

# FRENCH REVOLUTION

**Adrian Jones**

**with William Murray,  
Ross Smith, Alice Garner  
and Ian Coller**



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# Introduction

## Note to Teachers and Students

This interactive history etextbook is designed to complement study of histories of the French Revolution. It is written with the following aims in mind:

### Go to the primary source

Unlike most textbooks and narrative histories, this etextbook uses primary sources, written and visual, where possible, because it is important to respect the past when studying history. People in their time are always more interesting than you might imagine. Moreover, imagine the boot was on the other foot; we'd prefer historians of our lives and times to dwell on our primary sources—all the things we left behind. Textbooks tend to forget all this by summarising and simplifying events. To make the past really come alive, histories need primary sources because they help readers to engage with and care about people of the past. Histories should make them, and their lost world, seem more real. Only a focus on primary sources can achieve this.

### Hyper-history teaching and learning

The materials in this etextbook are organised in chapters that cover the topics:

- Causes of Revolution
- Ideas, Movements and Events
- Consequences of Revolution: Creating a New Society

Materials on the *Old Regime* and on the *Enlightenment* in France are included because knowing about the longer-term influences is essential in understanding the crises that caused the French revolution and that helped shape—even if only as a negative—revolutionary agendas. Exploring these topics isn't always linear (i.e. chronological). The strength of this etextbook is its searchability. This means you can move back and forth through topics.

Aspects of each topic are clearly signposted to improve historical discovery.



Concept



Discussion



Activity



Image



Key Words



Eye Witness

## Label the concepts

Throughout every chapter in this etextbook, questions and points for debate and discussion are suggested. Each question or discussion point is preceded by a word or phrase, printed in italics. The words in italics function as a label to indicate key historical concepts or historiographical lines of argument. The labels help readers to find things they might have missed and help them to understand and develop concepts relevant to that document and to the entire topic. These pointers help students and teachers to work together to get more out of their reading and discussion. Concepts or discussion points often carry forward into other aspects of the study, helping to build confidence in framing arguments, using concepts, and making connections.

Students engaged in higher-level studies of history often think they just have to learn lots and lots of facts. In fact, they are better off ‘knowing less’, but ‘knowing it better’. This means finding ways of helping them to master concepts. One way is to make explicit the sophisticated conceptual vocabulary of the secondary sources (all those ‘isms’) and of the primary sources (all those odd turns of phrase). Putting the lingo up front in every question and discussion point helps.

## Key Words

Make sure you understand the key words (in **bold**) in the paragraph. They are central aspects of **Old Regime** society; they underpin most new revolutionary ideas as well. Use the key words at the end of each chapter or the glossary at the end of the book and the websites in the footnotes to clarify these key words by putting them in context.

## Eyewitnesses

Wherever possible, we access eyewitness accounts of events. Some of the writers were French residents. Others were foreigners visiting France. These people kept journals, wrote memoirs, corresponded or painted. Their observations offer a window onto the French Revolution. Biographical details (as [hyperlinks](#)) accompany their inputs.

A short biography of some of these eyewitnesses are listed together with links to their works at the end of this section. We will study other eyewitnesses besides, introducing them when they arise, but the ones listed at the end of this Introduction will be used the most. The descriptions of their unusual lives also help to introduce the marvelous and transforming world of the eighteenth century to students and readers who might happen to think – and they’d be wrong! – that their lives and times are more interesting.

## Hyper-history

This etextbook integrates quality online materials into historical study. Online web resources can't be ignored in history classrooms and in home study. The web shovels the whole world into a person's study or classroom. Hyperlinks in this etextbook take students directly to images and

materials held in libraries and museums, in personal websites and in places and palaces. Quality resources in French and English are listed; where French sites are listed, enough guidance is provided to make visiting the site worthwhile even if students and teachers can't read French. Everything great in the world is not necessarily in English; the more global our world becomes, the more we need to understand foreign languages and to relish cultural differences.

Many sites were sieved to find web gold, and to shun web dross. Everyone knows that 'there's a lot of good stuff on the web', but it just takes time to find it, and you still need expertise to know what to do with it. That's why students need guidance when they are set to explore the web; otherwise they only search Wikipedia, encyclopedias, and banal blogs. However, some practical issues also arise: websites can drop out so; where possible, alternative websites are given in these materials. Quality sites hosted by museums and institutions are always preferred; they are more likely to endure, and more likely to offer something new when they are re-visited.

Teachers and students can either:

- print these hyperlinks as they please, or
- suggest them as a home study activity, or
- access them on-line individually, in groups, or as a whole class.

Why should accounting, info-tech and mathematics students monopolise a school's computer labs?

## How to annotate

Annotating this etextbook can be done in Adobe Acrobat. This tool is great for taking notes in the pages of the etextbook pre-class or for noting and highlighting important sections during class. The easiest way to add comments to an etextbook is to use the sticky note tool in Acrobat. Information and instructions on how to annotate PDF's with sticky notes can be found [here](#).

## Authors

*For the first edition (2007):* Adrian Jones (History @ La Trobe University) compiled chapters 1 - 4, and all introductions, hyperlinks, questions and activities in chapters 5 - 9.

Most documents in chapters 5 - 9 were selected and translated by Dr William (Bill) Murray (History @ La Trobe University). He is a great teacher and was an inspiring colleague. We always seemed to disagree about the French revolution, but his approaches to and passions about this subject were always inspiring. History studies in university are always like that: you have to debate the issues, citing evidence, and looking for different points of view and for new aspects. You build an interpretation. At many stages throughout this etextbook, you will be invited to debate and discuss. Make sure you do that in respectful ways, so that you are really listening and really learning. Many of the chapter 5 - 9 documents are based on a book Bill Murray once

edited with J.T. Gilchrist, *The Press in the French Revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), in which Bill did most of the translating and the introducing of the documents.

Another great teacher, Ross Smith (from *Parade College*), also worked on every aspect of this etextbook, improving the questions, tightening the introductions and suggesting new hyperlinks and discussion topics. He brought a teacher's eye to the project.

*For this second edition (2018):* Adrian Jones (History @ La Trobe University) was joined by colleagues Alice Garner and Ian Collier (University of California, Irvine). They have made heaps of suggestions and changes. Many additional suggestions by Professor Peter McPhee (University of Melbourne) helped improve this book immeasurably.

### Adrian Jones

**Dr Adrian Jones OAM** is an Australian historian of Europe. His PhD was from Harvard University and was in Russian history. As an Associate Professor of History, Adrian teaches at La Trobe University in Melbourne about most eras: ancient, medieval, early-modern and modern. He researches Russian and Ottoman history. He also writes about the philosophy of history (i.e., how we know what we know), and about history education (i.e., either how we learn it or how it can be taught). Adrian's doctorate in history at Harvard University explored the social and intellectual history of late-Imperial Russia. Adrian was one of the two Directors of the [Australian] National Centre for History Education. Adrian has also written well-thumbed books for History and Legal Studies classes in senior secondary schools. He helped design and assess the popular "History (Revolutions)" subject in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Adrian has appeared regularly as a commentator on ABC local radio on history matters.



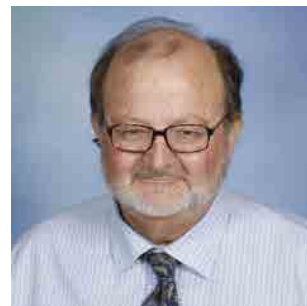
### William Murray

**Dr William J. (Bill) Murray** is a retired member of the History Department at La Trobe University. Bill's family were emigrant Scots. He was raised in Adelaide. His PhD in French history was awarded by The Australian National University. Bill's research focused on the role of the press in the French Revolution, and on the history of sport: not just the history of the world game he loves, football (soccer), but also of the Nazi Olympics of 1936. Bill published one of the first books of translations of documents about the French Revolution.



## Ross Smith

**Mr Ross Smith** has spent most of his adult life studying and teaching history. He began learning about history in 1967 as part of the first intake to the then brand new La Trobe University. Since graduating he has taught in a variety of Government, Private and Catholic Secondary Schools. For the last thirty years he has taught at Parade College, Bundoora. During that time he has tried to interest his students in the great and small themes of human history. Ross agrees with former Prime Minister John Howard's view that what we learn from history is that people do not learn from history. As a teacher, he has spent most of his time trying to recover the past so that informs a greater understanding of the present. He has contributed to several publications for students including writing *Reds Under the Bed* (HTAV) and co-authoring *Australia and the Modern World* (Macmillan).



## Alice Garner

**Dr Alice Garner** is a teacher and historian who has researched and published in social, cultural, environmental and educational history. She obtained a PhD in History from the University of Melbourne in 2000, and subsequently published *A Shifting Shore: Locals, Outsiders, and the Transformation of a French Fishing Town, 1823-2000* (Cornell University Press). Alice has also written a memoir, *The Student Chronicles* (Melbourne University Press), and co-authored a history of the Australian-American Fulbright exchange program, to be published by Manchester University Press.



IMAGE OF ALICE GARNER USED WITH PERMISSION FROM MILES STANDISH PHOTOGRAPHY

## Ian Coller

**Dr Ian Coller** completed a PhD at The University of Melbourne, and now teaches French History at The University of California (Irvine). Australian-born, and Melbourne-raised, Ian has published widely on the French Revolution, and especially on its immediate and long-term echoes and consequences for Arab and Islamic worlds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ian traces how each affected the other. His major publication is *Arab France*, published by The University of California Press.



## Keeping us on track

One of the best features of open access e-publishing is its responsiveness. With future students in mind, please point out our errors, or to sing our praises, and to advise us of excellent URLs we might have missed by writing to:

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## Eye witnesses

### Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne



**Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne** (also known as Nicolas Edme Restif), 1734–1806, was raised in the village of Sacy in Burgundy, in eastern France. An intelligent boy, he started out as a printer, but soon became a famous writer and journalist. Living by his pen and his wits, he wrote 204 published works and kept journals that are invaluable to historians. He took his inspiration from his rural youth, his later knowledge of Paris, and his lifelong experiences as a libertine. Rétif insisted that all his novels were true.

Venturesome writers like Rétif were the more usual face of the *Enlightenment* in France than intellectual ‘lovers of wisdom (*philosophes*)’. Rétif loved to write about ‘the people (*le peuple*)’, meaning the lower classes and simple uneducated peasants, whose habits and dialects he knew. He often printed his own works, even doing the engravings. He was therefore hard to censor. He became famous for sensational and pornographic novels, among them: *The Perverted Peasant* (1782).<sup>1</sup> In 1788–89, like many others, Rétif de la Bretonne joined in political debates. Always seeing himself as a humble countryman, even when he was living in Paris, Rétif was an astute observer of the mood of the French people. He was a firm, but not uncritical, supporter of Louis XVI, and of monarchy in France. Rétif died in poverty in the era of Napoleon.

### Arthur Young



**Arthur Young**<sup>2</sup>, 1741–1820, was an English gentleman and landowner. He styled himself as a man of the *Enlightenment*, an expert, writing mostly on ways of improving agriculture and on ways of stimulating trade.

His talents were apparent early; at the age of 17 he published a pamphlet called *On the War in North America*. In 1769, after travelling in France, he published *Letters Concerning the Present*

1. Portraits and samples of images from Rétif de la Bretonne's books are available on the [HathiTrust Digital Library](#).

2. Several portraits of Young can be seen at the [UK National Portrait Gallery](#).

*State of the French Nation*, his impressions of France. Arthur Young thought of himself as progressive. He wrote manuals demonstrating better farming methods, even though his estates in Suffolk failed to profit from his improvements. He returned to France years later and wrote *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*, a key source for public opinion in France on the eve of the revolution.

A handwritten letter written by Arthur Young to Sir Joseph Banks, 21 March 1805, is now in the 'Sir Joseph Banks Electronic Archive' in the [State Library of NSW](#). Young's *Travels in France* can be found at [here](#) and his autobiography is on the Internet Archive [website](#). *Letters Concerning the Present State of the French Nation* are digitised [here](#). Young's biographical details are on [Bitiannica.com](#).



Reproduced by Walter & Boutall Arthur Young 1898

## Jacques-Louis David



**Jacques-Louis David**, 1748–1825, was a painter who studied at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris from 1766–1774. After he won the *Grand Prix de Rome* in 1774, David spent five years in Italy (1775–1780) drawing and painting in ways adapting ancient themes and models. On his return to Paris in 1780, ancient history and mythology became his favourite artistic subject.

David greeted the French Revolution enthusiastically, actively participating in political life, siding with the Jacobin radical democrats between 1791 and 1794. A member of the National Convention (1792–95), David voted for the death of Louis XVI in January 1793 and supported Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety (1793–94). David was artistic director of most of the great revolutionary pageants or *fêtes* between 1790 and 1794. He drew on classical republican (i.e. ancient king-less, sovereign citizen) motifs and ideas. After the fall of Robespierre (27 July 1794 / 9 *Thermidor* II), David was arrested twice and narrowly escaped with his life. His political career ended, but his artistic career revived as a court painter to Napoleon.



Jacques-Louis David Self-portrait 1794

David's *Oath of the Horatii* of 1784 is at the [Louvre Museum](#). His *Serment du Jeu de Paume* (*Tennis Court Oath*) can be viewed [here](#). An image showing David working in his studio

workshop (*atelier*) is at this [website](#). A scene in Andrzej Wajda's *Danton* (1982), a great film about the French Revolution, evokes David's workshop when Robespierre arrives in 1793 to have another sitting for his portrait.

### Philip (Filippo) Mazzei



**Philip (Filippo) Mazzei**<sup>3</sup>, 1730-1816, was born near Siena in Tuscany in Italy on 25 December 1730. Trained to be a doctor, he became a ship's surgeon, and then travelled to London, becoming a trader of Italian wines and a teacher of Italian. He met Benjamin Franklin in London in 1767, after which he bought land in Virginia. In 1774, he formed farm partnerships with prominent Virginians, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, retaining such close ties with these men that he was involved with the formation of the new American revolutionary government in 1776.



Jacques-Louis David *Philip Mazzei* 1790-1791

In 1785, at the close of the revolutionary wars, Mazzei returned to Europe. Settling in Paris, he became special agent in Paris for King Stanislaus-Augustus of Poland until 1791. Mazzei wrote regular reports to the Polish king during the French Revolution. Mazzei's letters provide an invaluable perspective on revolutionary event.

### Gouverneur Morris



**Gouverneur Morris**<sup>4</sup>, 1752-1816, was born at his family estate in Morrisania, near New York City, into a wealthy family of colonial Americans. He graduated from King's College, New York, in 1768. At the age of 19, he was licensed to practice law and had a reputation as an immensely talented young man.

In 1775, he became involved in colonial and revolutionary politics, and in 1781 became the principal assistant to Robert Morris (no relation), Superintendent of Finance for the new United States of America. Later, in 1789, the two went into business together. Gouverneur Morris travelled to France, serving for a time as ambassador of the USA in France, the one European state which had consistently backed the USA in its revolutionary struggle with Britain. Morris kept a journal while he was living in France. It was eventually published in 1939 as *A Diary of the French Revolution*. It covers the years from March 1789 until January 1793.

3. Read a short biography on Mazzei at [here](#).

4. Go to [this website](#) for biographical information on Gouverneur Morris.

## Marie-Jeanne Roland de la Platière



**Marie-Jeanne Roland de la Platière**, 1754–93, was born Marie-Jeanne Philipon in Paris. She was the talented daughter of a Parisian artisan engraver and excelled in music, painting and literature.

In 1780, she married Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, a government inspector general who shared her enthusiasm for the radical *Enlightenment* philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Madame Roland believed in democracy and political equality. In 1791, she established a salon in Paris. Influential political leaders gathered here, especially the leaders of the moderate democratic group (they were called the *Girondins*) in the National Convention in 1792–93.



In a portrait (most likely made in 1787) by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749–1803), Madame Roland is shown at her writing desk.



A salon is a formal lounge, a room established for the receiving and entertaining of guests. This kind of room emerged in the palaces of kings in seventeenth-century Europe and then in the fine homes of nobles and wealthy merchants in eighteenth century Europe. In earlier eras, powerful people had met with other people in large and draughty banqueting halls. The lounge or salon created a more intimate space, a place in which men and women socialised, taking their leisure, flirting, dressing in the height of fashion, listening to live music, playing cards, hearing readings, and above all conversing. Is there a salon in your home? Have radio, television, iPods and smartphones killed conversation?



A portrait (by Johann Ernst Heinsius, 1740–1812, now in the Museum at Versailles) shows Mme Roland as a free-&-natural beauty.



A portrait of Madame Roland in patriotic revolutionary dress.

After the *sans-culottes* invaded the National Convention in June 1793, Madame Roland was a special target. She was arrested and falsely accused of being an agent of the monarch. While imprisoned, she wrote her memoirs. In November 1793, she appeared before a Revolutionary Tribunal. Given no opportunity to defend herself, she was executed by guillotine on 9 November 1793 / 25 *Fructidor* I. Her husband, Jean-Marie Roland, had been an ineffectual Minister in the *Girondin* government. He had earlier

avoided arrest by escaping to Normandy, a region more hostile to the Jacobins. When he learned of his wife's execution, Jean Roland took his own life.

The different ways Madame Roland wanted to present herself to the viewer in these portraits shows how people's sense of the possibilities of life were extended by the French Revolution. Educated women like Madame Roland had a new sense of the importance of being 'natural' and of the possibility of developing and expressing their talents; an example is Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's self portrait with two female pupils (1785) in the collection of the [Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York](#) (inventory 53.225.5).

## Germaine de Staël



**Germaine de Staël**, 1766–1817, was born Germaine Necker in Paris to Swiss parents. Her *liberal* father, Jacques Necker (1732–1804), was an immensely wealthy Protestant Swiss banker who was Louis XVI's finance minister from 1777 to 1785, and again in 1789. (Necker served Louis XVI even though Protestantism was—technically—illegal in eighteenth century France until 1786.) As the author of the *Compte-Rendu* of 1781 (falsely) claiming that the *Old Regime*'s finances were in balance (actually they were in chronic deficit), Jacques Necker was (mistakenly) regarded by people at the time as the greatest Ministerial adviser of Louis XVI. Germaine Necker was therefore the 'golden' daughter of one of the wealthiest, most politically prominent, and (by repute) one of the most progressive families in France.



Germaine Necker (1766–1817) at the age of 14



This [site](#) includes an image of Madame Necker's salon, and a portrait of her in 1780 aged 14, with an extreme hairdo. You can see her bedroom (La Chambre de Madame de Staël) [here](#).

Germaine studied at home under the supervision of her mother, Suzanne Curchod (1737–94). Germaine's mother was influenced by the educational theories of Rousseau, but she adapted them; she encouraged Germaine to think independently and make her own moral judgments; Rousseau had argued that these things should only be taught to young men. Germaine regularly attended her mother's salon where there was lively discussion on all aspects of political and *Enlightenment* thinking. In 1786, she married the Swedish ambassador, Baron Erik de Staël-Holstein (1749–1802); it was a marriage of convenience and did not prevent Germaine forming liaisons with other men, especially the *liberal* political theorist and novelist, Benjamin Constant.

Germaine de Staël wrote prolifically, and became one of the most influential intellectuals of her day. She wrote political treatises and pamphlets and was also a novelist.<sup>5</sup> She generally supported

5. For example *Corinne*, an English translation of which is available [here](#).

restrained forms of *liberal* democracy, such as were implemented between 1789 and 1791, and after 1795. Having criticised the Jacobins, Madame de Staël fled Paris to England in 1793, eventually settling in Switzerland where she set up a meeting place for Western intellectuals. She returned to Paris in 1794 after the fall of Robespierre. Her salon became one of the most important centres for political discussions in France. She was exiled by Napoleon in 1803.<sup>6</sup> She returned to Paris in 1814, but died in 1817. Germaine de Staël was one of the most important thinkers in Europe. She helped formulate ideas of *liberalism* that still shape politics today.

## Mapping France under the Old Regime, 1780

When we think of states and governments in the modern world, we think of societies governed by written laws: all nicely bound, indexed and public. We also think of government in terms of institutions: systematic, coherent and ordered. The state and the government in *Old Regime* France were more like bundles of local customs, special cases, and ad hoc arrangements and privileges that had accumulated over centuries. People thought that only the Crown held society together. Almost everything customary was seen as right because it was sanctioned by God.



**Customs.** In traditional *Old Regime* societies, custom counted for a lot more than written laws. Fewer people could read. Customs were their guide to how to behave. People were supposed to do what people like them had always done. Does something of that thinking still survive in schools, in the world of paid work, and in family life today? Consider this point of view: Who is to say that legislated laws (Revolutions loved these!) are always better than customary laws (Revolutions hated these!)? Sociologists call these customary rules and human behaviours 'norms'.

6. See her Ten Years' Exile at [here](#).

## Regions (gouvernements) of Old Regime France



William Shepard *The Gouvernements* 1926

## Legal-administrative boundaries of Old Regime France



William Shepard *The Generalities or Intendancies* 1926

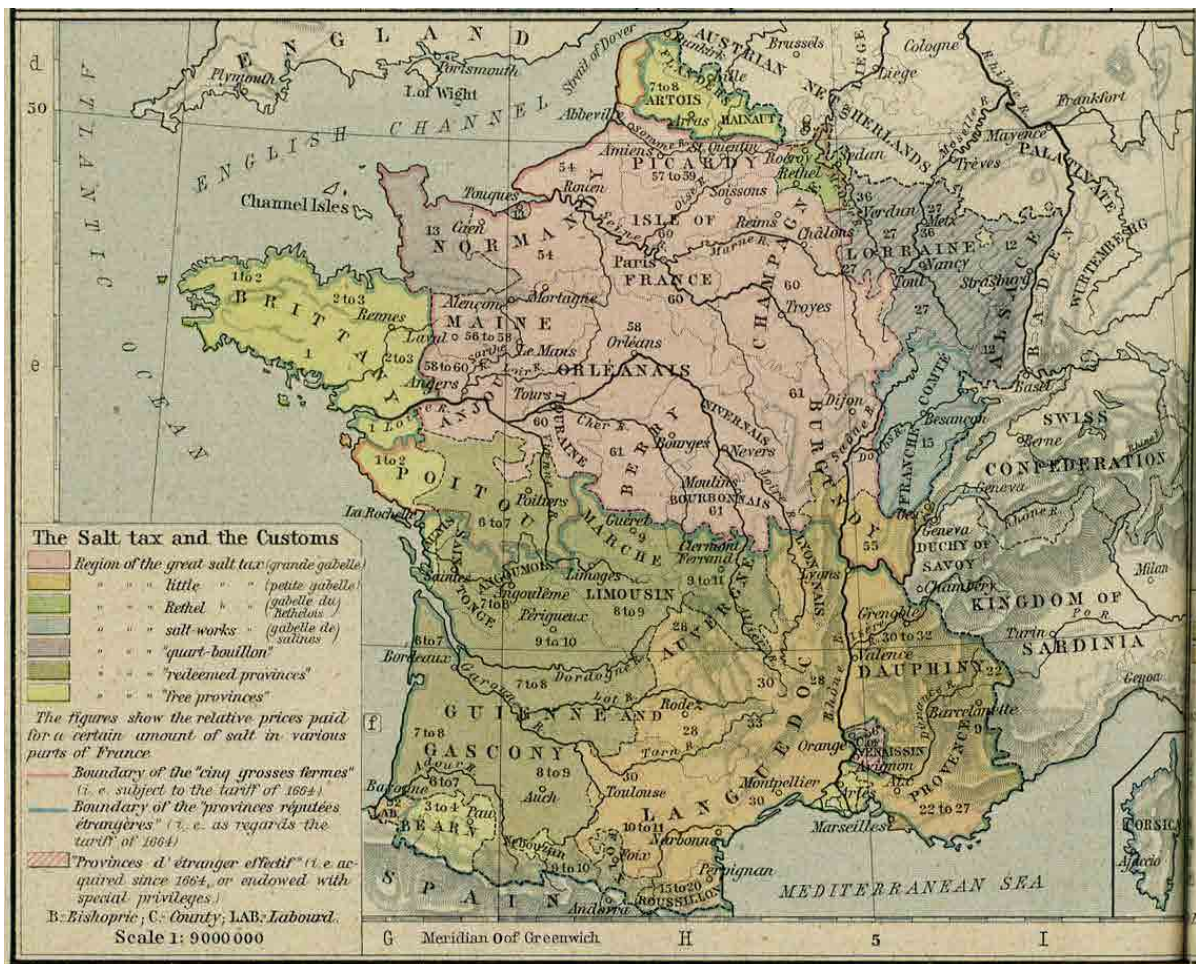
These boundaries show different kinds of local government in France.

[University of Texas Libraries](#) has pages of an excellent old historical atlas (William Sheppard's of 1926): *Pays d'état*, the areas subject to the jurisdiction of Provincial Estates, are shaded red; *Pays d'élection* are shaded green. *Pays d'élection* were the areas subject to direct control by an agent of the king, called an **Intendant**, who had to work in tandem with different regional **Parlements**.

## Boundaries of rules of law in Old Regime France

Who said **Old Regime** France was simple! These other maps add a further dimensions—the different systems of law applying in **Old Regime** France: the so-called 'custom law (*le droit coutumier*)' in the North, and the 'written law (*le droit écrit*)' in the South. View it [here](#).

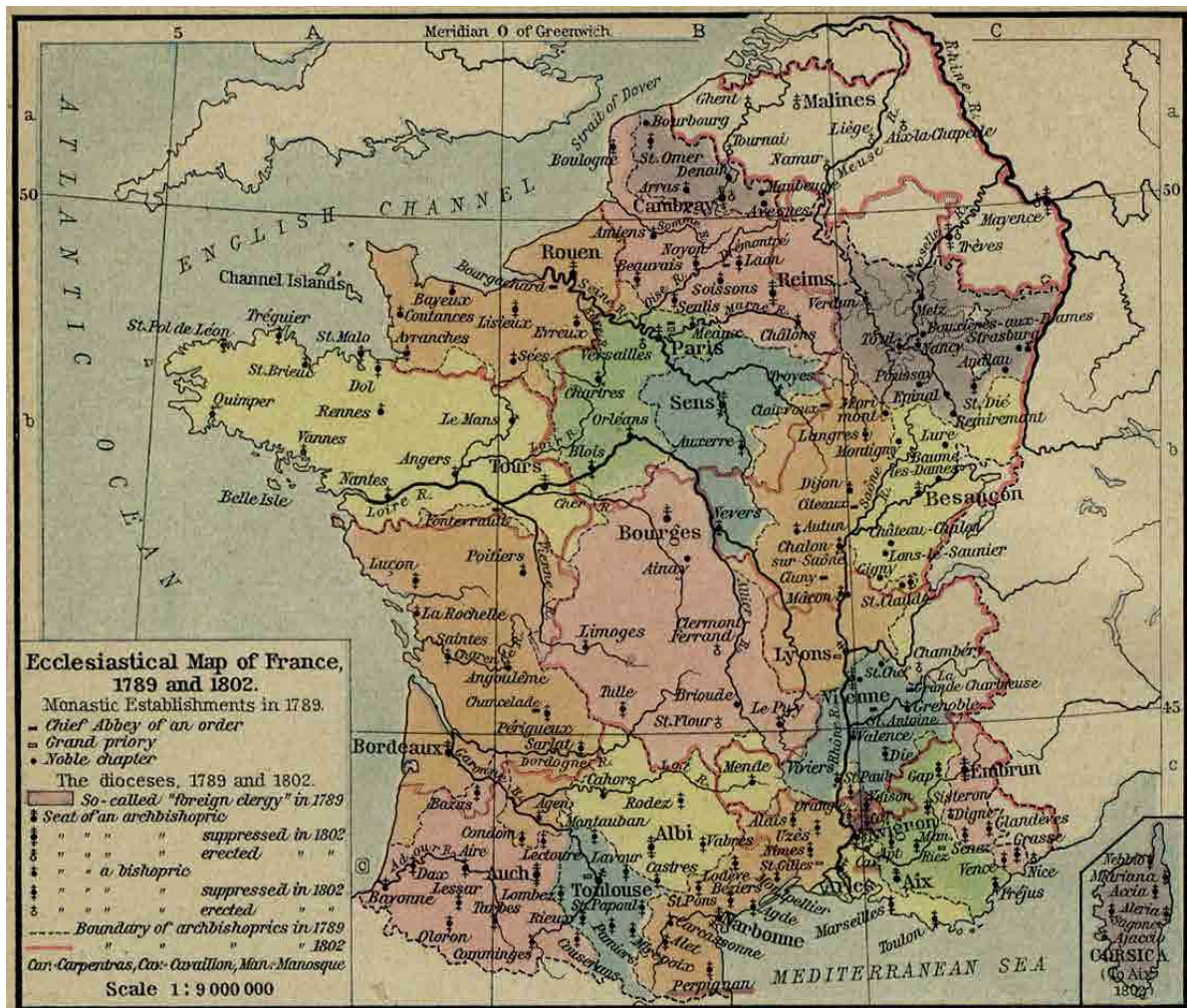
## Salt-tax (*gabelle*) boundaries in Old Regime France



William Shepard *The Salt tax and the Customs* 1926

Now add the different boundaries for taxation entitlements! Here are the frontiers for different rates of the salt tax (*gabelle*)

## Church boundaries in Old Regime France



William Shepard Ecclesiastical Map of France, 1789 and 1802 1926.

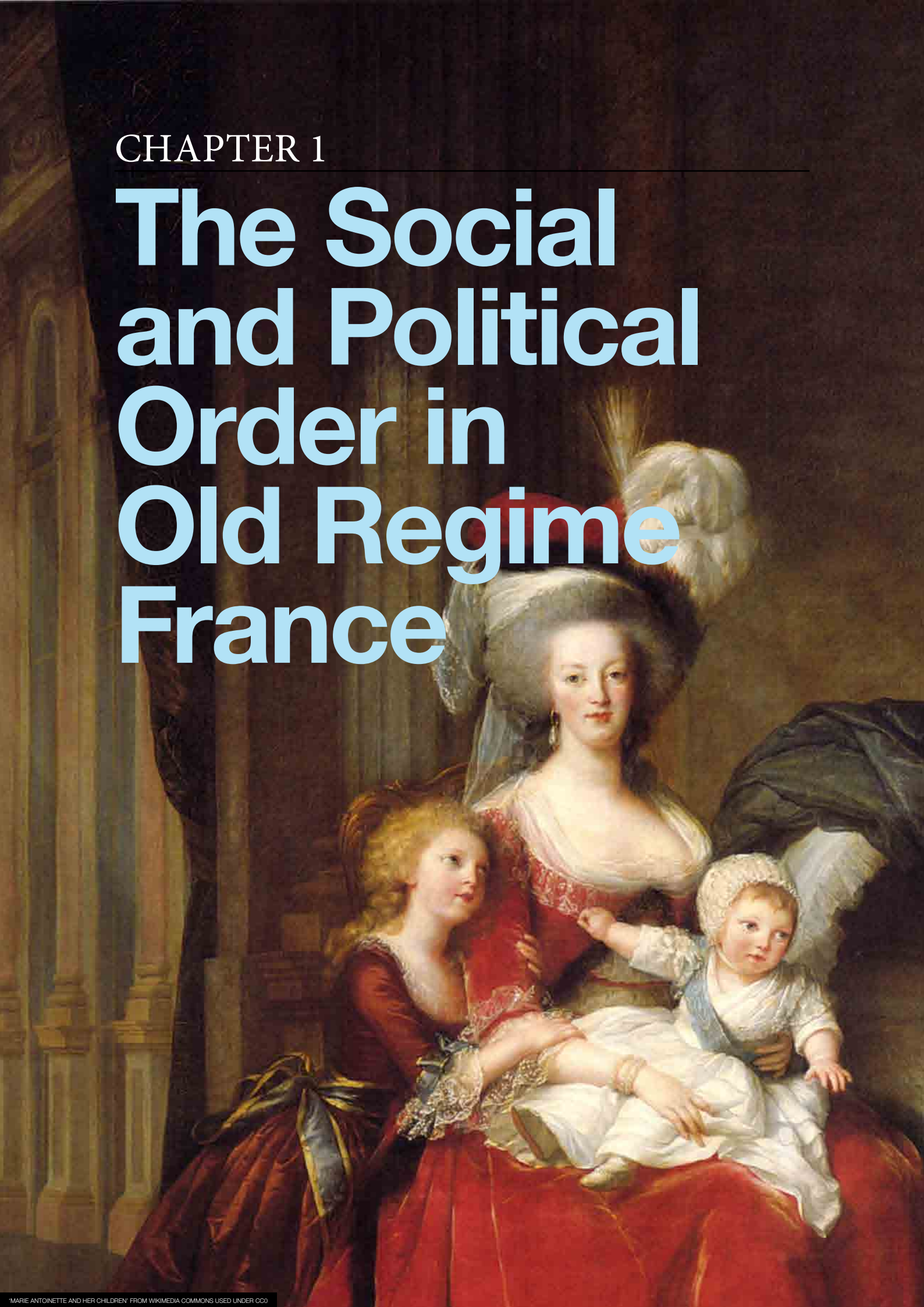
Here is a map and list of the many different dioceses (bishoprics and archbishoprics) in *Old Regime* France.

Are you confused? Everyone in France was just as confused as you are. These chaotic arrangements survived until 1789 simply because they were 'customary'—they were part of the medieval heritage of France.

## CHAPTER 1

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# The Social and Political Order in Old Regime France



## The Theory of Absolutism

Like many other countries in Europe in the eighteenth century, France was governed by a monarch. *Louis XVI* was born in 1754. He was King of France from 1774 until his execution in January 1793. In 1770 he married Marie Antoinette (b. 1755), daughter of Maria-Tdgjeresa, Empress of the neighbouring Habsburg Empire, which ruled over Austria, the Belgian lands, northern and central Italy, and east-central Europe. Louis XVI and *Marie Antoinette* were aged 16 and 15 when married.



To view portraits and representations of Marie Antoinette, view them [here](#). You can see a slide show of [Marie-Antoinette's estate](#), and the [Grand Apartment](#), where she slept.



**Louis Marie Sicardi** *Miniature Portrait of Louis XVI* 1784



**Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun** *Marie Antoinette and Her Children* 1787

Louis came to the throne at the age of 20. The ruling system in which a royal family governed and passed on the throne to the oldest surviving direct male descendant had been in place for many centuries. All power was supposed to be vested by God in the ruler, the King.



Louis XVI and his immediate ancestors were from the *House of Bourbon* (2). Visit this [site](#) for an extensive chronology and family trees of the various ruling families of France throughout the centuries and find out more about the *House of Bourbon* (2).

Louis XIII, born 1601	Reigned 1610–1643
His son, Louis XIV, born 1638	Reigned 1643–1715
His great-grandson, Louis XV, born 1710	Reigned 1715–1774
Louis XV's grandson, Louis XVI, born 1754	Reigned 1774–1792, executed 21 Jan. 1793

A brief account of Louis XIII's life is at can be viewed [here](#). A 1626 medal featuring Louis XIII is held in the [Met Museum collection](#).

A brief biography of Louis XIV can be found at this [website](#). Rigaud's 1700 portrait in the [Louvre](#).

Visit the fabulous site of the Château de Versailles [here](#) and for a wealth of information about Louis XIV, and excellent reproductions of some of his portraits.



Portrait of Louis XV at the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#). Portrait of Louis XVI can be viewed [here](#).

## Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne



In 1788, the first of our eyewitnesses to the Revolution, Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne (1734–1806) summed up the nature of government in France during the era that we now think of as the **Old Regime** (*l'ancien régime*):

*In France, the King is the head of the State. The Military are his hands. The **Magistrates** make up parts of the head; the mouth, eyes and ears, the organs fuelling the Mind, which is the King. The King is the heart and the stomach and the **Magistrates** are the other internal organs. The great nobles are the skin [or body] that envelops them; the little people (le menu peuple) are the arms, thighs, calves and feet. This is the body of the State.... The health of the body politic depends on goodwill between all these parts. If even the least part is bloated, if there is even the slightest imbalance, disorder follows, fever strikes up, and these can direct the body politic to its complete break-up.... The State is a family. The King is the father. His instructions must be absolute; if they are not, disorder creeps in. There has to be only one Father to give orders in a State, and lots of Children to implement them.... As the King... is their sole agent/trustee of authority, as to him alone all authority is rendered, no particular Estate has any right to ask the King to account for his administration.<sup>7</sup>*

7. Translated by Adrian Jones from the original in Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne, *Les plus forts des pamphlets. L'ordre des paysans aux États-Généraux*, (Paris: Éditions d'Histoire Sociale, 1967), 16–17.

As Rétif de la Bretonne shows, people in the era of the **Old Regime** thought of their social order and their state or government as a kind of body (*corps* in French) to which they belonged by birth, by faith, and by custom.

In the laws of the **Old Regime** there were three key social groups, called **estates** (or *états* or *corps* in French). Everyone had to belong to one estate or another. The **first estate** was for the clergy, God's people, the most special people of all. The **second estate** was for the nobility, the king's special people who had, or whose families once had, served the monarch with distinction, most often in his wars, sometimes in his administration. The **third estate** (*le tiers état*) was for everybody else who served, seemingly without any distinction. They were ordinary people: rich and poor, town and country, middle class (whether **bourgeois** of trade or of the professions) or working class [whether peasants, artisans or the urban poor (*le menu peuple*)].

The king united all the **estates** under his rule and in his nation or state. You were what you were born to be, not what you felt you might like to be. Even so, things were changing, and many **bourgeois** managed to buy noble titles for themselves. These 'upstart' purchases were particularly unpopular with nobles who were quite poor; they now had little but their aristocratic status.

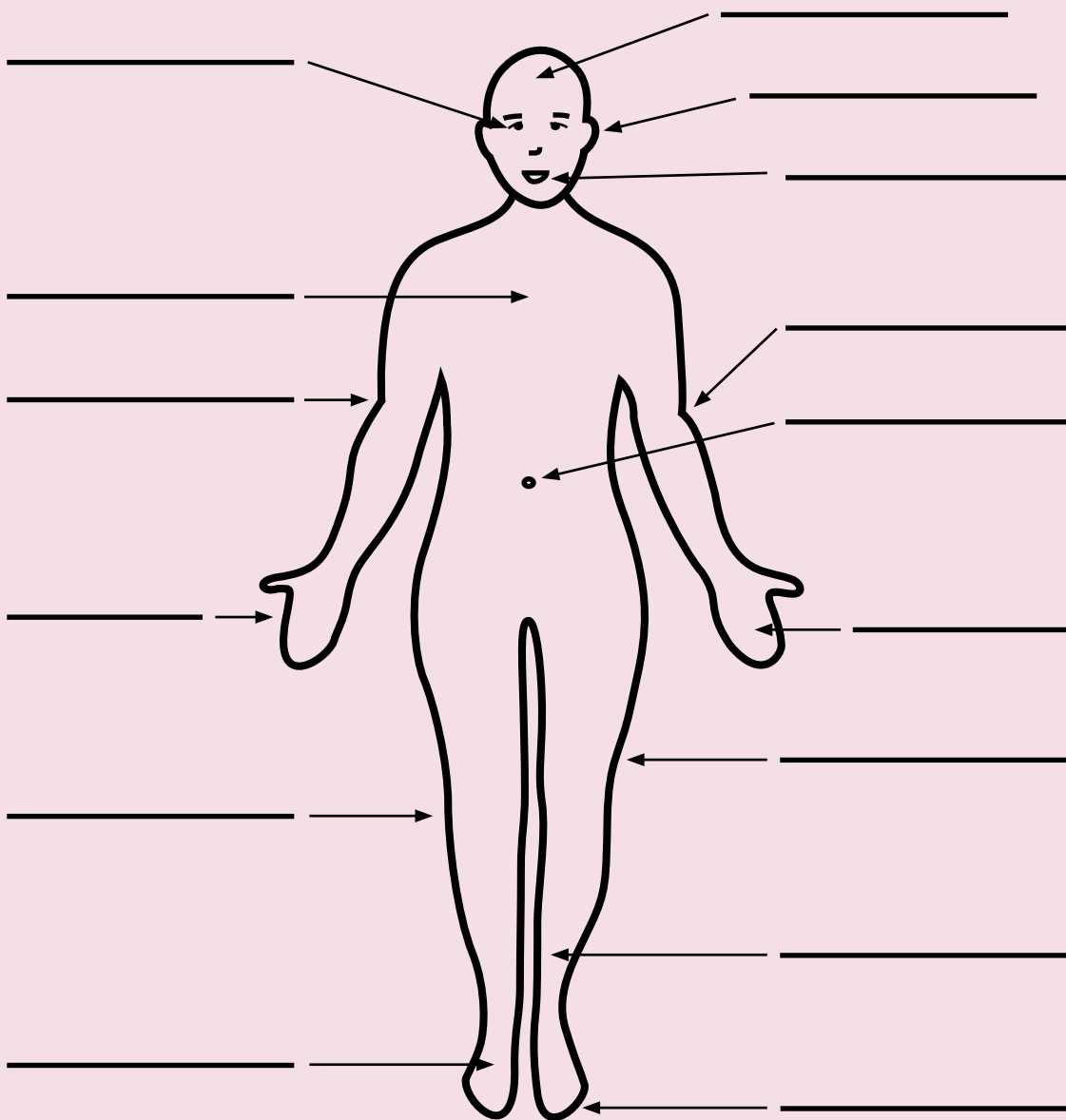
In many senses, the King was the nation. He was the father of all. Many people in France did not even speak French; many identified themselves by their locality or sometimes by their religion, rather than by their country; yet everyone was supposed to identify themselves as loyal subjects of their king.

## Community: Body Politic, Birth, Estate Society



Thinking about politics as if it were like a body: On the diagram below (Figure 14), decode the 'body politic' by labelling the parts of the body indicated by arrows.

Include the actual name and Rétif's corresponding metaphorical name, e.g. Feet = Little People = *le menu peuple*. How does Rétif's concept of the 'little people' differ from the *Old Regime*'s legal category of the '**Third Estate**'?





*Silences in the source.* Identify important groups and occupations in our society. What kinds of important people today did Rétif overlook? Why does Rétif not mention them?



*Tradition and Hierarchy.* Rétif's **Old Regime** model of state and society is traditional and hierarchical. What roles do the various 'body parts' play? Using a diagram, place each group in a hierarchy of importance. Use arrows and labels to indicate the relationships between the various groups.



**Bourgeois.** Rétif de la Bretonne gives us a glimpse of traditional values in **Old Regime** France, i.e. in France before the Revolution. Imagine you are a proud **bourgeois** living in Rétif's **Old Regime** France. You could be a wine merchant from Bordeaux (like many of the *Girondins*) or a lawyer (as was Robespierre, with a practice in Arras in the north of France). What might be your opinion of Rétif's traditional idea of the proper social and political order for France?



**Paternalism or despotism.** Rétif's traditional image of the political system as a body politic conveys one conception of an ideal way of governing and being governed. Is Rétif's ideal that of a king ruling with an iron fist over his subjects, on the model of Louis XIV, or is it an arrangement in which everyone belongs and works together for the common good, on the models of Louis XV (until 1770) and Louis XVI? How might these attitudes have shaped people's attitudes to future revolutionary governments?



*The Persistence of the Old Regime.* As we shall see in studies to come, the emotion-charged discussions about **paternalism** or despotism, which took place in France between 1787 and 1793, shaped the first political crisis of the Revolution. Is there any sense in which we still think about schools, families, business enterprises or community politics as a 'body politic', like Rétif? What are the advantages of **paternalism** or despotism in these contemporary settings? What are their drawbacks?

The King of France was perceived as the father of France. Ideas like these have been called **paternalistic**—deriving from the Latin word for father, 'pater'. The King was also said to have total or **absolute** authority, hence the term **absolutism**. This conception of **absolute monarchy** was based on long-held principles.



Robert Nanteuil *Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet* 1674

**Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704)** formed these principles into a theory of government that shaped official ideas of authority in eighteenth century France. Bishop Bossuet was a talented clergyman from Dijon. He rose to become a bishop in Burgundy and then a tutor at the royal court in Versailles, the fabulous palace built by Louis XIV as the great symbol of his ***absolute royal authority***. (French Kings had previously lived in the midst of their people in palaces, like *the Louvre* and the *Place des Vosges* in the heart of Paris; now Louis XIV had shifted to *Versailles*, a private rural locale on the fringe of Paris.)

Extensive information on Bossuet can be found [here](#), and for a briefer biography visit this [website](#). Rigaud's 1702 portrait is [here](#).

Visit the [Versailles](#) website and click on 'Le château' (or 'The Palace' if you have chosen the English language version of the site) and then select 'Découvrez les Lieux' or 'Discover the Palace' and explore the different sub-options of slide shows and videos of different parts of the palace and gardens.

Visit the [Louvre](#) website, where you can choose to read the website in English (see top-right pull-down menu). For information on the history of the Louvre, click on 'Collection and Louvre Palace' on the home page menu, and then on 'History of the Louvre'.

A range of views of Henri IV and Louis XIII's *Place des Vosges* in the Marais district of Paris can be viewed [here](#). Bossuet lived at no. 17 between 1678 and 1682. *Musée Carnavalet* is devoted to the history of Paris and of the French Revolution and occupies a corner of the Place, part of which is in the former *Hôtel Carnavalet* (1548, 1660) of the writer, *la marquise* Madame de Sévigné (1626–96). [The Musée Carnavalet](#) website hosts a useful Paris timeline and access to an imagebank of art and historical objects.

Appalled by *the Fronde*, Bossuet defended the ***absolute*** power of the monarchy against the aristocracy. In spite of opposition from the Pope, Bossuet supported Louis XIV's decrees re-organising taxes, tithes and religious posts of the Roman-Catholic Church in France. He also defended the King's ***absolute*** power to suppress Protestants living in France. In 1685, Louis XIV abolished the Edict of Nantes which, since 1598, had granted religious freedom to the Protestants of France. After 1685, and until 1786, it became illegal to be a Protestant pastor or to conduct Protestant worship in France.



**What was the *Fronde*?** The strengthening of royal power was not popular with all the nobles in France. Many French nobles believed they were the real force behind the throne. When Louis XIII died in 1643, his son Louis XIV was less than five years old.

The nobles took their chance to try to enforce their will on the young monarch. Their uprising was nicknamed *La Fronde* after slingshots used to hurl rocks. **The *Fronde*** was defeated by 1653, when Louis XIV was still only 15 years old. Louis XIV never forgot this danger of aristocratic resistance to royal authority. Louis XIV was ruthless in tightening monarchical control over most institutions and social groups in France.

The Edict of Nantes (promulgated in Nantes in Brittany in 1598) of the first Bourbon King of France, Henri IV, ended the Wars of Religion in France (1562–98) by giving all Protestants in France the right to worship freely (except in Paris, which had long resisted his effort to impose Bourbon rule). Henri IV's accession to the throne of France was finally accepted on the proviso that he abandoned his Protestantism and become a Roman Catholic. The Edict of Nantes (1598) signalled the end of the bitter Reformation wars of religion in France. However, many Roman Catholics still distrusted Henri IV, suspecting he might revert to being a Protestant and worrying about the many Protestant Pastors who were receiving state support. Henri IV was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic in Paris in 1610. Henri IV's grandson, Louis XIV, reversed Henri IV's policy of toleration. Louis XIV's Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685)—of which a translation can be found at this [site](#)—prompted many French Protestants to emigrate to the Netherlands, England and America. This intolerant one-religion policy was criticised by **Enlightenment** thinkers like Voltaire and Montesquieu, and was eventually abandoned by Louis XVI in an Edict of Toleration of 1787 (see [Musée Protestant](#)). But between 1685 and 1786, France's official policy of religious intolerance meant that France lost many intelligent people and business folk.

Louis XIV gave Bishop Bossuet the job of educating his son, the Dauphin, then next in line to be king of France. Here are some of Bossuet's ideas, first published in 1709, about the scope and nature of royal authority in France:

*To Monsieur the Dauphin, 'God is the King of Kings.'<sup>8</sup> From God alone comes all that instructs kings and all that governs them. They are God's ministers on earth. Hear therefore, My Lord Dauphin, all the lessons that God has given to kings in his Holy Scripture, and heed His rules and examples...<sup>9</sup>*

8. Church of England, *The Bible* (London: Imprinted at London : By Christopher Barker, Printer to the Queenes most excellent Maestie, 1580), 1 Timothy 6:15.

9. Translated by Adrian Jones from the original in Jacques Le Brun (ed.), *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte* (1709), (Geneva: Droz, 1967), 1.



*Why was the King's son called the Dauphin?* The Kingdom of France was built up over time from different regions with their own rulers. One such region was called the Dauphiné; its symbol was a dolphin. It is located in far southeastern France in the *départements* (provinces) of Isère, Drôme and Hautes-Alpes. Since it was assimilated in France in 1349–50, this region was promised to the heir to the throne of France. The French heir-apparent was then known as *le Dauphin* (doh-fan). His wife was *la Dauphine* (doh-feen). The British equivalent since the beginning of the fourteenth century was, and still is, known as the Prince of Wales.

Bossuet explained how God placed kings in authority over people to curb excesses of will and passion among the people and thereby to create justice:

*The only foundation of justice is a complete authority that subordinates other forms of power. Order is the only curb on selfishness. When everyone is able to do what they want, governed only by their desires, everything will end up muddled.... Only in the person of the king is there real unity among people, whereby every person renounces their will and desires, handing them over to the will and desire of their prince who unites them all as their Magistrate. With any other form of union, people just become vagabonds, as if they were a flock of sheep that has scattered....*

*All the powers of the nation converge as one, and the Sovereign Magistrate [i.e., the king] issues the laws that unite them all... [The king] holds in his hands all the forces of the nation. They freely accept to obey him... All that power is carried over to the [king as] Sovereign Magistrate, each and every subject upholds it in spite of his or her selfish selves, and renouncing even their life if they disobey. They all benefit from this, because they regain in the person of [a king] far more strength than they gave up to it in authorising it; the reason is that they get back all the power of a nation, together and united. This safeguards us all....*

*When everyone wants to do whatever they want, no one actually gets to do what they want; when there is no master, everyone is the master; when everyone is the master, everyone is a slave.... The prince as a prince is not seen as an ordinary man. He is a public person, all the State is in him; the will of all the people is within him. As all that's perfect and virtuous is found in God, so all the power in this world is united in the person of the prince. What greatness, that a single man holds so much of these worldly things!<sup>10</sup>*

Bossuet reasoned God ruled the world, and God had everybody's best interests at heart. The

10. Translated by Adrian Jones from the original in Jacques Le Brun (ed.), *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*, (Geneva: Droz, 1967), Book 1, Arts. 3.2, 3.3, 3.5; Book 5, Art. 4.1.

king or prince is God's representative on earth. Bossuet explained that because God had ordained kings to rule and kings in turn solemnly pledged service to God at their coronations, kings only ever had the public interest at heart. They took advice, and would do what was best for the state:

*This pact [between God and their king]... unites the people before God and unites the people among themselves. The people would never have been able to come together themselves in such an unbreakable way without the pact being accomplished...by God himself [through the monarch] .... Every subject of the king wants to have his king. But every such subject keen to serve his king also envies anyone else who has some glory from him. Thoughts of rebellion can only arise from these feelings if the prince does not give himself out equally to all, in effect not serving the public good.<sup>11</sup>*

Since monarchies were also like families, and kings were really like fathers, Bossuet couldn't approve any major changes to politics and authority:

*Staying true to these laws and to age-old principles makes states immortal.... People stop respecting laws whenever they see them changing too often. Whenever there's too much change, nations seem to stagger like the fuzzy-eyed and the drunk. Feelings of vertigo overwhelm those states; their fall is inevitable .... [Absolute monarchy] is best because it resists discord best ... [and is] the best way to prompt people to do what is best in conserving the State and all the power it deploys. It's natural: as he toils for the good of his state, the prince also works for all his children-subjects; the love that he has for his kingdom is bound up with his love for his realm-as-family... The key task of [royal] justice and laws is to conserve not only all the groups making up the state but also to ensure that each shapes laws that follow on from those of princes who came before... In turn, the good faith of the prince instills his subjects' good faith, who live out their lives in obedience, not only for reasons of faith, but more importantly, for reasons of affection.<sup>12</sup>*



Henri de Gissey Costumes du Ballet intitulé 1653

The Court of Louis XIV at Versailles used all forms of art to help communicate ideas of the glory of the Sun King as an absolutist monarch: art, architecture, sculpture, tapestry etc. In this case a Court ballet and opera costume communicates an idea of the King as the classical Greco-Roman God Apollo and also as Helios the sun-blessed. Louis XIV was especially proud of his elegant legs, so one expects he was pleased to see himself portrayed so handsomely in this Court ballet costume. The core idea was that everybody thrives when a great king is all-powerful. Do you agree?

To Bossuet, however, all this **absolute** authority was far from meaning that the monarch was

11. Ibid, Book 1, Art. 3.7; Book 3, Art. 3.13.

12. Translated by Adrian Jones from the original in Jacques Le Brun (ed.), *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*, (Geneva: Droz, 1967), Book 1, Arts. 3.8, 4.8, 4.10, 4.6; Book 8, Art. 3.2.

free to do whatever he pleased in France:

***Absolute** government is not arbitrary government. [Although] a prince can never answer to anybody else [except God] for the laws he ordains...he must submit himself like everybody else to the rule of those laws. This is because he must be just; he must set people the example of upholding justice. But kings don't ever subject themselves to the sanctions of laws... They subject themselves to the law, not as some power equal to them, but rather as a power they direct.... rather than thinking they have to account for their reasons to others, kings should only have heed to their own reasons and intelligence.... [The King of France] is absolute to the extent that there is no constraint, no power capable of forcing the Sovereign. In this sense, he is independent of all human authority.... [but his power is not arbitrary] because everything is still subject to the judgment of God...Even if there arose against the laws of the state some actions that rendered those laws null and void, it is always possible to open these matters up anew and restore the laws at some other occasion, in some other time. Everyone lives his life as a legitimate possessor of his properties. No-one can believe he can seize something with impunity if they violate such laws. Vigilance and actions against injustice and violence endure forever.<sup>13</sup>*

## Ideas on Royal Authority



**Absolutism.** How did Bishop Bossuet distinguish between 'absolute' and 'arbitrary' royal authority in **Old Regime** France? Suggest reasons why Bossuet considered 'complete authority' with 'no constraint' was best for 'the public good' and in everybody's best interests? Do you agree? Try applying it to your school.



**Divine Right.** Summarise Bossuet's reasoning to justify the 'divine right of kings'. How was a king thought to differ from ordinary people? Why might ordinary people and kings both have thought this way?



**Paternalism.** Why were ideas of authority in **Old Regime** France based on a (patriarchal) model of fatherhood and families, and not on a (matriarchal) model of motherhood and families?



**Custom, Religion, Tradition... and Reason.** How did these qualities influence Bossuet's official political ideas about authority under the **Old Regime**?

13. Ibid, Book 4, Arts 1.0, 1.4; Book 5, Art. 1.1; Book 8, Art. 2.1.



*Belonging to a group (corps).* We are dealing with influential people's ideas of power, politics and authority before elections commenced, and before people were thought of as equals, or even before they thought of themselves as sovereign citizens. These things were outcomes, not causes, of the French Revolution. So how did people living in the pre-revolutionary era of the **Old Regime** feel that they 'belonged' in their state, and in their social order?



*Senses of Self.* We think today of 'belonging' in terms of legal citizenship (the passport I hold), residence (my home, my suburb) and class (my kind of job, perhaps even my kind of school). When adults introduce themselves at parties, they may say something like: 'G'day mate. I'm an Australian. I work as a nurse at Royal Melbourne Hospital. I live in Broadmeadows.' In **Old Regime** France, people thought about themselves similarly and yet differently. Their senses of **sovereignty**, occupation and locality were more likely to refer to kingdom, guild and parish. Bossuet viewed France and the State as a jumble of groups (*corps* in French; hence the modern English word, 'corporations') with 'legitimate' interests to protect. Each group was defined by laws, customs and traditions. Each had roles to play. Suggest what the key groups might have been—refer again to your 'body politic' diagram. Outline Bossuet's view of the proper role and behaviour of a king in relation to those groups.



*Not Belonging.* How might educated and prosperous people who were not noble and not privileged—like free-thinkers (*philosophes*), professionals (i.e. lawyers and doctors) and merchants (*négociants*)—have viewed the political ideas of people like Rétif and Bossuet?



*Nation.* Bossuet mentions the 'nation,' and he also writes of kings as '**Sovereign Magistrates**'. After 1789, the idea of the 'nation' is usually associated with ideas of the **sovereignty** of the people. Bossuet shows us how there were ways in which aspects of these ideas were also part of official political thinking in the era of the **Old Regime**. What changed as a result of the Revolution? What stayed the same?



*People in Authority in our Society.* List examples of 'absolute'—but not 'arbitrary'—authority in our society. Would you include business 'corporations'? What about teachers or parents?



*The Impossibility of Democracy? **Absolutism** primed for a Fall?* Do you agree with Bossuet that 'when everyone is the master, everyone is a slave'? Or do you think that Bossuet is somehow naïve and blinkered in his thinking? What if many people of France come to believe (as they did in 1791–93) that they don't have a king who cares about the well being of his people?

## Absolutism and Art.

Art can tell us a lot about people and authority. Monarchs commissioned works of art so as to show important things about themselves and their power. Consult these examples. The messages are seldom subtle!

A number of images of Louis XIV on the walls and in the corridors at the Palace of Versailles show Louis XIV in Roman military dress trampling the enemies of France, not least the aristocratic and Parisian rebels who joined in a failed revolt known as **the Fronde (1648–53)**. The one here is a small copy in bronze, by an unknown pupil of the court sculptor, Gilles Guérin (1611–78). It copies a larger statue once erected outside the Town Hall (l'Hôtel de Ville) in Paris, within a year (1653) of the crushing of the revolt of **the Fronde**. The young Louis XIV was reminding Parisians who was in charge. He is portrayed as a great Roman general. He has his foot on a barbarian. By 1689, Louis XIV relented, ordering that the provocative statue be moved from Paris. It now stands in a courtyard at the Château de Chantilly, just north of Paris.



One version of the Guérin's statue is in Musée Carnavalet in Paris, item S 3420; a clay model for the Hôtel de Ville statue, is in the [Louvre](#).



Hyacinthe Rigaud *Portrait of Louis XIV* 1702

Another image (1681–83) is from the War Room in Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles. Louis XIV presents himself here as a great general, as 'Mars', the Roman God of War, even though we know that he was not interested in that role. It was executed by Antoine Coysevox (1640–1720) [here](#). An enemy of France lies dead, defeated beneath the mighty monarch on his great charger. An angel crowns him with a victor's laurel.

A contemporary gouache executed in the 1655 by Charles Poerson (1609–67) also shows Louis XIV as the victor over **the Fronde**. This gouache is now in the [Museum at Versailles](#) (item MV 8073). Poerson presents Louis XIV as Jupiter, king of the Roman Gods. He has suppressed Medusa, the evil god with the power to terrify, and he has encouraged Vulcan, the Roman god of people to forge and build a new society.



Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743) was the leading court painter during the last years of Louis XIV (1638–1715). He was born in Perpignan near France's maritime Pyrenean-Mediterranean border with Spain. Rigaud's official portrait of Louis XIV (1701), now in The Louvre. There is a copy of the painting, one of many done by apprentices in Rigaud's workshop—how else could a king enable more people to see his majestic image? View the image on [pg. 34](#).

Rigaud's painting was intended to be sent in 1701 to Philip V, the new king of Spain, but when Louis XIV saw it he was so delighted he kept it. He ordered Rigaud to paint a second copy, which now hangs in the Palace of Versailles.



Study the painting closely, then suggest why Louis XIV was so pleased. What visual message about royal power was Rigaud trying to put across? Louis was aged 63 when this portrait was executed. Were Hyacinthe Rigaud's ideas about royal authority consistent with Bossuet's?



*Are We Any Different?* Contrast the practice in today's world of [taking a selfie](#). Do we differ in our expectations about access to, and connections with, people who may have power over us? Why might that be so, or not be so?

## Historiography

**Historiography** is the noun describing the ways in which histories are written and studied. Now consider these points of view of historians. Each has tried to sum up the central ideas about monarchical power and authority in the *Old Regime*:

*Daniel Roche:*

*'The old monarchy ... was defined by the notion of universal obedience to the will of a single individual (even though the institutions of the monarchy ensured that real power was never concentrated in one man's hands) .... [The old monarchy] was based on conceptions of society, politics and religion totally different from our own, which are the product of the individualistic, egalitarian period that followed the Revolution. A simple idea served as the basis of the social pact [contract] between the king and people: the king as 'father' of his people .... Both king and people had duties defined not by a constitution but by practices ...'*<sup>14</sup>

14. Daniel Roche, *France des lumières*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 251–252.

Betty Behrens:

*'The form of government known as **absolutism** ... is a form of hereditary monarchy in which the monarch was held to derive his power from God, was seen as the representative of God on earth and ... was credited with semi-divine attributes.'*<sup>15</sup>

Albert Soboul:

*'The divine character of the monarchy granted it **absolute** authority in every sphere. But even if the King was absolute, this did not mean he was a despot .... The King was answerable to God for the ways in which he exercised his authority. He still had to respect the fundamental laws of the kingdom .... By his coronation oath, moreover, the King obliged himself to ensure that, through the unity of his person, the people upheld their Church, and he was to reign through judgments that were impartial and merciful.'*<sup>16</sup>

William Doyle:

*'The King of France was an **absolute monarch**. This meant that there was no institution in the state with the right to prevent him from doing whatever he chose to do, in contrast to a state like Great Britain, where royal power was circumscribed by Parliament. It is true that there were certain 'fundamental laws' which the king was expected to observe, such as those governing the succession. But there was no consensus for the most part over which laws were and which were not fundamental...'*<sup>17</sup>

Peter McPhee:

*Across eight centuries the Bourbon monarchy had stitched together a huge kingdom, the largest in Europe outside Russia. It was a patchwork of privilege, everywhere marked by accretions of history and custom. From the languages spoken by the kings's subjects to the laws and courts that regulated their behavior, from the systems of provincial administration to the structures of the Church, from levels of taxation to systems of weights and measures, every dimension of public life bore the imprint of eight centuries of state-building and compromise with newly incorporated provinces. Privilege was endemic.'*<sup>18</sup>



**Historiographical Points for Evaluations and Discussion.** What differences are there between these historians about the nature and extent of **absolutism** in **Old Regime** France?

15. C. B. A. Behrens, *The Ancien Régime*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 85.

16. Translated by Adrian Jones from the original in Albert Soboul, *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1962), 62. Another translation is Alan Forrest and Colin Jones, *The French Revolution, 1787–1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 79.

17. William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 53.

18. Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 1



# Key Words

## Bourgeois

This word has terrorised generations of English-language students. It derives from *bourg* or town, and originally referred to a town-dweller, neither peasant nor noble. The collective noun is the bourgeoisie, while the adjective is bourgeois. The masculine singular form and plural forms of the noun are bourgeois, and the feminine singular is bourgeoise.

## Estates

In the old societies of Europe, i.e., in the societies existing before the onset of revolutions, the status of people was defined by custom, religion and law according to “orders” or “estates”. People were generally born into their estate, i.e., into their legally defined social group. It was anticipated that most people, if they stayed ‘home’, would also stay in that group their entire life. Old-Regime people had a deeper sense of “belonging” than do modern people. Every language in Europe had a word or words for this concept of belonging to and being born in an estate. Your *birthright* and your birth status determined your “stations of life”, to use another such old-fashioned phrase. Notice the plurals. In France, the social estates were called “*corps*” or bodies; hence our notion of a “corporation” in English. In Germany, they were called *Stände*. In the Ottoman Empire, they were called *milletler*, and they separated people into different faith communities. Estates were known as *sosloviia* сословия in old Russia.

## First Estate

The First Estate was the clergy, the social group, in Old-Regime terms, closest to God.

## Fronde

The Fronde was an effort to reign in the power of the monarchy in France. It was a coalition of high aristocrats and Parisian élites that began in 1648, and persisted through to 1652. This coalition tried to force a young and inexperienced Louis XIV (born 1638, reigned 1643-1715) to agree to limits on his power. France might then have become an English or Polish style constitutional monarchy. Louis XIV soon disagreed, but took some time to marshal the bureaucratic, clerical and noble support he needed in order to re-assert absolute monarchical authority.

## Historiography

The word historiography is a composite of two ancient Greek words: *graphy* meaning writing and *history* meaning conducting investigations about the past. Looking at historiography means trying to understand the agendas and the methods of historians. Historiography is all about how people come to be able to ‘write’ history. Historiography is therefore the noun referring

to the ways historians work out what happened, what was important, and what it meant in the long run. These are complex tasks. Historiography looks at derived meanings and methods. Often people in the past may have had limited understandings about what is 'really' going on in their lives and times. Think of children's understandings of family and neighbourhood life. Historians take whatever documents and traces they can find, and try to piece together a convincing picture. Historiography is a bit like a crime scene investigation. There are clues, but no-one can presume what happened. Different historians will have different ideas—just like the detectives arguing about their murder case. Sometimes a group of like-minded historians form a 'School' based on a particular set of ideas, with different interests, or drawing on different evidence. Reading analyses from different schools helps to strengthen our understanding. In short then...historiography just means seeing where different historians agree and disagree, rather than simply learning 'dates and names'. This is how new knowledge is made

### Magistrates

**Magistrates** were people who had purchased, inherited, or had been appointed to *offices*, which were official positions, such as Secretary to the King. Under the **Old Regime**, most people paid for the offices they held, which meant that only people with enough money could obtain them. Each came with a title; most conferred nobility after several years; a few—like Secretaries to the King—conferred instant nobility. Prices paid reflected these considerations. Likewise, in order to raise more money for the state, an office of state or of a region or a municipality might be held by more than one person. During Louis XVI's era, for instance, there were hundreds of Secretaries to the King. Sale of offices—*la vénalité*—was a key fund-raiser for the **Old Regime**.

### Old Regime

Just as the Renaissance terms "Renaissance (re-birth)" and "Middle Ages (*Medioevo* in Latin, i.e. Medieval)" were a Renaissance way of disdaining the era preceding, so too the label, "Old Regime (*Ancien Régime* in French) is a put-down (i.e., a pejorative) created by the revolutionaries to diminish the standing of the era preceding their own. Generations tend to dismiss the achievements of those who go before. Different class cohorts in schools, each with own T-shirt, may be tempted to belittle their prior cohort as well.

### Second Estate

The Second Estate was the nobility.

### Third Estate

The Third Estate was .... everybody else, rich or poor, peasant or townspeople.

## CHAPTER 2

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# Tensions and Conflicts in Old Regime France



## New Thinking about Authority

New ideas of authority were emerging in **Old Regime** France even before Louis XVI came to the throne. Charles-Louis de Secondat, *baron* de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) rejected claims made by Bossuet. Montesquieu was one of the most influential thinkers of his age. He was a noble from Bordeaux, a city connected to France's Atlantic coast by the Garonne River. Noted for its elegant architecture and fine wines, Bordeaux was one of the leading centres of Atlantic trade. Commerce in wine, slaves and sugar made Bordeaux one of the wealthiest and most outward-looking regions in France.



Images of Montesquieu's Château de la Brède, near Bordeaux, may be seen [here](#).

As a well-educated lawyer and privileged noble of the robe (*noblesse de robe*), Montesquieu held a key post in the *Parlement* of Bordeaux. He wanted the noble-dominated **Parlements** to share power with the King in France. Montesquieu admired the British constitution, with its balance of power between the crown and landed élites who elected representatives in a parliament. Montesquieu despised Louis XIV's 'despotism' and intolerance. He wrote a satirical novel, *The Persian Letters*, and had it published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1721 to avoid royal censorship in France. In *The Persian Letters*, Montesquieu invented make-believe Persians who travelled to France seeking '**enlightenment**'. His 'travellers' wrote *Letters* about their experiences. The wit and irony in Montesquieu's phony-Persian perspective on his native France developed one of the first comprehensive critiques of the **Old Regime** in France. Montesquieu's make-believe took place in a context of growing French contacts with Persia (or Iran, as it is called today): a French ambassador to Persia was dispatched in 1705, a treaty was signed in 1708, and the Persians sent an ambassador to Paris in 1715. Travel broadens minds. In this passage from *The Persian Letters*, Montesquieu pokes fun at the idea of **absolute monarchy**:

*I have seen the young monarch [Louis XV]. His life is precious indeed to his subjects; it is no less so to the whole of Europe, because of the great disturbances that his death might bring.<sup>19</sup> But kings are like gods, and as long as they are alive we must believe them immortal. [Louis XV's] expression is majestic but delightful; the excellence of his upbringing seems to be allied to a propitious [favourable] character, and already betokens a great prince. They say that it is impossible to tell the character of Western kings until they have been subjected to two great ordeals, their mistress [lover] and their confessor [priest]. It will not be long before we see both of them hard at work to seize control of the king's mind; it will be a mighty*

19. Louis XV was then very young, and then had no successor. If he died without a successor, other states would likely declare war on France to support rival candidates for the throne. If he had died leaving only a very young successor, there would have to be a regent to govern in his stead.

*struggle. For under a young prince, these two powers are always rivals, though they are reconciled and join forces under an old [prince]....*

*The King of France is the most powerful ruler in Europe. He has no goldmines like the King of Spain, his neighbour, but his riches are greater, because he extracts them from his subjects' vanity, which is more inexhaustible than mines. He has been known to undertake or sustain major wars with no other funds but what he gets from selling honorific titles, and by a miracle of human vanity, his troops are paid, his fortresses supplied, and his fleets equipped. Moreover, this king is a great magician. He exerts authority even over the minds of his subjects; he makes them think what he wants. ... If he is involved in a difficult war without any money, all he has to do is to get it into their heads that a piece of paper will do for money, and they are immediately convinced of it. He even succeeds in making them believe that he can cure them of all sorts of diseases by touching them, such is the force and power that he has over their minds.<sup>20</sup>*

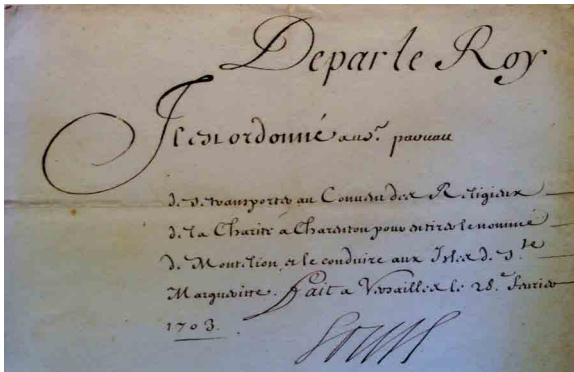
An English translation of this work can be found [here](#).

It had been believed for centuries that the monarch, being ordained by God, could 'touch for the King's evil'. The 'King's evil' was a disease called scrofula, a swelling and infection of the lymph glands. It was believed that the monarch could cure scrofula by touching the sick person with their fingers. This was also practiced in England. This [website](#) shows a sixteenth century copperplate engraving by court physician André du Laurens, of Henri IV healing the sick by touching them.

French Kings raised money by selling commissions in the army (*noblesse d'épée*), junior posts in the government, senior and junior judge- and clerk-ships in courts and **Parlements** (*noblesse de robe*), and all manner of posts in municipalities (*noblesse de cloche*). Wealthy people usually made a significant down-payment, and then paid an annual fee for the office. Some of these venal offices, like the ones in elite army regiments and in most **Parlements**, were closed to non-noble bidders. Most high-level venal offices eventually conferred nobility on the holder of the office, and on his heirs and successors. People who had bought an office, but who had not yet qualified for noble status, were called *anoblis*. They often tried to pretend that they already were nobles, often purchasing a country house and seigneurie to add substance to the pretence by adding a 'de ...' after their name. The young lawyer from Arras, Maximilien Robespierre, future leader of the Revolution, was a descendant of such a pretender.

Montesquieu delighted in barbs, smirks and double-meanings, such as his remark: 'he makes them think what he wants.' **Enlightenment** authors, like Montesquieu, tended to be cynical

20. Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters* (1721), tr. C.J. Betts, (Harmondsworth Eng ; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), letter 107, 196–197.



A lettre de cachet allowed the king of France to send into jail arbitrarily anybody he did not approved.

about established religion and authority. But authors who dared to disagree with the values of the **Old Regime** had to be cautious. Under the **Old Regime**, anyone could be arrested without trial and thrown into prison (often in the *Bastille*, the royal prison in Paris) by a royal order called a **lettre de cachet**.

This could occur if it was made known to the king that you had criticised or poked fun at him, if your sexual behaviour was regarded as outrageous, and/or if you had somehow shamed your family or defied your father. An early leader of the French Revolution, the comte de Mirabeau, did all three.



**Divine Right.** There is more than one explanation for why Louis XV's life—and by implication the lives of any **absolute monarch** in France—was 'precious'. What is Montesquieu suggesting about monarchy when he says, 'kings are like gods, and as long as they are alive we must believe them immortal'? How might you have responded to Montesquieu's point if you were a king? Furthermore, suggest what might be implied by the pointed way in which Montesquieu likened a divine-right king to a 'magician'?



**Abuse of Power.** Which abuses of power did Montesquieu emphasise? Which other **estates** in the **Old Regime** also took part in these abuses?



**New Values. Looking Ahead.** Montesquieu uses new ideas and new forms of literature to poke fun at people in power in France. First, identify examples of Montesquieu's use of *reason* and *merit* (two of his new **Enlightenment** ideas). Second, identify examples of his use of *satire* (his new kind of literature that makes its points by means of *wit* and *style*). How did each criticise traditional ideas of the monarchy in **Old Regime** France? These **Enlightenment** themes influenced many of the actions of the leaders of the **Parlements**, in responding to efforts to reform France, and they also recur in many Articles of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 27 August 1789. Each of these influences is to be studied later.



**Theory and Practice.** Why did Montesquieu think the practice of **absolute monarchy** was unlikely to match the promise of the theory?

## New Thinking on Family Life

These new ideas on authority applied to more aspects of the social order than just the authority of kings. Young women, for example, started to question their mothers and fathers. Consider this example from Madame Roland's memoirs, written shortly before her execution in 1793. She describes her adolescence during the 1770s:



Jean-Marc Nattier Portrait of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais 1755

*My parents' small library still supplied me with new reading.... I had already by then read all Voltaire.... and a host of other philosophes and critics. I have no doubt that my dear mother, realising that I must be allowed to exercise my mind, was quite glad to see me study [Enlightenment] philosophy at the risk of losing my [Roman-Catholic] faith, but thought that my heart was too easily moved and needed protection from too much emotion. But oh dear me; what useless efforts to escape destiny! The same motive must have been behind her refusal to let me take up painting and her opposition to my learning the harpsichord despite the golden opportunity I had for that.... Reason and nature conspire so effectively to persuade a wise, modest young*

*woman that she must get married that the only point left for deliberation is who it should be. On this my mother's arguments seemed to me quite sound. But I also thought that whatever they might say my provisional acceptance could not possibly be binding; it was absurd to regard me as committed just because I had agreed to meet in my father's house a man who wanted to marry me. I was quite determined that nothing on earth would make me go through with it if I did not like him. So I decided not to say no and to keep my options open.*

For an image and audio sample of a French harpsichord from the 1780s, held by the [National Music Museum](#) in South Dakota, USA. More harpsichords, details and sound samples at this [website](#)—scroll down to 'French Harpsichords' and click on some different types to hear samples

Consider another example. As Beaumarchais' comic play, *The Marriage of Figaro* (1783), draws to a close, he exposes double standards of adulterous husbands who still insist their wives must be virtuous. (We shall return to this play later.) At play's end, these characters, soon to marry, sing:



Illustration in the initial printing of Beaumarchais' play *The Marriage of Figaro*, ACT 1.

