Execution of the Duke d'Enghien**

- On March 14, 1804, a detachment of French soldiers crossed the border into the Duchy of Baden, just to the east of France. In the dead of night, they snatched the duke d'Enghien—a second cousin of Louis XVI, an émigré, and a well-known royalist—and spirited him back to Paris.
- The French police claimed that the duke was part of an immense Anglo-royalist conspiracy, a plot to kidnap Bonaparte. Authorities had learned that this conspiracy included plans for a Bourbon prince to march into France to stir people up for restoring the crown. Enghien became the chief suspect.
- In fact, there was a web of conspiracy, with agents inside and outside of France, but Enghien had nothing to do with it. No evidence beyond the duke's blustering royalist statements linked him to the plot. Still, he faced a summary court-martial a week later and was executed by a firing squad.
- All Europe was shocked. The French had violated international law by crossing into Baden and seizing Enghien. It was virtually an act of war.
  - Even Bonaparte's own court was stunned. All the nobles who had recently returned to France felt betrayed. And among the royal courts of Europe, Bonaparte resembled the worst of the revolutionaries. Like them, he'd killed a Bourbon prince.
  - To Bonaparte and his closest supporters, the discovery of this latest royalist plot proved that his own position needed shoring up. He was vulnerable to assassination or overthrow.

## Declaration of the Emperor

- Only a few days after Enghien's death, Cambacérès, the second consul and Napoleon's right-hand man, told the Council of State that the first consul wanted them to debate whether perhaps he should be made emperor. Napoleon was not present.
- Cambacérès himself opposed the idea, and some advisors advocated a delay, but the writing was on the wall. Napoleon's backers argued that strengthening his position and making it hereditary would stave off assassination attempts. They insisted that France had nothing to fear. After all, Napoleon was "himself the child of the Revolution."
- Those who had been hesitant withdrew their claims. The Senate backed the idea, as did all but one man of the Tribunate, Lazare Carnot. As a member of the Committee of Public Safety, Carnot had spearheaded the efforts to organize all of France's manpower and resources to save the Republic from outside invaders during the Terror. Now, he refused to vote for what he called "the reestablishment of monarchy."
- The Senate declared Napoleon emperor, and he introduced his third plebiscite and third constitution in five years. The men of France were asked to vote on this pronouncement: "The government of the Republic is entrusted to the Emperor." The votes in favor won out, though voter turnout had dropped considerably since 1802.
- The new constitution made the imperial crown hereditary. Napoleon had founded a dynasty, and interestingly, he had founded it on a popular vote. This was a new and unusual form of one-man rule.
- Many people were deeply disillusioned by Napoleon's move to emperor, but overall, France was calm. In naming his successor—a nephew—Bonaparte bypassed his brothers, sparking anger in his family.

## Coronation

- The coronation ceremony was scheduled to take place at Notre Dame in Paris. The ceremony would combine religious ritual with Roman imperial pageantry and references to the medieval emperor Charlemagne. Napoleon even managed to convince Pope Pius VII to take part.
- For the event, Napoleon and Josephine were both sumptuously dressed in white satin and crimson velvet. Josephine's attire alone cost more than 100,000 francs. Countless diamonds adorned her tiara, earrings, and necklace, and even her undergarments were decorated with emeralds.
- At the peak moment of the ceremony, Pius anointed the emperor and empress. He'd agreed ahead of time to let Bonaparte crown himself. Napoleon turned his back to the pope, faced the crowd, and placed the golden crown squarely on his own head.
- For Napoleon, the title emperor had panache. It evoked Caesar and Charlemagne and hinted at imperial expansion of territory. It might nullify the royalist claims of the king's brother in exile. And it conveyed a greatness and power beyond a mere royal crown.



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**Napoleon's crimson coronation robe was so studded with gold and jewels that it reportedly weighed more than 80 pounds!**

## Napoleon and the Revolution

- Why did the French people agree to replace the Republic with an Empire and let this single man rule them after they had fought so hard for a republic? To answer that question, we need to consider Napoleon's own relationship to the French Revolution.
- Without a doubt, Bonaparte suppressed at least three crucial elements of the Revolution's goals: (1) democratic politics, (2) free-form political discussion, and (3) a large number of egalitarian social reforms.
- But there were certain elements from the Revolution that Bonaparte preserved and transformed—gains that people valued. By 1802, he had made peace and secured France's "natural frontiers," and he had restored Catholicism to France.
- Napoleon seemed to offer something to everybody. To many ordinary people, he represented glory, peace, a return to religion, stability, and the possibility of upward mobility. Men of means appreciated his tamping down of popular activism and his defense of property. And in the eyes of many republicans, Bonaparte stood as the best remaining bulwark against royalism and a return to the Old Regime world of privilege.
- Napoleon was also a state builder, a man who contributed to altering fundamental institutions in France and beyond. During the five years of the Consulate, Napoleon and his advisors continually created institutions that tempered the Revolution but also built on it.
  - In 1802, for example, Bonaparte set up the Legion of Honor to reward men who had provided crucial service to the state, either in the military or in civilian service. Those appointed to the legion won a title, a medal, and a pension for life.
  - On the one hand, the Legion of Honor represented a true value of the Revolution: A man could rise up through the ranks, as Bonaparte himself had.

- On the other hand, many skeptics and opponents saw the legion as restoring a system of titles, ranks, and privileges. Almost half the Council of State and a third of the Tribunalate opposed the new institution. Lafayette refused the honor.
- As the emperor negotiated his way between revolutionary change and Napoleonic stability, he denounced revolutionary individualistic society as built on “grains of sand” and called for erecting “masses of granite on the soil of France.”
  - The “masses of granite” came to mean the social group—the solid notables and men of property—who would support his regime. But the phrase also referred to a wider set of institutions to underpin French state and society.
  - In every instance, these masses of granite built on revolutionary innovations but toned down their more controversial or ambitious goals. In education, for example, Bonaparte did not return to the project of primary schooling; instead, he built on the secondary schools of the Directory, but he made the system more centralized and less autonomous.
- Of all his acts of state building, Bonaparte was proudest of all of his civil code, completed by 1804. This law code governed questions of family, property, and the civil status of individuals. In modified form, it still governs French civil law.
  - The civil code cemented certain revolutionary acts that had fundamentally changed French society. It put a permanent stamp on France’s abolition of feudalism and privilege and formally backed the idea of the equality of all men before the law. At the same time, it guaranteed the status of private property.
  - Like the Revolution’s laws, the new civil code was national, and it was meant to be systematic and rational. The hodgepodge of local customs and diverse laws of the Old Regime was gone forever.

- Bonaparte didn't write the code, but he met frequently with the four jurists and the Council of State that hammered out its central ideas. He purged the Tribunate of liberal members when they resisted the rollback of certain revolutionary reforms.
- In answer to the question of why the French accepted an emperor after a revolution, we can say this: Yes, Napoleon ended the Revolution and drained politics of its voice, but in exchange, he brought valuable stability and secured certain revolutionary reforms. Further, Napoleon seemed like the best bet against a return to either royalism and the Old Regime or the radical Revolution and the Terror.

### Suggested Reading

Forrest, *Napoleon: Life, Legacy, and Image*.

Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution*.

Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte: A Life*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Napoleon changed over the five years between 1799 and 1804, or do you think his interior self remained somehow constant?
2. How did Napoleon combine conservative and revolutionary elements? Was he a contradictory figure? A unique synthesis?

# Napoleon's Ambitions in the New World

## Lecture 39

**A**lthough Napoleon would win fame as the conqueror of Europe, he had even wider aspirations. This lecture explores his colonizing goals in the Atlantic world, focusing on the territory of Louisiana and the colony of Saint-Domingue. Bonaparte's Atlantic ambitions were largely motivated by France's colonial rivalry with Great Britain. They had competed for decades over products from North America and the Caribbean. Now, they also jockeyed for trade with the new United States. From the moment he took power, Bonaparte saw possibilities for strengthening France in the Americas. He envisioned a vast western empire, with Saint-Domingue and the other Caribbean islands at its rich, sugar-producing center. In North America, he imagined it would also include Louisiana to supply the colonies.

### The Louisiana Territory

- Around 1800, the territory of Louisiana encompassed much more than the current state. It was an uncharted chunk of land that sprawled west from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and included the entire Great Plains and parts of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. At the time, the various European powers saw this territory as up for grabs.
  - The vast majority of Louisiana's inhabitants were Native Americans, but the Spanish had claimed the territory ever since the French had surrendered it to them in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years' War. The British in Canada also had their eye on the territory.
  - The French wanted to reclaim Louisiana because it held the crucial capacity to provide timber, flour, salted meat, and other food to the Caribbean colonies. And whichever nation held New Orleans controlled the shipping of goods down the Mississippi.

- In a secret treaty with Napoleon in 1800, the Spanish agreed to return Louisiana to France sometime soon in exchange for some Italian territories.
- For their part, the Americans who lived west of the Appalachians needed to be able to ship timber, tobacco, cotton, furs, and grain through the port of New Orleans. In the late 1790s, Spain had allowed this. But in 1801, when word began to circulate that France would take possession of the Louisiana Territory, the new president, Thomas Jefferson, became concerned. He predicted that France and the United States would come to blows over the Mississippi corridor.
  - Further, if the French held the Mississippi, Jefferson worried that they might convince Americans in the West to form a rival American state west of the Appalachian Mountains.
  - In late 1802, just before surrendering Louisiana to the French, the Spanish abruptly cut off shipping at New Orleans. This move infuriated Western Americans.
- Jefferson decided that he'd rather make a deal with the French than face either war or the possible breaking apart of the American union. In the spring of 1803, he authorized Robert Livingston, the American representative in Paris, to offer \$10 million to France in exchange for New Orleans and the Florida area. Napoleon told his finance minister to sell all of Louisiana. Livingston and James Monroe quickly closed the deal; in a single stroke, the Americans added more than 800,000 square miles to their new nation.

### **Saint-Domingue and Toussaint Louverture**

- Despite the abolition of slavery in 1793–1794, Saint-Domingue was wracked by warfare throughout the 1790s. In this cauldron of conflict, numerous groups struggled for control: French, Spanish, British, and rival black generals forging alliances with former slaves and people of color. By 1800, one man had emerged as the dominant figure in Saint-Domingue: the one-time slave and brilliant military leader Toussaint Louverture.

- Toussaint had a particular vision of how to lead Saint-Domingue. For the island to survive politically and economically, the plantation system had to be maintained. He forbid former slaves from moving to the cities or taking to the mountains, forcing them to stay put and work. By 1800, Saint-Domingue's plantation economy was just beginning to recover from years of revolt and warfare.
- At the same time, Toussaint defended abolition, and when Napoleon took power in France, Toussaint feared that he would restore slavery. He noticed that the first Napoleonic constitution had no guarantee of rights for anyone and no word about slavery or freedom in the French colonies.
- Toussaint also sought to consolidate his own power and produce a constitution for Saint-Domingue.
  - In 1801, this constitution declared Toussaint governor for life, promised the eternal abolition of slavery, and declared, "all men, whatever their color, are eligible for all positions." This was a pathbreaking move: It established a legal end to racial hierarchy and secured emancipation as a civil right.
  - At the same time, Toussaint's contradictory constitution reinforced the militarized system of forced labor on plantations. Laborers would be paid, but they could not leave the plantations.
- In writing this constitution, Toussaint and his fellow leaders took part in the great adventure of the revolutionary era: experimenting with new forms of politics and new social visions, often based on the ideology of rights but tied to the rule of law. Across the Atlantic world, such experiments were riddled with contradictions, inequities, and uncertainties.
- Saint-Domingue did not explicitly break away from France, but in writing the constitution, Toussaint challenged the bonds of colonial control and acted as if Saint-Domingue were independent.

Bonaparte paid attention to this display of power by an upstart black general.

### French Invasion of Saint-Domingue

- Knowing the economic value of the colonies and their role in the rivalry with Britain, Napoleon wanted to assert French control in the Caribbean. He had no ideological commitment to ending slavery but decided against restoring it in Saint-Domingue to avoid an alliance between ex-slaves and Britain.
- At the same time, however, Bonaparte was actively listening to merchants and white plantation owners in Paris, who urged him to reestablish slavery in Saint-Domingue. They pointed out that their property had been stolen and that slave plantations had long made France prosperous. No one quite knew what Napoleon would do.
- In the fall of 1801, Napoleon enlisted his brother-in-law, General Charles-Victor Leclerc, to lead an expedition to Saint-Domingue to rein in Toussaint. Leclerc set sail with 20,000 soldiers and more than 50 ships and frigates. In February of 1802, when he saw the size of the French fleet, Toussaint said, “All of France has come to overwhelm us.”
- At first, the French were able to win victories on the northern plains, but they couldn't overcome the guerilla-style warfare



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**General Charles-Victor Leclerc arrived in Saint-Domingue in February of 1802 to rein in Toussaint, but he quickly realized that overcoming guerilla resistance would not be easy.**

of the black forces. The French also faced a deadly epidemic of yellow fever; by the end of April, about a third of Leclerc's men had fallen ill.

- In the spring of 1802, with the fighting in a stalemate, Leclerc was finally able to convince some black generals to lay down their arms, including Toussaint. But Leclerc suspected that Toussaint was still working against him behind the scenes. In early June, the French lured Toussaint to a meeting, arrested him, and shipped him, along with his captive sons and wife, across the ocean to prison in France. He died there a year later.
- Leclerc's confidence grew after the capture of Toussaint, but during the summer, rumors began to circulate that Napoleon definitely planned to reestablish slavery. In fact, in May of 1802, he had already repealed the universal abolition of 1794. The French also reopened the slave trade. The ex-slaves on Saint-Domingue fought with a new level of desperation and determination; many of the black generals and troops who had aligned with Leclerc abandoned him.
- In November of 1802, Leclerc died of yellow fever. One black general, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, unified the insurgents under his command. By the end of 1803, the French withdrew in final defeat. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines led a ceremony to declare Saint-Domingue's independence, renaming the island Haiti. Political leaders established a dictatorship and militarized state, but there was no return to slavery.

### **Napoleon's Atlantic Vision?**

- For Napoleon, after the loss of Saint-Domingue, the Louisiana Territory began to look like more trouble than it was worth. He knew he would no longer need it to supply the plantations of Saint-Domingue, and it would be difficult to defend against the English. Further, France was on the verge of returning to war with Britain, and Napoleon could use some cash. Thus, the Americans' offer was too good to pass up.

