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Revolution Brings Reform and Terror

MAIN IDEA

The revolutionary government of France made reforms but also used terror and violence to retain power.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Some governments that lack the support of a majority of their people still use terrorism to control their citizens.

TERMS & NAMES

- Declaration of the Rights of Man
- Legislative Assembly
- émigrés
- sans-culottes
- guillotine
- Maximilien Robespierre
- Committee of Public Safety
- Reign of Terror

SETTING THE STAGE Peasants were not the only members of French society to feel the Great Fear; nobles and clergymen were equally afraid. Throughout France, bands of angry peasants struck out against members of the upper classes. In the summer of 1789, a few months before the women's march to Versailles, some nobles and clergymen in the National Assembly responded to the uprisings in an emotional late-night meeting.

The Assembly Reforms France

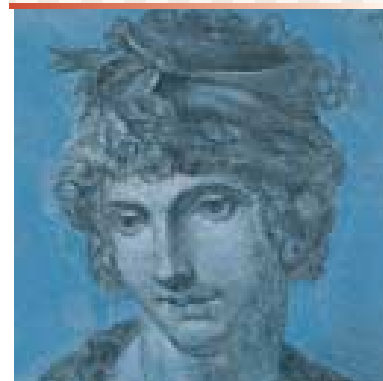
Throughout the night of August 4, 1789, noblemen made grand speeches, declaring their love of liberty and equality. Although motivated more by fear than by idealism, they joined other members of the National Assembly in sweeping away the feudal privileges of the First Estate and the Second Estate, thus making commoners and peasants equal to the nobles and the clergy. By morning, the Old Regime was dead.

The Rights of Man Three weeks later, on August 27, the National Assembly adopted a statement of revolutionary ideals called “A Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” commonly known as the **Declaration of the Rights of Man**. Reflecting the influence of Enlightenment ideas and of the Declaration of Independence, the document stated that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” and that “the aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural . . . rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.” Other articles of the famous document guaranteed citizens equal justice, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. As the French people embraced the principles of the declaration, the expression “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” became the slogan of the Revolution.

However, the Declaration of the Rights of Man did not apply to women. When Olympe de Gouges (aw-LAMP duh GOOZH) wrote a declaration of the rights of women, not only were her ideas rejected, but she eventually lost her head as an enemy of the Revolution.

A State-Controlled Church During 1790, many of the National Assembly's reforms focused on the relationship between church and state. The assembly took over church lands and declared that church officials and priests were to be elected by property owners and paid as state officials. Thus, the Catholic Church lost both its lands and its political independence. The reasons for the assembly's actions were economic. The delegates hesitated to further tax the bourgeoisie, who were strong supporters of the Revolution. However, the delegates were willing to sell church lands to help pay off France's large debt.

HISTORY MAKERS



Olympe de Gouges
1748–1793

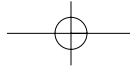
Olympe de Gouges was a playwright and journalist whose feminist writings reached a large audience. In 1791 this strong supporter of democracy demanded the same rights for French women that French men were demanding for themselves. In her “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen,” she challenged the oppression of male authority and the notion of male-female inequality:

Male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Synthesizing

How did the slogan “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” sum up the goals of the Revolution?



The assembly's actions alarmed millions of devout French peasants, who rallied to the support of their parish priests. Many French peasants, like their priests, were conservative Catholics. Although the assembly's move to make the church a part of the state was in accord with Enlightenment philosophy, it offended such Catholics, who believed that the pope should rule over a church independent of the state.

These changes in the church drove a wedge between the peasants and the bourgeoisie. From this time on, the peasants often opposed further revolutionary changes.

Louis Tries to Escape As the National Assembly restructured the relationship between church and state, Louis XVI pondered his fate as a monarch. Some of the king's advisers warned Louis that he and his family were in danger. Many supporters of the monarchy thought France unsafe and left the country. Then, in June 1791, Louis and his family tried to escape from France to the Austrian Netherlands. As they neared the French border, however, a postmaster recognized the king from his portrait on some paper money. The royal family was returned to Paris under guard. By his attempted escape, Louis XVI had increased the influence of his radical enemies and sealed his own doom.