SUZANNE:

*Let a husband break his vows, it's just a joke the world allows—  
But should a wife like freedom take, the world will punish her mistake.  
The strong it is for all they say, who in the end will have their way.*

FIGARO:

*Many a man who takes a wife, thinks to lead a quiet life.  
He keeps a watchdog—silly man, to guard his house—as if he can.  
For woman's love—for all they say—finds the means to fly away.<sup>21</sup>*



**New thinking on *paternalism*.** On what bases did Madame Roland question the authority of her father and mother to arrange her marriage?



**New thinking on freedom and choice.** What new ideas of liberty and a 'right' to self-expression are being lived out in Madame Roland's memoir and in Beaumarchais' song?

## New Thinking on Forms of Government: Voltaire

Like Beaumarchais, Madame Roland and Baron Montesquieu, François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778) was another of France's most creative and dazzling thinkers. Like Montesquieu, Voltaire was a leader of the '**Enlightenment**' in France. He described himself and people like Montesquieu as 'lovers of wisdom (philosophes)' who saw themselves as using reason to be 'enlighteners (called lumières in French, illuminati in Italian)'. Voltaire wrote poems, plays, novels and political theory, and was renowned for his partisanship, courage, wit and style. Though he served three-and-a-half years in gaol in the Bastille for his witty verses and subversive ideas, Voltaire was a sought-after guest at genteel parties and discussion clubs (salons) all over France. He regularly corresponded with rulers outside of France who wished to appear **liberal** and progressive like Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia and Catherine II (the Great) of Russia. To avoid arrest and censorship in France, he often denied authorship of the books he wrote; everyone knew otherwise however.

A biography of Voltaire can be found at [this website](#) which provides links to other Voltaire resources including the Voltaire Foundation at Oxford University. See [here](#) for information about his home between 1734 and 1749: the Château de Cirey sur Blaise, near the frontier in Lorraine in east France. (The Château de Cirey belonged to Voltaire's patron, a Parisian

21. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *The barber of Seville, and The marriage of Figaro*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), Act 5, 217.

salon hostess, the marquise Émilie de Châtelet. Many websites have copies of a bust (1781) of a smiling, seated Voltaire in marble or terracotta sculpted three years after Voltaire's death, by Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828) for Russian Empress Catherine, an admirer of Voltaire—for example on The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York [website](#). Other images can be seen at on the Institut et Musée Voltaire [website](#).

Voltaire loved satires, games and jokes, provided they made serious points. His motto was *écrasez l'infâme*: expose and oppose senseless injustices. After his second arrest and imprisonment, Voltaire chose to live between 1758 and 1778 at Ferney, close to the border with Switzerland, the better to escape when arrest threatened.



An engraving by Prévost of Voltaire in his garden at Ferney can be found in the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#).

Voltaire stood for **enlightenment** and education, espousing values of progress through individual freedom and tolerance of personal and religious difference; values that came to be called '**liberal**' and which persist today. Voltaire loathed ignorance and tradition, especially when it was linked to despotic authority and established religions. He detested the ideas of Bishop Bossuet (discussed previously). Voltaire had his own ideas about royal authority and government:

*A fatherland is a composite of several families; and as we usually stand by our family out of self-love when we have no conflicting interest, so because of the same self-love we support our town or village, which we call our fatherland. The bigger the fatherland, the less we love it, because divided love is weaker. It is impossible to love tenderly too numerous a family which we hardly know. He who burns with ambition to become... [a venal officeholder or a state official] cries out that he loves his country, but he loves only himself. Every man wants to be sure that he can sleep at home without another man arrogating [i.e., seizing or otherwise claiming unduly] to himself the power to make him sleep elsewhere. Every man wants to be sure of his fortune and his life. Thus, all having the same wishes, it turns out that private interest becomes the general interest: when we express our hopes for ourselves we are expressing them for the republic [i.e., the public good].*

*... Is it better today for one's country to be a monarchic or a republican state? This question has been debated for 4,000 years. Ask the rich for a solution, and they all prefer an aristocracy. Question the people; they want democracy. Only kings prefer a monarchy. How then is it possible that monarchs govern nearly the whole world?*

*Ask the rats who proposed to hang a bell round the cat's neck.<sup>22</sup> But in truth, the real reason is... that men are very seldom worthy to govern themselves. It is sad that, to be a good patriot, one is often the enemy of the rest of humanity. ... To be a good patriot is to want one's city to be enriched by commerce and powerful in arms. It is obvious that a country cannot gain unless another loses, and that it cannot vanquish without causing unhappiness. So it is the human condition that to wish for the greatness of one's fatherland is to wish evil to one's neighbours. The citizen of the universe would be the man who wishes his country never to be either greater or smaller, richer or poorer.<sup>23</sup>*

Voltaire mounted a multi-pronged attack on ancient regime France, but his thought was really aimed at improving it, not changing the system completely. He wanted Protestants to be tolerated, and slaves to be better treated, but he certainly did not propose that everyone should be equal. If the poor were free and equal to the rich, he argued, they would simply steal the property for themselves, and society would lapse into anarchy. On the whole, he preferred the idea of a truly meritorious aristocracy of philosophical rulers, rather like himself.

## New Thinking on Forms of Government: Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was profoundly different from Voltaire. Where Voltaire was rich and well connected, Rousseau was a poor watchmaker's son from Geneva, largely self-educated and married to an illiterate chambermaid. After arriving in Paris, he became friendly with philosophers who appreciated his remarkable character. One day, on the way to visit Diderot, who was in prison for his writings, Rousseau read an advertisement for an essay competition on the subject 'Have the Arts and Sciences benefited Civilization?' Jean-Jacques had an epiphany—he decided that the answer was no. His essay won the prize, and he followed it with a new discourse on the Origins of Inequality. Rousseau wanted to know why some had wealth and power while others had none. He concluded that it was the introduction of property that had changed human society from its original state, and made it much worse, he believed. The only way to move forward was to recognise that power did not belong to one person or a group, but to everyone. Each person is born free, but chooses to sacrifice that freedom, as part of a contract, in order to live in society. But no-one should ever take that power away from the people. These ideas of the '**sovereignty** of the people', and the 'social contract' were extremely radical. Unlike Voltaire, Rousseau published all of his works under his own name.

In fact, though, the works most people read were Rousseau's novels, like *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, his educational biography of a fictional young man called *Émile*, and his own autobiography, *Confessions*, in which he revealed his life and his private thoughts and experiences. Men and women of all classes, in reading these books, had a feeling that a different, modern world was

22. This is a reference to a fable of *Æsop*, a Greek writer from the 6th century BC. In *Æsop's* fable, a group of mice hit on an idea to protect themselves against a cat. They decide to hang a bell around its neck. But there is a snag. How will they get the bell there? *Æsop's* moral is that it is one thing to say that you'll do something; it is another to do it.

23. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, (ed., tr.) T. Besterman, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), extracts from 327–329.

opening around them. In 1762, both *Émile* and the Social Contract (*Du Contrat Social*) were published. The **Parlement of Paris** immediately ordered Rousseau arrested, and he had to flee across the border back to Switzerland. He died in 1778, before he could see the impact of his ideas in the French Revolution.

*Émile* got Rousseau into big trouble because of its challenge to religion. Rousseau was not an atheist like Voltaire, but he questioned the right of religions to claim they had the truth and to persecute others who disagreed. He shocked people by saying religion was a result of where a person was born and everyone should be allowed to choose his or her own religion. They could even set aside their differences and make a new civic religion. This was more than just tolerance, it was a radical idea that outraged conservative members of the clergy and the aristocrats of the Parlement of Paris. Rousseau had to flee France and go into exile back into Switzerland.

From *Émile*, Book IV

*If only a Turk, who finds Christianity so ridiculous in Istanbul, would come and see how Islam is considered in Paris! It is in religion above all that opinion triumphs. But we, who claim to have shaken off its yoke ... in what religion would we raise our Émile? ... The answer seems to me very simple; we would not raise him in one religion or another, we would put him in a position to choose that religion to which the best use of his reason carried him.*

Opening of *On the Social Contract*:

*Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others, but remains more of a slave than they are.*

Excerpt from *On the Social Contract* Book II

*If we ask in what precisely consists the greatest good of all, which should be the end of every system of legislation, we shall find it reduce itself to two main objects, liberty and equality—liberty, because all particular dependence means so much force taken from the body of the State and equality, because liberty cannot exist without it.*

*I have already defined civil liberty; by equality, we should understand, not that the degrees of power and riches are to be absolutely identical for everybody; but that power shall never be great enough for violence, and shall always be exercised by virtue of rank and law; and that, in respect of riches, no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself: which implies, on the part of the great, moderation in goods and position, and, on the side of the common sort, moderation in avarice and covetousness.*



*Questions about concepts:* How did Rousseau define equality? Why can liberty not exist without equality? Do you think his ideas are impractical?

Rousseau hated the aristocratic wigs and silk breeches of the Paris elite and tried to find a different, more comfortable style. He admired the warm, loose garments of the Ottoman Empire where his father had once lived, and ordered some clothes from an Armenian tailor. When he started wearing his new robe in Switzerland, many people thought it was Muslim costume, and he was attacked by local peasants.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau dressed in Armenian coat and cap.



*New thinking on **Paternalism** and **Belonging**.* These themes were also familiar to the **Old Regime** thinking of Bishop Bossuet and Rétif de la Bretonne. But they thought of society as being like a body, a living thing in which everyone and everything has to 'belong' in order to work correctly.



*New thinking on **Slavery**.* Montesquieu demonstrated an ambivalent attitude toward slavery, as did Voltaire. They were repelled by the abuses to which it gave rise, but still believed it was necessary to sustain the society that gave rise to 'civilization'. Montesquieu tried to explain it through climate, and Voltaire through the realities of power in the world. Although Rousseau did not explicitly write against slavery, it is clear that it was unjustifiable in the system he developed. A group of enlightened men and women created an association just prior to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1788, called the 'Society of the Friends of Blacks': the **abbé** Grégoire was its most notable member. A young black aristocrat in France, the Chevalier de St Georges, was a noted composer. Another later became a General in the French army, and his son became one of France's most renowned writers, Alexandre Dumas. The idea that black and white were equal was a radical new idea that would also have great impact during the revolution.

Voltaire offered new ways of thinking on these themes. Some of his new ideas undermined the **Old Regime**. But then again, not everything was new in Voltaire's ways of thinking. Consider these quotations as a way of sorting out which Old-Regime themes Voltaire rejected, which he still approved, and which he qualified in some way:

*'fatherland is a composite of several families',  
 'we usually stand by our family out of self-love when we have no conflicting interest',  
 'divided love is weaker', and  
 'he loves only himself'.*



Suggest what Bishop Bossuet or Rétif de la Bretonne (discussed earlier) might have thought of these statements.



**Liberal Individualism, not Community.** Explain the reasoning behind Voltaire's view that 'it [always] turns out that private interest becomes the general interest'.



**Liberalism and Individualism (1).** Voltaire's thinking is still influential. One of the key ideas of **liberals** and **liberalism** is that people will always/generally/sometimes be better off if they are free to pursue their private interests. Do you agree? What if the pursuit of private interests harms other individuals? Voltaire's ideas are associated with **liberals** and **liberalism**. In reflecting on Voltaire's reasoning, think about examples from today when the private interest is argued to be the same as the public good. What about the operation of the free market in music downloads? What about the need for car seat belts? Free speech—even hate speech? Banning tobacco advertising? etc.



**Liberalism and Individualism (2).** Voltaire's thinking about individualism and community will come up again in the extraordinary language of the Preamble and some of the Articles of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 26 August 1789, studied later. Do views like Voltaire's favour the middle classes (wealthy **bourgeois** and professionals) who benefit most from free trade and from open access based on merit to all state posts? Might poor people, or aristocrats, benefit just as much?



**Cosmopolitanism.** How does Voltaire use international and anthropological comparisons to reach conclusions about France? Do you agree with Voltaire's critique of patriotism? What were its implications for political ideas about authority in the **Old Regime** societies?



Rousseau said that cosmopolitans declare their love for 'humanity' in order not to have to love the real people around them. He was criticising Voltaire. Do you think he had a point?



**Enlightenment.** Voltaire maintains that 'men are very seldom worthy to govern themselves'. Speculate as to what Voltaire might have thought was the best form of government for a people only just becoming 'enlightened'? Might elections help? What sort of people might be best to elect?



**Enlightenment.** Do we live under what Voltaire would have called an 'enlightened' society? Are our governments enlightened'?



**Divine Right and Absolutism.** Analyse the two reasons Voltaire gives to explain why most states in Europe are monarchies. Which reason was more likely to please the monarchs themselves? Which reason would likely not please them, having subversive implications? Are any of Voltaire's political ideas reconcilable with Bishop Bossuet's absolutist idea of 'divine right' monarchy? Voltaire maintained 'enlightened absolutism' was the best form of government. Suggest reasons why he took this position.

## Stress Lines in the Old Regime: Arthur Young



The life of Arthur Young (1741–1820) was taken up with promoting better standards of farming. He is a classic figure of the **Enlightenment**. Young wanted land owners to enclose and fence open fields. He wanted landlords to manage their farm on a commercial basis, or at least put in place well-trained tenants. He aimed to show landlords how to boost crop yields, to enable selective breeding of livestock, to improve crop rotations, and to encourage better cultivation practices, chiefly by manuring soils, by under-sowing and by second harrowing.

In medieval and early-modern Europe—and in most, but not all, of France—peasants and landlords generally farmed in ‘open’ or ‘common fields’. This anchored local communities and deepened their traditions. ‘Common fields’ meant everyone farmed the same crops the same way. Peasants tended different strips in different open fields around their village; the landscape looked much as a market garden looks today. Isolated farms and farmsteads were rarer in Europe in general, though larger separate farms and estates were more common in the very fertile regions around Paris (Île de France), in those parts of the north of France with a wealthier medieval heritage associated with wool, grain and meat trade (Picardy, Flanders, Artois, Burgundy, and parts of Champagne). Another exception in France was the Atlantic northwest: smaller hedgerow (bocage) farmsteads predominated in particular regions of Normandy and the Vendée. The general pattern in France and in Europe, nonetheless, was that peasants lived in common in the village, commuting to plough, sow, harrow, weed and reap individually and in tandem in the fields, knowing only too well whose strips of land were whose. Once their crop was brought in, or while a field lay in fallow, the same people would graze their livestock in common on the stubble in the same fields. The desperately poor might ‘glean’ the stubble in the late-season heat, picking up the few grains that had fallen off the ripening sheaths.

Arthur Young travelled through *Old Regime* France with these interests in mind. He was made welcome, even though the last century had seen wars and stiff competition between France and Britain. France’s Louis XIV had backed Stuart kings and would-be Stuart kings of England against the Protestant-dominated English Parliament. A British army led by Marlborough had helped defeat Louis XIV’s ambition to dominate all Europe. Under Louis XV, the two realms had clashed in wars contesting thrones of Spain and Austria, as well over colonies in the Americas, India and the Caribbean.



**Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory** *Girl Feeding Chickens* from the series known as the *Enfants de Boucher* circa 1770–80

France’s economy prospered in the eighteenth century, maintaining a thriving Atlantic trade in sugar and slaves. France’s economy was also quite robust. France dominated Europe’s wine and Mediterranean trade with the Middle East, and led in the production of luxury goods from fine tapestries to exquisite clocks.

From 1662, the Gobelins manufactory was taken over by the Crown to supply tapestries to the king’s palaces. The [J. Paul Getty Museum](#) also has an online gallery of Gobelins Tapestries.

The [Museum of Clocks](#) in Saint Nicolas d’Aliermont in Normandy shows the fine art of French (and Swiss) clocks. See also the [Metropolitan Museum’s](#) seventeenth and eighteenth century European clock collection, with a useful historical outline.

As you might expect, however, Britain still fared best in almost all of Arthur Young's patriotic comparisons. In this passage written in Young's eighteenth century English, he summed up the **political and governmental systems** in France in 1769. With hindsight, we think of that political system as the **Old Regime**; Young saw it with the eyes of a contemporary, not as an historian. France's forms of government seemed stable and eternal to him. Young's point of view was probably shaped by his conversations with the French nobles who hosted him. Through Young, we can sense how French and English gentlemen had always imagined France's systems of government:

*The government of France is, without doubt, the most securely arbitrary of any upon earth; many [governments] have the appearance of more despotic authority, but none more of the reality. The eastern empires ... [he mentioned Russia and the Ottoman empire], where a mere despotism reigns, are greatly subject to revolutions and bloody catastrophes: That excess of power renders them so insecure that the prince is scarcely for a moment safe and firmly seated upon his throne. Whereas in those kingdoms [like France] where [Parlements] ... and other public bodies of people exist, with an appearance of great power, and the reality of some, [there is] between the Sovereign and people ... a certain degree or mixture of liberty.*

Young went on to explain that the liberty that was left over, this 'certain degree of liberty', meant that ordinary people in France (and in his England) didn't need to stage violent revolts in order to remove despotic rulers.

*The edicts of the king of France have not the force of laws, until they are registered by the [Parlement] of Paris; the members of which frequently remonstrate with their sovereign in very warm and expressive terms against his edicts, and sometimes even refuse their concurrence. Here lies the security of the king's power; this show of liberty serves the people instead of the reality. They are satisfied with daring to oppose, where in fact, opposition is of no effect; for the king holds a 'Bed of Justice [lit de justice]' and causes his edicts to be registered in his presence—after which they have the same force as if the Parlement had registered them without him.... Such a system of government could scarcely be framed for any purpose, but to render arbitrary power wonderfully secure. It deceives the people: for to their minds, so infatuated with the idea of the grand monarch, such resolute opposition as his edicts sometimes meet with in [the Parlements], amazes them; and gives them a notion of liberty, which renders the truth less apparent. It is incredible what numbers of Frenchmen will insist violently their king is far from being absolute—that they are a free people—and that the legislative power resides not in the king, but jointly with his [Parlements].*

Arthur Young thought it was impractical to have any form of government in which ordinary people had any real power. His reasons sum up a great deal of the thinking behind the **Old Regime**:

*In a free country the government cannot...make use of the real power of the nation—for no people can be free from factions—if they were, they would not long preserve their freedom. It is the nature of faction [i.e., interest groups, parties, clubs] to oppose everything but private interest, by which means the government is in some measure shackled...*<sup>24</sup>



**The Concept of Arbitrariness.** Why does Young conclude that France was ‘the most securely arbitrary’ government in Europe? What was Young suggesting to his English readers by coupling words we might think were opposites: ‘security’ and ‘arbitrariness’? What does ‘arbitrary’ mean?



**Arbitrary Authority.** Suggest examples of ‘arbitrary’ authority in today’s world. What about family life? School life? Businesses or other kinds of organisations? Do these arbitrary forms of authority ever make people feel secure? What might your reflections about these forms of authority today suggest about attitudes to authority in Old-Regime France? Has the **Old Regime** ever disappeared completely?



**The Concept of Security.** Young’s points are based on an explicit comparison between France and other ‘despotic’ states like the Russian and Ottoman Empires. Young’s points are also based on an implicit comparison with his native Britain. Since 1688, Britain had guaranteed civil liberties and the rule of law, centering power on a Parliament that had the power to approve or refuse taxation. This Parliament was dominated by landed gentlemen. Two English would-be absolutist monarchs (Charles I in 1649; James II in 1688) had been ousted. A more avowedly Protestant and constitutional monarchy, eventually based on new royal families, the first Dutch, the next Hanoverian, was installed in England in 1688–89 and 1714 respectively. These explicit and implicit comparisons underpin Young’s idea about ‘appearances’ and the reality of arbitrary authority in France. According to Young, how did giving ordinary people some feeling of influence or power in fact strengthen the king? Do you agree? English, Scots and Irish settlers who came to Australia had ideas similar to Young’s.

24. Arthur Young, *Letters Concerning the Present State of the French Nation*, (London: Nicoll Farnborough : Gregg, 1769), 404.



*The Concept of **Sovereignty**.* When he was explaining the **Parlements'** claim in France to have a power to register royal laws ['edicts'] and to issue *remonstrances* rejecting those they opposed, Young concluded that French people had the 'appearance of *great* power, and the reality of *some*'. Explain what he meant and why he thought it was a good thing for France. Did Young see France's government, on balance, as more like Britain's constitutional government than it was like Russia's despotism?



*The Concept of **Liberty**.* Young's ideal was 'a certain degree or mixture of liberty', 'a notion of liberty'. What did he mean? Young went on to argue that a 'show of liberty serves the people best' because it 'renders the truth less apparent'. Would Young be considered a democrat today? Young, the patriotic Englishman, doubted whether French people were really as 'free' as they insisted they were when he had spoken with them. Do you agree with Young, or with the French people with whom he spoke? Offer reasons why/why not.



*Liberty and Authority.* Consider people in authority in our society, say: parents, teachers or employers. Is 'a show of liberty' really best for all concerned? Is it possible or desirable to have total liberty in all situations?



*Authority.* Explaining the French king's '**absolute**' power to insist on what he wanted—such as when the monarch chose to take the public step of over-riding a *Parlement's remonstrance* by making a *lit de justice*, a King's personal appearance in the *Parlement* to veto (i.e., over-rule) a *remonstrance*—Young concluded that the political system in France 'render[ed] arbitrary power wonderfully secure'. Explain his reasoning.



*Faction (1).* Young disapproved of 'factions' in political life. He knew many people in France who felt the same way. We would call 'factions' political parties today. We expect our political life to be shaped by party platforms and election campaigns. Our political parties even have factions within them, organising branches and putting forward candidates for election to Parliament. A possible exception is people's attitudes to local government politics, where many people say they don't want political parties to be involved. Is this a survival of Old-Regime thinking about community and politics? Was the hostility of Young and of many people in France to 'factions' naïve?



**Faction (2).** One of the great puzzles of history is the question of why the French Revolution turned violent, naming ‘enemies of the people’ and executing some of these. How might these prevailing **Old Regime** attitudes to ‘faction’ have influenced attitudes towards political rivals when the Revolution got under way?



**The Concept of Legitimacy, or Claims to Have Authority.** Sum up what Young tells us about **Old Regime** France. Focus on the claims to authority of the king and the claims of the **Parlements**. Given what he had written about the situation in France, would Young have been surprised by the Revolution? Why is that?

## A View from a Village: ‘Feudalism’ in Eighteenth-Century France

A marvellous website prepared by *Pierre Collenot* discusses ‘*feudalism*’ in the village at St Martin de la Mer, Collenot’s village in the Morvan hill region of Burgundy. Collenot’s [website](#) shows the history of his village, documenting the rural world of eighteenth century France, and in particular, ways in which **seigneurial** or **feudal** obligations operated. Although Collenot’s St Martin de la Mer was a village named after a Saint of the Sea, it is actually located far from the sea, in France’s rich eastern province of Burgundy.



Unknown artist *Des Barriers Deliver us Lord* 1789-1799

‘**Feudalism**’ was a term of abuse adopted by revolutionaries in France to describe **proprietary** and **seigneurial** systems of landholding in **Old Regime** France. Most peasants in France—unlike in England, Scotland or Ireland—were smallholders; French peasants generally owned at least part of their land outright, though they might still farm in common fields, and though they might rent other people’s lands as well. France’s tradition of small-scale proprietorship of rural land laid the foundation for France’s distinct rural economy, and its tourism and fine cuisine. In France, rather more than in England, it was possible for many specialist producers of wines, cheeses, hams and truffles to emerge, and for some to prosper.

The simple point about **seigneurialism**, or **feudalism**, is that even though most French

peasants owned at least part of their lands outright, they still had to work in collaboration with other villagers—mostly because of the existence of communal grazing lands, and sometimes because of the continuation of the medieval pattern of peasant farming in family-owned strips in village-owned open-fields—and they often still had to pay ‘*feudal*’ fees and charges to the descendants of noble people who were once Lords (*Seigneurs*) of this land, or else to people, noble and non-noble (roturier), who had since purchased the rights to collect these charges. These concepts seem alien to people from Anglo-Saxon societies like Australia, USA and England (but not Scotland or Ireland) with long traditions of absolute rights to property: Why should we pay someone else a fee for something that we already own?

Many French peasants would have agreed, but the *Old Regime* left them with little hope of avoiding their unwanted obligations. They grumbled, but—until 1788—they could not complain. The situation changed when Louis XVI invited peasants to draw up lists of grievances (*les cahiers des doléances*) in 1788! By the end of 1792, peasants were the first clear beneficiaries of the Revolution; *feudalism* was abolished in stages between 1789 and 1792, and no-one, not least Napoléon, dared to revive it. French proprietors henceforth enjoyed (Anglo-Saxon-style) absolute property rights.



**Feudalism and Cartoons.** One indication of a new mood of grumbling about seigneurs is the emergence in eighteenth century France of a market for drawings attacking ‘*feudal*’ obligations. Prosperous peasants were keen to buy images attacking *seigneurs* and *seigneurial dues*. You can imagine, moreover, how these images were seen by many more people than just the purchasers. One example is an anonymous series of four prints in the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#) in Paris. One such image warned against trickster lawyers working for greedy seigneurs who try to revive forgotten *feudal* dues. Another pointed to private guards who worked for seigneurs to stop peasants ‘poaching’ game, wood, fruit and mushrooms from *seigneurial* lands; peasants were always going to take a different view. Another image complained about dues paid at customs barriers on private roads and bridges or at town gates. These levies were unpopular because they varied between towns and because they collected revenue from villagers coming to town to trade; these people were counting on this trade as one of their few ways of earning extra cash. Yet another image bemoaned town militia (a kind of police) who routinely extorted money from ordinary people (*le menu peuple*). Simply put, peasants and artisans felt that most people given positions of power over them were likely to cheat and bully them. And there seemed to be no other way for ordinary people to hold people like this to account other than by riot and/or by ridicule (*le charivari*).

**Seigneurial Dues and Deeds.** There is an example, in typed French, of a deed of record (*terrier*) of *feudal* obligations owing on allotments in Conforgien near Saulieu in 1777 in the [parish of St Martin de la Mer](#). You can take a virtual tour of the château de Conforgien, built in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries on this [website](#). There is a photograph elsewhere in the

same [website](#) of an original *terrier*, hand-written by the parish priest (*le curé*), Claude François Renard. The deed (*terrier*) records **feudal** dues owed to the duc de Nevers (also known as du Nivernais) on lands actually owned by other people in his parish of St Martin de la Mer in 1786. These lands were in a seigneurie called 'La Châtellenie de Liernais' in the duchy of Nivernais. It seems that when the duc du Nivernais was short of cash in 1786 he hired a feudiste: in this case, a local notary (official clerk) called Herard.

Louis Jules Barbon Mazarini-Mancini, duc de Nivernais, born in 1716, is pictured beside 'D' at this [website](#). In spite of his greed, the duc de Nivernais had a reputation as a **liberal** in national politics. He was associated with Loménie de Brienne in 1786. His estate was confiscated during the Terror and he was arrested and imprisoned in September 1793, only to be released, after 9 Thermidor II, the fall of Robespierre, in October 1794. He died in 1798.

Feudistes were legal experts in reviving and enforcing **feudal** obligations—the tricksters in the prints (mentioned before) that were once bought by peasants. Feudistes were loathed by peasants. They were rogue lawyer-historians who trawled through ancient documents to revive forgotten local obligations of peasants to landlords (seigneurs).

What was due in **seigneurial dues**. Pierre Collenot's website goes on to list the **feudal** dues (les droits seigneuriaux) usually paid to landlords, whether noble or **bourgeois**, by peasants, and then shows the exact imposts paid by peasants around St Martin de la Mer in the Morvan. Nineteenth-century drawings and photos of the village and people there can be viewed [here](#).

Typical fees that seigneurs charged are listed on this [website](#) and comprised:

**Les banalités:** peasants were obliged to use the seigneur's mill or oven, and every time they were used, the seigneur could take a set proportion—usually a 20th—of whatever was milled or baked. There was a corresponding **seigneurial** obligation to keep these facilities in good order. The custom made sense in the medieval world when capital was short and everything was done locally. But in a modernising economy, peasants were increasingly seeking to buy access to cheaper or better facilities elsewhere.

**Le cens:** a **feudal** license (la redevance), most often a modest sum paid in cash, but sometimes still paid in kind. The license simply recognised that the land currently used was once owned by a noble. It didn't matter who owned it now. From the peasants' point of view, cens payments were more irksome than burdensome, reminding them of their lack of status and of the limits to their ownership of their own land. In the village of St Martin de la Mer these payments were made on a fixed day of village festivities, in this case on 11 November, St Martin's day, when the winter crop of grain had been harvested.

**Le champart:** the seigneur's claim to a pre-fixed share, listed in the *terrier*, of anything harvested in the former common lands of the village. There was often a corresponding

**seigneurial** obligation to allow peasants to graze his woodlands, and even—if the peasants were hungry enough—to allow them to glean his lands (*le droit de vaine pâture*), meaning that they were allowed to come on and collect, by hand, individual grains that may have fallen onto the soil and been missed when the grain stalks had been reaped and sheaved. This customary ‘right’ was valued by the destitute; i.e. by peasants who were so hungry and so poor that they needed to crawl across someone else’s harvested fields and collect, one-by-one, the few ears of grain that had fallen onto the soil. This exacting work was often performed by destitute infants and children of primary school age. The work of older children and teenagers was needed elsewhere.

**La chasse:** the seigneur’s right to hunt and shoot across lands listed in the *terrier*.

**La corvée:** peasants had to work for free to maintain a local facility, like the road to the seigneur’s château. In St Martin de la Mer, this took place on one day each year, fixed for this purpose; the seigneur had to give his local peasants two days’ notice so that they could prepare tools etc. The peasants had to work dawn to dusk, and no more. The seigneur was then obliged to feed the workers and their beasts. They would judge him or her harshly if s/he did not turn on a feast.

**Les lods et ventes:** when peasants bequeathed or sold any of their landed properties within the limits of the seigneurie, they had to pay a set tax to their seigneur. In St Martin de la Mer, these levies were usually a 12th of the value of the estate or of the sale price.

You could even have more than one seigneur in your village. At least three different kinds of privileged people held **seigneurial** rights over various lands in the parish of St Martin de la Mer in 1786:

1. Espiard de Mâcon, possibly a **bourgeois** from Mâcon about 50 km away (his château at St Martin de la Mer is photographed).
2. Some sons of the duc de Choiseul-Praslin, a branch of a famous French noble family.
3. The Archbishop of Autun (the church prelate of a town about 20 km away, who may—or may not—have lived in his diocese anyway).



# Key Words

## Feudal

Medieval Europe (and early-modern Japan) was defined by a feudal system. The central authority of Rome in western Europe collapsed irredeemably in the fifth century. There was no longer any rule of law, only the memory of it. There was no established and stable pattern of constitutional or civil authority, again only the memory. The Roman Catholic Church alone was still in place, along with its fearful church congregations and monastic foundations. Roads often remained, but connected ruins. The Church had endured because it had always been adept at converting and cajoling barbarian pagan warrior chieftains. Under “feudalism (la féodalité in French)”, everybody from the humblest to the most powerful re-built their own security locally and from the ground up. This was the feudal system: kings, barons, knights, serfs, each bound together less by law and even by custom as by a hierarchy of reciprocal obligations. Homage and resources were handed up the hierarchy, and military protection and a faithful community of fellows was supposedly handed down the hierarchy. People traded the dead letters of their freedom under law and their citizenship for protection. They constructed a de-centralised system of reciprocal obligations: land rights and food were traded for security. Starting with the eleventh-century era of the Norman conquests and the so-called twelfth-century Renaissance in Italy, Spain and France, the feudal system gradually unraveled, in part because of the slow rise of the power of kings who could eventually deploy artillery to tear down castles. The kings also benefitted from revenues derived from new forms of traded wealth in the towns. Thereafter, the great catastrophe of the Black Death, in the mid-fourteenth century, altered this balance even more, evolving a social system with far more free peasants or very long-term tenants, and rather fewer serfs, especially in England, Flanders, The Netherlands and France. After the Black Death, manual labour was now scarce; new social rules therefore applied. The new social rules in the countryside came to be described as *seigneurial* in France. When the French revolutionaries started to talk about the *Old Regime* (ancien régime) as “feudal”, they were actually re-labelling it as something archaic and offensive. Names matter, as every victim of a bully knows.

## Lettre de cachet

An earlier lettre de cachet, dating from 1703, can be found [here](#). No charge is mentioned in the King’s letter; no charge needed to be listed; the King’s order was enough. These French customs are in direct contrast to the English legal principle of *Habeas Corpus*, which specified that no person could be held in custody without a charge being laid and without a trial being conducted. This famous English law—customary since the 12th century, but often breached by powerful English monarchs—was enacted in 1640, as one element in Parliament’s victorious struggle for supremacy over one Stuart monarch, Charles I. *Habeas Corpus* was subsequently

codified in 1679, when another Stuart king, Charles II, was allowed to return. Threats by yet another Stuart monarch, James II, to abolish *Habeas Corpus* were one reason for the English Revolution of 1688 which deposed James II, installed Mary II and William II, and incorporated *Habeas Corpus* into an English Bill of Rights (1690). The rule was then applied in *Somerset's* case in 1771, when the English Courts refused to allow an American slave owner to bring his African-American slave to England, the Court declaring 'the air of England has long been too pure for a slave, and every man is free who breathes it'. Similar conventions applied in France. Although many **Enlightenment** thinkers, like Montesquieu and Voltaire, admired this English approach to liberty, the trade in slaves was nonetheless only abolished in the British Empire in 1807 and in the USA in 1865. The leaders of revolutionary France, after refusing to concede in 1790–92 that slaves in the Caribbean might also be citizens of France, went on to abolish slavery in October 1793, only for Napoléon Bonaparte to revive it in 1802.

## Liberal

Along with the American Revolution, the French **Enlightenment** and the French revolution are often considered founding events of liberalism. The core conviction of liberalism was and still is that the individual does best when he or she is not subjected to rules, customs and stringent supervision. The liberal conviction valued and still values freedom of choice and freedom of expression as a better way to enable people to thrive. Liberals think people need to be made as free as possible to make their own way in the world. Liberals think that those with the most merit will then rise to the top, creating a meritocracy (rule by the best), not an aristocracy (rule by nobles), not a clerisy (rule by priests), not a monarchy (rule by a divine-sanctioned king or queen). Socialists critiqued liberals, conceding that while freedom was all very well, some measure of equality was also needed to give everybody the same chances in life; otherwise merit might only be a cipher for privilege and wealth.

## Parlements

Sovereign Courts or Parlements were royal-appointed Courts of Law which decided cases, civil and criminal, and which also registered the King's edicts in their region. From time to time, when the monarchy seemed weak, some Parlements also asserted a right to petition the King to re-consider edicts they thought might breach unwritten ancestral customs and liberties of France. These Parlementaire petitions were known as remonstrances. The king could still over-rule them by attending a session of the Parlement in person and reiterating his will. This was known as a 'bed of justice' (*lit de justice*).

## Political and Government systems

In the Old-Regime system of government, there was no separation of powers. Through agents and appointees, the King exercised all legislative, judicial and executive powers. To make law, the King simply issued edicts. But edicts had to be registered before they became law. In *Pays d'états* (the 'newer' provinces, those with Provincial Estates (*États provinciaux*) and those with **Parlements**), view the map [here](#), the King's edicts had to be registered in the Provincial Estates or in the 13 different regional **Parlements**. In the *Pays d'élections* (i.e. in the

old heartland provinces), the King's edicts might or might not need registration. The King's nominee as Chancellor (*Chancelier*), backed by noble Secretaries (*Secrétaires*) headed up the King's judicial, diplomatic and administrative work, mixing executive and judicial roles. The Comptroller General of Finances (*Contrôleur général des finances*) managed state budgets. Local administration in the towns, was handled by a confusing and varying mix of Town Councils (dominated by nobles 'of the clock'—*noblesse de cloche*) and royal appointees (*Intendants* and their *Sub-Délégués*). Local administration in the countryside was managed by an equally confusing mix of *Intendants*, beholden to the king, and local tax courts and Provincial Estates more likely to be out to preserve local conditions and privileges.

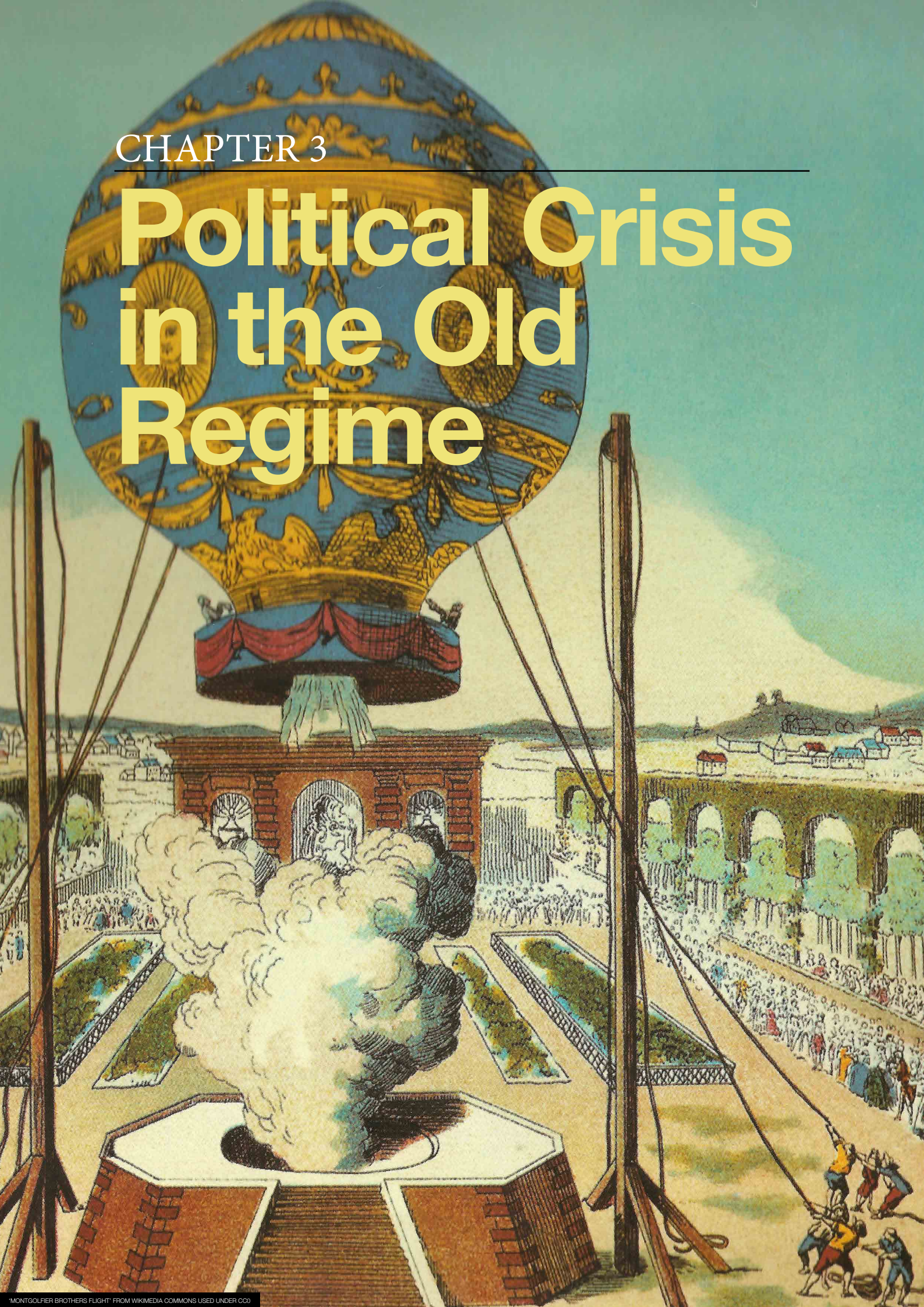
### Seigneurial

Seigneur was a French name for a person, originally a noble, who owned the right to exact levies in produce or cash over lands that her or his family no longer owned. From the late medieval era in France, Flanders and The Netherlands, the peasants generally owned the lands they farmed, but they still had to compensate their descendants of their former *feudal* lords for the loss of the ancestral patrimonies. Seigneurie was the abstract noun in French for the rights to earn an income from lands which had once been owned by a noble. The holder of a *seigneurie* recorded his hunting rights over the lands and his rights to certain shares of the income from the land in a seigneurial deed, and he or she generally had the important privilege of adding a seigneurial title to their name: "van" and "van der" in Flemish-Dutch, "de" in French, and "von" in German. These titles were keenly sought, as they conferred status; they linked their holders to a distinct location, often was the base for a fine home (*château*). Seigneuries could also be bought and sold; i.e., you bought the title, the income stream, the big house, but not over some or all of the agricultural land that the peasants owned and tilled. These sorts of purchases were often resented by peasants, as the new owners might be absentee, they might not even be noble (*roturiers*), and they were probably wealthier people who had no customary ties with the villages and villagers funding the seigneurie.

## CHAPTER 3

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# Political Crisis in the Old Regime



## The Old Regime and its Taxes

Members of the **Third Estate**, townsfolk and peasants alike, were the only people who paid the major tax in France, the *taille*. It was most often a direct tax on land.

Each year, the King's minister for finance set a state benchmark for *taille* receipts, and these were then allocated region-by-region. In some places, it was customary for the *taille* to be paid according to the number of Third-Estate people present. In most places, it was paid commensurate with lands held. If the state needed revenues, the easiest course was simply to raise arbitrarily the national benchmark for *taille* receipts.

Peasants and townsfolk also paid an indirect tax on their salt (*gabelle*), though the scale of the tax differed by region. The salt tax was resented; salt was vital for preserving food. Peasants also typically paid out a twelfth or so of whatever they produced as a tithe (*dîme*) to the priests and bishop of their local Roman Catholic Church. (As you might expect in the **Old Regime**, bishops received more of this revenue than parish priests.)



Christophe Civeton *Barrière Saint-Martin et canal de la Villette* 1829



Pierre-Antoine Demachy *Barrière d'Enfer (1796)* Dessin de Demachy 1796

Peasants' property rights were often also subject to **feudal** or **seigneurial dues**. This meant that nobles and even non-noble purchasers of **seigneurial** rights could still require peasants to pay annual set sums of money or to provide annual set amounts of produce over land that nobles may once have owned, but which peasants now owned or leased.

By contrast, the clergy—led by abbots, bishops, archbishops and cardinals who were almost always aristocrats—was free to decide (*don gratuit*) how much they would contribute in tax.

Pride and privilege were part and parcel of nobility in France, and indeed in much of Europe. An essential element of nobles' sense of their higher status was their sense of privilege, their right by birth not to pay taxes paid by commoners [roturiers (masculine), roturières (feminine.)], and their right to levy **seigneurial** dues. Like some families and

family businesses still, the **Old Regime** was built on ideas of prerogative and privilege, birth and custom, status and tradition.

These customs had some unusual consequences. The tax burden tended to fall disproportionately on the oldest and most traditional sectors of the economy: peasant agriculture and small-scale trade. By contrast, wealth generated from rents, from long-term investments (called *rentes*), from larger-scale local and especially international trade, and from providing professional services was in general lightly taxed in **Old Regime** France. These kinds of money making were too new for the tax system to track, let alone to collect from. The **Old Regime** had been built on traditional medieval ideas of land and labour as the key sources of wealth. The state's financial system hadn't really caught up with the moneyed wealth of *bourgeois* running businesses in towns and empires. Income tax didn't exist in Europe until the end of the nineteenth century. No state anywhere in eighteenth-century Europe had enough officials to try to find out what everybody earned.

Insofar as taxing business and commerce was concerned, the **Old Regime** relied on indirect taxes. These taxes added to the prices for goods (as they still do today), especially to prices of alcoholic drinks (*aides*). The **Old Regime** relied heavily on indirect taxes. It maintained **walls** (*barrières*) around towns, not to defend them, but to enable the charging of customs duties (*octrois*); people and their goods had to go past the guards and through the gates. Short on personnel, the **Old Regime** sub-contracted the collecting of indirect taxes to people called **tax farmers** (*fermiers généraux*), whose profits depended on funneling and trapping as many taxpayers as possible with their gates and **walls**. With their private armies of inspectors, the fabulously wealthy **tax farmers** of Old-Regime France were alternately envied and hated. Many built elegant townhouses lining the Place Vendôme in Paris. The system only encouraged smuggling.



Try these French sites about the Place Vendôme in Paris where the wealthiest Farmers General lived, view it [here](#), and two wonderful gouaches of 1705 held in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).

Throughout the eighteenth century, the state tried off-and-on to overcome its financial problems by imposing new taxes. Faced with the huge cost of his wars to dominate Europe, Louis XIV began the process of reform by successfully imposing in 1695 a poll-tax called the *capitation*. This was a tax on persons. This tax was unprecedented because it was levied on members of every Estate, not just the **Third Estate**—a measure of the great power of Louis XIV in France. Under the *capitation*, a census was conducted to register every person and every family in France. After 1701, the *capitation* was made a regular tax



Unknown artist Pavillon de l'octroi à la barrière du Trôneartist 1790

contributing a relatively small proportion of state revenues, and it was collected much like the land tax or *taille*: a national benchmark was established and then it was sub-allocated region-by-region.

There was also another way in which the state tried to enlarge its revenues. Would-be tax reformers under Louis XV and Louis XVI also tried to impose temporary taxes on everybody, not just on the traditional tax-payers, the urban poor and the peasants. Their preferred temporary tax was often either a tenth (*dixième*) or twentieth (*vingtième*) levied on goods produced, whatever the kind, whosoever the producer. A *dixième* tax was in place at times between 1710 and 1749, and was replaced by *vingtième* taxes in 1750–51, 1756, 1760–63, 1782–86. The onset of these ‘extra’ taxes corresponded to the costs of France’s participation in wars with the Habsburgs over Spain, and with Great Britain over the domination of the Caribbean and inland North America. All these non-traditional levies had to be approved by the **Parlements** and Provincial Estates every time they were imposed. All these ‘extra’ levies were resented. Every part of France had its laws and customs about what taxes each estate was supposed to pay, invariably leading to public protests.



See an evocative 1789 print critical of Ancien Régime taxes [here](#). The title translates as ‘In the Past the most useful people were trampled underfoot: *taille*, *impôts* [taxes] and *corvées* [unpaid labour]’.

## A View from a Village: Taxes in Eighteenth-Century France

In Pierre Collenot’s website about the history of his village of St Martin de la Mer, a village in the Morvan hill region of Burgundy, there is a list, in modern French, here summarised and translated, of imposts owed by peasants to the king, to their *seigneurs*, and to the clergy at this [website](#). A useful glossary of terms can be found [here](#).

These were the taxes typically owed by villagers to the King and Clergy:

**Les aides:** indirect taxes on wines and spirits (collected at Customs gates).

**La capitation:** a direct tax (new since 1695); so much paid per head of population, levels per head varying each time a *capitation* was announced.



Unknown artist The most useful time spent were trampled on: size, taxes and chores 1789

**Le centième dernier:** a 1% tax on the value of anything sold.

**La corvée royale:** peasants were obliged to work, as directed, for free, maintaining and building local roads. The state had no road gangs of its own. The local (non-noble!) people who benefited from the trade enabled by the roads were meant to supply the labour needed to build the roads. The fact that nobles and *bourgeois* probably benefitted more from road building was simply overlooked; manual labour was beneath their dignity.

**Le franc fief:** *bourgeois* owners of lands once owned by nobles paid a sum to the King.

**La gabelle:** the salt tax. Sales of salt had been a royal monopoly since 1383. The right to collect salt revenues was sub-allocated according to various systems in the different regions of the realm. Burgundy was in the so-called '*Pays de grande gabelle*' which paid the highest levels of salt tax, twice what was paid in the south of France. These absurd internal boundaries only encouraged smuggling.

**Le papier timbré:** special stamp duties on legal papers and official papers.

**La taille:** a direct tax paid by non-nobles (*roturiers*) only, and adjusted for revenue according to formulae that varied widely between localities. In the Morvan hill region of Burgundy, the *taille* was levied on hearths—i.e., fireplaces. The tax collector rode into the village and counted chimneys—it is hard to hide chimneys!—levying a set tax per chimney. In the Morvan, the *taille* was usually 10 *livres* a year. Given that a labourer in a vineyard in the Morvan earned about 5 *sol* a day in this period, paying this *taille* amounted to about a month's work, though much depended on the silver content in the coins offered and received. Different coins had different market worth and purchasing power under the *Old Regime*. Your proof of payment in St Martin de la Mer was a receipt in the form of a notched stick (*la taille*) carrying your notch and the notch of the tax collector.

**Le vingtième:** an occasional tax first introduced in 1749, and levied on revenues, which everyone (nobles included) was supposed to pay. The trouble was that some sorts of income and revenue were easier to hide than others.

**Tithes (Les dîmes):** a fixed proportion of anything harvested paid for the upkeep of clergy. They were collected along with the *feudal* payment to the landlord (*le champart*). Together these imposts could take anything between a third or a twentieth share. In St Martin de la Mer, these imposts took an eighth share.



*Tax avoidance.* Imagine that you are a tax accountant for a nobleman in the Morvan. Advise him or her how to minimise their tax. Try doing the same for a local *bourgeois*, and then for a peasant.



*Tax collection (1).* Most indirect and direct taxes imposed in **Old Regime** France were collected by people known as ‘Farmers General (*Fermiers généraux*)’ or **Tax Farmers**. These people bid for a license from the king to collect revenues from a particular tax in a particular region. They calculated they could collect more than the king and his finance ministers expected. These people built the customs **walls** around towns, and formed little private armies, all to collect revenues and police people trying to smuggle or cheat. How might this system of tax collection have benefited the king? (Think about state budgeting.) Correspondingly, how might this system have affected the amount of tax revenue going to the Crown and how might it have increased resentments among taxpayers? (Think about how you would make money if you were a **tax farmer**.)



*Tax Collection (2). Privatisation.* Contemporary governments in western Europe, north America and Australasia often privatise former government services like ports, freeways, railways and electrical supply. Is this a reversion to **Old Regime** practices? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of privatisation of these services. How do contemporary policy-makers and audit and accounting practices protect against possible abuses arising from privatisation of these services?



*Tax collection represented.* The [National Library in Paris](#) has a set of four anonymous images dating from 1788 or 1789. Each image has a caption addressed to the King. The first image at top left shows a peasant woman trying to bring goods to town for sale. She first must pay her customs dues to the guard at the gate in the customs wall and the caption reads: ‘From the customs barriers, free us Sire’. At top right, a nobleman’s gamekeeper arrests a poacher: ‘From the Gamekeepers and Guardsmen of the Hunt, free us Sire’. At bottom left, a militia man extorts money from a labourer: ‘From the militia, free us Sire’. The final image is of a **feudal** lawyer (*feudiste*) extorting money from a peasant, and the caption reads, ‘From the henchmen of trickery, free us Sire’. There was no copyright then. Revolutionary ideas circulated liked this in scores of conversations and observations: oral, written and (in this case) visual. How is each situation a source of conflict between the people and the authorities?

## The Idea of Reform

When educated people talked about politics in **Old Regime** France, they generally had the king’s proposals for reform of tax privileges in mind. They also argued over the authority of the King and his Catholic clergy to enforce obedience and censor opinions. In the prospering, cultured and urbanising world of eighteenth-century France, educated people pictured their King’s government as incompetent and out-of-touch. They thought their rural world was mired in ignorance and hamstrung by tradition.



Unknown artist *Establishment of the new Philosophy Our Cradle was a Caffé* no date



Louis-Léopold Boilly *L'intérieur d'un café, dit aussi La partie de dames au café Lamblin au Palais-Royal before 1808*

This is an image of a café drawn in early 1800s, three decades after the revolution, as drawn by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1825). Few earlier images of cafés exist in the public domain. The café was still an essential element of public life, still a sanctuary away from home for men of a certain standing and wealth, still a place to read pamphlets and news sheets, still a potential site of discussion that might be critical of people in power; only the men's dress norms have changed.

**Enlightenment** thinkers believed in equality of opportunity. Denouncing traditions and privileges embedded in custom, in **birthright**, and in official and **seigneurial** status, these would-be enlighteners argued for principles of merit instead. The idea of 'merit' favoured wealthy and/or educated people who were otherwise lacking in status. They wanted 'meritocracy', 'careers open to talents', and sometimes they wanted to abolish any possibility of the purchase of offices of state (venality of offices).

In love with liberty, the same educated people began to express political opinions in public. Men among the enlighteners started writing and reading the first newspapers. They talked in the first **cafés** about what they read. They formed the first gentlemen's clubs, where they discussed issues of the day over coffee, wine and cognac. The would-be enlighteners also read new-fangled literary things called **novels**,<sup>25</sup> with their wonderful new world of self-expression and make-believe. Novels were more popular with women. **Cafés** were male domains, though the newspapers and pamphlets men accessed there and from street vendors often were read by women in the home. Moreover, there were also newspapers for women, like Madame de Beaumer's *Le journal des dames*. Some elite and educated women (known as *salonnières*) formed discussion circles (*salons*). Madame Roland was one. Recall her quote about having read Voltaire etc. and his work having influenced her ideas).

All these things were vital in shaping the hopes and the expectations of the people who would take part in the French Revolution. **Enlightenment**-era women also dressed up à la mode

25. *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) by Marie Madeleine, comtesse de La Fayette, known as Madame de La Fayette (1634–1693) is usually considered to be the first novel written in French.

alluringly, and went to balls and soirées. They even went shopping to elegant new places like the **Palais Royal** together, and discussed and flirted at balls and salons, **theatre** and opera. (Shopping, hitherto, had been undertaken by servants, or else by vendors, tailors and dressmakers who made home visits.). Each of these new things—newspapers and novels, **cafés** and clubs, alluring fashion, shopping plazas, balls, **theatres** and salons—represented a new way of life. Each challenged the old ways of birth and tradition, custom and obedience.



[French salons](#) is a wonderful site (in French) listing the major figures involved with French Salons, with biographies and pictures. Click on [Visite au château de Coppet](#) to see what an eighteenth-century salon looked like. Links to an online version of Amelia Gere Mason's *The Women of the French Salons*, originally published in 1891. There is a wealth of information here—particularly chapters 13, 17 and 18. A useful 2008 article by Bonnie Calhoun comparing English Coffeehouses and French Salons in the Age of **Enlightenment** can be found [here](#).



For an overview of the history of opera, go to this [website](#). See also music historian Michael McClellan's [article](#) on **theatre**, opera and revolution in late eighteenth-century France.



For high resolution images of eighteenth-century French fashion, look at the Galliera Museum of Fashion [website](#).



Philibert Louis Debucourt *The Palais Royal Gallery's Walk 1787*

View of the people considering themselves élite promenading in the Palais Royale in Paris.

Démodé, a [website](#) devoted to historical costume has an excellent page on women's hairstyles and cosmetics in eighteenth-century France and England and an entertaining (and informative) [gallery](#) of photographs of reproduction eighteenth-century outfits, demonstrating the labour and artistry that went into their creation.

Everyone and everything was getting mixed up now, as different **social estates (corps)** collided, and as hundreds of points of view were put forth and debated.



*The middle layer of society no longer has the veneration for royalty that our fathers had for its divine origin. Our minds are getting accustomed to looking at the sovereign only as the administrator of the nation. The blood of kings is a phrase devoid of meaning to many people. Hereditary succession [as distinct from ideas of merit] no longer has anything but the common utility [i.e. custom] of the nation to support it. All this tends to move men away from that enthusiastic and servile submissiveness that provided earlier kings with the blind instruments of their despotism. The number of these instruments will decrease every year.... Philosophical reflections on the equality of men, on the natural liberty of each individual, on the abuses of the monarchy and on the absurdity of religious veneration of a class of families, the example of the English colonies in America; books in everyone's hands and the spread of knowledge which gives rise to the weighing of everything on the scale of natural right, all this has given rise to ideas about monarchical religion [the king as defender of the faith][,] and revealed religion in general[,] that are very far from those dominant during my youth. The bold and decisive tone of conversations astonishes me when I recall the time when people almost distrusted their own brother or friend in these two matters.*<sup>26</sup>



**Louis-Leopold Boilly** *The Galleries of the Palais Royal* 1809

Another image by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845), this time illustrating prostitution in the shopping galleries of the Palais Royal in 1809.



**Louis-Léopold Boilly** *Une loge, un jour de spectacle gratuit* 1830

A theatre crowd, depicted at a free concert.



Glimpse the life of a courtier at the Versailles [website](#).

The **abbé** de Véri went so far as to venture that:

*According to the ideas of the present day, there is no question of removing one king*

26. Jeffrey Kaplow, *France on the eve of Revolution: a book of readings* (New York ; Sydney: J. Wiley, 1971), 63–64.

*in order to replace him with another. An absolute indifference reigns as to who may have a right to the crown, and there is a secret desire to be rid of any pretension to government by right of birth. The enthusiasm for the blood of our kings that I still saw in my youth no longer appears to be the spirit of the nation. So that I wouldn't be astonished if a bet I have heard proposed actually comes to pass, that there would no longer be a monarchy in France and in England in half a century.<sup>27</sup>*



**Old-Order Concepts: Heredity. Faith. Veneration.** These ideas were associated by **abbé de Véri** with authority in the old order in France in particular, and in Europe in general. Reach for a dictionary if it's needed. Also try to specify the antonyms (i.e., the opposites) of these ideas. These will be the new concepts of authority that the **abbé de Véri** was noting about his life and times.



**'Philosophical reflections'.** What sort of ideas or behaviours did de Véri think were undermining the established order of custom and tradition in France?



**Respect.** According to the **abbé de Véri**, why did people have less respect for the monarch?

## Causes of Conflicts

The last decades of the **Old Regime** were dominated by political crises. The crises came in two waves: 1756 to 1771, 1785 to 1789. In both waves of conflict, the king was at odds with the high nobles of the *robe* who dominated the **Parlements**. The conflicts over tax reform between the Kings Louis XV and XVI and their **Parlements** elicited unprecedented levels of public debate, prompting ordinary people to begin to frame their own ideas about politics. A new and powerful force was created in political affairs, a force as hard to pin down as it was important: **public opinion** (*l'opinion publique*). Public opinion is fuzzy to define, even today—ask a political pollster, a market researcher, an advertising executive or a politician. New notions of public opinion in eighteenth-century Europe raised talk about a constitution for France, talk which help define the 'modern' in modern history. The idea of public opinion was centred on discussions on street corners, and in **theatres**, bars and **cafés**. It was fuelled by pamphlets and newspapers that people could now buy cheaply, read and then hand over to someone else. It was the essential pre-condition for democracy and for ideas of rights and freedom.

27. Jeffry Kaplow, *France on the eve of Revolution: a book of readings* (New York ; Sydney: J. Wiley, 1971), 63–64.

The **Old Regime** half-understood the importance of public opinion, and tried to control it through censorship. The core of **Old Regime** ideas of royal **absolutism** and indeed of noble privilege were undermined by ideas of the existence of ‘a public’ world, in which opinions were more open and uncontrollable, recognising fewer limits on freedom of speech, and respecting fewer traditions. The onset of the internet and mobile phones in our own era has presented similar challenges. True to its values, however, the **Old Regime** in France tried to exert new controls: anyone who wanted to publish a book had to apply for a ‘permission’ which they were not sure of getting. Then they could apply for a privilege (*approbation*) from the King or from an important noble, which might allow them to dedicate the book to this important figure, a sure way of improving sales. Many books did not go through this process, however. Knowing they would never receive a permission, authors had more radical books printed in Switzerland or Holland, or even secretly in France with false places of publication like London, Amsterdam or Constantinople. The books were then sold under the counter or at the bookstands of the **Palais Royal**.

During the first wave of political crisis, 1750s to 1771, the **Parlements** began to refuse to register royal edicts with which they disagreed, issuing instead public letters of explanation, called remonstrances. Public declarations like these were discussed in salons, at **theatres** and **cafés**, and in newspapers. Remonstrances often suggested other ways reforms might be accepted, and even proposed what they considered to be better policies of tax reform or fiscal management, citing what they thought were ancestral Frankish<sup>28</sup> customary laws and liberties.



Marie-Alexandre Duparc *Lit de Justice held at Versailles on August 6, 1787* 1802

Public opinion was forming as a kind of player in politics. An idea of the accountability of the King and his government to the people was taking hold. People were daring to question the wisdom of the King. Again and again in the 1750s and 60s, when an ageing Louis XV tried to raise new state loans or to push through tax reforms to cover the expenses of his Seven Years' War (1756–63) in Europe, the Caribbean, Canada and in backwoods America, Louis was forced to work hard to silence the **Parlements** by overruling them with his super veto, the *lit de*

justice. The most famous *lit de justice*, a royal decree overriding a Parlementaire remonstrance, was Louis XV's *séance de flagellation* (the Meeting of the Beating), 3 March 1766.

Abraham Girardet's etching shows Louis XVI enacting a *lit de justice* at Versailles in 1776 to push through Turgot's reforms. The King attended a session of the Parlement and performed a

28. The Franks were the German tribe who conquered France. Merovingian Franks united the territory now known as France in a single state ruled by a single dynasty in the sixth century.

ritual insisting on the registration of his Edict. His *lit de justice* overruled the remonstrance of the Parlement of Paris, whose text can be found [here](#).

Louis XV and Louis XVI did almost everything they could to try to avoid a final reckoning with the **Parlements**. Neither wished to appear a tyrant. They needed to raise loans from the same kinds of wealthy and privileged people in France who staffed or admired the **Parlements**. Both



Jean-Baptiste André Gautier-Dagoty René Nicolas Charles Augustin de Maupeou 1772

Louis' difficulty was that the **Parlements** resisted tax reform, upholding custom and privilege in the supposed name of the higher authority of the Estates General. Worse, from these Kings' points of view, was the Parlementaires' willingness to argue so loudly and publicly in their *remonstrances*, praising liberty and denouncing 'despotism'. Within limits, the aristocratic leaders of the **Parlements** were the people who inaugurated the **liberal**—and ultimately revolutionary—language of ancient rights and liberties of the Frankish people. The limit was the idea of the **sovereignty** of the people; the lawyer-aristocrats shaping the crises in the various troublesome **Parlements** between the 1750s and the 1780s were advocating they should share **sovereignty** (British-style) with the king, but they never endorsed the radical ideas of Rousseau in 1761

and of the revolutionaries after 1788 that **sovereignty** might actually belong to the people. But the radical rhetoric of the *Parlementaires* about ancestral Frankish liberties and nationhood was destined to engulf them as well as their king.

Matters came to a head in 1770, and again in 1787–88. In 1770, Louis XV belatedly decided to follow his chancellor, René Nicolas Charles Augustin de Maupeou (1714–92)'s advice to abolish the **Parlements**. Fifty-five years after his accession to the throne (1715) and forty-eight years after his accession to full government (1722), Louis XV was finally abolishing the **Parlements**; his grandfather, Louis XIV, had previously reduced their authority after the failure of a previous revolt of Parisians and aristocrats, known as the **Fronde (1648–53)**; the Regent revived the **Parlements (1715)**.

Louis XV set out in 1770 to replace the **Parlements** with new sovereign law courts and judges appointed by the king. They were no longer to be venal offices staffed by the



Pierre Lacour the Elder René-Nicolas-Charles-Augustin de Maupeou (1714-1792), chancellor de France 18th century

proudest of proud lawyer aristocrats. Louis XV expected his sovereign courts to do his bidding and to register his edicts. By 1771, it seemed Louis XV had prevailed. After an initial flurry of protest, public debate fizzled, and many ex-*Parlementaire* nobles were signing up to serve their king in his new compliant courts. In truth, many nobles had been troubled by their leaders' refusal to accept decrees of their divinely-anointed king. They were men of the *Old Regime* too.

Louis XV died in 1774. His successor, Louis XVI, was anxious to please. He did not want to be criticised as a despot. The first portraits of Louis XVI presented a new image of the king of France as a defender of the rule of law.



**Antoine-François Callet** *Louis XVI, King of France and Navarre* (1754-1793), wearing his grand royal costume 1789



**Maurice Quentin de La Tour** *Madame de Pompadour in her Study* between 1749 and 1755



**Antoine-François Callet** *Louis XVI, roi de France* (1754-1793) 1774-1793



**François Boucher** *Madame de Pompadour, Mistress of Louis XV* 1758

According to public opinion, Louis XVI's libertine grandfather, Louis XV, a man with notorious mistresses like the *Maame la marquise de Pompadour*, had embraced 'despotism' late in life.



A gallery of portraits of Madame de Pompadour can be found at this [website](#). Compare the portraits by François Boucher (1703–70), Maurice Quentin de la Tour (1704–78), Carle van Loo (1705–59). These artists at Versailles painted Madame de Pompadour as she wanted to be shown: elegant and refined, a 'country' maiden, and a patron of the arts and letters. Maurice-Quentin Delatour's 1749 pastel portrait can be view at the [Louvre](#); Carle van Loo's 1755 portrait of her as a Turkish lady is [here](#), and Boucher's 1758 portrait of her as country maid is at the [Victoria and Albert Museum](#).

'Despotism' was now seen as the long-term legacy of Louis XVI's conceited great-great-grandfather, Louis XIV. Louis XVI decided to restore the *Parlements*, confident they would now play a constructive role in public political affairs. An aquatint of 1774 on the left presents Louis XVI as no tyrant, but rather as a benevolent partner of all *Parlementaires*, who in their turn acknowledge him, kneeling before him in admiration. The aquatint is labeled: 'The Restoration everyone wanted. Louis XVI summons back his *Parlement*'.



**Wolckh** *The desired Return: Louis XVI recalls his parliament*  
1774

Then another war with Britain, in support of the independence of Britain's American colonies, 1778–83) and fiscal crisis interfered. Political and economic issues were again in dispute. Politics were again being debated. Everybody who could read or listen had an opinion. Political positions taken were seen by some as principled and by others as self-serving, by some as constitutional, and by others as plain defiant. The era of crisis returned. This second wave of crisis began in 1785, and ended in the revolution of 1789.

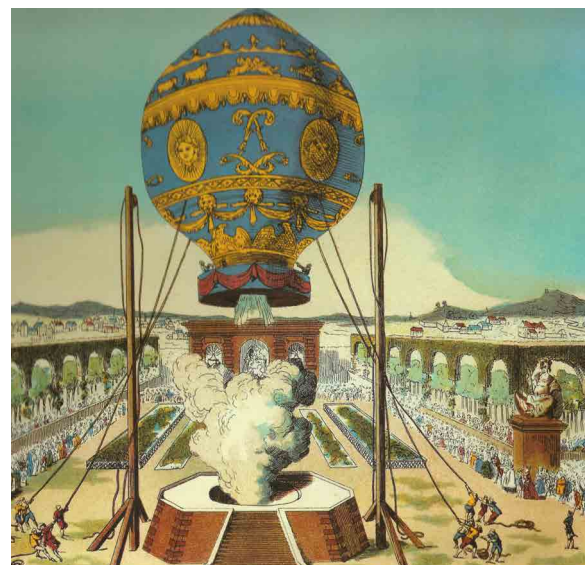
Each crisis of state was prompted by proposals coming from the King's ministers, his *Conseil d'État*, to reform state finances. The ministers usually tried to impose new taxes to fund war expenditures and to repair the gaping state deficit. Most often a special temporary *dixième* or *vingtième* tax was proposed, and/

or it was requested to be extended.<sup>29</sup> Often too there were proposals to remove tax exemptions or commutations for privileged classes. The king's ministers sometimes also announced plans to broaden representation in the sovereign courts and local administration. But more was at stake than just paying or not paying taxes. Ways had to be found to get public opinion to accept the new measures. These ways turned matters of war and finance into matters of accountability and good government. Talk of a constitution for France again became current.

The high-status lawyer nobles of the robe who led the *Parlements* saw these conflicts as matters of principle. They were fighting against 'despotism', though they also regretted the offence their principled defiance caused to their king. They hoped He (they always used capital-letters when referring to kings) might see things their way. The king was the greatest noble in the land; he needed them; they loved him. In most crises, the nobles of the *Parlements* blamed the king's ministers, not the king himself, for the conflict.

New ideas were afoot. *Parlementaires* were thinking anew about their work and their role. They thought the *Parlements* were a crucial part of a thing they called a constitution in France. As they saw it, France's ancestral Frankish constitution had been suppressed in recent times; unrestrained monarchical power wielded by Louis XIV (after the *Fronde*) and Louis XV (in old age) was to blame. The *Parlementaires* thought France really had a constitution, and it was a thousand years old. To be sure, they were poor historians; *Parlements* had only emerged in the early Middle Ages around 1250. In another respect, however, the *Parlementaires* were excellent futurists; the search they started for the 'right' constitution for France has dominated France's modern history.

The *liberal* lawyer aristocrats in the *Parlements* who wrote and spoke of an ancient constitution and of the aristocratic ancestral 'liberty of the [warrior] *Franks*' found a receptive audience. It is interesting that the fictions about the history of France that prompted their policies celebrated the era of free Germanic warrior aristocrats, *the Franks*, rather than the era of the *Gauls*, the free villagers who were conquered by Julius Caesar in the 50s BCE and whose lives and value in turn shape the popular twentieth-century comic series, *Astérix*. The lawyer aristocrats in the *Parlements* were already thinking of their lives and times as improving. They also liked to think of their



Claude-Louis Desrais Montgolfier brothers flight 1783

29. See also pages 67 - 68

times as 'Enlightened'. More people could read in eighteenth-century France than ever before. France was more prosperous. More and more people could buy newspapers. More people had the money, the leisure and the inclination to socialise in modern places, like *cafés*, where birth counted for little, and money, fashion, style, swagger and sex appeal counted for so much more. Wonders of progress were apparent. People were now watching some brave folk sailing in balloons, getting mesmerised, going shopping in places like the *Palais Royal*, watching opera, and above all they were chatting in (private) salons and (public) *cafés*.



Look at the mingling crowds, people of all kinds enthralled by the feat of [Jacques and Joseph Montgolfier](#) at Versailles in 1783. The modern age of sport and spectacles had begun; it no longer mattered who was watching. Also see the crowds watching the 1784 balloon flight at Lyon [here](#).



Take an [e-tour](#) of the *Odéon theatre* in Paris, it opened in 1782. An overview of the theatre's history can be found [here](#): and an early 1786 architectural drawing of the Odéon (when it was known as the Théâtre Français) is at this [website](#).



Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815)'s fake science of 'animal magnetism' and his early form of hypnosis was popular in France in the eighteenth century. View this [website](#) for a history and resources, and also this [website](#) (with illustrations) and an undated print entitled 'Mr Mesmer's pot or Faithful Representation of the Operation of Animal Magnetism' can be viewed [here](#).

A new age of public opinion and public spectacles had dawned. These lawyer aristocrats in the *Parlements* readily believed ancient French people of yore had done a deal with their first kings, a deal now seen as threatened by wily Ministers who seemed to want French monarchs to become despots. The same people still believed fervently in kingship, but they also believed the ancient liberties of the people had to endure: kings existed to unite and lead, but they also



Unknown artist *Le Mesquet de Mr Mesmer* no date



Charles de Wailly *Premier projet de l'Odeon* 1786

had to respect their subjects' ways. Henri IV was often cited; he was accepted as the rightful king of France, but he could never actually become so unless he renounced Protestantism and became a Catholic; he eventually complied in 1593, and was thereafter able to enter Paris, his capital city, for the first time in 1594. The **Parlements** pictured themselves as enlightened defenders of an ancestral, Catholic, traditional liberty of **Franks**. In the mind of the **liberal Parlementaires** who from time-to-time dared to remonstrate with, and sometimes even to defy, their king—though most *Parlementaires* never did—the ancient liberty of France chiefly consisted in respect for past privileges and old traditions. The great nobles and *Parlementaires* often conceded that customs and privileges might have to change in straightened times. What they really wanted was for the king and his ministers to consult them, justifying new policies in advance. The greatest public political spectacle of all, an Estates-General, not seen since 1614, was seen as the best occasion for this.

## New Thinking on Government: Voltaire and Rousseau

Montesquieu was one of the first **Enlightenment** thinkers to imagine what a better form of government might be. He wrote about this in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), a work which shaped the thinking of the **liberal** lawyer nobles of the robe in the **Parlements**. Montesquieu's key to having good laws was balancing public affairs in what he termed body and breath, or nature and spirit. As he saw it, the body (or constitution) of government was its institutions (like monarchy); the breath was the attitudes and principles infusing the institutions. (We have already studied the similar, but more traditional, **Old Regime** 'body politic' thinking of Rétif de la Bretonne.) From Montesquieu's studies of history (ancient, medieval and modern) and geography, he thought that climate shaped people's outlooks. Montesquieu held that four forms of government had existed: republican democracy, aristocratic rule by a few, limited monarchy, and despotism. Montesquieu favoured limited monarchy—in which a king governs in partnership with his nobility, allowing the nobility to uphold the rule of law. But Montesquieu had to be careful in arguing for this in his native France, where monarchs—encouraged by Bishop Bossuet—maintained that they had 'absolute' power. This explains Montesquieu's measured tone in the extract below.

Attending first to institutions—the 'body' of good government—Montesquieu made a pointed contrast of true monarchs with sordid despots:

*Intermediate, subordinate and dependent powers constitute the nature of monarchical government, that is, of the government in which one [person] alone governs by fundamental laws.... In a monarchy, the prince is the source of all political and civil power. These fundamental laws necessarily assume mediate channels<sup>30</sup> through which power flows; for if in the state there is only the momentary and capricious [fickle] will of one [person] alone, nothing can be fixed*

30. He means that there should be some people and/or institutions—the Parlements, of course—with the power to stand between a monarch and his or her subjects, 'mediating' between, balancing, protecting and explaining: issuing remonstrances.

*and consequently there is no fundamental law. The most natural intermediate, subordinate power is that of the nobility. In a way, the nobility is the essence of the monarchy, whose fundamental maxim is: no monarch, no nobility: no nobility, no monarch: rather, one has a despot... Just as the sea, which seems to want to cover the whole earth, is checked by the grasses and the smallest bits of gravel on the shore, so monarchs, whose power seems boundless, are checked by the slightest obstacles and submit their natural pride to supplication [petitioning] and prayer.<sup>31</sup>*

Montesquieu admired British government: not least the English Bill of Rights (1690) and the two-chambered British Parliament—one for Lords, another for Commons—which made laws together with the King. He worried, however, that there were only a hundred or so noble families in England and Scotland, all members of the House of Lords. Montesquieu preferred France's hundreds of thousands of nobles, each with a role in upholding laws and customs. It seemed to Montesquieu, furthermore, that the natural defenders of liberty and the best guarantors of the rule of law were those nobles, like him, who staffed France's **Parlements** or Provincial Estates (depending on the type of province), who settled disputes and registered royal laws, and who sometimes registered their disagreement (remonstrance) with those laws:

In order to favour liberty, the English have removed all of the intermediate powers [i.e., lesser nobles and separate legal jurisdictions] that formed their monarchy. They are quite right to preserve that liberty; if they were to lose it, they would be one of the most enslaved people on earth.... It is not enough to have intermediate ranks [i.e., like nobles, the **Second Estate**] in a monarchy; there must also be a depository of laws [i.e., institutions like **Parlements** in France]. This depository can only be in the political bodies, which announce the laws when they are made and recall them when they are forgotten. The ignorance natural to the nobility, its laxity, and its scorn for civil government require a body that constantly brings the laws out of the dust in which they would be buried. The [king's] council is not suitable... By its nature it is the depository of the momentary will of the prince... and not the depository of the fundamental laws. Moreover, the monarch's council constantly changes; it is not permanent; it cannot be large; it does not sufficiently have the people's trust: therefore, it is not in a position to enlighten them in difficult times or to return them to obedience. In despotic states, where there are no fundamental laws, neither is there a depository of laws. This is why religion has so much force in these countries; it forms a kind of permanent depository, and if it is not religion, it is customs that are venerated in the place of laws.