- For the United States, the Louisiana Purchase clearly transformed the nation into an empire. Further, France's failure in the Caribbean paved the way for the westward surge in America. Ironically, the courage of former slaves fighting in Saint-Domingue created the opportunity for American colonial expansion, with all its complicated repercussions, including a tremendous increase in American resources, the spread of American slavery west of the Mississippi, and decades of warfare against Native Americans.
- The momentous losses in the New World left Napoleon to focus his full attention on the European arena.

### **Rivalry with England**

- In the spring of 1802, France and Britain had made peace in the Treaty of Amiens, but this peace would last only 14 months. From then on, England and France would be at war continuously until Napoleon's fall.
- Why did France and England go back to war? This question is fraught with historical controversy. Frequently, English historians have cited Napoleon's overweening ambition, and French historians have tended to blame British intransigence. But both sides made moves that antagonized the other, and both violated the Treaty of Amiens.
  - Napoleon annexed territory in Italy, delayed his evacuation of Holland, and sent troops into Switzerland as a French client state. He refused to open French trade to British products and angled to expand his power in the Americas.
  - Meanwhile, English secret agents actively organized with royalists inside France, and Britain refused to surrender Malta, as had been agreed in the Treaty of Amiens. Napoleon taunted the British on this issue, and in May of 1803, Britain declared war on France.
- From 1803 to 1805, Napoleon massed troops, supplies, and ships on the Atlantic coast, maintaining the threat of an invasion across the

English Channel. But the logistical difficulties of such an invasion would be significant, and the British navy had only widened its advantages over the French during peacetime.

- Finally, in 1805, once the Spanish had allied with the French, the French and Spanish navies attempted to lure the British toward the Caribbean to leave the channel unguarded, but they completely bungled the attempt. Ultimately, Napoleon shelved his plans for invasion.
- By August of 1805, Russia and Austria had joined the British in a new coalition against the French. Thus, Napoleon marched his Grande Armée east, hundreds of miles across France and into German territory.

### Suggested Reading

Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*.

Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

Kastor and Weil, eds., *Empires of the Imagination*.

Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Older historical discussions of the Atlantic revolutions omitted the story of Saint-Domingue. How does including the story of Saint-Domingue/Haiti change our understanding of the age of revolution?
2. The events in this lecture seem to provoke hypothetical questions, such as: What if France had not sold Louisiana to the United States, or what if France had managed to invade England? Historians tend to mistrust counterfactual hypotheses, but they can be intriguing. For understanding history, what do you think should be the role of asking: “What if x had happened”?

# Taking on the Great Powers

## Lecture 40

In his memoirs, the French Romantic author François-René de Chateaubriand summed up Napoleon in just a few words: “He threw himself upon the world and shook it.” This lecture looks at one of the best examples of Napoleon throwing himself upon the world and shaking it: In 1805, Napoleon’s Grande Armée swept into Central Europe and decisively defeated the Austrians and Russians. We’ll look in depth at the Danube campaign and the Battle of Austerlitz, as well as the process by which Napoleon began to transform the “great nation” of France into the “Great Empire.”

### Return to War

- At the end of the last lecture, we left the French camped out on the Atlantic coast, at war with England in 1805. By that summer, war spread across the Continent. England convinced Russia, Austria, and Sweden to join the Third Coalition against France. Why did Europe go back to war?
- The European monarchs in general viewed Napoleon with growing suspicion. After all, in 1804, he had stunned Europe by kidnapping and executing the duke d’Enghien. That incident had especially disillusioned Alexander I, the young czar of Russia, who now saw Bonaparte as a rival to his own ambitions in eastern and southeastern Europe. The fact that Napoleon had boldly crowned himself emperor also raised hackles abroad.
- For his part, Napoleon defied old rules of diplomacy and dreamed up new ways to thumb his nose at the old powers. In 1803, in the Holy Roman Empire, he’d reorganized the boundaries of small German states and occupied Hanover. In May of 1805, at his coronation as ruler of Italy, he had renamed the Italian Republic as the “Kingdom of Italy.” In June of 1805, he annexed Genoa, and

for Austria, this was the last straw. The war of the Third Coalition began in September of 1805.

### **The Grande Armée**

- The men who had been stationed on the west coast of France, preparing to invade England in 1805, formed the core of Napoleon's Grande Armée and represented his finest army. This force was a hybrid group—a mix of officers from the Old Regime and volunteers and conscripts from the revolutionary era.
- Military historians trace a key evolution in military culture in the years since the early Revolution. Already during the Directory, French soldiers had grown more professional, more disciplined than the early revolutionary volunteers—and more willing to obey. It still mattered to some of them that Napoleon was leading them to make war on kings, but a fraternal culture of honor had replaced the old emphasis on revolutionary ideas and fervor.
- As in the days of the Italian campaign, Napoleon paid close attention to material details and personal rapport with his soldiers. He traveled repeatedly to the camps along the Atlantic coast to hold reviews and decorate his most prized men with the stars of the Legion of Honor. Further, the soldiers knew that Napoleon worked every bit as hard as they did.
- Beginning in 1800, Napoleon developed an all-important and innovative organizational system made up of seven corps. Each corps, of roughly 14,000 to 25,000 men, would operate like a miniature, semi-autonomous army. Each was commanded by one of Napoleon's marshals and included two to four infantry divisions, a brigade of light cavalry, several companies of artillery, engineers, medics, a supply train, and headquarters.
- Napoleon held central command over the whole army, but the corps system had crucial advantages.

- It gave tremendous strategic flexibility and mobility to the Grande Armée. The corps could travel independently and forage enough to supplement their light supply trains.
- They could also take on enemy armies separately or come together quickly. The marshals leading each corps had autonomy to make tactical decisions on the battlefield.
- Napoleon kept certain units separate from the regular corps, including his famous reserve, the Imperial Guard of elite soldiers.
- The Grande Armée was both more centralized and more flexible than the armies Napoleon would face from Austria, Russia, and eventually, Prussia. It was built for covering territory and concentrating troops swiftly, employing flexible operations and tactics, and provoking decisive battles.

### **The Danube Campaign**

- After the annexation of Genoa, the Austrians assumed that Napoleon would concentrate his firepower in Italy. In early September, the Austrian general Karl Mack invaded Bavaria with 72,000 men. The Russians followed, far to his rear. Mack guessed that Napoleon would bring an army of perhaps 70,000 to Germany and that it would take him 80 days to march from the Atlantic coast. Mack staked out a position in the area of Ulm on the Danube River, about 75 miles west of Munich.
- On October 8, the Austrians suddenly encountered French troops under Napoleon's brother-in-law, Murat. Mack then realized that more French troops were behind his forces, cutting off his communications to the east. In fact, Napoleon's marshals had marched nearly 200,000 men at breathtaking speed from the Atlantic coast. They had crossed the Rhine at various points, then swung around in massive southern arcs to get behind the Austrians to the east, north, and south.

- By October 15, Mack was completely surrounded, and the Russians were still more than 100 miles to the east. Less than a week later, Mack surrendered 27,000 Austrians as prisoners. Overall, without fighting a single major battle, the Austrians lost more than 60,000 men. Napoleon had humiliated the Austrian army.

## Battle of Trafalgar

- In the fall of 1805, the French admiral Villeneuve received orders for the Franco-Spanish fleet at Cadiz to look for an opportunity to attack the British navy, commanded by Horatio Nelson. The fleet should then make for the Mediterranean to help the French assault on Naples.



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- On October 21, 1805, off the Spanish coast, Nelson, with 27 English ships of the line, faced off against 33 French and Spanish ships. Nelson enacted a bold plan to attack the reluctant Admiral Villeneuve. He didn't fight the Franco-Spanish fleet in the classic pattern of a single line facing full front to full front. Instead, he drew up his fleet in two columns, perpendicular to the Franco-Spanish fleet, and cut through them, like crossing a t. He carved them into separate groups for concentrated attack.
- At around 1:00 in the afternoon, a French sharpshooter struck Nelson with a musket ball through his shoulder to his spine. While he lay dying, his sailors decimated the Franco-Spanish fleet.

**Horatio Nelson was feared by the French admiral Villeneuve, who knew that the British navy was superior to the French and Spanish in command, seamanship, gunnery, and tactics.**

- By late afternoon, a storm blew up, and the Franco-Spanish fleet lost 22 ships. At least 8,000 men were taken prisoner and another 6,000 either died or were wounded. The hapless Villeneuve was captured and committed suicide the following year.
- Not a single English ship was lost. Trafalgar was one of the greatest naval victories of all time, but the English had lost a hero. The battle also had the effect of further quashing Napoleon's Atlantic ambitions and redoubling his focus on continental Europe.

### **Battle of Austerlitz**

- After the French victory at Ulm in October 1805, the Russians approached from the east, but the savvy Russian general Kutuzov chose to slow down the French. He retreated, deliberately avoiding a major battle. The Russians withdrew north of Vienna, while the French occupied the glittering capital.
- The Holy Roman Emperor, the Austrian Francis II, was leaning toward asking the French for an armistice, but the young and feisty Czar Alexander overruled him. There were now more than 80,000 allied Austrian and Russian troops in the area, with more on the way.
- Napoleon knew that he might soon be badly outnumbered. The force of 90,000 Austrians in northern Italy was heading to Vienna, and Prussia had been flirting with joining the allies of the Third Coalition. Napoleon needed a major victory—and he would get one.
- The famous Battle of Austerlitz would turn out to be one of Napoleon's finest, though not his most typical. The man known for deft maneuvers or sudden and unexpected concentrations of troops now did something different: He set a trap and waited.
- Napoleon staked out his men on a high plateau known as the Pratzen Heights near the town of Austerlitz. He knew he was outnumbered—the Austro-Russian forces numbered roughly 89,000 to his 55,000—so he had ordered two of his marshals to

march their men toward Austerlitz. He brought his men down from the heights and deliberately spread them out to appear vulnerable, but to the rear, the French forces were growing.

- On December 1, Czar Alexander's men claimed the Pratzen Heights, and the next morning, just as Napoleon had hoped, the Russians sent three columns down off the heights to smash the spread-out French forces. The French began to fall back, and the Russians poured in more men from their center to hit the French right.
- The French right flank managed to hang on until one of the reinforcing corps arrived. Meanwhile, Napoleon sent his Marshal Soult, whose forces had been half hidden by morning fog, up the Pratzen Heights, straight at the center of the Russian line. The Russians desperately tried to call their men back toward the center, but only two battalions returned.
- Under Marshal Soult, the French seized the heights early on, only to fall back under a Russian counterattack. But Soult's forces rallied and wheeled right. Then French troops under Marshal Bernadotte stormed the heights from the left, and Napoleon sent in the cavalry of his Imperial Guard to strike the center and split the allies. By early afternoon, the Russians were in full retreat.
- The allies suffered crushing casualties at Austerlitz—some 27,000 men—while the French had almost 9,000. The Russians withdrew but didn't surrender. The Austrians sued for peace, and Napoleon chose to humiliate them. In the Treaty of Pressburg, the Austrian emperor Francis II signed away territory in southern Germany, in Italy around Venice, and along the Dalmatian coast. He promised to pay a huge indemnity to France and formally renounced his title as Holy Roman Emperor.

### **The Great Empire**

- In the wake of Austerlitz, Napoleon redrew the map of Germany and created a new vassal territory, the Confederation of the Rhine,

from the western part of the old Holy Roman Empire. This territory would serve as a buffer zone between France and the Central European powers of Prussia and Austria.

- He also began to carve out chunks of land across Europe for family members to rule. He placed his brother Louis on the throne of the newly created Kingdom of Holland and installed Joseph as ruler of the Kingdom of Naples. Napoleon now dominated the Low Countries, much of western Germany, and much of Italy.
- Astonished Europeans watched this patchwork empire-building—some with hope for revolutionary changes; others, with trepidation and dread.

### Suggested Reading

Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*.

Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*.

Rothenberg and Keegan, *The Napoleonic Wars*.

Tracy, *Nelson's Battles*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What factors seem most important in Napoleon's military success?
2. Napoleon redrew boundaries in Europe with amazing speed. How do you think people—rulers, local elites, and ordinary people—perceived and experienced that action? How can we interpret people's sense of territory and their regional or even national identity? How would all this state-making create losses and opportunities on the ground?

# Expanding the Empire

## Lecture 41

In this lecture, we'll watch Napoleon push his Empire beyond the limits of what he could actually rule. By 1808, his Empire included a federation of satellite kingdoms and territories that extended all along the Atlantic coast from the Netherlands to Spain; across the Mediterranean to include most of Italy and the Croatian coast; through Central and Eastern Europe to encompass Switzerland, much of western Germany, and large areas of Polish lands; and of course, France. As we'll see, an innate boldness influenced Napoleon's behavior as both a military leader and an empire-builder. This personal characteristic served him well as he led campaigns and built power, but it was also his weakness.

### Battles of Jena-Auerstädt

- The Prussian king Frederick William III had done his best to stay neutral in the fighting between Napoleon and the Third Coalition, but by 1806, he had become wary of Napoleon's growing power. In September 1806, he issued an ultimatum to Napoleon: Remove your troops back to the other side of the Rhine or face attack.
- Ever since the days of Frederick the Great's victories in the Seven Years' War, the Prussian army had a towering reputation, but that success made Prussia's generals slow to reform. They valued precision over speed or flexibility and still relied on extensive supply trains or food depots. Further, the Prussian military hierarchy left no room for able, young, non-noble officers to rise up through the ranks.
- In preparing to strike the French in 1806, the Prussians chose not to wait for their Russian allies. This decision would allow Napoleon to pick off his enemies separately, just as he'd done with the Austrians at Ulm a year earlier. Instead of attacking the Prussians head on and pushing them back toward Berlin, Napoleon planned to move fast and outflank them from the east.