Conflicting Goals Cause Divisions

For two years, the National Assembly argued over a new constitution for France. By 1791, the delegates had made significant changes in France's government and society.

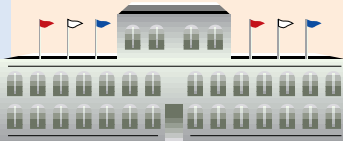
A Limited Monarchy The National Assembly created a limited constitutional monarchy. The new constitution stripped the king of much of his authority and gave the Legislative Assembly the power to create French law. Although the king and his ministers would still hold the executive power to enforce laws, France's assemblymen would be the lawmakers in the country.

In September 1791, the National Assembly completed its new constitution, which Louis reluctantly approved, and then handed over its power to a new assembly—the **Legislative Assembly**. This assembly had the power to create laws and to approve or prevent any war the king declared on other nations.

Factions Split France Despite the new government, old problems, such as food shortages and government debt, remained. Angry cries for more liberty, more equality, and more bread soon caused the Revolution's leaders to turn against one another. The Legislative Assembly split into three general groups, each of which sat in a different part of the meeting hall. (The three divisions are summarized below.)

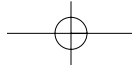
THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Identifying Problems What problems were not solved by the new government?

The Legislative Assembly		
Radicals	Moderates	Conservatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sat on the left side of the hall; were called left-wing and said to be on the left • opposed the king and the idea of a monarchy • wanted sweeping changes in government and proposed that common people have full power in a republic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sat in the center of the hall and were called centrists • wanted some changes in government, but not as many as the radicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sat on the right side of the hall; were called right-wing and said to be on the right • upheld the idea of a limited monarchy • wanted few changes in government

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. What do the divisions in the Legislative Assembly say about the differences in French society?
2. What similarities and differences do you see between the political factions in the Legislative Assembly and those in the U.S. government today?



Although these groups disagreed, there were groups in France that were far more extreme. **Émigrés** (EHM·ih·GRAYZ)—nobles and others who had fled France during the peasant uprisings—were on the extreme right. They hoped to undo the Revolution and restore the Old Regime.

On the extreme left, the most radical group was the **sans-culottes** (SANZ kyoo-LAHTS), “those without knee breeches.” Unlike the upper classes, who wore fancy knee-length pants, sans-culottes wore regular trousers. They were Parisian wage-earners and small shopkeepers who wanted a greater voice in government, lower food prices, and an end to food shortages. Although they did not have a role in the assembly, they soon discovered other ways to exert their power as a group, especially by influencing one of the political clubs that developed later.

War and Extreme Measures

In 1792, the French were faced not only with reforms at home but also with a disastrous foreign war. Monarchs and nobles in many European countries feared the changes that were taking place in France. They worried that peasant revolts similar to the ones in France could break out in their own countries.

War with Austria French radicals hoped to spread their revolution to all the peoples of Europe. When Austria and Prussia proposed that France put Louis back on the throne, the Legislative Assembly responded by declaring war on Austria in April 1792. Prussia later joined Austria in the war against the French. By going to war with France, the European leaders believed, they would be helping Louis XVI to regain his position as an absolute monarch, as well as preserving their own positions as monarchs.

The war began badly for the poorly equipped French forces. By the summer of 1792, enemy armies were advancing toward Paris. On July 25, the Prussian commander threatened to destroy Paris if the revolutionaries harmed any member of the royal family. This rash statement infuriated the Parisians. On August 10, about 20,000 men and women invaded the Tuileries, the royal palace where Louis and his family were staying. The king’s Swiss guard of 900 men fought desperately to defend Louis. The mob brutally massacred them and imprisoned Louis, Marie Antoinette, and their children in a stone tower. A witness in the palace recalled the scene:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

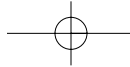
I ran from place to place, and finding the apartments and staircases already strewn with dead bodies, I . . . ran away to the Dauphin’s garden gate where some Marseillais [citizen soldiers from Marseille], who had just butchered several of the Swiss, were stripping them. One of them came up to me with a bloody sword in his hand, saying, “Hello, citizen! Without arms! Here, take this and help us to kill.” But luckily . . . I managed to make my escape. Some of the Swiss who were persued took refuge in an adjoining stable. I concealed myself in the same place. They were soon cut to pieces close to me. . . .