**Nobility.** What does Montesquieu see as the positive and negative characteristics of nobility?

31. Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Part 1, book 2, chapter 4. The entire work has been digitised and is available [online](#).



*Constitution (1). The Idea of a Foundation for all Laws.* What Montesquieu calls a ‘fundamental law’, is what we would call a constitution, and what the French revolutionaries later considered the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (26 August 1789) to be. Why are bodies like the **Parlements** so ‘fundamental’, meaning so important, for Montesquieu? Who decides which laws are fundamental?



*Constitution (2). The Idea of a Written Foundation for all Laws.* Did you notice that there is a flaw in the comparison between Montesquieu’s idea of the existence of fundamental laws and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (26 August 1789). The flaw is that the latter was written down, imitating the American precedents of Jefferson and Franklin, while the former was customary and implicit, i.e., not having to be written down, in the manner of the British customary constitution. Which factor do you consider more important—the formality of the writing of a constitution, or the acknowledgment that some laws were fundamental?



*Intermediary powers (1).* What did Montesquieu mean when he maintained that a monarchy like France needed ‘mediate channels’, i.e. constitutional forms of official authority and power that were ‘intermediate, subordinate and dependent’?



*Intermediary powers (2).* The American revolutionaries were also influenced by Montesquieu. When they framed the Constitution of the United States (1787), they insisted on a separation of powers: legislative, executive (governmental), and judicial. Each of the three has different powers, and their power is balanced by powers held by the other. Have Montesquieu’s ideas also influenced the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia (1901)?



**Absolutism.** What are Montesquieu’s arguments against **absolutism**?



**Trust.** If it wasn’t to be the king’s officials, who might Montesquieu have thought really had the people’s trust? Do you agree?

Montesquieu's ideas shaped political responses to the key crises in the lead-up to the French Revolution. Consider this example from a crisis over reform in 1770. It is an extract from a *remonstrance* written by a **Parlement**. It is a protest. It mentions the existence of 'fundamental laws'. When Louis XV's Chancellor Maupeou (1714–92), ironically a former *Président* of the **Parlement of Paris**, had dissolved the **Parlement** of Paris and even exiled its **Parlementaires** from their beloved Paris, the **Parlement** of Bordeaux was undeterred. (Similar events took place in 1787, when the **Parlement of Paris** had also issued a remonstrance and was also overruled, and when **Parlementaires** were also exiled, measures which sparked the popular protest in Grenoble, near the French Alps, known as the 'Day of Tiles [*Journée des Tuiles*]' 7 June 1787.) Back in 1770, both the **Parlements of Paris** and Bordeaux had opposed the king's proposals to extend the twentieth tax (*vingtième*) to fund the state deficit, and the **Parlement of Paris** had even dared to prosecute one of Louis XV's courtiers and officials. The **Parlement** of Bordeaux moved to protest, even though Paris, the leading **Parlement**, had been sent into exile.

We glimpse here some of the causes of the tensions and conflicts that shattered the **Old Regime**. As the **Parlementaires** of Bordeaux struggled to justify their deeply-held political convictions, they drew on the work of their old colleague, Montesquieu. Several of his ideas then took on a life of their own in the French Revolution. Look in particular for: *constitution*, *rights*, *nation* and *consent*. Look too for how the **Parlementaires** resolved their big dilemma: for even as they maintained that they loved and obeyed their king, they felt that they had to rebuke him. (Parents and children are like this!)

*Our system, Sire, (your **Parlements** have never known of any other) was and always will be to cause justice to reign, to see to the happiness of the population, to the observation of the laws and to keep intact the sacred depository [of the laws] confided to us and to punish anyone who dares to violate it.*

*Our principles exist with the monarchy, monarchy cannot exist without them. Before subjugating the **Gauls**, the **Franks** had laws or rather tacit agreements under which they had formed an association, and which usage had consecrated. We find these laws and customs [still in use] after the conquest of the **Gauls**; they form the constitution of the French monarchy. They assure the nation the rights to assist in the formation of new laws....*

*Thus, from the foundation of the monarchy to the reign of Philip the Fair [1285–1314], the nation was maintained in its right to assist in passing legislation: there is no law without its consent.... Even if your Parlement, Sire, hadn't the right to examine and verify such new laws as it may please your majesty to propose, this right could not be lost to the nation. It is imprescriptible and inalienable. To attack this principle is to betray not only the nation but kings themselves; it is to overthrow the constitution of the kingdom, to destroy the foundation of the monarch's authority. Can it be believed that verification of new laws in the Parlement does*

*not fulfil this original right of the nation? Could public order profit from its being exercised once again by the nation? As soon as your Majesty deigns to re-establish the nation in the enjoyment of its rights, we shall no longer demand the sort of authority which your royal predecessors have granted us....*

*We will not hide from you the fact, Sire, that this freedom has been infringed more than once; but the protests of your **Parlement** have always maintained the fundamental law of free verification [i.e., remonstrance]. The numerous efforts of arbitrary power have always failed or, at least, its temporary successes have served only to prove the wisdom and utility of the established way of doing things; these very successes have strengthened the dominion of the fundamental law. Such is the dominion of the fundamental law in your realm, Sire, that it sustains and perpetuates] itself by its own strength.... Your **Parlements**, Sire, have always used the freedom the fundamental law gives them for the welfare of the state and the glory of the king. If they have resisted [your decrees] it was to defend your rights or those of your predecessors; and never have they shown more zeal and fidelity than when they seemed to oppose the will of those who held the reins of state. [The king's evil advisors] do not wish to recognise any of the fundamental principles of the monarchy. The new law presented on your behalf [in 1770 to curb the **Parlement of Paris**] excludes them all. It establishes a law that destroys all laws.<sup>32</sup>*



**Constitution, Rights, Nation, Consent.** These four important new concepts are evident in this document. What does each mean in the context used by the **Parlementaires** in 1770? Similar ideas were current among **Parlementaires** in 1787–88.



**Consider the reception of these Ideas.** Consider whether ordinary people who heard about these four new concepts in a **café** or who read about them in a newspaper might have interpreted them in exactly the same ways. (Different interpretations of concepts and beliefs supposedly in common were an important source of the radical turns of the French Revolution.) In your discussion, consider to which of the following social groups these four new concepts would be likely to appeal: peasants, **bourgeois** traders, army officers, **bourgeois** women, the urban poor, lawyers...



**Vocabulary:** 'Imprescriptible and Inalienable' is a phrase the **Parlementaires** of Bordeaux use to describe the rights of the *Nation*. What do they mean? Use a dictionary. These rights are also said to be 'fundamental'. (The same phrases and the same qualities of those phrases recur in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 27 August 1789.)

32. Jeffrey Kaplow, *France on the Eve of Revolution: A Book of Readings*, (New York; Sydney: J. Wiley, 1971), 39–42.



*Unmet Expectations.* Which *Parlementaire* expectations of good government had been disappointed? Evaluate these. Were the *Parlementaires* too idealistic in 1770?



*Idealism? Self Interest?* How does the protest of the *Parlementaires* compare with Arthur Young's earlier assessment of the role of the **Parlements**? Assess whether Young's view was right: were the **Parlements** deceiving themselves in thinking that they made a real contribution to the passing of laws? Is their idealism really a cloak for their defense of privilege? Why do the *Parlementaires* write only about the exile of their Parisian colleagues, overlooking the fiscal reforms the king had proposed and the Parisian *Parlementaires* had opposed?



*Animosities.* Who are the *Parlementaires* of Bordeaux claiming they are really opposing? Are they being honest?



*Difficulties for governments wanting to promote change.* What exactly did the *Parlement* of Bordeaux want the king and his ministers to do if he/they wanted to bring about 'reform'? Was this practical?



**Absolutism.** Based on this evidence, how absolute was the king's authority?



*Reform.* On this evidence, was the **Old Regime** in France able to reform itself?

## Ripples in a Pond

### Debating possible links between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution

Historians have long disagreed on how to treat the influence of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution. Influential historians of the revolution who emphasise social structures (rural and

urban) and their links to crises in economics and politics (historians like Georges Lefebvre<sup>33</sup>, Albert Soboul<sup>34</sup>, David Andress<sup>35</sup> and Peter McPhee<sup>36</sup>) tend to start their histories with events in the 1770s and 1780s. Donald Sutherland<sup>37</sup> adopted a similar view, but didn't think the crises in the economy and politics were linked to changes in social structures. This "social and political" approach emphasises the fiscal and political crises which beset the last decades of the *Old Regime*. Historians of culture and ideas, however, tend to reach further back to the Enlightenment, exploring the longer-term erosion and disruption of long-standing systems of belief and behaviour. They point to the onset of subversive new fashions, and the subversive informal institutions to match.

Now consider the lines of argument, for and against, about there was indeed a link between the Revolution and the Enlightenment.

### The Case Against

For one thing, the Enlightenment reached well back into the last decades of the seventeenth century. The Enlightenment was indebted to the rationalisms promoted by the huge advances in science and mathematics associated with the seventeenth century. For another, few members of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment generations of public intellectuals (i.e., *les philosophes* – the lovers of wisdom) were alive during the years of revolution, 1789-1815. The Marquis Nicolas Caritat de Condorcet, the political philosopher and mathematician, and Antoine Lavoisier, the chemist, both of whom were executed in 1794, were tragic exceptions. The eighteenth-century *philosophes* became literary and legal celebrities, furthermore, in a European era in which absolute monarchy was the norm – excepting the constitutional monarchies of the United Kingdom, Poland and Sweden, and excepting the republics in Genoa, Venice, Dubrovnik and Switzerland. Although these Enlighteners may also have promoted exciting new social, political, penal and economic theories, they remained people of their times. They often depended on the patronage of aristocrats who were much wealthier and presumptuous than them. They frequented aristocratic *salons*, parties devoted to refined coiffures, elegant dress and fine dining, and to the discussion of ideas, the sassier and wittier the better. *Bon ton* ("making a mark in style") and exquisite skills of irony, flattery and conversation were important in the Enlightenment. *Salons* were often convened by talented aristocratic women. We can therefore be sure no leading figures of the Enlightenment in France were eager for revolution, even assuming they understood what this strange new term might mean. Informed people then could imagine a major political upheaval, to be sure, but the events of 1789-95 were not on anyone's radar. They could imagine peasant revolts (their word was *jacquéries*) and town riots (*émeutes*), and even the replacement of one dynasty with another. They could also recognise the possibility of a *Fronde*- or a British-style 1688-92 aristocratic humbling of a failed or foolish monarch, the result being a constitutional monarchy. With a few conspicuous

33 G. Lefebvre, R.R. Palmer, and T. Tackett, *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

34 Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787-1799 : from the storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

35 David Andress, *The French Revolution and the people* (London ; New York: Hambledon and London, 2004).

36 Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

37 Donald Sutherland, *France 1789-1815 : revolution and counterrevolution* (London: Fontana, 1985)

exceptions (Rousseau and Diderot), most of the leading figures of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century France were also nobles by birth or by purchase. Their general political preference was to ingratiate themselves with powerful monarchs, usually foreign, particularly those professing more eagerness for reform than was customary in France. Foreign monarchs like Frederick the Great of Prussia (reigned 1740-86) and Catherine the Great of Russia (reigned 1762-96) boosted the status, the self-regard and the finances of many *philosophes* in France.

Given all this evidence, it must seem an open-and-shut case that the Enlightenment had no bearing on the French Revolution. It is too long a bow to draw.

### The Case For

The preceding view is too literal and too circumspect. Like ripples in a pond, a movement can have revolutionary implications, long term, even though its original adherents were not revolutionaries, short or long term. Think of the mid-twentieth-century developers of artificial intelligence and computing. Think of how fashions emerge and then take off. The subversive ideas (e.g., reason, rights, equality) and the promotional practices (e.g., newspapers, pamphlets, *cafés*, clubs) developed in the “Dare to Know (*Sapere Aude*)” culture of the Enlightenment simply could not be contained as French Protestantism had once been suppressed centuries before by official acts of war, exile, counter-propaganda and violence. More people were educated in the eighteenth century than ever before. They were more suspicious of institutions. They were more prosperous. The finances of the royal government in France were even chronically indebted to the kinds of French people who were most influenced by Enlightenment ideas. In this environment, ideas can take flight and shape agendas far beyond their originating contexts. Scholarship across the generations by Paul Hazard<sup>38</sup>, Jürgen Habermas<sup>39</sup>, Daniel Roche<sup>40</sup>, Jonathan Israel<sup>41</sup> and Antoine Lilti<sup>42</sup> has traced these indirect results and connections. These connections elicited new and less respectful and less deferential forms of human society and of socialising (Roche and Lilti’s *la sociabilité*) and an enduringly subversive attention to fashions and celebrity (Lilti’s *le mondanité*). All were unconstrained by tradition and birthright. Over time, these changes amounted to the shaping of something much more modern than *les philosophes* could ever have imagined. Jürgen Habermas concluded that the crux of the great change was the development of a new “public sphere (Habermas’ *die Öffentlichkeit*)” of power that leap-frogged the old centres of power in private royal and clerical palaces. For Habermas, and the so-called “Revisionist” scholars (like Dena Goodman and Robert Darnton) who took up his ideas, the new and emerging “public sphere” of power was based on the startlingly modern idea that power should reflect “public opinion”. These new approaches gave rise to newspapers, *cafés* and chambers of commerce (*bourses*), and thence to political pressures which eventually demanded more respect for and representation of public opinions.

38 Paul Hazard, *The European mind, 1680-1715* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1963).

39 J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

40 Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

41 Israel has written several influential studies of the radical Enlightenment, also re-asserting the importance of the Dutch Enlightenment

42 A. Lilti, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).



Although you might have once expected that major questions like these have long been settled, these kinds of fundamental debates are actually very common in advanced-level studies of history, indeed in advance level studies of almost anything.

Which view of this particular controversy appeals to you, and why?

## The Meeting of the Beating

When other **Parlements** in 1765–66 backed the **Parlements** of Pau (in Navarre in the Pyrenees) and Rennes (in Brittany) in opposing reforms promoted by the king, Louis XV's patience snapped. He issued an angry *lit de justice* on a day (3 March 1766) that became known as *la séance de flagellation* (the Meeting of the Beating). It culminated in the temporary exile to Brittany of the leaders of the **Parlement of Paris**. Some **Parlements** and Provincial Estates had promoted Montesquieu's notion that they were really all one single institution limiting the power of the King. They were an 'intermediate power' in their own right, they ventured. They thought that they could and should be able to act in common to suggest amendments to royal decrees, even as each still had its customary regions and regional customs to protect and to superintend. The real fear of the **Parlements** was that some ministers of the king wanted to curb or even abolish them. Louis XV only took that course in 1770. Yet the political crisis was such that people were always acting on the basis of their worst fears. Trust was dissolving between institutions and between the social orders. The bedrocks of custom, deference and obedience underpinning the **Old Regime** were eroding.

Louis XV was just as alarmed as the *Parlementaires*. The king's speech at 'the Meeting of the Beating', extracted below, rebuked the **Parlements**. He accused them of shaking 'confidence by a series of false alarms'. Louis XV had his own idea of what were 'fundamental laws' in France. This is what he said in defense of **absolute monarchy** in 1766:

*What has happened in my **Parlements** of Pau and Rennes is no concern of my other **Parlements**; I have acted with regard to these two courts as my authority required, and I owe an explanation to nobody. I would have no other answer to give to the numerous remonstrances made to me on this subject, if their combination, the impropriety of their style, the rashness of the most erroneous principles, and the pretension of the new expressions which characterise them had not revealed the pernicious [harmful] consequences of that idea of unity which I have already prohibited, and which people wish to establish as a principle at the same moment in which they dare to put it into practice.*

*I shall not tolerate in my kingdom the formation of an association which would cause the natural bond of similar duties and common responsibilities to degenerate into a confederation for resistance, nor the introduction into the monarchy of an imaginary body which could only upset its harmony.*

*The magistracy [i.e., the Parlementaires] does not form a body, nor a separate order in the three orders [**estates**] of the kingdom.<sup>43</sup> The **magistrates** are my officers, responsible for carrying out my truly royal duty of rendering justice to my subjects, a function which attaches them to my person and which will always render them praiseworthy in my eyes. I recognise the importance of their services.*

*It is an illusion, which can only tend to shake confidence by a series of false alarms, to imagine that a plan has been drawn up to annihilate the magistracy, or to claim that it has enemies close to the throne. Its real, its only enemies are those within it who:*

- *persuade it to speak a language opposed to its principles;*
- *lead it to claim that all the **Parlements** together are but one and the same body, distributed in several classes; [and who say:]*
- *that this body, necessarily indivisible, is the essence and basis of the monarchy;*
- *that it is the seat, the tribunal, the spokesman of the nation;*
- *that it is the protector and the essential depositary of the nation's liberties, interests, and rights;*
- *that it is responsible to the nation for this trust and that it would be criminal to abandon it;*
- *that it is responsible, in all concerns of the public welfare, not only to the king, but also to the nation;*
- *that it is a judge between the king and his people;*
- *that as a reciprocal guardian, it maintains the balance of government, repressing equally the excesses of liberty and the abuses of authority;*
- *that the **Parlements** co-operate with the sovereign power in the establishment of laws;*
- *that they can sometimes on their own authority free themselves from a registered law and legally regard it as nonexistent....*

*To try to make principles of such pernicious novelties is to injure the magistracy, to deny its institutional position, to betray its interests and to disregard the fundamental laws of the state. As if anyone could forget that the sovereign power resides in my person only, that sovereign power of which the natural characteristics are the spirit of consultation, justice, and reason. My courts derive their existence and their authority from me alone. The plenitude [full scope] of that authority,*

43. The First Estate (État) was the clergy, the Second was the nobility, and the Third or le Tiers État comprised the rest of the population of France.

*which they only exercise in my name, always remains with me. It can never be employed against me. To me alone belongs legislative power without subordination and undivided. It is by my authority alone that the officers of my courts proceed, not to the formation, but to the registration, the publication, the execution of the law. It is permitted for them to remonstrate only within the limits of duty of good and useful councillors. Public order in its entirety emanates from me. The rights and interests of the nation, which some dare to regard as a separate body from the monarch, are necessarily united with my rights and interests, and repose only in my hands....*

*Remonstrances will always be received favorably when they reflect only the moderation proper to the magistrate and to truth, when their secrecy keeps them decent and useful, and when this method [of remonstrance] so wisely established is not made a travesty of libelous utterances, in which submission to my will is presented as a crime and the accomplishment of the duties I have ordered as a subject for condemnation; in which it is supposed that the whole nation is groaning at seeing its rights, its liberty, its security on the point of perishing under a terrible power, and in which it is announced that the bonds of obedience may soon be broken; but if, after I have examined these remonstrances, and, knowing the case, I have maintained my will, my courts should persevere in their refusal to submit, and, instead of registering at the very express command of the king (an expression chosen to reflect the duty of obedience) if they undertook to annul on their own authority laws solemnly registered, and if, finally, when my authority has been compelled to be employed to its full extent, they dared still in some fashion to battle against it... then confusion and anarchy would take the place of legitimate order, and the scandalous spectacle of an open contradiction to my sovereign power would reduce me to the unhappy necessity of using all the power which I have received from God in order to preserve my peoples from the terrible consequences of such enterprises.*

*Let the officers of my courts, then, weigh carefully what my good will deigns [stoops] once again to recall to their attention; let them, in obedience only to their own sentiments, dismiss all prospects of association, all new ideas and all these expressions invented to give credit to the most false and dangerous conceptions; let them in their decrees and remonstrances, keep within the limits of reason and of the respect which is due me; let them keep their deliberations secret and let them consider how indecent it is and how unworthy of their character to broadcast invective against the members of my council to whom I have given my orders and who have shown themselves to be worthy of my confidence....<sup>44</sup>*

44. Official Transcript of the 'Meeting of the Beating' in John Alexander Murray Rothney, *The Brittany Affair and the crisis of the Ancien Regime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 175–178, with changes to punctuation.



*Royal Reasoning on Reform.* In this speech, an angry Louis XV had to try to explain the nature of his authority, and what he saw as the errors and impertinence of the *Parlementaires* opposing him. The fact that the speech had to be made at all shows how traditions underpinning the **Old Regime** were unravelling. Louis XV's explanations offer a rare insider's view of the **Old Regime**. His acute summary of what he saw as the 'erroneous' views of **Parlements** show the tensions and conflicts that undermined the **Old Regime**. List the views he thought were wrong-headed, engendering conflict and 'shaking confidence'. Do you agree with Louis XV? Which aspects of the **Old Regime** were undermined by each of these *Parlementaire* points of view?



*A Monarchy Unable or Unwilling to Adjust?* Was the **Old Regime** unable or unwilling to adjust to changing circumstances? Should it have done so? Should it be expected to have done so?



*Authority under the Old Regime.* As Louis XV conceived it, the **Old Regime** had 'natural characteristics', which he saw as 'the natural bond of similar duties and common responsibilities' that sustained 'public order' and safeguarded the 'nation'. Refer to the 'body politic' material we looked at earlier to help understand how these **Old Regime** ways of thinking about authority, obedience and custom worked. Why did they seem 'natural' and 'beneficial' to Louis XV?



*Deference.* Outline all the features of the *Parlementaire* remonstrances Louis XV said he was happy to receive. What do they tell us about the expectations of people in power under the **Old Regime** about how people were expected to relate to their social superiors?



*Absolutism as seen by the king.* Louis XV says a lot of interesting things about **absolutism**. Evaluate them. How absolute was the **absolute monarchy**?

Use Louis XV's ideas as evidence, by clarifying what he meant by:

- 'sovereign power resides in my person only',
- 'the limits of duty of good and useful councillors',
- 'my **Parlements**',
- '**magistrates** are my officers',
- 'the spirit of consultation, justice, and reason', and
- 'legislative power without subordination and undivided'.



**Existence of a Nation.** This concept of ‘nation’ is often only associated with the French revolutionaries of 1789–99. The idea of ‘nation’ is actually older than that. How did Louis XV and the **Old Regime** understand the idea of ‘nation’?



**Role for Public Opinion.** Louis XV was particularly angry that the **Parlements** were stirring up public debate by making public statements exaggerating (so he maintained) the errors of the king’s proposals for reform, and running down, as he saw it, his good intentions for France. Clarify Louis XV’s views about the dangers of courting public opinion by summarising the features of the kinds of *Parlementaire* remonstrances he hated to receive. Why was the **Old Regime** so hostile to the idea that the merits of public policy might be debated in public? (Then again, perhaps the battle had already been lost, for here was a king who felt he had to make a public statement about why he should never have to make a public statement!)

## The Parliament of Great Britain

*Of the Laws and Customs relating to Parliament.*

*The parliament hath sovereign and uncontrollable authority in making, confirming, enlarging, restraining, abrogating, repealing, and expounding of laws, concerning matters of all possible denominations, ecclesiastical, or temporal, civil, military, maritime, or criminal: this being the place where that absolute despotic power, which must in all governments reside somewhere, is entrusted by the constitution of these kingdoms.*

*All mischiefs and grievances, operations and remedies, transcending the ordinary course of laws, are within the reach of this extraordinary tribunal; and whatever is done by the parliament, no other power on earth can undo. It is therefore a matter of the most essential consequence to the liberties of this kingdom, that such members only be delegated to this important trust, as are most eminent for their probity, their fortitude, and their knowledge; for it was a known apothegm [i.e., truth saying; aphorism] of the great lord treasurer Burleigh, ‘That England could never be ruined but by a parliament’.<sup>45</sup>*



What is the difference between the British Parliament as described here and the French **Parlements**?

45. *The New Present State of Great Britain* (London: Printed for J. Almon, 1770), 169



Why might Burleigh have said that England ‘could never be ruined but by a parliament’?



Do you think the French *parlementaires* hoped to achieve similar power in France? What problems would stand in the way?

## The Assembly of Notables, (1787)

In 1783, Louis XVI appointed a young noble administrator from Flanders, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne (1734–1802), his Minister in charge of state finances. Calonne faced huge challenges. France was nearly bankrupt. France’s government routinely spent 15 per cent more than it collected, borrowing by selling bonds. About half of state revenues already went to pay off debts owed to bond holders, mostly aristocrats and **bourgeois** in France. It was therefore impossible for the king to renege on the debt. That would have made him seem a despot, and it would have betrayed the core royal idea of being like a father to his country. Apart from massively cutting expenditure, there were therefore only two other ways out of the problem: either to increase the rates of taxes that some people paid or to remove the exemptions from tax that some people enjoyed.



Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun *Portrait of Charles-Alexandre de Calonne* 1784



Charles Clement Bervic *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes* 1780

Louis XVI and his chief minister, Charles Gravier Comte de Vergennes (1719–87) were only partly to blame for the mess which Calonne faced. Their recent huge naval and military expenditures in the American revolutionary war (1778–83) were a key source of the state deficit facing Calonne. Then again, state finances had often been in deficit in the reigns of Louis XIV, XV and XVI.

War between Britain and its American colonists began in 1775. Vergennes persuaded Louis XVI to give secret money and arms to the colonists in 1776, and then persuaded him to declare war on Britain in 1778. French participation in the American revolutionary wars lasted till the *Treaty of Paris* in 1783 that guaranteed the

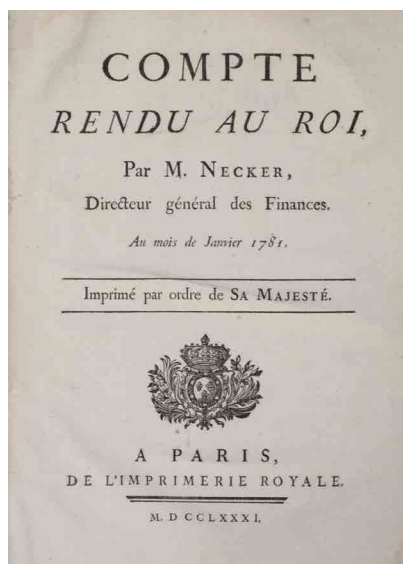
independence of the United States of America. France's gains from the war were rather modest. Most American trade afterwards was still managed by English ships and channelled through English ports.

The real problem of state finances was that there was no consensus in France, either in government or in public opinion, about who should pay taxes and how much they should pay. French monarchs had hesitated in past attempts at reform whenever there was opposition and resentment, especially from the *Parlements*, revived after 1774.

As soon as Calonne worked up a comprehensive plan in 1786 for reform of the state taxation and administration systems, a major new round of political wrangling occurred. Would the king still back his new minister? Would the *Parlements* succeed in scuttling, amending or delaying his measures?

The crisis of state was more than just financial. It was political. Whatever Louis XVI and his ministers proposed as reforms had to be accepted either by the *Parlements* and Provincial Estates that ordinarily registered laws or else by some new institution that might have to be created to approve them. Three political fixes seemed possible.

One way to push through reform could have been to create—breaking with tradition—a new and compliant system of royal sovereign courts to replace or displace the *Parlements* and Provincial Estates, which had often admitted the need for tax reform in France even as they opposed (with *remonstrances*) reform proposals that violated current tax laws, privileges and customs.<sup>46</sup>



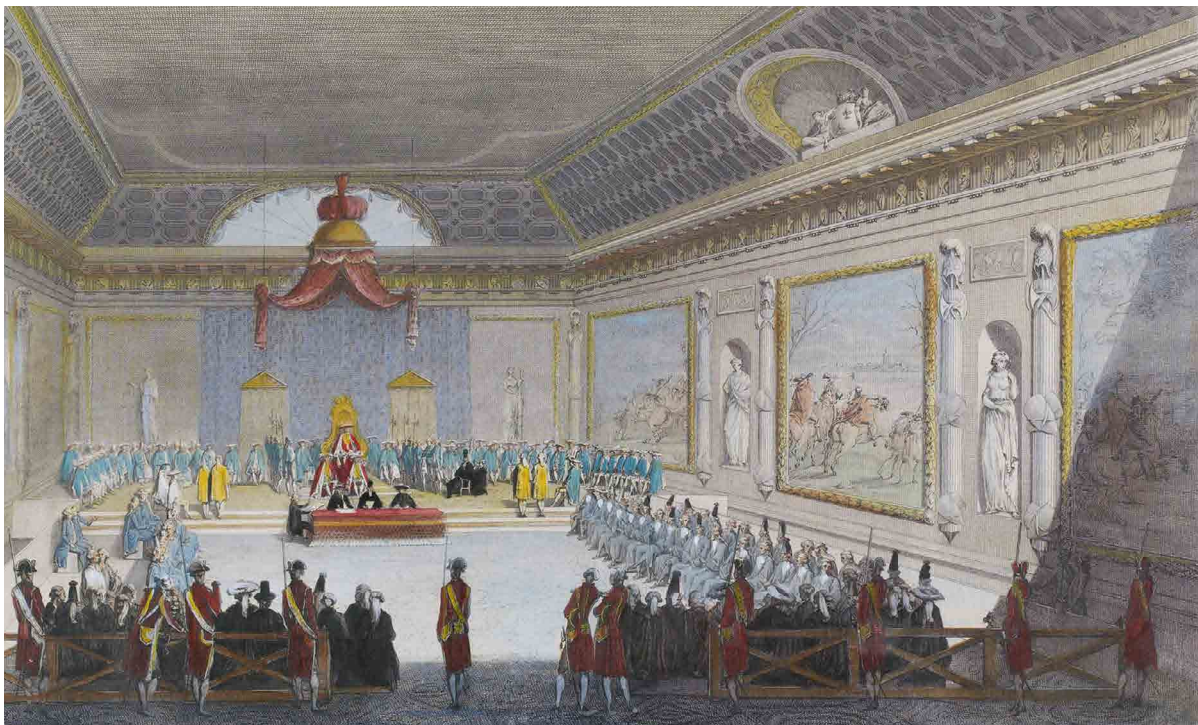
Compte Rendu au Roi by Necker, Paris 1781



Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs (inner courtyard) 22 avenue de Paris Versailles.

46. This was a policy broadly implemented by Maupeou in 1770–74, favoured by Turgot in the mid–1770s, and advocated unsuccessfully in 1787–88 by Calonne's successor, Cardinal Loménie de Brienne.

A second course of action to achieve reform was also contemplated. **Parlements** and Provincial Estates often called for an Estates-General (*États Généraux*), a special national meeting of elected representatives of all three **Estates**. Summoned by a king to respond to major proposals for reform, each estate in an Estates-General had previously—tradition and precedent were always important in the **Old Regime**—debated and decided matters separately, the king and his ministers brokering consensus between the **estates**. But there were snags with this course of action. No one alive in 1787 had experienced an Estates-General; the last had met in 1614. There was another difficulty besides: lists (*cahiers*) of reform ideas and policy grievances had to be drawn up in the months preceding the elections to an Estates-General. The worry was that consultations and public debates would inflame public opinion. This was precisely what happened after the decision was eventually taken on 8 August 1788 to summon an Estates-General to meet in May 1789.



Designed by Veny et Giradet, engraved by Claude Niquet *Assemblée des notables tenue à Versailles 18th Century*

A third—altogether different—political fix appealed to reform-minded Calonne. Realising in 1786 that the **Parlements** would never ratify the radical reforms he had in mind, he persuaded Louis XVI to summon an Assembly of Notables, another forgotten traditional assembly in France.<sup>47</sup> Opening in l'Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs in Versailles in the presence of Louis XVI on 22 February 1787, an assembly like this had not been seen in France since 1626. Comprising—following **Old Regime** precedent—all the princes of the royal blood, 6 marshals of the armed forces, 10 dukes (ducs), 7 of the king's ministers (*conseillers d'état*), 4 of his provincial governors (*intendants*), Procurators and Advocates General, 16 heads and deputies of the **Parlements**

47. For more information and primary sources on the Assembly of Notables, go to the 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' website, prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA, at this [website](#) and type 'Assembly of Notables' in the Quick Search window.

and Provincial Estates, 14 bishops and mayors of key cities, this Assembly of Notables seemed to Calonne and the king to have the advantages of preserving the honour and calm of the realm by not requiring either *cahiers* or elections. Calonne and the king anticipated that the dignity of the king's government would be maintained in this distinguished company of notables. They hoped that the king's government's financial problems would not provoke political grandstanding among this select group. Calonne calculated that the 144 members of the Assembly, flattered by their call-up as Notables of the realm, would do the king's bidding once they were ushered into his presence and pressure was applied.

Things went wrong. Louis XVI, for one, failed to attend any of the sessions of the Assembly, save the opening on 22 February 1787 and its desultory close on 25 May 1787. Louis XVI probably thought that politicking with the Notables was beneath the dignity of a king. Calonne's position was therefore very exposed, and his political pressure was rebuffed. He lacked a political patron and protector. Calonne had been chosen to solve these politico-financial problems because of the patronage of Louis XVI's chief minister, Vergennes. Calonne's political position was weakened by the death of his patron, Vergennes, before the Assembly convened. Furthermore, at the insistence of Louis XVI, and supposedly to maintain the dignity of the realm, Calonne's balance sheet of state finances had to be kept secret. But this financial secrecy of 1786–87 only encouraged Calonne's doubters and detractors (led by Etienne Charles Loménie de Brienne) in the Assembly of Notables. Calonne's general points about the looming bankruptcy of the state finances also seemed—to many Notables—to compare unfavourably with the balance sheet, the *Compte Rendu*<sup>48</sup>—much later found to be fraudulent—published back in 1781 by one of Calonne's predecessors as finance minister, Jacques Necker.



**Antoine-François Callet** *Louis-Philippe-Joseph, duc d'Orléans, dit Philippe-Egalité* 1761–1800

For all these reasons, Calonne's proposals were rejected. The setback was even more galling for Calonne and for Louis XVI, since the king's brothers, ducs de Provence (future Louis XVIII, reigning 1814, 1815–27), d'Orléans (future Philippe Égalité, executed in 1793), and d'Artois (future Charles X, reigning 1827–30) had joined in rejecting the reforms.

Antoine-François Callet (1741–1823) painted a pre-revolutionary portrait of the duc d'Orléans. It is now in the Palais de Trianon in Versailles, and is included in the collection of prints and paintings drawn from [60 Museums in France](#).

**Arthur Young** was in Paris during the time of the Assembly of Notables. He worried about the wild

48. This [extract](#) offers a glimpse at the claims Necker made. (© Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, Washington DC).

political discussions at that time. He wondered where it might all lead. He did not like any kind of rude or seditious political discussion. Parisian nobles he met were surprised that, though the Assembly of Notables had been handpicked by Calonne to approve the king's reform measures, the Assembly had pointedly refused to ratify them. The dissidents were egged on by the ducs and by Cardinal Étienne-Charles Loménie de Brienne (1727–94), archbishop of Sens since 1788, an ambitious man who coveted Calonne's position and who eventually received it on 1 May 1787.<sup>49</sup> Calonne's opponents artfully insisted instead on the calling of an Estates General, even as they conceded that some reforms were necessary. Young wrote in his diary:

OCTOBER 13, 1787

*Across Paris to the Rue les Blancs-Manteaux, to Mon. Broussonnet, secretary of the Society of Agriculture; he is in Burgundy. Called on Mr Cooke from London, who is at Paris with his drill-plough .... There has been much rain today; and it is almost incredible to a person used to London, how dirty the streets of Paris are, and how horribly inconvenient and dangerous walking is without a foot pavement. We had a large party at dinner, with politicians among them, and some interesting conversation on the present state of France. The feeling of everybody seems to be that the Archbishop [Loménie de Brienne] will not be able to do anything towards exonerating [relieving] the State from the burden of its present situation; some think that he has not the inclination; others that he has not the courage; others that he has not the ability. By some he is thought to be attentive only to his own interest; and by others, that the finances are too much deranged to be within the power of any system to recover, short of the [Estates-General] of the kingdom; and that it is impossible for such an assembly to meet without a revolution in the government ensuing. All seem to think that something extraordinary will happen; and a bankruptcy is an idea not at all uncommon. But who is there that will have the courage to make it?<sup>50</sup>*

OCTOBER 17, 1787

*One opinion pervaded the whole company, that they are on the eve of some great revolution in the government; that everything points to it; the confusion in the finances great; with a deficit impossible to provide for without the [Estates-General] of the kingdom, yet no ideas formed of what would be the consequence of their meeting; no minister existing, or to be looked to in or out of power, with such decisive talents as to promise any other remedy than palliative [i.e., band-aid] ones; a prince [Louis XVI] on the throne, with excellent dispositions, but without the resources of a mind that could govern in such a moment without ministers; a court buried in pleasure and dissipation, and adding to the distress, instead of endeavouring to be placed in a more independent situation; a great ferment amongst all ranks of men, who are eager for some change, without knowing what to*

49. Étienne-Charles de Loménie de Brienne was made Archbishop of Sens in 1788. See this [webiste](#) for more details.

50. Arthur Young, *Letters Concerning the Present State of the French Nation*, (London: Nicoll, Farnborough : Gregg, 1769), 80–81.

*look to, or to hope for; and a strong leaven [yeast] of liberty, increasing every hour since the American Revolution; altogether form a combination of circumstances that promise e'er long to ferment into motion, if some master hand, of very superior talents, and inflexible courage, is not found at the helm to guide events, instead of being driven by them. It is very remarkable, that such conversation never occurs, but a bankruptcy is a topic; the curious question on which is, would a bankruptcy occasion a civil war, and a total overthrow of the government? The answers that I have received to this question appear to be just; such a measure, conducted by a man of abilities, vigour, and firmness, would certainly not occasion either one or the other. But the same measure, attempted by a man of a different character, might possibly do both. All agree, that the [Estates General] of the kingdom cannot assemble without more liberty being the consequence; but I meet with so few men that have any just [true] ideas of freedom, that I question much the species of this new liberty that is to arise. They know not how to value the privileges of THE PEOPLE; as to the nobility and the clergy, if a revolution added anything to their scale, I think it would do more mischief than good.<sup>51</sup>*



*Expectations of politics in 1787.* Arthur Young closes his diary wondering whether ordinary people in France in 1787 really understand that freedom and liberty ought to have (British-style) limits, and whether nobles and clergy realise that if their wild political talk continues they might lose their privileges. Look again at the following quotes by Young. What do they tell us about people's expectations of politics in 1787?

- 'something extraordinary will happen'
- 'great ferment amongst all ranks of men'
- 'a strong leaven of liberty'
- 'would a bankruptcy occasion a civil war, and a total overthrow of the government?'



*Expectations of leadership in 1787.* Young writes of the need for 'some master hand'. Taking each in turn, what expectations did Young have regarding the capacity to achieve meaningful reform in France of:

- Louis XVI
- his (here un-named) policy makers
- his courtiers
- his critic, the ambitious Archbishop, Cardinal Loménie de Brienne
- a future Estates-General, if it were to be summoned.

51. Ibid, 85.

## Figaro Speaks

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–99) was France's greatest writer for the *theatre* in the eighteenth century. *Theatre* and opera were then becoming popular art forms. They were both popular because important ideas were discussed on stage, and always with humour and drama. *Theatre* and opera is always subversive and exciting. The audiences were very diverse: the wealthy in the boxes above; the poor in standing only in the dress circle below; each group observing the other. *Theatre* and opera were also popular because people liked to dress up and hobnob in elegant *theatres*. They flirted from balconies and across parterres, while being entertained by classic stories of courage and honour, and by comedies and farces.

Beaumarchais the playwright started as a talented watchmaker, a highly skilled profession, but then moved into journalism and currency speculation. His post as watchmaker to Louis XV made him wealthy enough to purchase nobility in 1761, acquiring a post (without a job!) as Secretary to the King. However, this did not prevent his arbitrary arrest and imprisonment in 1773 under a *lettre de cachet* when he was embroiled in a financial dispute. Beaumarchais was also an ardent supporter of the American Revolution, acting as a secret agent for Louis XVI in England at this time. Famous in Paris, Beaumarchais alternated stints of wealth and poverty, and was as known as much for his loves and lawsuits as for his plays: *The Barber of Seville* (1775) and *The Marriage of Figaro* (1783–85).

To evade censorship, Beaumarchais' plays were set in Old-Regime Spain, not France. Louis XVI banned *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1780 and 1783, but Marie-Antoinette's love of the comedy pushed it past six censors. (Repression under the **Old Regime** was often inconsistent and inefficient.) *The Marriage of Figaro* opened at the *Théâtre Français* (Odéon) in Paris on 27 April 1784.



Augustin de Saint-Aubin Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais 1773



See earlier information on the Odéon (previously known as the Théâtre Français). At the [site](#) there are nineteenth-century photographs of the *theatre*. You can find out what's on at the *theatre* today [here](#). An image of the first production of Beaumarchais' play is in a [Christies catalogue](#), and a 1784 edition of the play in English can be read [online](#).



Engraving depicting *Le mariage de Figaro*.

Beaumarchais' two great plays focus on *Figaro*, a **third estate** Mr Everyman (an honest man, *un honnête homme*), a talented and venturesome servant so often ensnared, like Beaumarchais himself, in farce and injustice. Both plays were later made into operas—*The Barber of Seville* by Rossini (1816) and *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart (1786).

André Hallays' 1897 biography of Beaumarchais (in French) has been digitised at this [website](#).

In *The Marriage of Figaro*, the poor but talented man-servant, Figaro, is set to wed another servant of the Count of Almaviva, the lovely Suzanne. Aided by flunkies and **feudal** lawyers, Figaro's employer, the Count, determines he'll bed Suzanne first, asserting a (mock) **feudal** right (*un droit de seigneur*) to make love to any woman who serves him in his household.

When the Countess discovers what her faithless husband, the Count, has in mind for a distressed Suzanne, the farce begins. Figaro and the Countess set out to thwart and shame the Count. When, unknown to Figaro, the Countess swaps places with Suzanne, the final Act of the play finds Figaro forlorn, waiting in the night in the garden, unsure whether his sweetheart Suzanne will comply with his lecherous and rapacious employer's demands. Beaumarchais wrote this soliloquy in which Figaro muses to himself in the dark about women who deceive men (an example of patriarchy, i.e., a classic male prejudice about females that females challenge) and about the unfair fate of people, like him, with talent, but not birth, in **Old Regime** France:

*FIGARO [gloomily walking up and down in the dark]: Oh, woman, woman, woman, feeble creature that you are! No living thing can fail to be true to its nature. Is it yours to deceive?... No, My Lord Count, you shan't have her, you shall not have her! Because you are a great nobleman you think you are a great genius.... Nobility, fortune, rank, position! How proud they make a man feel! What have you done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born—nothing more! For the rest—a very ordinary man! Whereas I, lost among the obscure crowd, have had to deploy more knowledge, more calculation and skill merely to survive than has sufficed to rule all the provinces of Spain for a century! Yet you would measure yourself against me....*

*Could anything be stranger than a fate like mine? Son of goodness knows whom, stolen by bandits, brought up to their way of life, I become disgusted with it and yearn for an honest profession—only to find myself repulsed everywhere. I study Chemistry, Pharmacy, Surgery, and all the prestige of a great nobleman can barely secure me the handling of a horse-doctor's probe! Weary of making sick animals worse and determined to do something different, I throw myself headlong into the*

*theatre*. Alas, I might as well have put a stone round my neck! I fudge up a play about the manners of the Seraglio [the harem or home of the wives and concubines of the Islamic Sultan of the Ottoman Empire]: a Spanish author, I imagined, could attack Mahomet without scruple, but, immediately, some envoy from goodness-knows-where complains that some of my lines offend the Sublime Porte [the Ottoman Empire], Persia, some part or other of the East Indies, the whole of Egypt, and the kingdoms of Cyrenaica, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco. Behold my play scuppered [suppressed] to please a set of Mohammedan princes—not one of whom I believe can read—who habitually beat a tattoo on our shoulders to the tune of ‘Down with the Christian dogs’! Unable to break my spirit they decided to take it out of my body. My cheeks grew furrowed: my time was out. I saw in the distance the approach of the fell sergeant [censor], his quill stuck into his wig: trembling I summoned all my resources. Economic matters were under discussion. Since one can talk about things even though one doesn’t possess them—and though in fact I hadn’t a penny, I wrote a treatise on *The Theory of Value* and its relation to the net product of national wealth. Whereupon I found myself looking from the depths of a hired carriage at the drawbridge of a castle, lowered for my reception, and abandoned all hope of liberty [ordered arrested by une *lettre de cachet*]. How I would like to have hold of one of those Jacks [courtiers and ministers of the king] in office—so indifferent to the evils they cause—when disaster had extinguished his pride! I’d tell him that stupidities that appear in print acquire importance only in so far as their circulation is restricted, that unless there is liberty to criticise, praise has no value, and that only trivial minds are apprehensive of trivial scribbling.

Tiring of housing an obscure pensioner [he was an ex-civil servant], they put me into the street eventually, and, since a man must eat even though he isn’t in jail, I sharpen my quill again, inquire how things are going, and am told that during my economic retreat there had been established in Madrid a system of free sale of commodities which extended even to the products of the press, and that, provided I made no reference in my articles to the authorities or to religion, or to politics, or to morals, or to high officials, or to influential organisations, or the opera, or to any theatrical productions, or to anybody of any standing whatsoever, I could freely print anything I liked—subject to the approval of two or three censors! In order to profit from this very acceptable freedom I announce a new periodical which, not wishing to tread on anyone else’s toes, I call the *Good for Nothing Journal*. Phew! A thousand miserable scribblers are immediately up in arms against me: my paper is suppressed and there I am out of work once again!

I was on the point of giving up in despair when it occurred to someone to offer me a job. Unfortunately I had some qualification for it—it needed a knowledge of figures—but it was a dancer who got it! Nothing was left to me but stealing, so I set up as a banker at Faro [a gambler’s card game]. Now notice what happens!

*I dine out in style, and so-called fashionable people throw open their houses to me—keeping three-quarters of the profits for themselves. I could well have restored my fortunes: I even began to understand that in making money savoir-faire [i.e., know-how; who you know; how you put it over] is more important than true knowledge. But since everybody was involved in some form of swindle and at the same time demanding honesty from me, I inevitably went under again.*

*This time I renounced the world, and twenty fathoms of water [suicide] might have divided me from it when a beneficent Providence recalled me to my original estate. I picked up my bundle and my leather strop and, leaving illusions to the fools who can live by them and my pride in the middle of the road as too heavy a burden for a pedestrian, I set out with my razor from town to town, and lived [as a barber] henceforward carefree. A great nobleman comes to Seville and he recognises me. I get him safely married, and as a reward for my trouble in helping him to a wife he now wants to intercept mine!.... Oh! Fantastic series of events! Why should they happen to me? Why these things and not others? Who made me responsible?....*

*[Withdraws off-stage–right. Enter the COUNTESS, dressed as Suzanne, SUZANNE, dressed as the Countess.]*<sup>52</sup>



**Abuses.** Which abuses of the **Old Regime** irritated Figaro?



**Vision of a New Regime: Merit.** As his audience of Parisian aristocrats laughed and swooned, Figaro asked nobles like his master, the Count, ‘What have you done to deserve such advantages?’ Elaborate on Figaro’s Mr Everyman vision of what France could and should be.



**Bourgeois.** Is Figaro, whom Beaumarchais has created as a Mr Everyman, really Mr **Bourgeois**? Is his 1783 vision of a New Regime likely only to benefit the middling classes (people like traders, professionals, writers)?



**Women.** And what of women? Are they encompassed in Beaumarchais’ Figaro’s notion of Everyman?

52. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *The barber of Seville, and The Marriage of Figaro*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), Act 5, 198–202.



**Liberalism:** *Freedom is best for all.* Along with Voltaire and Montesquieu, Beaumarchais' Figaro offers one of the great statements of a kind of **liberal** thinking that's still influential today. Beaumarchais' *Figaro* denounced censorship and arbitrary arrest. How would Figaro's 'private freedom' also promote the 'public good'?

## Jacques-Louis David



Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) makes a fine eyewitness for a study of the origins, course and consequences of the French Revolution. He witnessed its beginning, middle and end. As the themes in his art changed, we glimpse what educated people were talking about in France.

We begin with David in the era of the **Old Regime**. Educated people were taking up positions for and against tax reform, for and against noble privileges—**feudal**, fiscal or ceremonial—for and against free speech, and above all, for and against the 'despotism' of the king's ministers. Very few people doubted that Louis XVI had France's best interests at heart. Most educated people wanted to help him by showing the best ways to advance the public good and the common interest. As the theory of kingship went, kings in general were supposedly ordained by God to govern for the good of all; in France in particular this meant that kings had to be male, Roman Catholic, and absolute in their authority. Educated people knew that these ideas about kingship and government derived from the ancient Roman concept of the public good or *res publica*, from which we get the word *republic*. Large parts of well-to-do people's secondary schooling then consisted of studies of ancient Roman writings in Latin. Educated people knew, therefore, that during the sixth to first centuries BC in Rome, a Republic had been established; it was dominated by nobles, called 'patricians', who claimed to rule in the public interest. In the final centuries of Roman history, the first to fifth centuries, emperors overthrew the Republic, but they still made the same claim.

Enter David, painter of things Roman and republican who lived in France under an **absolutist monarchy**. In choosing to paint Roman Republican scenes, David knew that his educated audience would pick up messages in his painting. David's art was political. He was showing what he believed to be true liberty and true fraternity. He queried the claims made by kings and the privileged orders that they governed in the public interest. David was asking his viewers to doubt whether a society based on **birthright** was better than one based on merit.

With the idea of enlightening France, David began work in 1783 on a painting called 'The Oath of the Horatii (*Les serment des Horaces*)'. It was received with enthusiasm when exhibited in Paris in 1785. The painting was inspired by a performance David saw of Pierre Corneille's play *Horace*, which dealt with the conflicting loyalties of family and politics in ancient Rome. In David's painting, three brothers (the Horatii) swear an oath of allegiance to their father, who is

holding the swords. The brothers are about to go into battle to settle a dispute with a neighbouring town. They will have to fight three other brothers (the Curatii) from that city. But there are ties between these Republican families: one Curatius sister is married to a Horatius, and another Horatius sister is betrothed to another Curatius. Thus the brothers are not merely taking an oath on behalf of their family and city to avenge wrongs; they elevate loyalty to the state above any personal ties they might have.



Jacques Louis David *Le Serment des Horaces* 1784

or privilege, but from their personal qualities. David emphasises their physical strength, dedication and manliness. The women, by contrast, are distressed. They stand to lose at least a brother, husband or fiancé. Languid, drooping, seated, arms hanging, overcome with emotion, they are overwhelmed by thoughts of family. As hard-nosed David saw it, these women did not seem to have the good of the state at heart. Instead, their focus is inward, more concerned with the impact that the conflict will have on themselves. We now see things differently, noting the similarities with Figaro's patriarchal dismissal of women as deceitful. We understand the patriarchal ideas informing David's image of women as selfish weaklings as just another male device to exclude and preclude women from public life.

The groups of men and women in David's *Oath of the Horatii*

By depicting this scene, David set out to show what he considered were model citizens. Like the *Third Estate* in France (which included David), the Horatii were ordinary people then, not nobles. They are free and equal. David was emphasising their sense of duty and brotherhood, or fraternity. To preserve liberty, they do not hesitate to defend their community against tyranny. Their worth as humans was seen as deriving not from birth



Jacques Louis David *Les Licteurs rapportant à Brutus les corps de ses fils* 1789

show two types of social order. David glorifies one to criticise the other. Choosing to paint 'true' nobility, fraternity and liberty in a Republican [Roman] setting, David implies that his France is led by a decadent, selfish monarchy with outdated political and social values. Like the women in the painting, powerful people in France seemed to David too focused on themselves and their selfish concerns. David contrasted this with a government based on the principles of the public good and the public interest: Rome's ancient Republic.

This is why David depicted an oath (*un serment*). Nowadays, we would sign a contract. In Ancient Rome, however, an oath was just as serious and binding. The French revolutionaries also came to insist on oaths; in 1790: to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy; in 1793–94: to the Republic; in 1804: to the Emperor. In the era of the **Old Regime**, David uses the oath as a symbol, and points toward an alternative future for France using an ancient model. The personal qualities of the Horatii are the virtues of the republic's ordinary citizens. They understand the necessity of personal sacrifice for a public good.



**Contexts.** Now try to put David's work in its social and political context. How might the viewers in France in the 1780s (listed below) have related the themes of *The Oath of the Horatii* to themselves? Would they have been sympathetic and approved?

Would they have been affronted or angry?

- a minister proposing tax reform, like Turgot in 1774, or Calonne in 1787
- Louis XVI
- a member of a Provincial Estate or Parlement opposing tax reform, as in 1766–70 or 1785–88
- a member of a Provincial Estate or Parlement wanting the government to consult more
- a **tax farmer**
- a député of the **Third Estate** attending the opening of the Estates General, May–June 1789
- a seigneur who has recently taken the advice of a lawyer (feudiste) and re-instated **seigneurial** dues on peasants?



**Gender and Citizenship (1).** Use the painting to assess the qualities of David's model citizens. How are these qualities of model citizenship linked to manliness in the mind's eye of a painter like David? Why did David think that attitudes like those he painted in the women would lose wars, weaken the state, and destroy liberty? Do you agree with David? David went on to play a prominent role in the Revolution. What sort of revolutionary do you think he would become?



**Gender and Citizenship (2).** History is written in ironies. It is strange that later, when the revolutionaries of France imagined their ideal state and their ideal citizen, that they conceived both as a beautiful young woman, their Marianne, their citizeness (*une citoyenne*). Iconographies change to reflect their times and values.



**Methods.** What techniques has David used to emphasise his themes and heighten the drama, tension and power? How, for instance, has he used light, colour, architecture, and composition of people?

## New Thinking on the Social Order: Montesquieu and Voltaire

In his *Persian Letters* (1721), Montesquieu's fictional Persian reports on a party he attended. He manages to get the host aside for a quiet moment, plying him with questions about the guests. Montesquieu then describes each guest in turn, poking fun at the social order in France, suggesting that power and influence in his society were far from fair, and far from earned:

*'Who is the man,' I said, 'who has talked such a lot about the meals he has given for high-ranking nobles, who is so familiar with your dukes, and speaks so often to your ministers, who are supposed to be so difficult to see? Obviously he must be a man of quality, but his expression is so vulgar that he scarcely does credit to people of quality, and besides, he seems to me not to have been properly brought up. I am a foreigner, but I should say in general terms that there is a certain politeness that is common to every nation, and in him I find it missing. Are your men of quality less well brought up than the others?'*

*'That man,' he replied with a laugh, 'is a tax-farmer. In wealth he is as much superior to other people as he is inferior by birth. He would have the best table in Paris, if he could bring himself never to eat at it. He is extremely conceited and impolite, as you observe, but he excels by reason of his cook; nor is he ungrateful, for you have heard how he has been extolling him all day long.'*

*'And the big man dressed in black,' I said, 'whom that lady has had put next to her. Why does he have such gloomy clothes and such a bright complexion? He smiles charmingly as soon as he is spoken to; his costume is less extravagant than a woman's, but arranged with greater care.' 'That,' he replied, 'is a preacher [a Roman Catholic priest], and, what is worse, a spiritual adviser. As such, he knows more than husbands do. He knows a woman's weak point; and they know what his is too.' 'Really,' I said, 'he is always talking about something which he calls grace.' 'Not always,' he replied. 'In the ear of a pretty woman he is even readier to talk about*

*her fall. He thunders in public, but in private he is as gentle as a lamb.' 'It seems to me,' I said, 'that he is much sought after, and treated with great consideration.' 'But of course he is sought after. He is a necessity. He is what makes a secluded life attractive; little bits of advice, thoughtful attentions, visits by appointment; he gets rid of a headache better than anyone in the world; he is splendid'...*

*'And that old man,' I said in a low voice, 'who looks so bad-tempered. At first I took him for a foreigner, for apart from the fact that he is dressed differently from everyone else he criticises everything that happens in France, and disapproves of your government'. 'He is an old army man,' he said, 'who makes all his listeners remember him by the length of time taken up by his exploits....'*

*'But why did he give up the army?' I said. 'He didn't give it up,' he answered; 'it gave him up. He has been given a minor post and will spend the rest of his days recounting his adventures. The road to honour and glory is closed to him.' 'And why is that?' I asked, 'We have a maxim in France,' he replied, 'never to give high rank to officers who have spent their time patiently waiting in junior positions. We consider that they will have become narrow-minded by attention to detail, and that, because they are accustomed to little things, they will have become incapable of anything greater. We believe that if at the age of thirty a man does not possess the qualities required of a general, he will never possess them; that the man who lacks the vision to imagine a battlefield several leagues in extent in all its different aspects, and who lacks the presence of mind to use every advantage in victory and every resource in defeat, will never acquire these talents. It is for this reason that we have positions of pre-eminence for the sublimely great men to whom Heaven has granted the heart, as well as the ability, of a hero, and subordinate posts for those whose talents are subordinate too. Among them we include men who have grown old in unimportant wars; they will succeed, at best, only in what they have been doing all their lives; they should not be overburdened when they are beginning to weaken.'*

*A moment later curiosity again overtook me and I said: 'I promise not to ask any more questions, if you will allow me this one. Who is the large young man with the hair, who is not very bright, but extremely bumptious [full of himself]? Why is it that he talks louder than anyone else and is so pleased with himself for existing?' 'He is a Don Juan,' he replied.<sup>53</sup> At these words some people came in, others went out, we stood up, someone came and talked to my companion, and I remained as ignorant as before. But a moment later, by some chance, the young man happened to be beside me, and turning towards me he said: 'It is a fine day, sir; would you care for a stroll in the garden?' I answered as civilly as I was able, and we went out together. 'I have come down to the country,' he said, 'so as to do a favour to the mistress of the house, with*

53. Don Juan is a fictitious character in Spanish folklore: a consummate seducer of women.

*whom I am getting on rather well. I know that there is a certain lady in society who won't be very pleased, but what is one to do? I am friendly with the prettiest women in Paris, but I don't confine myself to one. They think me better than I am, for, between you and me, I am not a great performer'. 'I presume, sir,' I said, 'that you have some post or function which prevents you being more attentive to them.' 'No, sir; the only function I have is to make husbands wild or fathers desperate. I enjoy frightening a woman who thinks she has me, by bringing her nearly to the point of losing me. There are a number of young men like me, who share out the whole of Paris between us in this way, so that the town takes an interest in every detail of our actions.' 'From what I can gather,' I said, 'you cause more talk than the bravest soldier, and have a wider reputation than a learned judge. If you were in Persia you would not enjoy all these privileges; you would find yourself better qualified to guard our wives than to attract them.' The colour rose to my face, and I think that if I had said any more I should have been unable to prevent myself being rude to him.*

*What do you think of a country where such people are tolerated, and where a man who follows such a career is allowed to exist, where faithlessness, treachery, abduction, perfidy [deceit] and injustice earn respect, where a man is esteemed for separating a daughter from her father, a wife from her husband, and for breaking up the most delightful and most sacred of attachments? Happy the children of Ali [i.e., Shia Islam], who preserve their families from seduction and disgrace! Daylight is no purer than the fire which burns in our wives' hearts; our daughters never think without trembling of that day which must deprive them of the virtue that makes them similar to the angels and incorporeal powers. Cherished land of my birth on which the sun looks first, you are not sullied by the horrible crimes which force that heavenly light to hide as soon as he appears in the blackness of the West!*<sup>54</sup>



**Irony and Stereotypes.** Montesquieu uses irony, mockery and stereotypes. What is irony? What is a stereotype? Consider some contemporary examples in film and television of irony and/or stereotypes.



**Merit and Birth.** Reflect on how Montesquieu balances merit and birth in his mocking stereotypes of people of the old order in Europe: the big-noting **tax farmer**, the 'attentive' *priest*, the retired junior *army officer*, and the 'Don Juan'. Suggest reasons why Montesquieu is inconsistent in the balances he strikes between the competing claims of merit and birth in each case? How does Montesquieu view the opportunistic **tax farmer**, a priest without private wealth, an officer without patronage connections to senior officers, and a gigolo with only his charm and good looks to rely on?

54. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (1721), (ed., tr.) C.J. Betts, (Penguin Classics, 1973), 104–109



*Religion.* Montesquieu criticises priests who ‘thunder in public’ and yet who are ‘as gentle as a lamb’ in private. Suggest social and economic reasons why priests might have acted like this.



*Freedom and License.* Montesquieu’s conclusion is ironic in this letter. He wanted to explore the difference between freedom and license. ‘License’ in this sense is the abuse of freedom, a lack of restraint, a selfishness; our term for indulgent people who lack self-control is ‘licentious’. But there is a double irony here. Montesquieu’s phony-Persian’s last letter from France in *The Persian Letters* concluded with news of the revolt of one of his wives left behind in his *harem* in far-off Persia. By contrast, Montesquieu’s Persian concludes this [earlier] letter stating that Persian women would never succumb to Don Juans like the one he met at the party in France. What ironies of license and freedom in an enlightened Europe is Montesquieu here exploring? Is Montesquieu really holding up Persia as an example for enlightened societies to follow? What sort of balance between freedom and license is he trying to strike? Contrast Madame Roland’s and Beaumarchais’ comments, studied previously, on mothers’ and fathers’ authority over their daughters’ marriages.



*Gender and Cultural Attitudes to Citizenship.* Did you notice how Montesquieu, when discussing the social role of the priest in Old-Regime society, also draws on the theme of women’s supposed weakness to make a political point: ‘[the priest] knows more than husbands do. He knows a woman’s weak point’. This is patriarchy: a set of masculinist attitudes that transcend eras. We begin to glimpse why women only gained the vote in France in 1945.



*Freedom and License.* Do similar balances have to be struck between freedom and license in family life and popular culture today? Consider this website on ideals of family life in eighteenth-century France, and in particular this [page](#) on Nicolas Rétif de la Bretonne’s memories. Are our ideals still the same?

In his *Philosophical Dictionary*, published in 1764, François Marie Arouet de Voltaire took Montesquieu’s ideas a step further. He reflected on ways people should be governed and on how they should relate to each other. Like Montesquieu, Voltaire developed his important ideas in a light-hearted way. In an essay on ‘Equality’, he began with a provocative question, ‘What does a dog owe to a dog, and a horse to a horse?’ He answered:

*Nothing, no animal depends on his like; but man having received the ray of divinity called reason, what is the result?—slavery throughout almost the whole world.*<sup>55</sup>

55. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, (ed., tr.) T Besterman, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1971), 181.

A 1924 translation by H.I. Woolf of Voltaire's Dictionary is available [online](#).



*Reason and Tradition.* Voltaire maintains that human 'reason' is 'a ray of divinity', an attribute given by God. This was a new science-like view of the characteristics of God. It first emerged in the seventeenth century and grew in the eighteenth century, but it was still only common among highly educated **liberal** and mathematical-minded people. Recall the document by Bishop Bossuet. How different is his more traditional view of the characteristics of God, as God the Father?



*Implications.* Suggest what might have been the implications of Voltaire's kind of new thinking for people in power claiming God-sanctioned authority in **Old Regime** France? What were the implications for the **Old Regime**, if educated people in the eighteenth century were always to do what Voltaire suggests: i.e., to value reason over tradition?



*Irony.* Voltaire is ironic about key aspects of the **Old Regime** and its social order. Show that irony by connecting the ideas that Voltaire deliberately left vague. (Although Voltaire loved enigmas, he also had good reason to fear arrest and imprisonment, so he often left his readers to fill in a few blanks.) So, what do you think he meant by 'no animal depends on his like', and that there is 'slavery throughout almost the whole world'?



*Subversion.* What is subversion? Louis XV and Louis XVI both considered Voltaire was subversive. Do you agree?



*Wit.* Can you think of contemporary comics who are subversive? Are they still subversive if they are accepted in the mainstream media, or are they more subversive for being so accepted? Again, think of an example of a modern comedy.



*'Feudalism'.* Dog to dog, horse to horse and, by implication, human to human. Was Voltaire endorsing the '**feudal**' dependency of one person on another, so common in the **Old Regime**, as either natural or a good thing?



*Nature.* In considering the social and political order in eighteenth-century France, why did Voltaire use animal analogies? What did he think was odd about human societies in places like France in the eighteenth century?

As soon as he wrote this, however, Voltaire seemed to draw back. He was a nobleman after all. He had servants. Theories were one thing; practice was another. He then tried to be realistic. As he thought about the social and political order in his France, he started to write things like ‘must have’, ‘necessarily’ and ‘obvious enough’. Considering the sources of inequality in the world in general, and in his eighteenth-century world in particular, Voltaire sighed, blaming Nature: the land, the weather, and the fact that different people have different talents:

*If everybody were the same, if everybody had enough to eat, people would be as happy as all quadrupeds [four-footed beasts], birds and reptiles. Domination would then be a chimera [mirage], an absurdity which would occur to nobody: for why seek for servitors when you need no service? .... All men would necessarily be equal if they were without needs. The poverty characteristic of our species subordinates one man to another. It is not inequality that is the real evil, but dependence. It matters very little that some man is called his highness, and another his holiness; but it is hard to serve one or the other. A numerous family has cultivated good land. Two small neighbouring families have barren and obstinate fields. It is obvious enough that the two poor families must serve the opulent [rich] family or murder it. One of the two indigent [poor] families offers its labour to the rich to get bread; the other attacks it and is beaten. The former family originated [created] servants and labourers, the defeated family [became] slaves. It is impossible on our wretched globe for men living in society not to be divided into two classes, one of oppressors, the other of the oppressed; and these subdivide into a thousand, and the thousand have further gradations.*

*All the oppressed are not absolutely unhappy. Most of them are born in that state, and continual work prevents them from feeling their condition too keenly.... Every man has the right to believe himself, at the bottom of his heart, entirely equal to all other men. It does not follow from this that a cardinal's cook should order his master to prepare his dinner; but the cook can say: 'I'm a man like my master, like him I am born in tears; like me he will die with the same sufferings and the same ceremonies. Both of us perform the same animal functions. If the Turks capture Rome [i.e., if the world went topsy turvy; if there was a revolution], and I am then a cardinal and my master a cook, I will take him into my service.' All this speech is reasonable and just; but until the Grand Turk captures Rome the cook must do his duty, or every human society is perverted.*

*As for a man who is neither a cardinal's cook nor endowed with any other public office [a **bourgeois**?]; as for a private person of modest views, but who is annoyed because he is received everywhere [by nobles] with a patronising air or one of disdain, who sees clearly that several monsignors [senior Roman Catholic priests] have no more knowledge, no more intelligence, no more virtue than he, and who is sometimes wearied to find himself in their waiting rooms, what should he do? He should leave.<sup>56</sup>*



**Inequality.** By what reasoning did Voltaire consider inequality between people as natural and inevitable? Are you convinced? Rousseau was not convinced.



**Legitimations.** Legitimations are justifications; in this case, the reasons people in authority give for their authority and for the ways things are organised in life and at work. Among Voltaire's reasons for inequality in the **Old Regime**, 'poverty' and 'oppression' figure prominently. Were Voltaire's new legitimations of age-old traditions of inequality more likely to harm than uphold the traditional social and political order of the **Old Regime**?



**Dependence.** In this time before capitalism, industrialisation and before large-scale urbanisation, Voltaire maintained that the 'real evil' of the **Old Regime** was dependency, not inequality. How could Voltaire think that it was alright for people to be unequal in wealth, talent or status, but it was not alright for them also to be made to depend on the good will of someone else? Explain the distinction. Which aspects of urban and village life during the **Old Regime** promoted *dependent* social relations? (The ideal of the independent producer and voter was a key part of the thinking of **bourgeois** and *sans-culottes* in the Revolution.)



**Birthright. Dignity. Duty.** In his story of the cook and the Cardinal, Voltaire weighed three pillars of a person's sense of self and worth under the **Old Regime**. Why did Voltaire think that people in a dependent-lower-status position in the social order—people like servants, cooks and wives—'must' uphold whatever their independent-high-status superiors (Cardinals) maintained? Weigh up for yourself each person's likely senses of **birthright**, personal dignity and duty in explaining Voltaire's reasoning: servant, cook, wife. Was Voltaire, the **Enlightenment** new thinker, still enmeshed in Old-Regime ways of thinking and acting?

56. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, (ed., tr.) T Besterman, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1971), 182–84.



*Revolution.* We know a revolution is coming. Voltaire did not. Yet he could imagine a revolution. How did Voltaire imagine a revolutionary world in which society changed radically? Did he endorse it? Why or why not?



*Implications.* Try re-telling Voltaire's cook and cardinal joke from the point of view of the cook. Is it still funny? Contrast the **abbé** de Siéyès pamphlet of 1789, *What is the Third Estate?*, listed later.



*Rights and Independence.* Voltaire's ideal people were either **bourgeois**, independent people of commerce or the professions unfettered by birth and custom, or *philosophes*, independent thinkers guided only by reason. Voltaire described that kind of person in his final paragraph, concluding with a joke: 'He should leave'. (Many Protestants had to do exactly that in France after the revocation between 1682 and 1786 of their prior regime of toleration, the Edict of Nantes, 1598.) What points about human worth and human rights was Voltaire trying to make about the **Old Regime**? If cooks were still supposed to obey and do their duty, why weren't **bourgeois** and *philosophes*? Explain Voltaire's dependence/independence distinction. Are you convinced? View Voltaire's distinction from the point of view of cooks—not cardinals, aristocrats and **bourgeois**; many *sans-culottes* in the French Revolution felt just this way.



# Key Words

## Abbé

An abbé was a leading clergyman, the abbot of a Roman Catholic monastery. A famous abbé was Emmanuel Joseph de Siéyès. By the eighteenth century, many monasteries were extremely wealthy institutions with extensive landholdings in the towns and the cities. Others marketed lucrative brands of wine, brandy or cheese, or controlled customs gates, mills and bridges, charging for access. Posts as abbés tended to be much sought after by wealthy sons of nobles or *bourgeois*, especially by sons who could make some claim to intellectual distinction. Many abbés never bothered to visit the monastery from which they derived their income. Many French peasants resented paying tithes and charges which supported these monasteries. Most French revolutionaries opposed the ongoing existence of monasteries in France, seeing them as upholding laziness and monopolising valuable lands. They were dissolved in 1790, and their lands nationalised. The *Jacobin Club* occupied the Parisian site of one such former monastery.

## Café

The *café* is one of the most enduring developments that arose in eighteenth-century France. Like the experience of shopping and promenading in the *Palais Royal*, the café encouraged people to socialise in exciting new ways. The emerging habits of shopping, promenading and sitting around and chatting in cafés, and always being on display, put fashion, grace, wit, style and even sex appeal before birth, honour and tradition. A new social order was emerging. These exciting new developments were adopted by the *bourgeoisie* and the nobility alike. A way was being opened for the emergence of the politics of 1789: free trade, citizenship, open debate, and above all, a preference for the idea of citizenship instead of belonging to a social estate (*corps* or *état*): Why should the ugly and boring well-born be more privileged than the gorgeous and talented low-born? *Café Procope* is one of the earliest *cafés* in Paris. It was opened in 1686 by a Sicilian from Palermo, Francisco Procopio dei Coltelli, whose café was famous for hosting *theatre* folk (the famous *theatre* of *la Comédie française* is nearby) and in the eighteenth-century it was a favourite of *Enlightenment* figures like Diderot, d'Alembert and Voltaire. During the revolution, this café was favoured by radical democrats like Georges Danton, Fabre d'Eglantine and Camille Desmoulins, leaders of radical violence and popular democracy in 1792–93, but soon to be arrested and executed as *indulgents* in March 1794 for pleading for an end to the terror. The café is now renovated, very elegant, very expensive, a magnet for tourists who don't understand its revolutionary heritage. You can tour *Café Procope* [here](#). You can also glimpse the kinds of people who gathered in cafés. See this undated but probably late eighteenth-century print titled 'Establishment of New Philosophy: Our Cradle was a Café', at this [website](#). For an early nineteenth century Louis-Léopold Boilly painting of men playing draughts/checkers in the Café Lamblin in the Palais-Royal, go to this [site](#).

### Franks, The

The Franks were the German tribe who conquered France. Merovingian Franks united the territory now known as France in a single state ruled by a single dynasty in the Sixth Century.

### Gauls, The

Gauls were the original ancient Celtic people of France. They symbolised the nation. They were conquered by Julius Caesar for Rome in 50s BCE. A modern version of the Gauls, with all its nationalist connotations, is the cartoon character, 'Astérix'.

### Palais Royal

When high officials of state were encouraged to build grandly in Paris, the *Palais Royal* complex was built by Cardinal Richelieu in the 1640s as a mansion (*hôtel*), garden and colonnade. After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the *Palais Royal* became the home of the Regent, the *duc d'Orléans*, who loathed Versailles; it remained as an Orléans estate after the 12-year-old Louis XV asserted himself in 1722, beginning to rule in his own right and shifting the court and government back to Versailles. When Louis XVI ordered his brother, a new *duc d'Orléans*, in the 1780s to open the gardens and colonnades of the *Palais Royal* to the public, the complex became an elegant shopping mall, the height of style by day, a place to find prostitutes at night. Works by three contemporary artists enable us to glimpse what it was like to promenade the *Palais Royal*. The first artist is Philibert-Louis Debucourt (1755–1832). His 'The *Palais-Royal*—Gallery's Walk' (1787) is now in the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington DC. The second work is a painting (1806) by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), now in *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris.

### Parlements of Paris

There were thirteen Parlements. The Parlement of Paris was the most important; its authority extended over half of the kingdom. View the seat of the Parlement of Paris, *Le Palais de Justice*, in the Île de la Cité in Paris [here](#). Other key Parlements were: Rouen (Normandy), Rennes (Brittany), Grenoble (Alpine east), Douai (north), Dijon (Burgundy), Metz and Nancy (Franco-Germanic northeast), Pau (Navarre, Pyrenees), Bordeaux (Guienne, southwest), and Toulouse (Languedoc). Search the internet to find images of these provincial *Parlements*.

### Sol

More commonly known as a 'sou', this was a copper or silver coin formerly used in France. Worth 12 deniers, it was a twentieth part of one livre.

### Tax Farmer

In France, many taxes were collected by people who 'farmed' them. They bid in a state auction for the right to collect particular taxes in particular towns and regions. The state received its revenues up-front, without having to employ its own agents. The 'farmers general (*fermiers généraux*)' made a profit simply by raising more funds than the state expected. Tax farmers were hated in France, as they were almost always extraordinarily wealthy. Allegations of corruption surrounded the auction process. Tax farmers routinely secured their revenues by

bribing officials, hiring squads of private troops, imposing lucrative supply monopolies, and building *walls* around towns to force people to pass by their gates and pay their taxes.