- Napoleon drew up his 180,000 men into a massive marching formation called the *bataillon carré*—the “square battalion.” Imagine a huge diamond shape, made up of three columns of two corps each. They traveled northward on parallel roads, some 20 to 30 miles apart. Cavalry screened them ahead and on the sides as reconnaissance.
  - This formation allowed Napoleon to move a large number of men northeast rapidly while still being able to feed them with foraging and to maintain contact between the corps. It also enabled the forces to turn and move in any direction.
  - The use of the square battalion was a daring, beautiful move; it swept across the countryside, slicing through the Thuringian Forest and then wheeling westward. The French moved around the eastern flank of the Prussians. Napoleon aimed to strike them from the rear.
- When Napoleon found the Prussians at Jena on October 14, he thought he’d found the main body, but an even more important action was taking place the same day about 13 miles north at Auerstädt. Here, the French marshal Davout with his corps of 27,000 was holding off some 64,000 Prussians.
- Although greatly outnumbered, Davout’s infantry squares withstood early cavalry charges. Then, with tactical mastery, the general sent his divisions forward one by one to take down different parts of the Prussian forces in turn. In the middle of the assault, the Prussian commander Brunswick was mortally wounded, and by 1:00 pm, the Prussians could hold out no longer.
- The double battles of Jena-Auerstädt became the crucial turning point in this Napoleonic blitzkrieg. Some of the French corps chased the Prussians westward, away from Berlin, the capital of Prussia. Other French corps swept northeast to occupy the capital.
- This Prussian campaign illustrated core elements of Napoleon in action: his headlong pursuit of victory, his unvarying ability to

seize the initiative, his isolation of a single enemy, the mobility and flexibility of his corps system, and his willingness to take risks in pursuit of victory.

- The French victory didn't result in an immediate treaty. The Prussian king Frederick William and Queen Louise fled to East Prussia, and Napoleon still faced the British and the Russians.

### **Campaign in Poland**

- Napoleon next headed east into what had been Poland; earlier, in the 1780s and 1790s, the Polish territory had been divided up among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. When Napoleon appeared in Warsaw, many Poles saw him as a potential savior. The French, especially the revolutionaries, had longstanding ties with Poland. Perhaps the emperor would help the Poles oust their occupiers.
- In February of 1807, the French and Russian armies met in a howling snowstorm near the Polish town of Eylau and fought to a bloody draw. Both sides withdrew, exhausted. But that summer, Napoleon's men crushed Alexander's forces at the Battle of Friedland and put a decisive end to the War of the Fourth Coalition.
- What would peace mean for Poland, Prussia, Russia, and the French Empire? As a general, Napoleon liked to isolate and take down a single enemy at a time. As a diplomat and empire-builder, he pursued the same strategy.
  - In July 1807, on a raft in the middle of the Nieman River in Polish territory, the Russian czar Alexander and Napoleon met to hammer out the peace, leaving Frederick William of Prussia on the shore.
  - Prussia was the great loser of the moment. Napoleon even considered stripping Frederick William of his crown, but he settled for forcing Prussia to pay an indemnity and surrender more than a third of her territory.

- With his typical chutzpah, Napoleon created more new kingdoms. Out of Polish lands that the Prussians had seized in the 1790s, Napoleon invented a new entity, the Duchy of Warsaw. Far to the west, partly out of former Prussian lands, he would soon create the Kingdom of Westphalia.
- Napoleon and Alexander emerged from their negotiations as allies, two great powers sharing hegemony on the Continent. Alexander agreed to recognize the Duchy of Warsaw and Napoleon's Empire and to back the French economic boycott of England. Napoleon recognized Alexander's dominance in eastern and southeastern Europe and agreed to ally with him against the Ottoman Turks if necessary.

### Continental Blockade of Britain

- By the summer of 1807, Napoleon had forced the three great continental powers—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—to recognize his supremacy and become his allies, at least in theory. He'd managed to put his family members on the thrones of various states in the Germanies, Italy, and the Netherlands, and his Empire extended as far east as Poland. Arguably, he was already overextended.
- But Napoleon still had one more enemy: Great Britain. Late in 1806, he decreed that all of Europe under his control must boycott British goods or goods carried in British ships.
  - The blockade was risky and difficult to enforce. Britain ruled the seas more than ever and was already disrupting French maritime trade.
  - Further, Napoleon's allies and Empire didn't necessarily want to comply with the blockade, which could harm their own economic interests. Trying to force all of Europe to comply with the Continental System would get Napoleon embroiled ever deeper in warfare.
- In 1807, when Portugal refused to take part, Napoleon negotiated with the Spanish to allow him to send 25,000 French troops across

Spain toward Lisbon. This invasion of Portugal became the opening wedge in Napoleon's attempt to conquer Spain, which would be the tipping point for the French Empire.

### “The Spanish Ulcer”

- Napoleon thought he saw a golden opportunity in Spain that he couldn't pass up. The Spanish court was riddled with feuding and factionalism. The king, Carlos IV, allowed a chief minister, Manuel de Godoy, to run the country, but Godoy was also the lover of Carlos's wife. The king's son, Ferdinand, resented Godoy for stealing his parents' attention and power and plotted against all three.
- For Napoleon, the discord in the Spanish royal family presented an opportunity to take Spain for himself. Early in 1808, he sent his brother-in-law Joachim Murat toward Madrid with 25,000 men.



The quarrel between Carlos IV and his son created an opening that fit in well with Napoleon's improvisational and expansionist style.

- Meanwhile, Ferdinand organized his supporters in an uprising that forced Godoy to resign and Carlos to abdicate in favor of his son. Ferdinand was proclaimed the monarch, but then Carlos changed his mind. Both father and son sought Napoleon's backing.
- Napoleon convinced Ferdinand and his parents to travel to the town of Bayonne in French territory to meet with him and sort things out. But Napoleon then demanded that they both abdicate and hand the Spanish throne over to him. He sent the Spanish royals into exile in France and proclaimed his brother Joseph "king of Spain and the Indies." With this act, Napoleon had made a fatal misjudgment.
- On May 2, 1808, while Napoleon was still in southern France with the Spanish royal family, crowds in Madrid revolted against the occupying French troops. Murat put down the revolt and instituted martial law. Over the next few days, he executed some 200 insurgents. The uprising in Madrid sparked widespread resistance to the French across Spain.
- In July, Joseph arrived in Madrid to take the throne, but he stayed only 11 days. His new kingdom was in open rebellion against him. The day after his arrival in Madrid, the Spanish army beat the French badly at Bailén in the south. Europe was stunned at the French loss. Late in 1808, Napoleon went to Spain himself and put Joseph back on the throne, but Joseph never had full control of his kingdom.
- For the next five or more years, the French would be engaged in relentless warfare in Spain. The Peninsular War took two forms: guerilla warfare of localized resistance and more conventional warfare by the Spanish, British, and Portuguese armies fighting the French. Napoleon came to call the situation "the Spanish ulcer." Ongoing guerilla resistance in Spain would eat away at his Empire from within.
- How had Napoleon so misjudged the situation in Spain? He believed that he had far more potential backers there than he did,

and he thought he could easily take down the weak Spanish army, not anticipating endless guerrilla resistance.

- There was also a structural flaw in the very nature of the Napoleonic Empire: It had only one leader, who was head of state, lead diplomat, and general of the Grande Armée.
- This immense concentration of different kinds of power in the hands of one highly capable and aggressive man meant that Napoleon could weave together strands of politics, diplomacy, and war in a unified way to dominate Europe. But it also meant that the Empire had no balance of power and depended far too much on the judgment and choices of one man.

### Suggested Reading

Bell, *The First Total War*.

Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*.

Esdaille, *Napoleon's Wars*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the European powers failed to unify effectively against Napoleon?
2. Why did Napoleon invade Spain?

# France during the Empire

## Lecture 42

In his memoirs, the Romantic poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine remembered that images and tales of Napoleon had circulated in his village in southern Burgundy. “Thus it was,” Lamartine wrote, “that I felt the first sensations of *la gloire*.” It was this glory that gave Napoleon his legitimacy, and he had spent his career cultivating the image of a great warrior. In this lecture, we’ll return to France and ask two interconnected questions: How did Napoleon build his glory and his legitimacy at home? And in return, how did France serve Napoleon’s pursuit of glory and international empire? What was the impact of Napoleon’s actions as he marshaled his resources to build his Empire?

### The Need for an Heir

- Given his immense power, it may seem strange to say that Napoleon’s legitimacy was a fragile thing, but in fact, he had no royal blood or ancient claim to rule. With his plebiscites, he asked for the backing of the people, but the people are notoriously fickle. Napoleon himself—for all his confidence in his destiny—knew that his legitimacy was unstable; he believed he needed an heir to give lasting claim and dynastic power to his status as emperor.
- Napoleon believed he had proof of his fertility—sons produced by two of his mistresses—but Josephine had failed to produce an heir. By the fall of 1809, he decided that he must divorce her. An annulment granted by the pope seemed out of the question given that Napoleon had arrested Pius VII after his refusal to enforce the Continental Blockade in the Papal States.
- On December 15, 1809, a well-attended official divorce ceremony took place in the Tuileries Palace. Napoleon was visibly moved as he read a formal statement of his gratitude to Josephine.

- There were two contenders for Josephine's replacement: Czar Alexander's younger sister, Anna, only 16, and the daughter of the Austrian emperor, Marie-Louise, age 19. Napoleon chose the Austrian princess.
- A little more than a year into their marriage, a son was born, Napoléon-François-Joseph-Charles. Now that he had a dynastic heir, Napoleon needed a better imperial court to increase his status and legitimacy.



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**Europe was astonished by the fact that Napoleon would marry Marie-Louise, the daughter of Francis II of Austria and the great-niece of Marie-Antoinette.**

### The Imperial Court

- The etiquette and rituals of Napoleon's court were every bit as ceremonial as they had been in King Louis XIV's day, but the mood was quite different. Napoleon's court had a decidedly military atmosphere.
- The court was peopled by a new form of nobility created by Napoleon. He conferred the titles of duke, count, baron, and chevalier to men who had performed exceptional service. By 1814, in addition to making his siblings into kings and princesses, he had created more than 3,200 noblemen—about one-fifth of them came from Old Regime noble families.
- But the Napoleonic nobility had certain key distinctions from the Old Regime version. It was not based on blood or birth, and it carried no legal privileges or exemption from taxes. Instead, Napoleon used the new aristocracy to build the upper echelons of his state and army, secure elite support, and reinforce his own

legitimacy. And these elites could now mingle with greater ease in the elegant courts of Europe.

- The majority of Napoleon's noble titles went to military men, but another segment went to civilian servants of the state and a few industrialists. Each Napoleonic nobleman got a coat of arms and the income from a piece of landed property in the outreaches of the Empire.
- Napoleon, the one-time son of the Revolution, structured inequality into the very makeup of his state. But he still maintained his emphasis on the possibility of moving up through merit, just as he had done. One could earn nobility by aiding Napoleon.
- Many ex-revolutionaries were not quite comfortable with the return of an aristocracy, even a modern kind. The most hardcore republicans abandoned public service, while some of Napoleon's closest advisors found themselves compromising on their earlier principles.
- Interestingly, a Napoleonic nobleman could make his title hereditary only if he could prove that he had a substantial amount of wealth to pass on to the next generation.
  - With this stipulation, as always, Napoleon fused new values with old ones. To make nobility hereditary smacked of feudalism, but at the same time, requiring nobles to demonstrate their wealth in order to maintain their status was a modern move.
  - This demand also recognized the growing power of money. It was money and service to the emperor, not birth or blood or land, that conferred status in the post-revolutionary world.

### **The Remaking of Paris**

- Napoleon also had a goal of transforming Paris into a showcase of his power and glory. At Saint Helena, he later recalled that one of his "ceaseless dreams [was] to make Paris the true capital of

Europe. I wanted it to become... something fabulous, something colossal and unprecedented.”

- To this end, he commissioned one neoclassical monument after another to honor his soldiers and his victories. He built the Arc du Carrousel near the Louvre and began the Arc de Triomphe at the top of the Champs-Élysées. He imitated Trajan’s Column in Rome by erecting a great obelisk in the Place Vendôme and coating it with bronze bas-relief plaques.
- Napoleon also expanded the Louvre, which had been a royal palace in the Old Regime. The revolutionaries had transformed the Louvre into a public museum in 1793, allowing the people to see the art taken from aristocrats’ homes and the king’s palace at Versailles. During the Directory, artistic booty taken from Italy and elsewhere had been added. Now, the Louvre was renamed the Napoleon Museum and transformed into a grandiose venue for art from across the Empire.
- In all these projects, Napoleon recognized the value of keeping Parisians employed with public works. He wanted to boost the economy, and he didn’t quite trust the people not to revolt.
- The man who had made his career by providing well for his troops now carried out a series of practical reforms for urban dwellers: He rebuilt streets in the center of the city and paved the riverfronts along the Seine. He made new cemeteries outside of Paris, including the famous Père-Lachaise. And he hired Parisians to construct several bridges over the Seine—two named after his great victories at Austerlitz and Jena (Iéna).

### **Changes in the Provinces**

- Napoleon wanted all of France—not just Paris—to become stable, orderly, and prosperous in order to reinforce his domestic stability and help him rule the Empire and win wars. He had always applied his attention to improving the economy, and in the early 1800s, a series of good harvests helped him out. He also subsidized certain

industries, laid the foundations of a national bank, and promoted industrial expositions and technological education.

- But with his nervousness about popular unrest or disorder, Napoleon stepped up surveillance of workers. They had to carry passbooks that recorded their employers and place of residence. His laws also prohibited worker associations. Still, in many ways, laborers did well under the Empire. Because so many men were at war, wages for workers rose.
- Napoleons' wartime ambitions had another significant impact on ordinary citizens. For certain workers and industrialists, the Continental Blockade of Britain was a boon. Without competition from cheap English goods, France embarked on the beginnings of its own Industrial Revolution. But at the same time, the blockade curtailed trade in parts of France that depended heavily on maritime commerce, drove up prices, and created shortages of some goods.
- Meanwhile, the military expenses of the nation kept growing. In 1807, the state spent 60 percent of its revenue on war. By 1813, that percentage had risen to 80 percent. Napoleon's glory was expensive for France. And his commitment to war and military matters began to penetrate French society and culture.
- Under the Empire, Napoleon also stepped up censorship and the production of imperial propaganda. The revolutionary brouhaha of popular debate in pamphlets, political clubs, and newspapers had ended long ago. By 1811, the remaining newspapers were filled with news of France's military successes and prowess at war. The theater, book trade, salon society, and cafés were all subject to careful surveillance.

### **The Burden of Conscription**

- To fight his wars, Napoleon drew tremendous resources from outside France, including taxes, men for his armies, and indemnities from such defeated enemies as Austria and Prussia, but he also relied on France.

