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Deborah Vess, Ph.D.

Professor of History and Interdisciplinary Studies
Department of History, Geography, and Philosophy
Georgia College and State University



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Chapter 24

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

KEY TERMS

Revolt Noblesse	The Emergency Republic
Third Estate	Thermidorian Reaction
Estates General	Napoleon
Tennis Court Oath	The Consulate
National Assembly	Second and Third Coalitions
Declaration of the Rights of Man	The Berlin Decrees and the Confederation of the Rhine
Civil Constitution of the Clergy	Waterloo
Active and passive citizens	Holy Alliance
Girondists	Congress of Vienna
Jacobins	The Quadruple Alliance and the Concert of Europe
<i>sans-culottes</i>	
Declaration of Pillnitz	
The Reign of Terror	

THE REVOLT NOBLESSE

Discontent with the absolutist government created by Louis XIV boiled over in the eighteenth century. The financial crisis following the Seven Years' War (1757–1763) contributed to the rise of revolutionary sentiment. Fully half of the royal budget went towards interest payments on the royal debt, and although the nobility had great wealth, they found numerous ways to escape the payment of mandated taxes. Louis's ministers Turgot and Necker both attempted to stabilize French finances, but to no avail. When the government attempted to reform the tax system so that the nobility paid the taxes they were intended to pay, the Parlement of Paris resisted and revolted, followed by other Parlements throughout France. The Parlements then demanded that the Estates General be summoned, something that had not been done since 1614. This initial stage of the revolution is known as the **Revolt Noblesse**, or the Revolt of the Parlements.

Summoning of the Estates General

Although there was great hope among the masses surrounding the first meeting of the Estates General in 1789, that hope was quickly dashed. The Estates General voted by body, that is, one vote per estate. The three estates were the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. The first two could and did always outvote the Third Estate, which represented the majority of the French population. The famous pamphlet by the Abbe Sieyes, "What is the Third Estate?" pointed out the folly of this process, when he argued that the answer to the title question was, "everything." The Third Estate performed most of the work in France and paid most of the taxes, and, therefore, was entitled to more rights. When the Estates met for the first time after the Revolt Noblesse, the first two estates marched in by body sitting in their traditional locations and dressed in their finery. The Third Estate soon realized that nothing would change for them through this process.

The National Assembly

On June 1, 1789, the Third Estate left the assembly and then invited the clergy and the nobles to join them. By June 17, they had declared themselves the **National Assembly**. On June 20, they took the famous **Tennis Court Oath**, promising not to disband until the Assembly had created a new constitution. The majority of the clergy and a large number of nobles joined with them.

The French Revolution is considered the first movement in which the masses participated. The role of the people became intense about the time the National Assembly began its work. In 1788, there was a Great Famine, leading to bread riots in 1789. The royal family had little or no understanding of the needs of the masses. Although **Marie Antoinette**, the German queen of Louis XVI, never

made the infamous remark, “Let them eat cake,” the remark symbolized the distance between the royal family, who led a life of great pomp at Versailles, and the masses, who led lives of misery. While Marie Antoinette frolicked in a country village constructed on the grounds of Versailles for her amusement, the masses did not even have bread to eat. Rarely had royals been so distant from those they governed.

The Storming of the Bastille

The bread riots alarmed the monarchy, and it already had many troops in Paris due to the revolutionary activities of the Third Estate. The masses became further agitated when Louis dismissed his minister, Necker, whom the people saw as their champion against the aristocracy. This volatile situation erupted on July 14, 1789, and culminated in the storming of the **Bastille**, a fortress prison where the monarchy traditionally kept dissenters. The rioters killed troops and released seven prisoners and formed a new municipal government, **the commune**. In response, the government created a militia in Paris, which became the National Guard. Its emblem was a cockade made up of the two colors of the city of Paris, blue and red. Louis XVI gave command of the Guard to General Lafayette, despite his involvement in the American Revolution, of which the monarchy had disapproved.

The Great Fear

The situation became progressively more volatile as the Great Fear swept through France in 1789. Fear of an aristocratic conspiracy to overthrow the Third Estate in the National Assembly, desperate needs in time of famine, and long-standing anger over feudal dues brought about violent protest against ancient manorial privileges. Peasants still paid fees for the use of village mills and other privileges known as banalities. They paid rent for land.