### Theatre

Theatre was as important a venue for revolutionary ideas and for socialisation across *estates* (corps) as *cafés*, newspapers and shopping centres like the *Palais Royal*. The third work is an engraving by Claude-Louis Desrais (1746–1816): Boilly and Desrais' works both seem critical of prostitution (or is it just loose living?) in the *Palais Royal*. This [site](#) glimpse the *Palais Royal* as it is today. [Theatre Database](#) is an excellent and detailed site with useful links to figures like Beaumarchais and Voltaire, whom we encounter shortly. Theatre crowds were not always 'civilised'. Louis Binet's [drawing](#) of c1798 of the Foyer of the Montansier Theatre (which was in the *Palais Royal*) focused on relations between theatre-going men and prostitutes. A disdainful [painting](#) by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), now in the Louvre, shows a raucous crowd of ordinary people trying to get inside a theatre, in the case l'Ambigu Comique in 1819, when free tickets are being handed out: . In 1830 he revisited the theme in his [painting](#) of 'Une loge, un jour de spectacle gratuit' ('A theatre Box, on a free ticket day').

### Walls (*barrières*)

Websites showing the work of architect Charles-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) show customs offices and gates (*barrières*) built by Farmers General (*fermiers généraux*) to funnel goods coming into Paris past tax collectors: his barrier gates still stand in Paris at St Martin, at Denfert-Rochereau (also known as the Barrière d'Enfer) and at Trône: respectively [here](#) [Christophe Civeton, pen and ink, 1829] and [here](#) and at this [site](#) (pencil and watercolour, 1790). As the tax walls were torn down in 1789, no one bothered about the gates! This is why they survived. Other gates built by Ledoux in 1784 are shown at [this website](#) and an early nineteenth century map tracing the 24-km walls and barriers around Paris can be found [here](#). Most large towns in *Old Regime* France had customs gates and walls. In Paris, the Farmers' General wall and most of its 65 gates were demolished by the revolutionaries after July 1789.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Crises of 1788 and 1789



## Abbé Siéyès

After France was wracked by yet another round of major disputes about tax reforms that broadened, from 1787, into a full-scale constitutional wrangle about how France ought to be governed, a clergyman, **abbé** Emmanuel Joseph Siéyès (1748–1836) wrote a political pamphlet. Hundreds of other people did the same in 1788 and 1789. Siéyès' pamphlet was particularly influential, however. His prose had bite and spite.

A digitised copy of the pamphlet can be read in its entirety (in French) on the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's Gallica [website](#). For an English translation, go to this [website](#).



This Napoleonic-era engraving, presumably from a set of images of leaders of the French revolution, claims to reproduce a life drawing or painting depicting the young Siéyès around 1789–90. This was the time when Siéyès wrote his famous pamphlet and when he played a prominent role in the National Assembly. Siéyès returned to prominence between 1794 and 1799. The engraving is found in [Gallica](#).



Jacques-Louis David Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès 1817

Siéyès was from the south of France: Fréjus in Provence. He was the son of a notary, a respected **bourgeois** professional who drew up and registered official deeds and documents. Siéyès became a clergyman. He was a talented writer and intellectual, conscious of his humble origins, vain as a person, and a bit boring as a speaker. Prior to 1789, Siéyès had been a middling cleric at Chartres, a cathedral city southwest of Paris. The Catholic Church he served then was dominated by hierarchs whom he loathed; mostly high and haughty aristocrats.

Instantly popular after publishing his pamphlet, Siéyès was elected by the citizens of the **third estate** in Paris as one of their deputies to the Estates-General even though

he was not from Paris. Siéyès then helped draft the Constitution of 1791, particularly its distinction between active and passive citizens. Returning to politics in the National Convention (1792–95), Siéyès supported executing Louis XVI (January 1793), but not the Jacobin terror. He hid in 1793–94. Re-surfacing in 1795, Siéyès supported the aggressive foreign policy of the Revolution, and was an architect of the rise of General Napoléon Bonaparte in 1799 as a way of solving the chronic instability of revolutionary government.

These were Siéyès' political views around December 1788 and January 1789:

*Who is bold enough to maintain that the **Third Estate** does not contain within itself everything needful to constitute a complete nation? It is like a strong and robust man with one arm still in chains. If the privileged order were removed, the nation would not be something less but something more. What then is the **Third Estate**? All; but an 'all' that is fettered and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged order? It would be all; but free and flourishing. Nothing will go well without the **Third Estate**; everything would go considerably better without the two others.*

*It is not enough to have shown that the privileged, far from being useful to the nation, can only weaken and injure it; we must prove further that the nobility is not part of our society at all: it may be a burden for the nation, but it cannot be part of it.*

*First, it is impossible to find what place to assign to the caste of nobles among all the elements of a nation.... The fewer [the] abuses, the better organised a state is supposed to be. The most ill-organised state of all would be the one where not just isolated individuals, but a complete class of citizens, would glory in inactivity amidst the general movement and contrive to consume the best part of the product without having in any way helped to produce it. Such a class, surely, is foreign to the nation because of its idleness. The nobility, however, is also a foreigner in our midst because of its civil and political prerogatives [special powers and privileges]. What is a nation?: A body of associates living under common laws and represented by the same legislative assembly, etc. Is it not obvious that the nobility possesses privileges and exemptions which it brazenly calls its rights and which stand distinct from the rights of the great body of citizens? Because of these special rights, the nobility does not belong to the common order, nor is it subjected to the common laws. Thus its private rights make it a people apart in the great nation. It is truly imperium in imperio [a state within a state]. As for its political rights, it also exercises these separately from the nation. It has its own representatives who are charged with no mandate from the People. Its deputies sit separately, and even if they sat in the same chamber as the deputies of ordinary citizens they would still constitute a different and separate representation.*

*They are foreign to the nation first because of their origin, since they do not owe their powers to the People; and secondly because of their aim, since this consists in defending, not the general interest, but the private one.*

*The **Third Estate** then contains everything that pertains to the nation while nobody outside the **Third Estate** can be considered as part of the nation. What is the*

***Third Estate?** Everything! ... The nation as a whole cannot be free, nor can any of its separate orders, unless the **Third Estate** is free. Freedom does not derive from privileges. It derives from the rights of citizens and those rights belong to all. If the aristocrats try to repress the People at the expense of that very freedom of which they prove themselves unworthy, the **Third Estate** will dare challenge their right. If they reply, 'by the right of conquest', one must concede that this is to go back rather far....<sup>57</sup>*

*By **Third Estate** is meant all the citizens who belong to the common order. Anybody who holds a legal privilege of any kind deserts the common order, stands as an exception to the common laws and, consequently, does not belong to the **Third Estate**.... A nation is made one by virtue of common laws and common representation. It is indisputably only too true that in France a man who is protected only by the common laws is a nobody; whoever is totally unprivileged must submit to every form of contempt, insult and humiliation. To avoid being completely crushed, what must the unlucky non-privileged person do? He has to attach himself by all kinds of contemptible actions to some magnate; he prostitutes his principles and human dignity for the possibility of claiming, in his need, the protection of a [noble-born] somebody.<sup>58</sup>*

As indeed they did eventually assemble—to the delight of Siéyès—in the days after the defiant Oath of the Tennis Court (*Jeu de Paume*), 20 June 1789, culminating in the moment on 27 June 1789, when Louis XVI seemed to give up on his opposition to the idea of a uni-cameral National Assembly, because significant numbers of priests and *liberal* nobles had already abandoned voting by order and were assembling with the *deputies* of the **Third Estate**.

Siéyès is anticipating the seating and voting procedures set for *Estates General* were only reiterated by the **Parlement of Paris** on 21 September 1788, and by Louis XVI on 27 June 1789. The last time the Estates General had met had been in 1614. At that time, each estate had deliberated and voted separately in separate chambers. Both the *Parlement's* order of 21 September 1788 and Louis XVI's instruction of 23 June 1789 envisaged the arrangements of 1614 would apply again in 1789. By raising these issues here, Siéyès was signalling the determination of many would-be *deputies* to the Estates-General not to allow voting according to the '*feudal*' rules of 1614.

In every free nation—and every nation ought to be free—there is only one way of settling disputes about the constitution. One must not call upon Notables, but upon the nation itself.

57. Emmanuel Joseph Siéyès, *What is the Third Estate?*, (ed.) S.E. Finer, (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), 53–56.

58. Ibid, 61.

This occurred in the Assemblies of Notables summoned by Louis XVI in February–May 1787. Writing in December 1788–January 1789, Si  y  s feared this might still occur if there was to be separate voting by each of the three *estates* in the projected Estates General, which was summoned on 8 August 1788 by Louis XVI to convene on 5 May 1789.

*If we have no constitution, it must be made, and only the nation has the right to make it. If we do have a constitution, as some people obstinately maintain, and if, as they allege, it divides the National Assembly into three deputations of three orders of citizens, nobody can fail to notice, at all events, that one of these orders [the **Third Estate**] is protesting so vigorously that nothing can be done until its claim is decided.*<sup>59</sup>

This is the uni-cameral legislature that Si  y  s desired. Si  y  s' name for the legislature anticipates the name adopted by the deputies of the **Third Estate** on 17 June 1789. Si  y  s' moved the motion that purported to establish The new legislature. Louis XVI belatedly conceded a National Assembly meeting as one on 27 June 1789, after the deputies of the **Third Estate** and other *estates* defied Louis XVI's order of 23 June 1789 for all deputies to deliberate and vote in their separate *estates*.



*The Body Politic.* At start of the document, Si  y  s compares the human body to the **Third Estate**. How is his comparison different to Retif's?



*What did Si  y  s want to change?* Imagine that you are a member of the **Third Estate**. Write a pamphlet supporting the idea of single National Assembly. Use some of the positive ideas from Si  y  s quoted below:

- 'a body of associates'
- 'the nation'
- 'the general interest'
- 'rights'
- 'the common order'
- a 'constitution'.



*What did Si  y  s want to destroy?* Your pamphlet should now use some of the negative ideas from Si  y  s quoted below. He used these ideas to attack people who rejected a single National Assembly and who still wanted to keep the three separate assemblies: 'caste', 'privilege', 'nobility', 'the private interest', 'idleness'.

59. Emmanuel Joseph Si  y  s, *What is the Third Estate?*, ed. S.E. Finer, (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), 119–120.



**Bourgeois.** Is Siyès' Mr Everyman really Mr **Bourgeois**? Is his vision of a revolution one that will only benefit the middling classes (merchants, professionals, writers and the like)?

## A Revolution Begins

The meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles at the beginning of May 1789 was the event that allowed an odd collection of grievances from all sections of French society to come together in one place: the result was a revolution that no-one could have predicted.



Here is an image by Jean-Michel Moreau (1741–1814) of the grand state occasion of the three orders of the realm assembled—separately—at the opening of the Estates General, 5 May 1789, in the great room (*La grande salle*) of Louis XV's *l'Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs* (1745) in Versailles. Moreau's engravings can be seen [here](#). It is interesting to note that Napoleon ordered the demolition of the original meeting chambers of 1789 in 1802.

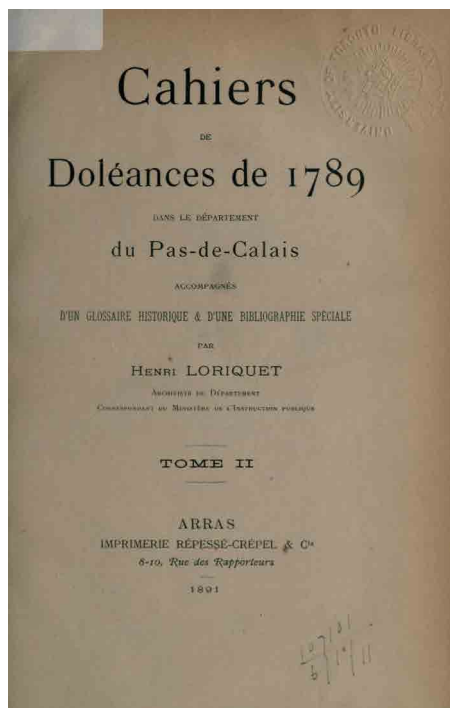


Isidore-Stanislas Helman and Charles Monet *Ouverture des États généraux, à Versailles, le 5 mai 1789* 1789

The edict of 8 August 1788 summoning an Estates-General to meet in May 1789 organised elections and also asked virtually all sections of society in France what their complaints were. Electors in each town and district were asked to draw up *cahiers de doléances*, a list of grievances which the deputies they appointed would take to Versailles to put before the king.<sup>60</sup> What came out of this was a great sense of hope and expectation: the king had asked his subjects what their complaints were and so he seemed to be intending to do something about these complaints. So, the deputies from

throughout the land arrived at Versailles in May 1789 with briefcases bulging with the grievances of their region and their own hopes for the future. At Versailles they met many other like-minded citizens. The grievances of the entire nation were brought together in the one place. At Versailles deputies from all over France discovered that, despite the regional differences, they had much in common. Many loved the works of the writers of the **Enlightenment**. Most had read many of the pamphlets that were on sale on every street corner: all had followed the many crises since the meeting of the Assembly of Notables in February-May 1787.

60. A digitised 1891 reprint of the *cahiers de doléances* of the towns and villages of (what would become) the Pas-de-Calais department on France's north coast can be found at this [website](#). An English translation of the cahier of Blois can be read [here](#). High resolution scans of the original, handwritten cahier of the commune of Méobecq in the Indre department are at this [website](#).



Front page of the *Cahiers de doléances de 1789 dans le département du Pas-de-Calais*, 1891

None of these *deputies* came to Versailles intent on bringing about a revolution. They came expecting flagrant abuses, above all in taxation, to be eliminated, but there were some, like *abbé* Siéyès, who hoped for changes in government, changes that would give men of education some say in how the country was governed. Representatives of the *Third Estate* came with suspicions of the nobles of the *Second Estate* and the hierarchy of the *First Estate*, but all believed the king would act in the common interest. They were disappointed. The king had doubled the number of the deputies to the Estates General following the pamphlet campaign, but he had remained silent on the desire to vote in common. The king simply made it known that he wanted each Estate to meet and vote separately, as in 1614. Beyond that instruction, neither the king nor his ministers took any kind of lead. There was no announcement of any sort of program of reform, neither constitutional nor financial, until 23 June, a month and a half since the Estates-General had convened on 5 May.

But it was the resistance of the clergy and the nobles in the first days of the meeting of the Estates-General that turned hope to disappointment and then to defiance ... even of their king. When this defiance was met by the capitulation of the king on 27 June, it appeared as though a revolution in government had been accomplished without violence or the spilling of any blood. Faith in the king was reinforced, but it was a faith that was to be tested at regular intervals in the future.

The revolution of June 1789 envisaged a new political system based on the idea of *national sovereignty*. Final authority would not rest only with a king ruling on behalf of God, but with the people speaking through their elected representatives. The king would still play a key, though still to be determined, role—and he now seemed, like the National Assembly, to enshrine the nation just as much as he might have been anointed by God. An even more difficult issue was determining just who represented the people, how this was to be done, and just what was meant by ‘the people’. The outcome of the Revolution of May-June 1789 depended on how these two great issues were to be resolved—the role and power of the king, and the scope and power of the sovereign people. Together they were the nation, but no one was certain yet what this all meant.

## A National Assembly

The deadlock between the three *estates* began at the first formal meetings of the Estates-General on 6–7 May; the deputies of the two privileged orders refused to meet in common to verify

their credentials. Many leaders of the **Third Estate** had resolved that the three orders should meet together from the very beginning. The deadlock was finally broken when the **Third Estate**, strengthened in its resolve by the defection of some members of the **First Estate** (clergy) and aware that they had the sympathy of many members of the Second, decided in the first two weeks of June to act unilaterally and declare itself an assembly representing the 'nation'.

In the six weeks of the deadlock, while the king prevaricated, and his ministers and courtiers were divided, the deputies of the **Third Estate** were not idle; they had discussed what to do next, absorbing the arguments of the pamphlets, taking advantage of the freedom of expression unwittingly opened by the calling of the Estates-General. No pamphlet was more influential than **abbé** Siyès' *What is the Third Estate?*; events unfolding from 17 June followed closely the action he had advocated in January.

An informal group of radicals, the 'Committee of Thirty' emerged, led by Mirabeau, Siyès and **Jean-Sylvain Bailly**.

The committee worried about the possibility of their arrest and/or the closure of the assembly if the king ordered troops, especially foreign troops (as he did on 26 June), to come to Paris and Versailles. The Committee of Thirty readied themselves to take more radical measures to secure public backing for a single assembly, entreating **liberal** nobles and lesser clergy to join them (10–19 June) in the one chamber at Versailles, taking an oath (20 June) never to disperse until they had won the day, calling on the king to send foreign troops back (8 July), and encouraging Parisians of all **estates** (in the first weeks of July) to air their views on the need for reform and for a single assembly.

On 17 June 1789, the Assembly declared itself the Nation, a revolutionary act which challenged the **sovereignty** of the king. Whereas the king had been seen to govern on the authority of God, the idea of a National Assembly placed the authority to govern in the hands of the deputies acting on the authority of the 'people'. The unilateral proclamation of the Estates-General as a National Assembly was as follows:

*The Assembly, deliberating after the verification of powers, recognises that this assembly is already composed of deputies sent directly by at least ninety-six per cent of the nation...*

*This Assembly...alone may interpret and present the general will of the nation; no veto, no negative power may exist between the throne and this assembly.*

*Accordingly, the Assembly declares that the common work of national restoration can and must be begun immediately by the deputies present, and that they must pursue it without interruption or hindrance.*

*The name of NATIONAL ASSEMBLY is the only one which suits the assembly under the present circumstances, whether because the members who compose it are the only representatives lawfully and publicly recognised and verified, or because they are sent directly by almost the entire nation, or, finally, because, the representation being one and indivisible, none of the deputies, from whatever order or class he be chosen, has the right to perform his duties apart from the present assembly.*

*The Assembly will never lose hope of uniting within its midst all the deputies who are absent today; it will not cease to summon them to fulfill the obligation imposed upon them to co-operate in the session of the Estates General. At whatever moment the absent deputies present themselves during the course of the session which is about to open, it declares in advance that it will hasten to receive them, and, after verification of their powers, to share with them the continuation of the noble efforts which are to effect the regeneration of France.*

*The National Assembly orders that the motives for the present deliberation be drawn up immediately, to be presented to the King and to the nation.*<sup>61</sup>



*Representatives and representation.* The radical *deputies* express strong ideas of themselves as the representatives of the people, and of themselves representing 96 per cent of the population. Did numbers and representation count for anything in **Old Regime** terms?



*The 'General Will' and 'Common Work'.* Suggest sources for this kind of thinking about power and authority from the writers we have studied.



*'Never lose hope of uniting'.* What were the radical *deputies* trying to achieve in this paragraph of their declaration of 17 June 1789?



**Veto.** Put yourself in the shoes of Louis XVI reading this declaration. What are the radical *deputies* of the **Third Estate** saying about who will have the last word on what measures will be passed as laws in France? Is their point of view simple and clear? Are you likely to accept their demand? Why?

61. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 87–88.



*Political Options.* Canvas all of Louis XVI's options at this point in time. His counselors were deeply divided. How did the continuing financial crisis in France limit the King's options? Which action is best for the monarchy, which is best for France, which is best for the Committee of Thirty? Why might it have made sense for the Committee of Thirty to seek to involve the people of Paris in the deadlocked events taking place at the Estates General meeting at Versailles?

## The Oath of the Tennis Court

Three days later, on 20 June, the newly-declared National Assembly found itself locked out of the hall it had been using. They believed the king was preparing to take action against them for the revolutionary act of 17 June; in fact it was closed for minor redecorating, but the deputies were not told of this. The radical deputies of the **Third Estate** hastily gathered in a nearby indoor tennis court (*le Jeu de Paume*)<sup>62</sup> where they re-affirmed their determination not to go back on their pledge of 17 June: this was the famous 'Tennis Court Oath':

*The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the kingdom, to effect the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to establish itself; and, finally, that wheresoever its members are assembled, there is the National Assembly;*

*Decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that, the said oath taken, all members and each one of them individually shall ratify this steadfast resolution by signature.*<sup>63</sup>

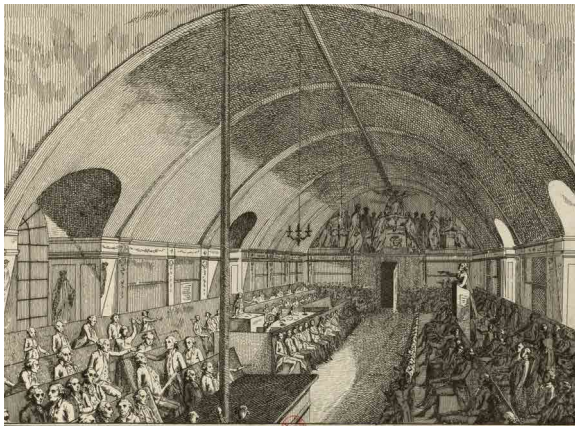


The original document has been digitised by the [French National Archives](#).

The symbolism and mythology of this revolutionary act were captured in an unfinished painting by Jacques-Louis David. In the previous section, we looked at a painting by David called *The*

62. This was where Réal (Royal) tennis was played. It was an indoor game, played with the hands rather than rackets. Royal or Real Tennis is still played in Melbourne and Hobart. You can see the court [here](#).

63. 'The Tennis Court Oath' (20 June 1789) in John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 88



**Henri Nicolas Vangorp** *Société des amis de la Constitution* between 1791 and 1792



**Jean Pierre Marie Jazet** *Oath of the Jeu de Paume* 1825

*Oath of Horatii*. The themes he covered in this work were continued and expanded upon in *The Oath of the Tennis Court*. In 1790, David was commissioned by the **Jacobin Club** of Paris to glorify this revolutionary event of 20 June 1789, which took place in the hall of a Royal Tennis court, the **Jeu de Paume**.

The Oath of the Tennis Court was a departure for David, who usually painted small groups of figures, which often (as we have seen) took their subject matter from Antiquity. Not only was the event being depicted a real and contemporary one, but David was also obliged to gather together a hundred enthusiastically gesturing men dressed in the style of the day. He also had to depict them heroically, without losing the individual detail which would give them their emotional force.

David's Oath of the Tennis Court was planned as an enormous (seven by ten metres) canvas, with life-sized figures, largely painted by students under his supervision. It was never completed, and exists now only as three separate studies. One of the main reasons the painting remained incomplete was that, as the revolution wore on, many key figures depicted by David were accused of betraying its original principles. For more information see Michael Adcock, *The French Revolution in Art: A Supplementary Text*, Melbourne: History Teachers' Association of Victoria, 1997 (Most representations of the painting come from the preparatory drawing, called a cartoon, on which the life-size paintings were based. There was to be more than one.) However, the monumental significance David tried to give this event can be seen in the composition. The top half of the painting is a vast space which gives the viewer a sense of the dramatic events taking place below, and suggests the revolutionaries' soaring hopes. Through the windows in the upper part of the work, an allegorical storm blows the winds of change through the draperies, allowing a glimpse of a lightning bolt striking Versailles. The bolt also points directly at the outstretched arm and head of Monsieur le Président of the new National Assembly, the man of science, **Jean-Sylvain Bailly** (1736–93), future mayor of Paris, and future victim of the terror; **Bailly** is elevated on a table receiving the oath of the men surrounding him.



**Unknown artist** *Jean Silvain Bailly* 1789



A portrait medal of **Bailly** by Jean Montagny is held by the [Museum of Victoria](#)



Pierre-Michel Alix Jean Silvain  
Bailly 1795

The gathered deputies pledge their unity and fraternity in a manner so strongly reminiscent of the *Horatii* that they could have been transplanted from that painting. A sea of outstretched arms points to **Bailly**, signalling overwhelming support for the oath to create a National Assembly, and with it, a France renewed. **Bailly** the scientist is bathed in the allegorical light of the *Enlightenment*, as are the three representatives of the main religious persuasions: a protestant pastor, Rabaut Saint-Etienne, a leader of a once-banned (1572–98, 1685–1786) religion in France; a **liberal** catholic, **abbé** Henri Baptiste Grégoire, a *curé* from Lunéville, near Nancy, quick to join the National Assembly; and a more conservative catholic,

Dom Gerle, a Dominican monk from the cathedral city of Chartres. Together they symbolise the destruction of old divisions and feuds and a united approach to the future. David wanted to show people of all kinds and all **estates** agreeing to put aside their differences for the public good. He emphasised unity. Placing the figures at the front of the painting in a semi-circle draws the viewer into the actions of the people gathering and embracing. The viewer is invited to join the patriotic fervour of the collective.



Examine the **Abbé** Grégoire's unfinished portrait (now in La Musée des Beaux-Arts in Besançon) by David, or else by a pupil of David, [here](#). There is also an etching of the **Abbé** Grégoire from circa 1790-92 at this [website](#).

David's politics evolved, like so many people in France. So hindsight is involved here: the sketches for a future famous painting we are analysing here were hardly known in 1789-91. David became a radical republican revolutionary in 1793-94, like so many others, evolving views to which he added atheist convictions. Back in 1789, no one would have admitted to such beliefs. But when he sketching these drawings, David was becoming increasingly drawn to radical politics. For this reason, perhaps, he chose to depict a rising deputy from Arras, Maximilian Robespierre—an emerging leader in the **Jacobin Club** which commissioned the painting, whose ardour had begun to impress in the early events of the Revolution. Robespierre appears with his two arms crossing his chest, wishing he had two hearts, not one, to beat for Liberty.



There is another oil portrait of Robespierre, by Pierre Roch Vigneron after a 1790 pastel by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (mis-dated in Wiki), in the Versailles museum. View the portrait [here](#).

Onlookers can be seen in the public gallery, participating then in much the same way as football supporters in another era. And recording it all is the journalist, Barère de Vieuzac, one of many individuals who would take advantage of the new freedoms to create a revolution of their own in the field of journalism.



*Revolution.* What was revolutionary about the meeting and naming of the National Assembly? What aspects of the **Old Regime** did they reject?



There is a diagram naming all key figures in the painting in J.M. Thompson, *The French Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959) opposite the title page, and another in simple French [here](#). If you click on the image in this site, a window will open. Click on the number and around the picture, and the name of the numbered people will appear. Historian Simon Schama analyses the painting (or the studies for it) in his 2006 BBC documentary series *The Power of Art*, in Episode 4 on David.



*Representation.* Whom did the National Assembly claim to represent?



*Oaths.* The French revolutionaries took oaths and oath-taking very seriously. How might oaths have related to their ideas of serving the nation? Why did they feel that they needed to take an oath at that point?



*Oaths.* Oaths might seem to us to belong more to the world of honour and status that was the **Old Regime**. We might even think that our modern world of rights and liberty doesn't need oaths. Suggest times and places where oaths are still made today. Review your discussion about honour and freedom occasioned by Voltaire's witty story about the cook and the Cardinal. Suggest how the oaths promoted by the French revolutionaries might reflect anxieties they had about freedom and license, liberty and the public good. Do you share their worries? Why are oaths still needed?



*Aims.* What were the aims of the members of the National Assembly, as stated in their declaration of 17 June, and in their oath of 20 June 1789?



*Monsieur le Président.* How has David emphasised **Bailly**, the central figure in *The Oath of the Tennis Court*? Would he have had his back to the assembly? What problems would painters like David suddenly have faced in showing the public of France, and of Europe, elected leaders who were not kings?



*Ideals.* What ideals and hopes for the new nation did they have?



*Allegory.* What is allegory? How could 'light' and 'wind' be allegorical?



*Old Regime and New Regime.* Identify the similarities and differences between the two David paintings we have studied. How do they increase our understanding of the French Revolution, and the aims of the Revolutionaries?



*Propaganda.* David's painting is not like a photograph that might appear in the newspaper the day after it was taken. He was making a careful and public statement about the Revolution and its values. Compare it to other representations of the same event. What is different? How can we tell if the painting is accurate, from this distance in time?



What image of 'the nation' appears here? Who is not in the picture of the Tennis Court Oath? Consider the population of France and its colonies.

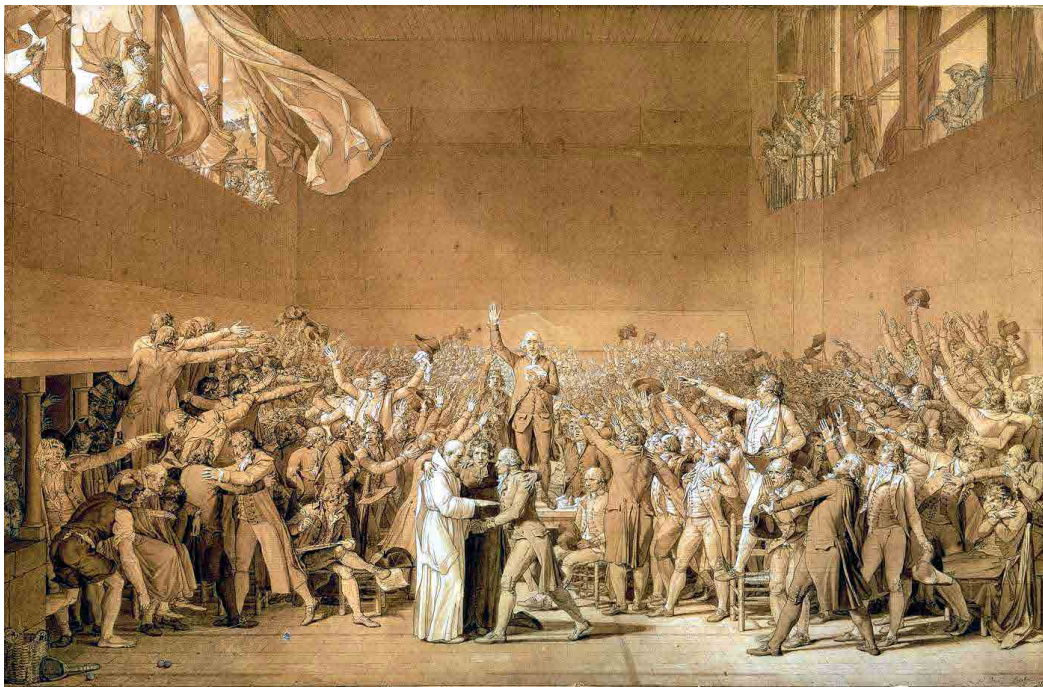
Through May and into June 1789, Louis XVI had not made his views known. Vacillating at the best of times, he had been in mourning from early in June when his eldest son died, aged only seven. This paralysis of the sovereign power, however sympathetic one must feel about the despair of a father over the loss of his son, was in itself a condemnation of power being in the

hands of a single individual: or perhaps even worse in this case, in the hands of advisers who had their own selfish goals to pursue and privileges to protect.



*Jacques-Louis David and The Tennis Court Oath.* In 1790, Jacques Louis David was commissioned by the **Jacobin Club** of Paris to glorify this event of 20 June 1789, which took place at Versailles in the hall of a Royal Tennis court, the **Jeu de Paume**.

The Oath of the Tennis Court was a departure for David. He usually painted small groups of figures, often of ancient history subjects. Not only was the event depicted real and contemporary, David was also obliged to portray a hundred patriotic enthusiasts gesturing. He also had to depict them all heroically. A sense of the importance and pride of the individuals was important; lots of revolutionaries had been there—or at least they said they were! Their cherishing of that moment had prompted David's commission; they would search David's tableau for themselves.



Jacques-Louis David *Le Serment du Jeu de paume* 1791

*The Oath of the Tennis Court* now hangs at [Versailles](#) (Musée National du Chateau de Versailles) and the work may be seen at this [website](#).

David's representation of The Oath of the Tennis Court was planned as an enormous (seven by ten metres) canvas, with life-sized figures. It was never completed, and exists now only as three separate studies.<sup>64</sup> However, the monumental significance David tried to give this event can be seen in the composition. The top half of the painting is a vast space, the vacuum in which the charged

64. A key reason the painting remained incomplete was that, as the revolution wore on, many of the figures depicted by David came to be seen by the Jacobins as traitors.

events taking place below are set, representing the revolutionaries' soaring hopes. Through the high windows on 20 June 1789, an allegorical storm blows winds of change through the draperies; we glimpse a bolt of lightning striking Versailles. The bolt also points to the outstretched arm and head of Monsieur le Président of the National Assembly, the man of science, **Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736–93)**, soon to be Mayor of Paris, later to be executed, but here elevated on a table receiving the oath of the men surrounding him.<sup>65</sup> The gathered deputies pledge their unity and fraternity as in David's Horatii. A sea of outstretched arms points to **Bailly**, signalling support for the oath to create a National Assembly and a new France. **Bailly** the scientist is bathed in the allegorical light of the **Enlightenment**, as are the three members of the clergy embracing in front of him. These figures are significant: Dom Gerle is a monk; **abbé** Grégoire is a priest, and Rabaut Saint-Etienne is a Protestant pastor.<sup>66</sup> They symbolise the imminent destruction of old divisions and feuds (particularly between Catholics and Protestants) that had dominated French history for 200 years. A united 'national' approach to the future seems at hand. Like Rousseau, David wanted to show people of all kinds and all **estates** agreeing to put aside their differences for the public good. The nation must come from heartfelt belief in the ideals of liberty, unity, brotherhood and the common good.



*Allegory.* What is allegory? How could 'light' and 'wind' be allegorical? How does David show new ideas like: the public good, the nation? Why might **Bailly** have his back to the assembly?



*Dissent. Community.* What do you make of the man with the arms folded in the bottom left-hand corner of the etching? And how do interpret the behaviour of the people round about him?

The king finally made his first public appearance three days after the Tennis Court Oath, on 23 June, to make his anxiously awaited response to the revolutionary acts of the deputies. His address to the assembled deputies now calling themselves a National Assembly, made some concessions to the former **Third Estate**, concessions which a year or so earlier might have been received as acts of principled statesmanship, but by insisting that sovereign power remain entirely in his hands he disappointed the best hopes of the accidental revolutionaries. He attempted to ignore the events of the previous week, and he made an implicit threat to cower the revolutionaries by calling in troops. These gestures were met with defiance. The deputies refused to retire to their former meeting place, the *comte* de Mirabeau and the **abbé** Siéyès distinguishing themselves by declaring that on that day the deputies were what they had been the day before, vowing that they would not be moved except at the point of bayonets.

65. An excellent diagram naming all the key figures in the painting is in J.M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), beside the title page.

66. Protestantism was banned in France between 1682 and 1786. Particularly during the last years of Louis XIV, king until 1714, many Protestants were arrested, and many more fled to places like Britain and the Netherlands.

This is what the king said to the National Assembly on 23 June 1789:

*Gentlemen, I thought I had done everything in my power for the welfare of my people when I resolved to assemble you, when I surmounted all the difficulties attendant upon your convocation, when I anticipated, so to speak, the will of the nation by manifesting in advance my wishes for its happiness.*

*It appeared that you had only to finish my work; and the nation impatiently awaited the moment when, through the concurrence of the beneficent views of its sovereign and the enlightened zeal of its representatives, it could enjoy the prosperity that such a union was to procure for it.*

*The Estates General has been in session nearly two months, and it has not yet been able to agree upon the preliminaries of its operations...I owe it to the general welfare of my kingdom and to myself to terminate these calamitous divisions. It is for that purpose, Gentlemen, that I reassemble you about me; it is as the common father of all my subjects, as the defender of the laws of my kingdom, I come to recount to you the true spirit thereof, and to repress the attacks which have been made upon them.*

Louis XVI then turned to address the former privileged **estates**. But he still recognised them as separate—and privileged—orders, showing how out of touch he was with the events of the previous weeks:

*But, Gentlemen, after having clearly established the respective rights of the several orders, I expect from the zeal of the first two orders for the Patrie, I expect from their devotion to my person, I expect from their knowledge of the pressing ills of the State, that in matters concerning the general welfare they will be the first to propose a union of opinions and sentiments, which I regard as necessary in the present crisis, and which is to effect the salvation of the State.<sup>67</sup>*

Then after the elapse of another four days, faced by the determination of the revolutionaries not to go back on their pledge, the king appeared to give in. On 27 June 1789, he told the members of the **First** and **Second Estates** to join the National Assembly. It appeared as though a massive revolution had taken place without a drop of blood being spilt. The king now seemed to be the father of the nation.

67. 'The King's Opening Speech,' 23 June 1789, in John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951). 89–90.



*Tradition.* Louis XVI spoke of his role as a ‘common father’ and as the ‘defender of the laws of my kingdom’. What did he mean? Were these values still fundamental features of the **Old Regime**?



*Mine.* How might the revolutionaries have responded to Louis XVI’s idea of the nation as ‘my kingdom’?



*‘I owe it to the general welfare of the kingdom and to myself.’* Where the revolutionaries had written, spoken and acted in their declaration of 17 June and their oath of 20 June according to principles linking the ‘general will’, the common good and the ‘common work’ of reform to ideas of rights and representation, how did Louis XVI put across the idea that he too was acting for the good of all? What does his use of words and phrases like ‘concurrence’, ‘union’ and ‘beneficence’ suggest about his thinking?



*Constitutional monarchy.* Does Louis XVI’s way of speaking and acting offer any grounds for hoping that a constitutional compromise might have been reached between the National Assembly and the Crown?

## Arthur Young



We have met Arthur Young (1741–1820) before—he was the landed English gentleman who travelled extensively in France reporting on what he believed to be the best agricultural practices. Enlightened landlords, Arthur Young believed, could play a leading role in improving agriculture and therefore living standards, whether on their own lands or on the lands of their tenants. He returned to France again in the summer of 1787, the autumn of 1788, and in the summer of 1789. Arriving on 2 June 1789, he was excited by the recent convocation (5 May 1789) of an Estates General (*États généraux*) in France. He anticipated that ‘in all probability, that assembly will be the epoch of a new constitution, which will have new effects’ not only helping to improve France’s system of government but also her agriculture.

Young’s diary is a great source for the early history of the French Revolution. Young hoped that the Estates General in France would usher in a system of government like Britain’s, with a monarch working in tandem with a sovereign Parliament. He preferred a Parliament of two chambers elected by gentlemen-only voters, to give more weight, as he saw it, to the traditional forces of order and progress in his world: landed gentry. As the political crisis in France

deepened, however, Young became alarmed at what he thought of as too much wild political talk. These entries from his journal are from June 1789:

JUNE 8, 1789

*...Paris is at present in such a ferment about the States-General, now holding at Versailles, that conversation is absolutely absorbed by them. Not a word of anything else talked of. Everything is considered, and justly so, as important in such a crisis of the fate of four-and-twenty millions of people. It is now a serious contention whether the representatives [of the **Third Estate**] are to be called the Commons<sup>68</sup> or Tiers État; they call themselves steadily the former,<sup>69</sup> while the Court [i.e., the King, his courtiers and ministers] and the great lords reject the term with a species of apprehension, as if it involved a meaning not easily to be fathomed. But this point is of little consequence, compared with another, that has kept the States for some time in inactivity; the verification of their powers separately or in common. The nobility and the clergy demand the former, but the Commons steadily refuse it. The reason why a circumstance, apparently of no great consequence, is thus tenaciously regarded is, that it may decide their sitting for the future in separate houses or in one. Those who are warm for the interest of the people declare that it will be impossible to reform some of the grossest abuses in the State, if the nobility, by sitting in a separate chamber, shall have a negative on the wishes of the people, and that to give such a veto to the clergy would be still more preposterous; if therefore, by the verification of their powers in one chamber [ie, a National Assembly], they shall once come together, the popular party hope that there will remain no power afterwards to separate. The nobility and clergy foresee the same result, and will not therefore agree to it.*

*In this dilemma it is curious to remark the feelings of the moment. It is not my business to write memoirs of what passes, but I am intent to catch, as well as I can, the opinions of the day most prevalent. While I remain at Paris, I shall see people of all descriptions, from the coffee-house politicians to the leaders in the States; and the chief object of such rapid notes as I throw on paper will be to catch the ideas of the moment; to compare them afterwards with the actual events that shall happen will afford amusement at least. The most prominent feature that appears at present is, that an idea of common interest and common danger does not seem to unite those, who, if not united, may find themselves too weak to oppose the common danger that must arise from the people being sensible of a strength the result of their weakness.*

68. The Englishman Young reaches for English equivalents: the House of Commons in the British Parliament. But the analogy fails because there were only 120 or so noble families in England, all members of the House of Lords; there were approximately 120,000 noble families in France. Until the 1832–67, voters in elections for Britain's House of Commons had to own substantial landed properties, especially in the countryside.

69. On the motion of abbé Siéyès, the deputies of the Third Estate had already declared their intention on 17 June to turn their meetings of the Third Estate into sessions of a National Assembly. When the representatives of the Third Estate were then shut out of the meeting room at the palace of Versailles, they resolved on 20 June to assemble at an adjacent Tennis Court, vowing never to be dispersed until a single-chambered National Assembly was formed. Soon after, the leaders of the Third Estate tried to drum up support from like- and liberal-minded nobles and clergy, hitherto assembling in the Second and Third Estates, and from the people of Paris, ardently following events at Versailles, 30 km away.

*The king, court, nobility, clergy, army, and [Parlements] are nearly in the same situation. All these consider, with equal dread, the ideas of liberty now afloat; except the first, who, for reasons obvious to those who know his character, troubles himself little, even with circumstances that concern his power the most intimately. Among the rest, the feeling of danger is common, and they would unite, were there a head to render it easy, in order to do without the States at all. That the Commons themselves look for some such hostile union as more than probable appears from an idea which gains ground, that they will find it necessary, should the other two orders continue to unite with them in one chamber, to declare themselves boldly the representatives of the kingdom at large, calling on the nobility and clergy to take their places; and to enter upon deliberations of business without them, should they refuse it. All conversation at present is on this topic, but opinions are more divided than I should have expected. There seem to be many who hate the clergy so cordially, that rather than permit them to form a distinct chamber would venture on a new system, dangerous as it might prove.*

JUNE 9, 1789

*The business going forward at present in the pamphlet shops of Paris is incredible! I went to the Palais-Royal to see what new things were published, and to procure a catalogue of all. Every hour produces something new. Thirteen came out today, sixteen yesterday, and ninety-two last week<sup>70</sup>... [The] spirit of reading political tracts [newspapers and pamphlets], they say, spreads into the provinces, so that all the presses of France are equally employed. Nineteen-twentieths of these productions are in favour of liberty, and commonly [object to] the clergy and nobility. I have today bespoken many of this description... but inquiring for such as had appeared on the other side of the question, to my astonishment I find there are but two or three that have merit enough to be known. Is it not wonderful, that while the press teems with the most levelling and even seditious principles, that if put in execution would overturn the monarchy,<sup>71</sup> nothing in reply appears, and not the least step is taken by the Court to restrain this extreme licentiousness of publication? It is easy to conceive the spirit that must thus be raised among the people. But the coffee-houses [cafés] in the Palais-Royal present yet more singular and astonishing spectacles; they are not only crowded within, but other expectant crowds are at the doors and windows, listening à gorge déployée [open-mouthed] to certain orators, who from chairs or tables harangue each his little audience. The eagerness with which they are heard, and the thunder of applause they receive for every sentiment of more than common hardiness or violence against the present government, cannot easily be imagined. I am all amazement at the ministry permitting such nests and hotbeds of sedition and revolt, which disseminate amongst the people, every hour, principles that by and by*

70. These are defections to the National Assembly from the First and Second Estates.

71. Young exaggerates. No one argued for a Republic in 1789. Young envisages the end of the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI, but still hopes that Louis XVI as a constitutional monarch will not be a mere figurehead, but will retain real constitutional powers of the government.

*must be opposed with vigour, and therefore it seems little short of madness to allow the propagation at present.*

JUNE 10, 1789

*Everything conspires to render the present period in France critical; the want of bread is terrible; accounts arrive every moment from the provinces of riots and disturbances, and calling in the military, to preserve the peace of the markets. The prices reported are the same as I found at Abbeville and Amiens; 5 sous (2½d) a pound for white bread, and 3½ sous to 4 sous for the common sort, eaten by the poor; these rates are beyond their faculties, and occasion great misery...*

JUNE 11, 1789

*I have been in much company [chatting] all day, and cannot but remark, that there seem to be no settled ideas of the best means of forming a new constitution. Yesterday the **abbé** Siéyès made a motion in the House of Commons [i.e., the **Third Estate**] to declare boldly to the privileged orders, that if they will not join the Commons, the latter will proceed in the national business without them; and the house decreed it, with a small amendment. This causes much conversation on what will be the consequence of such a proceeding; and on the contrary, on what may flow from the nobility and clergy continuing steadily to refuse to join the Commons [National Assembly], and should they so proceed, to protest against all they decree, and appeal to the King to dissolve the [Estates-General], and recall them in such a form as may be practicable for business. In these most interesting discussions, I find a general ignorance of the [British?] principles of government; a strange and unaccountable appeal, on one side, to ideal and visionary rights of nature; and, on the other, no settled plan that shall give security to the people for being in future in a much better situation than hitherto; a security absolutely necessary. But the nobility, with the principles of great lords that I converse with, are most disgustingly tenacious of all old rights, however hard they may bear on the people; they will not hear of giving way in the least to the spirit of liberty, beyond the point of paying equal land taxes, which they hold to be all that can with reason be demanded. The popular party, on the other hand, seem to consider all liberty as depending on the privileged classes being lost, and outvoted in the order of the Commons, at least for making the new constitution; and when I urge the great probability, that should they once unite, there will remain no power of ever separating them; and that in such case, they will have a very questionable constitution, perhaps a very bad one; I am always told, that the first object must be for the people to get the power of doing good; and that it is no argument against such a conduct to urge that an ill use may be made of it. But among such men, the common idea is, that anything tending towards a separate order, like our House of Lords, is absolutely inconsistent with liberty; all which seems perfectly wild and unfounded.*

JUNE 13, 1789

... All this day I hear nothing but anxiety of expectation for what the crisis in the States will produce. The embarrassment of the moment is extreme. Everyone agrees that there is no ministry.<sup>72</sup> The Queen [Marie-Antoinette] is closely connecting herself with the party of the princes, with the Count d'Artois<sup>73</sup> at their head; who are all so adverse to Mons. Necker that everything is in confusion; but the King, who is personally the [most] honest man in the world, has but one wish, which is to do right; yet, being without those decisive parts that enable a man to foresee difficulties and to avoid them, finds himself in a moment of such extreme perplexity [puzzlement], that he knows not what council to take refuge in.

JUNE 21, 1789

... The present moment is, of all others, perhaps that which is most pregnant with the future destiny of France. The step the Commons [**Third Estate**] have taken of declaring themselves the National Assembly, independent of the other orders; and of the King himself, precluding a dissolution [i.e., by not closing the Estates General by force], is in fact an assumption of all the authority in the kingdom. They have at one stroke converted themselves into the Long Parliament of Charles I.<sup>74</sup> It needs not the assistance of much penetration to see that if such a pretension and declaration are not done away, king, lords, and clergy are deprived of their shares in the legislature of France. So bold, and apparently desperate a step, full in the teeth of every other interest in the realm, equally destructive to the royal authority, by [**Parlements**] and the army, can never be allowed. If it is not opposed, all other powers will lie in ruins around that of the Commons. With what anxious expectation must one therefore wait to see if the Crown will exert itself firmly on the occasion, with such an attention to an improved system of liberty, as is absolutely necessary to the moment.<sup>75</sup>

We have seen how Young had been critical at first of the wild revolutionary sentiments that he met everywhere he went in Paris. He feared the deputies of the **Third Estate** were too extreme in their demands, but he greeted with joy the king's instructions to the deputies from the former privileged orders to join the new National Assembly. He was amazed that such far-reaching changes had been accomplished in such a peaceful manner:

JUNE 27, 1789.

*The whole business now seems over, and the revolution complete. The King has been*

72. Young means that the Ministers of Louis XVI are offering no leadership or policy direction during the political crisis. The reasons had to do with Louis XVI's uncertainty, and divisions and jealousies among them.

73. This is Louis XVI's youngest brother, the comte d'Artois, future Charles X (1827–30). He was the most opposed to any kind of reform, and emigrated soon after. Louis XVI's brothers, the 'Party of the Princes', mostly opposed any reform.

74. Young refers to the revolutionary period in England from 1640 to 1649 when the English Parliament, recalled after a period of absolute monarchy (1627–40), defied King Charles I and organised an army that defeated (1642–45, 1648), arrested (1647) and executed (1649) him.

75. Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788 & 1789*, (ed.) Constantia Maxwell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 132–139 passim, 149–150. The full text can also be found [online](#).

*frightened by the mobs into overturning his own act of the séance royale [June 23], by writing to the presidents of the orders of the nobility and clergy, requiring them to join the [National Assembly], full in the teeth of what he had ordained before. It was represented to him, that the want of bread was so great in every part of the kingdom, that there was no extremity to which the people might not be driven; that they were nearly starving, and consequently ready to listen to any suggestions, and ... that Paris and Versailles would inevitably be burnt; and in a word, that all sorts of misery and confusion would follow his adherence to the system announced in the séance royale. His apprehensions got the better of the party, who had for some days guided him; and he was thus induced to take this step, which is of such importance... The joy this step occasioned was infinite; the Assembly, uniting with the people, all hurried to the chateau [of Versailles]. Vive le Roi might have been heard at **Marly**; the King and Queen appeared in the balcony, and were received with the loudest shouts of applause; the leaders, who governed these motions, knew the value of the concession much better than those who made it.<sup>76</sup>*



**Commons.** In assessing the political position of the king, the courtiers, the nobility, clergy, army, and **Parlements** in the political crisis of June 1789, Young concluded, in the entry for 8 June: ‘an idea of common interest and common danger does not seem to unite those, who, if not united, may find themselves too weak to oppose the common danger that must arise from the people being sensible of a strength the result of *their* weakness.’ What did he mean?



**Public Opinion.** Consider Young’s entry for 9 June: How is public opinion being formed in Paris at this time? Why is it so influential? What surprises Young about the amount of public debate?



**Conflict.** Consider his entry for 8 June: Why are the privileged orders and the **Third Estate** in conflict over ‘the verification of their powers’? Was it ‘a circumstance ... of no great consequence’?



**Common Danger.** What prompted Young to consider as ‘very questionable’ (entry for 11 June) any Constitution likely to be framed by a triumphant **Third Estate** which might manage to turn itself into a National Assembly?

76. Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788 & 1789*, (ed.) Constantia Maxwell, (Cambridge University Press, 1950), 159–160.



**Common Interest.** What is the ‘common interest’? What did Young consider was the true duty of people of birth and privilege in France? What views were they generally putting to him? What is it that Young thinks élites in France have forgotten? Recall Young’s standpoint; he is an English gentleman; the British government has been run, since 1649 and 1688, by a Parliament dominated by landed gentlemen.



**Young and Siéyès.** In his entry for 11 June, Young referred, disapprovingly, to people promoting ‘ideal and visionary rights of nature’ in France. Is Young’s view a fair summary of the views of **abbé** Siéyès?



**Contrasts.** In Young’s entry for 11 June, what are the ‘great lords’ at most prepared to give up in the debate that is to happen? Why is he concerned for the people’s ‘security’?



**Contexts.** In Young’s entry for 10 June, what gave added urgency to an apparently abstract debate over politics?



**Feelings.** Young thought that political discussion in France, the ‘feelings of the moment’, were ‘tenaciously regarded’ (entry for 8 June). Did he endorse this? Identify words or phrases from the passages that show the emotions of the people with whom Young spoke.



**Outcomes.** Are the reasons suggested by Young (entry for 27 June) for Louis XVI’s change of heart about a National Assembly convincing?

In a rare document that gives us some idea of what ordinary French people were thinking in the countryside at this time, Arthur Young approached what he took to be an ‘old’ woman, but who was in fact a young peasant woman worn down by her daily labour. She was full of hope that her life would get better.

*JULY 12, 1789.*

*Walking up a long hill, to ease my mare, I was joined by a poor woman, who complained of the times, and that it was a sad country. Demanding her reasons, she said her husband had but a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet they*



Unknown artist A faut esperer q'eu.s jeu la finira bentot : l'auteur en campagne 1789

had a franchar (42 lb.) of wheat, and three chickens, to pay as a quit-rent to one seigneur; and four franchar of oats, one chicken and 1 sou to pay to another, besides very heavy tailles and other taxes. She had seven children, and the cow's milk helped to make the soup....[I]t was said, at present, that something was to be done by some great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, because the tailles and **feudal** dues are crushing us. This woman, at no great distance, might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, and her face so furrowed and hardened by labour; but she said she was only twenty-eight. An Englishman who has not travelled cannot imagine

the figure made by infinitely the greater part of the countrywomen in France; it speaks, at the first sight, hard and severe labour. I am inclined to think, that they work harder than the men, and this, united with the more miserable labour of bringing a new race of slaves into the world, destroys absolutely all symmetry of person and every feminine appearance. To what are we to attribute this difference in the manners of the lower people in the two kingdoms? To GOVERNMENT.<sup>77</sup>



**Hope.** What, precisely, did the young-old peasant woman cite as the source of her hope? Did Arthur Young share her sense of hope?



**Representation.** Do you think that the idea of elections and representation meant anything to her? (They seemed to mean something to Arthur Young, who mentioned them when referring to the '[British] GOVERNMENT'.)



**Her king.** Can you conclude anything from the fact that the peasant woman did not seem to place her hopes and trust in her king?

77. Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788 & 1789*, ed. Constantia Maxwell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950). 173.



Philip Mazzei was equally impressed. On 29 June 1789 he wrote to his employer, the king of Poland:

*After taking so many wrong steps dictated by ignorance, malice, and intrigue, Saturday morning the King took a very prudent one worthy of his excellent heart... At half-past four in the afternoon the deputies were completely re-united; it is difficult to describe the jubilation this brought about, and Their Majesties shared in it to the utmost. Called by the universal voice of a people that adores him and seemed to need only the sight of its ruler to reach the height of happiness, that evening the King appeared on the balcony; and from the look on every face it was evident that the repeated cries of Long Live the King came from the heart. That multitude was... a mixture of citizens of all stations and professions. There were also women mixed in with men. The Queen was led to the balcony by the King who held her by the hand; her arrival redoubled the cheers; Long live the King, Long Live the Queen were almost the only shouts heard; the royal couple embraced publicly and tears of tenderness and joy streamed from their eyes and from those of the entire crowd as a token of what the tongue cannot put into words.<sup>78</sup>*

The optimism of people like **Young** and **Mazzei** late in June 1789 proved to be ill-founded. The pattern for future problems was set by the double dealing of the king, who could not accept any serious diminution in his power. Given the nature of his education and upbringing, the misgivings of the king are perfectly understandable, but France was changing. In a bankrupt France with a large, highly-educated middle class, and in a France with distinguished professionals and aristocrats brought up on the ideas of the **Enlightenment**, the affairs of the French nation could no longer be subject to the whims of an individual and his (often misguided) advisers.

## Alarmed and Alert

Under the pretext of restoring law and order in Paris, Louis XVI called in more reliable troops from the provinces. The people of Paris were already suffering from the high price of bread and had been eager observers of the uncertain and unprecedented political events unfolding at Versailles. The radical views of most Parisians were in turn reflected in the attitude of the king's Parisian garrison troops who had suffered from the same high prices for bread and the same poor wages. Parisians from all walks of life were by and large firm in support of the National Assembly. And almost everyone shared the same fear. The real reason for the king calling in his provincial troops seemed clear: they were intended to suppress the Revolution itself.

Already on 30 June, a crowd invaded the Abbaye prison to release members of the French Guard held there for insubordination.

78. Philip Mazzei to the King of Poland, 29 June, 1789 in Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy, Cassa Di Risparmio e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 161.



A contemporary etching of this event by Jean François Janinet is held in the [Harvard Art Museum](#).

Protest riots in Paris followed this order, and French garrison soldiers in Paris refused to disperse the rioters. Shortly after this incident, Louis XVI decided to bring in foreign troops to replace some of the French. In the National Assembly, still in session at Versailles, alarms were raised as fear of ‘counter-revolution’ mounted. This is a report from a newspaper, *Le Journal de Paris*, 11 July 1789:

*Alarmed and Alert*

*Estates-General, Thursday 9 July 1789*

*The reading of the address to the king, decreed yesterday, and which was to have been printed by the Drafting Committee, was expected; but it was no longer awaited with anxiety. The President of the National Assembly [Bailly], summoned yesterday morning by His Majesty, had the honour of seeing him in the evening. His Majesty told him that he had had a look at the decree about to be presented by the Assembly, and that he wanted to assure the president in advance; that the troops who had been drawn up around the capital had no other object than to hold in check the people who might give themselves up to outbreaks of violence and that immediately he was informed that the people had returned to peace and order, then the troops would be withdrawn.*

*These promises and assurances by the king calmed all our fears. The president then announced that the Central Bureau [legislative sub-committee] had a report to make. This report also had a general success, most gratifying in its acceptance; it was approved equally by the three Orders. What was mainly appreciated was its preamble, whose tenor was such as to encourage a spirit of moderation, peace and love in the great work of the constitution.*

*Here is the order in which the National Assembly will deal with the matters before it.*

1. *Declaration of the Rights of Man*
2. *Principles of the Monarchy*
3. *Rights of the Nation*
4. *Rights of the King*

5. *Rights of the Citizen*
6. *Organisation and rights of the National Assembly*
7. *Procedures required for the establishment of Laws*
8. *Organisation and functions of the Provincial Assemblies*
9. *Obligations and limits of the judiciary*
10. *Functions and duties of the military power.*

*All the Bureaux assembled after dinner to confer on this proposed order of work.*

The optimism of the deputies was in part to cover their very real anxiety about the intentions of the king. Just before Louis XVI's dismissal of Necker (July 11) that sparked off the riots in Paris leading to the fall of the Bastille (July 14), the leaders of the National Assembly in Versailles expressed their concerns in an open letter (July 10), sent to the king. The letter appeared in *Le Journal de Paris*, 12 July 1789:

*Estates-General, Friday 10 July 1789*

*Sire*

*You have invited the National Assembly to give you witness of its confidence: this was to anticipate the dearest of its wishes.*

*We come to place before Your Majesty our most pressing fears. If we were their object, if we were so weak as to be afraid for ourselves, your goodness would still serve to reassure us, and even whilst blaming us for having doubted your intentions you would still want to know what gave rise to our doubts; you would remove their cause: you would not leave the least doubt as to the position of the National Assembly.*

*But Sire, we in no way implore your protection; that would be to doubt your sense of justice: we have harboured fears; and, we dare say it, they stem from the purest patriotism, and concern for the interest of our electors, for public peace, and for the happiness of our beloved monarch, who, by making smooth the road to good fortune, well deserves to walk there himself unhindered.*

*Do as your heart commands, Sire, in this lies the true salvation of the French people. At this time when troops are approaching from all directions, when camps are being set up all around us, when the capital is besieged, we ask ourselves in amazement: does the king distrust the loyalty of his people? Had he doubted our loyalty ought he*

*not to have told us of this fatherly distress? What does this display of force mean? Where are the enemies of the state and of the king, who must be crushed? Where are the rebels, the seigneurs who must be mastered? As of one voice the reply is heard in the capital and throughout the breadth of the kingdom: 'We cherish our king, we bless heaven for the gift that he has given us, in his love.'*

The petition assures the king that the people in no way blame him for their ills, that his word is all that is necessary to avoid bloodshed. It continues:

*The danger, Sire, is pressing, it is universal and beyond all the calculations of man's prudence.*

*The danger is for the people of the provinces. Once alarmed for our liberty we know of no means of holding them back. Distance in itself enlarges things, exaggerates everything, doubles the unease, embitters, and finally envenoms them.*

*The danger is for the capital. How will the people in the depths of want, and tormented as they are by the most cruel anguish, look on the need to contend with a crowd of menacing soldiers for what remains of its subsistence? The presence of the troops will inflame them, cause them to riot, and produce universal unrest, and the first act of violence, delivered under pretext of police action, will set in motion a terrible succession of misfortunes.*

*The danger is for the troops. French soldiers, brought into the centre of discussions and joining in the passions and in the interests of the people, might forget that they are enlisted as soldiers, to remember only that nature made them men.*

*The danger, Sire, menaces the work which we have made our first duty.*

*The danger, Sire, is even more terrible; you can judge its extent by the fears which bring us before you. Great revolutions have been sparked off by less trivial causes than these; more than one enterprise fatal to nations has been ushered into the world in a manner less sinister and less formidable...*



**Order of Business.** Consider the order of business projected for the National Assembly by its leaders and announced in their address to the king, dated 9 July, and reported in the newspaper on 11 July. The Assembly was going to consider rights and principles first, and then turn to practical measures affecting actual laws, administrative arrangements, law cases and military forces. How would the king have likely reacted to this?



*The **Enlightenment**.* How have the ideas of the **Enlightenment** influenced this order of business?



*Principles and Practice.* In your view, is the course of action proposed by the leaders of the National Assembly—principles first; practice to follow— wise for people exercising authority in a time of great political instability? What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this way of doing things?



*Disingenuous.* What does it mean when a person says that another is ‘disingenuous’? Is the National Assembly’s open letter to the king, dated 10 July, and reported in the newspaper on 12 July, an example of disingenuousness? Suggest a likely reaction of the king.

## The Fall of the Bastille

No event symbolises the Revolution more than the taking of the Bastille, an old royal fortress in Paris. Built by Charles V in 1370 as the eastern defensive fort in his walls of Paris, the Bastille came to symbolise what was called the despotism and *feudalism* of the **Old Regime**. The storming, and dismantling, of the Bastille on, and immediately after, 14 July 1789 has been mocked as a useless adventure; it only released seven or so harmless inmates, and the fort was due to be dismantled as it was as obsolete as the old walls of Paris. But these are partial truths. The Bastille was a real symbol of the **Old Regime**, and it was also a fortress stocked with gunpowder and arms. Its guns menaced the poverty-stricken, over-crowded St-Antoine quarter that surrounded it.

The fall of the Bastille came after a few days of rioting that began with suspicions about the intentions of the king. The Parisian rioters were fired up by the pamphlets that were appearing in profusion. The trigger was the announcement, late on 11 July, that the king had dismissed his leading minister, the reform-minded Swiss Protestant banker, **Jacques Necker** (1732–1804), the author of the *Compte Rendu* of 1781. Necker had served as Comptroller-General of Finances before, between 1777 and 1781, only to be re-appointed in August 1788, replacing Archbishop Loménie de Brienne, at the height of the crisis with the **Parlements** over the need to summon the Estates-General. Many Parisians and many members of the National Assembly were convinced that Necker sympathised with the aspirations of the ‘people’, and he was popular with the middleclasses for having appeared (falsely) to finance French involvement in the American War of Independence without raising taxes. Thus, Necker’s sudden dismissal was seen as the first act of the counter-revolution.



**Joseph Duplessis** *Portrait of Jacques Necker* circa 1781



**Jean-Baptiste Lesueur** *Sans-culottes carrying a model of the Bastille*, 1793 Late 18th Century



**Pierre-Gabriel Berthault** *Motion faite au Palais royal, par Camille Desmoulins*. Le 12 Juillet 1789 1802

Calls went out for the defense of the Revolution and the revolutionaries, most notably by a young lawyer who would make his name as a brilliant journalist, Camille Desmoulins (1760–94). Overcoming a stutter that limited his work as a barrister, Desmoulins leapt on a table in the *Palais-Royal*, a private garden notorious as a meeting place for radical agitators. Desmoulins plucked a leaf from a tree, which he stuck in his hair, and called for Parisians to defend themselves: ‘Aux armes, citoyens!’, he cried. So began the two days

which began as an urgent and riotous search for arms. It then led to the closure of the city’s *theatres* and the sack of the toll gates in the city’s customs walls (12–13 July), before the rioters turned toward the seizure of arms in the *Invalides* and in the Bastille (morning of 14 July).

The legend of the fall of the Bastille as a great act of liberation was born in the radical *Révolutions de Paris*, the first and most successful of the profusion of newspapers that swept the political landscape with the unprecedented press freedom that came with the Revolution. Under the clarion call:

*‘The great only appear such because we are on our knees!  
Let us stand up!’*



**Jean-François Janinet** *Transport of the cannons of the Invalides which the people and the bourgeoisie had seized 1789-1791*



**Unknown artist** *Liberté de la Presse* no date

*Les Révolutions de Paris* became the longest lasting and most consistent defender of the 'people', first under its lead writer, the young and tragically short-lived Elysée Loustallot (1762–90), but always under its owner, Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830) who enjoyed a long career as a publisher in the Revolution and beyond.



Prudhomme can be seen holding a copy of *Révolutions de Paris* at the feet of the Nation (figured as a woman holding the words 'The Nation The Law The King') in [Berthet's 1791 print](#) titled 'The Sacred Fire of Patriotism Drives them All'. Scanned copies of the *Revolutions de Paris* can be accessed on the [BNF website](#).

Loustallot's description of the fall of the Bastille should be read as it appeared to a participant, rather than as an objective appraisal.

As soon as the city learnt of Monsieur Necker's departure, there was general consternation; the people, in despair and seeking an end to its ills, set fire to several toll gates and dispersed in all directions, their aims uncertain, while the citizens, in gloomy silence, discussed the events among themselves and could not hide their tears. At five o'clock, on Sunday 12 July, some citizens, assembled at the **Palais Royal**, despatched orders to close all the **theatres**; this was done without question. This mark of respect, given to so great a man, made known in no uncertain fashion the extent of the public grief.

*Monday 13 July*

*The gun shots that were heard during the night of Sunday to Monday and which were mentioned in yesterday's news, had been fired by the soldiers of the fatherland; this is the title taken by the French Guards when presenting themselves at the camp*

*of the regiments of Royal-Allemand and of Chateaufieux; but these refused to fight and the soldiers promised to lay down their arms. The cruel prince Lambesc threatened them with hanging; they rose up against him, and this detested person found himself forced to leave for Versailles the next day.*

*The National Assembly sent a deputation to the king, to set before him the state of the capital. The king replied that he intended to carry on with his plans as advised by his Council... In the evening the capital was quiet; **bourgeois** of the various districts, helped by some soldiers of the fatherland, were in arms and had orders to disarm all unauthorised persons, which they did with the strictest regularity. We forgot to say that the majority of the national troops and even some of the foreign ones seemed to be on our side; and that at any moment we expected help from the provinces.*

*Tuesday 14 July*

*The night of Monday to Tuesday was extremely quiet, apart from the arrest by citizen militia of some 34 unauthorised persons... But a victory of outstanding significance, and one which will perhaps astonish our descendants, was the taking of the Bastille, in four hours or so. First, the people tried to enter the fortress by the rue St-Antoine, this fortress, which no one has ever penetrated against the wishes of this frightful despotism and where the monster still resided. The treacherous governor put out a flag of peace. So a confident advance was made; a detachment of French Guards, with perhaps 5,000 to 6,000 armed **bourgeois**, penetrated the Bastille's outer courtyards, but as soon as some 6,000 persons had passed over the first drawbridge, the bridge was raised and artillery fire mowed down several French Guards and some soldiers; the cannon fired on the town, and the people took fright; a large number of individuals were killed or wounded.*

*The revolutionaries soon rallied and counter-attacked, capturing one officer and releasing him once they knew he was not the Governor. A siege ensued around the inner fortress. The revolutionaries used every vantage point high and low to fire on the small numbers of garrison troops to prevent them from taking defensive measures. A cannon was brought up, breaching the second drawbridge. The fort was overwhelmed and the Governor, the marquis de Launay, was captured. Loustallot adds, 'They treat him shamelessly; he is dragged through the crowd' and before he reached the square, 'De Launay was struck a thousand blows, his head was cut off and hoisted on the end of a pike with blood streaming from all sides'.*



Charles Thévenin's *Bastille*. This is a Jacobin-era version of the fall of the Bastille. It was painted by Charles Thévenin in 1793, and is in the collection (P572) of the *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris. It shows the capture of the *marquis de Launay*, the Governor of the *Bastille*, who was hacked to death, shortly thereafter. Do you think Charles Thévenin (1764–1838) agreed with Elysee Loustallot's account that this was a 'triumph for justice and liberty'? Thévenin's painting is at [Musée Carnavalet](#) Compare Simon Schama's account of the same incident in *Citizens* (1989), ch. 10, s. 5, pp. 399–406.

Loustallot's report for *Les Révolutions de Paris* went on:

*Serene and blessed liberty, for the first time has at last been introduced into this abode of horrors, this frightful refuge of monstrous despotism and its crimes.... This glorious day must amaze our enemies, and finally usher in for us the triumph of justice and liberty. In the evening, there were celebrations.*<sup>79</sup>

News of the fall of the Bastille was received with amazement and mostly with joy, as soon as it reached provincial France and continental Europe, and travelled across the Channel to Britain, and then to the United States, weeks later. **Liberal** opinion rejoiced in the fall of 'despotism' and optimism greeted the attempts to found a new society on more **liberal** principles. For the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, in far off Königsberg in East Prussia, news of the fall of the Bastille became only the second time in his life that he interrupted his daily walk—the other time had been when he received a copy of Rousseau's *Social Contract* and did not leave his house until he had read it.

Rousseau would later be accused of filling the minds of the revolutionaries with the ideas that led to the Terror, but his works were scarcely quoted in the early years of the Revolution when there were so many practical tasks to fulfill. The spirit of his works, however, was there from the beginning.

It did not take long for the enthusiasm for the Revolution to be dampened. The storming of the Bastille was associated with violent excesses, above all the killing of unpopular figures from the **Old Regime**. Their hearts were ripped out by angry crowds, and their hacked-off heads were stuck on the end of a pike. Much of this they had learned from the brutality of crime and the savagery of some official punishments under the **Old Regime**, but many of the supporters of the Revolution, as much as those who feared popular intrusion into politics, were horrified at these excesses. The young Elysée Loustallot appealed for calm and urged compassion on the part of those who had suffered under the old 'tyranny'. On 22 July 1789 he implored:

79. *Les Révolutions de Paris*, no. 1 (12–18 July 1789) in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 54–55.

*Frenchmen, you destroy tyrants; your hate is frightening; it is shocking. But you will be free! O my country, the rights of man will at last be respected among us! I know, O my fellow citizens, how deeply these turbulent scenes afflict your soul; like you, I am seized to the quick by such events; but think how ignominious it is to live and to be a slave; think with what torments one should punish crimes against humanity; think, finally, of what good, what satisfaction, what happiness awaits you, you and your children and your descendants, when august and blessed liberty will have set its temple among you! Yet do not forget that these proscriptions outrage humanity and make nature tremble.*<sup>80</sup>

On 17 July the king was brought from Versailles and formally accepted the Revolution at l'Hôtel de Ville, the Paris Town Hall. There accepted the new symbol of the revolution fashioned by La Fayette who added the white of the house of Bourbon and placed it between the blue and red of the city of Paris on his cockade, thus giving rise to the tricolor, a symbol of the king becoming part of the nation. This flag—the flag of France, 1790 to 1815, and since 1830—would be raised by **liberal** and nationalist revolutionaries throughout the century to come: a symbol of liberty in the face of despotism. Despite the king's overt support for what had happened on 14 July, some people still did not trust him, as Phillip Mazzei noticed:

*The French nation is no longer what it was. The night following that of the fall of the Bastille, in [Faubourg] St. Honoré, walking by a large crowd of men and women talking about the troops without and the preparations within, I realised they still knew nothing about the step taken by the King and about the deputies who had gone to inform city hall of it. I felt it was my duty to reassure those poor people by telling them what had happened [between 27 June and 14 July]. The difficulty I had in having them believe me led me to give a detailed account in such a way as to remove all doubt [about the King's sincerity]. After telling of the King's speech (read by himself) [27 June 1789], I said that in delivering it to the Assembly, the poor monarch had wept out of tenderness. One of the men in the crowd, looking at me with a serious and sullen countenance, chimed in, 'Or out of weakness'. Instead of giving themselves up to rejoicing, all of them together said that in spite of that they must not take any chance nor consider going to bed. This was the way everybody thought. In fact, when at 3 o'clock that afternoon I heard someone from the balcony of city hall inform the people of the happy change in the situation on behalf of those in authority, he had concluded, 'But keep your weapons.'*<sup>81</sup>

80. Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 2, 18–25 July 1789, p. 25, in J. T. Gilchrist and W. J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971) 55–56.

81. Philip Mazzei, 10 August 1789 in Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy, Cassa Di Risparmio e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 187.



*Violence.* A number of brutal and bloody deaths occurred during the taking of the Bastille. How are these reported by Loustallot? What attitude do you think is being displayed? Do you agree?



*Revolution.* More than any other event, most general history textbooks date the French Revolution to the fall of the Bastille: 14 July 1789. Judging from Loustallot's account of the fall of the Bastille, did the people involved have a sense right there and then that the event was 'revolutionary'?



*Revolution. Paintings.* 'Toppling' or 'Falling'? 'Freedom Fighters' or 'Furious Fanatics'? There are several different contemporary paintings or engravings accessible on the web whose subject is the events of 14 July 1789 around the Bastille: those of *Claude Cholat*, *Jean-Baptiste Lallemand*,<sup>82</sup> and finally *Pierre-Gabriel Berthault's* engraving based on *Jean-Louis Prieur's* drawing.



*Revolution. Artefacts.* Judging by this evidence of things that people made, was the fall of the *Bastille* still seen as significant in subsequent years? Consider these examples. The first is a ceramic model of the *Bastille*, now in the *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris. It was made sometime between 1790 and 1793 in Sèvres, a city, now a suburb, southwest of Paris, half way to Versailles. It is a stove to heat your room. Imagine warming yourself before a symbol of the demise of despotism! The second example is a Bastille diploma. In 1790, authenticated participants in any action in Paris leading to the storming of the *Bastille* were entitled to receive this diploma. Access the diploma [here](#), then choose the 2nd image down from the top, 'Diplôme de Vainqueur de la Bastille'. The decision to issue diplomas on 14 July 1790 was taken by decree of the National Assembly of 9 June 1790.



*The Revolutionaries: Fors and Againsts.* Judging from Loustallot's account of the fall of the Bastille, what did the people involved think they were 'for' and what did they think they were 'against'?



*Berthault's Bastille* can be found at [here](#). It depicts the 'Taking of the Bastille', and reproduces an original engraving by Jean-Louis Prieur (1759–95); it is now held in the MuCEM, or Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille.

82. Lallemand's Bastille. This view was painted by Jean-Baptiste Lallemand (1716–1803), later in 1789 or early in 1790. It is at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris.

Some see those events as ‘the fall (*la chute*)’, others as ‘the toppling’ or ‘the taking’ (*la prise*)’ of the Bastille. In which images is there more of a ‘fall’ and in which is there more of a ‘taking’ of the Bastille? Cholat’s, Lallemand’s and the two anonymous persons’ images were made by people who were participants in the taking of the Bastille, or who were at least in Paris at



Claude Cholat *Siege of the Bastille after 1789*

the time of the events. How do they view the event? Berthault’s image (based on Prieur) is retrospective; it looks back years later. How and why might it matter when the image was made?



**The *Old Regime*.** It’s time to debate and to try to sum up your views of the ***Old Regime***. Do you think Loustallot and the people he reported were right in their views of the ***Old Regime***? Why / Why not?



**Bearing arms.** Do you think we still need to have our arms ready to guard against the forces of reaction from governments in the world today that may be far more oppressive and powerful than the government of Louis XVI?