- Wars demanded manpower. Under the Empire, mass conscription reached unprecedented levels. Each year between 1805 and 1810, about 80,000 young men were drafted into the army. From 1810 to 1813, the numbers only went up, and the age and height requirements of conscripts went down.
- For some men, the army became an opportunity, a way out of ordinary life, but not everyone wanted to race into Napoleon’s glorious armies. Resistance to conscription was widespread; some men paid for replacements as a means of avoiding the draft, while others opted for “ghost marriages”—unions made with every intention of divorcing.
- Some potential draftees tried for medical releases, knocking out their own teeth or claiming maladies that were difficult to detect. Occasionally, fellow villagers might denounce a faker, especially if they had been drafted themselves. But in much of France, there was no strong cultural sense that young men needed to serve the state. On the contrary, whole communities often supported draft dodgers and defended them as a point of honor against the state.
- Draft resistance ran highest in the countryside, especially in areas where the terrain allowed young men to hide in the mountains, marshland, or forests. In response, Napoleon stepped up his efforts to capture evaders. He sent in armed men and even billeted troops at the homes of families whose sons had fled. Such techniques increased compliance but alienated many and broke the revolutionary ideal of the citizen-soldier—the notion that young men who served the homeland earned their rights as citizens.

### Suggested Reading

Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life*.

Forrest, *Napoleon: Life, Legacy, and Image*.

Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do new regimes or new leaders build up their political legitimacy in various historical moments and places?
2. Why do you think Napoleon was able to get away with creating a new nobility? How can we understand this move? Why did he want to do it? And how does it relate to the changing structure of French society after the Revolution?

# Living under the Empire

## Lecture 43

**N**apoleon's goal was not just to conquer and rule but to transform and integrate Europe. Ever since he fell from power, historians have debated how to interpret his imperial project. Was he a modernizer and liberal reformer? Was he a cultural imperialist? Or was he an old-style ruler who exploited conquered peoples and dressed up his exploitation in claims of liberation? It's possible to make a case for each of these interpretations because of a fundamental contradiction at the heart of Napoleonic imperialism: He tried to introduce innovative and modernizing reforms, but his policies also aimed to subordinate peoples and to extract a heavy toll in taxes, soldiers, and lands. This lecture examines Napoleon's impact across his European Empire.

### **Napoleon's Vision of Empire**

- Napoleon's vision of empire was both breathtakingly ambitious and an act of improvisation. He drew inspiration from the Enlightenment, with its scientific models of progress and enlightened reforms from above, as well as some revolutionary ideas and his military experience.
- The Great Empire was vast, ad hoc, and cobbled together, but Napoleon and his men believed that policies across France's Empire should be centralized, rational, uniform, and efficient. The Empire was also meant to be authoritarian; power and reforms would come from Napoleon.
- Further, Napoleon wanted to promote a social and legal model that eliminated the world of traditional privilege and introduced judicial uniformity, equality before the law, and defense of private property. Note, however, that Napoleon was not a social radical; he disliked the old-style hierarchy of nobles and high clergy, but he had no desire to press for social equality.

- A fourth goal for Napoleon was that the secular state should have power over religion and minority faiths should be recognized. A fifth goal was that the Empire should be French. New territories would send men and taxes for France's armies and model themselves on French ways of doing things. French reformers assumed they were carriers of civilization and modernity.

### **Napoleon's Treatment of Jews**

- Napoleon's treatment of Jews embodied many of his guiding visions for the Empire, and his reforms in this area would have a lasting influence in Europe. He sought to redefine Jews' relationship to the state and encourage them to assimilate within the Empire.
- Enlightenment ideas about religious toleration informed Napoleon's thinking, but a much stronger motive was that he viewed the Jews as a social problem.
  - He was bent on introducing uniform practices that demanded uniform obligations from people across the Empire. But even after the revolutionary laws in France had made Jews citizens, they didn't fit in.
  - Napoleon saw Jews as too recalcitrantly separate, and their rabbis and communal leaders had too much power. They governed not just religion but also "political and civil laws, the habits, and all the customs of life."
- In 1806, Napoleon convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables in Paris. The job of these Jewish leaders was to demonstrate how Jewish beliefs and practices could be compatible with loyalty to the Empire. The notables had to answer a series of 12 questions dealing with usury, rabbis' activities, Jewish attitudes toward their French "brethren," marriage, and so on. In the end, they gave answers that left some room for interpretation but nonetheless satisfied the emperor.
- Emancipation for Jews under the Empire worked out unevenly. First, Napoleon maintained a version of revolutionary citizenship

principles for the Jews and spread them beyond France. Ironically, however, he placed immediate limits and specifications on the equal treatment of Jews as citizens. Obviously, he desired assimilation more than uniform or equal treatment.

- Under the Empire, the state also became more involved in overseeing Judaism. Napoleonic officials and the Assembly of Jewish Notables hammered out a new system of consistories—governing councils of Jewish affairs—that spread across the Empire in cities with substantial Jewish populations.
- By far, the largest population of Jews in the Empire—almost 800,000—lived in the Polish Duchy of Warsaw. Here, Gentile elites convinced French authorities to suspend Jews’ political and civil emancipation on the grounds that they hadn’t integrated enough into mainstream society. Only a few of the most well-established Jews managed to gain rights to own property and move into upscale neighborhoods in Warsaw.
- Anti-Semitism also limited the practices of emancipation elsewhere. By and large, the greatest transformations in Jewish life took place within France and nearby areas, such as northern Italy and western Germany.
- Opening the ghettos and lifting residence requirements meant that Jews had increased mobility. But when well-off Jews moved out of the ghettos, their poorer neighbors often suffered because key donors of money left the community. Bridges and houses crumbled, and the system of poor relief broke down.
- In some places, Jews moved into once-forbidden occupations or bought land—a practice previously forbidden to them. Sephardic Jews of southwestern France became city officials, artisans, professionals, and landowners. More and more Jews sent their children to public schools.

- Napoleon had set up a model of assimilation that had lasting power in Europe, especially in France, and would have tremendous influence into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Supporters of Napoleonic Reforms**

- The Napoleonic Empire attempted to institute a long list of reforms, including the civil code, new education systems, uniform taxation, the dissolution of serfdom, an end to noble privileges, centralized police forces, censorship, nationalization of church property, and much more. These reforms met with mixed results and stirred up opposition, although they also had local supporters.
- At times, particular regions had reason to back Napoleon. For example, in southern German states, such as Bavaria, he was hailed as the hero who had defeated the enemy, the Austrians, and was championed by both conservatives and liberals.
- Overall, outside France, Napoleon won much more support from the upwardly mobile middle classes and new elites than he did from the popular masses. He had the greatest success in those territories occupied for the longest time by France, such as Belgium, the Rhineland, and northern Italy.
- Especially in the early years, educated elites often associated Napoleonic reforms with the Enlightenment and progress. That meant that in some cities, such as Milan or Brussels, Napoleon received the backing of a wide array of individuals—former supporters of the Enlightenment, anticlerical Freemasons, lawyers, city officials, scientists, old radicals and patriots, and in some cases, merchants or industrialists.
- French administrators held many of the highest positions within the imperial administration, but they enlisted the aid of local elites in their reform projects. This approach was particularly successful in the town of Aachen in the Rhineland, which had benefited from Napoleon's Continental Blockade.

- For European elites who had embraced the Enlightenment, the Empire created opportunities for innovations in science, engineering, and technology. Legally trained figures could help implement Napoleonic judicial reforms and run the new streamlined courts.
- Many local elites and middle classes viewed the Napoleonic regime as an opportunity to move up in his merit-based bureaucracy, as tax collectors, land surveyors, policemen, or local officials. The Empire also rewarded military men of all nationalities with special economic, administrative, and political opportunities.
- In Catholic parts of his Empire, Napoleon nationalized church lands and put them up for sale. Men with money could buy into this valuable real estate. Bourgeois city dwellers snapped up rural and urban properties. Manufacturers could purchase old monasteries or convents and use them for workshop spaces. Buyers of nationalized lands included merchants, speculators, military officers, some nobles, and Jews, who had never been able to buy land before.

### **Opposition to Reform**

- Even among the most enthusiastic of local elites, loyalty to Napoleon was always fragile. French administrators repeatedly found themselves struggling to mediate between the goals of local reformers and Napoleon's insistence on thoroughgoing, standardized reforms *à la française*.
- The economic downturn of 1810–1811 and Napoleon's incessant demands for taxes and men increasingly caused him to lose the support of former advocates. Further, he was never able to win the hearts of the popular classes in Europe. Many disliked his antireligious policies, and he had never prioritized deep-rooted egalitarian reforms that might benefit the people.
- Napoleon's economic policies also wreaked havoc with the livelihoods of thousands of citizens in the Empire. The blockade against Britain had helped some inland areas, but it produced

depression and despair in coastal areas and whole regions that depended on international trade.

- In the Netherlands, for example, the Continental System devastated the economy. Louis, king of Holland, failed in his desperate attempt to convince his brother that trying to cut Holland off from British commerce was like “trying to stop skin from sweating.” Louis’s refusal to fully enforce either the blockade or conscription ultimately provoked Napoleon to remove him from the throne in 1810.
- In the coastal city of Hamburg, dock workers, merchants, insurance agents, sugar refiners, grain clerks, wine haulers, rope makers, and countless others lost their livelihoods. To survive, many turned to the underground economy now spreading across Europe.
- Most inhabitants of the Empire who disliked Napoleon limited themselves to passive resistance, but in a few regions, especially Spain, resistance spiraled upward into all-out warfare. Spain became the perfect storm—the place where the Napoleonic Empire met its match when it attempted its classic triple play: grab power, institute reforms, and extract goods.
  - Spanish insurgents had many layers of motives, particularly French anticlerical policies. Locally organized guerilla warfare was persistent, widespread, and resilient. Guerillas cut off the supply lines of their occupiers and ambushed French troops, while the French retaliated with cruelty of their own.



**In Galicia in northern Spain, the French Marshal Soult demanded that two towns hand over their horses, fodder, and rations, but Spanish guerillas snatched away the rations before the French could lay hands on them.**

- Napoleon poured troops into Spain by the tens of thousands, but his men could not be everywhere. When they pacified one area, another rebelled. The sheer size and scale of Spain and its resistance would defeat him in the end. His stubborn and tragic attempt to subdue Spain would help to bring down his Empire.
- Napoleon's ambitious reforms failed totally in Spain, and they invariably faced resistance elsewhere. But in the long run, he left behind a model of efficient state administration with the power to tax, conscript, and police the people. In the years after his fall, his former territories and old enemies paid him silent tribute by retaining or imitating many of his changes.

### Suggested Reading

Broers, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799–1815*.

Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*.

Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin*.

Tone, *The Fatal Knot*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What does it mean to “modernize”? Is this terminology useful in thinking about historical change, or is too loaded with the assumption that history should follow a particular trajectory? Are some places more “modern” than others?
2. For Jews in Napoleonic Europe, what might be the pros and cons of “assimilating” in European society?

# The Russian Campaign

## Lecture 44

**T**he year 1812 was a turning point for Napoleon's Empire. This was the year he made his most famous and fateful decision: to invade Russia. Given that his Empire was already vast beyond imagining, why did he come to this decision? He seemed to think that a victory against Russia would distract France from his Spanish losses and settle the fate of Britain, Spain, and Portugal. Further, he was furious at Czar Alexander, who had refused to continue Russia's participation in the blockade against Britain. In this lecture, we'll follow the French through the Russian campaign and the disastrous retreat from Moscow. And we'll see the beginning of the end for Napoleon in Paris.

### The Early Russian Campaign

- In May of 1812, Napoleon left Paris with great fanfare, promising to "liberate" more of Poland. When his Grande Armée headed east across Polish lands and into Russia in June, it was about 650,000 strong and was accompanied by the largest supply train ever assembled by the French.
- Napoleon assumed that the Russians would fight an offensive war and come to meet him. He had three armies traveling in parallel, and he envisioned conducting a grand enveloping maneuver in western Russia, similar to what he'd done in southern Germany at Ulm in 1805. But nothing went the way Napoleon had planned.
- On June 23, 1812, the Grande Armée crossed the Niemen River into what was then Russian territory. That summer, Napoleon chased the Russian armies eastward across modern-day Lithuania and Belarus. Each time Napoleon thought that he would meet the Russians in the massive battle he craved, they'd withdraw further east. The Russians knew they were outnumbered. Their lead generals bickered and didn't have a concerted strategy, but their constant retreat turned out to be effective.

- Early in the campaign, Napoleon’s troops missed an opportunity to entrap a portion of the Russian forces in Lithuania. This proved to be an early hint of what would become an ongoing problem: the difficulty of keeping tight coordination and communications with far-flung armies. The vast distances and sheer size of the French army created an entirely different situation than Napoleon had faced in his famous lightning strikes against the Italians, the Austrians, and the Prussians in earlier campaigns.
  
- At the same time, moving and supplying the Grande Armée was a logistical nightmare. The French had amassed a massive supply train, but they also counted on foraging as they marched, as they always had in the past. Already on June 20, Napoleon got word from one of his Polish commanders that because of the meager resources of the countryside, “the question of supply is becoming more difficult by the day.”
  
- Almost everyone is familiar with the effects of the bone-chilling cold later in the Russian campaign, but as the French soldiers marched eastward in the summer of 1812, they faced driving rain, unbearable heat, hunger, and disease.
  - They found that peasants in the countryside had fled from the French advance, taking all the available food with them. Drinkable water was also in short supply.
  
  - Tens of thousands of French soldiers were taken by dysentery, hunger, and dehydration, and thousands more deserted or fell far behind.
  
  - In late July, by the time it reached Vitebsk in Belarus, the Grande Armée had not yet engaged the Russians in a major battle, but the effective fighting force had already been reduced by more than a third.
  
  - Several times as he headed east, Napoleon considered turning around and abandoning his pursuit of the Russians.

- In mid-August, Napoleon hoped to take down the Russians at Smolensk, but he didn't move with his trademark speed. When he finally attacked, late on August 16, the Russians held on. By nightfall, the French had gained a foothold on the heights above the city, but when they forced their way into Smolensk the next morning, they found that most of the Russian troops had slipped away.
- Smolensk had been the farthest point east that Napoleon had even considered going. His men had marched more than 300 miles since entering Russia's territory at the Niemen River. Moscow stood 280 miles further still, and the French army had shrunk to 156,000 men. Napoleon debated with his generals whether to press onward, but in the end, he couldn't abandon his single-minded pursuit of the Russians. He convinced himself that getting to Moscow would bring victory.