UNNAMED ROYAL SERVANT, quoted in *The Days of the French Revolution*

France’s war with Austria and Prussia also affected daily life in Paris. During the summer of 1792, Parisians learned that French troops were failing to hold back the approaching Prussian forces. Just as bands of volunteer soldiers were preparing to leave Paris and reinforce the French soldiers in the field, they heard rumors that the royalists imprisoned in Paris would seize control of the city in their absence. Angry



In June 1792, rioters invaded the Tuileries—Louis’s palace in Paris. They shouted at Louis and waved swords in his face for hours before being persuaded to leave peacefully.



citizens responded by taking the law into their own hands. For several days in early September, Parisians raided the prisons and murdered over 1,000 prisoners. Many royalists, nobles, and clergymen fell victim to the angry mobs in these so-called September massacres.

Faced with the threat of the Parisian radicals, the members of the Legislative Assembly gave up the idea of a limited monarchy. They set aside the Constitution of 1791, declared the king deposed, and dissolved their assembly, calling for the election of a new legislature.

The new governing body, elected in September, called itself the National Convention. Just as the new government took office, France had a stroke of luck. A French army won a battle against the Austrians and Prussians. For the moment, France was out of danger from abroad.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
C. Recognizing Causes What did the September massacres show about the mood of the people?



In this engraving, titled *Execution of Louis XVI*, a revolutionary presents Louis's head to the crowd after the king's execution in Paris.

Radicals Execute the King During the frenzied summer of 1792, the leaders of the mobs on the streets had more real power than any government assembly. Although the mobs were made up of the poor, their leaders came from the bourgeoisie.

Both men and women of the middle class joined political clubs. The most radical club in 1792 was the Jacobin (JAK-uh-bihn) Club, where violent speech-making was the order of the day. The Jacobins wanted to remove the king and establish a republic.

One of the prominent radical leaders was Jean Paul Marat (mah-RAH). During the Revolution, he edited a radical newspaper. His fiery editorials called for “five or six hundred heads cut off” to rid France of the enemies of the Revolution. Georges Danton (zhawrz dahn-TAWN), a revolutionary leader who was devoted to the rights of Paris's poor people, joined the club as a talented speaker.

The National Convention, meeting in Paris on September 21, quickly abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic. Adult male citizens were granted the right to vote and hold office. Despite the important part they had already played in the Revolution, women were not given the right to vote. The delegates reduced Louis XVI's role from that of a king to that of a common citizen and prisoner. Then, guided by radical Jacobins, they tried Louis for treason and found him guilty. By a very close vote, they sentenced him to death.

On January 21, 1793, the ex-king walked with calm dignity up the steps of the scaffold to be beheaded by a machine called the **guillotine** (GIHL-uh-TEEN). Thousands died by the guillotine during the French Revolution.

France's Citizen Army The new republic's first problem was the continuing war with Austria and Prussia. Early in 1793, Great Britain, Holland, and Spain joined Prussia and Austria in an alliance known as the First Coalition. Forced to contend with so many enemies, France suffered a string of defeats.

The Jacobin leaders took extreme steps to meet the new danger. In February 1793, the National Convention decreed a draft into the army of 300,000 French citizens between the ages of 18 and 40. By 1794, the army had grown to 800,000 and included women.

Vocabulary
coalition: a temporary alliance between groups for some specific purpose.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Guillotine

If you think the guillotine was a cruel form of capital punishment, think again. Dr. Joseph Ignace Guillotin proposed a machine that satisfied many needs—it was efficient, humane, and democratic. A physician and member of the National Assembly, Guillotin claimed that those executed with the device “wouldn’t even feel the slightest pain.”