**Historiography.** Read a number of textbook accounts of the storming of the Bastille. Consider the authors’ views on whether the storming was worthwhile and on the Parisian crowd’s immediate execution of de Launay, (i.e. Did it seem justified?; Was it just bloodlust?; Was it a portent of worse to come?). Raid the stacks in your library and contrast historians’ differing views on these issues. Judging from a few books on my shelf, for instance, Schama, de Baecque and Gaxotte take hostile points of view, while Lefebvre, Soboul, Rudé, and McPhee are quite positive. It doesn’t matter what books you choose, just refer to the author’s index or table of contents to find his or her description of the events surrounding the fall of the Bastille. Then take careful note of the historians’ differing views on:

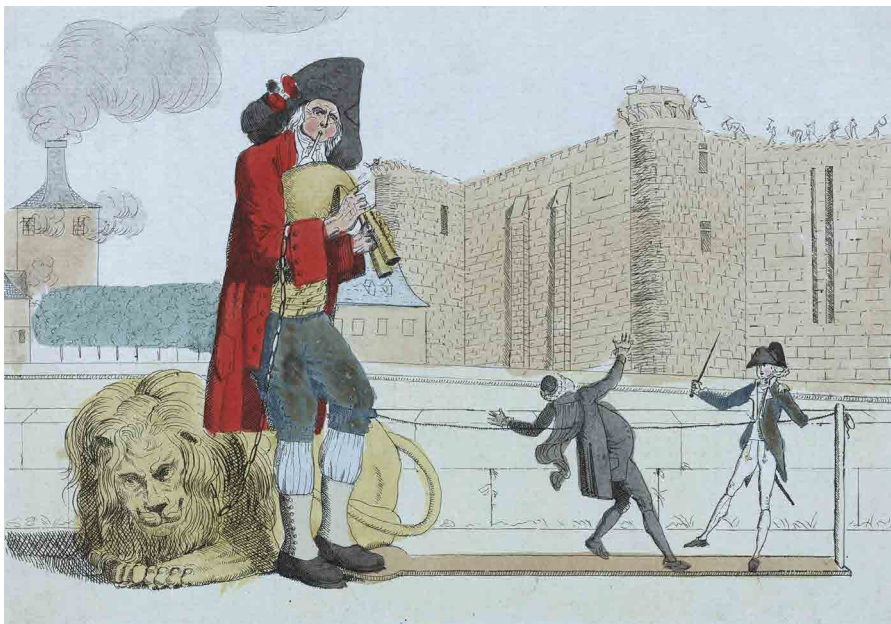
- de Launay’s action, at the first drawbridge, in waving the white flag, and yet firing. Can you justify his actions? Did Loustallot?
- the crowd’s action in murdering de Launay. Can you justify their actions? Did Loustallot?

How do *you* view revolutionary violence?



**Cockade.** What are they, and why would people wear them in their hats? What might be a modern day equivalent of wearing a cockade in your hat? *The Bastille.* Of all the buildings in Paris, consider why this particular one was destroyed and dismantled.

What significance did it hold for the people of France? One way of judging this is to examine contemporary views of the significance of the Fall of the Bastille, 14 July 1789, which may be found at the excellent website, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA. View the hand coloured engraving *Farewell Bastille* below.



Unknown artist *Farewell Bastille* 1789



See cockades adorning the headwear of National Guardsmen in Jean-Baptiste Lesueur's [drawing](#) (c1789–99) of Marquis de La Fayette giving orders to an Aide-de-Camp, at.



Can you think of any examples of politically motivated attacks on buildings considered iconic or symbolic in recent times? Choose one example and compare the language of contemporary reports from the recent event(s) and the taking of the Bastille.

## Looking Back: Political Crisis and Royal Authority

After the *Old Regime* was swept away by the French Revolution, a noble from Normandy reviewed the lost world of *birthright*, *paternalism* and obedience to divine-sanctioned authority. The nobleman was Count Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59).

De Tocqueville had travelled to the United States in 1831, returning to write his famous study of New World settler societies like the USA and Australia: *Democracy in America* (1835–40). De Tocqueville served as a Minister in 1849 in France's only Republican and democratic government between 1792 and 1875. In retirement, he wrote a major work of reflection on France's history: *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution* (1856), and noted this about the French and their kings:

*[Don't mistake] submission to authority as per se a sign of moral abjection [surrender]—that would be using a wrong criterion. However subservient was the Frenchman of the **old regime** to the King's authority, there was one kind of subservience to which he never demeaned himself. He did not know what it was to bend the knee to illegitimate or dubious authority, a government little honoured and sometimes heartily despised, which it is well to truckle [submit] to because it has power to help or harm. This degrading form of servitude was something quite unknown to our forefathers. Their feeling for the King was unlike that of any other modern nation for its monarch, even the most absolute; indeed, that ancient loyalty which was so thoroughly eradicated by the Revolution has become almost incomprehensible to the modern mind. The King's subjects felt towards him both the natural love of children for their father and the awe properly due to God alone. Their compliance with his orders, even the most arbitrary, was a matter far less of compulsion than of affection, so that even when the royal yoke pressed on them most heavily, they felt they still could call their souls their own. To their thinking, constraint was the most evil factor of obedience; to ours, it is the least. Yet is not that type of obedience which comes of a servile mind the worst...?*<sup>83</sup>

On 22 March 1790, with Revolution entrenched, **Philip Mazzei** looked back on France before the Revolution. He thought he could now explain to his employer, the king of Poland, how and why the Revolution had happened:

*The aristocratic hydra was more pestiferous [plague-causing] and had more heads in France than in any other country. The privileges and exemptions of the nobility threw the heavy load of taxes on those who could no longer carry it. The nobility held all military, civil, and ecclesiastic offices: It intruded everywhere and annexed exclusively to itself even those privileges which elsewhere the same aristocratic government leaves to the Commoners. The three classes into which the nobility branched off, that is, the military, the Parlement and the ecclesiastic [high clergy], were not over fond of each other. Nonetheless they united against the government in order to tear down the ministerial oligarchy [narrow clique of king's ministers], pretending to wish to uphold the interest of the common people as their own. The*

83. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, ed., tr. Stuart Gilbert, (New York, Doubleday, 1955), 119. A digitised version of an 1856 edition of this work is available [here](#) (note the translation will differ).

*government too had made known its inclination to rouse the masses. Having to give to someone in a far away country, an idea of what was taking place here under the stupid administration of the Archbishop of Sens,<sup>84</sup> I wrote as follows: «Aristocratic tyranny struggles against the despotism of the monarchy. The pretext is the good of the common people, which good the aristocracy is here, as elsewhere and as it has always been, more set against than the monarchy. Fortunately the two combatants are not very shrewd, and hence there will probably result the good that has never been the object of either one of them».<sup>85</sup>*



**Aristocratic Reaction.** What did Mazzei mean by ‘aristocratic hydra’? What classical/mythological reference was he making? According to Mazzei, where does the bulk of the blame for the slide into Revolution lie?



**Dignity and Rights.** Alexis de Tocqueville was promoting democracy. We live today in a democratic society. We too would probably equate ‘submission to authority’ with ‘servility’, ‘subservience’ and ‘moral abjection’. In contrast, what points did de Tocqueville make about the eighteenth century idea of ‘submission to authority’?



**Dignity and Rights.** Is such ‘submission to authority’ ‘almost incomprehensible to the modern mind’? Do people today accept authority based on ‘natural love’ or ‘awe’? If they do not, why then do people accept and obey an authority?



**Sages?** These two observers offer their perspectives on two different aspects of the **Old Regime**: Political Crisis (Mazzei) and Royal Authority (De Tocqueville). How would you rate their assessments?

84. Étienne-Charles de Loménie de Brienne was made Archbishop of Sens in 1788. See this [website](#) for more details.

85. Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy: Cassa Di Risparmi e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 305–306.



# Key Words

## Bailly

Bailly went on to be the first mayor of Paris. He retired from public life late in 1791. Accused of helping order the repression of the democratic demonstrators at the military parade ground in Paris, the champ de Mars, on 17 July 1791, Bailly was arrested and tried in November 1793 and executed in the same champ de Mars on 12 November 1793 / 21 Frimaire II.

## Invalides

*Les Invalides* is a military hospital built for war veterans in 1670 by Louis XIV to the west of the city of Paris with gardens which ran up to the left bank of the Seine. See Janinet's print of the canons of the Invalides being seized by the people [here](#). For contemporary views of *Les Invalides* and an overview see this [website](#).

## Jacobin Club

The Jacobin Club was founded by radical patriots in April 1789: Siéyès and Antoine-Pierre Barnave were early members. Modelling themselves on American revolutionary societies, the members of this club called themselves the 'Society of Friends of the Constitution (*La Société des Amis de la Constitution*)', resolving never to disband until the job of writing a constitution for France was finished. They met first in Versailles. Like the king, they shifted their headquarters to Paris in October 1789, meeting first in the former library and then in the former church of the recently closed 13th-century Dominican monastery of St Jacques (the Jacobins), located on the rue **St Honoré** (now the Place du Marché **St Honoré**), near St Roch and the Tuileries (now 1<sup>er</sup> arrondissement). After the Jacobin Club lost its more moderate members in 1790–91, including Siéyès and Barnave, the Jacobin Club of Paris, and its many provincial affiliates, became a formal centre (there was a steep membership fee) of radical political discussion in France, especially between 1792 and 1794. Robespierre and St Just were key club members. The Jacobin Club was closed by order of the Convention on 12 November 1794 / 21 Frimaire III, though it revived weakly in 1795–96. Its buildings were demolished in the Napoleonic era to make way for a market in 1810. The Club in the more radical era of 1792 is shown in another [engraving](#).

## Jeu de Paume

The long room, high ceiling and big upper windows of this building for Royal Tennis Club still exist. David and members of his workshop made three sketches for a painting of the *Oath of the Tennis Court*. One of the studies for David's *Oath of the Tennis Court* is in Versailles. See David's painting of 1791 there in a reproduction (the original is in the [Musée Carnavalet](#)) on the back wall of the Jeu de Paume today. The other study by David, a coloured one, probably painted

much later in the 1820s, is in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris and can be viewed [here](#). There is also an engraving by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (1748–1819) of the *Oath of the Tennis Court* which was published in 1800 as one of a set of 46 engravings illustrating great moments in the history of the Revolution. It is based on an earlier engraving by Jean-Louis Prieur (1732 or 1736 to 1795). You can see Prieur and Berthault's version of the Oath on the [National Archives' ARCHIM site](#) at or at [Wikimedia Commons](#). This [site](#) show the layout of the Jeu de Paume today.

### **Marly**

The Royal Chateau at Marly was built by Louis XIV in 1678 as a hunting lodge, where he could escape his high-visibility life at Versailles. The chateau was demolished in 1799. The gardens, designed by André Le Nôtre, remain. This site is now a park in Paris. A selection of images of the Chateau, can be seen [here](#).

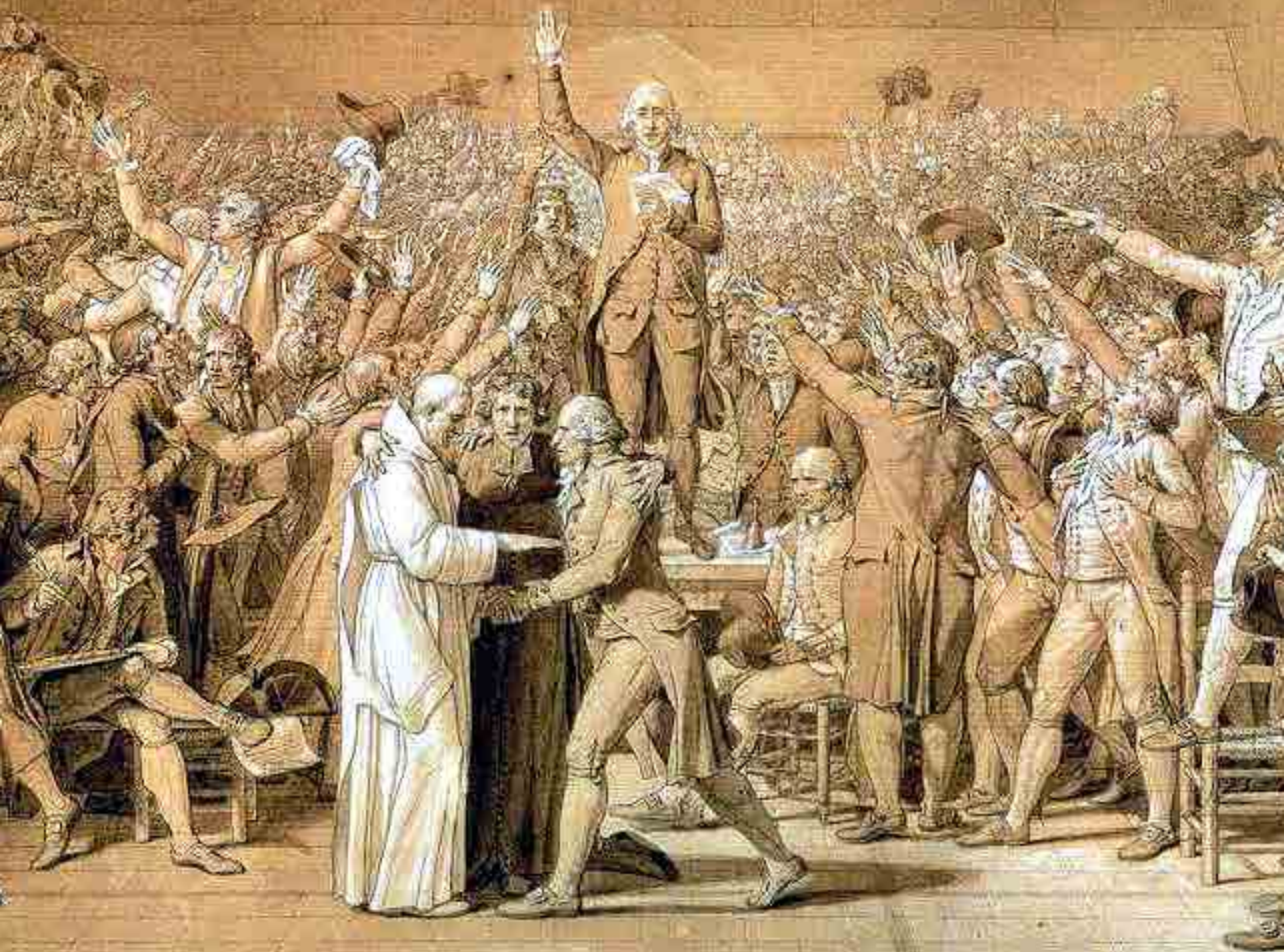
### **St. Honoré**

This is an elegant district in the west of the city, to the west of the Tuileries, on the right bank of the Seine.

## CHAPTER 5

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# A New Dawn: Reforming France



The meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles at the beginning of May 1789 was a catalyst. A rag bag of grievances from all sections of French society came together at the behest of the King at one time and in one place: the result was a revolution that no-one could have predicted.

The king's decision of 8 August 1788 to call the Estates-General meant all sections of society in France now had to list their hopes and their complaints: this was in the drawing up of the *cahiers de doléances*, lists of grievances the Deputies took to Versailles to put before the king. Deputies for the **First** and **Second Estates** were directly elected by all members of their social caste, provincial (**feudal**) district (bailliages & sénéchausées). In Paris, there were 60 electoral districts in 1788–89, replaced on 21 May 1790 with a system of 48 electoral sections that endured till 1795. This electoral system was far broader than the equivalent system in Britain at the time. It also favoured the kinds of educated, talented and respected locals so often slighted by les grands of the **Old Regime**, the magnates of the law courts, the Court and the Cathedral. Deputies for the **Third Estate** were elected indirectly; meeting first in their corps, as a village, or in their guilds or professions, each drawing up their *cahiers* and electing their electors; assemblies at each local district would then pool *cahiers* and elect their **Third Estate** Deputies.

“Tell me what’s wrong”, said Louis XVI to the People of France

The decision taken on 24 January 1789 to summon an Estates General coincided with the onset of the winter aftermath of the poor harvest of 1788. Mid-winter was usually a time of dearth even in a good year. The winter of 1788–89 was even tighter; most people had even less food in store. Moreover, prices to buy in foodstuffs were corresponding high. It was a grumpy time.

Tradition dictated that every time an Estates General was summoned, lists of grievances (**cahiers de doléances**) would be drawn up. Following tradition, Louis XVI obliged on 24 January 1789, determined to show he too was a monarch who cared. The precedents of this process of asking for policy advice from the people as they had developed in medieval and early-modern times emphasised elaborate homages to the solicitude of the king of the day, followed by a modest list of suggestions carefully tailored to the issues the king wanted to be discussed. After all, few people could read, let alone write, in medieval and early-modern times. Ordinary people had a stronger sense of their stations in life then. They did not relish provoking anyone who was wealthy and/or in authority, as they had few protections against the wrath of the powerful.

1789 was a different time. Only courtiers and lawyers, furthermore, knew about how things were done in previous times. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, all sorts of people had more confidence in and capacity to speak their minds. The rare opportunity afforded by Louis XVI after January 1789 for the people to speak up was therefore fraught with danger for existing institutions and for existing ways of doing things.



Consider the analogy of a teacher of a raucous and troublesome class of students in a junior high school (i.e., years 8 and 9). What would be the likely outcomes, for the teacher, and for the students, of a teacher's request for students to submit suggestions about how the classroom might be managed better?

How did people actually respond in their cahiers de doléances? We can now answer this question comprehensively. In 1998, a major work of quantitative history was published which involved the surveying and coding of many thousands of the cahiers de doléances. Previous scholars, starting with Beatrice Hyslop as early as 1934, had studied samples of cahiers. This study by Gilbert Shapiro, Timothy Tackett, Philip Dawson and John Markoff was entitled, *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doléances of 1789* (Stanford University Press, 1998). The authors took pains to explain how they read and then computer coded the tens of thousands of responses in the cahiers de doléances from different social groups (chiefly 1. from peasants, and 2. from the **second estate**, and 3. from the **third estate**. [Recall that these categories are respectively the nobles (as item 2) and the townspeople, **bourgeois** and peasants (as item 3).] The authors also added a fourth category: responses from different small-scale (parochial) local regions (parishes, their item 4). Another scholar, Kenneth Margerison, has then compiled this short summary of the main conclusions of Shapiro, Tackett, Dawson and Markoff's study:

The greatest preponderance of grievances concerned taxation in general and indirect taxes in particular. However, the dissatisfaction with the system of taxation varied considerably among the three categories of cahiers. Complaints about taxation characterized 66 percent of the peasant grievances but only 43 percent of the **third estate** and 36 percent of the nobility. Surprisingly, the droit de contrôle, the [i.e., stamp duty] tax on the official registration of documents which imposed burdens on all levels of society, was the most frequently criticized of all taxes. However, more cahiers at the parish level complained about the gabelle (i.e., the salt tax, 43 percent) than the droit de contrôle (35 percent). More striking was the attention given to constitutional issues in the general cahiers of the **third estate** and the nobility. For example, the cahiers of both the nobility (95 percent) and the **third estate** (86 percent) demanded regular meetings of the Estates General, but only 21 percent of the parish cahiers made a similar demand. The French peasantry in 1789 were clearly more concerned with issues directly affecting their economic well-being than those re-establishing the representative institutions of the realm.

The parish cahiers demonstrate the level of complaint against the **seigneurial** system... Shapiro is able to demonstrate... that over 70 percent of the peasant cahiers contained grievances against the **seigneurial** system and 84 percent of **third estate** cahiers sought the abolition of specific **seigneurial** institutions. Markoff reveals that peasants were willing to indemnify [i.e., pay compensation to] the holders of **seigneurial** rights in specific cases where a monetary value could be accurately assigned, and he suggests that this may have been why the deputies in the

Constituent Assembly believed peasants would be willing to indemnify their lords for the loss of *seigneurial* rights after the abolition of *feudalism* on August 4, 1789.

Markoff argues that all levels of society were open to change in the spring of 1789 even though there was little agreement as to what that change might entail. In general, the cahiers demanded reforms, and there were very few requests, with the exception of 13 percent of the noble cahiers asking for the maintenance of the *seigneurial* system, for institutions to remain unchanged.

The peasant cahiers in particular expressed considerable ill will toward the *Old Regime*. The nobility was extraordinarily concerned with constitutional issues such as the organization and authority of the Estates General, the establishment of personal liberty, the maintenance of private property, and the financial accountability of the government. The *third estate*, on the other hand, was less concerned with issues regarding the nature and limitation of government and more interested in issues related to its place in society and its commercial activities. Therefore, *third estate* cahiers demanded vote by head in the Estates General, the abolition of internal customs duties, and careers open to talent in the military. Based on the clear distinction between noble and *third estate* cahiers, Markoff concludes that “the agenda of the Nobility reminds us, perhaps startlingly so, of the degree to which the French Revolution was the work of aristocrats” (p. 382).



**Standpoints.** Take on the typical persona of either (a) a member of the nobility, (b) a peasant, or (c) an unspecified member of the *Third Estate* in a parish, whom we know were likely to be the wealthier farmers and the *bourgeois* in the locality. Review the evidence in the summary by Margerison for “your” type of person. Which grievances were “you” most likely to put forward? Which grievances of others interested “you” less? (Be aware that this data set is typical and statistical rather than personal and particular, whether regional or individual: the study just describes the most common trends.)

Imagine, furthermore, how each group would have responded to the others. You could achieve this contrast in an actual class discussion.

A great sense of hope arose from this process of drawing up lists of grievances. The king seemed intend to do something about the people’s complaints. The Deputies from throughout the land arrived at Versailles with folders containing the grievances of their region and their own hopes for the future. At Versailles they met many like-minded subjects. The grievances of the entire nation were brought together in the one place. At Versailles, moreover, Deputies from all over France discovered that despite their regional differences they had much in common. Many were already inspired by the writers of the *Enlightenment*. Most had read many pamphlets, like *abbé* Siéyès’ *What is the Third Estate?* on sale on street corners. All had followed the many crises since the first meetings of the Assembly of the Notables in February 1787.

The Deputies did not arrive at Versailles intent on bringing about a revolution. Most came expecting flagrant abuses, above all in taxation, to be eliminated. Many hoped for minor changes in government that they assumed would give provincials and men of education some say in how the country was governed. But representatives of the **Third Estate** still came to Versailles with suspicions of the nobles of the **Second Estate** and of the church hierarchy in the **First Estate**. The dowdy uniforms of the **Third Estate** at the ritualistic opening of the Estates-General (3–4 May 1789) and the Third's Estate's ceremonial up-staging by the other (privileged) **estates** served to rekindle resentments. But the mood was still optimistic. Grateful to their king for having summoned the Estates-General, almost all representatives of the Third (and many Deputies in the other estates) believed that the king would, should and could act in the common interest. The resistance of the higher clergy and some of the nobles in the first days of the meeting of the Estates-General, however, soon turned hope first to disappointment and then to open defiance on 17 and 20 June 1789, of the explicit order of the King at the séance Royale, 23 June 1789 for the Deputies to meet in separate **estates**, as precedent prescribed.

An ardent 'Society of the Thirty', led by prominent Deputies like Mirabeau and Lafayette, Siéyès and Talleyrand, was already working behind the scenes and between the orders to stiffen resolve for constitutional reform. On 3 and 17 June 1789, they were openly preferring) and then insisting (at the Jeu de Paume, a Royal Tennis Court, 20 June 1789) on one National Assembly (Assemblée nationale), not three orders meeting separately as an Estates-General. **Liberal** clerics and nobles started to join in from 19 June. When this ongoing defiance was eventually met by the peevish capitulation of Louis XVI, on 27 June 1789, still grieving for his eldest son who had died just a few weeks earlier, it appeared as though a revolution in government had indeed been accomplished without violence or the spilling of any blood. Faith in the king was reinforced, but it was a faith that was to be tested at regular intervals in the future.

The revolution of June 1789 envisaged a new political system based on the idea of the sovereignty of the people, or national **sovereignty**. The final authority would now rest not just with a king acting on behalf of God, but also with the people speaking through their elected representatives. The king would still play an important role, but the king's precise powers and roles were still to be determined. Another difficult issue for the new National Assembly would be to determine who actually represented the people, how this was actually to be accomplished, and just what was meant by 'the people' anyway. Resolving these issues, between 1789 and 1791, would determine the outcome of the June revolution of 1789.

## The New Regime

In the last weeks of July and the first week of August 1789, following hard upon the dramatic events in Versailles (the formation of a National Assembly, 17–27 June) and then in Paris (the fall of the Bastille, 14 July), a wave of panic swept through the French countryside. The harvest had failed dismally the previous year: amid all the political turmoil so far away in Paris and Versailles, and yet so unsettling, peasants now worried that gangs of brigands and roving

bands of beggars might come and destroy the new harvest upon which so many of their hopes depended. The worries of the peasants betrayed their deeper fears of recalcitrant aristocrats, who might be fomenting trouble among these outsider *ne'er-do-wells*, beggars and vagabonds. Parisians and patriots in towns and cities harboured similar anxieties. They worried about Swiss and German mercenaries in the French army, or indeed about anyone who might be ordered by someone to overthrow not only the brand new National Assembly, but also the many associated municipal revolutions which had changed the ways in which scores of French cities were governed.



*The Great Fear.* There is an anonymous contemporary colour drawing, now in the National Library in Paris, of the sacking of a rural nobleman's chateau during 'The Great Fear (*La grande peur*)' at the village website of St Martin de la Mer, in the Morvan hills, near Saulieu in Burgundy. There is also a black-and-white version as the 6<sup>th</sup> image at [here](#). The painter/engraver seems hostile to the revolutionaries, emphasising the plight of the nobles and clergy whose *châteaux* and abbeys are burning.



Ways in which rumours started and spread (independently) in rural France during 'The Great Fear' are mapped on this [website](#).

At the same time, the Deputies of the National Assembly saw an opportunity to further entrench their precarious constitutional position, a position which had already been assisted by the ardent support from the people of Paris, when they tore down the fortress of the Bastille. On the night of 4 August 1789, the enthusiasm of the Deputies led them to try to abolish the central planks of the *feudal* regime immediately. They did this not only because they said they were hostile to *feudal* forms of property which interfered with any freeholders' rights over land, but also to try to capture the support of France's peasants who resented having to pay *feudal* dues to use property they owned or leased.

In the days following, however, cooler heads prevailed. Many Deputies belatedly realised that some *feudal* dues and rights were indeed forms of property; many French *bourgeois*, for instance, had purchased seigneuries, not so much for the revenue stream coming from customary *feudal* dues, but so as to live as if they were a noble, acquiring the status of having a 'de' after your given and family names, the 'de' referring to your rural land and country house (*seigneurie*) or country 'seat', as it would be in English. In one heady night, the Deputies had abolished all *feudal* dues willy-nilly on 4 August 1789. On the next day, however, they realised they would have undermined someone's (*feudal*) fights in order to defend someone else's dream of the possibility of completely-private property. These kinds of unlimited property rights are called 'fee simple' in English. This concept underpins the English saying that a person's home

is his or her castle. It was not so easy to put the same view in France, however. Property and privileges were central to the self-identity of the **bourgeoisie** and the nobility alike; property and privileges enabled them to show their value in the new society. A compromise had to be reached. It was decided that compensation was to be paid for some of the **feudal** rights and dues lost by bishops, seigneurs and nobles. This is reflected in the final draft of the decree published by the National Assembly. Needless to say, most peasants were unlikely to appreciate, let alone approve, the fine distinction their legislators had made.

A way was opened for a more radical politics. It would emphasise the first sentence in the first Article of the 4 August decree. It would serve self-interest by ignoring much of what followed.

## Decrees of 4 August 1789, as amended 5-11 August

### Article 1.

*The National Assembly abolishes the **feudal** regime entirely, and decrees that both **feudal** [i.e., manorial share of produce] and **censuel** [i.e., manorial rent] rights and dues deriving from ... personal servitude [i.e., serfdom—by now rare in France] ... are abolished without indemnity [i.e., compensation], and all others declared redeemable [ie. they can be paid out]; and that the price and manner of redemption shall be established by the National Assembly. Those of the said dues which are not suppressed by the present decree, however, shall continue to be collected until reimbursement has been made.*

### Article 2.

*The exclusive right to keep pigeons and dovecôtes is abolished; pigeons shall be confined at times determined by the communities; and during such periods they shall be regarded as game, and everyone shall have the right to kill them on his own land.*

### Article 3.

*The exclusive right of hunting and open warrens is likewise abolished; and every proprietor has the right to destroy and to have destroyed, on his own property only, every kind of game, conditional upon conformity with police regulations relative to public security...*

### Article 4.

*All **seigneurial** courts of justice are suppressed without any indemnity; nevertheless, the officials of such courts shall continue in office until the National Assembly has provided for the establishment of a new judicial organisation.*

*Article 5.*

*Tithes of every kind and dues which take the place thereof, under whatever denomination they are known and collected ... are abolished, subject to the devising of means for providing in some other manner for the expenses of divine worship, the maintenance of ministers of religion, relief of the poor, repairs and rebuilding of churches and parsonages, and for all establishments, seminaries, schools, colleges, hospitals, communities and others, to the maintenance of which they are now assigned. Meanwhile, until such provision is made and the former possessors are furnished with their equivalent, the National Assembly orders that collection of the said tithes shall continue according to law and in the usual manner...*

*Article 6.*

*All perpetual ground rents [i.e. **seigneurial** dues], either in kind or in money, of whatever species, whatever their origin, to whatever persons they are due ... shall be redeemable...*

*Article 7.*

*Venality [i.e., purchase at auction sale] of judicial and municipal offices is suppressed henceforth. Justice shall be rendered gratuitously [i.e., free]; nevertheless, the incumbents of said offices shall continue to perform their duties and to collect the emoluments [i.e., fees] thereof until the Assembly has provided means of procuring their reimbursement...*

*Article 9.*

*Pecuniary privileges, personal or real, in matters of taxation are abolished forever...*

*Article 10.*

*.... [A]ll special privileges of provinces, principalities, pays [i.e., regions] ... cities, and communities or inhabitants ... are declared abolished forever, and shall be absorbed into the law common to all Frenchmen.*

*Article 11.*

*All citizens may be admitted, without distinction of birth, to all ecclesiastical [church], civil, and military employments and offices....*

*Article 17.*

*The National Assembly solemnly proclaims King Louis XVI Restorer of French Liberty.<sup>86</sup>*

86. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 106–110.

The revolution in Paris had given the impulse to towns throughout France to accept what was now clearly a Revolution, not just a revolt. Indeed, within a short period of time, people in France were everywhere speaking—just as historians do now—of the ‘old’ or ‘former’ (ancien) regime.<sup>87</sup>



4 August 1789. On this [website](#) see some ways 4 August 1789 was commemorated in France. Debates in the chamber leading to the famous decrees are represented in an [engraving by Charles Monnet](#) (1732–1809).

As we have noted, the revolution in Paris and in so many towns could hardly satisfy the grievances of the peasants, however. They took their problems into their own hands. Already before the fall of the Bastille there had been riots in the countryside by peasants anxious to settle accounts with their *feudal* overlords, and these increased after 14 July.

On a positive view, this context of rural upheaval makes the period of the August 1789 decrees one of the few times in history where those in power responded by listening to grievances rather than sending in troops: the Deputies of the new National Assembly at Versailles deciding to accede to the claims of the peasants. On a negative view, the same context might be seen as pandering to the worst fears of ignorant people. The leaders of the National Assembly had benefitted from popular violence in Paris on 14 July 1789. But armed force was still predominantly in the hands of the king, and there were on-going concerns especially about what royal mercenary troops, mainly Swiss and German, might do. The revolutionaries' National Guard, led by the marquis de Lafayette, was only founded on 9 August 1789, and really formed up between October 1789 and February 1790. The security choices of the Deputies of the National Assembly were therefore quite limited, so they decided to legislate a form of democratic security, introducing the popular decrees we have listed, and chiefly announcing the ‘abolition’ of the *feudal* regime. This occurred over a single night, 4–5 August 1789, spurred on by a lawyer Deputy, Guy-Jean-Baptiste Target, who proceeded theatrically to give up *feudal* rights others said he did not have anyway. Others followed. Other unpopular laws were swept away. By morning, all the worst injustices of the *Old Regime* had been abandoned.



Jean-Baptiste Lesueur's contemporary gouache of Desmoulins at the *Palais Royal* is can be viewed [here](#).

87. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 106–110.

Throughout France, the new French ‘citizenry’ marvelled at what had been achieved in the reforms of 4 August 1789. It all seemed so exciting, radical, and full of promise: The same Camille Desmoulins who had enjoyed his moment of fame in the *Palais Royal* in Paris at 3.30pm on Sunday, 12 July 1789, with his call to arms to defend the Revolution, was now building a reputation as a radical journalist. Here he comments on the August decrees of 1789.

*Frenchmen, aren't you going to institute a fête [festival] in commemoration of that night when so many great things were done without the delays of scrutiny and as by inspiration? It is on that night, you must say ...that we came forth from the wretched bondage of Egypt. That night put an end to the wild boars, rabbits and game devouring our crops ...That night ... has destroyed the tyranny of the Robe [lawyer nobles]; that night[,] by suppressing the venality of the [noble judicial & municipal] magistracy[,] has secured for France the inestimable benefit of the abolition of the **Parlements**. That night has put down the **seigneurial** justices and the free duchies, has abolished mainmorte, corvée and crop-share rents, and effaced from the land of the [ancestral] **Franks** all traces of slavery. That night restored Frenchmen to the Rights of Man, and declared all citizens equal, equally admissible to all offices, places, and public employ; again, that night has snatched all civil offices, ecclesiastical and military, from wealth, birth and royalty, to give them to the nation as a whole on the basis of merit ...*

*On that night finally, Justice cast out of the temple all the sellers in order to listen freely to the poor, the innocent and the oppressed; that night destroyed the exclusiveness of the legal classes [lawyer nobles], an order that monopolised all suits, and with its monopoly of pleading, its claim to exploit exclusively all the disputes of the realm. Now, any man who has the ability and confidence of his clients can plead ... O happy night for the merchant, who is assured of freedom of trade! Happy for the artisan, whose industry is free and given every incentive, who will no longer work for his master but will receive his salary for himself! happy for the peasant, whose property finds itself increased by at least ten per cent with the suppression of tithes and **feudal** dues; happy indeed for everybody, since the barriers that excluded nearly everybody from the path of honours and employment have been forcibly thrown down for ever, and today there no longer exist among the French any distinctions but those of virtue and talent.<sup>88</sup>*



**Feudalism.** In the era of the French revolution, describing something as ‘**feudal**’ became the same as calling it ‘outdated’. The revolutionaries were saying to the people of France that the traditional social, political and economic systems of the

88. “Discours de la Lanterne aux Parisiens”, France, 1st Year of Liberty’, 5–9 in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire; 1971), 60–62.

High Middle Ages were no longer relevant. Historians often agree with them, dating the ‘modern’ period of history from the French Revolution. The system of reciprocal obligations which governed the relationships between Church, nobility and peasants was formally ended by the August Decrees; at least that seemed to be their intention. The new social, political and economic system that replaced tradition was based upon different principles and expressed with a different vocabulary. All people now were believed to have rights. One of these rights was the right to own private property. This may not have mattered much to those who did not own property and to those who had no prospect of owning anything (like itinerant workers, urban renters and rural labourers), but it certainly was important to those who did own property.

- Which rights to property were still protected in the August Decrees?
- Which rights were abolished entirely?
- Explain what is meant by each of the following, and why the revolutionaries considered them part of the **feudal** regime: **seigneurial** courts; tithes; ground rents; pecuniary privileges.
- The Deputies eventually (when day dawned!) became more hard-headed, distinguishing purely ‘**feudal**’ dues (those relating to the person and so akin to slavery) from ‘manorial’ dues (those relating to property and so subject to compensation). Is the distinction viable: legally or politically? Suggest the likely legal and political reactions of a lawyer (**feudiste**) representing a noble holding **seigneurial** rights over a village, and of the peasants in that village.
- One anonymous contemporary artist supposed that French peasants would be delighted at the ‘abolition’ of **feudalism** on 4 August 1789. He prepared an engraving which he hoped would sell well to peasants in places like **cafés**, cabarets and markets. The print is now in the National Library in Paris. The artist pointedly reversed the images of the oppression of the **Third Estate** which dominated political discussion in 1788–89. A delighted peasant is now shown returning from a successful hunt with a hare, hitherto banned for him under the **Old Regime**. ‘Courage’ is emblazoned on his sword, and there is a promise of peace and prosperity in his pocket. The peasant now declares, ‘Of course, I knew we’d get a fair go’. He shouts ‘Long live the King and Long Live the Nation’ while he is being carried along by a nobleman and while he is led along by a clergyman who now has ‘liberty and equality’ impressed on his scales of justice, see on this [website](#).



Étienne Béricourt’s gouache (c. 1789) of a cabaret (and brothel) in eighteenth-century Paris is at [this website](#). This ‘Scène de cabaret’ was ‘chez Ramponaux’, a cabaret on the rue de l’Orillon, 11<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, Paris.



**Privileges.** Privilege is a word that has changed its meaning over the years. Privileges then were held by many people as a matter of birth, location or vocation. You had no choice; they weren’t even earned; they came with the job or with the blood. Today privilege is often linked to responsibility. It was different during the **feudal** era. Privileges then

were seen as a sign of power and of status, and even seen as a protection against authority in a society where there were few theoretical limits to the power of the King and his ministers. The removal of privileges gave many people freedoms and opportunities that had not existed in the past, but it also opened up new possibilities for the abuse of power:

- For each Article to Article 11, explain who would benefit (in theory) from the new freedom given to them by the August Decrees, and how they would benefit?



*Liberty.* In Article 17, the King is described as ‘Restorer of French Liberty’ and in the following document by a radical **liberal** journalist, Camille Desmoulins; the journalist writes that the night ‘restored Frenchmen to the Rights of Man’. The Deputies believed that there had been an ancestral time when the French enjoyed these rights. How do you think they were able to explain to the people the supposed loss of those rights? (Hint: we enter an important realm of the historical imagination. If you know the Asterix© cartoons, you will recognise a more modern French imaginative re-telling of issues like these. Are there equivalents in the Australian historical imagination? What evidence is there in the Decrees that they were considered transitional and that much more legislation was needed?



*Desmoulins on **Liberal** Freedoms: Trade, Merit and Talent*

1. According to the revolutionaries, success in the new society that was to replace the old would be based upon an individual’s merit, virtue or talent. Camille Desmoulins wrote enthusiastically that ‘everybody’ would benefit from the removal of the ‘**barriers**’ of the **Old Regime**. How did Desmoulins think the lives of people from all classes of society would improve? Do you agree with Desmoulins’ **liberal** agenda?
2. Not everyone agreed with Desmoulins. Read what a reactionary, Antoine de Rivarol, has to say below. Why was the property of the Church confiscated by the revolutionaries? Who would in reality be the main beneficiaries of the Revolution, according to Rivarol?

The press in France after July 1789 was the freest that has ever existed to date. Not only was censorship removed, but publishing any sort of newspaper or pamphlet was now possible for anyone with a small sum of money and a talent for writing. In the early months of the Revolution most of the new newspapers that appeared supported the Revolution; older newspapers generally adopted a cautious stance. One of the first opponents of the Revolution to bring out his own newspaper was Antoine de Rivarol; his Journal Politique National combined a contempt for the king, whom he regarded as inept, with a loathing of the ordinary people (le menu people), whom he saw as unfit to participate in government. Rivarol hated above all the Parisian **bourgeoisie**, blaming them for biting off more than they could chew in bringing about the Revolution. He took a particular delight in pointing out the contradictions in their attempts to win over the people and protect their own financial interests at the same time:

## Paris, the Capitalists and the Ruin of France

*The capitalists who gave you Paris [in July 1789] have especially deserved their misfortune. They did not see that it was necessary to strengthen their debtor, not to weaken him; the king could never be too powerful if they were to get their money. They destroyed the old power to which their fortune was tied, in order to raise up a new power [of the people] that owed them nothing, that was in no way beholden to them, and which could, after all, only make them bankrupt. Finally they played for the provinces [in August 1789], and capital lost the game. Paris, which has upturned the kingdom, will not restore it.*

*[Rivarol then dwelt on what he sees as the inevitable bankruptcy facing France and mocks the futile efforts of the Deputies to face up to the danger] So many motions without purpose, so many requests without replies, and discussions without conclusions; so many voices that thunder without enlightening, and purposeless lists, that rain down from every side and gather about the National Assembly like a storm of absurdities; all that, I say, is only an abridged version of one of your sessions. And what purpose does it serve if I depict the Assembly as dividing into several groups, to form a conflict of blind men who dispute about reason ...?*

*[Rivarol delighted in bringing up the spectre of the People who had saved the **bourgeois** revolution now representing an even greater threat: moreover, how could they expect to be paid the money they were owed if the People were not going to pay any more taxes?] [The capitalists] saw especially that the people always stopped at the first part of your decree that abolishes, and never at the second part that replaces. Then you voted the patriotic fourth [special revolutionary turnover tax]; and in order not to scare people, you decreed that this contribution would be voluntary; but in order not to alienate the capitalists, you have just declared that it will be a forced one. Finally, since all these methods have been insufficient or illusory, you fell upon the property of the clergy and expropriated the Church. I will not trouble to investigate whether you had the right to do so; you had the need to do so, and I leave you the excuse of necessity, that grand protectress of all crimes; ... do not say that I bring about bankruptcy, I do not advise its declaration; all I do is tell you it is a fact. The doctor does not bring on the illness; he diagnoses and names it. . . . You have broken all the bonds that united Frenchmen to the state. France is parcelled out into forty thousand petty republics [administrative departments], which still recognises your aristocracy: let them at least profit from the general dissolution: let them escape the clutches of this capital that has been for too long their vampire!<sup>89</sup>*

89. 'Le Journal politique national, vol. 2, no. 24 (1790)', pp. 30 and 17, in J. T. Gilchrist and W. J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 80–82.

## Aims of the New Society

Even before the fall of the Bastille, as we have seen above, the Deputies started to draw up a Declaration of Rights. This followed the example of the American revolutionaries, whom France had supported in their war against Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson, one framer of the US Declaration of Independence, future third President of the United States, was in Paris at this time. But the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen was a French initiative, the ideas being drawn from the common well of the *Enlightenment*. Every article was a nail driven into the coffin of the *Old Regime*. Every article also proclaimed a new future, a 'direction of intention' as historian Georges Lefebvre called it, to guide the revolutionaries as they drew up France's first written constitution. The Declaration of Rights was meant to justify the violence that had brought the revolutionaries to power.

Another way was opened for a more radical politics. It would emphasise the widest possible interpretations of the Declaration of Rights.

## The Declaration of the Rights of Man



Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* 1789

This document<sup>90</sup> proclaimed before the National Assembly on 27 August 1789 is among the most significant in the history of the modern world. It came to define the modern world. It has been criticised as too idealistic, but in fact it is a document constructed by men with a very real knowledge of the recent past and with a fairly clear knowledge of the society they wanted to create.

The representatives of the French people, organised in National Assembly, considering that ignorance, forgetfulness, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that such declaration, continually before all members of the social body, may be a perpetual reminder

of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative [parliamentary] power and those of the executive [government] power may constantly be compared with the aim of every

90. This website has copies of the originals of the marquis de Lafayette's motion in the National Assembly (11 July 1789) that France ought to follow the Americans and make a Declaration, only theirs should be a Declaration of Rights. Lafayette's hand-written motion is at [this website](#) and [here](#). The 1st legislative transcript can be found [here](#).

political institution and may accordingly be more respected; in order that the demands of the citizens, founded henceforth upon simple and incontestable principles, may always be directed towards the maintenance of the Constitution and the welfare of all.

Accordingly, the National Assembly recognises and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen.

1. *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; social distinctions may be based only upon general usefulness.*
2. *The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.*
3. *The source of all **sovereignty** resides essentially in the nation; no group, no individual may exercise authority not emanating expressly therefrom.*
4. *Liberty consists of the power to do whatever is not injurious to others; thus the enjoyment of the natural rights of every man has for its limits only those that assure other members of society the enjoyment of those same rights; such limits may be determined only by law.*
5. *The law has the right to forbid only actions which are injurious to society. Whatever is not forbidden by law may not be prevented, and no one may be constrained to do what it does not prescribe.*
6. *Law is the expression of the general will; all citizens have the right to concur personally, or through their representatives, in its formation; it must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal before it, are equally admissible to all public offices, positions, and employments, according to their capacity, and without other distinction than that of virtues and talents.*
7. *No man may be accused, arrested, or detained except in the cases determined by law, and according to the forms prescribed thereby. Whoever solicit, expedite, or execute arbitrary orders, or have them executed, must be punished; but every citizen summoned or apprehended in pursuance of the law must obey immediately; he renders himself culpable by resistance.*
8. *The law is to establish only penalties that are absolutely and obviously necessary; and no one may be punished except by virtue of a law established and promulgated prior to the offence and legally applied.*

9. *Since every man is presumed innocent until declared guilty, if arrest be deemed indispensable, all unnecessary severity for securing the person of the accused must be severely repressed by law.*
10. *No one is to be disquieted because of his opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.*
11. *Free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Consequently, every citizen may speak, write, and print freely, subject to responsibility for the abuse of such liberty in the cases determined by law.*
12. *The guarantee of the rights of man and citizen necessitates a public force; such a force, therefore, is instituted for the advantage of all and not for the particular benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.*
13. *For the maintenance of the public force and for the expenses of administration a common tax is indispensable; it must be assessed equally on all citizens in proportion to their means.*
14. *Citizens have the right to ascertain, by themselves or through their representatives, the necessity of the public tax, to consent to it freely, to supervise its use, and to determine its quota, assessment, payment, and duration.*
15. *Society has the right to require of every public agent an accounting of his administration.*
16. *Every society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured or the separation of powers not determined has no constitution at all.*
17. *Since property is a sacred and inviolable right, no one may be deprived thereof unless a legally established public necessity obviously requires it, and upon condition of a just and previous indemnity.<sup>91</sup>*

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91. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 113–115.

Consider these issues about ‘Rights’, one of the most influential ideas promoted by the French Revolution:



*Constitution, Nation, **Sovereignty**, Rights.* Define each key term. Circle words you don’t understand in the Declaration, and look them up. They are used frequently by the revolutionaries and we use them today as well. Our introduction to the document asserted: ‘Every article was a nail driven into the coffin of the **Old Regime**. Every article also proclaimed a new future.’ Did it? Test that proposition against each Article of the Declaration.



*Preamble.* Our introduction to the document also asserted the declaration ‘has been criticised as too idealistic’. Is the preamble too idealistic? Do you agree with its assertion about ‘the sole causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments’? What is the remedy? In Australia there has been a campaign in recent years to have Indigenous Australians mentioned in the preamble to the Constitution. What will this change for Indigenous Australians?



*Rights—but not Duties?* Conservatives argued—in 1789 and today—that it was irresponsible for the new government to list only people’s rights, without also listing their duties. Do you agree? Would a teacher do the same? Does it matter if the class is primary, junior secondary, senior-secondary, or tertiary?



*US Bill of Rights.* Ideas of the American revolutionaries influenced the French legislators’ decision to write a Declaration. The Americans included the Bill of Rights in their Constitution as the first ten amendments. The Bill of Rights has had an enormous impact on American society being used to justify legislation, in later eras, as various as enabling private gun ownership and desegregation. The US Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments (proposed September 1789, ratified December 1791) of the US Constitution (1787) is at [this website](#). Read through the Bill of Rights (i.e, Amendments 1 to 10) and note the similarities with the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (26 August 1789) [here](#). What differences do you see?



*Rule of Law.* The French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (26 August 1789) emphasises establishing laws and following established procedures when charging people with offences. Arrests on behalf of government were no longer to be arbitrary; they could only be made according to laws created by the representatives of the people. This is still an issue; *Amnesty International* still works to uphold such principles. One recent response by the US governments to the problem of terrorism has been controversial, for

instance. The imprisonment without charge for years in Guantanamo Bay, a US base in Cuba, of foreign nationals accused of organising terrorist acts against the USA, led to heated debate. Under Articles 7 and 8 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, would the detention of suspected terrorists have been legal?



*Liberty, Equality and Fraternity: Which might come first?* From a modern perspective, the important ‘rights’ listed in 1789 might seem (to us) to overlook other important things like environmental sustainability, social justice and gender equity. That’s why we need historians; they can place a document like the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in its own time and context. (Later in this study, you can compare the Declaration drawn up in 1789 with another Declaration of Rights drawn up in 1793—that document of the era of revolutionary war and terror was concerned more with ‘equality’ than with ‘liberty’.) The revolutionaries of 1789 saw ‘equality’, however, as simply requiring men to have equal opportunities to pursue careers, social position and treatment by the law.



What does it mean today if we claim that everyone is free and equal? Do both concepts apply to the resourcing of schooling in our society?

Are these two concepts—liberty and equality—contradictory? The issue is crucial. It shaped the politics of the French Revolution and much of the history of developed societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After the French Revolution, socialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concluded that freedom without equality wouldn’t help the poor and the oppressed. Socialists came to consider ‘fraternity’ as the only ideal that could reconcile liberty and equality. After the French Revolution, **liberals** of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries believed that the poor and the oppressed were better off free to choose rather than equal and not free. Fascists and Communists of the twentieth century argued freedom was over-rated: better to be strong and/or equal under firm leadership. Try to clarify your views in discussion: Does too much liberty lead to inequality or to injustice? Does too much equality undermine important liberties? Try applying the same principles to your family or social lives!



Fraternity is the odd and old-fashioned word, a word often overlooked in discussions about the famous revolutionary triad: ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité)’. Suggest reasons why the revolutionaries valued fraternity/brotherhood. But consider why they left out sorority/sisterhood. Was sorority implicit anyway? In modern political life is there any evidence of any value still being placed on either fraternity or sorority? Is either still valued in social or sporting life? Suggest reasons for the differential survivals.



*Wealth and Power.* Why then is fraternity not specifically mentioned in the Declaration?

Some scholars have argued that the *Declaration of Rights* of 1789, while full of fine principles, actually only secured a path to power for people with money and/or learning. They argue that the last point in the Declaration, Article 17, was in fact the key article, and furthermore that wealthy and/or well-educated *bourgeois* and provincial nobles were the only people who could realistically benefit from the freedoms listed in the Declaration. Do you agree? Does it matter? Consider the contrary evidence in Article 2: rights of ‘property’ and ‘safety’ would certainly seem to satisfy the interests of people of wealth and power, but did a ‘right of resistance to oppression’ also do so? How might you explain the last phrase: Is it just naïve? Is it just a way of justifying events in Paris on 14 July? Is it pure idealism? Self-interested or not, were the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity still important because they were so inspiring, affirming and empowering to all kinds of people: wealthy or poor, French or not French, men or women, Protestants and Jews, slaves etc?



*Secular and Civil.* The *Declaration of Rights* emphasised the principled rationalism of the French people rather than the authority of the king of France. Louis XVI was angry that the monarchy, let alone his name, was never even mentioned. Louis XVI’s approval of the *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen* (27 August 1789) was only secured on 3 November 1789. He had held out till after the October days, refusing until then to counter-sign this ‘god-less’ and ‘king-less’ Declaration. Once he and his family had been brought reluctantly to Paris, however, and after he had been obliged to put on the cap of liberty, and once he had toasted in Paris—under his breath!—the Revolution of 1789, Louis XVI then ratified the Declaration. But he denounced it again in the message he left behind when he tried to flee France in June 1791. The *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen* (27 August 1789) also surprised many people in France and Europe because it was such a secular document. It used the inclusive words ‘Supreme Being’ instead of the expected word ‘God’. Does this mean that the Declaration was also anti-religious? How far has today’s society adopted the secular principles and inclusive language of the *Declaration of Rights* of 1789?



*Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.* The first list of rights in Australia was created by the government of the ACT in 2004. Victoria followed in 2006. You can see the complete Charter [here](#). Click on ‘Legislation’, then click on ‘C’

for *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. Read through the document. Are there similarities with the French document? Are there differences? Do citizens in Victoria need a charter of rights? Why do you think it has taken so long for one Australian state to decide it needed such a Charter of Rights?

## Debating the Declaration of Rights

People debated whether or not France should have a *Declaration of Rights* long before it was legislated on 26 August 1789. A **liberal** noble, the marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) was the first to propose to the National Assembly the idea of writing a declaration of core principles on 11 July 1789. He became the first commander of the revolutionary militia, the National Guard, formed in Paris after the fall of the Bastille. Lafayette had been a hero of the American Revolution, having once served as a popular commander of Louis XVI's forces supporting the American colonists and took his cue from Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence* (1776). Lafayette put this view to his fellow parliamentarians on 11 July 1789:

*In effect, whether you would immediately offer to the nation this enunciation of incontestable truths or would think that this first chapter of your great work should not be set apart from it [the constitution], it is established that your ideas must at once fix on a declaration that contains the first principles of any constitution, the first elements of all legislation. However simple, however common even are these principles, it will often prove useful to bring the discussions of the Assembly back to them.... The first [reason for a declaration] is to recall the sentiments that nature has engraved on the heart of every individual and to facilitate the development of them, which is all the more interesting in that, for a nation to love liberty, it suffices that it be acquainted with it, and for it to be free, it suffices that it wishes it. The second reason is to express these eternal truths from which all institutions should be derived and to become, in the labours of the representatives of the nation, a loyal guide that always leads them back to the source of natural and social right....*

Speaking later to the same National Assembly on 1 August 1789, another **liberal**, Mathieu Jean, duc de Montmorency (1767–1826), one of France's leading noblemen, expressed this view:

*To raise up an edifice [i.e., a building], it is necessary to lay foundations; one does not draw conclusions without having posed principles; and before choosing for oneself the means and starting along a path, one must be assured of the endpoint. It is important to declare the rights of man before the constitution, because the constitution is only the continuation, the conclusion of this declaration. This is a truth that the examples of America and of many other peoples and the speech of the archbishop of Bordeaux [a previous speaker] have made tangible.*

*The rights of man in society are eternal; no sanction is needed to recognise them. Some have spoken of provisionally adopting this declaration; but do they believe that we could reject it later? The rights of man are invariable like justice, eternal like reason; they apply to all times and all countries. I would wish that the declaration be clear, simple, and precise; that it be within the reach of those who would be least able to comprehend it.*

*These are not detestable principles that the representatives of the nation should fear to bring into the light! We are no longer in those times of barbarism when prejudices took the place of reason. Truth leads to happiness....*

Later that day, Pierre Victor Malouet (1740–1814) disagreed. He thought that American ways could not translate to France, and—like Arthur Young—he was troubled by the radical and abstract tenor of political talk. He would have preferred France to have a bi-cameral parliament on the British model—i.e., having two houses of parliament, the upper to act as a brake on the lower—rather than the uni-cameral National Assembly that emerged in Versailles between 19 and 27 June 1789.

*Sirs, it is with uneasiness and regret for the time that is passing and for the disorders that are accumulating that I take the floor. The moment in which we find ourselves requires more action and reflection than speechifying. The nation is waiting for us; it wants order, peace, and protective laws.... The question that occupies you still at present, and such is the disadvantage of all metaphysical discussion. It presents, I would say, an equal number of objections and of grounds for and against.*

*[You] wish to have a declaration of the rights of man because it is useful.... You have been shown the advantage of publishing, of consecrating all the truths that serve as beacon, rallying point, and asylum to men scattered around the globe. To this is opposed the danger of declaring in an absolute manner the general principles of natural right, without modification by actual laws. Finally, on the side of the disadvantages and misfortunes produced by ignorance, you have seen the perils and disorders that originate in partial knowledge and in the false application of principles....*

*I know that the Americans have not taken similar precautions; they took man from the bosom of nature and presented him to the universe in all his primitive **sovereignty**. But American society, newly formed, is composed in its totality of landowners already accustomed to equality, foreigners to luxury as well as to poverty, barely acquainted with the yoke of taxes or the prejudices that dominate us, having found on the land that they cultivate no trace of **feudalism**. Such men were without doubt prepared to receive liberty in all its vigour: for their tastes, their customs, their position called them to democracy.*

*But we, Sirs, we have for fellow citizens an immense multitude of men without property who expect above all their subsistence from an assured labour, right regulation, and continual protection; they become angry sometimes, not without just cause, at the spectacle of luxury and opulence.*

*It should not be believed that I conclude from this that this class of citizens does not have an equal right to liberty. Far be it from me such a thought. Liberty should be like the morning star which shines for everyone. But I believe, Sirs, that it is necessary in a large empire for men placed by circumstances in a dependent condition to see the just limits on as much as the extension of natural liberty. Since the rights of man in society should be developed and guaranteed by [a good constitution], their declaration should be the introduction to it; but this legislative declaration is necessarily remote from the metaphysical statement and abstract definitions that have been proposed.... Why begin therefore by transporting man to a high mountain and showing him his empire without limits, when on climbing down he must find limits at each step? Will you tell him that he has the free disposition of his person before he has been forever dispensed from having to serve against his will in the army or the navy? That he has the free disposition of his goods before the customs and local laws that dispose of it against his will are abrogated? Will you tell him that in poverty he has the right to assistance from everyone, while he invokes perhaps in vain the pity of passers-by, while to the shame of our laws and customs no legislative precaution attaches the unfortunate to society even as misery separates them from it? It is therefore indispensable to compare the declaration of rights and to make it concordant with the necessary and obligated state in which the man for whom it was written finds himself.... In [our present] circumstances, an express declaration of the general and absolute principles of natural liberty and equality can shatter necessary bonds.<sup>92</sup>*

Consider the debaters' points of view:



**Revolution.** Consider the *Declaration* and the speeches in support of it by Lafayette and Montmorency as examples of the self-image of the people who were leading France in the first months of 1789. Did they see themselves as 'revolutionaries'? What are we to make of their talk (in July 1789!) of an '**Old Regime**'?



**Principles and Practice.** How did the French revolutionaries conceive of the link between principles and practice in social, personal and political policy? Do you consider policies in the same way?



**Metaphysics and Property.** Evaluate Malouet's arguments against adopting a Declaration. Was he right?

92. Lynn Avery Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, (Boston: St Martin's Press, 1996), 72–76.

## Reconstruction of France: Départements and Actifs

The National Assembly also embarked on major and enduring reforms of government and of the financial system in France.

A compromise of sorts was reached on the executive agencies of government, mainly through the good auspices of Mirabeau. The Ministers of State (*Conseillers du Roi*) would still be royal appointees, functioning separately from the National Assembly, and not even obliged to report to it. Deputies of the National Assembly even declared that none of their members could be a Minister without resigning his seat in the legislature (7 November 1789).

None of this meant, however, that the legislature was now happy to surrender the real political initiative to the monarch or to his executive. There were still many major reforms to put in place. One of the most important involved France's system of local and regional finance, judiciary and government.

Jacques Guillaume Thouret (1746–94) from Rouen in Normandy proposed a new and rational system of local and provincial government that was accepted, in principle, by the National Assembly on 22 December 1789. France was re-divided into 80 *départements* or provinces, plus another one for Paris and two abroad, with each *département* now set to embrace all aspects of life—administrative, legislative, judicial, religious—each having approximately the same population, each with a logical name evoking its region, each with a capital already functioning



Map of France, 1791, showing former provinces and départements. From the *The Historical Atlas* by William R. Shepherd.

as a market town located logically near its centre, each *département* then sub-dividing into nine districts (*communes*). Ignoring custom and tradition, everything was rational: every Department was roughly the same area and population, and its capital city was logically located near its actual centre—its communes each in turn sub-dividing into a neat nine cantons, with each canton forming a citizen friendly electoral assembly comprising about 700 active citizens, and with every other level of government also having an Assembly, an Executive (un Directoire), and a paid Administrator (un procureur-syndic).

The pages of an excellent old historical atlas (William Sheppard's of 1926), accessible on-line from the library of the University of Texas, show the new Departments superimposed over the *Old Regime's* chaos of customs and traditions, the old system of *gouvernements*

Another of the first tasks of the National Assembly was the decision as to who could vote. It was soon decided to distinguish between active and passive citizens (*citoyens actifs et passifs*). The distinction was regarded as normal. It had been suggested originally by the *abbé* Siéyès in 1788–89, and it mirrored the electoral laws of ancient republican Rome, admired by many revolutionaries, and the recent experience of indirect voting in the elections for *Third Estate Deputies* to the Estates-General. Radical democrats, however—such as the anti-slavery activist, the *abbé* Grégoire, a *curé* from Emberménil in Lorraine in north-east France, and also Maximilien Robespierre, a lawyer from Arras in Artois in north-west France—argued the distinction was inconsistent with the inclusive language in *Article 6* of the *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen* (27 August 1789) about law as ‘an expression of the general will’ and about all citizens having the ‘right to concur personally, or through their representatives,’ ‘the same for all,’ ‘equally admissible to all public offices ... according to their capacity, and without other distinction than that of virtues and talents’.

When these matters were debated and resolved in October 1789, few members of the National Assembly were bothered by such considerations. Almost all of the *représentants du nation* assumed that full participation in politics must be associated with masculinity and with the possession of a measure of property. Their measure of property used by the French revolutionaries to enfranchise voters (males paying taxes to the equivalent of the value of three-day's labour) was now much more inclusive in France, where about 3 in 5 men could now vote (indirectly), than in, say, Scotland—about 1 in 250—or in England—about 1 in 25 (before 1832) or about 1 in 3 (from 1832 to 1867). To be sure, to have a full vote (i.e., to be able to vote directly) and to be eligible to be elected to serve in the different levels of revolutionary government required commensurately greater levels of property: taxes paid to the value of ten-day's labour at the municipal and *commune* levels, and to 50-day's labour (a silver mark, *le marc d'argent*) for the forthcoming Legislative Assembly (1791–92).



**Masculinity.** Suggest reasons why people then presumed that only men could have political power?

Nevertheless, by any measure, the officially approved scope of popular participation in government in revolutionary France (as enshrined in the Constitution, approved by the king on 14 September 1791) was still immeasurably greater than in the customary constitution of Great Britain. And even then, as things actually turned out, the lower the level of revolutionary government and administration, the more likely it was to be radical and even democratic,



**Unknown artist** *Je suis sous le Rideau et je Reponds de Tout*  
1791

even before 1792. Moreover, the lower the level of government, the less likely it was to uphold, in practice, the distinction between active and passive citizens. If electorally-unqualified men were otherwise popular and active politically, they were unlikely to be precluded, formally or informally, from participating in political life.

In the Autumn of 1789, under the electoral rules drafted by Thouret and Siéyès, a card was issued to every man who qualified to be an active citizen. The rules of exclusion were actually a bit broader than indicated in the summary previously.

Everyone who was female, and anyone who was male and poor was considered just a ‘passive citizen’, but people who were also excluded were bankrupts, domestic servants, actors, and persons accused of a crime. ‘Active’ citizens (i.e. citizens who had the right to vote) had also to be men older than 25 years and had to have lived in the place in which they wanted to vote for more than one year. Many ordinary people actively following or participating in political discussions in 1787–89 were disappointed by the passive/active distinction sponsored by Siéyès and enacted by the National Assembly on 29 October 1789.



**Class.** Does the distinction between “active” and “passive” citizens suggest the emergence of something new in revolutionary-era politics: class consciousness?



*Names people call themselves.* What are we to make of the names poorer people in the towns chose to call themselves? At first, they referred to themselves as a collective, *le menu people*, the little people, the humble ones, but over 1790–92, they began to re-name themselves, *les sans-culottes* or ‘the folks who wear pants’, i.e. as the people who don’t or won’t wear the foppish breeches characteristic of the nobleman.

Another way was opened for a more radical politics. Anyone putting political participation before electoral qualifications was opening a path for republicanism and democracy.

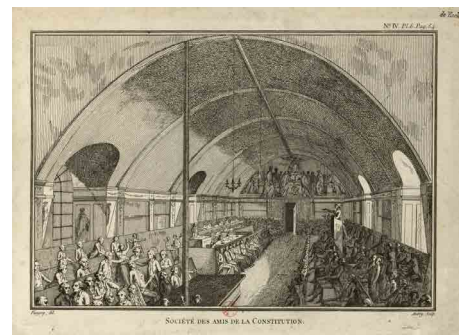
## King vs the People

We have already noted that in the *Declaration of Rights* there is no reference to the king. This is not to say that the revolutionaries wanted to dispense with the king. On the contrary, they wanted to establish a constitutional monarchy. They also needed the king’s authority to support and to assist the changes about to take place and to give the revolutionaries the legitimacy they craved.

It was really over the issue of how much power to give the king that the Deputies in the National Assembly—or Constituent Assembly, even National Constituent Assembly—began to form into parties: groupings of people sharing political views. The most famous of these was the “Society of Friends of the Constitution” that became known as the Jacobins. The name ‘Jacobin’ came from the disused monastery in Paris where they met to discuss their parliamentary tactics for the following day. ‘Jacobin’ then gave its name to the political club they formed. Membership in the Club was open only to anyone who could afford the steep entry fee and the time to take part in its discussions—in this way the **Jacobin Club** remained a strictly ‘*bourgeois*’ body.

At this time the task of the National Assembly was twofold: first, it had to create a new constitution, based on the ideals of the *Declaration of Rights*, which would offer a framework for the laws they would bring in. At the same time, however, the Deputies had to run the country as legislators on a day-to-day basis. Laws were passed on a majority basis after lengthy debate. For the first year and more of the life of the National Assembly, the Jacobins dominated these debates, even as other groups, called by a variety of names, usually insulting, also existed.

The *Jacobins* were not a political party in the modern sense of the word. Indeed the [modern] notion of an organised political party went against the generally held notion that there was such a thing as the national will, or the general will (to use Rousseau’s term). The aims



Henri Nicolas Vangorp *Société des amis de la Constitution* between 1791 and 1792

of the Jacobins themselves changed in the course of the Revolution, with breakaways (like the *Feuillants* in 1791–92, and *Girondins* in 1792–93) forming new clubs, usually because some members thought the Jacobins were becoming too radical.

It was in this time that use of the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ to describe political opinions came into being. On the extreme left of the tribune in the National Assembly—the tribune was the lectern behind which the president presided—was the small group led by Maximilien Robespierre who believed that all power should be in the hands of the ‘people’. On the extreme right were those who wanted all power to be in the hands of the king. Both of these were small groups. Between them were various other factions: among these the Jacobins were the largest, while to their right were the ‘Anglophiles’ or ‘monarchicals’ who wanted a system similar to the parliament in Britain where the king had sole executive power (i.e., choosing and managing the government) and where the king also had the right to veto any legislation passed by a House of Commons or by the aristocratic-dominated House of Lords. The Jacobins were suspicious of their king (and kings in general), and they would have nothing to do with this English model of a bicameral (two Houses) legislature, fearing any sort of upper house would only become a power base for the old aristocrats.

After the October days of 1789, the deputies of the National Assembly were able to shift their deliberations from Versailles to Paris. Now the National Assembly met in the *salle du Manège* in the Tuileries Palace in the heart of Paris, that is, until the Palace and the Chamber was destroyed by fire by the invading sans-culottes on 10 August 1792. Contemporary illustrations of the *salle du Manège* around 1790–92 can be viewed [here](#). Did the space suit orderly and polite parliamentary debates?

The first debate to bring the issue of the king’s power to a head was the debate over Louis XVI’s right to ‘veto’ legislation proposed by the unicameral legislature: those on the far left wanted to refuse him any veto, those on the right demanded an absolute veto, while the Jacobins opted for giving him a ‘suspensive’ veto, the right to delay legislation for two legislatures, in effect four years. The most popular figure in the National Assembly was the *comte* de Mirabeau, a brilliant orator, though notorious for his loves and for his corruptibility—it was said of him (by Rivarol) that he would do anything for money, even a kindly act. Even as he was detested by many of his fellow aristocrats for taking leading roles on behalf of the **Third Estate** in 1789–90, he was also accepting bribes from the Court.



*Wheeling and dealing or Conflict of interest?* Could Mirabeau take money from the court and still give independent advice?



Satire on the fall of the Bastille, July 1789.

Mirabeau's corrupt support for giving the king an absolute veto in 1790–91 compromised his popularity with the people. Mirabeau's less-than-hard line made him clash with the Jacobins and Siéyès, a chief sponsor of the view that no monarch should have a veto. Mirabeau's sudden death in April 1791, however, preserved his reputation (for a while). The matter of the veto was eventually resolved on 11 September 1789 by negotiation between the Court, represented by Necker, and by a group of non-aligned Deputies, led by Lafayette, who proposed the suspensive veto as a compromise, on the condition that Louis XVI also agree to sanction the reforms of 4 – 11 August.

An engraving from late in 1789 expresses the hope of stabilising the Revolution. It emphasises how a new constitution is emerging in France, seeing Louis XVI in a central, if secondary, role. It represents an idea of government in France as an equal partnership, via the symbolism of the flag, *le tricolore* between the King, Paris and the National Assembly. But it also emphasises how it is the **third estate** which is the more robust and productive. The caption reads:

*The New Place de la Bastille [i.e., no more despotism]. The Friend [Father] of the [bad] old days is no more, so render under Cæsar [the King] the things that are Cæsar's, and render to the Nation the things that are [properly] the Nation's.*

Another way was opened for a more radical politics. A constitutional compromise had been reached, and was even being celebrated, but nothing about the constitution had really been resolved, and no-one in power (or close to it) had much trust in the good faith of anyone else. The ambiguity of the attitude of the Deputies to the place of the monarch can be seen in their two-faced praise for his person on the one hand, and in their restrictions on the actual powers they gave to him on the other. This can be seen in the Decree on the Fundamental Principles of Government, passed on 1 October 1789:

## The Fundamental Principles of Government

1. All powers emanate essentially from the nation and may emanate only therefrom.
2. The French government is monarchical; there is no authority in France superior to the law; the King reigns only thereby, and only in the name of the law may he exact obedience.



Unknown artist *J'savois ben qu'j'aurions not tour : vive le roi, vive la nation* 1789

3. *The National Assembly has recognised and declared as fundamentals of the monarchy that the person of the King is inviolable and sacred; that the throne is indivisible; that the crown is hereditary in the reigning family, from male to male, by order of primogeniture, to the perpetual and absolute exclusion of women and their descendants ...*
4. *The National Assembly shall be permanent.*
5. *The National Assembly shall be composed of a single chamber.*
6. *Every legislature shall be of two years' duration.*
7. *The members of every legislature shall be renewed in their entirety [reiterated in the surprising revolutionary idealism of the 'self-denying ordinance', 16 May 1791, the law precluding any member of the National Assembly from also being a member of the Legislative Assembly].*
8. *The legislative power resides in the National Assembly, which shall employ it as follows:*
  - *No act of the legislative body may be considered as law if it is not made by the freely and legally elected representatives of the nation and sanctioned by the monarch.*
  - *The King may refuse his consent to acts of the legislative body.*
  - *In case the King refuses his consent, such refusal shall be only suspensive.*
  - *The King's suspensive refusal shall expire at the second legislature [two parliamentary cycles] following that which proposed the law.<sup>93</sup>*



*Representative or direct democracy?* The fact that the people could and should participate in their own government was a new idea for the people of France. It took time for ordinary people to understand and accept the principles and practices.

Leaders of the revolution, with their classical education, had the models of the Greeks and the Romans to guide them. The Romans eventually became an Empire (14 CE) losing all semblance of democratic ideals. Many Ancient Greek states, like Athens, were based around a small population in which citizens were few and slaves were many, and every male citizen was obliged to vote. Key decisions in Athens were decided in public assemblies by everyone eligible to vote.

93. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 115-117.

This was direct democracy. France was altogether different. It was a large country with about 28 million people in 1789. It was not practical to have every man meet to vote on everything. The practical solution was to elect someone to represent your views: indirect democracy. However, once elected, the next issue was whether the representatives should be able to follow their own conscience or whether they had to do the bidding of the voters who put them into office? This was not a real issue for Deputies from distant provinces, but it seemed crucial in Paris, when voters there could simply walk across the city and insist that the Deputies do what they wanted, even though the people of Paris may not have been representative of the popular opinion of such a diverse state as France. Even so, this problem of remoteness was not an issue for provincials attending the Festival of the Federation in 1790, nor the Marseillais army in 1792 which was heading towards the war front. Review the *Fundamental Principles of Government* (1 October 1789). How did the representatives try to protect themselves against the power of the king or the crowd? How did the Deputies try to preserve the position of the King in this document? What signs had there been by this time, that the people of Paris were quite prepared to act outside of the limitations of law?

Despite the restrictions on the king's powers, the radicals opposed any power remaining in his hands. The debates on the veto convinced the radical journalist, Elysée Loustalot, the 27-year-old editor (who died in 1790) of the *Révolutions de Paris*, that the Assembly was still dominated by aristocrats, only whereas they had formerly 'reigned over us like lions now they reign like foxes'.

*The suspensive veto—which has been presented to the people as a good measure, and which we could not avoid granting to the king, will put the nation in chains on account of the intended length of its operation, for one would have to be blind or a fool to doubt, following Monsieur Necker's note, that the suspension is valid for three legislatures, that is to say, for six years, without doubt long enough for a Louis XIV or a Richelieu to recover a despotic authority. Considering the influence of the ministerial party in the Assembly, that is, the nobles, the clergy and some Deputies of the commons who have **feudal** property, or who aspire to the favours of the Court, we cannot in any way expect to gain a constitution for the nation; it will be for the Court....*

*[For Loustalot, a disciple of Rousseau, the people's representatives ought only to be subject to the will of those who had elected them and not to the parliament.] It is absurd that a representative can make laws for his constituents; the people, assembled in communes, has therefore the right to summon back its representatives, to revise their work, to adopt, reject or to amend it. Let us act promptly and make use of this right—indeed, we must—for public opinion no longer means anything to certain Deputies; and we must do so, in accordance with a decree of the National Assembly.<sup>94</sup>*

94. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, no. 11, 19–25 September 1789', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 70.

Another radical exponent of direct democracy, and an equally radical opponent of the rights of the Deputies to act on their own authority once they had been elected, was Jean-Paul Marat, known as the ‘Friend of the People (*L’Ami du peuple*)’, the name he also gave his newspaper that first appeared in September 1789. Marat is today the best known journalist of the Revolution, but it should be noted that Marat’s often violent message was not popular in the early years of the Revolution; he frequently went into hiding. One of Marat’s problems, which he shared with Robespierre in the National Assembly, was that he did not seek popularity; both were often ahead of public opinion. The main targets of Marat’s attacks were always inside France, especially the moderate Deputies who dominated the Assembly. As Marat saw it, the chains of **Old Regime** privilege had merely been replaced by the ‘Chains of the Moneyed Men’:

*I beseech my readers to [see that the king and his ministers are acting only out of self-interest, with the intent of reducing to ‘smoke ...the great work of the Constitution’, while the Deputies used it to secure their own interests]... Then there is the prince [Louis XVI], who has become once more the supreme arbiter of the law, seeking to oppose the Constitution even before it is finished. Then there are the ministers [Louis XVI still appoints] so ridiculously exalted, whose only thought is to return to the hands of the monarch the chains of despotism that the nation has taken from him. Here then is the nation itself enchained by its representatives and delivered defenceless to a bossy master, who, forgetful of his powerlessness, violates his promises and oaths.<sup>95</sup>*



*The Constitution and the Veto.* Distinguish between the various models of ‘veto’: absolute, suspensive, nul.



*Fears of democrats.* Why did Lousstallot fear that the compromise of a suspensive veto was still dangerous? Marat did not believe the King would ever work within the new constitution. He blames the representatives of the nation for enslaving it to the King again. What did he mean?



*Fundamental Principles of Revolutionary Government.* Review the *Fundamental Principles* document of 1 October 1789. Do you think these fears of the democrats were justified?

95. ‘L’Ami du peuple, 20 September 1789’, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 70–71.