### Battle of Borodino

- On September 7, 1812, Napoleon finally got his chance against the Russians at the Battle of Borodino. The czar ordered his lead general, Kutuzov, to face the French. Kutuzov took advantage of the bluffs and hillcrests near the town of Borodino to dig in earthworks and place his batteries. On his left flank, to the south, the hills and ravines gave way to rolling plains. This was the weakest section of Kutuzov's line.
- On September 6, Marshal Davout had urged Napoleon to let him make an enveloping maneuver around Kutuzov's weak left flank. But Napoleon was more cautious. He wasn't sure that the Grande Armée was strong enough in numbers to pull off this *manoeuvre sur les derrières*, and he didn't want to leave the remaining line too vulnerable. He had perhaps 130,000 men to the Russians' 121,000. Above all, he was afraid that any elaborate maneuver might cause the Russians to withdraw, and he desperately wanted his big battle.
- On September 7, Napoleon hurled his troops head on against the Russians, with some diversionary attacks on their wings. He aimed

to pierce through the enemy line, focusing on the center-left. The French artillery hammered away, but in the end, the day boiled down to a hard-fought battle of attrition. The French struggled to take the Great Redoubt at the center and the earthworks to the left of center.

- Several of his generals begged Napoleon to send in the Old Guard of the imperial reserves and decimate the Russians, but Napoleon—wary of losing his last reserve when he was 1,200 miles from France—refused.
- By day's end, technically, the French had won. The Russians had pulled back, and the road to Moscow lay open. With 44,000 casualties, the Russians had suffered even more than the French, who lost more than 30,000 men, including 43 generals or high-ranking officers. Borodino was not the decisive victory that Napoleon needed.

### **Moscow: Occupation and Retreat**

- On September 14, the French army marched into Moscow, but they city was empty. Its 300,00 inhabitants had evacuated. Soldiers scoured the town for food and drink. They barged into houses and churches and took everything they could find.
- The next night, Moscow went up in flames. The city governor had hired arsonists to ensure that nothing would be left for the French. Napoleon moved into the Kremlin to await word that Alexander had



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**Napoleon had entered Russia with 650,000 men, but by the time the Grande Armée marched into Moscow, it numbered only about 100,000.**

surrendered, but the days ticked by with no word forthcoming. In fact, the czar was rebuilding his army in Saint Petersburg.

- Napoleon knew he couldn't winter in Moscow and finally decided that he could wait no longer. On October 19, a long column of French troops left Moscow. On November 6, the first serious snow fell. Eventually, the temperature would fall as low as 35° below 0.
  - Men and horses fell frozen in their tracks. Soldiers fought one another for scraps of food. As one peasant soldier put it, "Every sentiment of humanity was extinguished."
  - The exhausted men limped westward, harried by attacks from the Russian army and the Cossacks. Some of the Russian peasants formed bands and attacked the French, infuriated by the devastation from both armies.
- When the French finally reached the Berezina River, they faced yet another harrowing obstacle. Despite the cold, the river had thawed unexpectedly. Soldiers and army engineers tore down houses in a riverside village and waded into the freezing water to throw up two makeshift bridges. As the French tried to cross, one bridge collapsed, and hundreds fell off the second bridge into the icy waters in the confused stampede toward safety.
- By December 18, Napoleon was back in Paris. His Grand Armée had been devastated. More than 500,000 men did not return home.

### Beginning of the End

- Signs of a shift in Napoleon's control had begun two months earlier in Paris. An old revolutionary named Claude-François de Malet had almost managed to pull off a coup by forging documents that announced Napoleon had been killed in Russia.
  - Malet and his accomplices managed to convince some high-ranking officers and five companies of the National Guard to join them. With these forces, they began to take control of government offices and even arrested the minister of police.

Finally, the military governor of Paris called their bluff and put an end to the attempted coup.

- It's easy to dismiss this failed plot as a fantasy, but it exposed the fragility of Napoleon's dynastic claim to hereditary power. As Malet spread word of Napoleon's alleged death, no one thought of securing the throne for the emperor's baby son.
- That winter in Paris, Napoleon carried on with his operas, balls, and court festivities, as if everything would return to normal. But he quickly made moves to rebuild his army, and his actions were met with grumbling across France.
- Outside of France, the warning signs were more dire. In January 1813, Napoleon sent word to his brother Joseph, the king of Spain, that he should move his capital out of Madrid and set up headquarters much farther north in Valladolid.
  - In 1812, Napoleon had siphoned off some French forces from Spain, and the British general, Wellington, had led his combined army to win several key victories. Once already, he'd chased Joseph temporarily out of Madrid.
  - Far to the north, the Russians had occupied the Duchy of Warsaw, and Alexander's advisors urged him to become the savior of Europe. The Russians asked the Prussians to join them, and by March of 1813, King Frederick William III had signed an alliance with Alexander.

### Suggested Reading

Blaufarb and Liebeskind, eds., *Napoleonic Foot Soldiers and Civilians*.

Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*.

Esdaille, *Napoleon's Wars*.

Walter (Raeff, ed.), *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Napoleon could have succeeded in Russia, or was the expedition doomed from the outset?
2. Empires seem to fall or shrink in size and power for an array of reasons. Across history, what forces seem to be most responsible for making various empires fail?

# Napoleon's Fall and the Hundred Days

## Lecture 45

Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign created an opening for the other powers of Europe. For the first time, he looked vulnerable. Perhaps Europe could take down "Boney, the upstart Corsican," as the British called him. In France, Napoleon had often acted against the Revolution, but abroad, in this world of hereditary monarchs, other rulers and nations had always viewed Napoleon as a revolutionary, a direct threat to the principles of tradition and stability. In 1813, the European powers began to forge a new alliance against Napoleon, but as we will see, he still had some surprises of his own in store for Europe.

### European Alliance against France

- In early 1813, as the powers of Europe began to circle around him, Napoleon worked to pull his army together. His new recruits were younger than ever—green, untrained, and underequipped—but they were 170,000 strong.
- Napoleon marched his men into Saxony and defeated the Russians and Prussians twice that spring. Austria was still neutral and offered the services of Metternich, its foreign minister, to negotiate a peace.
  - Metternich proposed that Napoleon surrender his grandiose outer Empire in Poland, Illyria, and Germany. He could keep a fattened-up France and perhaps maintain some satellite states.
  - Napoleon was flabbergasted. The Russians and Prussians hadn't beaten him on the battlefield, and Austria hadn't even been in the fight. He was in no way ready to accept a reduced Empire.
- During the summer of 1813, Austria decided to enter the Sixth Coalition. For the first time, Napoleon would have to face all three major powers to the east: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Sweden then

joined them. And Britain, Spain, and Portugal were still attacking from the south.

- At this point, the French were weary of war. They had stuck by Napoleon, but even the large and populous nation of France could give only so much.
- In October of 1813, Napoleon's armies faced off against the allies in the largest and bloodiest battle in European history so far: the three-day Battle of the Nations at Leipzig. Napoleon's 180,000 men were soundly beaten by some 320,000 Prussians, Austrians, Russians, and Swedes. Casualties were staggering—more than 100,000 all told, with the French suffering perhaps 73,000.
- Napoleon and the French had no choice but to retreat home, beyond the Rhine. A stubborn Napoleon refused one last peace proposal to limit France to its 1797 borders, including Belgium and the Rhineland.
- Inside France, the loss at Leipzig produced despair and even panic. Napoleon called up a fresh round of taxes and recruits, but even the authorities began to balk at continued conscription. There were signs of discontent among the elites, as well.
  - In December 1813, Napoleon asked the legislative body to call on France to unite behind him. Instead, the legislators issued a report filled with criticisms of his authoritarian ways and called on him to initiate peace talks immediately. They also demanded that he guarantee “the nation its free exercise of its political rights.”
  - Napoleon was outraged by the suggestion that his own ambitions might no longer match the goals and needs of France.

### **Invasion of France and Disintegration of the Empire**

- The allies had decided not to wait out the winter season. To the south, Wellington and the Anglo-Portuguese army swarmed over the Pyrenees. In the northeast, allied forces crossed the Rhine. The

powers of Europe believed they could do more than just restore Napoleon to a smaller France; perhaps they could overthrow him altogether.

- At the same time, the French Empire itself was crumbling or breaking away. The Dutch had already revolted, and Switzerland declared its independence. The Confederation of the Rhine had dissolved, and the smaller German states swung their allegiance to the allies. In early January, to Napoleon's great shock, his own sister Caroline and her husband, Murat, king of Naples, switched over to the allied side in a bid to save their throne.
- In early 1814, Napoleon fought frantically, even brilliantly, but he didn't have the numbers to hold off the allies. One of his ministers, Caulaincourt, later recalled that as dangers pressed around him, Napoleon deceived himself more and more. He minimized the odds and predicted that all of France shared his zeal.
- But finally, Napoleon could deceive himself no more. Enemy armies were approaching Paris, and refugees streamed out of the city. On March 29, Napoleon's wife, Marie-Louise, fled the capital with their three-year-old son. Napoleon would never see her again. Much of the court and government also abandoned Paris.
- On March 30, the last-ditch defense of Paris was pushed back to the heights of Montmartre. Saving the city was impossible. The next day, 145,000 troops occupied the French capital. Czar Alexander and Frederick William marched up the Champs-Élysées.

### **Restoration of the Throne and Journey to Elba**

- At the urging of Talleyrand, the allied leaders offered the throne of France to the brother and heir of Louis XVI, the count de Provence. In an attempt to give the new Bourbon king, Louis XVIII, a good start, the allies were quite lenient in their treatment of France. They didn't demand an indemnity or leave occupying troops.

- While Paris collapsed and the allies debated what to do with the once-powerful nation, Napoleon was about 35 miles south of the capital at Fontainebleau with 60,000 men. He wanted to rally them to march on Paris, but his generals refused.
- On April 11, a deflated Napoleon signed his abdication from the thrones of France and Italy. A week later, he set out on a journey through the south of France and across the Mediterranean to the small island of Elba, not far off the western coast of Italy.



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**For the other monarchs of Europe, the lumbering, gout-ridden brother of Louis XVI—the former count de Provence and now Louis XVIII—hardly seemed to be a threat.**

The allies had promised him sovereignty over this miniature kingdom and allowed him to retain about 600 soldiers. Elba was a beautiful island, but too small for Napoleon—only 86 square miles.

- Still, Napoleon hit the island like a whirlwind: He built new roads, sewers, and irrigation systems. He ordered mulberry trees to start a silkworm industry and built a hospital and new fortifications to defend the island. Inevitably, though, he grew bored.

### Louis XVIII

- In May of 1814, Louis XVIII made his ceremonial entry into Paris in a carriage pulled by eight white horses. He had insisted on leaving the name Louis XVII for the son of his brother and Marie-Antoinette, who had died in prison in 1795.

- France was in a state of shock and confusion. Certainly, there were strong pockets of royalists, especially in the west and south, but it had been a generation since the French had had a king, and most people weren't sure whether they wanted one now or not. More than anything, they wanted peace.
- For his part, Louis XVIII was a cold and fussy fellow who hated the last 25 years of history. He was not the best man for the job of bringing new unity to France. The allies had insisted on giving him a constitution to lessen his power, but he destroyed it and wrote his own constitutional charter. The charter claimed that he was in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of his reign and called him king “by the grace of God.”
- Louis made some concessions to the revolutionary changes and the passage of time. His charter accepted civil equality and religious freedom and set up a legislature with two chambers, but it saved a fair amount of law-making power for the king.
- Louis XVIII speedily flooded his court with returning noble émigrés and proclaimed Catholicism once again the official religion of France. New religious festivals commemorated Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Louis XVIII placed his hopes on throne and altar—monarchy and church—to erase the memory of the Revolution as much as possible.

### **The Hundred Days**

- In mid-February of 1815, Napoleon slipped away from Elba with 1,000 men in arms; he landed on the south coast of France on March 1. He skirted the most royalist areas of Provence and headed north through the Alps.
- As he marched north, he encountered forces sent to stop him, but many had been Napoleon's men, and they rallied around him instead. On March 19, Louis XVIII fled Paris, and the next evening, Napoleon and his cavalcade of troops and followers marched unopposed into the capital and straight to the Tuileries Palace. Thus began the era known as the Hundred Days.

- How could Napoleon return so easily? His greatest backers were the officers and veterans of the old army. Louis XVIII had forced 12,000 officers into retirement on half pay. Those still in the army couldn't help but feel resentment as Louis XVIII promoted returning émigrés and noble favorites who hadn't fought for France.
- Further, about 300,000 ordinary soldiers had been demobilized. Many were initially happy to return home, but they—like others in France—quickly became disillusioned with their new king. Rumors circulated that Louis would soon bring back the feudal dues and the tithe from before the Revolution. At the same time, with the end of the Continental Blockade, British goods flooded France, and unemployment skyrocketed.
- News of Napoleon's return did not electrify France in a single shock. Rather, as the rumor spread from village to village that he was back, people responded with disbelief and a certain awe. In much of the country, military men and ordinary citizens rallied around the former emperor, and many others waited to see what he would do next.
- On the march north, Napoleon had reinvented himself one more time. He shed his stodgy imperial image and presented himself as a young revolutionary once again, on fire to oust the Bourbon king and save the nation of France.
- Amazingly, once in Paris, Napoleon managed to recruit one of his most fervent liberal critics, Benjamin Constant, to write a new constitution. This was called the Additional Act, supposedly an addendum to Napoleon's earlier constitutions. The act limited some of the powers of the former emperor, making him a constitutional monarch. It defended freedom of the press and of religion and set up a bicameral legislature that was similar to Louis XVIII's system.
- The start of the Hundred Days was a bizarre political moment; Napoleon's liberal Empire was a mishmash of contradictions and improbabilities. His hold on power was bold but impossibly fragile.

French elites puzzled over which way to jump—with Napoleon or against him.

- In 1814, the powers of Europe had sent their representatives to gather in Vienna to negotiate the peace. When they heard the emperor had returned, they declared Napoleon an outlaw and began to organize their troops.

### Suggested Reading

Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*.

Jordan, *Napoleon and the Revolution*.

Schom, *One Hundred Days*.