Abolition of Feudal Obligations

On the night of August 4, 1789, while the nobility was absent, the National Assembly abolished feudal society in France. The assembly outlawed banalities, tithes to the Church, and mandated that jobs be made open to all. Peasants, however, still had to buy their land to legally own it, which for most of them amounted to the same thing as the old rent payments.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man

On August 27, 1789, the Assembly issued the **Declaration of the Rights of Man**, by which everyone in France was considered born free and equal in rights, especially those of life, liberty, property, security, and of resistance to

oppression. Although the document contained many lofty sentiments, including freedom of the press, the delegates' use of the word "man" clearly left "women" out of the equation. Mary Wollstonecraft would later write a rebuttal of the assumptions that women were not equal to men in her "Vindication of the Rights of Women." The ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, however, later led to a wave of abolitionism throughout Europe.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

In July 1790 the Assembly passed the **Civil Constitution of the Clergy**, whereby they secularized the French Catholic Church. They confiscated church lands, especially those owned by monasteries, and dissolved the monasteries. The Assembly used these lands as the basis for selling bonds called assignats. The clergy was now to be paid a salary by the state and elected by the appropriate parishes. Such clergy would feel no real allegiance to the Roman pope, but rather would be loyal to the new Republic. The Assembly forced the clergy to take an oath to uphold the Civil Constitution. The Roman Catholic pope repudiated the Civil Constitution in 1791, but it reflected centuries of seething resentment toward the Church.

Active and Passive Citizens

The term of the National Assembly expired in September 1791, and their achievement was a new constitution. The constitution distinguished between **active and passive citizens**, on the basis of the amount of taxes paid. Active citizens could fully participate in the government, while passive citizens were more limited. Only males were considered citizens. Passive citizens had to have had French parents or to have been born in France. In order to become active citizens, one had to take a civic oath, be 25 years of age, and pay a tax equivalent to three days' wages. The revolutionary leader **Jean Paul Marat**, one of the most radical revolutionaries who advocated universal male suffrage, was horrified by this distinction and cried out in a famous pamphlet, "The Worst Has Happened."

The Legislative Assembly

After the National Assembly was dissolved, the **Legislative Assembly** took its place. Girondists, Feuillants, and Jacobins dominated the Assembly. The **Girondists** were primarily deputies of the department of the Gironde, and supported the idea of a foreign war in the belief that war would unite France and help to spread the revolution to other countries. They were also interested in a constitutional government. The **Feuillants** were a group that supported a constitutional monarchy, but since they opposed a foreign war, many associated

them with the royalist factions. The **Jacobins** opposed all counter-revolution, but wished to limit the power of the king and to institute a republic.

The Storming of Versailles

Meanwhile, the Revolution was beginning to fragment as the revolutionaries disagreed, and European monarchs began mustering forces to oppose them. Peasant revolts had erupted all over Europe in response to the French revolutionary motto of “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” European monarchs rightly believed that the Revolution threatened their own monarchies, and this was further confirmed when an angry Parisian crowd stormed Versailles on October 5, 1789, and brought the king and queen, whom they mockingly called “the baker and the baker’s wife,” to the Tuileries Palace in Paris.



Portrait of King Louis XVI

Louis XVI and the Flight to Varennes

Louis XVI’s wife, Marie, was the sister of the Holy Roman Emperor. Louis believed they could expect help from the Emperor, as well as other monarchs, and so attempted to leave France. Revolutionaries got wind of his desperate

flight on June 20 and 21, 1791, and halted him at Varennes. The king and queen were escorted back in humiliation and Louis was eventually forced to accept the new constitution.

Declaration of War Against Austria in 1792

As the Revolution gained in momentum, the Feuillants fell. In August 1791, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Prussia met at Pillnitz, and issued an ultimatum to the French in the **Declaration of Pillnitz**. That ultimatum demanded the protection of Louis XVI on the threat of war. The Girondists hoped that the declaration would be interpreted as a declaration of war and on April 20, 1792, the second revolution began when the Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria.

In addition to Marie Antoinette's brother, the Holy Roman Emperor, among the foreign leaders that now aligned themselves against France were the King of Sweden, the Russian Tsarina Catherine the Great, the King of Prussia, and even Alexander Hamilton of the United States.

The National Convention and the September Massacres

The war went very unfavorably, and the masses began to turn against the king and queen as they feared a royal conspiracy. In August, they stormed the Tuileries, where the king had been kept since his flight, and imprisoned him. The rebels set up an insurrectionary commune that replaced the legally elected one of the early revolution. They rejected the constitution of the National Assembly, and demanded new elections by universal manhood suffrage for a National Convention, whose task would be to draw up a new constitution. There were mass arrests of royalists and in September, a wave of massacres in which approximately 2,000 prisoners died.