Prior to the guillotine’s introduction in 1792, many French criminals had suffered through horrible punishments in public places. Although public punishments continued to attract large crowds, not all spectators were pleased with the new machine. Some witnesses felt that death by the guillotine occurred much too quickly to be enjoyed by an audience.

Once the executioner cranked the blade to the top, a mechanism released it. The sharp weighted blade fell, severing the victim’s head from his or her body.

Some doctors believed that a victim’s head retained its hearing and eyesight for up to 15 minutes after the blade’s deadly blow. All remains were eventually gathered and buried in simple graves.

Earlier Forms of Punishment

Criminals in 17th- and 18th-century France sometimes faced one or more of the following fatal penalties:

- Burning
- Strangulation
- Being broken on a wheel
- Hanging
- Dismemberment
- Beheading
- Being pulled apart by horses

Woman knitters, or *tricoteuses*, were regular spectators at executions and knitted stockings for soldiers as they sat near the base of the scaffold.

Connect to History

Synthesizing In what ways was the guillotine an efficient means of execution?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R18

Connect to Today

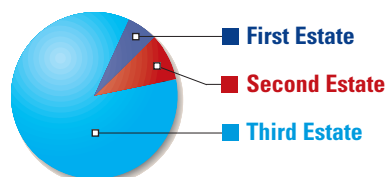
Comparing France continued to use the guillotine until the late 1970s. Compare this instrument of capital punishment with the ones used in the United States today, and present your findings in an oral report. Speculate on what the goals of capital punishment are and whether they have been achieved—in the French Revolution or in today’s world.

For an Internet activity on the French Revolution . . .

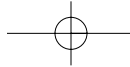
NET ACTIVITY
CLASSZONE.COM

Beheading by Class

More than 2,100 people were executed during the last 132 days of the Reign of Terror. The pie graph below displays the breakdown of beheadings by class.



Before each execution, bound victims traveled from the prison to the scaffold in horse-drawn carts during a 1½ hour procession through city streets.



On this late-18th-century French inkwell, the liberty cap worn by revolutionaries crushes a clergyman of the Old Regime.

The Terror Grips France

Foreign armies were not the only enemies of the French republic. The Jacobins had thousands of enemies within France itself—peasants who were horrified by the beheading of the king, priests who would not accept government control, and rival leaders who were stirring up rebellion in the provinces. How to contain and control these enemies became a central issue.

Robespierre Assumes Control As dozens of leaders struggled for power, **Maximilien Robespierre** (ROHBZ-peer) slowly gathered control into his own hands. Robespierre and his supporters set out to build a “republic of virtue.” They tried to wipe out every trace of France’s past monarchy and nobility. Many families named

Leroy (“king”), for instance, changed their names

to something less political. No household item was too small to escape the influence of Robespierre—even the kings, queens, and jacks in decks of cards were changed to figures that represented revolutionary ideals.

Firm believers in reason, the radicals changed the calendar to be more scientific. They divided the year into 12 months of 30 days and renamed each month. The new calendar had no Sundays because the radicals considered religion old-fashioned and dangerous. They even closed all churches in Paris, and towns all over France soon did the same.

In the summer of 1793, Robespierre became the leader of the **Committee of Public Safety**. As head of the committee, he decided who should be considered enemies of the republic. The committee often had people tried in the morning and guillotined the same afternoon. From July 1793 to July 1794, Robespierre governed France nearly as a dictator, and the period of his rule became known as the **Reign of Terror**. In his speeches, Robespierre justified the Reign of Terror, explaining that it enabled French citizens to remain true to the ideals of the Revolution. In this speech excerpt, Robespierre makes a connection between virtue and terror:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror. If the basis of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the basis of popular government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror: virtue without which terror is murderous, terror without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing else than swift, severe, indomitable justice; it flows, then, from virtue.

MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE, quoted in *Problems of Western Civilization: The Challenge of History*

The most famous victim of the Terror was the widowed queen, Marie Antoinette. Calm and dignified, she rode in the death cart past jeering crowds. On the scaffold, she accidentally stepped on her executioner’s foot. “Monsieur,” she apologized, “I beg your pardon. I did not do it on purpose.” Those were her last words.