### Questions to Consider

1. In periods of rapid historical change, people born in different generations have strikingly different experiences. How might individuals born in 1755, 1780, and 1805 view and experience the Restoration of Louis XVIII or the whole revolutionary era differently? More broadly, do you think generations of people undergo collective experiences that shape them in historically powerful ways? Do different generations have “cultural” traits that historians should analyze?
2. How do you think civilian life in French towns and villages was shaped by the absence of so many young men?

# Waterloo and Beyond

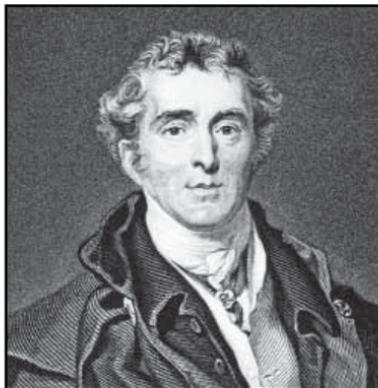
## Lecture 46

Soon after Napoleon catapulted himself back into power in the spring of 1815, his former foreign minister and advisor Caulaincourt summed the situation up neatly: “He is going to be up against the whole of Europe.” This lecture follows the irrepresible Napoleon in 1815 as he tried to retain his power in the period known as the Hundred Days. In spite of his triumphant march north from the Mediterranean, Napoleon’s hold on France was far from complete. Royalists, especially in the south and west, defied his rule, and the Vendée broke into open rebellion. Anti-Napoleon sentiment could even be heard in Paris. Further, all the major European powers had declared war against Napoleon. The emperor faced overwhelming odds.

### A Preemptive Strike

- In the spring of 1815, as the Seventh Coalition began massing troops to invade France, Napoleon decided to make a preemptive strike on Prussian and Anglo-Dutch forces in Belgium.
- Napoleon moved his men north with speed and secrecy. On June 14, the allies were stunned to learn that Napoleon’s 125,000 men were already just south of the Belgian border. His plan was to drive a wedge between the two enemy armies and try to take them down one at a time.
- In eastern Belgium, General Blücher had 117,000 Prussians and 296 guns. Further west, near Brussels, Arthur Wellesley, the duke of Wellington, commanded an Anglo-Dutch-German army of 110,000 men and 196 guns.
- Although Napoleon had a good strategy, he faced some disadvantages. He’d lost some of his best generals to retirement or royalism, and his chief of staff had passed away. He was also forced to leave thousands of soldiers behind to guard the frontiers and fight royalists in the Vendée.

- On June 18, the French moved further north into Belgium. They quickly defeated the Prussians at Ligny, but Napoleon refrained from ordering his men to chase the retreating army.
- On the same day, Marshal Ney engaged the British at Quatre-Bras, five miles away. In Russia, Napoleon had dubbed Ney “the bravest of the brave,” but now, he acted with uncharacteristic caution, allowing the British to pull back to the north and regroup. By the end of the day, the French had not managed to eliminate either army.



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**Arthur Wellesley was known as the Iron Duke; an old-school aristocratic commander, he was cautious and precise in his tactical moves.**

### **The Prelude to Waterloo**

- On the morning of June 17, Wellington chose the spot to make his stand. Just south of Waterloo, in open farmland, he identified a small ridge running east to west at Mont-Saint-Jean.
  - He massed his men along the crest and on the backside of the slope. The reverse slope gave Wellington’s men a crucial advantage: They were partially concealed and could gain some protection by positioning themselves behind the crest.
  - On his right, to the west, and a bit out to the front, Wellington staked out the Chateau of Hougomont with its ditches, thick hedges, and garden walls. His men also occupied the farm and gardens of La Haie Sainte in front of the middle of the line.
- Meanwhile, Napoleon sent off General Grouchy with about a third of his army to find the Prussians and hold them off. The French were convinced that the Prussians had headed east toward their supply lines. But Blücher had retreated north and was preparing

to march his Prussians toward Waterloo. On the day of the battle, Grouchy and his 33,000 men would miss the action.

- In the afternoon of June 17, rain began to pour down from the heavens. The remaining two-thirds of the French army slogged north in the mud and bivouacked on a ridge to the south. The French had 72,000 men to Wellington's 68,000. In the morning, Napoleon decided to delay his assault until the muddy terrain dried out and his cavalry and artillery could maneuver.

### **Battle of Waterloo**

- On the plains south of Waterloo, Napoleon's battle plan was straightforward and simple. He would send a diversionary attack to Hougoumont on the right, soften the line with artillery fire, and then smash through the British center. Sometime around 11:00 am, Napoleon's brother Jerome spearheaded an early assault on Hougoumont, but the British dug in and held onto this crucial spot.
- Meanwhile, Napoleon drew up his artillery to blast the center of the British forces. But even as his forces opened fire, Napoleon got word that an advance corps of Prussians had been sighted. He chose to unleash the main assault.
- In the second wave of the battle, four columns of infantry marched across the shallow valley to hit the left-center of the Anglo-Dutch line. On the hillcrest, one Dutch-Belgian brigade, already decimated by the cannonade, took to its heels. But the English infantrymen hung on, and a counterattack by the British cavalry sent the French reeling backward.
- In the midafternoon, Marshal Ney thought he saw the British wavering; in a third wave, he launched his own cavalry against the British right-center even though he had no artillery cover or infantry support. The British formed into infantry squares to withstand the cavalry charge. Ney, in a frenzy, hurled his men forward repeatedly, but they never managed to do more than take La Haie late in the day.

- By late afternoon, the Prussians had arrived and were storming the French right flank to the rear. Napoleon had diverted troops away from the main attack, and his reserves, the men called the Young Guard, barely managed to stabilize the right flank against the Prussians.
- At 7:00 pm, Napoleon knew that a third corps of Prussians was fast approaching. He ran the risk of being encircled. He made one last bid to break the Anglo-Dutch line, sending in almost all he had of his reserves, nine battalions of his Imperial Guard. By some mistake, the guard divided and veered toward the right-center of the British line, its strongest spot. The British soldiers raked the guard with musket fire, and the French wavered and broke. Wellington sent his whole line charging forward.
- Before long, the Prussians broke through on the right, and the French were in headlong flight. Some 8,000 men would be taken prisoner, and another 25,000 fell on the battlefield, dead or wounded. For Napoleon, all was lost.

### **The Impact of Waterloo**

- In the years to come, the victory at Waterloo became central to the English sense of identity. It stood for British orderliness, stability, and civilization against the French madness of revolution and reckless pursuit of glory. Wellington became a heroic icon of English resilience under adversity.
- For Napoleon, the defeat at Waterloo meant abdication and exile on Saint Helena and the return of Louis XVIII to the throne of France.
- For many in France, at first, Waterloo was associated with humiliation, sorrow, and grief. But the battle was fast reshaped in the French memory as a moment of ultimate sacrifice and courage under fire. Waterloo as a tragic defeat and a glorious last stand would echo with emotional power across the generations and beyond France.

- Waterloo also came to represent the end of an era of revolution and republican dreams. Even in Britain, radicals and some Romantic writers mourned Waterloo as the victory of kings over the people and the tragic end to an era.
- Even after his crushing defeat, Napoleon tried for a comeback. He called on Joseph to raise more troops, but the legislature in Paris refused to back him. On June 22, 1815, he abdicated for the second and final time. He was sent by the British to Saint Helena, a rocky island in the middle of the south Atlantic, more than 1,200 miles from the west coast of Africa and almost 2,000 miles from Brazil. Even Napoleon couldn't escape.

### **The Congress of Vienna**

- Since Napoleon's first fall from power in 1814, European diplomats had been meeting in Vienna to hammer out the contours of a new map of Europe. Representatives at the Congress of Vienna included those from small states, cities, religious communities, and even some powerful families hoping to regain land.
- The key figures represented the most powerful nations of Europe. Big players included the Russian czar Alexander, the Austrian diplomat Metternich, Viscount Castlereagh from England, and Frederick William III of Prussia. France was not formally invited, but Talleyrand worked his way into the discussions of the big powers.
- Every country at the Congress of Vienna had its own interests, but they all wanted peace. The wars represented an astonishing level of destruction and loss of life, along with a host of revolutionary challenges to the power of princes, nobles, feudal lords, clergy, and so on. Even enemies of France found themselves forced to adapt to the revolutionary changes.
- The fall of Napoleon brought varied reactions in the territories in his Empire. Some, such as the Papal States and Piedmont-Sardinia, rejected revolutionary innovations and worked to dismantle them. Other territories, such as Lombardy and states in southwest

Germany, retained many revolutionary reforms. Overall, however, the mood at the Congress of Vienna was sharply opposed to revolution. Metternich and Castlereagh were especially bent on establishing a new diplomatic system that would guarantee as much as possible a return to the old order.

- Kings were restored to the throne in Naples, Piedmont, Spain, and France. The territory of France was reduced to its 1789 boundaries, and the French were forced to pay an indemnity of 700 million francs. Wellington and his troops occupied France for the next three years.
- Eventually, the representatives in Vienna agreed that they should try to balance out the power of the largest nations so that no single country would come to dominate Europe again. This balance of power helped to prevent major wars in Europe for decades. Much of Europe's violent quest for territory now turned outward, toward potential colonies around the globe.

### **The End of Napoleon**

- Napoleon spent his last six years on Saint Helena. For his closest companions, he had an Irish doctor and four French officers. He mostly devoted himself to spinning his image and legacy.
- From about 1818 on, Napoleon developed trouble with his stomach and liver. Some people have theorized that he was dying of arsenic poisoning, secretly fed to him by one of his companions, but the evidence for this theory is circumstantial. Most historians agree that Napoleon had hepatitis, followed by stomach cancer, leading to an inexorable decline.
- By late 1820, Napoleon's health had fallen into a sharp downward spiral. On May 5, 1821, he passed away, surrounded by several of his closest companions. Writing of the former emperor's death, his longtime critic Chateaubriand said, "Napoleon gave up to God the most powerful breath of life that ever animated human clay."

## Suggested Reading

Kauffmann, *The Black Room at Longwood*.

Keegan, *The Face of Battle*.

Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think Waterloo took on such emotional significance in European history? Are there other battles—victories or defeats—that have become iconic of some powerful set of ideas or meanings? Why and how? (Gettysburg, for example, would be an interesting point of comparison with multiple meanings.)
2. Why do you think people are so continually intrigued by Napoleon—even after his defeat? What chords does he touch, and why is he so perennially controversial?

# Emerging Political Models

## Lecture 47

In 1815, when France's enemies returned Louis XVIII to the throne, his Restoration was part of the broader European reaction against the revolutionary era—the reaction so strongly on display at the Congress of Vienna. The word “restoration” implies a return, a going back to old ways, and that's what such European leaders as Metternich wanted to do and what Louis XVIII hoped to negotiate. But restoring the old would turn out to be impossible; France had changed too much, and political awareness and divisions ran too deep after the tumult of the last 25 years. In this lecture, we'll examine how political disputes produced key ideologies—new models that resonated well beyond the borders of France.

### Changes in French Society

- How had French society changed as a result of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras? In the realm of religion, France was still Catholic, but the church would never regain its Old Regime wealth and power. In society at large, the changes were also deep.
  - Most people in France were still peasants, and rural economic production remained steady. In the cities, the guilds were gone, but artisans continued to produce most goods in workshops. In other words, it was England, not France, that led the path to the Industrial Revolution.
  - But something fundamental had shifted in France: A society based on class had replaced the Old Regime society of estates. The earlier deference and system of judicial and economic privileges had been swept away. Rural France took its modern shape as a land of small-holding peasants—a land tenure system and way of life it would retain until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Returning nobles complained about the end of feudal practices, but in the 1820s, most of the richest men still came from noble

backgrounds, and they still owned one-fifth of the land. Despite the revolutionary quest for equality, France remained a hierarchical society, but the hierarchy was now based on money rather than birth or blood. Returning aristocrats became part of a wider elite that included wealthy commoners in business, state administration, and industry.

- Many members of the bourgeoisie had benefited from revolutionary changes, such as the sale of national lands. The world seemed full of nouveaux riches, who had come to expect more from the state in terms of education, stability, and opportunity for social mobility. In short, post-Napoleonic society was a hybrid world. New values and social patterns clashed with embedded practices and expectations.

### **Politics of the Restoration**

- Once again returned to the throne, Louis XVIII made some concessions to the last 25 years. He agreed to allow various civil liberties and set up a legislature with two chambers. He had imagined unifying France and somehow forgetting the past 25 years, but Napoleon's return during the Hundred Days had only deepened the political divide in France. After Waterloo, royalist gangs in the south unleashed a movement called the White Terror against supporters of Napoleon or the Revolution.
- Louis himself instituted his own legal White Terror. He purged more than 50,000 pro-Napoleon government officials across France. More than 5,000 people were put on trial, and more than half were convicted. Marshal Ney and several other officers faced the firing squad, convicted of treason.
- A group known as ultra-royalists emerged that included returning émigrés and nobles. Members of this group backed Louis XVIII as king, but the man they truly loved was his fiery younger brother and heir, the count of Artois. Deeply conservative, Artois thought his brother was a fool for granting the French people the constitutional charter and accommodating revolutionary changes.

## Development of Conservatism

- Conservatives believed in tradition, religion, divine monarchy, social order, and a natural hierarchy of kings over subjects, aristocrats over commoners, and fathers over their families. Before the Revolution, it hadn't been necessary to articulate conservatism clearly as an ideology because many of its ideas were taken as givens.
- In reaction to the Revolution, Edmund Burke first began to stake out a conservative ideology in 1790. Leading French conservatives, such as Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre, built on his ideas. They defined conservatism as an epic struggle against the destructive and modernizing forces of the Enlightenment and the Revolution.
- Conservatives defended three central propositions, the first of which was the centrality of religion and divine providence. De Maistre articulated the notion that religion, especially Catholicism, underpinned social cohesion and morality. He further asserted that the world was governed by divine providence, not by reason, progress, or the power of human actions and innovations.
- The second key tenet of conservatism was tradition. Social arrangements and government institutions were the organic products of each nation's particular history and should be conserved. To suddenly invent new constitutions or declarations of rights produced only divisive individualism and chaos.
- The third proposition of conservatism was that hierarchy and patriarchy must be restored. Conservatives believed that the hierarchical authority of kings, nobles, and fathers produced social glue and orderliness in society.
- In terms of practical politics during the Restoration, conservatives wanted a powerful, divine-right king. They wanted aristocrats to dominate parliamentary and local politics. And they pushed for the omnipresence of clergy in education, politics, and cultural life.