The *sans-culottes*

Radical revolutionaries dominated the National Convention, especially members of the *sans-culottes*, or “those without fancy breeches.” Although often portrayed as frenzied commoners, the *sans-culottes* were lawyers, clerks, tradesmen, and the working people of France. Among their leaders were the most radical revolutionaries, such as Georges Jacques Danton, Jean Paul Marat, and Camille Desmoulins.

Abolition of the Monarchy

The convention met for the first time on September 21, 1792, and immediately abolished the monarchy. It proclaimed Year One of the French Republic. Not only were the years to be dated from this event, but also new names were to be used for the months and weeks were to have ten days. The convention then

accused the king of treason and on January 21, 1793, executed Citizen Capet, as Louis was then known. Mass citizen uprisings in areas of strong support for the royalist cause occurred in the Vendée. The opposition of foreign monarchs became more intense and civil strife in France increased.

The Convention created a democratic constitution that was approved by 1.8 million voters in a plebiscite, but it was never implemented.

THE REIGN OF TERROR

From 1792–1795, the **Emergency Republic** ruled France, dominated by the **Committee of Public Safety**, created in April 1793. The committee was essentially a dictatorship, whose tasks were to manage the war abroad and the growing chaos at home. Wages and prices were frozen, and the French ordered the use of the worthless assignats as money. The most important leaders were **Georges Danton** and **Maximillian Robespierre**, who vigorously argued in defense of any measures to ensure the survival of the “Republic of Virtue.” Robespierre instituted a **Reign of Terror** starting in 1793. Robespierre supported such lofty ideas as universal suffrage, but the society he created was anything but utopian. He turned against any and all whom he believed did not support the revolution and who might see its reforms turned back. The Girondists, for example, were now enemies of the spread of the revolution. In 1793 **Charlotte Corday**, whose brother had been denounced and condemned by the Committee of Public Safety, assassinated Marat while he was soaking in his bathtub. Robespierre condemned many of his own friends, such as Danton, to the guillotine.

Fall of Robespierre

By July 27, 1794, however, many feared that Robespierre would turn against them, and they shouted him down in the assembly. Robespierre fell victim to his own extremities and was executed on July 28, known as the ninth of Thermidor in the revolutionary calendar.

Thermidorian Reaction

The conservative reaction that followed is known as the **Thermidorian Reaction**. A new constitution created a **directory** and a two-chamber legislature. There were five directors, but unfortunately, they and their colleagues were corrupt.

Napoleon

Many feared the return of the royalists, but at the same time, many royalists were able to reassert their ideas. The Abbé Sieyès, once a leader of the Third Estate,

now called for direction from above and supported the efforts of a French war hero, **Napoleon Bonaparte**, to restore order. Napoleon had recently crushed the Austrian armies and the First Coalition (Spain, Holland, Austria, Prussia, England, and Sardinia). The Treaty of Campo Formio in October 1797 ended the first phase of the Napoleonic wars.



Napoleon Bonaparte

The Battle of the Nile

The Directors feared Bonaparte, and so in May 1798, they sent him out of France to capture Egypt. The possibility of his success greatly worried the British, for if the French dominated the Middle East, they would control the land route to India. In August 1798 at the **Battle of the Nile** (or Aboukir Bay), Lord Nelson wiped out the French fleet while it was anchored in shallow water, leaving 38,000 French soldiers stranded.

The Second Coalition

Now a **Second Coalition** formed against the French to take advantage of their defeat on the Nile. From 1799–1801 the Second Coalition, made up of Turkey, England, Austria, and Russia, fought France. In 1799, Austria drove the

French back across the Rhine, a Russo-Austrian army defeated the French and drove them out of Italy, and Britain pushed the French out of Holland. A three-pronged attack was planned on France by Britain, Austria, and Russia.

The Consulate

Meanwhile, Napoleon returned to France and on the nineteenth of Brumaire, or November 10, 1799, Napoleon established the **consulate** and named himself as first consul. In 1801, Napoleon shocked many revolutionaries by making peace with the Roman Catholic pope. He argued that since Roman Catholicism was the religion of people, peace was good, but at the same time, he kept all the Church lands previously confiscated. Napoleon continued to insist that the clergy swear an oath of loyalty to the state, and submitted a new constitution to the public for ratification according to universal male suffrage.

The Napoleonic Code

He also instituted the **Napoleonic Code**, which tended to favor employers over their employees, and males over females within the family. Prior to the code, France did not have a single set of laws. The code was also the first code established in a country where there was a civil law system, and it followed Roman law in dividing civil law into personal status, property, and acquisition of property.