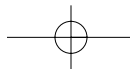
The “enemies of the republic” who troubled Robespierre the most were fellow revolutionaries who challenged his leadership. In October 1793, revolutionary courts pronounced death sentences on many of the leaders who had first helped set up the republic. Their only crime was that they were less radical than Robespierre.

By the beginning of 1794, even Georges Danton found himself in danger. (Marat had already been stabbed to death by a young woman.) Danton’s friends in the

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

D. Summarizing

How did Robespierre justify his use of terror?



National Convention, afraid to defend him, joined in condemning him to death. On the scaffold, he told the executioner, “Don’t forget to show my head to the people. It’s well worth seeing.”

Besides leading political figures, thousands of unknown people were sent to death on the flimsiest of charges. A revolutionary court sentenced an 18-year-old youth to die by the guillotine for sawing down a tree that had been planted as a symbol of liberty. A tavern keeper was executed because he sold sour wine “to the defenders of the country.”

During the Terror, approximately 3,000 people were executed in Paris. Some historians believe that as many as 40,000 were killed all together. About 85 percent were peasants or members of the urban poor or middle class—common people for whose benefit the Revolution had supposedly been carried out.

End of the Terror

By July 1794, the members of the National Convention knew that none of them were safe from Robespierre. To save themselves, they turned on him. A group of conspirators demanded his arrest, shouting, “Down with the tyrant!” The next day the Revolution’s last powerful leader went to the guillotine. The Reign of Terror, the radical phase of the French Revolution, ended when Maximilien Robespierre lost his head on July 28, 1794.

French public opinion shifted dramatically to the right after Robespierre’s death. People of all classes had grown weary of the Terror. They were also tired of the skyrocketing prices of bread, salt, and other necessities of life after the Terror.

In 1795, moderate leaders in the National Convention drafted a new plan of government. The third since 1789, the new constitution placed power firmly in the hands of the upper middle class and called for a two-house legislature and an executive body of five men, known as the Directory. The five directors were moderates, not revolutionary idealists. Some of them freely enriched themselves at the public’s expense. Despite their corruption, however, they gave their troubled country a period of order.

The Directory also found the right general to command France’s armies. This supremely talented young man was named Napoleon Bonaparte.

Vocabulary
conspirators:
people involved in
a secret plot.

HISTORY MAKERS



The Dead Marat (1793), Jacques Louis David

Jean Paul Marat 1743–1793

Marat was a thin, high-strung, sickly man whose revolutionary writings stirred up the violent mood in Paris. Because he suffered from a painful skin disease, he often found comfort by relaxing in a cold bath—even arranging things so that he could work in his bathtub!

During the summer of 1793, Charlotte Corday, a supporter of a rival faction whose members had been jailed, gained an audience with Marat by pretending to have information about traitors. Once inside Marat’s private chambers, she fatally stabbed him as he bathed. For her crime, a revolutionary court sent Corday to the guillotine.

Section 2 Assessment

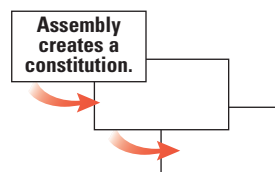
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Declaration of the Rights of Man
- Legislative Assembly
- émigrés
- sans-culottes
- guillotine
- Maximilien Robespierre
- Committee of Public Safety
- Reign of Terror

2. TAKING NOTES

Recreate the cause-and-effect graphic below on your paper. Fill in the main events that occurred after the creation of the Constitution of 1791.



3. RECOGNIZING CAUSES

After the French rejected the king’s absolute control, they struggled to create a more democratic government. However, in 1793, Robespierre became a dictator. What caused this to happen?

THINK ABOUT

- the political climate prior to Robespierre’s rule
- the need for a leader
- Robespierre’s personality

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Revolution Create a revolutionaries’ “Wall of Fame.” Working in small teams, write short biographies of revolutionary figures mentioned in this section (including pictures if possible). Then add biographies of other revolutionary figures—from England and the Americas—mentioned in the unit.