## Development of Liberalism

- In contrast to the conservatives, liberals hoped to preserve certain aspects of the Revolution, especially the early, moderate Revolution. They backed the constitutional monarchy and valued basic civil liberties, a constitutional rule of law, and representative government, elected by men of property. Though politics didn't always correlate exactly with class, liberals often got the backing of merchants, manufacturers, professionals, and civil servants.
- The liberals sought to solve one central question: How could revolution take place without the Terror? How could a political system be created that preserved the gains of 1789 without descending into violence or authoritarianism?
- In response to this problem, liberals emphasized a middle way between radical democracy and a return to older hierarchies, tradition, and religious morality.
  - Liberals argued fiercely against the conservatives in favor of the rule of law, constitutions, and civil rights. They defended freedom of the press, speech, and religion and the right to form associations or clubs.
  - But they also set aside the revolutionary quest for equality and total democracy. They didn't want to reignite popular participation in politics. They mistrusted the lower classes, who seemed to have led France into the Terror.
- In a move that would grow typical of continental European liberals, Madame de Staël looked to England and its stable parliamentary system as the "most advanced" system for preserving liberty and the rule of law.

## Return to Repression

- Louis XVIII tried to hold the ultra-royalists in check and run a moderate form of constitutional monarchy. But in February of 1820, the king's nephew, the duke de Berry, was assassinated by a Bonapartist. The duke had been second in line for the throne.

- The assassination caused politics to swing abruptly and repressively to the right. Louis fired his moderate minister, began to censor the press heavily, and agreed to back a new law that doubled the voting power of the 23,000 richest men in France.
- With the new electoral rules and Louis's defense of the monarchy, ultra-royalists surged into ascendancy. Their power grew even greater when Louis died in 1824. His younger, aggressively conservative brother, the count of Artois, took the throne as Charles X.
- The lurch to the right from 1820 on drove the left-wing opposition underground. All across France, secret revolutionary societies, called Charbonnerie, met in homes and cafés. Members conspired to overthrow the king or, at least, to circulate seditious literature and cultivate memories of Napoleon and the Revolution.

### **Bonapartism**

- Within this simmering world of opposition to the Restoration, Bonapartism was a strong, complex, and fascinating strand. The movement simultaneously encompassed a nostalgia for the emperor, a personal identification with his strong nationalist glory, and an evolving set of political ideas.
- In the decades between 1815 and 1848, Bonapartism was politically amorphous. Early Bonapartists often advocated republican or liberal principles. But over time, Bonapartism increasingly came to mean support for authoritarian rule by a strong man running a strongly centralized state. The latter meaning became dominant by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, staged a coup d'état.
- Early Bonapartists opposed royalism, hated privilege and celebrated social mobility, and often backed universal manhood suffrage. Oddly, this group kept republicanism alive, even though Napoleon himself had repressed the Republic when he built the Empire.

- The White Terror and ultra-royalists drove republicans and Bonapartists together by attacking them as one and the same. When the ultras roamed France, burning the tricolor flag and tearing down Napoleonic eagles, French pride, national glory, and the revolutionary legacy all seemed under assault. The illegal cult of the emperor flourished.
- In 1823, Bonapartism and its ties to revolution received a boost from a new book, an account of Napoleon's life and exile written by one of his companions on Saint Helena. To people at the time, the authentic Napoleon seemed to leap off the pages.
  - The book's author endowed its subject with two outstanding characteristics: the epic grandeur of a man without equal and the intense humanity of a man who had suffered.
  - Above all, Napoleon was presented as the heir to 1789 and a liberal reformer who attacked nobles and clergy during the Hundred Days.
- Napoleon became again the people's hero. The public affection for him seemed to represent multiple ideas: patriotism and honor, antiroyalism, often anticlericalism, and an underlying attachment to revolutionary egalitarianism and republicanism. More broadly, Bonapartism, liberalism, and republicanism battling against royalism demonstrated one clear modern legacy of the revolutionary era: Politics was everywhere in France, reaching down the social scale in a way that had never been true in the Old Regime.

### Continuing Political Experimentation

- In 1830, in harsh economic times, a second antiroyalist revolution wracked France, as people in Paris took to the barricades in an uprising known as the Three Glorious Days. Lafayette once again became head of the National Guard. When the dust settled, Charles X had fled, and liberal politicians had taken charge. They put the king's cousin on the throne, the liberal constitutional monarch Louis-Philippe.

- This liberal monarchy would last until 1848, when revolution broke out once again in France and across Europe. Then, France tried for the second time to institute an experimental republic. Who did the French elect as their first president? Napoleon's nephew, who soon abolished the republic and became emperor.
- The tumultuous events of the years 1789 to 1815 generated a rich repertoire of political models and issues both inside and outside of France. Conservatism, liberalism, revolution, democratic republicanism, and emerging socialism became central political frameworks across 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and beyond.

### Suggested Reading

Geyl (Renier, trans.), *Napoleon, For and Against*.

Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon*.

Mansel, *Louis XVIII*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How do political traditions, such as conservatism, for example, reinvent themselves as circumstances evolve?
2. Why do you think so many modern political models emerged from this era of history?

# Revolutionary Legacies

## Lecture 48

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic age had significant global impact. On the one hand, the Revolution introduced a stunning new set of ideas and practices related to political participation, rights, and social equality. On the other hand, the revolutionaries and, even more so, Napoleon unleashed international conflict, destabilizing international geopolitics. In this lecture, we'll look at the ideals, symbols, and practices of this era that had far-ranging and diverse consequences. We'll also consider how different groups appropriated the malleable meanings of the era and made them their own.

### Revolution in Spanish America

- In August of 1808, news of the imprisonment of the Spanish royal family by Napoleon shocked Spanish citizens living in the colonies. Napoleon's seizure of power took place when Spain's 300-year-old empire was already wracked with difficulties. Soon after Napoleon ousted the Spanish king, rebellions and civil wars broke out across South America. By 1825, all the Spanish South American colonies on the mainland had broken away from Spain.
- In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Enlightenment ideas and news of the American and French revolutions had circulated in Latin America. Some people were clearly intrigued by the French Revolution, but many of the creole elites viewed the disorder it produced with apprehension. Its worst crime was that it had contributed to the Haitian Revolution, which Spanish American elites watched with horror.
- The Latin Americans seeking independence in the 1810s and 1820s didn't want to imitate the French Revolution, but they drew inspiration from the same sets of ideas. Like the French, they soon claimed sovereignty and experimented with new forms of politics, often fusing republican models with conservative social goals.

- In dialogue with other Atlantic revolutions, the French Revolution generated immensely malleable and powerful symbols, political practices, and language of liberty, rights, and constitutions. Other places appropriated these symbols and practices, reformulated them, and fused them with their own traditions and innovations. This international dialogue about the political and social order became all the more explosive as a result of revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare and destabilization.

### **Impact of the Revolution in Europe**

- Recall that the Congress of Vienna had two key goals: (1) to restore the traditional power of kings, nobles, and the church and (2) to act in concert to maintain international peace. Austria, Prussia, and England were especially set on constructing small buffer states rather than new unified nation-states that could rival older powers.
- But restoring the old order proved impossible. A wide variety of new forces, including explosive population growth, fast-growing cities, and the spread of industry, put pressure on the conservative order.
- Perhaps more significantly, the French Revolution had posed the problem of how to create a democratic or representative system of politics.
  - Right in the middle of traditional Europe, the French had overthrown their king and launched a complicated series of political and social experiments. In the short term, these experiments had failed, but their longer-term importance was greater than their failures.
  - The Revolution left behind a deep sense that politics should not be concentrated solely in the hands of a few people. It provoked the desire to rethink the configuration of political power-sharing in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and beyond.

**1848: The Year of Revolution**

- In the year 1848, a series of revolutionary uprisings occurred in Paris; Vienna and Berlin; Budapest, Prague, and Kraków; and Milan, Palermo, Naples, and Venice. Working-class radicals and middle-class liberals hoped to create new political orders, set up constitutions, and perhaps even oust kings.
- The rebels also wanted to redraw the map of Europe to do away with the splintered buffer states of the Congress of Vienna and establish unified nations in Italy, Germany, Hungary, and elsewhere. Peasants rose up against their lords in eastern Europe, and in western Europe, they pressed for common lands and lower taxes.
- Three issues were at stake in 1848: (1) constitutions and democracy, (2) national unity and nationalism, and (3) the “social question,” that is, how to deal with pervasive inequality and widespread poverty.
- As in 1789, the revolutions of 1848 sprung up out of a moment of intense economic crisis and hardship. They began in January in Palermo and Naples, where crowds rose up against their absolutist king. Then, in February, Parisians stunned Europe by throwing up barricades in the streets, declaring a republic, and overthrowing the king—again!
- While conservatives watched with dread, republicans and liberals surged into the streets in cities across Europe. Their goals ranged widely: equality of men before the law; freedom of the press, speech, and religion; representative parliaments; and trial by jury.
- These activists had different visions of what form of politics to pursue. Liberals, often of middle class or elite background, lobbied for constitutional monarchies, while radicals hoped to institute republics. Liberals more often had the opportunity to try their hands at exercising official power.

- The revolutions of 1848 also unleashed expectations and stirred up debate about social reforms that should accompany the new politics. Democratic republicans and workers often collided with more moderate liberals over just how egalitarian their aims should be. Nowhere was this social clash more pronounced and clearer than in France.

### **The Second Republic in France**

- When France declared its Second Republic in 1848, radical leaders pressed for what they called “a democratic and social republic.” They were inspired in part by early socialist thinkers and by the Jacobin tradition from the first Revolution.
- Activists in 1848 demanded a new social right, beyond the ones declared in 1789: the right to work. The new republican government agreed to the demand to set up national workshops to employ impoverished men.
- By May, the workshops had swelled to 115,000 workers, fired up by the new politics. Liberal leaders in the new National Assembly grew nervous. They feared economic consequences and the dangerous political impact of these rabble-rousing, impoverished workers in the streets. In late May, the workshops were closed.
- Demonstrations began immediately, and by June 23, the demonstrators had grown impatient. They marched to the square where the Bastille had once stood, then set up barricades and occupied all of eastern Paris.
  - The government sent in the army and the guard. After several days of fierce fighting in the streets, some 1,500 workers and more than 900 soldiers and guardsmen lay dead. About 12,000 were arrested.
  - This incident emboldened conservatives—both in France and abroad—to move more strongly to contain the Revolution of 1848.



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One leader of the demonstrations in Paris stirred up the crowd: “Friends! Our cause is the cause of our fathers. ... Liberty or Death!”

- In search of a way to stabilize France, the Assembly adopted a constitution with a strong executive, modeled in part on the American system. Later that year, France elected Napoleon’s nephew as president. Like his uncle, he seemed to represent both democracy and order, and he presented himself as a man above factions and divisions. Also like his uncle, within a few years, he dismantled the Second Republic and turned France into an Empire.

### Aftermath of the Revolutions

- France was not the only place where the political and social experimentation of 1848 was cut off. Kings reconsolidated their power, often with armed force, by 1849. Many rulers and conservative leaders resolved once again, as they had in 1815, to keep the forces of liberal politics and revolution at bay.
- But the rebellions of 1848 didn’t fail completely. The biggest social change was the abolition of serfdom and the remains of

seigneurialism in large areas of Eastern and Central Europe. Further, 1848 served as a moment of political apprenticeship as millions of Europeans experimented with the vote, worker associations, political clubs, a free press, and parliaments.

- The year 1848 also demonstrated the ongoing evolution and centrality of issues raised by the French Revolution: civil liberties and equality before the law, political participation and representation, nationalism and new models of citizenship, and so on.

### **Revolutionary Legacies in the Modern Era**

- By 1848, a rival ideology on the left was beginning to emerge that would eventually lead to a rival model of revolution: socialism. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in the same year. Marx and the Russian revolutionaries envisioned a new model of equality with the sharing of goods in common and an end to private property.
- Within France itself, socialist ideas would combine in combustion with the older revolutionary tradition. In 1871, yet another revolution broke out, known as the Paris Commune. The Commune was crushed by the Third Republic, which gradually defined itself as a force of order.
- With the outbreak of World War II, the ideals of 1789 suddenly returned to center stage. In 1939, with fascism looming, the well-known historian Georges Lefebvre called on the youth of France to defend the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Months later, in 1940, the Nazis rolled into France. The Third Republic fell and was replaced by the collaboration government of Vichy. After the war, the French founded the Fourth Republic.
- The Holocaust and atrocities of World War II made the issue of human rights starkly relevant. After the war, the new United Nations set up a Human Rights Commission; it hammered out the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which drew inspiration from 18<sup>th</sup>-century French and American declarations.

But it also revealed how far rights concepts had moved beyond their 18<sup>th</sup>-century origins.

- Around the globe, the struggle to define rights and to defend them has continued to the present day. Within that ongoing struggle, the postwar era also made clear that French republican legacies were filled with contradiction. In the years after World War II, French colonies fought to break away from France, tapping into the promises of 1789 and highlighting French hypocrisy.
- The year 1989 marked the bicentennial of the French Revolution. The French celebrated the event by arguing—once again—over what their Revolution really meant. Events outside France at the time, such as the student protests in Tiananmen Square and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, demonstrated the continuing relevance of the fundamental issues of rights and liberty.
- Today, the French Revolution has what could be called a stealth effect. We have come to take some of its most controversial claims for granted, and its power and influences have intermingled with other traditions, so that its specific legacies no longer leap out with striking clarity and controversy, the way they did in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Yet this course has shown us the wider role played by the Revolution in the hotly contested invention of modern politics and the ongoing struggle for human rights and equality.

### Suggested Reading

Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France, 1814–1871*.

Rapport, *1848, Year of Revolution*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why did the French Revolution and Napoleonic era have so many and such contradictory impacts?
2. Are some eras more influential than others in producing historical change or major turning points?