## Enter the People (again): the October Days

The march of about 8,000 women of Paris to Versailles on 5 and 6 October 1789, best known as the 'October Days', brought an end to the seclusion (and security) of the monarchy in Versailles. The demonstrators returned to Paris with the 'baker, the baker's wife and the baker's boy' (the king, the queen and the heir apparent, the *dauphin*). A century before, Louis XIV had removed the Royal Court from the Louvre in Paris to a new site in the countryside of Versailles, 30 kilometres from Paris, wanting to escape the tumultuous life in Paris, especially after Parisians had backed the aristocratic riots known as the *Fronde* (1648–49).

The October Days marked another major stage in the Revolution. Another major intervention by the 'people', but unlike July 1789, this time the *journée* was followed by legislation to curb popular disturbances: many of the leaders of the National Assembly now considered in October 1789 they had achieved all they wanted; they thought they no longer needed the support of the 'people': for them, 'The Revolution was Over', in the phrase of the renowned *Feuillant* orator from Grenoble, Antoine Barnave in 1791.



Unknown artist *The March on Versailles, also known as The October March 1789*

Events preceding the march of 5–6 October 1789 had paralleled those of July 1789: economic distress—over the price and availability of bread—uncertainty as to the king's policy intentions, and fear of counter-revolution. This time, however, the idea of 'marching' came from the women of the markets and faubourgs of Paris, for whom the job of feeding the family was a daily battle. Anti-revolutionary pamphlets and drawings of the time depicted the event as led by men dressed as women. The women were indeed there, heading the march, followed by their menfolk, along with sections of the National Guard (officially formed on 9 August 1789) together with a hesitant Lafayette, leader of the National Guard and the 'Hero of the Two Worlds' for his support of the American revolutionaries in the war of 1776–1783 and the French revolutionaries in July 1789.

The crowd of women carrying pikes going to Versailles on 5 October 1789, shouting for bread, is depicted in two contemporary drawings:



‘Market women setting off from Paris to Versailles in order to look for their King, 5 October 1789’ by Pierre Gabriel Berthault, reproducing an original by Jean-Louis Prieur (1759–95), can be found at [here](#)<sup>96</sup>



Are these pro- or anti-revolutionary depictions of the October Days?

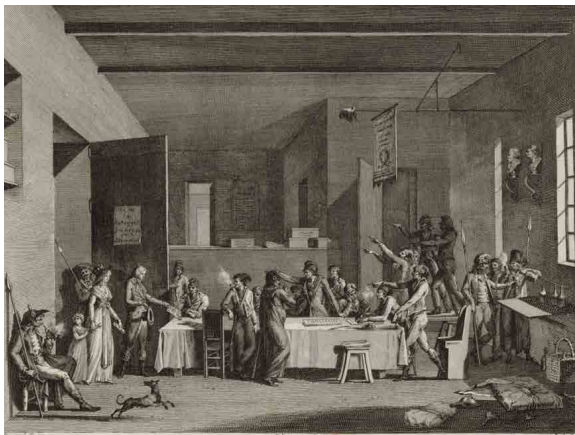
On this occasion, a flood of new newspapers played a significant part in the October Days. Every decree of the Assembly could be read on a daily basis from a wide range of opinions, as well as the king’s opposition to them. The women’s concern about basic food for their family gave this event a particular twist. In this case the political tensions came with the king’s refusal to pass the legislation on the suspensive veto and on the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Bread prices were high, caused on this occasion by a lack of wind to turn the windmills and convert the wheat into flour. But throughout the revolution, suspicions thrived when the price of bread rose with any sort of scarcity; rumours flourished in the bread queues that profiteering middlemen were deliberately withholding supplies so that the price of bread would rise, and people now blamed the **liberal** reform banner of ‘free trade’. Others blamed the high prices on ‘aristocratic conspiracy’, another notion that would continually re-surface in the period of the Revolution. Among the rumours flying around Paris—by word-of-mouth, in the press, and in pamphlets—were ones maintaining that the king’s ministers (the king himself was always absolved) were plotting counter-revolution. Tensions mounted when the king, as in June 1789, called in his Flanders regiment, soldiers whose loyalty to the Revolution was seen as suspect. On arrival at Versailles the Flanders troops were then given a banquet in their honour, and toasts at the banquet in the presence of the unpopular queen were said to have insulted the ordinary people (*le menu peuple*) of Paris and trampled the tricolor cockade. These were the sparks provoking the women’s march to Versailles on 5 October 1789. The king was forced to accede to the demands of the demonstrators and on 8 October he was more or less forced to move out of Versailles to take up residence in the Tuileries Palace in the heart of Paris, where the royal family could be supervised and kept apart from all but a few of the Courtiers, Ministers and foreign troops who concerned the worried and watchful people of Paris.

96. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Prieur: les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris, Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plate 28 (Louvre RF6194; Musée Carnavalet D7730), 113, 115.

The October Days were a warning not only to the monarchy, but to the Deputies in the National Assembly, where the majority leadership decided that they had no further need of popular intervention. The ‘people’ had done their job in toppling *absolutism* and defeating the counter-revolution: now it was hoped they would return to a more passive role. Many Deputies feared a democratic revolution that might threaten their rights to property. To ease this threat they decided to restrict political power to men of property, dividing all citizens into ‘active’ and ‘passive’, with only the ‘active’ having a vote to an electoral college from which Deputies to the National Assembly would be elected, and even fewer having the chance to be elected to the new Assembly. Of equal significance was the passing of the Martial Law decree on 21 October 1789 which gave the Assembly the right to enact special powers to use military force to repress riots and demonstrations. The decree claimed to distinguish between liberty and licence, the latter ‘when the people, excited by causes which are often criminal in character, become the unwitting instrument of intrigues’.

These new repressive laws encountered small but vocal opposition in October 1789. This democratic opposition began now to foreshadow the split in the Left in the National Assembly. This split worsened throughout 1790 and the first months of 1791, as the king sulked and vetoed lots of legislation. The split crisis point when, on 20–21 June 1791, the king tried unsuccessfully to flee to a foreign state, the Austrian Netherlands. The split became a reality on Sunday, 17 July 1791, when the Martial Law decree was implemented to shoot dead at least 15, perhaps 50, republican agitators in a crowd of 50,000 demonstrating democrats in Paris. The crowd was

assembling at the military parade ground, the ‘Field of Mars (Champ de Mars)’, to demand the overthrow of the monarchy.



**Pierre-Gabriel Berthault** *Intérieur d'un Comité révolutionnaire sous le régime de la Terreur 1802*

A well-to-do couple seem to be in an awkward position when they appear before this popular revolutionary club committee or society.

In the National Assembly back in 1789, this radical opposition was led by a small group of Deputies centred on Robespierre. There was also the ever-growing radical newspaper and pamphlet press. In addition to Loustalot, Desmoulins and Marat, there were journalists like Jacques-Pierre Brissot of the *Patriote français* (future leader in the Legislative Assembly in 1791–92) and Antoine-Joseph Gorsas of the *Courrier de Versailles à Paris*.

A new form of democratic opposition also came from the creation of clubs. The Cordeliers Club was a more popular version of the *Jacobin Club*. Renowned among the Cordeliers, Georges-Jacques Danton's oratory and popularity led to him being called the Grand Seigneur of the Common Folks. These represented a minority voice, the voice of the politically dispossessed; they owned no property and all resented their status as ‘passive citizens’. The vast majority

of literate opinion, however, sided with those who owned property: the prospering peasants (called *laboureurs*), the **bourgeois** who ran businesses or were professionals, and the former aristocrats, provided they had not objected to losing unearned privileges.



There are two contemporary images of popular revolutionary clubs in 1792–93:

Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard (1780–1850), a son of the great artist Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) and a pupil of David's. His father had painted scenes of aristocratic life and love.

An Italian coffee-table history book has an image of an ordinary people's political club or popular revolutionary society in France in 1792 or 1793: *Modern Europe: The Decay of the Ancien Regime*, in Marco Guidi and Nanda Torcellan (eds), Milan, Banco Nazionale del Lavoro, 1987, Plate 735, p. 463 (citing Tallandier Documentation, Paris, Photo Bulloz—neither source traceable). It shows a rowdy poor men's political club which resembles the Cordeliers Club. The Cordeliers was closed in 1795. Its building in the former fifteenth-century church of St François and monastery of Cordeliers were ordered to be demolished by Napoleon in 1802.

What can be discerned about popular democracy from these images?

A more critical opinion was also emerging on the Right. Writers such as Rivarol delighted in sarcasm about the predicament of those revolutionaries who had used the people for their own purposes and were now having difficulty in taming them: he scoffed at declarations that all citizens were equal, as some were more equal than others, and at the Martial Law decree that made a crime on 21 October of what had been the sacred right of revolution on 14 July and of the right of 'resistance to oppression' on 27 August (in Article 2 of the Declaration of Rights). Rivarol put before his conservative readers the spectre of the shepherd who called on the tiger to save his sheep from the wolves, but who now needed protection from the tigers. For him, the people were no more than animals, and the **bourgeois** whom he saw as the leaders of the Revolution deserved all they got from the monster they had conjured out of the filth of the streets. Ever concerned about the Revolution descending into lawlessness, Loustalot's *Révolutions de Paris* published letters of concern about the behaviour of some revolutionaries:

*Monsieur,*

*I am the father of six children, four boys and two girls. The two older boys wear the national uniform; on Monday they set out for Versailles, leaving me at home with my fears. Yesterday evening the joy of seeing them return in good health re-united my family, and we set about preparing a pleasant meal; the only one missing was my son who is an **abbé** and who usually comes home very early. We all love him dearly, because he is kind, learned, and good company. His mother and his two sisters were*

*extremely alarmed; when at last he arrived home at half past nine his face was covered with blood and mud, his clothing in shreds. He had wanted to see the king pass by. But just because he was an **abbé** he had to suffer in silence, for more than two hours and in full view of the National Guard, the most disgusting jeers and insults. After this he was pursued by a crowd of madmen who beat him up. Ah! If this is freedom let us be returned to despotism with its spies and its soldiers, at least they will guarantee our safety...*<sup>97</sup>

The Diplomat for Poland, **Philip Mazzei** (1730–1816), sent on his views shortly after the king was brought back to Paris:

*After the monarch's departure, the abovementioned remarks [by troops of the Flanders Regiment] increased and were followed by others very insulting to the nation and the National Assembly. Patriotic cockades were trampled upon and it was announced that they would thereafter be ripped off anyone daring to wear them. On Saturday the foolishness grew worse; besides repeating Thursday's performance, the officers unsheathed their swords and took oaths. A captain standing on a table harangued in such a way as to move a grenadier to also stand on a table and answer: "It is true, we have always obeyed you, and we will obey you whenever you command us for the good of the country, but not if it means going against the nation." Under a rather frivolous pretext, the next day the grenadier was placed under arrest.*

*Knowledge of these things, partial before their actual manifestation, began to spread through Paris on Sunday. Unfortunately, it so happened that the complaints about the lack of bread were greater than before, and not without reason. Monday morning, as I was finishing my dispatch [diplomatic report], a huge multitude, preceded by thousands of women who filled the City Hall [l'Hôtel de Ville] square and the adjacent streets, forced their way past the guards, entered the Hall, and caused some disturbance. There was no bread and subsequent reports about what had happened in Versailles were provoking more and more. Armed national guards were dispatched everywhere by order of their commandant, but the desire spread among them to go to Versailles to settle accounts for the above-mentioned insults. The Marquis de La Fayette was obliged to march at their head against his desire. However, he did not leave until he was so ordered by the city authorities, who sought thereby to save him from the extreme danger in which he found himself. Everyone agrees that but for him a mass slaughter would have occurred and all of Versailles would have been reduced to ashes. The national guards in orderly march were 24 thousand strong [!]; the armed and unarmed populace and the infinite number of hags preceding them could not have been fewer than one hundred thousand. The women were the first to reach Versailles, they marched up to the King who was*

97. Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 13, 3–9 October 1789, pp. 34–35, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 75.

*returning from the hunt, asked him for bread, a few kissed him and, for the time being, seemed satisfied with the loving replies of the Monarch.*

*The Marquis de La Fayette at the head of his 24 thousand men left from the Champs Elysées at nightfall, as though he were going to the gallows, and a driving rain accompanied him the entire way. Arriving in Versailles after midnight he managed to be obeyed by his men, whom he left drawn up some distance from the palace, and went alone first to see the King and subsequently the National Assembly. They had already been informed of the true situation, thus it is no wonder that the dear Marquis was embraced by the King and called his deliverer. I reached Versailles Tuesday morning at ten. I saw the King and his entire family leave at two o'clock in the afternoon and I was informed of everything, but my copyist has no time left and consequently I must go no further for the time being and be satisfied with just adding that the King, Queen, Dauphin, Madame Elizabeth, Monsieur and Madame are staying at the Palace of the Tuileries, that the two aunts remained in Bellevue, and that after such a violent storm, I think it looks like clear skies will soon be here. It is probable that the nearness of the royal family will destroy all cabals.<sup>98</sup>*

Jacques Mallet du Pan (1749–1800) was the chief political writer for the long-established *Mercure de France*. He had supported the Revolution in its early days, but wanted a Constitution similar to that in Britain, where there were two houses, one for the more privileged, and he wanted the king to have an absolute veto. He was always concerned about popular unrest, and indeed left Paris for the countryside shortly after the October Days, but not before he reported on them in the paper:

*The incomprehensible shortage of bread and the military dinner at Versailles were the reason for its outbreak. The people suffering in every way, deprived of the help of many rich families now expatriated, out of work, lacking several of their ordinary resources, and, moreover, accustomed during the previous two months to independence and idleness, found it difficult to get even poor-quality bread. It should be noted that bread was available; but it had to be fought for; the doors of the bakeries resembled those of the Discount Bank; and hunger waited for its food for hours on end, with fear its ready cash. For a fortnight there was an appearance of famine without actual scarcity. The 'popular' press which took upon itself to account for this state of affairs, embellished its accounts with so many contradictory details, that it became difficult for an intelligent person to make sense out of this scarcity of bread....<sup>99</sup>*

American diplomat, Gouverneur Morris (1752–1816,) continued to record his more personal views in his diary:

98. Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy: Cassa Di Risparmio e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 212–213.

99. 'Le Mercure de France, 17 October 1789', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 76–77.

*21 October 1789: There has been hanged a Baker this Morning by the Populace, and all Paris is under Arms. The poor Baker was beheaded according to Custom and carried in Triumph thro the Streets. He had been all Night at Work for the Purpose of supplying the greatest possible Quantity of Bread this Morning. His Wife is said to have died with Horror when they presented her Husband's Head stuck on a Pole. Surely it is not in the usual Order of divine Providence to leave such Abominations unpunished. Paris is perhaps as wicked a Spot as exists. Incest, Murder, Bestiality, Fraud, Rapine, Oppression, Baseness, Cruelty; and yet this is the City which has stepped forward in the sacred Cause of Liberty. The Pressure of incumbent Despotism removed, every bad Passion exerts its peculiar Energy. How the Conflict will terminate, Heaven knows.*<sup>100</sup>

The murder of the baker François prompted the introduction of the Martial Law decree on 21 October 1789. But this measure to try to suppress popular political violence, and the electoral law later that month distinguishing active from passive citizens, suggested to Loustalot in the *Révolutions de Paris* that an 'aristocracy of wealth' had been created:

*There is no such thing as a half citizen. This status, once it is received, carries the exercise of all the rights of the citizen, and if the civic listing confers no right, since it is only an empty ceremony, then the great effects that are properly expected of it will be altogether missing. Now, what other right can it confer, but that of being an elector or eligible for the primary assemblies; it will not be that of carrying arms, for a Citizen is liable for military service from eighteen years of age, and it is policy to summon him to it as soon as he can perform it. These contradictions are heart-rending for those who ardently engage themselves in everything that has a bearing on morals and liberty; they saw with joy the bankrupts and insolvent debtors excluded from civil functions; but if they hoped that this decree would make commerce flourish again, and would restore good faith in our midst, their hopes surely were dashed when they saw that a man needed some sort of property and had to pay a contribution of a silver mark to be able to be a Deputy in the National Assembly? There, then, is your aristocracy of wealth consecrated by a national decree...*<sup>101</sup>



**Active and Passive Citizens.** What evidence is there in the writing of Philip Mazzei, Jacques Mallet du Pan and Gouverneur Morris of the fears of people in, or close to, power. Why did they think it was dangerous to give so much power to ordinary people? Note the irony that people like these used the words 'active and passive' when they were actually worried that the passive citizens were not passive enough.

100. Gouverneur Morris, Beatrix Cary Davenport (ed.), *A Diary of the French Revolution*, (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), vol. 1, 265–266. An online version of Morris' Diary and Letters (1888, vols 1 and 2) can be found [here](#).

101. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 17, 31 October–7 November 1789', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 247–248.



**Marie Antoinette: film.** Watch the recent film directed by Sofia Coppola, scripted by Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette* (2006). It can be criticised on a number of levels but it does show the dangers faced by the royal family when the crowd marched on Versailles. The film ends with the royal family being brought back to Paris. What details of court life does the film show in detail? How much interest is shown by the King and Queen in the major events of the period? Is this likely to be true? What are the threats faced by the royal family in the film towards the end? How do they manage to survive? Do they have the sympathy of the audience by the end of the film? How is that achieved by the filmmakers?

## King, Church and People, 1790–1791

Throughout 1790 and into 1791 the National Assembly steadily gained control, bringing order to the countryside and building a new political framework for France. There was resistance to this from the die-hard aristocrats of the **Old Regime**, and the king was never happy with the reforms, but the most contentious issue was the absorption of the Catholic Church into the new regime.

The decrees of 4–10 August 1789 had already set in train political changes with profound implications for the Church. Article 5 abolished the tithe, promising that the National Assembly would soon find a new and fairer way to support the Church, and not just the Catholic Church, as under the **Old Regime**, but all churches. The Declaration of Rights of 27 August 1789 then followed up with its distinctly secular values and its resounding agenda for toleration and equality of taxation obligations. On 13 April 1790, the National Assembly gave another such indication when it pointedly refused proposals of the Dominican monk from Chartreux, dom Gerle, to continue the traditional designation of Catholicism as the established state religion of the kingdom of France. (Gerle was a central figure in David's famous painting of the Tennis Court Oath.) Louis XVI was dismayed by these policies. Pius VI (1717–99, Pope 1775–93)<sup>102</sup> repeatedly condemned the work of the revolution, though discreetly at first on 29 March 1790 (condemning the Declaration of Rights), then publicly and trenchantly in Papal Bulls issued on 11 March and 13 April 1791; the revolutionaries replied by engineering the restoration to France of the Pope's French enclave, Avignon, on 11 June 1790.



Unknown artist Portrait of Pope Pius VI late 18th Century

<sup>102</sup> Pius VI was born in central Italy in 1717, became a Cardinal in 1773, and was elected Pope in 1775. In 1793, Pius VI encouraged coalitions of foreign monarchs who were seeking to overthrow the French Republic. When the Italian peninsula was invaded by France in 1796, Pius VI was obliged to sign a humiliating peace in 1797. When a Republic was declared by popular insurrection in Rome in 1798, Pius VI fled the city, and soon after his capture by the French, he died a prisoner in the southern French town of Valence in 1799.

There was still the matter of the state's fiscal crisis to solve. Many *cahiers de doléances* had already indicated, one way or another, that the great monastic landed estates in France and the notorious *feudal* and entrepreneurial revenue streams attached to dioceses and monasteries might be somehow taken over or sold to pay off debts and to curb the budget deficit. On 2 November 1789, the Deputies of the National Assembly signaled their agreement. On Mirabeau's motion, and according to Talleyrand's plan, the Deputies resolved 510 votes to 346 that they regarded church property as national property, and therefore it was potentially at their disposition. Lands and properties of the church were re-named as 'goods and benefices of the nation (biens nationaux)'. But there were now corresponding obligations on the state. It would have to find a way to support the clergy and to fund and run its traditional tasks of conducting worship, registering births and deaths, providing poor relief, and offering primary and most secondary education. These activities had been funded by church revenues and tithes.

Between May and July 1790, Talleyrand, the wily reforming absentee Bishop of Autun, and other leaders of the National Assembly, worked on the new order for religious affairs in France. It was soon decided to support all clergy by a common tax paid by all. They would put all priests on a national salary scale, and they would insist that church properties now to be accessible to all. Monks and nuns were now prohibited by law; they were considered idle (13 February 1790), and anyway monasteries often held enormous landholdings and cash reserves.

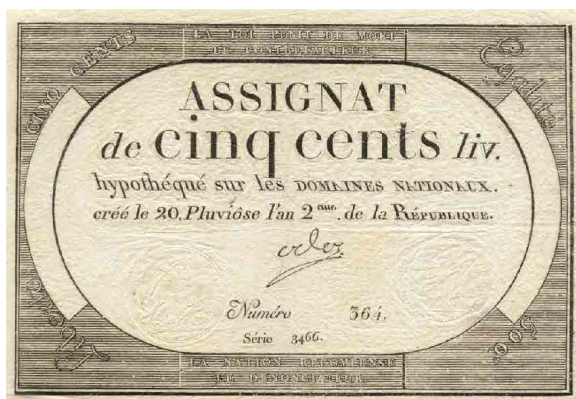
Furthermore, with regard to former church lands, now 'national' lands, an auction and bonds system was devised. They initially printed 20 million worth of new money units in the form of treasury bonds or promissory notes—called *assignats*—and they issued them in blocks of 50, paying 5 per cent a year. People could buy these notes, then use them to purchase unencumbered church lands when they were put up for sale. The first sales of lands commenced in December 1789. *Assignats* soon became traded, emerging as a *de facto* currency. Church lands were attractive to buyers. They were unencumbered; their current liabilities had been taken over by the state in March and April 1790. They were also often some of the most valuable and productive pieces of land in France. Even aristocrats who despised the revolution often bought church lands; they couldn't overlook such a once-in-many-lifetimes opportunity. Moreover, the whole plan seemed to make political sense: the state would receive the revenue 'up front' and its budget could be restored to health, and the people who bought these *assignats* and lands could be expected to support the revolution for evermore, so to speak, as they 'bought in' to it.



**Assignats.** Discuss what could possibly go wrong with the system of *assignats*? Hints: Ask an economics teacher. What if revolutionary governments, as occurred in 1791–93, were tempted to print more and more *assignats* to bring in more revenue? What if church (or émigré) lands were only offered for sale in large parcels, a policy to which first the Cordeliers and later the Jacobins were opposed [3 June 1793 (for émigré lands) and 22 November 1793 / 2 *Frimaire* II (for former church lands), reiterated in St Just's *Ventôse* decrees 26 February 1794 / 8 *Ventôse* II]? In each case, whose needs and interests would be ignored or harmed?



These sites have images of various kinds of *assignats*. Of the following websites, work out which belong to the era of the constitutional monarchy, 1789–92, and which to the republic, 1792–1804: [link one](#), [link two](#) (scroll down page), [link three](#) and [link four](#). Judging by the images printed on the assignats, as it seemed to these artists around 1792 and 1795, who benefitted from the buying and selling of assignats?



Assignat 500 livres, 1794.

As the revolutionaries worked on the document which became known as the Civil Constitution for the Church (*Constitution civile du clergé*) between May and July 1790, they began to treat the church and the clergy as just another department of state. This offended many parish priests (*curés*) who up until then had largely supported the revolution. Every diocese was now aligned with the departments, old church parishes were rationalised, often to the dismay of

locals. It was further decided that bishops and local clergy could never be absentee, but rather should also be elected to their posts, and they would use the same electoral system as for offices of state. All clergy, furthermore, would be obliged to take a public oath, just as did soldiers and elected officials, declaring their loyalty to their king and to France's new Constitution and National Assembly. Priests choosing to follow the view of their Pope, and not the view of Talleyrand and the National Assembly, were then made liable by decree of 27 November 1790 to dismissal, getting pensioned off if they refused to preach in favour of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. A typical *curé* was expected to take the oath after High Mass and in the presence of the whole congregation and of the *Président* of the local *Commune*.

Defiance was one result of these insensitive policies. Administering oaths has a way of forcing a decision on people who might otherwise prefer to keep their head down or slink away. Only six bishops took the oath (along with Talleyrand) as *constitutionnels*, and only about half of the *curés*, though the picture was patchy with defiant priests (*réfractaires*) predominating in borderlands and in the north and southwest: Vendée, Artois, Flanders, and Alsace. Communities in these places tended to resent the new (Gallican) rules coming out of Paris. They simply continued to support their non-oath-taking (*non-jurés*) priests, often choosing to pay them a kind of tithe. The National Assembly's policy towards the Church was also grist for the mill for those who wanted to oppose the Revolution on any grounds whatsoever. The king was already dismayed at the policy directions being taken by the Revolution, but he had relented from time to time, withdrawing a veto, and even accepting the indignity of having to profess in public, from time to time, his support for the revolution. But when Louis XVI was asked on 12 July 1790 to sign the decree passing the new Civil Constitution for the Church (*Constitution civile du clergé*) he

had a crisis of conscience. Louis XVI was eventually constrained to approve on 22 July 1790, but only on condition that Pope Pius VI would agree, which Louis XVI knew he would not.

This constitution brought in much needed reforms in the Church, but it trampled the sensitivities of those who did not want to see the Church become a mere department of state. Deeply wounded at having to sign this document, Louis was prompted finally to take the advice of those, like his queen, who had been urging him to flee France and seek help abroad to crush the Revolution.

Another way was opened for a more radical politics. Counter-revolutionaries now had a firmer basis for support, the revolutionaries were insecure again, and the king was trying to find a way to escape the clutches of the revolution.



*Images from the era of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Suggest how these images show the revolution radicalising.*



(top) **Unknown artist** *Le Degraisneur patriote* : patience, Monsieur, votre tour viendra 1790

(bottom left) **Unknown artist** *Pretre aristocrate fuyant le serment civique* 1790.

(bottom right) **Unknown artist** *Pretre patriote pretant de bonne foi le serment civique* 1790.



In this image from the middle months of 1790, a fat bishop is about to be downsized by Patriot members of the National Assembly. A nobleman and a monk worry that they might be next.

Another poster of the era offers a rude image showing a patriotic sans-culotte's harsh view of Papal Bulls issued by Pope Pius VI in March-April 1791 rejecting any idea that there could

ever be a Civil Constitution of the Clergy (12 July 1790): he mooned the Pope. This anonymous colour drawing (not on the web!) is now in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. ‘Bulles du XVIIIème siècle. Pendant que Pie VI [...], la France repousse les Bulles [du pape]’ (©Musée Carnavalet Roger-Viollet), [here](#). And, on a similar theme: [Anonymous], ‘La Frances’ appuiant sur les droits de l’homme en écrasant la noblesse et le clergé :repousse avec une chignaupe patriotique les bulles apostolique du St Pere preparées par l’abbé Royou battant de l’eau de savon dans un plat aux pieds de sa sainteté sontlestitres des princes, a similarly coarse response is the written one by Jacques Hébert (1757–94), enraged leader of sans-culottes, future victim of Robespierre. His rude text, typical of Hébert, is in the 44th issue of his newspaper, *Père Duchesne*. Another [website](#) has an image of a constitutional (*juré* or *juteur*) priest taking the oath of loyalty to the Constitution as required by the law of 27 November 1791: ‘I promise to uphold the Constitution with all my power’.

### A Document from the era of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy

At the offices of Elysée Loustalot’s radical **liberal** newspaper, *Les Révolutions de Paris*, the elimination of undue priestly influence was seen as a necessary first step to the proper education of the people. In a tone that has sinister echoes of the *sans-culotte* de-Christianisation movement to come in 1793, the *Révolutions de Paris* rejoiced late in November 1790 that ‘the reign of priests has passed’:

*The reign of the priests has passed; and the more efforts they make to maintain the tottering remains of ecclesiastical power, the sooner will they hasten its collapse. The National Assembly, in debating the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, has declared that each department will form a single diocese. It has established ten metropolitans and defined their area of authority. In reducing the number of bishoprics, it has assigned them new districts and has suppressed several of them. It has forbidden the recognition of the authority of a bishop whose see is under foreign control. It has established the election of bishops and curés, it has committed this election to the same electoral body as nominate the members of the departments and districts... If the clergy were less concerned with their past glory and wealth, if they did not wish to foment, at any possible price, civil war, they would no longer resist the lawful will of the nation. One would not see the majority of the bishops of France, in agreement with the curés, crying out that the Catholic religion is lost,*



**Unknown artist** *La France s'appuyant sur les droits de l'homme en écrasant la noblesse et le clergé* 1791

*because they have been deprived of the means of a display of wealth that is both insolent and absolutely opposed to the principles and spirit of the Gospel.*<sup>103</sup>

## Creating New Men and Women

While the Deputies at Versailles worked feverishly on the work of giving France its first written constitution, ordinary people were often carried away with the vision, in the best spirit of the **Enlightenment**, of a society in which the worst of human failings would be eliminated. They believed an education system open to all and good legislation could remove the most basic of human prejudices, be it in regard to foreigners, people of a different race or religion. Voices were even heard suggesting that women be given equal rights with men.

*La Feuille villageoise* was a newspaper specially written for the peasants. It was sent each week to the provinces and was usually read out by the local priest after Mass. The newspaper explained the work of the Assembly. It believed that the path to the future of the new regime could be smoothed by the Light of Reason and Education. This extract from its first number explains the motives that led to its being founded and the principles on which it would be based.

## The Light of Reason

*It is for you that we write, O peaceful inhabitant of the country; it is time that education came to you. Previously, it was restricted to the towns, where good books imperceptibly enlightened people, and prepared the Revolution from which you received the first benefits. It is by reading that those brave men were produced whom you charged to represent you and to defend your rights: it is by reading that you yourselves will learn to know your rights, and to preserve them. Doubtless you have not the ambition or at least the leisure to aspire to very detailed knowledge; but there is some knowledge that must be held precious by all French people, and which it is indispensable for you to acquire. We have seen the time when people were not ashamed to insist that ignorance must be your lot; the reason being that ignorance on the part of those who are ruled seems to ensure the safety of those who rule .... A new government is going to succeed the one that, from abuse to abuse, had heaped up its wrongs upon every class in society.*

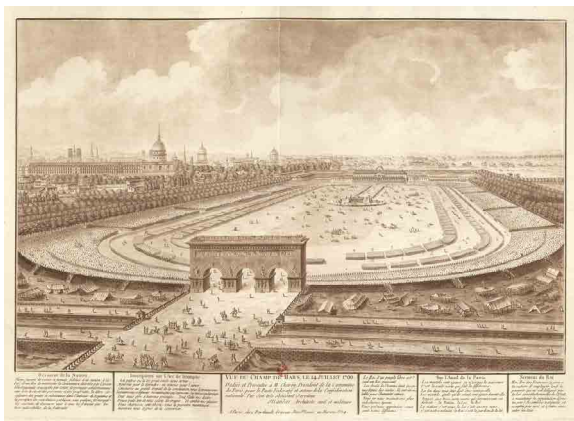
*Country dwellers, you take part in this government. You have the right to elect those who represent you, you yourselves can be elected; your fellow citizens can entrust to you some share in the administration of your everyday affairs; and even if you do not aspire to any of these honourable positions, you ought to know their duties and functions, in order to obey those who have been raised to them, in order to judge whether they are worthy of your trust. Finally, the right and the duty of each one of*

103. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 73, 27 November–4 December 1790', 390–94, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 98–99.

*you is to study its laws, in order to learn how to obey them.*

*Previously the peasant, still attached to the soil, knew nothing of the relations of France with her neighbours, or he received only false ideas in this regard. Every inhabitant of a free country must, however, be instructed in the interests of his country.*

*Persuaded finally that light is born from light, and that the mind is enlightened in proportion to that which is enlightened, we shall present you, country dwellers, with all sorts of useful discoveries which will make your lot better, will enrich your leisure, lighten your work, and instruct you in the arts and trades that open up new sources of wealth to you. You are everything to us. Those who concern themselves with the happiness of the country workers, do so to the good of the nation, for the rural areas are the source of the state's wealth, and it is the enlightened tiller of the soil who enriches this source. Receive then the light; let it spread in your soul as joy swells in the heart: and never forget, that if liberty is gained by force, it is preserved by education.*<sup>104</sup>



Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (1737–1831) engraving of the Champ de Mars with its triumphal arch, on 14 July 1790.



An engraving by Berthault of a Jean-Louis Prieur drawing (1759–95) shows an amazing light show four nights after the Fête de la Fédération, on 18 July 1790.

Spirit of the New Society: Performance: Fête de la Fédération, 14 July 1790.

50,000 troops and National Guardsmen trooped into the key military parade ground in Paris, the *Champ de Mars* on 14 July 1790, to mark the conclusion of the first year of the revolution. The event was a public festival to celebrate the work and the achievements of the Revolution: the *Fête de la Fédération*. A crowd of about 300,000 people were said to have attended, half to a third of the Parisian population. What follows is a collection of images of the *Fête de la*

104. 'La Feuille villageoise, No. 1, 30 September 1790', 3–6 in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 239–40.

*Fédération*. We take secular festivals for granted today; every city seems to have one; the French Revolution, as with so much else, invented the genre. Before 1789, there were lots of religious, royal and guild events, some of which involved elements of public procession, but a secular event to celebrate something as abstract as rights and a constitution presented artists and event organisers, like Jacques-Louis David, with quite a challenge. Arrangements for an Olympic Games opening ceremony would represent a rough contemporary equivalent to the challenge the revolutionaries faced in framing a public event for 14 July 1790. How could they celebrate their constitution when it was not yet bedded down, and when the king, the Pope, most nobles and some clergy were still hostile?



*Politics as Performance*. How did the French revolutionaries, in this, their first great festival, give expression to the idea of the **sovereignty** of the people? You will need to review the different images in the selection below. In doing so, you will need to bear in mind who's doing what and what is presented as being in the centre of things. You will also need to identify symbols, and consider what spectators in the crowd were supposed to think and do.



Hubert Robert (1733–1808), a former Court painter based at Versailles, painted another view of the '*Fête de la Fédération au Champ de Mars 14 juillet 1790*', (now in Versailles: Musée national du château et des Trianons), and [online](#).



There is a wide-angle [image](#) of the *Fête de la Fédération*, 14 July 1790, at painted by Pierre-Antoine Demachy (1723–1807) and exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1793.



Another interesting engraving of the layout of the festival, found in an Almanach of 1791, and preserved in the French National Archives' Centre for Historical Research can be viewed [here](#).



An un-attributed image allows a close-up of the centre-piece of the festival [here](#).



An unknown naïve artist, Dubois, painted the festival, focusing on the King and Queen in partnership with the National Guard and the Nation (gendered female) view the painting [here](#).



**Charles Monnet** *Fédération générale des Français au Champ de Mars, le 14 juillet 1790* 1790

Another interesting engraving of the festival was by Charles Monnet (1732–1809), and is from the French National Library collection.



**Planting a Liberty Tree.** Between 1791 and 1800, members of the Lesueur (or Le Sueur) family of artists painted, then cut out, a series of gouaches of revolutionary events and scenes, representing events as they occurred. The gouaches were probably made for a fairground kind of magic-lantern show, functioning as an as-it-happens illustrated history of the revolution. (Such a magic-lantern show features in the opening scenes of Ettore Scola's fine film of 1982, *La Nuit de Varennes*, which imagines what might have happened if Casanova had also fled France with the royal family). Family lore in the 1880s identified Jean-Baptiste Lesueur (1749–1826) as the key artist in the project. He had been an elector in 1792 and 1798, served on Republican-era food-supply and security-surveillance committees, and was listed as an ex-Jacobin terrorist in 1802. His father had trained as a landscape painter in the **Old Regime**, but became, like David, a Republican artist interested in democracy and the democratisation of dress, promoting a new and freer ancient-Greek style of dress. The Lesueur home was in the *faubourg* Saint-Martin in Paris. The gouaches were found in the 1880s in a family collection in the Yonne, just to the southeast of Paris. These gouaches are invaluable as sources because they were composed by 'true believers', and composed at the very times to which they refer; they are not sullied by cynicism and by later forms of political correctness. Some of the gouaches are now in the *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris.



Many of Lesueur's works can be found through the Musée Carnavalet Collections gateway [webpage](#). Enter Lesueur into the search field to the right and press 'Valider'.

The series of gouaches of revolutionary scenes now in *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris by the Lesueur family contains a record of a formal revolutionary ceremony: the planting of a 'Tree of Liberty

(*un arbre de la liberté*)'.<sup>105</sup> Although a decree of the *National Convention*, 23 January 1794 / 3 *Pluviôse* II, ordered every municipality (*commune*) in France to plant a liberty tree, many had already done so. The first recorded instance was in a Breton village, Gahard, north of Rennes, in February 1790. Over 200 were planted alone in Paris in 1791. Most municipalities chose an oak or a poplar. Lesueur's lively gouache records the ceremony as this tree was planted around 1790. It shows local municipal leaders and/or members of the National Assembly planting the tree in the presence of the town band, patriotic young girls and the National Guard. Humbler people seem pushed to the rear.



What messages is Lesueur's gouache of the ceremony trying to convey about the foundations of liberty in France, and about the potential for cooperation between revolutionary leaders and the *sans-culottes*?

The Lesueur image 'Plantation d'un arbre de la Liberté' is at [Vigneux Histoire](http://Vigneux Histoire) — a site dealing with the local history of Vigneux-sur-Seine, which also traces trees of liberty planted there in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



**Jean-Baptiste Lesueur** *The Planting of a Tree of Liberty in Revolutionary France 1790*



*The Political and Social Values of the National Guard.* Use these two portrait sources dating from 1790 or 1792 to decode the values of the National Guard in the era of constitutional monarchy.

1. First there is a proud portrait of the young commander of the National Guard, the *marquis* de Lafayette, painted appearing at the centre of the *Fête de la Fédération*, 14 July 1790: Talleyrand is shown having just preached a sermon praising France's new Constitution. Lafayette 'reigns' supreme in the centre, surrounded by youthful gentleman members of the National Guard. The King is conspicuously absent. This anonymous painting, dating from around 1790, is in the *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris (inventory no. RVB01885) and another treatment of the same subject, an allegory of 'France, liberty and Minerva surrounding La Fayette and his national guards as he takes the civic oath on the day of the *Fête de la Fédération* 14 July 1790'.

105. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris, Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plate 11 (Musée Carnavalet D11975), 85–86.

2. The next image is from the Museum of the French Revolution (Musée de la Révolution française) at the Château de Vizille, near Grenoble. It holds an extraordinary portrait (MRF 2004-14) of an aged National Guardsman and his wife, René Dogereau and Perrine Trouillard, as painted in 1791. The old guardsman's patriotic buttons proclaim National Guard values: 'la Loi et le Roi (the Law and the King)'. Would Louis XVI have agreed with this emphasis? The Parisian artist, Rémy-Furcy Descars, (1746–93), had been known as a painter of music concerts, aristocrats and minor royals. Here he seems to be reveling in portraying the new values of revolutionary France. His subjects might have been wealthy **bourgeois** or aristocrats, but this is not how they are portrayed. They are all patriots.



*A Spanish View: Goya.* While Spain is a long way from France, the example of the sensitivities of Spanish artist, Goya, offers impressive evidence of the extraordinary reach of the changing values and agendas of the French revolution. Francisco Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828) was an artist from Saragossa, in the austere region of Aragon in central northeast Spain. Never a famous public figure in Spain and suffering from profound deafness from 1792, Goya nonetheless rose to the position of court painter to the kings of Spain from 1789 until his death in 1828. His father was a master craftsman, a gilder in Saragossa; young Goya associated with artists. At the age of 13, he was apprenticed to one, and then journeyed to Madrid and to Rome to enhance his art skills. In a painting from 1778, the 'Hawthorn blossom seller', a study for a tapestry workshop in Madrid, Goya tried to earn extra money by painting scenes to be turned into tapestries to hang on noble people's walls. Goya was then a junior artist at the court of Spanish King Carlos III (1759–88), but his scenes contained elements of criticism of **Old Regime** society. The 'Hawthorn blossom seller', for instance, contrasts the unaffected, fresh and natural beauty of a market seller of the fruits of the hawthorn tree with her buyers, a degenerate well-to-do couple comprising an ogling nobleman and his female mistress or companion (*petimetra*) full of airs.<sup>106</sup>

Another Goya work, an etching of 'A Garrotted Man' (1779) was likewise a critical work, based on his witness or recollection of an execution: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.<sup>107</sup> The condemned man is shown seated on a stool, an iron collar around his neck, and—supposedly quickly and humanely—he died by tightening of the collar's screw. Nobles in Spain were executed in this way; commoners were just hanged, or in the past, burned. Already critical—in private!—of the old order in Europe, Goya seems to have been influenced by events in France in 1788–90. He painted 'Little Giants (*Las gigantillas*)' in Madrid in 1791–92: *Muséo del Prado*, Madrid.<sup>108</sup> It was a design for a tapestry to hang in a *salon* of a member of the Spanish Bourbon royal family. Goya shows boys playing as boys do; but in his version, stout peasant lads in working breeches carry fancier dressed noble boys. Or are they just taking turns? Who is accepting of whom in this tableau that crosses the **First** and **Second Estates**? Is this a political

106. 'Hawthorn blossom seller' (1778), Prado Museum, Madrid, from Janis A. Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes*, 1746–1828, (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 36, Plate 20.

107. *Ibid.*, 45, Plate 28.

108. *Ibid.*, 91, Plate 65.

painting, or is it 'just' a study in human worth and in human vanity? Is your interpretation affected by the fact that it was to be a tapestry intended for the wealthy wellborn? Or is all art like that?

Timothy Tackett's *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* is an impressive contribution to the study of the French Revolution. The book was published by Princeton University Press in 1996. Tackett simply studied the careers, writings, speeches and actions of every deputy in the National Assembly, 1789-91. Tackett focussed on their prior experiences and of course on their actions during the first eighteen months of the revolution in 1789-90. It was already clear, by the end of 1790, that huge changes had been accomplished in France by a large group of people who never imagined they would make fundamental changes when they first came to Versailles in May 1789. By 1791, most deputies in the National Assembly thought the hard work was done; they only had to tidy up loose ends. With hindsight, we know — but they could not — that unanticipated crises would thwart the confident presumptions about peace, good order and a workable constitution they displayed in the *Fête de la Fédération* in 1790. Their worst moment for the deputies came with the decision in June 1791 of Louis XVI not only to try to flee France, his family in tow, but also to look to join the counter-revolution, encamped in the Rhineland not far from the point on the frontier to which he was heading. These astounding and de-stabilising events also became the subject of a fine narrative history by the same historian, Timothy Tackett. He entitled it: *When the King took Flight*.<sup>109</sup>

Tackett's question about 1789-90 was original. Great works of history always begin with the posing of great questions by historians. His answer was to embark on a biography of a whole group, something experts call a prosopography. His data was his comprehensive study of the political passions, interests and experiences, past and present, of the people who became deputies of the National Assembly, the key group of central actors in a pivotal period of the transformation of French institutions, values and politics: 1789-90.

The same data also enables a fresh look at the relationship between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, something we first discussed in **Ripples in a Pond**. The conclusion to Tackett's book agreed that the problem of the origins of the Revolution is quite different from the problem of understanding its course and outcomes. Revolutions always transcend their origins. That is a unique feature of revolutions: they break moulds. Tackett noted that the fiscal and political problems of the monarchy could never entirely account for the onset of the revolution. The monarchy in France had been bankrupt often enough before, and it had encountered acts of resistance, even defiance, but never before had there been such a radical constitutional change in France.

109. Timothy Tackett, *When the King took Flight*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press)

This view had important implications. It shows that the great changes initiated in 1789-90 arose at least as much, probably more, from what the people who became the leaders of the revolution brought to the revolution as it may have arisen from the failures of the *Old Regime*. So, what then did Tackett think were the key new elements which the soon-to-become revolutionaries brought to the revolution? What were the key new and additional things making this royal bankruptcy and political crisis so disastrous for the *Old Regime*?

Tackett concluded that the Enlightenment was unimportant. (But perhaps he defined the role of the Enlightenment too narrowly as a formal set of ideas and principles, rather than as a set of cultural dispositions, sites and practices.) Surveying the pre-revolutionary careers and values of the future central figures in the revolutionary dramas of 1789-90, Tackett concluded Enlightenment agendas scarcely influenced those who came to Paris in May 1789 to take a seat in an Estates General that all-too-soon became a National Assembly. While a few famous deputies like Constantin François de Chassebœuf, *comte de Volney*, and like the *abbé* Siéyès, were steeped in the most radical trends in the Enlightenment, most deputies of the *Third Estate* were oblivious. Tackett found their core frustrations were with unmerited inequalities and with arbitrary authority, royal or aristocratic. The pre-revolutionary things they had most in common were their “hands-on” local experiences as junior lawyers and minor officials engaged in local work to try to improve local government and to enable more justice in their local courts of law. The deputies of 1789-90 were all monarchists, too. They were hoping the king would assume the unifying and fatherly constitutional role they had mapped out for him and which, from time to time, he had seemed he might fulfil.

Tackett thought the deputies of the National Assembly were politicians above all, pure and simple. We now know these kinds of people well, but we have to remember that they were a group without precedent in France. Politicians were also barely emerging as a group in eighteenth-century Britain. The deputies in the National Assembly in France in 1789-91 were local hopefuls: political men with extensive experience of power at the local level. They cared about the people who elected them. They had now tasked themselves to try to solve political problems at a national level. They were practical people, not theorists. They tended to avoid discussions of abstract principles, though they did enact the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in August 1789. They simply learned about national politics by listening to each other in the heady atmosphere of parliamentary debates and in political club debates.

In Tackett’s lines of argument, the keys to understanding the course and outcomes of the French Revolution are all political and institutional, and they are researchable in the study of personal experiences. Analyses emphasising social and ideological factors in the background seem too contrived for Tackett.

### **Spirit of the New Society: Words**

The French revolution particularly impressed a lot of well-educated people in Europe, especially

people whose talent did not to coincide with noble birth. One young German poet, Goethe (1749–1832), painted an allegory of freedom as late as 1792, after French troops defeated a Habsburg army invading France at Valmy, 20 September 1792: his scene showed free peasants in happy surrounds, and Goethe captioned it: ‘Passers-by, this land [France] is a free country’. When another young poet from the north of England, William Wordsworth (1770–1850), visited France in 1790, he shared the enthusiasm for the new world ushered in by Paris.

In an autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, Wordsworth recalled in 1805:

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven ! —Oh! times,  
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance!  
When Reason seemed the most to assert her  
rights,  
When most intent on making of herself  
A prime Enchantress—to assist the work,  
Which then was going forward in her name!*



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *Freiheitsbaum in Luxemburger Landschaft* 1793

## Titles

On Saturday, 19 June 1790, the National Assembly abolished the right to hereditary titles of nobility. The decree was an important statement of egalitarian values, but it had no practical repercussions. Former nobles (called *ci-devants*) were still known to be nobles, even though everyone was ostensibly, sometimes ostentatiously, now just a citizen (*citoyen*). Writing in his newspaper, *Révolutions de Paris*, Elysée Loustalot thought the National Assembly should have gone further in creating a more equal society.

## Pavements for the Poor

*The Assembly decreed the suppression of the titles of count, duke, noble, etc... It is a fine result, but it would have been a good decree to force these citizens to exact declarations of their goods, and to subject their parks, châteaux, and other lands that they foolishly leave uncultivated, to the same heavy taxes as if they had been cultivated. It is a fine decree to put an end to livery; but it would be a good one to establish a tax on the number of domestic servants, and by this means to cause to return to the country some of the good-for-nothings that the former nobles support in idleness. It is a fine decree to have the statues of the tyrants knocked down. It is a*

*good decree to have established pavements for the poor, who carry burdens, and to protect pedestrians against the despotism of coachmen.*<sup>110</sup>

Ever concerned about the rights of the ordinary people, Elysée Loustalot in the *Révolutions de Paris*, appealed for clubs to be set up throughout France to educate the people in their rights.

## Clubs for the People

Jacques is the father of a typical family of the people. Every morning when he gets up his first thought is for his children, the eldest of whom is only just beginning to walk. How does he provide for them? After some trouble Jacques was able to get permission to put up a small lean-to under which he spends the whole day at a tiring job which returns little profit. On the few occasions when his wife manages to get away from caring for their growing family she sits down at Jacques' side to help him with his work. Jacques, who is a good father, begrudges the half-hour that it takes to eat his meagre meals.

Jacques has his little stall situated almost opposite the house of the Jacobins in the Rue **St. Honoré**; he has noticed the crowds of people who arrive there around dusk. He asked what everyone was doing in that house, and at that particular time, three or four times a week. This is what he was told:

*Three or four times a week, twelve to fifteen hundred citizens make a point of meeting in the library of the former convent. There, for four or five hours, they discuss, reason, absorb sound principles, and take precautions against pseudo-patriots; in a word they make themselves worthy of the liberty which we have conquered.*

*Jacques then ruminates on the good fortune of these members of what was known as the **Jacobin club**, the most famous of the many that emerged with the Revolution. He contrasts his own condition: so very busy, unable to keep up with the news, kept in the kind of ignorance that might cause him to take the side of this or that person because I have neither the time nor the guidance necessary to clarify my ideas and direct my patriotism. I must blindly follow those who represent me; for this reason they get their own way with their constituents, three-quarters of whom are no better educated than I am. How cruel it is not to be able to enjoy fruitfully and without abusing it, the blessing of liberty, at the conquest of which I played no small part on the 14 July! Let others reply to poor Jacques' reflections, and those of millions like him: we do not feel that we have the courage: we will merely say this: Will nothing ever be done for the people who have done everything? Will they always be forgotten? Without instruction liberty is for them useless and even dangerous. Since*

110. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 50, 19–26 June 1790', pp. 6–8 in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 251.

*they set themselves free has anyone sought ways of instructing them? What are the establishments decreed for this purpose?*

*Loustalot goes on to plead that the people having become sovereign must exercise this **sovereignty**; that this three-quarters of the population must be given equal education, and a better share in government and in job allocation. We need [Cordeliers-like] clubs for the people. Let every street in every town, let every hamlet have one. The primary assemblies are too solemn and too infrequent to take their place. The people need clubs which are fixed and free, few in number but informal, without regulations or titled officials; such things detract in some way from liberty, waste too much time and engender that selfish spirit so contrary to the public good. The Jacobin and other clubs serve a purpose but clubs for the use of the people, simply organised and held without pretensions would be of the greatest benefit. Let an honest artisan call together at his house some of his neighbours; see him read by the light of a lamp, burning at common cost, the decrees of the National Assembly, adding to the reading his own reflections or those of some of his attentive neighbours. At the end of the meeting listen as he cheers up his audience, startled by one of Marat's articles, with a reading spiced with the patriotic swear-words of the Père Duchesne.*

*It is most surprising that some wealthy citizens cannot be found who are good enough patriots to offer houses as a centre to which the people of the district could come every Sunday and holiday, to employ usefully the time otherwise wasted in taverns. In this way they could bring themselves up to date with events and make themselves familiar with the principles of the Constitution. In the event of private houses not being made available couldn't the people seize some of these churches rendered vacant by the suppression of the religious orders and the canons? It is said that there has already been formed, in the house of the Capucins in the Rue St.-Honoré, a popular club such as should be set up in every section of the big towns. In the country the porches of the parish churches, or even the churches themselves, could be consecrated to this purpose. Such buildings could only become more respectable.<sup>111</sup>*

In December 1789, the National Assembly discussed the issue of whether Jews, actors and hangmen should be admitted to the rights of citizenship. All eventually received the vote, though domestic servants and women were still excluded; their positions of dependency making them unfree and therefore unfit to vote. On 24 December 1789 and 28 January 1790 respectively, the National Assembly granted Protestants and Jews full civil rights, suspending the application of the new rules regarding Jews until 1791.

111. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 73, 27 November–4 December 1790', 401–406, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 173–174.

On 24 December 1789, the National Assembly granted full civil rights to ‘non-Catholics’ including non-Christians. However, no agreement could be reached on the question of Jews, because of the hostility of deputies from eastern France, who claimed that Jewish moneylenders owned debts that would bankrupt the region if Jews were given full rights. The measure was adopted while adding the clause ‘without intending to influence the decision on the Jews, on whose status the National Assembly will decide later’.

*Elysée Loustalot* explained the new **liberal** principles of the new era in the document below. There was no reason not to believe, argued Loustalot, writing in the *Révolutions de Paris*, that prejudices held against these groups could not be overcome, but the legislators had to distinguish between those that could be attacked openly and those that had to be attacked more subtly: the power of prejudice was real and so the ‘constitution had to be made for the people, as the people cannot be made for the constitution’:

*There exist against the Jews hatreds; against actors, opinions; against hangmen, prejudices. If it is not shown, in the eyes of the great majority of individuals composing the nation, that these hatreds, these opinions, these prejudices, are without foundation, then we run the risk of making laws that will not be executed at all; and, what would be even more dangerous, laws that could cast disfavour on the code in which they were to be found, on the laws that preceded or followed them. It is not therefore for a legislator to say to a people you will no longer have such an opinion, nor to prescribe what is contrary to such a prejudice...*

*There was such a simple means of sounding their views that it is astonishing that it has not been used. Let us suppose that the National Assembly had defined that which constituted the citizen, which was the first thing that it had to do in order not to expose itself to risky discussions. Suppose that it had said: ‘Permanent residence in the territories of the French monarchy carries the obligation of contributing to the public taxes and confers rights of citizenship’. From that time, the Jew domiciled in France would have been reckoned a citizen; if chosen by his neighbours he could have been elected; his virtues, talents, and services would gradually make people forget the wrongs committed by those of his cult. These men would attach themselves to professions, to works by which they could conquer the general esteem; public hatred would be extinguished; the Israelite caste would be united to the great mass of the body politic; and the legislator would obtain without upheaval, without friction, without danger, the effect that will be tried perhaps vainly to be produced by another means.<sup>112</sup>*

112. ‘Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 24, 19–26 December 1789’, 2–6 in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971). 94.

The most obvious clash of principle and practice of the *Declaration of Rights* was slavery and the slave trade, an important source of French commercial wealth. Before the Revolution a society called ‘The Friends of the Blacks’ was founded to seek the gradual abolition of the slave trade. During the Revolution it came up against one of the most powerful lobbies at this time, the *Club Massiac*, which spent lavishly to defend the cause of the slave-owning colonists and the sugar- and slave-trading merchants in the colonies and in France. The *Club Massiac* subsidised newspapers such as the *Gazette de Paris*. The injustice of black slavery in the islands of the French Caribbean was championed in France by Brissot and Robespierre and by the **liberal** clergyman, **abbé** Henri Grégoire, who had also advocated granting Jews full civil rights. As expected, matters came to a head in the French slave plantation colony of Saint Domingue (now Haiti), a colony located on the western third of the tropical island of Hispaniola in the northwestern arm of the chain of islands in the Caribbean Sea. Fortunes were made in cane sugar production here. The labour was sourced from slave traders in west Africa. There were nearly half a million West African slaves in Haiti alone. The result was a triangle trade for places like Bordeaux, Liverpool, Lisbon and Cadiz: cloth was traded to west Africa for slaves, then the slaves were traded in the Caribbean for products like cotton and sugar, which then arrived back in these and other European towns. This trade in human misery was very profitable for naval financiers, merchants, seamen and plantation owners; each voyage in the equilateral triangle generated substantial profits, most of which ended up in Europe in the richer decoration of churches and in the building of fine country estates and townhouses, as well as helping heap capital for industrial developments.

The new French talk of human rights was bound to have repercussions. They quickly surfaced in Haiti as early as August 1790, when slaves rioted, burned their plantations’ ‘big’ houses and even briefly controlled the main port. The National Assembly responded in May 1791 by granting very limited rights to a tiny minority of free-born blacks in Haiti. But soon after, there was an even bigger insurrection in Haiti in August 1791, which now murdered some white plantation owners, and which created a revolutionary government. By contrast, the revolutionaries in France were now deeply conflicted; their principles against their wallets. The Legislative Assembly would still not abolish slavery, as the trade was just so lucrative, but they did extend citizenship in April 1792 to more of the few blacks who were free.

Eventually the problem of the political status of the coloureds was left to the colonies themselves to solve—that is, until much later on in the revolution when the National Convention decreed its abolition, 4 February 1794 / 16 Pluviôse II. But in the short term, especially the outbreak of war in April 1792, the issue of slavery was pushed into the background. In the meantime, using the same radical **liberal** principles, Loustalot’s *Révolutions de Paris* argued against the powerful colonial lobby on the simple principle of racial equality:

*As for the slave trade and negro slavery, the European governments will find it useless to oppose the cries of philosophy, the principles of universal liberty that germinate and spread throughout nations. Let them learn that it is never in vain*

*that peoples are shown the truth; once the impulse is given, it must absolutely give way to the flood that is going to sweep away the ancient abuses, and the new order of things will raise itself despite all the precautions that have been taken to prevent its establishment. Yes! we dare to forecast with confidence that the time will come, and that day is not far off when you will see an African, with frizzy hair, with no other recommendation than his good sense and his virtues, come to take part in the legislation in the heart of our national assemblies.*<sup>113</sup>

And later:

*But negroes, you will say, are a kind of men born to slavery; they are dull, lying and wicked; they themselves agree about white superiority, and almost about the legality of their rule. It is not true that negroes are dull; experience proves that they were successful in all branches of knowledge; and if the brutalised condition into which they are sunk makes them believe that whites are a superior race, liberty will soon bring them up to their level. As for what people say of their wickedness, it will never equal the cruelty of their masters.*<sup>114</sup>

Robespierre is famously said to have declared, when the issue of slavery and profits came into conflict, it was better that the colonies should perish rather than a principle. On 7 May 1791 it was proposed that the colonial assemblies, which were composed entirely of whites, should be given exclusive legislative power in the colonies. Thus, not only the negro slaves, who made up the bulk of the population, but the free negroes and mulattoes (mixed 'blood'), who had been seeking representation at the National Assembly since it first met, were to be left to the mercy of the colonists. The proposal excited a vigorous debate, during which Robespierre (12 May 1791) compared the inequality in the colonies to the situation that had existed in France before the Revolution: the right-wing Deputy *abbé* Jean-Siffrien Maury—another orator of renown, a cobbler's son and future Cardinal of Paris under Napoleon—replied, predicting the colonies would perish if they were not controlled by the whites. The famous expression, 'Perish the colonies rather than a principle!' was not used by any one orator, although it was implicit in the anti-slavery speeches of Robespierre and Dupont de Nemours. In the final outcome, self-interest won over principle, although in the concluding debate on 15 May, Robespierre gained a slight concession for mulattoes. But even this was lost on 24 September 1791 when further pressure from the colonists forced the Assembly to reconsider its decree.

In and around the many opinions speaking on behalf of the world's disadvantaged, the rights of women also came in for some consideration. Opinions favouring women's civil rights were rare indeed. The most famous advocate of women's rights was a philosopher and mathematician, the *marquis* de Condorcet, a radical who was also an atheist and a republican in 1790–91. One

113. Les Révolutions de Paris, no. 63, 18–25 September 1790', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 523–24.

114. Les Révolutions de Paris, no. 66, 9–16 October 1790' in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 523–24..

public speaker on behalf of women was Olympe de Gouges. She published a *Declaration of the Rights of Women* in 1792 to set alongside *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* of 27 August 1789; but before her, the Dutchwoman, Etta Palm d'Aelders, spoke out at a confederation of the 'Friends of Truth' claiming that women should be given equal rights with men. The following is the conclusion to her speech:

*Justice must be the first virtue of free men, and justice demands that the laws be common to all beings as the air and the sun; and yet everywhere the laws are in favour of men, at the expense of women, because everywhere power is in your hands.... Be fair towards us, Messieurs, you that nature created very superior in physical strength; you have kept for yourself all the ease and enjoyment of vice, while to us, who have so fragile an existence, whose collective ills are enormous, you have given all the difficulty of virtue as our share; and this delicate formation of nature has made your injustice all the more profound, since instead of remedying it by education and by laws in our favour, it seems that you form us only for your pleasures, whilst it would be so sweet, so easy, to associate us in your glory! The prejudices that have surrounded our sex are based on unjust laws, which grant us only a secondary role in society, and often force us to the humiliating necessity of conquering the wicked nature or savage character of a man, who, having become our master through the greed of our parents, has caused to change for us the sweetest, the most sacred of duties, that of spouse and mother, into a painful slavery. Yes, Messieurs, there is nothing more humiliating than to demand as a right what it would be glorious to obtain by choice; to get by guile what is so sweet to own only by sentiment; to acquire your heart, your hand, the association of a companion for life, of another self; by a pose that is not our own, by a blind submission to the wishes of our parents, and by making a special study of coquetry in order to soften our captivity; for I must tell you, Messieurs, that it is more often by simpering, by trifles, and the beauty-box, I almost said even by vice, that we win your approval and affection rather than for a lofty mind, a great genius, a heart both truly feeling, as well as delicate and virtuous ...*

*[Madame Palm then tries to prove by examples from history that if nature gave men greater physical strength, it made women their superior in moral force, in delicacy of sentiment, and generosity of soul, etc. Then she concludes by saying:] Would that our sacred Revolution which is due to the progress of philosophy, would work a second revolution in our morals: that the instruments of severity so weighted against us, and which true philosophy condemns, would give place to the sweet, just and natural law; that your love, your friendship, your approbation would be henceforth the recompense of virtuous citizenesses; that civic crowns replace on these attractive heads the wretched pompons, symbols of frivolity and shameful signs of our servitude.*<sup>115</sup>

115. 'La Bouche de Fer, 3 January 1791', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 237–238.

## Radical Liberal Ideas and Changing Social Attitudes



**Education.** The French revolutionaries really believed in education, and saw their work as profoundly educational.

1. What efforts did the revolutionaries make to change the attitudes that existed in the past towards matters such as human rights, prejudice and religion? Have these efforts endured to the present day?
2. Have methods changed today when there are attitudes and behaviours that are seen to be unacceptable? Choose an issue of today that is the focus of government campaigns, for instance: violence against women, drink driving, illegal drug use, under-age alcohol use, and smoking. How should society approach one of these issues? What avenues of persuasion are open to government today that were available to the French revolutionaries? Are these methods likely to be more successful today?

### Phillip Mazzei



Can you reconcile Mazzei's reports with the ideals and policies discussed in the previous sections? Phillip Mazzei sensed a breakdown of social and political stability in France in 1790. Reporting to the King of Poland, 8 January 1790, he quoted 'a letter from St. Omer [in Artois, Flanders] written to a friend of mine by a wise and unbiased man':

*We are being flooded here with incendiary pamphlets monks and aristocrats distribute to stir up the people against the National Assembly; and to judge by the inclination I notice in the minds, the people of Artois, Flanders, and Hainaut, could well be won over to the views of the firebrands if matters continue to drag on for still some time, and if the National Assembly does not see to it that an eye is kept on them. The final decision for the sale of church property and the announcement that was made regarding a quarter of every citizen's income, could well ignite the fuse.*

Mazzei concluded:

*The former privileged classes, with the exception of a few good and honorable individuals, show more and more that they prefer the total destruction of the structure to the correction of the abuses. They yearn for civil war; but more probably they will get a massacre at their own expense. In that case, the worst evil would be the impossibility of distinguishing the innocent from the wicked.*

Reporting again on 22 March 1790, Mazzei emphasised how the more radical democratic

supporters of the Revolution were as bad as its outright opponents:

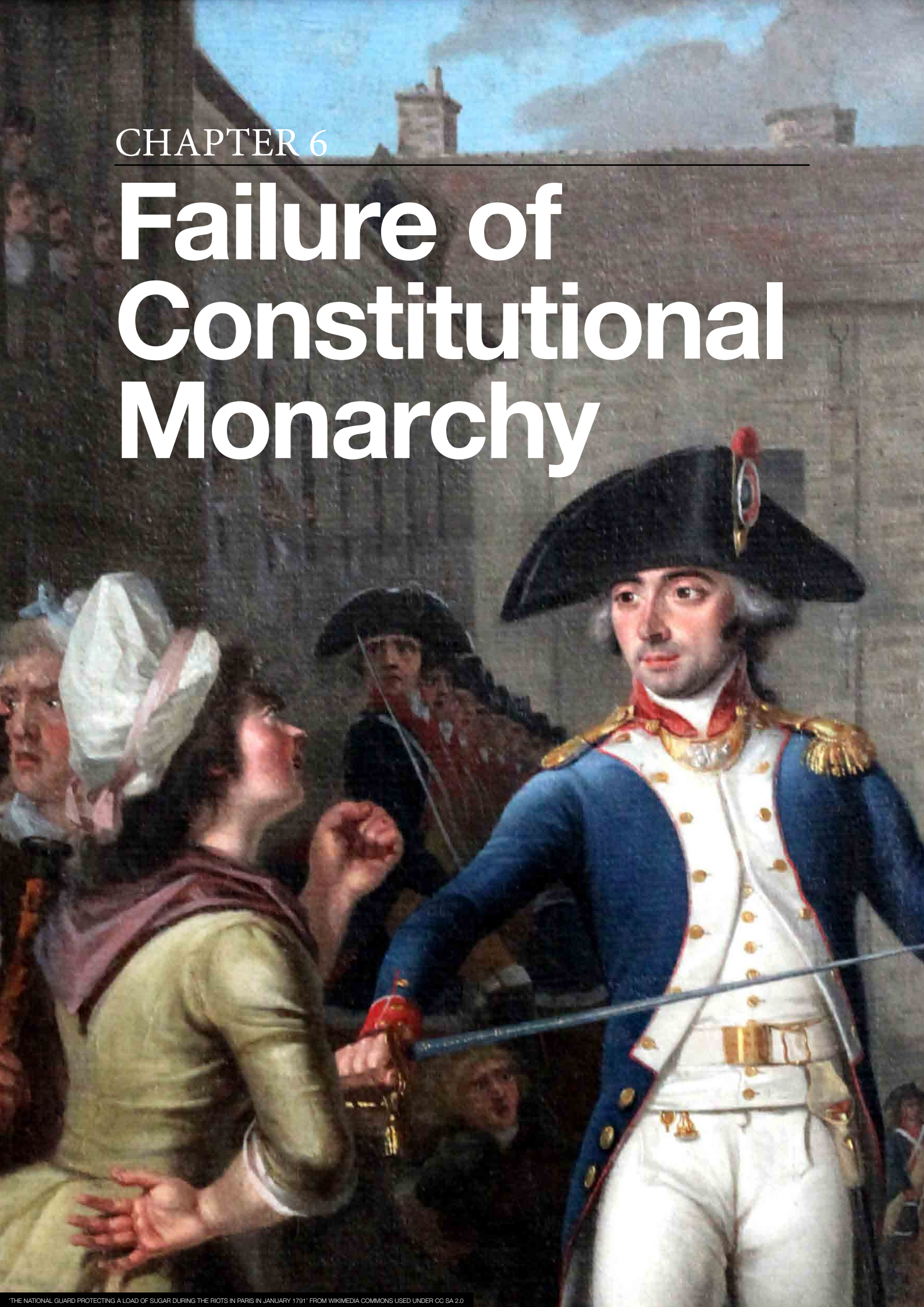
*There is a sufficiently clear account of the intentions to oppose the completion of the Constitution, intentions shared by all the aristocrats and a small number of alleged democrats, who, while pretending to be the most zealous defenders of the rights of the people, try to bring everything to excessive disorder, whereby they hope to give rise to a new state of affairs favorable to their views. The wickedness of these fellows surpasses that of the advocates of former abuses; but since both base their hopes on widespread disorder, they often travel the same roads. I hope, however, that both will be equally disappointed, for the party of reason is forging ahead every day...*<sup>116</sup>

116. Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy: Cassa Di Risparmi e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 255, 303–304.

## CHAPTER 6

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# Failure of Constitutional Monarchy



## Throne, Altar and the Sovereignty of the People

In the months after the Revolution the popularity of the king was undiminished; it even appeared as though he had welcomed the Revolution. On occasions, Louis XVI made—or felt he had to make—public proclamations supporting the reforms of the National Assembly. He still vetoed many new laws, but after the October Days 1789, he also wore the cap of liberty in Paris. After the *marquis de Favras* was executed on 4 February 1790 for conspiring to get the king to commit treason by fleeing France, Louis XVI appeared in public on 13 February proclaiming his support for the Revolution. On 29 May 1790, the king made another declaration in favour of the work being done by the Assembly, prohibiting wearing of any sign of royal favour other than the tricolor.

Louis XVI's decision to flee changed everything. He even left behind a *mémoire*, a little dossier of his views denouncing the revolution.<sup>117</sup> Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the dauphin were spirited away from Paris by a Swede, comte Axel Fersen, during the night of 20 June 1791. Louis XVI left the Tuileries Palace dressed as a peasant, but in a large and cumbersome carriage, an incongruous symbol of wealth and comfort quite inconsistent with the needs of a peasant. The king's party travelled all the next day and night, 21 June, hoping to reach Champagne and then Lorraine, the river Meuse/Maas frontier and the Austrian Netherlands. They were heading for a foreign state, one governed by Louis XVI's nephew-in-law, the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II, a state already sheltering émigrés hostile to the French Revolution. But Louis XVI was recognised—from his image on the 50 livre assignat—by Drouet, a humble postman at Sainte-Menehould, as the king was approaching in his fine carriage the river Aisne separating Champagne from Lorraine. The fact that Louis XVI was running about five hours late meant he had already missed a planned rendezvous with the duc de Choiseul's troops sent ahead to Champagne from the fort at Montmédy. The postman, Drouet, a former dragoon, had time to race to Varennes by the backroads, raising a hue and cry, arranging for the monarch to be identified and detained when he was supping around midnight in the house of citizen Sauce, the local grocer and procureur-syndic at Varennes.

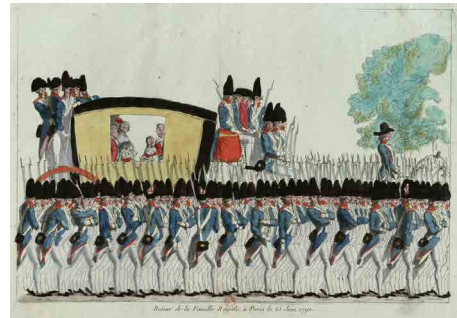
Arrest and detention followed. On his slow return to Paris, 23–25 June 1791, Louis XVI and the royal family passed crowds of sullen onlookers. This was not their usual bowing, waving and cheering crowd. The people they passed were eerily quiet, solemn even. The gritty demeanour of the public, more than the occasional insults, expressed the dismay of ordinary people for the folly—or was it treachery?—of their king. Mid-way through the return journey of the royal family, when a notoriously reactionary aristocrat, the *comte de Dampierre*, dared nonetheless to shout his support for the monarch, local peasants murdered him on the spot.

117. The declaration, which the king left behind on 20 June 1791, announcing his real views about the Revolution is now in the National Archives in Paris, and scans are accessible online. Search the [ARCHIM page](#) at by entering the document number AE/II/1218 in the 'Cote' field. Otherwise, a transcript (in French) can be read [here](#).

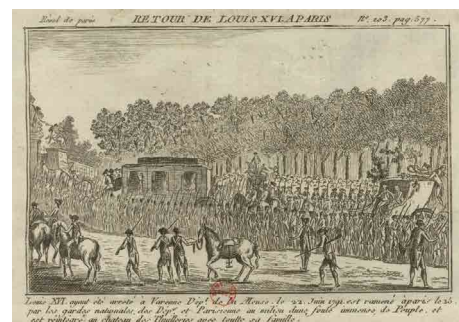
## Contemporary images of the King's Flight to Varennes

Here is a series of contemporary images of the flight from Paris (20 June 1791), detention in Varennes (21 June), and return to Paris of Louis XVI (25 June). Look for evidence of the onset of a republican mood in revolutionary France: ideas of the treason of the king and the queen, and of a changing popular mood.

1. The identification and arrest of the king in the grocer's upstairs room at Varennes at midnight on 21 June 1791, while trying to pass himself off as an ordinary chap with an extraordinary appetite. The image can be found on the [website](#), 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA (© Center for History and New Media).
2. An engraving by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (1748–1819) after an original by Jean-Louis Prieur (1759–1795).<sup>118</sup>
3. One of the Lesueur's interpretations of the upshot of the arrest of Louis XVI at Varennes: the image appears on the [Louvre website](#). The royal lady-in-waiting faints as Bayon, the agent of the National Assembly, detains the monarch. Royal children (in the arms of their nanny) ask for clemency, and the king exasperatedly exclaims that his detention must mean that there is no longer a real king in France.<sup>119</sup>
4. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette's return to Paris under armed escort on 25 June 1791, is portrayed in an engraving by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (1748–1819) after an original by Jean-Louis Prieur (1759–1795)<sup>120</sup> on this [website](#).
5. Contemporary images of the return of the King to Paris can be found in the [Bibliothèque Nationale](#).



Unknown artist *Retour de la famille royale, à Paris le 25 juin 1791* 1791



Bureau des Révolutions de Paris *Retour de Louis XVI à Paris 1791*

118. Philippe de Carbonnières, Prieur: *les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris: Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plates 50 and 51 (Louvre RF6217; Musée Carnavalet D7734), 160–162.

119. Philippe de Carbonnières, Lesueur: *Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris: Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plate 15 (Louvre RF36560; Musée Carnavalet D9095), 94–95.

120. Philippe de Carbonnières, Prieur: *les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris: Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plate 52 (Louvre RF6218; Musée Carnavalet D7719), 164.

Some anonymous, anti-monarchical cartoons of the time (1791) include ‘Louis as Pig’



Unknown artist *La Famille des cochons ramenée dans l'étable* 1791



Unknown artist *Ah! le maudit animal* 1791



Ettore Scola's Italian/French historical fancy, *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982).<sup>121</sup>

This is not a true story, but it is worth viewing as an interesting historical romance nonetheless. Scola imagines a group travelling by stagecoach to France's NE frontier a few hours or so behind the fleeing King and Queen. They are observed by a real diarist of the revolutionary era, Nicolas Edme Rétif de la Bretonne, who figured in the documents in Chapter One of this etextbook. The film opens with Rétif's wife trying to resist bailiffs seizing bankrupt Rétif's assets. A licentious man of letters on the fringe of polite society who supported himself by writing pornographic novels,

Rétif was an acute observer of popular moods.<sup>122</sup>

When he hears in a brothel that the king and queen might try to run away, Rétif investigates, first at the royal palace in Paris, the Tuileries, and then at the coach stop in the **Palais Royal**. He aims to publish what he learns in his diary-chronicle of the Revolution. The fictional travellers include:

- The notorious Venetian lover, Giacomo di Casanova (1725–98), was now old and poor, but he could still charm women. Weary of a reputation he feels he can no longer keep up [!],



Unknown artist *Rétif de la Bretonne un écrivain imprimeur du XVIIIe siècle* 1785

121. Ettore Scola (dir.), *La nuit de Varennes*, (Gaumont, 1982). The film is discussed [here](#).

122. Sample Restif de la Bretonne (1734–1806)'s texts at this [website](#).

alarmed at the demise of the traditional society of orders he took for granted, Casanova poses as the *chevalier* de Seingalt, heading for retirement as the Duke of Waldstein's librarian in the chateau Dux<sup>123</sup> in Czech'ia, then Austrian Bohemia, where he will write his famous memoirs of life and sex in the **Old Regime** Europe.