Napoleon becomes Emperor in 1804

In 1802, Napoleon made peace with Britain, thus ending the threat of the Second Coalition. Napoleon alienated many of his supporters, however, in 1804 when he declared himself emperor. The ceremony occurred in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and at the point when the pope had blessed the regalia, Napoleon took the crown and placed it on himself.

The Third Coalition

The **Third Coalition** of Britain, Russia, and Austria formed against France, and on October 21, 1805, **Admiral Horatio Nelson** defeated the French at the **Battle of Trafalgar**. The British now had control of the sea. On land, the story was different. Napoleon occupied Vienna and in December 1805, he defeated Austria and Russia at Austerlitz. Austria retreated from Italy, leaving Napoleon in control of everything north of Italy. Napoleon proclaimed himself the king of Italy and annexed Genoa. Napoleon appointed his relatives in control of his new territories. In 1808 Napoleon made his brother Joseph the king of Spain after obtaining the abdication of Charles IV and his son Ferdinand VII.

Napoleon also defeated the Prussians at Jena in 1806. As a result of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, Prussia lost half its territory, and Russia recognized the French gains and eventually lent support to Napoleon in his defeat of the Swedes.

The Berlin Decrees and the Confederation of the Rhine

Europe was now virtually unrecognizable from the prerevolutionary period. The Holy Roman Empire was essentially dissolved in 1806, and Napoleon now controlled most of the West German princes through the Confederation of the Rhine. Napoleon made kings of the Electors of Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony; created the kingdoms of Holland and Westphalia; and made his brothers Louis and Jérôme Bonaparte their kings. In 1806, the Berlin decrees forbade his allies to import British goods. Napoleon instituted the Continental System and imposed his codes all over Europe.

Napoleon Marries Marie Louise

The Austria Hapsburgs were so weakened by this time that the Holy Roman Emperor was now calling himself the “emperor of Austria.” In 1810, after Napoleon had his marriage to Josephine annulled, he married Marie Louise, the daughter of the Austrian emperor Francis I, formerly the Holy Roman Emperor Francis II. Together they had a son, the “king of Rome,” later known as the Duke of Reichstadt or Napoleon II.

Revolts

Many Europeans as well as Napoleon’s allies were beginning to revolt from his heavy-handed policies. The Continental System ruined the economies of many of Napoleon’s allies. There were revolts in Spain, and in 1810 Russia withdrew from the Continental System.

Napoleon Invades Russia in 1812

In 1812 Napoleon collected the largest army ever seen and invaded Russia. The Russians tried to slow them by following a scorched earth policy, but both sides lost huge numbers of casualties at the Battle of Borodino on September 7. The French lost 30,000 men and the Russians twice as many. Napoleon reached Moscow on September 14, only to find that the Russians had burned the city. The French army now was caught in the Russian winter and began a disastrous retreat on October 19, 1812. Those who did not die of exposure died of sheer hunger. Napoleon left with 600,000 men and returned with only 100,000.

Capture of Paris in 1814

Nevertheless, upon his return to France, Napoleon was once again planning war. Many former allies now turned against him. Prussia allied with Russia in 1813, soon followed by Britain and Sweden, and finally, by Austria. At the **Battle of the Nations** at Leipzig in October 1813, they defeated Napoleon. The allies now offered peace if Napoleon would stay within French borders, but he refused, and the allies then took Paris on March 31, 1814.

Napoleon Abdicates and then Returns for the 100 Days

Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and went into exile on the island of **Elba**. The Bourbon monarchy was restored, and **King Louis XVIII** took power. While the allies debated the future of Europe at the **Congress of Vienna** (1814–1815), Napoleon made a return, landing at Cannes on March 1, 1815. Many French were still suspicious of the Bourbons and remained loyal to their former emperor. Napoleon entered Paris on March 20, 1815, and for 100 days ruled again.

Defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo

The Continental Congress declared Napoleon an outlaw and sent the **Duke of Wellington** to defeat him. At **Waterloo**, in what is now Belgium, on June 18, 1815, Napoleon was finally defeated. Napoleon abdicated and was sent into exile on the remote and tiny island of **Saint Helena** in the Atlantic off the coast of Africa, where he died of stomach cancer in 1821. In 1840, Louis Philippe ordered the return of Napoleon's remains, and they remain enshrined today in the Invalides in Paris.