## Timeline

- 1751–1780..... Diderot publishes the  
multivolume *Encyclopedia*.
- 1756–1763..... Seven Years' War; French loss of  
New France in North America.
- 1762..... Rousseau publishes *The  
Social Contract*.
- 1763..... Voltaire publishes *A Treatise  
on Toleration* in response to the  
1761–1762 Calas affair.
- Aug. 15, 1769..... Birth of Napoleon  
Bonaparte on Corsica.
- 1770..... Raynal, *Philosophical and Political  
History of European Colonies and  
Commerce in the East and West Indies*.
- May 16, 1770 ..... Marriage of Louis and  
Marie-Antoinette.
- 1774–1792..... Reign of Louis XVI.
- June 11, 1775 ..... Coronation/consecration of  
Louis XVI as king.
- 1778–1783..... French participation in the  
American Revolution.
- 1782–1787..... Dutch Patriot Revolt.

1785.....	Diamond Necklace Affair.
Feb. 1787.....	Meeting of the Assembly of Notables to deal with royal bankruptcy.
Aug. 8, 1788.....	King agrees to call the Estates-General.
1789–1790.....	Revolt in the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium).
Jan. 1789 .....	Sieyès publishes “What Is the Third Estate?”
March–April 1789.....	Elections for the Estates-General; drawing up of grievance lists.
May 5, 1789 .....	Meeting of the Estates-General.
June 17, 1789 .....	Third Estate breaks away from the Estates-General and declares the National Assembly.
June 20, 1789 .....	Tennis Court Oath.
July 14, 1789 .....	Storming of the Bastille.
Late July–early Aug. 1789 .....	The Great Fear (peasant revolts).
Aug. 4, 1789.....	Abolition of feudalism, seigneurial dues, tithes to the church, and various privileges.
Aug. 26, 1789.....	Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.
Oct. 5–6, 1789.....	October Days: Parisian women march to Versailles; royal family brought to Paris.

- Nov. 2, 1789..... Church lands nationalized; will be put up for sale to pay the national debt.
- Early Dec. 1789 ..... Foundation of the Jacobin Club.
- Dec. 24, 1789 ..... Decree granting civil liberties to Protestants.
- Feb. 13, 1790..... Decree prohibiting monastic vows.
- June 19, 1790 ..... Abolition of hereditary nobility and noble titles.
- July 14, 1790..... Festival of Federation.
- Aug. 18, 1790..... Counterrevolutionary assembly at Jalès.
- Oct. 1790..... Vincent Ogé leads a revolt of free people of color in Saint-Domingue (executed in Feb. 1791).
- Nov. 1, 1790..... Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.
- Nov. 27, 1790..... Decree that priests must take an oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (written in July 1790).
- Jan. 1791 ..... Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (part II in 1792).
- May 15, 1791 ..... Rights granted to free men of color with free-born parents.
- June 20, 1791 ..... Flight of King Louis XVI.

- July 11, 1791 ..... Procession to bring Voltaire’s remains to the Panthéon.
- July 17, 1791 ..... Petition and massacre on the Champs de Mars.
- Aug. 22, 1791..... Slave revolt begins on Saint-Domingue.
- Aug. 27, 1791..... Declaration of Pillnitz by Austria and Prussia.
- Sept. 14, 1791 ..... Louis XVI formally accepts the Constitution of 1791.
- Sept. 28, 1791 ..... Decree granting civil rights to all Jews (Sephardic Jews in Jan. 1790).
- Sept. 1791 ..... Olympe de Gouges, “The Rights of Woman.”
- Oct. 1, 1791–Sept. 20, 1792..... Legislative Assembly meets.
- Oct. 1791– April 1792..... Debates over going to war.
- April 4, 1792 ..... Rights granted to all free people of color.
- April 20, 1792 ..... France declares war on Austria (Prussia enters the war in June 1792).
- June 20, 1792 ..... Paris crowd invades the Tuileries Palace.
- July 25, 1792 ..... Brunswick Manifesto.
- Aug. 10, 1792..... Overthrow of the king.

Sept. 2, 1792 .....	Fall of Verdun to the Prussians.
Sept. 2–6, 1792 .....	September massacres in Paris prisons.
Sept. 20, 1792 .....	Legalization of divorce; secularization of civil recordkeeping.
Sept. 20, 1792 .....	Battle of Valmy.
Sept. 21, 1792 .....	National Convention first meets; exists until October 26, 1795.
Sept. 22, 1792 .....	Republic proclaimed.
Nov. 6, 1792 .....	Battle of Jemappes.
Mid-Nov. 1792–Jan. 1793 .....	Debate over the king's fate and trial of the king.
Jan. 21, 1793 .....	Execution of King Louis XVI.
Feb. 1, 1793 .....	France declares war on Great Britain and the Dutch Republic.
Feb. 24, 1793 .....	Decree for levy of 300,000 men.
March 10, 1793 .....	Revolutionary tribunal established.
March 11, 1793 .....	Counterrevolutionary uprising begins in the Vendée.
March 18, 1793 .....	Battle of Neerwinden.
April 5, 1793 .....	Dumouriez defects to the Austrians.
April 8, 1793 .....	French diplomat Genêt lands at Charleston.

May 4, 1793 .....	First maximum limiting prices.
May 31–June 2, 1793 .....	Insurrection by Paris sections, leading to arrest of Girondins.
June 24, 1793 .....	Convention approves the Constitution of 1793 (approved by popular vote and suspended).
June 1793 .....	Spread of federalist revolts.
July 13, 1793 .....	Charlotte Corday assassinates Marat.
Aug. 10, 1793.....	Festival of Unity organized by Jacques-Louis David.
Aug. 23, 1793.....	Decree for <i>levée en masse</i> (draft for the army).
Aug. 29, 1793.....	Sonthonax abolishes slavery in northern Saint-Domingue.
Sept. 5, 1793 .....	Demonstration in the Convention; calls for adopting “terror as the order of the day.”
Sept. 17, 1793 .....	Law of Suspects.
Sept. 29, 1793 .....	General maximum (price controls).
Oct. 5, 1793.....	Republican calendar adopted.
Oct. 10, 1793.....	Declaration of Revolutionary Government, increasing the power of the Committee of Public Safety.
Oct. 16, 1793.....	Execution of Marie-Antoinette.

- Oct. 31, 1793..... Execution of Girondin leaders.
- Oct. 26, Nov. 2, 1793/Jan. 6, 1794.. Egalitarian inheritance laws passed.
- Nov. 10, 1793..... Festival of Reason, part  
of the dechristianization  
campaign of 1793–1794.
- Dec. 4, 1793..... Law consolidating the  
revolutionary government.
- Dec. 17–19, 1793..... French recapture Toulon;  
Bonaparte commands artillery.
- Dec. 19, 1793..... Decree on public education.
- Feb. 4, 1794..... Abolition of slavery throughout  
French colonies.
- March –April 1794..... Arrest, trial, and execution  
of Hébertists and Indulgents  
(Desmoulins and Danton).
- June 8, 1794..... Festival of the Supreme Being.
- June 10, 1794..... Law of Suspects of 22 Prairial,  
driving the Great Terror.
- June 26, 1794..... Battle of Fleurus.
- July 27, 1794..... 9 Thermidor, overthrow of Robespierre  
and other Jacobin leaders.
- Nov. 12, 1794..... Closing of the Jacobin Club,  
provoked by the gilded youth.

Nov. 19, 1794.....	Jay Treaty signed between the United States and Great Britain.
Dec. 24, 1794.....	Abolition of the general maximum.
Jan. 19, 1795.....	First sister republic established: Batavian (Dutch) Republic.
April–June 1795.....	White Terror against the Jacobins.
May 20, 1795.....	Prairial uprising in Paris, calling for “bread and the Constitution of 1793.”
Oct. 5, 1795.....	Royalist uprising put down by Bonaparte in Paris.
Oct. 25, 1795.....	Lakanal decree on public education.
Nov. 2, 1795.....	Installation of the Directory under the Constitution of 1795 (year III).
March 2, 1796.....	Bonaparte appointed general of the French army of Italy; Italian campaign begins in April.
March 9, 1796.....	Bonaparte marries Josephine de Beauharnais.
May 10, 1796.....	Battle of Lodi.
May 10, 1796.....	Babeuf and leaders of the Conspiracy of Equals arrested; Babeuf executed on May 27, 1797.
Oct. 1796–July 1797.....	Creation of the Cispadane, Ligurian, and Cisalpine republics in Italy.

- Sept. 4, 1797 ..... Fructidor coup against royalist deputies.
- Oct. 17, 1797 ..... Treaty of Campo Formio with Austria.
- Oct. 1797–early 1798 ..... XYZ Affair, leading to the Quasi-War between France and America, 1798–1800.
- May 19, 1798 ..... Bonaparte embarks for Egypt; stays until August 23, 1799.
- July 21, 1798 ..... Battle of the Pyramids.
- Aug. 1, 1798 ..... Naval battle in Aboukir Bay (Battle of the Nile).
- Nov. 9–10, 1799 ..... Bonaparte seizes power (18 Brumaire).
- Dec. 24, 1799 ..... Constitution of Year VIII creates the Consulate; Bonaparte is first consul.
- June 14, 1800 ..... Battle of Marengo.
- Dec. 24, 1800 ..... Rue Nicaise bomb: attempt to assassinate Bonaparte.
- Feb. 9, 1801 ..... Treaty of Lunéville with Austria.
- July 8, 1801 ..... Constitution of Saint-Domingue promulgated.
- July 15, 1801 ..... Signing of the Concordat, promulgated on Easter 1802.
- Feb. 4, 1802 ..... Leclerc expedition lands in Saint-Domingue.

- March 25, 1802 ..... Treaty of Amiens with Great Britain.
- May 19, 1802 ..... Creation of the Legion of Honor.
- May 20, 1802 ..... Bonaparte repeals the universal abolition of slavery.
- Aug. 2, 1802..... Bonaparte pronounced consul for life.
- April 30, 1803 ..... Louisiana Purchase signed in Paris.
- May 18, 1803 ..... Britain declares war on France.
- Jan. 1, 1804 ..... Haiti declares independence from France.
- March 21, 1804 ..... Execution of the duke d'Enghien.
- May 18, 1804 ..... Proclamation of the civil code.
- Dec. 2, 1804 ..... Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine.
- May 26, 1805 ..... Napoleon crowned king of the Kingdom of Italy (created in March 1805).
- Oct. 20, 1805 ..... Austrians surrender at Ulm to Napoleon's Grande Armée.
- Oct. 21, 1805 ..... Naval Battle of Trafalgar.
- Dec. 2, 1805 ..... Battle of Austerlitz.
- Dec. 26, 1805 ..... Treaty of Pressburg with Austria, leading to the 1806 dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire.

March–June 1806.....	Creation of satellite kingdoms: Naples (Joseph), Holland (Louis), Grand Duchy of Berg.
July 1806–March 1807 .....	Meeting of the Jewish Assembly of Notables and Grand Sanhedrin.
July 12, 1806.....	Confederation of the Rhine created.
Oct. 14, 1806.....	Battles of Jena and Auerstädt.
Nov. 21, 1806.....	Napoleon inaugurates the continental blockade.
July 7–9, 1807.....	Treaties of Tilsit with Russia and Prussia; creation of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Westphalia (with Jerome as king).
Nov. 1807– May 1808.....	Peninsular War begins: invasion of Portugal, then Spain; royal family forced to abdicate.
March 1, 1808 .....	Imperial nobility created.
May 2, 1808 .....	Uprising in Madrid against French occupiers.
Spring–summer of 1809.....	Annexation of the Papal States, papal excommunication of Napoleon, imprisonment of Pius VII.
Dec. 15, 1809 .....	Ceremonial divorce of Napoleon and Josephine.
April 2, 1810 .....	Marriage of Napoleon and Marie-Louise of Austria.

March 20, 1811 .....	Birth of son and heir to Napoleon and Marie-Louise.
June 1812 .....	Start of the Russian campaign.
Sept. 7, 1812 .....	Battle of Borodino.
Sept. 14–Oct. 19, 1812.....	French occupation of Moscow, followed by French retreat.
Oct. 23, 1812.....	Malet’s attempted coup in Paris.
March–August 1813.....	Formation of the Grand Alliance (Sixth Coalition) against Napoleon.
Oct. 16–19, 1813.....	Battle of the Nations at Leipzig.
March 31, 1814.....	Allies occupy Paris.
April 11, 1814 .....	Napoleon abdicates; Louis XVIII becomes king of France.
April 1814–July 1830 .....	Bourbon restoration (except during the Hundred Days, March–June 1815).
May 1814–Feb. 1815 .....	Napoleon on Elba.
Oct. 1814–June 1815 .....	Congress of Vienna.
March 1, 1815 .....	Napoleon lands in southern France.
March 20, 1815.....	Napoleon marches into Paris; replaces Louis XVIII for the Hundred Days.
June 18, 1815 .....	Battle of Waterloo.

June 22, 1815 .....	Napoleon abdicates again, soon sent to Saint Helena.
May 5, 1821 .....	Death of Napoleon on Saint Helena.
Aug. 9, 1830–Feb. 24, 1848.....	July monarchy, reign of Louis- Philippe d’Orléans.
1848.....	Year of revolutions across much of Europe.
Feb. 24, 1848–Dec. 2, 1851 .....	French Second Republic.
1852–1870.....	Second Empire of Napoleon III.
1870–1940.....	French Third Republic.
Spring 1871 .....	Paris Commune.

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Tone, John Lawrence. *The Fatal Knot: The Guerrilla War in Navarre and the Defeat of Napoleon in Spain*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. This well-told history situates Spanish guerrilla resistance to Napoleon in its social context and emphasizes the regional characteristics of the Spanish revolt.

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Woell, Edward J. *Small-Town Martyrs and Murderers: Religious Revolution and Counterrevolution in Western France, 1774–1914*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006. A sensitive and well-researched regional study of the Vendée, its religious culture, and its counterrevolutionary movement. Also explores the longer-term memory of the Vendée.

Woloch, Isser. *Napoleon and His Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. A fascinating look at how former revolutionaries responded to Napoleon's evolving politics. Assumes some background knowledge.

———. *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994. A magisterial work analyzing a range of revolutionary and Napoleonic changes in local institutions, such as schools, judicial courts, politics, and conscription.

Zahniser, Marvin R. *Uncertain Friendship: American-French Diplomatic Relations through the Cold War*. New York: Wiley, 1975. An older but readable survey of Franco-American diplomatic history.

Zamoyski, Adam. *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007. A lively and detailed

account of the Congress of Vienna, with a focus on the major diplomatic personalities and their intricate negotiations.

## Notes