**Czech National Heritage Institute** View of the castle Dux from above no date



**Czech National Heritage Institute** The main hall with Wallenstein family gallery no date

- The Queen's lady-in-waiting, the beautiful and wealthy comtesse de la Borde, is an old conquest of Casanova's, and the daughter of a brewer who became a **tax farmer**. She travels with the Queen's (gay) hairdresser and her own Caribbean black servant, Marie-Madeleine. The Countess hopes the king and queen on the same road up ahead will escape. As they approach the frontier, the countess anticipates the rendezvous, which went awry, of the royal family with counter-revolutionary émigré troops led by the duc de Choiseul, coming via Montmédy from Metz and Coblenz in the Prussian-controlled Rhineland. The comtesse de la Borde hates revolutionary Paris. She counts on what she considers the peasants' ardent faith in the divine right of kings and their 'natural' deference to aristocrats. In this vein, she recalls the king's journey to open the harbour in Cherbourg in 1786.
- The English radical, *Thomas Paine*, champion of democracy, hero of the American revolution, as eager to support the cause of democracy in France as to uphold the rights of free speech (against zealots like the student, Émile Delage, who is infatuated with Marie-Madeleine).
- Virginie, an ageing Italian opera diva, now headed for provincial obscurity.
- A ex-Parlementaire judge (one of the noblesse de robe) who hates the impertinence of the lower orders in the revolutionary era. He blames the freethinkers of the **Enlightenment**, like Restif, Beaumarchais and Rousseau.
- An Old-Regime-type of wealthy widow of a champagne merchant who wants Casanova to live with her.

123. Dux castle in Czechia [website](#).

- A New-Regime-type of wealthy *bourgeois* industrialist, de Wendel,<sup>124</sup> founder of the metallurgical enterprises of Le Creusot. De Wendel is sympathetic to the revolution; people of his class gained most from the sale of church lands and the freeing-up of the economy and government posts.
- When the postman, Drouet, discovers the king at Varennes, many folk maintain that Jean-Paul Marat has been right all along: the king must be a traitor, for he has tried to run away. Others, like the Deputy-Mayor Saucy, and the Commander of the National Guard, Lafayette, try desperately to pretend that the king must have been kidnapped. The Countess's illusions are shattered, *Tom Paine* takes heart, and Casanova resigns himself to his fate: Europe is utterly changed.

## The Great Divide—the King and the Constitution

The king's flight on 20 June 1791 presented France's moderate revolutionaries with a crisis that threatened to ruin their work. Moderates like Lafayette, Barnave and *Bailly* had committed themselves since the autumn of 1789, and still were committing themselves, to a constitution (the Constitution of 3 September 1791) based on a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch still nominated his Ministers and still exercised a suspensive veto, and according to which active citizens had more rights than passive citizens. By fleeing Paris, the king broke his oft-repeated oath to support the Revolution. In the *Mémoire* Louis XVI left behind he even made it clear his past instances of express support for the Revolution were made under duress.

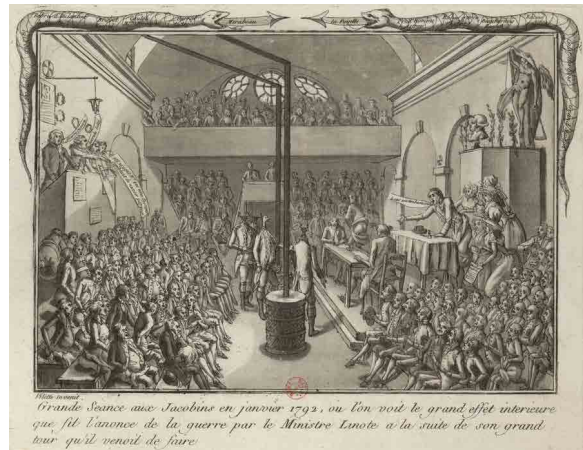
This was a disaster in more than one respect. The failure of the king's flight also alarmed monarchs of other key neighbouring states—though not Russia, as yet; Russia was busy tightening its grip over Poland. On 27 August 1791, the new Habsburg emperor, Francis II, and the Prussian king, Frederick William II, met at Pillnitz, the Saxon summer palace on the Elbe river near Dresden, issuing a joint declaration threatening to invade France should the revolutionaries ever harm their monarch. This blunt declaration was unlikely to impress public opinion in France. There is a popular print of a *Jacobin club* discussion in January 1792 showing radical revolutionaries outdoing each other to issue counter threats to Austria and Prussia. It only hardened the resolve of radical democrats, orienting them more and more towards a Republic, not any sort of constitutional monarchy, and it generally added to wild talk of waging war against anyone who seemed an avowed enemy of rights and reform in France: English or émigré, Catholic conservative or *absolute monarchist*.

Inside France, too, politics was harder to manage. While the Right anti-revolutionary spectrum of politics cheered the king's unambiguous declaration, with his feet and his pen, against the Revolution, the democrats among the Left demanded that his treachery be punished. The

124. Assess the bourgeois lifestyle of the de Wendel family's eighteenth-century home in Châlons region [here](#). De Wendels helped develop the iron industry in France. The family prospered in the nineteenth century.

majority of Deputies in the National Assembly were just appalled, however. They did not want to see their constitutional work of the previous two years, 1789 to 1791, come to nought. For this reason, and in spite of the opinions of the king expressed in his *Mémoire*, the moderates adopted the fiction that the king had been ‘kidnapped’. The Jacobin movement soon split, the moderates like Barnave and Lafayette who promoted the fiction about the king’s kidnap coming to be called Feuillants.

The reaction by the public to the king’s flight should have revealed to the king that whatever he thought of his position in the new regime it was nonetheless one that the vast bulk of the French people favoured. But traditions of kingship weigh heaviest on kings themselves; **absolute monarchs** are not hardwired with antennae to register public opinion. The sullen and ominous silence greeting his return to Paris from Varennes contained a message that could not be read by the monarch. It also showed that the French people, now faced by a possible threat of foreign invasion, were beginning to express their preparedness to take up arms to defend the Revolution: thousands of volunteers (*volontiers*) were now offering themselves up to defend the nation should it ever be attacked by British ships or by continental armies led by émigrés and/or by Louis’s fellow ‘despots’. This was the first context, as Lesueur’s gouache faithfully records, when the cry went up among radical democrats and volunteer soldiers: ‘Liberty or Death! (*La Liberté ou la Mort!*)’



Lebel, éditeur, Paris Grande seance aux Jacobins en janvier 1792 1792



See the Jean-Baptiste Lesueur image of a *volontier* in 1792, all his family supporting him, as he departs for military action on the frontier in: Philippe de Carbonnières, Lesueur: *Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 17 (Louvre RF36547; Musée Carnavalet D9068), pp. 99–100 and at the official all-French-museums Joconde [database](#).



Jean-Baptiste Lesueur image of armed sans-culottes and soldiers meeting in the street and shouting the slogan in 1792: Philippe de Carbonnières, Lesueur: *Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 17 (Louvre RF36547; Musée Carnavalet D9068), pp. 99–102; left-hand tableau, can be viewed [here](#).

The response to the king’s flight in the press was also dramatic. As some on the Right took fright, others challenged the king to stand by his *Mémoire* denouncing the Revolution. Left-wing

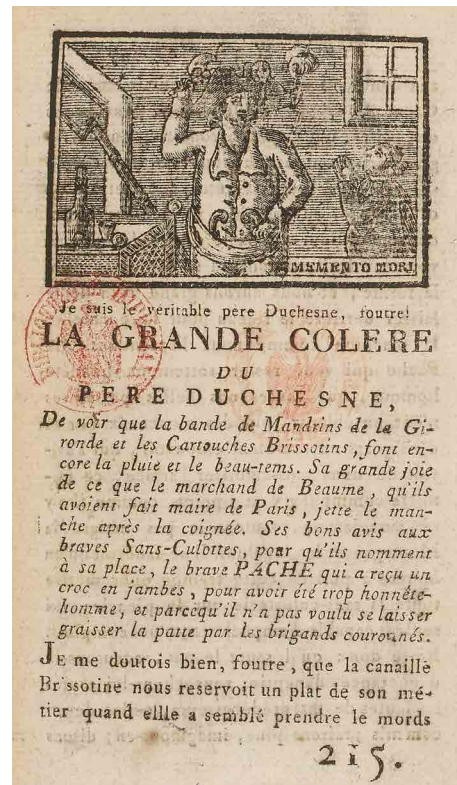
writers not gulled by the fiction of the kidnapping invented by the Feuillants in the National Assembly also became more and more scathing. The defection of the king, for instance, brought about a change of attitude in one of the newspapers that would go on to establish a unique position in the revolutionary press: Jacques René Hébert's *Le Père Duchesne*.



*Père Duchesne* This [website](#) offers Jacques René Hébert's image of what he thought his *Père Duchesne* would look like with his sans-culotte style: moustache, open shirt, artisan's clothes, pipe and general demeanour of bloody-minded-ness. His pipe inhales revolution and exhales aristocracy. By 1792, Hébert's *Père Duchesne* is really in your face with his politics, crude and rude.

Hébert had once praised the king; on the occasion of the king's cold, for example, Hébert's swarthy patriot of the wine bar and barber's shop, *Père Duchesne*, had maintained he had been unable to drink his wine, which had become bitter, or smoke his pipe, because the tobacco choked him, all because 'My king, my good king, is ill ... the restorer of French liberty is confined to bed'. The king's flight changed this. The perpetual anger of the *Père Duchesne*, delivered in his popular trademark wine-shop foul language, were now turned on the person of the king. In a supposed conversation where *Père Duchesne* called the king a 'fat yokel', and was told to remember to whom he is speaking, he replied:

*You my king. You are no longer my king, no longer my king! You are nothing but a cowardly deserter; a king should be the father of the people, not its executioner. Now that the nation has resumed its rights it will not be so bloody stupid as to take back a coward like you. You king? You are not even a citizen. You will be lucky to avoid leaving your head on a scaffold for having sought the slaughter of so many men. Ah, I don't doubt that once again you are going to pretend to be honest and that, supported by those scoundrels on the constitutional committee [Feuillants], you are going to promise miracles. They still want to stick the crown on the head of a stag; but no, damn it, that will not happen! From one end of France to the other, there is only an outcry against you, your debauched Messalina, and your whole bastard race. No more Capet [i.e., surname of the dynasty], this is what every citizen is shouting, and, besides, even if it were possible that they might want to pardon you all your*



Jacques-René Hébert *Je suis le véritable père Duchesne, foutre* 1793

*crimes, what trust could now be placed in your remains? You vile perjurer, a man who has broken his oath again and again. We will stuff you into Charenton asylum and your whore [i.e., the queen] into l'Hôpital.<sup>125</sup> When you are finally walled up, both of you, and above all when you no longer have a Civil List, I'll be stuffed with an axe if you get away.<sup>126</sup>*

## Massacre at the Champ de Mars, 17 July 1791

Since the October Days 1789, the Deputies in the National Assembly had looked with increasing concern at the growth of radical opinion: this fear was inflamed not only by the king's flight on 20–21 June 1791, but also by the efforts of the *Feuillants* in the Assembly to cover this up with the fiction that the king had been 'kidnapped'. This was perhaps a reasonable, if transparently false, means of preserving their work.

The *Feuillants* now also decided to take a risk. With the fate of Louis XVI still unresolved, and with his cooperation still hard to secure, even when he was a virtual prisoner in Paris in the Tuileries Palace, the *Feuillants* decided to try to crush what they saw as the threat from the Left.

In the press and the *Jacobin clubs*, and especially in the *Cordeliers Club*, there had been a grassroots movement for action to be taken against the king. With this end in view a petition was drawn up—not yet to get rid of the monarchy, but to prosecute the king. A monster petition was sponsored by the *Cordeliers* and by rank-and-file leaders of the Paris electoral sections, both hotbeds of radical democrats. Their petition was to be presented for signing on the *Champ de Mars*, the site where the celebration of the first anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille had been held on 14 July 1790, and which is today still a big expanse of lawn between the eighteenth-century *École Militaire* and the river Seine, where the Eiffel Tower was built to celebrate the centenary of the Revolution in 1889. There had also been plans to celebrate the second anniversary of the Revolution on the *Champ de Mars*, but these plans were interrupted by the king's flight.

The times were already tense. By June 1791 the Jacobins and *Feuillants* were dueling in rival festivals for and against further radicalising the revolution: the Jacobins honoured the release of troops from Nancy who had been imprisoned and tortured in August 1790 for mutiny; the *Feuillants* honoured a mayor, Simoneau from Étampes, who had been murdered in March 1791 during a food riot. The July 1791 petition added to the tension. Thousands of petitioning Parisians were assembling on the *Champ de Mars* when a fracas broke out. The fracas gave the Deputies at the National Assembly the excuse to declare Martial Law to try to deter, once and for all, radical democrats like the petitioners. When two men found hiding under the podium

125. Charenton and l'Hôpital were asylums and gaols in Paris. The marquis de Sade was consigned to Charenton in 1789.

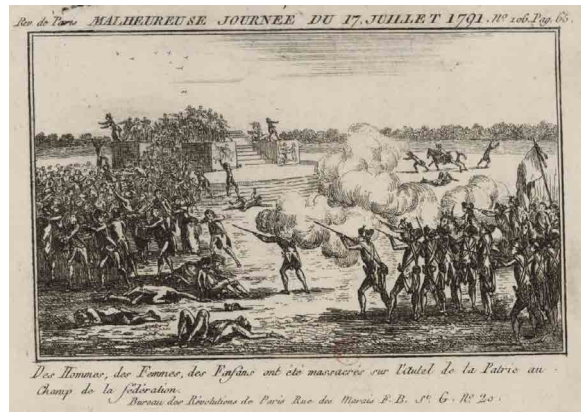
126. 'Le Père Duchese, No. 61', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 132–133. Murray notes as follows: translating foul language is difficult. What is considered foul language to one generation can be tame to another. Today 'bloody' and 'shit' are part of normal conversation in some circles and 'fuck' can appear spelled out in full. In the 1790s 'damn' was written as 'd\*\*n' so strong was it deemed to be—the equivalent of 'fuck it!' today.

were accused as counter-revolutionaries and summarily killed by the crowd, the Feuillant leaders of the National Assembly declared martial law, instructing Lafayette and the National Guard to suppress the demonstration and their petition calling for the king's deposition.

## Documents and Images of the Champ de Mars

The emergence of Republican and democratic themes in strident speeches of this era is suggested in this document translating petitions signed by the Cordeliers and **Jacobin clubs**, after the flight of the King on 21–25 June 1791, but before the attempt to suppress demonstrations on the military parade ground, *Champ de Mars*, in Paris had left about 50 people dead. The speeches-cum-petitions can be viewed [here](#). The demonstrators were encouraged by the Cordeliers and **Jacobin clubs**.

1. There is a translation of the newspaper report in *Les Révolutions de Paris* about the massacre at this [website](#).
2. There is a contemporary view of the massacre, exaggerating numbers of people involved, the 12th image, titled 'La fusillade du Champ-de-Mars', on this [website](#), and another contemporary print titled 'Malheureuse journée du 17 juillet 1791'.



Unknown artist *Malheureuse journée du 17 juillet 1791* 1791



Louis Lafitte *Fusillade sur l'autel de la Fédération au Champ de Mars* 1791-1794

3. The most dramatic—and ardently pro-Republican—illustration is Louis Lafitte's (1770–1828) powerful and Romanticised drawing of Republican demonstrators at the *Champ de Mars*. Huddled, the demonstrators stand proud and defiant, baring their breasts, parading their copy of the Declaration of Rights before the (unseen) National Guardsmen's volley of rifle fire. This is the *Champ de Mars* as the Jacobins wished it to be remembered.<sup>127</sup>
4. The drawing was probably destined for a Year II (1793–94) art portfolio or commissioned for a Jacobin calendar. Lafitte went on to have a successful career designing and painting for elegant drawing rooms for Napoleon, Louis XVIII and Charles X.

127. Simon Schama, *Citizens: a chronicle of the French Revolution*, (London: Viking, 1989), plate 146, 568

Shots were fired and between fifteen and fifty were killed. The Revolution was irrevocably split between the supporters of a clearly '*bourgeois*' Revolution in which the rights of property were paramount and those who believed that the rights of man applied to all (men) regardless of their wealth.

In the National Assembly, Joseph Barnave gave an impassioned speech<sup>128</sup> on 15 July 1791, warning that if the Revolution took one more step in the direction of liberty the result would be anarchy, if it took one more step in the direction of equality the result would be the Agrarian Law [i.e., a socialist-like measure calling on everybody to own the same amount of money]:

*That which I fear most ... is the indefinite continuation of our revolutionary fervour; today any change is deadly, any prolongation of the Revolution disastrous ... Are we going to terminate the Revolution or are we going to start it all over again? If you deviate even once from the Constitution, just where is the line to be drawn—and above all where will those who succeed us draw it? ... We have nothing to fear beyond our borders, but in the interior we are being grievously harmed by agitators with deadly aims ... who inflame a revolutionary movement that has destroyed all that there had to be destroyed, but which must now be stopped ... If the Revolution takes one more step forward it can only be a dangerous one: if it is in line with liberty its first act could be the destruction of royalty; if it is in line with equality its first act could be an attack on property. If popular movements are started up again, if the nation has once more to suffer great upheavals, if all the people's troubles are transmitted to this movement, if their influence continues to be felt on the political scene, is there any other aristocracy remaining to be destroyed but that of property? Men who want to make revolutions do not do so with metaphysical maxims; they seduce, they drag in a few intellectuals [penseurs de cabinets], a few men skilled in geometry but ignorant of politics [i.e., a radical democrat, citoyen (the marquis de) Condorcet?], doubtless feeding them with a few abstractions: but the multitude, without whom there can be no revolution, can be dragged in only by realities, they can be influenced only by practical/solid (palpable) advantages .... It is time to bring the Revolution to an end ... it must stop at the point where the Nation is free and all Frenchmen are equal ... everyone must be made aware that it is in the common interest that the Revolution be brought to a halt: it is in its final stage, the happiness of the fatherland demands that it should continue no longer.*

Before going into hiding Marat fired off another volley against the leaders of the Assembly:

*Blood has just flowed on the Field of the Federation [i.e., the Champ de Mars]; the altar of the fatherland is stained by it; men and women have been murdered; the citizens are in a state of consternation. What will become of liberty? Some say that it*

128. A 1915 *Life of Barnave* by E.D. Bradby is available online on the [Internet Archive](#) and includes analysis of his speech of 15 July.

*is finished, that the counter-revolution is complete; others are certain that liberty has been avenged, that the Revolution has been consolidated in an unshakable manner. Let us examine impartially two such strangely differing views.*

*The majority of the National Assembly, the département [of the Seine], the Paris municipality [commune], and many of the writers say that the capital is inundated by brigands; that these brigands are paid by the representatives of foreign courts. ... However, if the victims of Champ de Mars were not brigands; if these victims were peaceful citizens with their wives and children; if that terrible scene is but the effect of a formidable coalition against the progress of the Revolution, then liberty is truly in danger, and the execution of martial law is a horrible crime, and the sure precursor of counter-revolution. For the public to form its judgement it will need full knowledge of the facts. So far all the writers have presented garbled versions.*

A rather different account of the 'massacre' and the events leading up to it can be found in **Philip Mazzei**<sup>129</sup>. He wrote on 18 July:

*For some time now the Société fraternelle [of popular revolutionary clubs], ... has appeared to be following in the footsteps of the Cordelier Club, in which the most moderate are not outdone by extremist Jacobins. In that Société and in that Club meet mainly the disturbers of public peace. Everything has been tried to intimidate the Assembly, which has evinced intrepidity [i.e., steadfast courage] and shown supreme contempt for the numberless incendiary writings hawked throughout the city, spread through the kingdom, and even posted on street corners and all public places. That Société and that Club even dared to make audacious and insolent petitions (against laws), something which only administrative bodies have a right to do as a body. When they saw they could get nothing through that channel, they chose a legal one. The Assembly cannot refuse a petition signed by 50 active citizens. Saturday they submitted one signed by 100. The Assembly had it tabled, not wishing to interrupt its discussions. It was read Friday morning. Without paying the least attention to it, the Assembly passed to the order of the day .... As it was known that the Assembly wished to settle the matter before adjourning, even if it had to sit all night, the troublemakers did not give up. They met at the Champ de Mars and about noon came to the Assembly with a second petition they said had been signed by 15,000. There were about 500 of them, but only six were allowed to enter as delegates to deliver the petition, not in the hall, but in the corridor and to an usher sent by the Assembly to receive it. They refused to give it to him and took it back to their fellow members, whose insolence the cavalry was about to repress by dint of saber blows when the city officials that always kept close to the Assembly intervened... More than a year ago I was wont to say to my friends, «Every drop of blood spared*

129. Margherita Marchione, Stanley Idzerda and S. Eugene Scala (eds.), *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence*, (Prato, Italy: Cassa Di Risparmi e Depositi Di Prato, 1983), vol. 2, 597–602.

*now will probably cost a barrel of it.» Last night it all began, as I will explain below. There can be no doubt that the hope of impunity was bound to attract to this capital ruffians from all countries and for a double reason render them stronger and more daring. ... The above occurrence, and even more the great concourse of people to the Champ de Mars in the afternoon, besides the none too good intentions that were well known, induced the Marquis de Lafayette to go himself at the head of a large detachment and followed by some pieces of ordinance. There were municipal officials with a red flag to indicate that martial law had been declared. The rabble had the audacity to try to prevent the troops from entering the Champ de Mars. One of the many stones cast wounded an officer standing besides the Marquis de Lafayette. The troops finally fired, and last night people were saying that there were 10 or 12 casualties between killed and wounded. The cavalry seized 40 or 50, some of whom will no doubt be hanged.*

On 20 July, Gouverneur Morris wrote of what he had seen when he arrived at the Champ de Mars shortly after the ‘massacre’:

*There had been a pretty general summons to the friends of Liberty, requesting them to meet in the Champ de Mars. The Object of this Meeting was to persuade the Assembly by the gentle Influence of the Cord [i.e., the gallows], to undo what they had done respecting the imprisoned Monarch. As the different Ministers and municipal Officers had received it in Charge from the Assembly to maintain Peace and see to the Execution of the Laws, they made proclamation and displayed the red Flag...*

*I went shortly after to a Height to see the Battle but it was over before I got to the Ground, for as the Militia would not as usual ground their Arms on receiving the Word of Command from the Mob, this last began according to Custom to pelt them with Stones. It was hot Weather and it was a Sunday Afternoon for which Time, according to Usage immemorial, the Inhabitants of this Capital have generally some pleasurable Engagement. To be disappointed in their Amusement, to be paraded thro the Streets under a scorching Sun and then stand like Holiday Turkeys to be knocked down by Brick-Bats, was a little more than they had Patience to bear, so that without waiting for Orders they fired and killed a dozen or two of the ragged Regiment: the rest ran off like lusty fellows. If the Militia had waited for Orders they might I fancy have been all knocked down before they received any. As it is, the Business went off pretty easily. Some of them have since been assassinated, but not above five or six, as far as I can learn.<sup>130</sup>*

130. Gouverneur Morris, Beatrix Cary Davenport (ed.), *A Diary of the French Revolution* (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 221.



*The Political and Social Values of the National Guard in 1792.* Use this portrait dating from 1792 to decode the values that the National Guard wanted to project in the era when constitutional monarchy seemed threatened by social and political disorder.

The Museum of the French Revolution (Musée de la Révolution française) at the Château de Vizille, near Grenoble holds a portrait (MRF 1986-270) of a National Guardsman restraining a humble (radical?) woman who is trying (to stage a diversion in order to steal (or re-distribute?) sugar from the docks at Bordeaux. With whom does the artist Bizard seem to sympathise?

The massacre on the *Champ de Mars* brought the issue of republicanism to the fore for the first time. Most radical democrats demonstrating that day were only contemplating deposing Louis XVI, but other Jacobin leaders like Robespierre (though still hesitating), Camille Desmoulins, Brissot and Madame Roland were now arguing openly for a Republic. Marie-Jeanne Roland and Brissot belonged to the emerging faction (called Brissotins and Girondins in 1792–93) of radical Republicans whose influence would be increasingly felt directing the levers of power in 1792–93. Writing in prison between her arrest on 1 June 1793 and her execution on 8 November 1793 / 18 Brumaire II, Madame Roland<sup>131</sup> offered this ironic account of the tragedy of the *Champ de Mars* and Robespierre's reactions to it in July 1791:

*The Jacobins drew up a petition to the Assembly calling for the condemnation of the King. However, when they all met the following day to finalise their petition they learned that the [Feuillant majority in the] National Assembly had already determined the fate of the King. So they [the Jacobins] sent their commissioners to the Champ de Mars to inform the crowds gathered there that the petition was withdrawn. I happened to be there. There were not more than two or three hundred people scattered about round the 'altar of the Republic' and they were being harangued by speakers from various 'fraternal societies' carrying pikestaffs with slogans hostile to the King. When it was announced that the Jacobins' petition was withdrawn there was a loud demand that all zealous citizens should meet next day to prepare another. At this point the partisans of the Court decided to use force: in a quick and unexpected move they declared martial law and attempted to impose it, leading to what has been justly called the 'Massacre of the Champ de Mars'... I have never seen anything like Robespierre's terror on this occasion. There was talk of putting him on trial, probably to intimidate him, and of some plot being hatched against him and the other authors of the Jacobins' petition. Roland and I were seriously worried about his safety.*

Whatever the truth about Madame Roland's comment on Robespierre, it was Robespierre who almost single-handedly saved the **Jacobin Club** when it was faced by the desertion of its members to form a new club called the *Feuillants*. As the truth of the events surrounding the

131. E. Roland, and Evelyn Shuckburgh, *The memoirs of Madame Roland*, (London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), 83–84.

king's flight and the Champ de Mars massacre became more evident, the *Jacobin Club* steadily rebuilt its strength.

In the meantime the National Assembly finally brought its work of creating a Constitution to an end on 30 September 1791. The king gave his approval and in the beginning of October the Legislative Assembly took over, elected by the active citizens of France to run the country according to the Constitution its predecessor had drawn up.

The events of the previous three months brought a decided chill to the celebrations, the king was no more enamoured of the Revolution than he had been in the past, and the threat of war still hung over the revolutionaries. To add to these perennial problems the economy took a decided turn for the worse at the beginning of 1792. France's first freely elected parliament would have a short life.



*Different points of view on the Champ de Mars Massacre.* How would you account for the differing accounts of the Champ de Mars massacre? Was the Assembly justified in its actions? Did the petitioners deserve their fate?



*Competing Images of the Monarchy in 1791–92: Traitor or Not?* Which of the following graphical points of view about Louis XVI would the *Feuillants* (the moderate constitutional monarchists) and the *Jacobins* (the radical democrats) respectively have wanted you to endorse? The changed mood in France is shown in two drawings from the period of the Legislative Assembly (September 1791 to September 1792). The [first image](#), whose title translates as 'The Janus King, or the two-faced man', shows him on one side telling a [*Feuillant*?] legislator, 'I will uphold the Constitution [now]', and on the other side telling a clergyman, 'I will destroy the Constitution'. The [second image](#), held by the British Library, and accessible online at, shows a sturdy Louis XVI at peace with the Revolution, toasting the Nation, and proudly wearing all the symbols of liberty and equality: the Phrygian Cap (an ancient symbol of a freed slave) and the tricolor sash of the Legislators.



*Allegory of the Constitution of 1791.* Consider the values expressed in this contemporary graphic, Didier's 'Allégorie à la Constitution, dédiée à la nation française' or 'Allegory to the Constitution, dedicated to the French nation'. A youthful attractive and free Frenchwoman grasps the constitution. She is surrounded by symbols of strength and unity, including a King Louis XVI who's rather objectified and remote. Oppressive **Old Regime** taxes are discarded below.



**D. Berthault** *Louis seize coiffé du bonnet rouge le 20 juin 1792* 1792



**Didier** *Allégorie à la Constitution, dédié à la nation française* 1791

## The Legislative Assembly and the Declaration of War, 20 April 1792



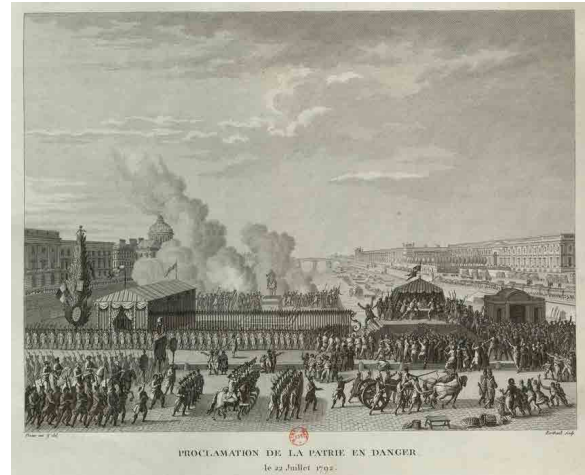
**Unknown artist** *Le Roi Janus, ou l'homme à deux visages* 1791-1792

The Legislative Assembly was the new legislature created by the Constitution of 1791. It lasted less than one year. Its elections were early in September 1791. Convened between 3 October 1791 and 16 September 1792, the demise of the Legislative Assembly was accomplished by the popular *journée* in Paris of 10 August 1792 which overthrew the monarchy and the Constitution of 1791.

The Legislative Assembly started with two handicaps created by its predecessor. The first handicap was that only active citizens could participate in its elections, and then only the better off of the active citizens could be elected; restrictions increasingly rejected by the very radicals in France who were gaining the upper hand. The second handicap was the 'Self-Denying Ordinance (*l'abnégation*)', a decree that no member of the National Assembly could be a *Député* in its successor, the Legislative Assembly.

The Ordinance had been proposed by Robespierre on 16 May 1791 and backed by the right wing of the Assembly, both hoping to rid the chamber of people they loathed. The Self-Denying Ordinance was also extended to exclude local elected officials on 28 May 1791. Like Marat, Robespierre was suspicious of the aims of the majority in the National Assembly whom he

believed ruled in their own interests rather than those of the nation, but he actually deprived the revolution of experienced leadership. The *Deputies* in the Legislative Assembly were less hardened and more impressionable, even though most backed the *Feuillants* at first. These *Députés Législatifs* were pushed aside when the war they started on 20 April 1792 went into crisis from the outset, when the people were encouraged to arm themselves ('La patrie en danger!', 11 July 1792), when key generals deserted (Lafayette on 20 August 1792; Dumouriez in April 1793), and when the monarchy was first threatened by Parisian crowds (Invasion of Tuileries Palace, 20 June 1792)<sup>132</sup> and then overthrown by the same crowds (Storming and Burning of the Tuileries Palace, 10 August 1792, transfer of the king to the Temple Prison, 13 August 1792). For more information about the stages and battles of war in the counter revolution click [here](#).



Pierre-Gabriel Berthault *Proclamation de la patrie en danger : le 22 juillet 1792* 1802

Event	Date
The Ordinance was proposed by Robespierre	16 May 1791
The Self-Denying Ordinance was extended to exclude local elected officials	28 May 1791
Députés Législatifs were pushed aside	20 April 1792
Invasion of Tuileries Palace	20 June 1792
'La patrie en danger!'	11 July 1792
Storming and Burning of the Tuileries Palace	10 August 1792
Transfer of the King to the Temple Prison	13 August 1792
Key Generals deserted Lafayette	20 August 1792
Key Generals deserted Dumouriez	April 1793

The 'Self-Denying Ordinance' was not the only time that adherence to principle on the part of Robespierre would prove to be politically detrimental to others. It did help renew Robespierre however. Now out of legislative work, though he had been widely respected as a *Député* for his oratorical skill and his honesty, and soon unsuccessful in his attempt to create a new popular democratic newspaper, most of Robespierre's energies were soon devoted to the **Jacobin Club** whose powers by the end of 1792 were restored, soon to outdo the rival *Feuillant Club*. Members of *Feuillant Club*, however, predominated in the Legislative Assembly.

132. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Prieur: les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris: Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plate 59 (Louvre RF6231; Musée Carnavalet D7723), 177.



Unknown artist *Les Derniers adieux de Louis XVI à sa famille*  
1793-1795

The Jacobin Left in the Legislative Assembly, re-tooled by its strident democratic opposition to the *Feuillants*, included some brilliant, if irresponsible, orators. At the **Jacobin Club** these *Deputies* gained the ascendancy over Robespierre. The new group's irresponsible calls for war 'against the crowned heads of Europe' proved more popular than Robespierre's calls for caution. The leader of this group was Jacques-Pierre Brissot, whose fame had come as author of the *Patriote français*, one of the first and among the most successful of the radical newspapers. A known republican, he gathered

around himself a group of *Députés Législatifs* many of whom came from near Bordeaux in the department of the Gironde, in the Gascon southwest of France. They later became known as the Girondins, and ruled France between September 1792 and April 1793. Madame Jeanne-Marie Roland and her husband, Jean-Marie Roland (de la Platière), were key members of Brissot's political party or circle.

The position of the king and his ministers remained an insoluble problem. When the king used the powers that had been bestowed in the Constitution of 1791 to block legislation passed in the Assembly, he did so legally and constitutionally. For example, Louis XVI vetoed legislation of 27 May 1792 that enabled the deportation of non-juring priests. On 8 June 1792, he also vetoed a decree calling for the formation of a volunteer army of 20,000 fighters, called *fédérés*. To radical democrats these and other vetoes of legislation deemed vital by the Legislative Assembly seemed to be more evidence of treason, especially after France declared war against Prussia and Austria on 20 April 1792.

## Declaration of Pillnitz

War complicated relations with the king. War would also trouble the consciences of people on the Right as much as the Left about the devastation it would bring. 'Fraternity' could be interpreted only as a challenge to regimes where rights did not exist and privilege rested in the hands of a few. The necessity, advisability or otherwise, of declaring war dominated every other issue in the Legislative Assembly from the time in October 1791 when Brissot first preached his 'crusade against the crowned heads of Europe'. It was debated heatedly not only in the Assembly, but in the clubs and in the press. Among the radicals, Marat and Robespierre lost popularity for not joining the hawks, while the *Révolutions de Paris* maintained a cautious approach.

Recall that Louis XVI had been detained in June 1791, fleeing towards Luxembourg dominions

of the Habsburg monarchy, where *émigrés* had long been assembling just beyond the Meuse (Maas) valley and just beyond the north-eastern-most French province of Lorraine. Louis and his courtiers were widely (and correctly) suspected by the radicals in Paris and other urban centres to be engaged in secret negotiations, plotting with foreign powers to crush the Revolution. But the *Feuillants* holding the majority in the Legislative Assembly refused to take action. How could they? Deposing this king and installing another seemed out of the question—the *Dauphin* was just six years old in 1791; one royal brother, Artois (future Charles X, 1824–30), had emigrated as early as 16 July 1789; another royal brother, Provence (future Louis XVIII, 1813–14, 1815–24), had emigrated in June 1791 (reaching Belgium, when Louis XVI only reached Varennes); moreover, the royal cousin, Orléans, already seemed more radical than anyone. Orléans had been a noble who defied Louis XVI at the Assembly of Notables (1787) and as a noble *Député* supported the National Assembly (1789–90), soon becoming a Jacobin (1791), no friend of the *Feuillants*, even re-naming himself Philippe Égalité (Equality) (1792), only to be executed in November 1793 when his son (future Louis-Philippe, king of the French, 1830–48) emigrated with General Dumouriez in April 1793. Desperately wanting the new Constitution to work, the *Feuillants* could do little other than hope Louis XVI could be brought to see reason.

Radical republican democrats disagreed with the *Feuillants*. One way to achieve a republic and democracy was thought to be to put the nation and the revolution on to a war footing, taking the fight right up to enemies at home and abroad. This was Brissot's view. Bold action would flush traitors out. Another and related way to achieve the same goal was to look towards launching another *Bastille*-type blow, a second armed revolution by 'the people', especially by the people of Paris, perhaps to overthrow the monarchy, so often seen now as the first 'link in the counter-revolutionary chain'. Bold action would flush things out. This was the *Cordeliers* and Paris sections' view, and it was steadily gaining adherents among the Jacobins. Their moment of success came on 10 August 1792.

France was entering another radical phase. The first months of 1792 were beset by economic difficulties, leading to unrest in many provinces. Inflation was out of control: too many *assignats* had been printed, and there were too few goods on offer for sale in these difficult times. France had suffered from loan and paper-currency crises before; many people were suspicious of the new paper notes. And rumours abounded that currency and commodity speculators were the only ones said to be profiting from the new system of finance and free trade. Criticism in this regard came from the two extremes of political opinion.



# Key Words

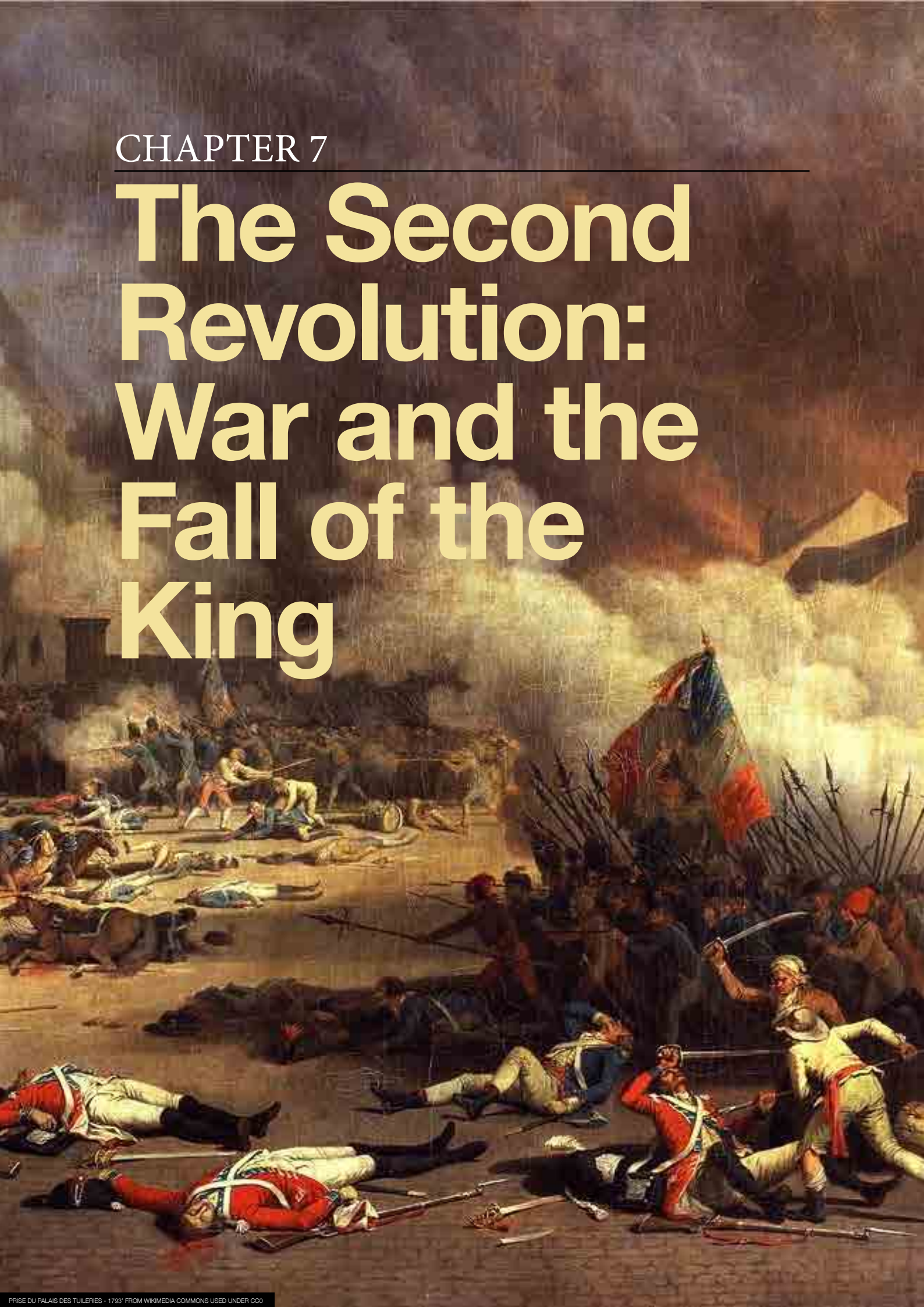
## Tom Paine

A great defender of the French Revolution, Tom Paine witnessed the Revolution first-hand from September 1789 to March 1790, and again in 1791 until July. He returned from England to Paris in September 1792, joining the National Convention, but was regarded with some distrust by the Jacobins in 1793 because he was English, and because of his opposition to excesses of Terror and the execution of the king. He was detained in Luxembourg prison in Paris, December 1793 to November 1794. His pamphlets defending the Revolution—its reforms (the *Rights of Man*, part 1: Feb. 1791), its republican democracy (the *Rights of Man*, part 2: Feb. 1792) and its anti-clericalism: *The Age of Reason* (1794)—helped shape British-Australian traditions of democratic radicalism. View the Thomas Paine [website](#) and History Guide [website](#) for more information.

## CHAPTER 7

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# The Second Revolution: War and the Fall of the King



## The Second Revolution: War and the Fall of the King, 10 August 1792

By far the biggest issue to divide the nation in 1792 was whether an emerging coalition of the 'crowned heads of Europe' represented a clear and present danger to the Revolution and should thus be met with a pre-emptive strike.

Robespierre believed that the foreign despots represented a threat to the nation, but he also believed that there were more serious problems at home and that they should be dealt with first. He did not believe that democracy could be imposed on a foreign nation that either did not want it or was not prepared for it: in his own words: 'no-one likes armed missionaries'; revolution could not be exported 'on the point of bayonets'.

The predominant Brissotin faction among the Jacobins, on the other hand, was messianic. They thought a war would flush out counter-revolutionaries in France and purge Europe of the evil empires of the absolutists: it was their mission to bring about democratic regime change in line with the revolutionaries. For the faction around Brissot, the war issue was a simple one of those who were with the revolution and those who were not.

Here is Robespierre's point of view in 1792:

*It seems that those who desired to provoke war adopted this view only because they did not pay sufficient attention to the nature of the war that we shall undertake and to the circumstances in which we today find ourselves.... I say then, that to know which is the better course of action, it is necessary to examine what kind of war can threaten us; will this be a war of one nation against other nations? Will it be a war of a king against other kings? No, it will be a war of all the enemies of the French Constitution against the French Revolution.*

*These enemies, who are they? They are of two kinds; the enemies within and the enemies without. Is it reasonable to look for the Court and the agents of the executive power among the internal enemies? I cannot in any way resolve that question; but I will observe that the external enemies, the French rebels [émigrés], and those who could be counted among their supporters, claim that they are only the defenders of the court of France and of the French nobility.... Can we fear to find the internal enemies of the French Revolution, and to find among these enemies the court and the agents of the executive power [i.e., the King's Ministers and the army, still shaped by the values of the **Old Regime**]? If you reply in the affirmative, I shall say to you: To whom will you entrust the conduct of this war? To the agents of the executive power? By this act you will abandon the security of the empire to those who wish to destroy you. It follows from all this that what we have most to fear is war ... War gives opportunity for terror, danger, retaliation, treason and finally loss. The people grow weary. Is it necessary, they will say, to sacrifice the public treasury*

*for empty titles? Would we be any worse off with counts, marquises, etc.? The parties come together; they slander the National Assembly, if it is severe; they blame it for the misfortunes of the war. Finally they capitulate.*<sup>133</sup>

Here is Brissot's pro-war point of view:

*The question under discussion is to know whether we should attack the German princes, who support the emigrants, or whether we should await their invasion... For six months and ever since the Revolution I have been considering which side to take. Even the most cunning sorcery on the part of our adversaries will not in any way see me abandon it. It is by force of reason and fact that I am persuaded that a people that has conquered liberty after ten centuries of slavery has need of war. It needs war to consolidate its victory, it needs it to purge itself of the vices of despotism, it needs it to dispel from its bosom the men who could corrupt it. Thank heaven for the way it has favoured you and for the fact that it has given you time to settle your Constitution. You have to chastise the rebels, you have the force to do it; be resolved then to do it.... For two years, France has exhausted all the peaceful means to bring back the rebels into its bosom; all the attempts, all the requests have been fruitless; they persist in their revolt; foreign princes persist in supporting them; can we hesitate to attack them? Our honour, our public credit, the need to moralise and to consolidate our revolution, everything makes it imperative; for would not France be dishonoured if; the Constitution being finished, it tolerated a handful of dissidents who insulted its constituted authorities; would it not be dishonoured if it endured outrages that a despot would not have put up with for a fortnight? A Louis XIV declared war on Spain, because his ambassador had been insulted by that of Spain; and we who are free would hesitate for a moment!*<sup>134</sup>

It was certainly true that the **absolute monarchs** of Europe did not look kindly on the new constitutional monarchy and emerging democracy in France, but their resistance was half-hearted before 1792. Marie-Antoinette's brother Leopold II, Habsburg Emperor of Austria, had tried to direct the attentions of the European monarchs towards France in 1790 but made little impact. Hohenzollern Prussia, Habsburg Austria and Romanov Russia were distracted by the partitioning of Poland. This changed when Leopold II died and was succeeded in March 1792 by Marie Antoinette's nephew, Francis II, an ardent opponent of the Revolution.

Following an exchange of ultimatums and insults, France declared war on Austria on 20 April 1792. In May 1792, Prussia also committed itself to helping Austria invade France; Britain and Russia held back. In signing the public declaration of war, and to the delight of his ministers and the extreme hawks on the Right who hoped for a successful invasion of France, Louis

133. 'Le Journal des débats des Amis de la Constitution, 13–14 December 1791', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 214.

134. *Ibid.*, 215.

XVI claimed that Austria had refused to take action against the terrorists on their territory, most notably the *émigré* army marshalling at Coblenz in the Prussian Rhineland. *Émigrés* had advocated an invasion of France since the middle of 1790:

*The National Assembly, deliberating upon the formal proposal of the King, considering that the Court of Vienna, in contempt of treaties, has continued to grant open protection to the French rebels; that it has instigated and formed a concert with several European powers against the independence and security of the French nation; .... The National Assembly declares that the French nation, faithful to the principles consecrated by its Constitution not to undertake any war with a view to making conquests, and never to employ its forces against the liberty of any people, takes arms only to maintain its liberty and independence [i.e., France was maintaining it would take action only against those who were against them; those who were with them would be treated as friends] ... That it adopts in advance all foreigners who, abjuring the cause of its enemies, range themselves under its banners and consecrate their efforts to the defence of its liberty; that it will ever assist their settlement in France by all the means within its power.*<sup>135</sup>



#### Merits of Going to War in April 1792.

Debate the issues!

- Should France have gone to war in April 1792?
- As outlined in the official French declaration of war, do you consider the causes of the war, and the conditions under which it would be conducted, were: Justified?, Realistic?, Idealistic?, Cynical?

In 1792—as in times past, and in times to come—it was easier for leaders to accentuate the ‘danger’ that justified war than to calm anxious souls, especially when the country was in the grip of a worsening economic situation. No group was happier with the declaration of war than those who wanted to destroy the Revolution and return to the **Old Regime**. The queen took this hard-line view. The king, however, was more troubled, but in the end signed the declaration of war. He had already vetoed legislation aimed at the property and citizenship of *émigrés* (19 November 1791), many of whom had found a haven at Coblenz. Many *émigrés*—the king’s brothers among them—had called on foreign powers to support them in waging a war against the Revolution. Later on, however, Louis XVI wrote officially (4 December 1791) to the Elector of Trier demanding that *émigrés* not be sheltered at Coblenz; the Elector complied. Mixed messages continued. On 8 June 1792, Louis XVI vetoed a decree calling for the formation of an army of 20,000 *fédérés*. It happened anyway. Then Louis XVI reluctantly acceded to a decree (May 1792) dissolving his personal bodyguard.

135. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 286–288.

Radical democrats among the revolutionaries saw the king's use of his veto as only protecting counter-revolutionaries: non-juring priests were seen as enemies of the Revolution; the *fédérés* were volunteer units offering their services to the Revolution. When Louis XVI dismissed three Ministers associated with the democratic (Brissotin) faction in the Legislative Assembly, replacing them with *Feuillants*, he provoked popular demonstrations that coincided with the third anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath, 20 June 1792. His courageous behaviour on that occasion, when his palace was invaded and he faced down insults and threats of the demonstrators, won him praise, but suspicions were not lifted about the so-called 'Austrian Committee' at his Court, led by the queen. The Court was seen by radical democrats as the 'first link in the counter-revolutionary chain', a chain which many considered had to be broken. To this end the Jacobins, the popular clubs, the Sections, the government of the city of Paris and part of the National Guard combined to pressure the Legislative Assembly to remove the king constitutionally or else face armed attack. Further pressure on the Legislative Assembly came from the *fédérés* who were arriving in Paris from all over to prosecute the war and (incidentally) to celebrate the third anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, 14 July 1792. Among them were those from Marseilles, who as they marched to Paris sang a new song (April 1792) written by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760–1836). Called the 'Song of departure (*Chant du départ*)', de Lisle's violent ditty celebrated the bravery of 'children of the fatherland' leaving for the Rhine to take up arms against the tyrants who had raised their 'bloody standards' against the Revolution, and whose 'impure blood' would soon be 'fertilising the furrows' of the French countryside. The 'Song of Departure' became known as '*La Marseillaise*', from the *fédérés* who popularised it, and soon became the anthem of the Republic to come. There is a Lesueur gouache of 1792 showing citizens singing the anthem with gusto.



Jean-Baptiste Lesueur image of four sans-culottes in 1792, learning the song in a wine-shop (cabaret), singing with gusto: Philippe de Carbonnières, Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 30 (Louvre RF36556; Musée Carnavalet D9069), pp. 138-39; can be viewed [here](#).



New Public Performances of an Emerging Democracy. Here are visuals representing new ways of celebrating the revolution in the era of emerging democracy. Judging from these images, first of the Fête de la Fédération in 1792, and second of the planting of a liberty tree in 1792 or 1793, suggest how the revolution became more democratic in spirit in 1792–93 than the one celebrated in 1790. You will have to compare the later-era ceremonies with the 1790-era ceremonies you studied before.

1. Fête de la Fédération, 14 July 1792 style. We have already studied the first revolutionary festival, la Fête de la Fédération of 14 July 1790. By the corresponding day in 1792, the revolution was entering a more radical phase. Contrast the Bastille Day fête of 14 July 1792, as represented in a contemporary engraving in the [Musée Carnavalet](#) in Paris by Berthault

of a drawing by Jean-Louis Prieur (1759–95).<sup>136</sup>

2. The king's 6,000-strong regiment of guards had just been disbanded in May 1792; Louis XVI now had no troops close by in Paris on whom he felt he could rely. Moreover, a military camp of 20,000 ardent Republican military volunteers from the provinces (les fédérés) had just been established in Paris in June 1792, in spite of the king's disapproval. They had arrived singing revolutionary songs like *La Marseillaise*. This image of a new public ritual on 14 July 1792 shows a different model of citizenship being promoted and performed in public, one rejecting kingship and indeed any distinctions between 'active' and 'passive' citizenship, one with altering the ways leaders relate to the people.
3. Liberty Tree in 1792–93. New Hopes, New Anxieties. Étienne Bericourt's image of a later-era ceremony of planting of a liberty tree in 1792 or 1793 is at the [Carnavalet Museum](#). Compare it to the earlier study of a planting of a liberty tree in 1790. That study featured the famous gouache by one of the Lesueurs.

## The overthrow of the Monarchy (10 August 1792) and the September Massacres

In all these ways, war 'revolutionised the Revolution'. As in most wars, high ideals became mired in bloody atrocities, and under the cover of war depraved acts were committed that would never have been contemplated in time of peace. In one of the more general reasons for France going to war, Brissot believed that *absolute monarchies* elsewhere in Europe would never allow democracy to endure in France. Democracy could only survive in France, he believed, if wars in other countries brought about democracy. Robespierre, on the other hand, believed that it was better to ensure the success of democracy in one country first before embarking on foreign adventures. Émigré declarations routinely issued blood-curdling threats to the revolution and to revolutionaries throughout this period, heightening the mood of fear and panic.

Another reason for going to war was to uncover the treachery of the throne. In this case, and unlike more recent wars, the 'smoking gun' justifying the initiation of war was found when the counter-revolutionary machinations of the Court and the queen were revealed by correspondence found in an infamous 'iron chest' (*armoire de fer*) discovered in October 1792. The initial reverses suffered by the French in the first months of the war were met by accusations of treachery, more so when Lafayette deserted on 20 August 1791 to the enemy with the bullets of his own troops flying around his ears. Despite this, the Legislative Assembly refused to take parliamentary action against the Court. This only added to the belief that there were traitors within the gates.

The bloodshed that accompanied the second revolution of 10 August 1792 and the summary

136. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Prieur: les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris, Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plate 60 (Louvre RF6226; Musée Carnavalet D7722), 180

justice that followed it has to be seen in these contexts of wild talk and deep fears on all sides. If revolutionary justice was indeed prompt and severe, there was every reason to expect that a victory by returning émigrés would have resulted in even more horrific slaughter.



10 August 1792

What kinds of forces, people and classes are shown as being involved?

1. Contemporary images of the assault on the royal palace and the legislature in the Parisian place complex of the Tuileries may be found at a variety of sites. The [website](#), 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA, has another image of the storming at if you type 'Day of 10 August 1792' in the Search window.<sup>137</sup>
2. A closer view, in a 1793 oil painting by Jean Duplessis-Bertaux, is found [here](#). (and held at the Palace of Versailles collection)
3. Two Lesueur gouaches view 10 August 1792 from a sans-culotte perspective. One shows charging sans-culotte pikemen moving to attack the king's Swiss Guard outside the Palace and explains how they were also taking fire from Royalists manning the windows of the Palace—on this [website](#). The other—can be viewed [here](#)—focuses on the scale of the rifle volleys fired from the Palace, and shows a wounded sans-culotte being carried away, his wife and children lamenting.<sup>138</sup> At the official French museums [Joconde database](#), type in 'LESUEUR Jean-Baptiste' in the 'Auteur/Exécutant' line, the first image referred to is the 40th and the second image referred to is the 4th image.



**J. Chereau** *Siège du Château des Tuileries par les braves sans culottes et les intrépides marseillois le 10 aoust 1792* 1792

The attack on the *Tuileries* Palace of 10 August 1792 resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 attackers and defenders of the monarchy, a death toll far greater in number than all the deaths directly related to the Revolution in the previous three years. The bloodshed that followed in the September massacres was a gory episode involving as many as 1,000 people dragged from their prison cells and tried in the street and summarily killed or liberated.

137. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Prieur: les tableaux historiques de la Révolution, Catalogue raisonné des dessins originaux*, (Paris: Paris Musées : N. Chaudun, 2006), plates 63 and 64 (Louvre RF6228; Musée Carnavalet D7762), 186–189.

138. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris, Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plates 24 and 25 (Louvre RF36566; Musée Carnavalet D9096 & D14434 réserve), 120–25.



Jean Duplessis-Bertaux *Prise du palais des Tuileries* - 1793 1793

As historian Georges Lefebvre saw it, so many events in the French Revolution were a result of fear, defensive reaction, and punitive will. 'Fear' in this case came from the invasion of France by Prussian armies. Paris was left vulnerable by the patriotic rush to meet the enemy. Parisians became worried that Paris was open to the vengeance of the counter-revolutionaries in prison or in hiding. The prisons were filled to overflowing following the arrests after 10 August, and they were never secure even at the best of times. 'Defensive reaction' came in the form of hastily organised trials of the prisoners. The 'punitive will' manifested itself in the savage killing of the prisoners, not all of whom had been incarcerated for political reasons—indeed a large number were simple prostitutes. Explaining, of course, does not justify.

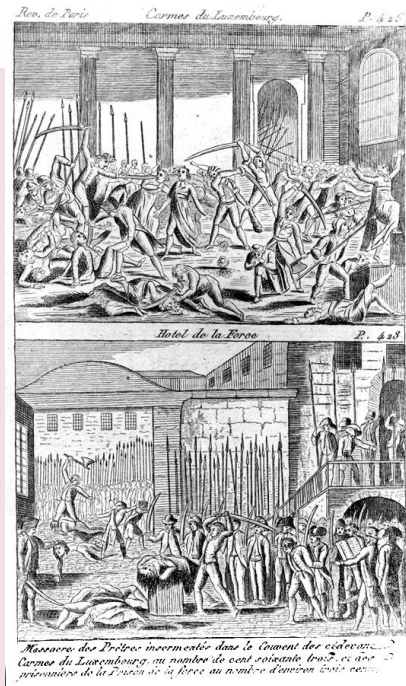


#### *Document and Image Studies: The September Massacres*

1. Images of the September massacres (1792): The radical newspaper, *Les Révolutions de Paris*, approved of the massacres. Its illustration of events at the former Abbey of St Germain where refractory clergy were murdered is at the [website](#), 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA.
2. A Lesueur gouache offers a view of one kangaroo court, on 2 or 3 September 1792. A well-dressed prisoner pleads his case before a very informal 'court' of 8 sans-culottes, one of whom is sleeping off the effects of the many bottles of wine they have already consumed.

His pipe-smoking accuser bids him prove his innocence, but in fact they know that all prisoners, bar a few whose names are listed, will be executed as soon as they step through the door on the other side of the room. The image can be found on the Joconde [database](#).

3. Philippe de Carbonnières, Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 26 (Louvre RF36559; Musée Carnavalet D9097), pp. 126–28; La Révolution française. Le premier empire. Dessins du Musée Carnavalet, 22 février–22 mai 1982, Paris, Les Musées de la ville de Paris. 1982, plate 77, pp. 91, 93. There are clear affinities between this gouache and another work by Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard (1780–1850).
4. Marat was a prime instigator of these events. His language was always bloodthirsty. He criticised Robespierre in May 1792 for not being prepared to use violence against counter-revolutionaries. These examples are from Marat's newspaper, 'The Friend of the People (L'Ami du peuple)'. Discuss the role of journalism in shaping public opinion.
5. On 17 December 1790, he had Feuillants in mind: *The bribed bunglers cry out murder when I counsel you to take a jump on the monsters who would cut your throats. A year ago [1789] by cutting off five or six hundred heads you would have set yourself free and happy for ever. Today it would need ten thousand; within a few months perhaps you will need to cut off a hundred thousand, and you will do a fine job; for there is no peace for you until you have exterminated the implacable enemies of the patrie down to their last member.*
6. And the following day, 18 December 1790: *No, it is not on the frontiers, but in the capital that we must rain down our blows. Stop wasting time thinking up means of defence; there is only one means of defence for you. That which I have recommended so many times: a general insurrection and popular executions. Begin then by making sure of the king, the dauphin and the royal family: put them under a strong guard and let their heads answer for events. Follow this up by cutting off, without hesitation, [there follows a list, including well known revolutionary figures]. Six months ago five or six hundred heads would have been enough to pull you back from the abyss. Today because you have stupidly let your implacable enemies conspire among themselves and gather strength, perhaps we will have to cut off five or six thousand; but even if it need twenty thousand, there is no time for hesitation.* L'Ami du peuple, No. 314, 18 December 1790.
7. On 16 August 1792, Marat was urging that the prisoners held in the Abbaye prison be



Unknown artist Carnes du Luxembourg  
; Hotel de la Force : massacre des prêtres  
insermentés 1793

speedily but legally dealt with: *Hurry ahead with the judgement of the prisoners at the Abbaye. If the sword of justice at last strikes down the intriguers and the traitors, you will no more hear me speak of popular executions, a cruel expedient that only the law of necessity can command of a people reduced to despair, and that the wilful torpor of the laws always justifies.* L'Ami du peuple, No. 679, 16 August 1792.

8. Three days later Marat was becoming impatient with the judicial processes and offered some advice that would be taken up less than three weeks later: *What is the people's duty? ...In the last resort, indeed the surest and wisest measure it can take, is to present itself armed at the Abbaye, to pull the traitors out from within it, particularly the Swiss officers and their accomplices, and to put them under the edge of the sword. What stupidity to consider trying them! It's all over; you took them prisoner arms in hand against the patrie, and you massacred the soldiers; why then spare their officers, incomparably more culpable? The stupid thing is to have listened to the appeasers [endormeurs], who advised taking them prisoner of war. They are traitors who must be immolated immediately, for they could never be considered from any other point of view.* <sup>139</sup>

## Democracy in Dance: Dance the Carmagnole



Dansons la carmagnole vive le son vive le son!

Everyone knows the blood-curdling song of 1792: the national anthem of France (but only since 1879). This song everyone knows is *La Marseillaise*, composed in April 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760-1836). There is a famous version, with English subtitles, sung by Mireille Mathieu (born 1946) at the foot of the Eiffel tower in Paris during the Bicentenary of the French Revolution in 1989.

*Let's dance the Carmagnole* is a popular song of the French Revolution dating from 1792. It has no known author. It swept to popularity in France in the middle of 1792, the astonishing moment when a Republic and a democracy of all the (male!) people was about to be born in France. Many ordinary French people were disillusioned and frightened. They felt their King and Queen had betrayed

139. L'Ami du peuple, No. 680, 19 August 1792, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789-1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971)

the Revolution, first by continually vetoing revolutionary legislation and then by trying to flee France itself. The royal family had hastened to reach an hostile army of French exiles and Habsburgs in Coblenz in the Rhineland, an army which was about to invade France. *La Carmagnole* was a “catchy” song and dance. *La Carmagnole* and *La Marseillaise* helped solidify ordinary people, even illiterate people, in defence of the values of the Revolution and in support of the arrest of the royal family on 10 August 1792. A radical idea like democracy needed the “glue” of popular music and dance. The words go as follows (as translated on the French Revolution [website](#) of the George Mason University.



Dining and dancing – French Revolution-style in 1792!

### I

*Madame Veto [Marie Antoinette] has promised  
Madame Veto has promised  
To cut everyone's throat in Paris  
To cut everyone's throat in Paris  
But she failed to do this,  
Thanks to our cannons.*

### Refrain:

*Let us dance the Carmagnole  
Long live the sound  
Long live the sound  
Let us dance the Carmagnole  
Long live the sound of the cannons.*

### II

*Mr. Veto [Louis XVI] had promised (repeat)  
To be loyal to his country; (repeat)  
But he failed to be,  
Let's not do quarters.  
Refrain*

### III

*Antoinette had decided (repeat)  
To drop us on our asses; (repeat)  
But the plan was foiled  
And she fell on her face.  
Refrain*

## IV

*Her husband, believing himself a conqueror, (repeat)*

*Knowing little our value, (repeat)*

*Go, Louis, big crybaby,*

*From the Temple into the tower.*

*Refrain*

## V

*The Swiss had promised, (repeat)*

*That they would fire our friends, (repeat)*

*But how they have jumped!*

*How they have all danced!*

*Refrain*

## VI

*When Antoinette sees the tower, (repeat)*

*She wishes to make a half turn, (repeat)*

*She is sick at heart*

*To see herself without honor.*

*Refrain*

*Refrain*

*Refrain.*

A 1960s French heart-throb, the singer Johnny Hallyday, sings “Dansons la Carmagnole” with gusto in French in 1967 in an early music video.

## Two Memoirs of the September Massacres: Madame Roland and Gouverneur Morris

How does each explain how massacres arose and why they continued for days?

Madame Roland’s comments on the September massacres came later in the following year when she was also imprisoned as a leading member of the Girondins:

*The ministers emerged from the Council after eleven o’clock; we heard only next morning of the horrors committed during the night and which were still being committed in the prisons. Appalled by these abominable crimes, by our own inability to prevent them and by the evident complicity of the Commune [Paris municipality] and the General commanding the [National] Guard, we decided that the only course open to a responsible minister was to denounce them publicly with the utmost vigour, challenge the Assembly to put a stop to them and arouse the indignation of all good men, taking the risk of assassination if need be. But the*

massacres continued. At the Abbaye<sup>140</sup> they lasted from Sunday evening until Tuesday morning; at La Force<sup>141</sup>, longer; at Bicêtre, four days, and so on. I am now in the first of these three prisons myself and that is how I have heard the gruesome details; I dare not describe them. But there was one event which I will not pass over in silence because it helps to show how all this was linked and premeditated. In the faubourg St-Germain there was a warehouse where they put prisoners for whom there was no room in the Abbaye. The police chose the Sunday evening just before the general massacre to move prisoners from this depot to the prison. The assassins were lying in wait; they fell upon the coaches, five or six in number, broke them open with swords and pikes and slew the men and women within, screaming there in the open street. All Paris witnessed these terrible scenes, carried out by a small number of butchers....All Paris saw it and all Paris let it go on. I abominate this city. It is impossible to imagine Liberty finding a home amongst cowards who condone every outrage and coolly stand by watching crimes which fifty armed men with any gumption could easily have prevented. The forces of law and order were badly organised, and still are, because the power-hungry brigands were careful to oppose any form of discipline which might restrain them. But does a man need to receive orders from his officer and march in column of fours when it is a question of rescuing people who are having their throats cut? The fact is that the reports of conspiracies in the prisons, however improbable, and the constant propaganda about the people's will and the people's anger, held everyone in a sort of stupor and gave the impression that this infamous performance was the work of the populace, whereas in reality there were not above 200 criminals. It was not so much the first night that astonished me, but four days! And the ghoulisish sightseers coming to watch the spectacle! I know of nothing in the annals of the most barbarous nation to compare with these atrocities.<sup>142</sup>



PRISON DE LA FORCE, RUE SAINT-ANTOINE.

Charles Simond La Force Prison in Paris, France  
1821

Gouverneur Morris's comments were kept to the privacy of his diary:

*Sunday 2nd—This Morning I go out on Business. Mad. De Flahaut takes the same Opportunity to visit her Friends; on our Return we hear, or rather see, a Proclamation. She enquires into it and learns that the Enemy are at the Gates of*

140. Image facing p. 24 of this [etextbook](#).

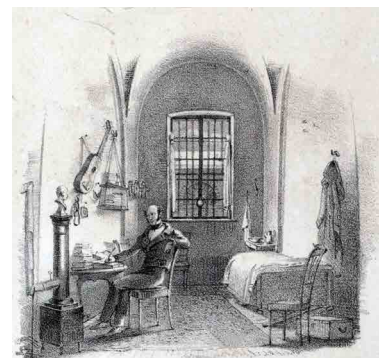
141. A Polish [site](#) shows this prison.

142. E Roland, and Evelyn Shuckburgh, *The memoirs of Madame Roland*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989)

*Paris, which cannot be true. She is taken ill, being affected for the Fate of her Friends. I observe that this Proclamation produces Terror and Despair among the People. This Afternoon they announce the Murder of Priests who had been shut up in the Carmes. They then go to the Abbaye and murder the Prisoners there. This is horrible.*

*Monday 3rd—he murdering continues all Day. I am told that there are about eight hundred Men concerned in it. The Minister of Parma and Embassadress of Sweden [Madame de Staël] have been stopped as they were going away.*

*Tuesday 4th—The Murders continue. The Prisoners in the Bicêtre defend themselves and the Assailants try to stifle and drown them. A certain Mr Bertrand of the Cavalry comes here. Mad. had sent for him to give him a Compensation for his Kindness in saving her Husband. I collect from him that Paris waits but the Moment to surrender. He does not say so, but if I may judge from strong Indications, the Cavalry mean to join the Invader. Several Strangers who call on me complain that they cannot get Passports. It is said that as soon as the Prisoners are demolish'd the Party now employ'd in executing them mean to attack the Shop Keepers. The Assembly have official Accounts that Verdun is taken and, it is said, Stenay also. The Weather is grown very cool and this Afternoon and Evening it rains hard.*



Unknown artist Louis de Potter en prison 1906

*Wednesday 5th—Mr P. tells me that the Ministry and secret Committee are in Amaze. Verdun, Stenay and Clermont [towns in Lorraine in northeast France] are taken. The Country submits and joins the Enemy. The Party of Robespierre has vowed the Destruction of Brissot. The Bishop d'Autun [Talleyrand] tells me that he has seen one of the Commission extraordinaire (i.e.) secret Committee, who tells him that there is the most imminent Danger. I was told that one of the principal Jacobines had exprest his Fears, or rather Despair, not so much on Account of the Enemy Force as of their internal Divisions.*

*Thursday 6th—There is Nothing new this Day. The Murders continue and the **Magistrates** swear to protect Persons and Property. The Weather is pleasant.*

*Friday 7th—I write this Morning. The News from the Armies are rather encouraging to the new Government. [Talleyrand] tells me that he hopes to get his Passport and urges me to procure one for myself and quit Paris. He says he is perswaded that those who now rule mean to quit Paris and take off the King, that their Intention is to destroy the City before they leave it. I learn that the Commune have shut the [city*

*customs] Barriers because they suspect the [Legislative] Assembly of an Intention to retreat. The Weather is very pleasant.*

*Friday 14th—Some People have amus'd themselves this Day in tearing the Earrings out of People's Ears and taking their Watches. It is said that some of the Violators have been put to Death. The Factions seem to be daily more embittered against each other and notwithstanding the common Danger they are far from a Disposition to unite. It seems probable that those who possess Paris will dictate to the others...*

*Monday 17th—This Day Accounts arrive from the Army to shew that [General] Dumouriez [French army commander-in-chief] has been defeated or something very like it. The Weather cool for the Season but pleasant.*

*Tuesday 18th—By the official reports of the Day Paris is in a state of imminent Danger from the internal Movements. The factions grow daily more inveterate. The Weather is very cool.*

*Wednesday 19th—Every Thing still wears an Appearance of Confusion. No Authority any where. The Weather is pleasant.*

*Thursday 20th—Mr Payne [ie., English radical and pro-French republican, **Tom Paine**] calls on me. I find from various Channels that the brissotine Faction is desirous of doing me Mischief if they can. I am inform'd that the Powers of Barbary [Moorish North Africa] are about to cut off all Communication with this Country. If so the southern Provinces will starve. The Weather lowers and this Evening it rains hard.*

*Friday 21st—Nothing new this Day except that the Convention has met and declar'd they will have no King in France. The Weather is foul.<sup>143</sup>*

People power worked. The Prussians were defeated by a French army led by General François Kellermann (1735–1820) at Valmy (in Champagne in northeast France) on 20 September. This was the first victory of a people's mass army of revolutionary enthusiasts against the usual Old-Regime force, a smaller band of better-trained, but less-enthused (often press-ganged) troops. 20 September 1792 was judged by the **liberal** German literary genius, von Goethe, as representing a landmark date in the history of mankind. He wanted the values of the French revolution to reform the German states as well; he correctly concluded that the French victory at Valmy opened the way for this (though only from the time of the General Charles-François Dumouriez's follow-up victory at Jemappes, in south-central Belgium, on 6 November 1792).

143. Gouverneur Morris, Beatrix Cary Davenport (ed.), *A Diary of the French Revolution*, (Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), vol. 2, 537–538, 542, 547.

At the same time, an Austrian siege of Lille (in northern France) which had commenced on 9 September 1792, and which entailed the shelling of the city since 29 September, was abandoned on 7 October 1792. The mayor and ardent citizens of the city had been stout in the defence of their city. For a time, the revolution was safe.



*Why was Louis XVI convicted of treason?* Review what you know about Louis XVI's policies in 1791-93



A local painter, Louis-Joseph Watteau (1731–98), whose uncle was a renowned painter of aristocratic life, painted in 1797 a scene of the siege ('Le Bombardement de Lille') which is now in the Lille city museum, Musée de l'hospice comtesse visible [here](#). The work is also reproduced in Valmy: 20 septembre 1792, in Patrick Bouchain, Ministère de la Défense et al.(eds.), 1989, pp. 20, 117 (crediting Lorette-Giraudon).

On that same day as Valmy, 20 September 1792, the National Convention assembled to give France a Constitution to replace that of 1791. The first act of the National Convention was to declare France to be a Republic.

## Trial (26 December 1792) and Execution (21 January 1793) of the King

Reports of the September massacres horrified people throughout most of Europe, even those who had been sympathetic to the Revolution. Another event followed that would send a chill through Europe: the trial of the king on 26 December 1793 and his subsequent execution on 21 January 1793.



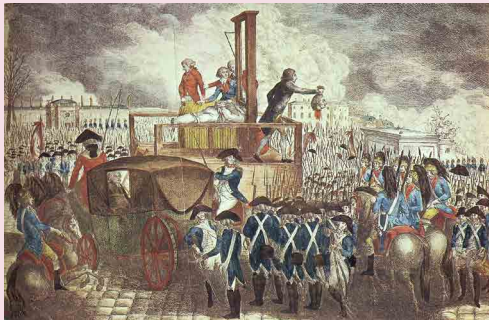
### *The Execution of Louis XVI*

Explain the political agenda behind each extraordinary drawing. To whom was each directed?

1. In an engraving issued within weeks of the execution of the king, The king's severed head is dramatically emphasised. The caption reads: 'Here's something for the other juggler-joker Sovereigns to think about: 'impure blood irrigates our furrows'. Part of this caption 'qu'un impur sang abreuve nos sillons' is a quote from the Marseillaise. View the image [here](#).



**Unknown artist** *Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnés* 1793



**Georg Heinrich Sieveking** *Exécution de Louis XVI*  
1793

Charles Benazech (1767–94)—shows Louis XVI, now dubbed Louis Capet, mounting the scaffold with dignity, nobility and grace, and hints at reasons why the execution of a king so disturbed public opinion in parts of provincial France and certainly in the rest of Europe. See this image on the Versailles collection [website](#).

2. A [view](#) of the scene at the execution.
3. Another view, titled 'An Exuberant Executioner' can be found [here](#). What's more, you could even eat your dinner on a plate commemorating this execution scene. In the [search box](#) type 'Commemorating the Revolution in Chinaware' to see the plate. A contrasting portrait—as imagined in 1793 by a Czech-German artist in England,
4. See also Benazech's painting of Louis XVI taking leave of his family, held in the [Versailles museum collection](#).

The moderate *Feuille villageoise*, aimed at the peasants, thought it best that 'Louis the Last' just be forgotten:

*It is likely that people will forget him in his prison until victory has forced the enemy to abandon him to justice or to national clemency. The scheme to bring the royal family to trial would be at the present time a fatal one. This is the advice of all the English who have embraced our cause. A king hounded, they say, no longer has supporters; a king killed arouses sympathy, and this compassion gives his family defenders. Tarquin had no successors; Charles I still has them.*<sup>144</sup>

On the day following 10 August, Hébert's *Père Duchesne* at first dismissed the thought of the French 'soiling themselves in the blood of a coward', but shortly after this he was soon demanding 'the monster's' blood; he wrote that his only regret was that it was such a long and complicated business to 'knock off a tyrant's head'. Once the king was beheaded on 21 January 1793, the great joy of the *Père Duchesne* was restrained only by the thought of the remnants of royalty still in France. Marie-Antoinette became the object of particularly vitriolic slander from Hébert until her execution on 16 October 1793 / 25 *Vendémiaire* II. In the chilling extract that follows, Hébert urges that 'serpents' be crushed right down to their last number:

*An authority that is powerful enough to dethrone a king commits a crime against*

144. 'La Feuille villageoise, No. 51, 27 September 1792', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 152

*humanity if it does not profit from the occasion to exterminate him and his bastard race. What would you say of a fool, who, while working in his field, came upon a nest of vipers, yet was content to crush only the head of the father, and was chicken-hearted enough to spare the rest; if he said to himself: 'It is a pity to kill a poor mother in the midst of her children: everything small is so tender. Let's take this pretty nest to the house to amuse my brats'. Would he not commit, through stupidity, a very great crime? For, damn it, the monsters that he had revived, and whose life he had thus saved, would not fail to recompense him, to bite him, his wife and his brood, who would perish the victims of misplaced pity. No quarter! Whenever we can lay our hands on emperors, kings, queens, empresses, let us rid them from the face of the earth. Better to kill the devil than that the devil should kill us. Never will we do as much harm to these monsters as they have done to us and would do to us, damn it.*<sup>145</sup>



#### Executing the King and the royal family

1. *Alive or Dead. Policy Options.* In your view, was either the king or the queen more dangerous alive or dead? Outline the policy options confronting the National Convention in December 1793 and January 1794.
2. *Dictatorship and Democracy.* One of the great political theorists, J.H. Talmon, has argued that the French Revolution between 1792 and 1794 gave birth at the very same time to most of what became twentieth-century politics: **liberal** democracy and fascist dictatorship. Is there evidence in Hébert's political writings in *Père Duchesne* to support Talmon's conservative point of view?
3. *'Bastard race'.* Hébert's chilling phrase has overtones of 'genocide'. Conservative historians who discuss the mass killings in the Vendée late in 1793 also accuse the French revolutionaries of 'genocide'. Is there evidence in Hébert's political writings in *Père Duchesne* to support a charge of inciting genocide? The 1948 United Nations Convention defined 'genocide' as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
  - Killing members of the group;
  - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
  - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
  - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
  - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.'