German Nationalism

Napoleon's return made the attitudes of the allies toward France more harsh and spurred on an intensely conservative reaction. Napoleon's attempt to dominate the German principalities spurred on a wave of German nationalism. Later figures, such as Herder, would write about the *Volksgeist*, or special spirit, of the German people. Napoleon succeeded in inspiring a wave of nationalistic sympathies that would culminate in the unification of Germany and Italy in the nineteenth century.

The Congress of Vienna

The **Congress of Vienna** created a balance of power in Europe that would dominate Europe for the next century. The allies agreed that no single nation should dominate Europe, and that the Bourbon monarchy should be restored to prevent France from becoming a threat again. The Congress erected a series of

powerful border states to contain French expansion, such as the Netherlands and Prussia, but they failed to revive the once mighty Holy Roman Empire, leaving in its place the German Confederation.

The Holy Alliance

The Holy Alliance of Russia, Austria, and Prussia was founded to uphold the Congress and to preserve Christian ideals.

The Quadruple Alliance and the Concert of Europe

The **Quadruple Alliance** of Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, which had successfully defeated Napoleon, later evolved into the **Concert of Europe** and included France, making a Quintuple Alliance, in 1818. The Concert of Europe was founded in order to preserve peace through diplomacy. In the wake of Napoleon's attempt to conquer Europe, peace and the balance of power were desired at all costs. The Ottoman rulers, as Muslims, were left out of both alliances, one of the weakest decisions of the aftermath of Napoleon.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following statements accurately depicts the developments of the French Revolution prior to September 1792?
 - (A) The National Assembly created a basic declaration of liberties and a new constitution to establish a limited monarchy.
 - (B) Louis XVI supported the National assembly.
 - (C) Warfare broke out between France and Austria, which was endeavoring to restore the French monarchy.
 - (D) Both (A) and (C).

2. The French Reign of Terror
 - (A) was an effort to eliminate all domestic threats to the authority of the Committee of Public Safety.
 - (B) permitted some cities to continue to protest without interference.
 - (C) resulted in the execution of Robespierre, which led to the Thermidorian reaction.
 - (D) Both (A) and (C).

3. Which of the following was an achievement of Napoleon?
 - (A) He continued to suppress the Catholic Church in France.
 - (B) He codified the laws of France in his famous Civil Code.
 - (C) He created a powerful, centralized bureaucracy in France.
 - (D) Both (B) and (C).

4. Napoleon intended to use his Continental System to
 - (A) create a European trade community.
 - (B) diminish British power by depriving it of wealth from European trade.
 - (C) force the Russians to ally with Britain.
 - (D) Both (A) and (B).

5. Napoleon was ultimately defeated because of
 - (A) the triumph of the Continental System.
 - (B) Britain's ability to sustain its power and ultimately defeat him.

- (C) nationalism's growing strength throughout Europe.
(D) Both (B) and (C).
6. The First, Second and Third Estates represented which groups of society, respectively?
- (A) Clergy; peasantry, middle class and artisans; nobility
(B) Nobility; peasantry, middle class, and artisans; clergy
(C) Clergy; nobility; peasantry, middle class, and artisans
(D) Peasantry, middle class, and artisans; clergy; nobility
7. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790)
- (A) destroyed the Catholic Church's financial independence and made it a state agency.
(B) extended all civil rights enjoyed by laymen to the Catholic clergy.
(C) reaffirmed the administrative and financial independence of the Catholic Church.
(D) reserved a percentage of state jobs for Catholic clergy.
8. The National Assembly accomplished all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) the abolition of the feudal system.
(B) the complete equalization of society.
(C) the abolition of the church as a religious and political power.
(D) the abolition of all titles.
9. The Constitution developed by the National Assembly
- (A) fully implemented the revolutionary demand for liberty, equality, and fraternity.
(B) applied to women as well as to men.
(C) kept the Roman Catholic Church as a privileged institution.
(D) distinguished between active and passive citizens.

10. Which of the following statements most correctly describes interpretations of the French Revolution?
- (A) All historians agree that it originated out of a class conflict, and that Marxist analyses are adequate.
 - (B) Some historians point out that the leaders of the Revolution had much in common with the aristocracy, casting doubt on the Marxist interpretation of the Revolution.
 - (C) Historians agree that the events of the French Revolution was a unified series of events with a common goal.
 - (D) Historians agree that the Reign of Terror was an aberration of the French Revolution.

Answers

- | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1. (D) | 4. (B) | 7. (A) | 10. (B) |
| 2. (D) | 5. (D) | 8. (B) | |
| 3. (D) | 6. (C) | 9. (D) | |