145. 'Le Père Duchesne', in J. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 156.

## Père Duchesne

This [website](#) offers Hébert's image of what he thought his *Père Duchesne* would look like with his sans-culotte style: moustache, open shirt, worker's clothes, pipe and attitude of bloody-mindedness. He inhales revolution and exhales aristocracy. He is really in your



Jacques-René Hébert *Le Père Duchesne* 1790s



Unknown artist *The Grande visite de MME* 1902

face with his politics, announcing on his Phrygian cap 'La Nation, The Law and F\*\*\* the King', and on his sash, 'Live Free or Die—F\*\*\* the king'.

## Dance the Carmagnole

A related image in the 1793 era of *Père Duchesne* shows a group of sans-culotte men and women dancing joyfully around a liberty tree and singing revolutionary songs. Around the Liberty Tree, capped by the Phrygian cap of the freed slave, the sans-culottes sing and dance to the revolutionary song known as the *Carmagnole*, a song heaping scorn on the queen.<sup>146</sup> Though they may be as poor and as ugly as *Père Duchesne*, their patriotism shines as the army of the revolution sallies from revolutionary France.



Unknown artist *Refrains Patriotiques* 1789

## Marie Antoinette's Trial and Execution

When the monarchy was overthrown, Marie Antoinette was imprisoned on 13 August 1792 in the *Prison du Temple* with the king, the seven-year-old heir apparent (*le Dauphin*), Marie-Antoinette's sister Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte (Madame Royale), and Madame Élisabeth, sister of Louis XVI. After the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, the other members of the royal family remained together in the Temple Prison until the *Dauphin* was taken away on 1 July 1793. Nothing more than a hostage, the *Dauphin* was re-imprisoned in the Temple in January 1794, and the unhealthy conditions there caused his death from a tubercular disease on 8 June 1795. Meanwhile, in August 1793, Marie Antoinette was transferred to the Prison at the *Conciergerie* to await her trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Tribunal heard Marie Antoinette's case over 20 continuous hours on 14–15 October 1793. On 16 October, grim and

146. The words are translated and you can hear it sung on this [website](#), 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA. (© Center for History and New Media).

unflinching, Marie-Antoinette was executed at noon in the *Place de la Révolution* (today's Place de la Concorde).



Assess the mood of political talk in France in 1793 by reviewing the official accusations against Marie Antoinette, otherwise known as 'Madame Veto', the 'the Austrian whore' or 'Madame Deficit'. She was arraigned for trial under this charge: having cooperated directly by means of subterfuges and tip-offs with foreign powers and with external enemies [i.e., émigrés] of the Republic as well as having tried to promote civil war by means of plots and conspiracies so as to goad citizens to take up arms against each other. Was she guilty as charged? Did it make sense to execute her?

1. The prosecution document of the Revolutionary Tribunal charging Marie-Antoinette and her last letter is available [here](#)
2. An excellent illustration (of counter-revolutionary origin?) of a session of a Revolutionary Tribunal.



**Jean Dupless-Bertaux** *Marie Antoinette of Austria at the revolutionary tribunal 1806*

3. David's quick sketch of her on her way to her execution.



**Jacques-Louis David** *Portrait de Marie-Antoinette conduite au supplice* no date

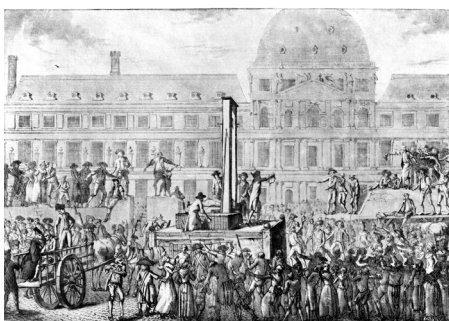
4. The eighteenth-century Breton artist, Madame de Bréhan's portrait of a dignified Marie Antoinette in mourning while detained at the *Temple* prison.



Anne Flore Millet Marie-Antoinette en grand deuil au Temple 1752

## Guillotine

Consider, if you dare, the public execution as *theatre*. What does the *theatre* associated with the New Regime's supposedly swift and mechanical form of execution show about the New (and Old) Regimes? The history of this awful mechanical instrument is ably traced [here](#) and on this [website](#). The engineer who designed the guillotine was Tobias Schmidt, a maker of harpsichords, according to an idea promoted by Dr Antoine Louis (1723–92), a leader, since 1764, of the Royal Academy of Surgery in France. Dr Joseph Guillotin (1738–1814) was a medical specialist who opposed the death penalty, but who also promoted this more egalitarian, and supposedly painless and swift way of death to the other members of the National Assembly in October 1789. Only nobles hitherto had been eligible for the quicker death of decapitation, whether by the sword (in France) or the axe (in England). Humble people were usually broken on a wheel and/or hanged, garrotted, or burned.



Unknown artist Guillotine at the place du Carrousel, Paris 1792

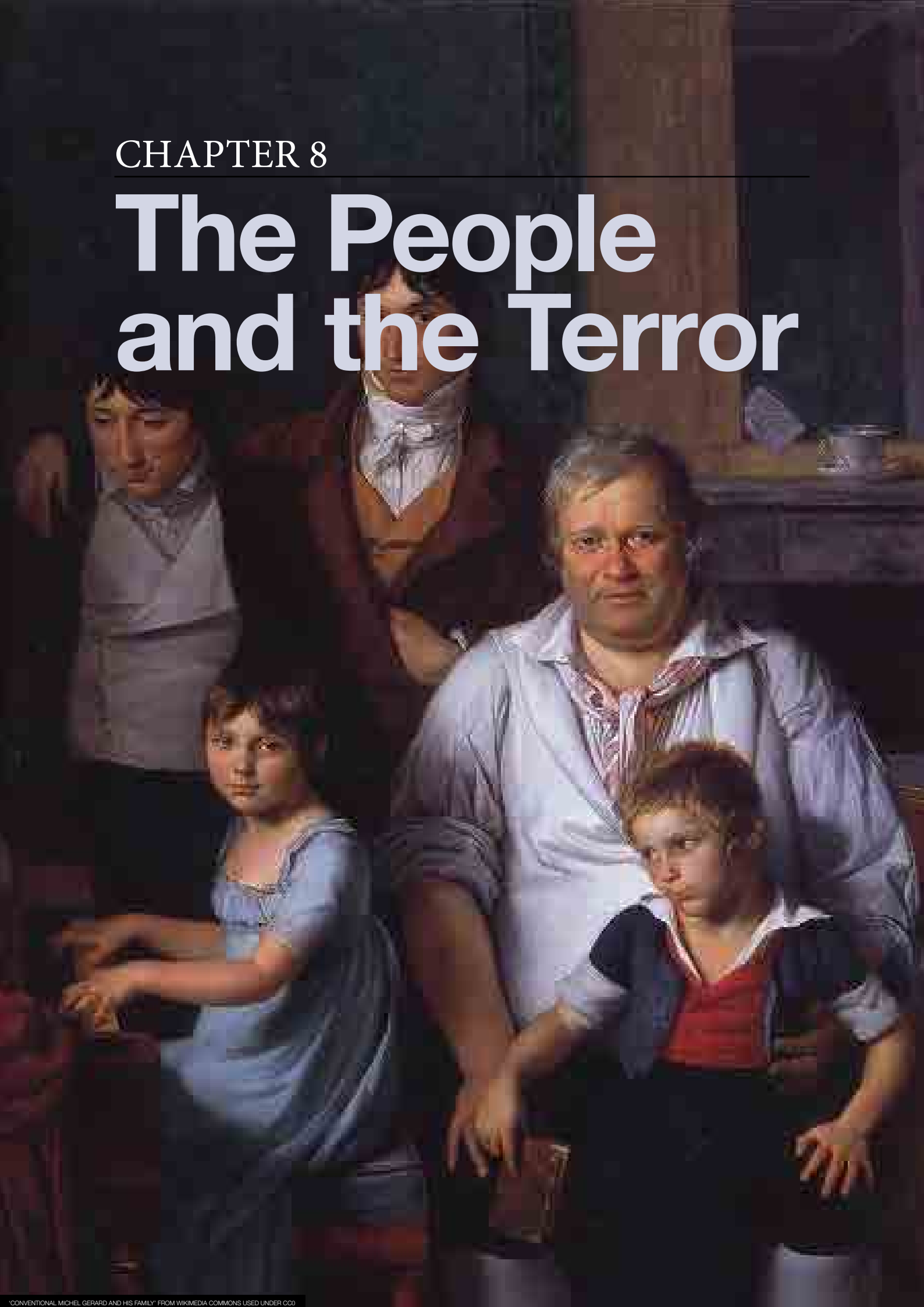
Dr Guillotin was a medical lecturer and *député* for the *Third Estate* of Paris in the National Assembly, 1789–91. His proposal to use a guillotine, if executions still had to be carried out, was seen by him and by most members of the National Assembly as an enlightened gesture to equalise the social orders in state-ordered deaths. The guillotine is depicted in everyday use in Paris at the Place du Carrousel,<sup>147</sup> 13 August 1792, in an etching held in the collection of the *Musée Carnavalet*, Paris.

147. West of the Louvre, and now dominated by a smaller Napoleon-era Arc du triomphe erected in 1806–08 to commemorate the victories over the Habsburg and Prussian monarchies at Austerlitz and Ulm and the peace forced on Russia at Tilsit. The arch was modelled on Constantine the Great's in Rome (312 CE). The bigger one on the Champs Élysées was erected in the 1840s.

## CHAPTER 8

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# The People and the Terror



In 1789 none but a handful of revolutionaries were republicans: David, Desmoulins and Condorcet. Almost all revolutionaries wanted a king working harmoniously with the new National Assembly. When it came to the crunch, however, and as the king revealed he had no wish to work with the new regime, he extinguished all the goodwill shown to him. Most French people had no wish to return to the *Old Regime*, even one purged of its worst abuses. Reluctantly—even people like Marat and Robespierre at first could not envisage a France without a monarch—the Republic was declared on 20 September 1792 by the National Convention.

But no sooner had the revolutionaries declared the Republic than they were once more engaged in factional battles. Robespierre, Marat and Danton were now the leaders of the Left in the *Jacobin Club*; in the Convention they sat on the high benches and were thus known as ‘The Mountain (*La Montagne*)’. In opposition and forming a new Right was the group around Brissot, the pro-war faction of 1792, whose influence was undermined by rumours of links to the monarchy, by the military setbacks before Valmy and Jemappes, and by their disapproval of the September massacres. Brissot had already left the *Jacobin club* just before the fall of the monarchy. His ‘Brissotin’ group was later known as the Girondins or Rolandistes. The Girondins were numerically superior to the Mountain, but between the two groups was a majority of Deputies who prevaricated. On most issues they sided with the Girondins, but on vital issues of the survival of the Revolution, they voted with the Mountain.

In the midst of this feuding, the counter-revolution continued to gather strength. In spite of the victories against the Prussians at Valmy (20 September 1792) and against the Austrians at Jemappes (6 November 1792), foreign armies continued to threaten France. The external situation worsened when the Prussians and Austrians won a new ally in Britain from the end of January 1793, for the first time exposing the French revolution to naval blockades and attacks. Throughout 1793 the whole country was wracked by economic disasters: shortages of goods, charges of speculation, and inflation out of control. And furthermore, the Civil Constitutional of the Clergy, and especially its system of oaths, was encountering more and more resistance in provincial France.

Throughout the Revolution the ever-present problem was the role of the people, in particular the people of Paris. This dominated the minds of the Deputies at the new National Convention, now gathered to give France a republican constitution—as well as to govern a country at war and beset by internal strife exacerbated by an economy worsening in 1793. As in other phases of the Revolution, the problem in the economy was how to reconcile the *bourgeois* ideology of free trade with the reality of the higher cost of living (on staples like bread). The poor in the cities—and even in the country—were the ones suffering the most as fewer goods were in circulation (owing to social, political and military instability) and more money (*assignats*) was printed (as if it might somehow compensate).

In political terms there was the question of how poorer sections of the population, now called *sans-culottes*, should be enabled to have their opinions heard: should this be through the

parliament and regular elections, or might a more direct form of democracy be introduced, in which the popular assemblies, the clubs and the sections were invited to decide, on a day-to-day basis, what should be done? Fear of the people of Paris paralysed the Girondins; the Mountain understood how they might still be involved in solving the problems of war, counter-revolution and increasing economic misery. None of these problems could be solved without the support and direct intervention of enthusiastic ordinary people. After the September massacres of 1792, the Girondins feared such an outcome.

## Sans-Culottes

Yet another day of revolutionary violence settled the matter—or rather, it seemed to. With the forced expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention, in the *coup* of 31 May to 2 June 1793 when *sans-culottes* invaded the chamber, the way was prepared for the emergency measures known as the Terror. Ever since the taking of the Bastille in July 1789, ‘the People (*le peuple*)’ had taken on a mystic quality in the French Revolution. On the one hand they were lauded as the backbone of the Revolution; on the other they were feared or hated by successive groups, latterly the Girondins, for wanting to take it too far

In the first days of the Revolution ‘the People’ encapsulated the Nation, but increasingly as popular demonstrations determined political events, ‘le Peuple’ really meant poorer people, particularly those in the cities, especially self-employed artisans and shopkeepers and those who worked for them, people who were semi-skilled or with no trade at all, right down to the common labourer. This is the group that came to be called the *sans-culottes*. First used as a *bourgeois* or aristocrat’s term of insult, increasingly from 1792 it became accepted as a badge of honour.

The ‘People’s Friend’, Jean-Paul Marat’s writing about the *sans-culottes* offers an example. Marat was noted mainly for the savagery of his writing, but here he is in a jovial mood, publishing a letter ridiculing customs of exaggerated respect for social position or authority. *Sans-culottes* would have none of that!

*To the Ami du peuple, 15 January 1790*

*Today’s Journal de Paris has taken the trouble to give us a bulletin on the condition of Monsieur Necker. I ask you, Sir, to be so good as to publish in your paper the bulletin on the illness of my coachman, who was at the siege of the Bastille, and who has deserved as much of his country as the first minister of finance.*

*‘Pierre le Brun yesterday evening had a violent attack of hepatitis, which lasted almost all night; he then slept fitfully, about seven minutes at a time. His urine is still infrequent; there are nauseating vomitings; his pulse is still poor.’*

SIXTE-QUINT.

*I hope that all good patriots will interest themselves in the health of an excellent French citizen: 'Vice alone is lowly, virtue determines rank.'*<sup>148</sup>

*Signed le chevalier DE BLAVILLE*

Religious ideas were especially called into question by ordinary people in this period. Already in July 1789, *abbé* Fauchet had preached a sermon in which the virtues of the common man (storming the Bastille?) were compared to the teachings of Christ (money changers in the Temple?). The notion reappears in Hébert's homilies. In the number of Père Duchesne from which this extract is taken, Hébert has been preaching the necessity for a good education. Liberty and equality were to be the child's first words learned at school. The Constitution would be his [yes, his!] only catechism; the history of kings would engender a hatred of monarchy, but each child would be encouraged to choose the religion that suited him best, be it Judaism, Hinduism or whatever. Hébert maintained he would not mind if children chose to be Quakers; these 'good chaps hold bloodshed in horror'. Yet they are Christians, he points out, drawing inspiration from the same gospel as counter-revolutionary non-juring Catholics. In fact, argued Hébert, the priests read the gospels all wrong. They destroyed the beauty of the New Testament, argued Hébert, who explained that Jesus's perfect model for life reflected 'the Sans-Culotte who made [it]':

*I know no better Jacobin than this man Jesus. He is the founder of all popular societies. He did not want them to be too large, for he knows that large assemblies almost always degenerate into a rabble and that sooner or later the Brissotins, the Rolandins, the Buzotins worm their way in. The club that he created consisted of only twelve members, all of them poor sans-culottes; yet, even into this small number, a false brother insinuated himself; namely, Judas, whose name signifies, in the Hebrew language, a Pétion. With his eleven Jacobins, Jesus taught obedience to the laws, preached equality, liberty, charity, fraternity, waged eternal war on priests, financiers, destroyed the religion of the Jews, which was a bloody cult; he taught men to despise wealth, to respect old age, to forgive wrongs. All the sans-culottérie soon gathered about him. The more that kings and emperors persecuted his disciples, the more did their number grow. Unfortunately, damn it, the tares [i.e., vetch, low grade grains] are mixed with the good wheat. Other Judases succeeded to the one who sold him, and, after his death, they crucified him again by becoming popes, cardinals, bishops, *abbés*, monks and canons. This wretched gang, in the name of this divine lawgiver who loved only poverty, enriched itself on the spoils of the fools by inventing a purgatory, a hell, by selling indulgences for their weight in gold. In the same way, I avow, did the Feuillants, like the priests, seek to lose liberty by dishonouring it and robbing it of everything it has.*<sup>149</sup>

148. 'L'Ami du peuple, No. 102, 19 January 1790', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 196.

149. 'Le Père Duchesne, no. 277', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 198.

Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve (1756–94) was a radical democrat in Paris who replaced **Bailly** as mayor of Paris in 1791. He was the representative of the Legislative Assembly sent to Varennes to bring the royal family back to Paris under armed guard. On 3 August 1791, he supported de-throning Louis XVI, effectively allying himself with the demonstrators at the *champ de Mars*, and eventually voted in favour of the execution of the king. He had supported the war in April 1792, which inclined him to support the Girondins, which more importantly made him see himself as an opponent of Robespierre. Though elected the first presiding officer of the National Convention, his popularity in Paris was waning, hence Hébert's threat in the extract. Expelled from the National Convention on 2 June 1793, marked down for arrest, Pétion fled first to Caen in Normandy and then to villages in the Gironde. In each case, the counter-revolutionary rebellions there had failed by the summer of 1794. Pétion decided to suicide as the Jacobins were closing in on him in June 1794. If he had lasted another few weeks, he would have out-last Robespierre.

When asked to give an explanation of the origins and definition of the *sans-culottes*, the radical newspaper, the *Révolutions de Paris*, took the opportunity to ramble over a history of the Revolution and how the role of the people set it apart from all other revolutions:

*A number of our readers ask us for a definition of the sans-culottes, the history of their origin, and a precise and true list of the manners and virtues of these patriots par excellence, of these born republicans. We could content ourselves by replying that every citizen who is neither royalist, nor aristocrat, nor idle rich, nor selfish, nor moderate, deserves to be saluted by the honourable title of sans-culotte. But we think that it is not without some value to enter into a few details on this quite new subject, although the term itself is in common enough use. So many people, today, out of fear or for even less excusable motives, take on the cloak of sans-culottism in order to hide themselves or in order better to deceive the nation which they rob and betray!...*

*Are we then more free, more content? They call us sovereign, yet we still have a king; they tell us that all men are equal, have equal right to live, yet we continue to die of hunger, in the midst of abundance, beneath the eyes of the rich who sneer at us. It is still we who work the land and gather the harvest, and a minority consume it or allow it to rot rather than share it with their brothers. It is too much! What kind of revolution is it that leaves everything on one side and nothing on the other? Let's march; let us re-establish the natural order of things, and without any false piety or criminal weakness let us make a clean sweep of all who refuse to go along with us. At this cry of reason, too long stifled; at this demand for justice, too long outraged or blinded; those who are not sans-culottes become seriously alarmed, and say to themselves in their turn: the storm is rumbling and drawing near; the sans-culottes are people who put words into action....*

*Do you know what a sans-culotte is? He is not the equivocating type, the person without character who lets himself go with the tide of events; who, as it is said, howls with the wolves in order not to be devoured by them. Nor is he the smug egoist who has no other country than the inside of his house, and who, like the snail, withdraws into its shell while the tempest blows, and who swims near the surface....*

*The true sans-culotte is a man of nature, or one who has preserved all his energy in the heart of civil society, regenerated by the Revolution. He is a patriot strong in mind and body, who has always shown himself openly and taken a step ahead, consequently he has not waited for the country to summon him to her. It is this artisan, this head of the family, endowed with good sense, who, far from giving to the service of the republic the spare part of his time, regarded himself, from 12 July 1789, as permanently requisitioned, both in his person and in his abilities. A true sans-culotte is what one used to call the man of the people, open, cordial, sometimes rough and ready but always humane, even in those revolutionary moments when a veil is thrown over the statue of humanity. The true sans-culotte desired the death of the despot and of all the conspirators; he is seen where traitors pass on their way to execution; he is seen even pressing about their scaffold, because his humanity does not exclude justice.*

*He carries the sense and love of justice to a point that distressed the moderates, the undecided, the temporisers, all those who compromise with their principles. The true sans-culotte loves to get to the heart of the matter, even if he has to forgo his interests, provided it is in the public interest; thus no sans-culotte becomes or remains a rich man. Rich and sans-culotte! The two terms never go together. . . he is hard-working, economical, but at the same time he is the opposite to selfish and dislikes those who are such. Selfishness is the curse of patriotic virtues and generous sentiments....Love of work and frugality justifies, more than enough, the sans-culottes slandered; the share they take in the affairs of their country makes them deaf to the comforts of life that they could get for themselves, like so many others. They are neither less active nor less intelligent; but they are less selfish....*

*It has been said and often repeated that religious practices, the offices of the Church, the ideas associated with the god of the priests, would serve as a consolation and spectacle for the people in its misery. The sans-culottes prove at this moment that they need other spectacles....<sup>150</sup>*

150. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, Nos 214 and 215, 5–12 November 1793 / 15–22 Brumaire II, and 13–20 November 1793 / 23–30 Brumaire II', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 199–202.

## Sans-Culotte Self-Image.



What do the above descriptions of the *sans-culottes* tell us about:

1. their self-image
2. their belief in their proper role in the Revolution
3. their fears
4. their worst enemies?



How close do you think these beliefs are to reality?



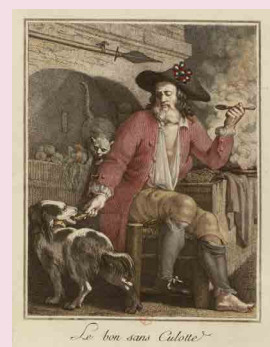
How do you reconcile their self-image with their more common depiction as ignorant and bloodthirsty savages?

## Images of Sans-Culottes

Here are positive and negative contemporary portraits (you decide which!) of *sans-culottes* as they seemed to people living in revolutionary France:



Simon Schama's *Citizens* (New York, Viking, 1989), plate 174, on pp. 712, 947 (© Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) shows an anonymous portrait of 'The Good Sans-Culotte', a cockaded working fellow at his hearth in his humble home, pike at the ready.



**Unknown artist** *Le Bon sans-culotte* 1793



*La Révolution française. Le premier empire. Dessins du Musée Carnavalet, 22 février–22 mai 1982*, Paris, Les Musées de la ville de Paris. 1982, plate 154, p. 165 has a portrait of three *sans-culottes*, dated patriotically as '9 Nivôse II of the Republic

one and indivisible' or 30 December 1793 (inventory no. D5999), by Pierre-Alexandre Wille (1748–1821). It is entitled: 'Republican Moustaches, or Three Good and Patriotic Frenchmen'. Is the title ironic? Or lovingly approving? They are possibly from a revolutionary army (*une armée révolutionnaire*), a force charged with suppressing internal counter-revolution. In hostile zones, this enthusiastic force of Parisian sans-culottes committed mass murder and often tried to de-Christianise churches. P.-A. Wille had commanded a battalion of National Guard from 1789. He abandoned painting for drawing in the years of the revolution. The *sans-culotte* on the right wears a Phrygian cap of liberty; the one on the left is a National Guardsman.



Another portrayal was executed in October 1792 by the painter Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845). Boilly asked a famous singer, Chenard, to pose for him the ultra-patriotic manner of a *sans-culotte*. In one sense, the portrait is phoney; Chenard was a performer, not a 'real' sans-culotte. On the other hand, the portrait is 'real'; it shows us the radicals' romantic idea of what the sans-culottes stood for and represented in the period between the flight of the King (20 June 1791) and before the Committee of Public Safety (Comité du salut publique) recalled the sans culottes' revolutionary armies (March 1794).



**Louis-Leopold Boilly** *Le porte drapeau de la fête civique 1795*



More of the gouaches executed by the Lesueur family show various groups of *sans-culottes*, some more positively than others. There are clear negative connotations in the revolutionary committee gouache: see the image listed third in the *September Massacres* image study. There are more images of *sans-culottes* in Lesueur's gouaches:

1. 'Making Armaments'<sup>151</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> on the left on a web page made by the Museum of the French Revolution (*Musée de la Révolution française*), Château de Vizille, near Grenoble and at the official all French museums Joconde database, type in the 'Auteur/ Exécutant' line, choosing the 38th image.
2. 'Sans-culottes at arms'<sup>152</sup>, many with comments about their imposture, violence and theft, at the official all French museums Joconde database, for



**Lesueur Brothers** *Sans Culotte Lighting his Pipe, Young Butcher, Bourgeois Going to Guard, Huntsman, Citizen Defending his Liberty, Sans Culotte Keeping Guard 18th Century*

151. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris: Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plate 19 (Louvre RF36555; Musée Carnavalet D9073), 105–106; *La Révolution française. Le premier empire. Dessins du Musée Carnavalet*, 22 février–22 mai 1982, (Paris, Les Musées de la ville de Paris. 1982), plate 80, 92, 95.

152. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris: Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plates 21–23 [Louvre RF36528, 36530 & 36543; Musée Carnavalet D9077 & D9075 (Réserve) D9081 (Réserve), 111–119.

example: view this [image](#) or this [image](#). For more examples on this theme by Lesueur, go to this [website](#) and type in 'LESUEUR Jean-Baptiste' in the 'Auteur/Éxecutant' line, choosing the 14th, 28th, 29th, 67th and 68th images.

3. A satirical print of the 'President of a Revolutionary Committee' who is nothing more than a thief can be seen [here](#). The caption suggests disdainfully that this is what the chairman of a revolutionary committee really looks like once he's heading for home with all the trappings of his office.



Unknown artist *President of a revolutionary committee, after the lifting of a seal 1794*

4. *Conventionnels: Radical Republican Democrats reveal themselves in their portraits.* There are portraits of members (*deputies* were called *Conventionnels*) of the *National Convention*, the assembly of radical Republicans and democrats, which ruled revolutionary France between October 1792 and October 1795. The *National Convention* was the first legislature anywhere to adopt a system resembling democracy: voting by universal male suffrage. The *National Convention* was also the revolutionary assembly which decided (overwhelmingly) to bring the king to trial, then to find him guilty of treason (a big majority: 426 votes to 278), then to decide (a narrow majority: 387 to 334) to execute the king. The *National Convention* was also the legislature which decided to install a temporary Jacobin dictatorship, which endured from the summer of 1793 to the summer of 1794.



*Democracy and fashion, body language, self-image.* We are used to assessing fashion as self-image in our own lives. How did French revolutionaries of the radical era, 1792–95, choose to present themselves to others? What was a democratic person supposed to look like? How were they supposed to behave? Are democratic politicians any different today? In this era of the revolutionary wars, 1792–99, suggest how and why these democratic styles and ways shocked rulers and leaders in traditional Old-Order societies like Britain, Prussia, Austria and Russia?



**Jean François Sablet** *Daniel Kervégan, Mayor of Nantes 1794*

1. The first portrait—by Jean François Sablet (1745–1819)—is of a revolutionary in Paris in 1794. Scholars now think that the subject of the painting is a former mayer of Nantes, Daniel Kervegan. It was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. It is visible on the [Google Art Project](#).

2. The second portrait is by an unknown student in David's studio in Paris. The student painted a portrait of the Conventionnel Gérard,<sup>153</sup> and his family, and the painting is now in the Musée Tessé de Beaux-Arts in Le Mans, in the Sarthe region, southwest of Paris.<sup>154</sup>



Jacques-Louis David *Portrait d'un homme et de ses enfants* 1800s

3. The third image is again by Jean-Baptiste Lesueur (1749-1826), and is part of his marvellous gouaches of revolutionary scenes in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. One gouache shows different Jacobin officials to the fore, probably including **représentants en mission**, sans-culottes at the rear, all gathering for a revolutionary festival under the cheerful banner 'Live Free or Die (Vivre libre ou mourir[sic?])'<sup>155</sup>, a reference to the battle cry of the ancient **Gauls** against the Romans, as celebrated by Plutarch and even by Julius Caesar.<sup>156</sup> Go to the official all French museums Joconde database, type in 'LESUEUR Jean-Baptiste' in the 'Auteur/Executant' line.
4. Two studies of Conventionnels acting as plenipotentiaries (**représentants en mission**) with powers over (often counter-revolutionary) provinces in 1793–94:
  - The Conventionnel Milhaud was painted in 1794 by Garneray father and son (though the portrait was previously attributed to David) The miniature on ivory is now in the Louvre in Paris (inventory FR 27894). The image is online [here](#).
  - Jean-François Hue (1751-1823) drew another *Conventionnel* <sup>157</sup> at the Breton port of Brest, possibly **Jean Bon Saint-André (1749–1813)**.
5. The family of Andre-Francois, Count Miot de Melito (1762-1841) consul of France to Florence, Louis Gauffier.

153. This may be Michel (père) Gérard, a Breton peasant from Montgermont, the sole député of peasant background elected to the Estates General / National Assembly. At the opening, he stood out by his choice to wear peasant dress—Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789–1799*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 38; Local lore does not mention whether he was a Conventionnel as well.

154. A reproduction can also be found in Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution française: Images et récit*, 5 vols., (Paris, Livre Club Diderot, 1986), vol. 2, 20.

155. See some coins on this [website](#).

156. Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, (Paris: Paris musées : Musée Carnavalet, 2005), plate 45 (Louvre RF36533; Musée Carnavalet D9071), 182–186.

157. This Musée Carnavalet black crayon image (inventory D8005) is reproduced in *La Révolution française. Le premier empire. Dessins du Musée Carnavalet*, 22 février–22 mai 1982, (Paris, Les Musées de la ville de Paris. 1982), 64.

6. This is an image of the French Revolution at the moment in 1795-96, the fourth year of the French Republic. The portrait shows the well-to-do family of Andre-francois, the Count of Miot de Melito (1762-1841). He was then acting, at the young age of 34, as the ambassador of the French Republic to the Duchy of Tuscany. Ambassador Andre-Frencois Miot de Melito chose to have himself depicted in his home in Florence, the city itself featuring in the painting depicted in the painting. The ambassador rejoices in the company of his family, all shown at ease and in the latest fashions emphasizing classicism and 'freedom'. One of his sons dies in the battle of Waverloo in 1815. The Republic is emphasized by the classical statuary left and right: Minerva (Athena) goddess of Athenian democracy and empire, and Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic. The painting was made by a French artist, long resident in Florence: Louis Gauffier (1762-1801). Collection of the [National Gallery of Victoria](#), 2010:513, purchased with funds donated by Andrew Sisson.
7. Polish director Andrzej Wajda's modern film, *Danton* (1983)<sup>158</sup>, also has scenes which vividly evoke the culture and the manner of operations of revolutionary agents: the *Conventionnels* and of its executive, the *Committee of Public Safety*, founded 6 April 1793, granted dictatorial powers on the initiative of Danton in 10 October 1793 / 2 *Vendémiaire* II. By focusing on Danton's disastrous face-off with Robespierre in February-March 1794 / *Ventôse* II, when Danton and Desmoulins suddenly became *indulgents* determined to try to curb the kinds of Terror measures they had supported between September 1792 and October 1793, the Polish director Wajda sees the Terror scripting the Communist Poland of his own time (1980s) as Polish people also struggled to free themselves from a dour tyranny. The filmmaker blends fact and fiction to make history come alive.

## The New Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

The Declaration of the Rights of Man of 27 August 1789 encompassed universal rights, but its omissions meant that it had more appeal to men of property than to those who would be known as the *sans-culottes*. In 10 August 1793, shortly after the Girondin Deputies (2 June 1793) were expelled from the National Convention, a new Constitution was drafted. It was never implemented, however. Crises of war and counter-revolution supervened, and a temporary revolutionary dictatorship was established under the auspices of an executive committee of the National Convention, the 'Committee of Public Safety' CPS (*Comité du salut public*). Replacing the king and his ministers, the CPS was founded on 6 April 1793, meeting often in the apartments of the former queen in the *Tuileries* Palace, its 9 members soon expanded to 12, all elected monthly, Robespierre joining in July 1793 when Danton was withdrawing.

Though a dead letter, the 1793 Constitution is still an interesting document, however. It shows the changing values and agenda of the Revolution in this its most radical phase.

158. Andrzej Wajda (dir.) *Danton*, (Gaumont, 1983).

The National Convention's revised *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, as amended 10 August 1793,<sup>159</sup> was one of the Mountain's ways of consolidating their alliance with the radicals in the Clubs, the Commune and with the sans-culottes in the electoral sections of Paris. This alliance had (again) proved politically effective: (this time) in ousting the Girondins from the government and from the National Convention, 31 May to 2 June 1793.

The Constitution of 10 August 1793 was prefaced by a new Declaration of the Rights of Man: both included significant changes from that of 1789, particularly in the references to 'general welfare' and the provision of 'education', but the main benefits were still to those who owned property.

The French people, convinced that forgetfulness of and contempt for the natural rights of man are the sole causes of the misfortunes of the world, have resolved to set forth these sacred and inalienable rights in a solemn declaration, in order that all citizens, being able constantly to compare the acts of the government with the aim of every social institution, may never permit themselves to be oppressed and degraded by tyranny, in order that the people may always have before their eyes the bases of their liberty and their happiness, the magistrate the guide to his duties, the legislator the object of his mission.

Accordingly, in the presence of the Supreme Being, they proclaim the following declaration of the rights of man and citizen.

1. *The aim of society is the general welfare. Government is instituted to guarantee man the enjoyment of his natural and inalienable rights.*
2. *These rights are equality, liberty, security, and property.*
3. *All men are equal by nature and before the law.*
4. *Law is the free and solemn expression of the general will; it is the same for all, whether it protects or punishes; it may order only what is just and useful to society; it may prohibit only what is injurious thereto.*
5. *All citizens are equally admissible to public office. Free peoples recognise no grounds for preference in their elections other than virtues and talents.*
6. *Liberty is the power appertaining to man to do whatever is not injurious to the rights of others. It has nature for its principle, justice for its rule, law for its safeguard. Its moral limit lies in this maxim: Do not do to others that which you do not wish to be done to you.*
7. *The right of manifesting ideas and opinions, either through the press or in any other manner, the right of peaceful assembly, and the free exercise of worship*

159. The original version from the [National Archives](#).

*may not be forbidden. The necessity of enunciating these rights implies either the presence or the recent memory of despotism.*

8. *Since every man is presumed innocent until declared guilty, if his arrest is deemed indispensable, all severity unnecessary for securing his person must be severely curbed by law....*
9. *The law is to enact only penalties which are strictly and obviously necessary. Penalties must be proportionate to offences and useful to society.*
10. *The right of property is the right appertaining to every citizen to enjoy and dispose at will of his goods, his income, and the product of his labor and skill.*
11. *No kind of labor, tillage, or commerce may be forbidden the industry of citizens.*
12. *Every man may contract his services or his time; but he may not sell himself or be sold; his person is not an alienable property. The law does not recognise the status of servant; only a bond of solicitude....*
13. *No one may be deprived of the least portion of his property without his consent, unless a legally established public necessity requires it, and upon condition of a just and previous indemnity.*
14. *No tax may be established except for general utility. All citizens have the right to concur in the establishment of taxes, to supervise their use, and to have an account rendered thereof.*
15. *Public relief [of poverty] is a sacred obligation. Society owes subsistence to unfortunate citizens, either by procuring work for them or by providing the means of existence for those unable to work.*
16. *Education is necessary for everyone. Society must promote with all its power the advancement of public reason, and must place education within reach of all citizens.*
17. *The social guarantee consists of the effort to assure to each the enjoyment and preservation of his rights; this guarantee is based upon national **sovereignty**...*
18. *Every citizen has an equal right to concur in the law and in the selection of its mandataries or agents.*
19. *Public functions are essentially temporary; considered as neither distinctions nor rewards, but only as duties.*
20. *Offences of mandataries and agents of the people must never go unpunished. No one has the right to consider himself more inviolable than others....*
21. *Resistance to oppression is the consequence of the other rights of man.*

22. *There is oppression against the social body when a single of its members is oppressed. There is oppression against every member when the social body is oppressed.*
23. *When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people, and for every portion thereof, the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties.*<sup>160</sup>

## Robespierre, the Terror, and another New Society

‘Terror’ is the threat or use of force to achieve particular ends. It is a word that has many meanings and which has been used for a wide variety of purposes. It is present in all revolutions, from the threats of counter-revolutionaries to the popular uprisings against them. However, the word did not carry the same meanings as the modern idea of ‘terrorism’. ‘Virtue and terror’ were often linked, with the idea that intransigent citizens could be awed into adopting the values of the Revolution, as the fear of punishment teaches children to be virtuous.

‘The Terror’, as it has come to be known in history usually relates to the period of the Revolution when civil liberties were suspended and the country was run by extraordinary decrees. This period in the French Revolution is most commonly dated from the expulsion of the Girondins at the end of May 1793 to the fall of Robespierre on 27 July 1794. Some break this into a period of a so-called ‘Great Terror’—dating it either from early September, following another popular invasion of the Convention by the Hébertistes, or from 4 December 1793 / 14 *Frimaire* II, when government by emergency decree (the so-called ‘Constitution of the Terror’) came into force.

‘The Terror’, as the revolutionaries themselves called the government of this period, was thus an exceptional form of government in which civil liberties were suspended in view of the national crisis. As such it was meant to be a series of temporary measures, which would be removed or relaxed when France was no longer under threat from foreign enemies and internal disorder.

Robespierre is the individual commonly associated with the Terror. Whatever date one chooses to mark the beginning of the Terror, it always ends with his fall from power on 27 July 1794 / 9 Thermidor II and his execution the next day. Robespierre’s influence came from the position he had adopted from the start of the Revolution; never seeking popularity; always standing up for the rights of the people. One ironic consequence was his popularity with the people of Paris and his leadership in the **Jacobin club**. This posture and role made him a vital link between the people and their democratic lawmakers. He was seen—and he certainly liked to see himself—as a man of integrity. Robespierre’s role in the Committee of Public Safety (he joined the CPS in its July 1793 draft) changed one important executive arm of revolutionary government (among several) into an executive dictatorship.

160. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 455–8

Was 'the Terror' a success? This is a major question. It challenges at a number of levels: political as well as ethical. Some historians (like Albert Soboul and Georges Lefebvre) view it as a success because it faced up to, and overcame, the crises facing France: feeding the people, arming them against the foreign armies who in the middle of 1793 were making incursions in various parts of France, and crushing the counter-revolution then enveloping large parts of France. Others (like Simon Schama) are troubled by what they see as the unnecessary scale and prolongation of its violence. For Robespierre himself, 'the Terror' he so promoted was to bring about his own downfall when he tried to use it beyond the purpose for which it had been founded. From March-April 1794 / Ventôse-Germinal II on, well after the military emergencies had passed, Robespierre centralised the terror and tried to use it to establish his own vision of the ideal society: the 'Republic of Virtue'. Though he came to abhor the anarchic de-Christianising violence of the sans-culottes and their revolutionary armies (*armées révolutionnaires*), ordering their recall and even suppression, he still continued his centralised version of the terror, even executing indulgents, like Danton and Desmoulins, who were now criticising him. When they had begun in the summer of 1793, the draconian measures of 'the Terror' had encompassed political, economic and idealistic means: political decrees against the perceived enemies of the Revolution, measures to control the economy, and appeals to the goals of the Revolution. Above all 'the Terror' in the second half of 1793 had been related to war efforts, internal and external, as urgent as they were vicious and all-encompassing. Things no longer appeared so urgent in 1794; yet 'the Terror'—different now, more ideologised, more centralised—actually crescendoed.

### Regarding the threats prompting the terror

Between 1792 and 1794, the French Revolutionaries were threatened from all sides. Two threats coalesced: the fear and the reality of invasion, and the fear and the reality of internal sabotage and outright opposition. These threats played a major role in radicalizing the revolutionaries and prompting episodes of revolutionary terror: especially the September massacres of 1792, and of course the Jacobin terror of 1793-94. The revolutionaries knew that should the foreign invaders ever succeed in capturing them, they would be subjected to terror. Each phase and episode of the terror - with one significant exception, discussed later - can be cross-matched against the worsening of the threat of invasion or of subversion.

Here is how the crisis developed. Worried about the mounting pressure on the King of France, a reluctant constitutional monarch, war had been threatening ever since the brother-in-law of Louis XVI, the Habsburg dynasty Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold II, and the Hohenzollern dynasty King of Prussia, Frederick William II, had met at Pillnitz, near Dresden in Saxony, on 27 August 1791, to issue a declaration threatening the new political leaders of the constitutional monarchy in France. The threat was repeated, and backed by an army, by the Duke of Brunswick at Coblenz, in the Rhineland, on 25 July 1792. Recall that Louis XVI had attempted to flee toward a Habsburg frontier on 21 June 1791, only to be identified at Varennes, thence to be returned in disgrace to Paris. An anxious coalition of major foreign powers anchored to tradition was

forming against the revolution, and it would soon embrace Great Britain as well. It would wage war with revolutionary France, off and on, between 1792 and 1797. Different versions of much the same coalition — sometimes including or excluding Spain, the Netherlands, Russia and Sweden — ensured France was ensnared in war between 1798 and 1802, between 1803 and 1806, in 1809, between 1812 and 1814, and lastly in 1815.

At the outset, the French revolutionaries had not taken a backward step. They responded to these threats, as we have seen, with their own declaration of war on 20 April 1792. If we ignore the protracted French struggle with Britain for supremacy over the Atlantic and Mediterranean Seas, the key external threats to France were initially posed as threats to the northern parts of France. As early as the Declaration of Pillnitz, 27 August 1791, there was always the threat of attack from an uneasy coalition combining the armies of the Dutch, the Austrian Habsburgs (who controlled much of Belgium, northern Italy, and of central and eastern Europe as well) and of the Prussians (who controlled territories in the Germanic west and northeast. Britain joined the coalition from January 1793. One key land battle front lay northeast of Paris on either side of the Rhine River, France's porous northwestern borderland (Champagne-Ardenne, Lorraine, Alsace) commingling Germans and French. The other key land battle front lay due north and northwest of Paris, in Flanders, the Pas de Calais and Hainault (le Nord), another borderland between the French and the Walloon French (Habsburg subjects) and the Flemish (Habsburg subjects). The Dutch further to north were generally considered (by the French!) more receptive to France. Bellicose groups of French émigré aristocrats — including Louis XVI's two younger brothers, Provence and Artois — who detested the French Revolution, had long been forming an army of sorts in Coblenz, in the Rhineland. The Prussian and Habsburg invasion started in earnest in July 1792, and soon French fortress towns fell: Longwy and Verdun, putting the French revolutionaries under great pressure.

Even though people did not experience events in these ways, the following schematic summary helps show the ebb and flow of the first major phase of the long war between revolutionary France (and its great capital, Paris) and the "First Coalition" (managed from the other great capital cities of Europe: Berlin, Vienna, Brussels and London, all trying to form an alliance that was far from easy to coordinate). If we also add (in **bold**) indications of the timings of key internal revolts against the revolutionaries in power in France, the security threats become even clearer:

- **Counter-revolutionary predominantly Roman Catholic resistance movements in Vendée in the Atlantic central west of France spill over in outright revolt, 1791-93. Passive and active resistance from "non-juring" Roman Catholic priests and their parishioners in many other regions besides.**
- French victory over the Prussians and Habsburgs at Valmy (Champagne-Ardenne), 20 September 1792
- French victory over the Habsburgs at Jemappes (Hainault), 6 November 1792

Hindsight suggests that revolutionary France was now reasonably secure, at least from external invasion, by an army, in both of the key danger sectors of France's north and northeast. But hindsight is a false prophet; France was attacked again, and no one alive at the time knew for sure what we historians know...

- Coalition victory against France at Neerwinden, in the Austrian Netherlands (Flemish Brabant), 18 March 1793. The military coalition then errs, deciding to split its land armies.
- **“Federalist” revolts in key second-tier cities in France, June to December 1793: Lyon, Bordeaux and Marseilles, and their hinterlands. These revolutionary cities were suddenly dismayed by the ouster from power in Paris of their representatives, the Girondins, in May-June 1793.**
- **A “Royalist” revolt seizes control Toulon, a key naval base for France’s Mediterranean fleet. The royalists link to the French-enemy navies of Britain and Spain. A protracted and eventually successful land siege ensues, 29 August to 19 December 1793, as troops loyal to the revolution eventually re-capture the port city.**
- French victory over a British army at Hondschoote (Nord), 7 September 1793. This was the first British army to be seen in Europe for nearly eighty years. It was ineffective. Britain was then a predominantly naval power.
- French victory at Wattignies, in northern France (Nord), 15 October 1793.
- **“Chouan” counter-revolutionary revolt in Normandy, late in 1793.**
- French victory at Wissembourg (lower Rhine), late in December 1793.

**Hindsight informs us that the last major internal revolt has been suppressed by the start of 1794. Once again, however, no one at the time knew what we historians know...**

- French victory at Tourcoing (Nord), 18 May 1794.
- Decisive French victory at Fleurus (Hainault), 26 June 1794.

Consider the way hindsight works. Some say the danger for revolutionary France was well and truly past, at least by January 1794; they think the victories at Tourcoing and Fleurus were predictable; the invasion pressure was already off. Others maintain (largely by overlooking the internal revolts) the danger for revolutionary France was well and truly past as early as Jemappes in November 1792. After Fleurus, 26 June 1794, it was much easier to discern the trend of the war, however. After June 1794, right up to 1799, and perhaps till 1812, the revolutionary war had entered a more aggressive phase in which French power was no longer seriously threatened in its own spheres, but rather was now committed to recasting the societies, the rulers and the politics first of the immediate neighbours of France — the Austrian Netherlands (today's Belgium), The Netherlands, and the Rhineland — and second of northern Italy and Egypt, then

third even Habsburg central Europe, with Prussia and Russia both surviving, but getting their fingers badly burned between 1806 and 1812.



*Review the timeline of the battles and revolts.* Now re-consider the timing and tempo of the crisis posed by invasion threats and internal revolts, 1792–94, and its relation to the Jacobins' policy of meeting the danger with their own deterrent of terror.

Robespierre always emphasised how the terror policies pursued by the Revolutionary Tribunals and by the agents of the Committee of Public Safety was purifying. Robespierre and St Just, and many others besides, considered their use of terror was just their weapon of vigilance and self-defense against the war, rebellion and terror promoted by the enemies of the revolution. Now chronology, contingency and context are always important factors to consider when historians try to explain historical events. So here is a knotty problem, one that troubled generations of historians.

Suggest, debate and discuss reasons why the Jacobin Terror continued past the time of the victory at Fleurus (26 June 1794)? The Jacobin Terror not only continued; executions escalated right up to the sudden arrest and execution of Robespierre and the dissolution of the Committee of Public Safety on 9–10 Thermidor, year II (27–28 July 1794). An exhausted Robespierre had still been preoccupied by internal enemies in the National Convention on 8 Thermidor, still foreshadowing fresh arrests.

Debate and discuss the ways in which Peter McPhee weighs things up:

*“The overthrow of Robespierre and his associates was far more than the ousting of a governing coerie that had outlived its purpose. It was also the end of a regime that had cherished the twin aims of saving the Revolution and creating a new society. It had achieved the former, at great cost, but the vision of the virtuous, self-abnegating civic warrior embodying the new society had palled. For those mindful of the magnitude of the counter-revolution, it was a triumphant emergency regime, even though too many excesses had been committed. Others were horrified by what they saw as the unnecessary violence used against the Revolution’s opponents, particularly as the military crisis receded.”*<sup>161</sup>

And then... new rounds of executions began. “The Thermidorians” started hunting down and executing Jacobins, beginning the so-called “White Terror”.

## War and Invasion, 1792–94

There are excellent maps of threats to the French Republic in 1792–94. Different maps are [here](#) and on this [website](#) (3rd image) show both internal revolts (Royalist, Federalist, Vendéan and Chouan) and the external threats from Spain, Britain (by sea), and Italy (via the Piedmont), and the areas in the north of France occupied by Prussian and Austrian forces from late in 1792.

161. Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 270.



J.-B. Maillac painted a proud portrait of a 'Defender of the Fatherland (*Defenseur de la Patrie*)', dated 21 February 1793. Unfortunately not online, the portrait is in the *Musée de l'Armée*, in the Invalides in Paris and reproduced in *Valmy: 20 septembre 1792*, in Patrick Bouchain, Ministère de la Défense et al. (eds.), 1989, pp. 12, 117.

## Levée en masse—23 August 1793

The original mood of 'the Terror' is best seen in the decree, the 'levée en masse', the first instance of mass conscription in a modern western European society. This ground-breaking measure called on all French people, young and old, male and female, fit or infirm, to rally to the defence of the Fatherland.



*Duty and Revolution.* What are the patriotic duties of every French man and women in this time of trial?

*Henceforth, until the enemies have been driven from the territory of the Republic, the French people are in permanent requisition for army service. The young men shall go to battle; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes, and shall serve in the hospitals; the children shall turn old linen into lint; the old men shall repair to the public places, to stimulate the courage of the warriors and preach the unity of the Republic and hatred of kings. National buildings shall be converted into barracks; public places into armament workshops; the soil of cellars shall be washed in lye to extract saltpetre therefrom.*



Lesueur's image of women donating shirts is at: Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 39 (Louvre RF36565; Musée Carnavalet D9090), pp. 159–63 and on this [website](#).



Lesueur's image of one of these workshops is [online](#) and reproduced in Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 19 (Louvre RF36555; Musée Carnavalet D9073), pp. 105–106.

*Arms of caliber shall be turned over exclusively to those who march against the enemy; the service of the interior shall be carried on with fowling pieces and sabers.*

*Saddle horses are called for to complete the cavalry corps; draught horses, other than those employed in agriculture, shall haul artillery and provisions.*

*The representatives of the people dispatched for the execution of the present law [i.e., Conventionnels or représentants en mission] shall have similar authority in their respective arrondissements, acting in concert with the Committee of Public Safety; they are invested with the unlimited powers attributed to the representatives of the people with the armies.*

*No one may obtain a substitute in the service to which he is summoned. The public functionaries shall remain at their posts.*



Does the story in this Lesueur gouache confirm (in general) or deny (in particular) this provision? View it on this [website](#). Jean-Baptiste Lesueur's portrays an enrolment of volunteers, in this case heading off to repress the revolt in the Vendée in the autumn of 1793. A father is shown volunteering to take the place of his son, who is ill and simple-minded. See also: Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 35 (Louvre RF36544; Musée Carnavalet D9076), pp. 153–154.

The levy shall be general. Unmarried citizens or childless widowers, from eighteen to twenty-five years, shall go first; they shall meet, without delay, at the chief town of their districts, where they shall practice manual exercise daily, while awaiting the hour of departure.



View Lesueur's [image](#) of people registering for the levy, and in Philippe de Carbonnières, *Lesueur: Gouaches révolutionnaires*, Paris, Collections du Musée Carnavalet, 2005, plate 32 [Louvre RF36550; Musée Carnavalet D9065 (Réserve)], pp. 143–146.

*The representatives of the people shall regulate the musters and marches so as to have armed citizens arrive at the points of assembling only in so far as supplies, munitions, and all that constitutes the material part of the army exist in sufficient proportion.*

*The points of assembling shall be determined by circumstances, and designated by the representatives of the people dispatched for the execution of the present decree,*

*upon the advice of the generals, in co-operation with the Committee of Public Safety and the provisional Executive Council.*

*The battalion organised in each district shall be united under a banner bearing the inscription: The French people risen against tyrants.....*<sup>162</sup>



The [website](#), 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', prepared by scholars at George Mason University and New York University in USA at reproduces a military banner saying 'Tremblez Tyrans (Tremble, Tyrants)' from 1792–96 on this [website](#). The banner is now in the [Museum of the French Revolution](#) (Musée de la Révolution française) at the Château de Vizille, near Grenoble.<sup>163</sup>

## Economic Terror and the New Society

The implementation of the 'economic terror' went against the basic principles of even the most radical Jacobin revolutionaries, who believed that a free market economy was the best. They had so legislated so as to encourage free trade in the Allarde Law, 4 May 1791, banning strikes, and the Le Chapelier Law, 14 June 1791, banning all guilds and trade unions (then called *coalitions*).

These laws were unpopular. They were widely blamed for shortages of food and goods to trade. The new and radical legislators in the National Convention realised that maintaining a hard position on free trade seemed to the people only to mean higher prices for essential commodities and hardship for the poor.

Against their own best wishes, then, but in view of the threat to the very survival of the nation, the Jacobins in the National Convention intervened to impose restrictions on the capacity to make profits from essential items. This policy reinstating price control was known as 'The Maximum'. One such law was passed on 4 May 1793, and a second on 29 September 1793 / 8 Vendémiaire II.

1. *The articles which the National Convention has deemed essential, and the maximum or highest price of which it has believed it should establish, are: fresh meat, salt meat and bacon, butter, sweet oil, cattle, salt fish, wine, brandy, vinegar, cider, beer, firewood, char- coal, coal, candles, lamp oil, salt, soda, sugar, honey, white paper, hides, iron, cast iron, lead, steel, copper, hemp, linens, woolens, stuffs, canvases, the raw materials which are used for fabrics, wooden shoes, shoes, colza and rape, soap, potash, and tobacco.*

<sup>162</sup>. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 472–474

<sup>163</sup>. The banner is also reproduced in 'Valmy: 20 septembre 1792', in Patrick Bouchain, Ministère de la Défense et al. (eds), 1989, pp. 43, 117 (photograph by Dominique Champion).

2. *Among the articles specified in the above list, the maximum price for firewood of the first quality, that of charcoal, and of coal, are the same as in 1790, plus one-twentieth. The decree of 19 August on the fixing of the prices of firewood, coal, and peat by the departments is revoked. The maximum or highest price of tobacco in rolls is twenty sous per livre, eight ounces; that of smoking tobacco is ten sous; that of a livre of salt is two sous; that of soap is twenty-five sous.*
3. *The maximum price of all other commodities and merchandise specified in article 1 shall be, throughout the entire extent of the Republic and until the month of September next, the price of 1790, as stated by the market prices or the current prices of each and every department, plus one-third; deduction being made for fiscal and other fees to which they were then subject, under whatever denomination they may have existed.*
4. *All persons who sell or purchase the merchandise specified in article 1 for more than the maximum price stated and posted in each department shall pay, jointly and severally, through the municipal police, a fine of double the value of the article sold, and payable to the informer; they shall be inscribed upon the list of suspected persons, and treated as such. The purchaser shall not be subject to the penalty provided above if he denounces the contravention of the seller; and every merchant shall be required to have a list bearing the maximum or highest price of his merchandise visible in his shop.*
5. *The maximum or highest figure for salaries, wages, manual labor, and days of labor in every place shall be established, dating from the publication of the present law until the month of September next, by the general councils of the communes, at the same rate as in 1790, plus one-half.*
6. *The municipalities may put in requisition and punish, according to circumstances, with three days' imprisonment, workmen, manufacturers, and divers laborers who refuse, without legitimate grounds, to do their usual work....*<sup>164</sup>

On the same day as the *levée en masse* was decreed, 23 August 1793, an ultra-radical, Théophile Leclerc, issued a protest. Leclerc saw himself with his fellow 'enragé' Jacques Roux as the successor to Marat, just assassinated by Charlotte Corday, on 13 July 1793. (An image study on Corday and Marat follows.) Leclerc published in his version of *l'Ami du peuple* an 'Appeal to the Guillotine'. Leclerc took aim at the internal enemies of the Revolution, attacking the government of the day as sacrificing the interests of the people to the greed of the **bourgeoisie**.

164. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 498–500

## Appeal to the Guillotine

If the National Convention really desires the salvation of the fatherland, let it prove it by at once conscripting all the *sans-culottes* of that immense city, without distinction of rank or age; let the toll-gates be closed, as well as the shops; let all activity cease except for the manufacture of arms and, above all, once the people are on their feet, see that they are not forced to withdraw, as happened on the evening of 29 May [1793, i.e., expulsion of Girondins], exhausted from want, and collapsing from fatigue and inanition; let the popular tribunals be provided with the best of the citizens and be formed up at once and let them set up two guillotines permanently on the Place de la Revolution. Then with a decree or without a decree, according to the orders of a revolutionary committee which, I hope, will not be composed as is usually the case of weak or wrongly intentioned individuals, the armed force will betake itself in platoons to the homes of all the hoarders, speculators, suspects, egoists, persons who have grown rich since the Revolution, the plunderers of the Revolution in general! Whatever be their mask, we will say to them:

### *To the hoarders*

*'Pitiless bloodsuckers, grown fat on the needs of the people, too long have you abused the patience of the French nation; you have founded upon their needs your odious speculations; you have dared everything to reduce them to perish from want and hunger: well then, it is for the Republic that you made your fortune.' It will not be enough merely to make them restore their ill-gotten goods; if they have bought up the basic foodstuffs before the promulgation of the law forbidding monopolies, then let them be imprisoned until the end of the war; but if they have had the audacity to disobey the law, let them be sentenced on the spot, no quarter, no delay, and straight away to the guillotine.*

### *To the speculators*

*'By infamous dealing you have cast on our assignats an attitude of mistrust and lack of confidence; now, the man who discredits face values is as wicked as the one who by forgery increases the quantity. Your judgement is decided by this simple logic; to the guillotine.'*

### *To the suspects*

*'If, after having made the most exhaustive searches of their homes, any papers have been found that indicate they have been in correspondence with the counter-revolutionaries, say to them: 'The time of the people's rising is that of the death of men of your type: to the guillotine.'*

### *To the egoists*

*'The people are tired of carrying on by themselves the weight of a terrible war. The time is past, when, by making financial sacrifices, a man could buy the right to perpetuate his shameful uselessness. Without being excused from paying proportion-*

*ately to your fortune and progressively the immense expenses occasioned by the war, you will come in person to defend the cause of liberty. Take your choice: take the road either to the frontiers or to the Place de la Révolution where the guillotine awaits you....*<sup>165</sup>



(left) The famous painting (1793) of the assassination of Marat (13 July 1793) by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).

(right) A painting by Jean-Joseph Weerts from 1880 (nearly a century after the event) shows the fury of the sans-culottes at the point of arrest of Marat's assassin.



Drawn by Raffet, engraved by Fournier Charlotte Corday 1847



Paul-André Basset Marat. *L'Ami du peuple* 1793

## Revolutionary Saints and Sinners. Marat and Corday

Many other depictions of Marat are available on the internet. There are other contemporary versions of the assassination of Marat on the web, including a painting by Guillaume-Joseph Roques (1757–1847), a painter from Toulouse in the south of France, who saw David's painting when it was exhibited in the Louvre in Paris in 1793. Roques also decided to paint the assassination in 1793. Meant for

the *Jacobin Club* in Toulouse, Roques' work is in *Musée des Augustins* in Toulouse.<sup>166</sup>

165. 'L'Ami du peuple, 23 August 1793', in J.T Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 282–283.

166. Michael Adcock also has the Roques painting: *The French Revolution in Art: A Supplementary Text*, Melbourne, [History Teachers' Association of Victoria](#), 1997.



Marat is shown addressing a revolutionary crowd in 1792 in a painting by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), held in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Lille.

By contrast, the (counter-revolutionary?) Brion de la Tour painting (now in the [Musée Lambinet](#) in Versailles) also shows Charlotte Corday at the assassination, but presents her with dignity, as does another, anonymous painting which can be viewed [here](#).

Other sympathetic images of Corday include Jean-Jacques Hauer's paintings held in the [Versailles et Trianon museum](#), one a portrait, at and the other his '[Death of Marat](#)'.

Marat's Republican funeral in the former monastery garden of the *Cordeliers Club*<sup>167</sup>, attributed to Fougat, and held at the Musée Carnavalet. Corday was executed on 17 July 1793.

A popular revolutionary print presents Marat as a kind of Republican saint, while a corresponding, mid-nineteenth century counter-revolutionary image of Corday (attributed to Raffet, engraved by Fournier), seems to grant her anti-Republican sainthood as she goes to her execution<sup>168</sup>

## The Law of Suspects, 17 September 1793 / 8 Vendémiaire II

Perhaps the most insidious of the laws of the Terror was that in regard to people who were merely 'suspected' of being enemies of the Revolution. Neighbours had to spy on neighbours: it was enough that seven people declared another 'suspect' for that person to be arrested. This decree, perhaps more than any other, deepened the dictatorial power of the Committee of Public Safety (CPS).

1. *Immediately after the publication of the present decree, all suspected persons within the territory of the Republic and still at liberty shall be placed in custody.*
2. *The following are deemed suspected persons: 1st, those who, by their conduct, associations, talk, or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty; 2nd, those who are unable to justify, in the manner prescribed by the decree of 21 March [1793], their means of existence and the performance of their civic duties; 3rd, those to whom certificates of patriotism have been refused; 4th, public functionaries suspended or dismissed from their positions by the National Convention or by its commissioners,*

167. Michael Adcock also has the funeral image: *The French Revolution in Art: A Supplementary Text*, Melbourne, [History Teachers' Association of Victoria](#), 1997.

168. For an overview (in French) of visual representations of Corday and Marat over two centuries, with high quality reproductions, see Guillaume Mazeau's 2009 exhibition catalogue '*Corday contre Marat*', published by the Musée de la Révolution française at Vizille

*and not reinstated, especially those who have been or are to be dismissed by virtue of the decree of 14 August [1793]; 5th, those former nobles, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, and agents of the émigrés, who have not steadily manifested their devotion to the Revolution; 6th, those who have emigrated during the interval between 1 July 1789 and the publication of the decree of 30 March–8 April, 1792, even though they may have returned to France within the period established by said decree or prior thereto.*

3. *The Watch Committees established according to the decree of 21 March [1793] ... are charged with drafting, each in its own arrondissement, a list of suspected persons, with issuing warrants of arrest against them, and with having seals placed on their papers. Commanders of the public force to whom such warrants are remitted shall be required to put them into effect immediately, under penalty of dismissal.*
4. *The Watch Committees shall dispatch to the Committee of General Security of the National Convention, without delay, the list of persons whom they have arrested, with the reasons for their arrest and with the papers they have seized in such connection.*<sup>169</sup>

### Arrest of a suspect

Étienne Bericourt's watercolour, now in the Musée Carnavalet, shows a typical arrest of a suspect in 1793: (go to this [website](#) and type 'Béricourt' into the Auteur field, click 'Valider'). Judging by this evidence, were arrests secret? Were they popular? With whom?

Jean-Baptiste Lesueur's gouaches show some famous arrests of Antoine Lavoisier (1743–94),<sup>170</sup> the famous chemist, said to be still reading while in the tumbril on his way to the scaffold, and when summoned up, professing to be annoyed he had no bookmark to mark his place. On the Carnavalet museum [website](#) (inventory no. D14949) at: (tableau on the left); Malesherbes (1721–94),<sup>171</sup> the famous reformer of the **Old Regime** who dared to defend the king at his trial, who spoke out, disdaining to flee, in the same image as Lavoisier's arrest



**Unknown artist** *Woman with basket before the entrance to a prison 18th century*

169. John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 477–479

170. Arrested along with other former *fermiers généraux* in autumn of 1793, guillotined 8 May 1794 / 19 Floréal II.

171. Arrested December 1793, guillotined 22 April 1794 / 3 Floréal II.

(above, a.), the right-hand tableau; Camille Desmoulins (1760–94),<sup>172</sup> also at the [Carnavalet](#) (inventory no. D 9094), and a general checking of a suspect citizen's papers, at can be viewed [here](#). (Carnavalet, inventory no. 9083).



For the complete series of revolutionary gouaches by Lesueur, go to the [Joconde database](#), type in 'LESUEUR Jean-Baptiste' in the 'Auteur/Executant' line and scroll down through the images.

Another Lesueur gouache shows a kind of revolutionary nightmare, as counter-revolutionaries (in the Vendée, in far western France) are shown coming to chop down a liberty tree; some patriotic women are trying to save it. It is at the official French museums [Joconde database](#).

## De-Christianisation and the New Calendar

In addition to the measures taken to stabilise the economy and mobilise the army, there arose purely ideological measures showing a fanaticism that had been present since the start of the Revolution but which could only flower under the cover of war. This reached its most indecent excesses in the anti-religious campaigns, led by Hébert.

The key reform of the Revolution was its secularism: revolutionary France by 1789–91 was the first state founded on a secular basis. The first Declaration of Rights (27 August 1789) and the church reform (1790–91) had laid the foundation for much of the progress (and troubles) the revolution would experience in the years to come. It is important to remember, however, that this secularism was not anti-religious *per se*. Secularism merely claimed that religious matters are private, not public. Even revolutionary anti-clericalism was not necessarily anti-religious, although — to be sure — it often was and still is. Secularism just insisted on a strict separation of church and state, and (in theory) it rejected any official policy favouring or recognising any religion. All were to be treated the same.

The de-Christianisation movement associated with the *sans-culottes* and Hébertists during the Terror was aimed squarely at the destruction of all religions, however. They had been identified by the ultra-radicals as inherently counter-revolutionary.

Among the stranger novelties of this period was the introduction of a new calendar. It was based on what could be seen as a new religion of Nature. On 24 November 1793 / 4 *Frimaire* II, a decree was finalised which established a new calendar for the French nation. The date from which it would take effect was retrospectively declared to be 21 September 1792, the day when the National Convention had held its formal opening session and when the Republic had been

172. Arrested 31 March 1794 / 11 Germinal II, guillotined 5 April 1794 / 16 Germinal II, dramatised by Andrzej Wajda (dir.), *Danton*, (Criterion Collection, 2009).

established. This was also the date of the autumn equinox, when night and day are nearly of the same length and the sun crosses the celestial equator moving southward (in the northern hemisphere). The Revolutionaries explained the twofold significance of this day:

*The sun passed from one hemisphere to the other on the same day in which the people, triumphing over the oppression of kings, passed from a monarchical government to a republican government.*<sup>173</sup>



The new calendar was made to seem natural. Months were named, respectively, for times of snows, of winds, of sap, of flowers, of meadow grasses, of harvest grains, of the warmth, and of the fruits, and a week lasted 10 days. Each year, therefore, began on 22 September. The months of the year ran as listed below.

Gregorian Calendar Month	Season (Northern Hemisphere)	French Revolutionary Name	Meaning Of The French Revolutionary Name
22 September - 21 October			
22 October - 20 November			
21 November - 20 December			
21 December - 19 January			
20 January - 18 February			
19 February - 20 March			
21 March - 19 April			
20 May - 18 June			
19 June - 18 July			
19 July - 17 August			
18 August - 16 September			
17 - 21 September			



The following links contain information about the French Revolutionary Calendar. Use them to complete the table and answer the questions below:  
[Windhorst](#), [Web exhibits 1](#), [Web exhibits 2](#) and [Science world](#).

1. What was the new 10-day 'week' called, and how were the days (i.e., Monday, Tuesday etc.) re-named?
2. How did they indicate years? How would you write 19 November 1794 according to the Revolutionary Calendar?

173. Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 345.

3. What were the days 17–21 September called? Why were they left over at the end of the calendar? What were these days now devoted to?
4. What was the point of this calendar? What features of the old calendar (Pope Gregory XIII's so-called 'Gregorian' calendar of 1582—i.e., the calendar we still use) was it trying to replace? What breaks with **Old Regime** thinking was it trying to enforce? How did the new calendar fit in with the broader aims of the revolution/republic?



*Revolutionary Policies. Jacobins and Sans-Culottes. True Partners?*

1. To what extent was a constructive collaboration between Jacobins and *sans-culottes* essential in safeguarding the Revolution during the crisis years of 1792–94?
2. Consider whether either the Jacobins or the *sans-culottes* paid too high a price for this collaboration? Weigh up, for example, the Laws of the Maximum, of Suspects, the recall of the *armées révolutionnaires*, the executions of the indulgents (Danton & Desmoulins) and of the ultras (Hébert), the 10-day work week in the new calendar, and the dictatorship of the CPS.



*Revolutionary Images. Allegories of Liberty in Republican France, 1793 or 1794*

1. *Jean-Louise (Nanine) Vallain's*. This woman's allegory of liberty was painted sometime in 1793 or 1794, and was hanging in the vestibule of the **Jacobin Club** until it was closed in 1795. It is now in the Museum of the French Revolution (*Musée de la Révolution française*) at the *Château de Vizille*, near Grenoble. Nanine Vallain (1767–1815)'s Liberty figure is a beautiful young woman, dressed in foundation garments of pure white with a blue military overlay. Her stout staff upholds the Phrygian red cap of liberty, of freed slaves. She displays the (new?) Declaration of Rights. She sits beside the *fascis*, the Roman symbol of strength through equality and solidarity, and she sits before the Masonic symbol of a simple and true honour, the pyramid. A funeral urn (for the Republican dead?) spouts Greco-Roman Olympic-Imperial laurels of victory. A broken crown and rent chains symbolise **feudal** and absolutist pasts overcome.
2. *Jean-Baptiste Regnault's allegory*. Regnault's (1754–1829)'s painting seems an extraordinarily optimistic painting, but its optimism might be relief to be rid of Jacobins, or alternatively relief to be governed by Jacobins. You decide! Regnault's painting dates



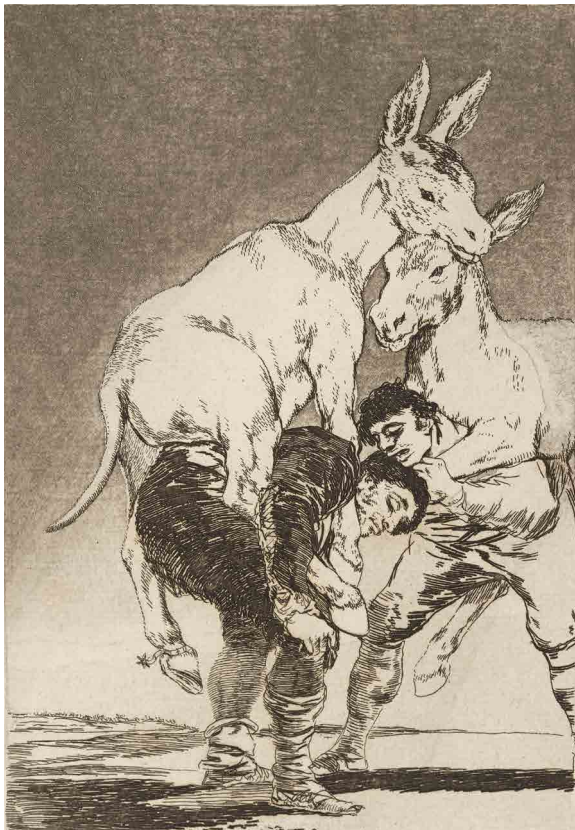
**Jeanne-Louise (Nanine) Vallain** *La Liberté*  
1794

from 1794 (or 1795): ‘Liberty or death (*la liberté ou la mort*)’, and is now in the *Hamburg Kunsthalle* in Germany. A gorgeous goddess of liberty carries the Phrygian cap of freed slaves, and a Masonic triangle symbol of the unity and equality of all orders of society. Yet she is shown beside a gun carriage. And she upholds a symbol of revolutionary solidarity and of the absolute **sovereignty** of the people: the ancient-Roman Republican *fasces*, that bundle of sticks, any one of which is easily broken, but which, when all bundled together, is impossible to break. Try to explain the optimism in this painting, which probably dates from the first half of 1794: the period between the end of the era of civil war (December 1793–January 1794 or *Frimaire* II), the end of anarchic terror (March 1794 or *Ventôse* II), and finally the end of Jacobin centralised terror (July 1794 or *Thermidor* II). Regnault’s allegory seems to endorse war and terror as a stark alternative to death. His Revolution is a fine young angel. His counter-revolution is nothing but death. Do you feel as optimistic about the French revolution as did the painter Regnault? He went on to paint Court and classical scenes for Napoléon. An allegory of Rousseau and Revolution. Nicolas Henri Jeaurat de Bertry (1726–98)’s painted allegory (1794, as on the foot of the column) emphasises intellectual aspects of the Revolution: especially Rousseau’s imagining (in the *Social Contract*, 1762) a new kind of republican society shaped initially by lawgivers, then governed by the general will. The painting is in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris and can be found on their [website](#). This commercial [website](#) offers zoomable images.<sup>174</sup> Type in ‘Nicolas Henri Jeaurat de Bertry’ in the Search buttons. Jacobin sympathiser Jeaurat de Bertry’s optimistic rural image features sisterhood (sorority) rather than fraternity, and shows the rural productivity of a free (Phrygian-red-capped) peasantry. Coffers overflow. A National Guardsman looks benevolent. A broken column of ‘old ways of life (*les mœurs*)’ is to undergo ‘régénération’. A liberty tree is present—of course!—and the *fasces* too, this time labeled with ‘Force, Truth, Justice, Unity’, and garlanded as in a revolutionary festival. There is the (Masonic) egalitarian pyramid, too, this time explicitly linking courage to establishing a republic, and truth to promoting social concord, copying—in a way—the faith of the mangy dog.



Jean-Baptiste Regnault *La Liberté ou la Mort* 1795

174. The allegory also features on covers of the Penguin editions of Maurice Cranston’s translation of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*. Michael Adcock has also reproduced and interpreted the painting in his pamphlet, *The French Revolution in Art: A Supplementary Text*, *History Teachers’ Association of Victoria*, Melbourne, 1997.



Francisco de Goya *Tú que no puedes* (*Thou who canst not*)  
1799

### Goya's 'You who cannot'

After 1796, for his own satisfaction, the Spanish court artist Goya made some art prints just to please himself, works not commissioned by patrons. He called these prints 'caprices': "whimsical subjects (*asuntos caprichosos*)". He eventually published them as an album, *Los Caprichos* in 1799. Goya was experimenting with different forms of etching, tinting and washing. *Las Caprichos* is one of the greatest examples of the printmaker's art; the National Gallery of Victoria has a full set. But Goya's prints were also made at a highly political time. Revolutionary France had already invaded and defeated Spain in 1794–95, and it would return in 1797 and 1808–12. This work, 'You who cannot (*Tu que no puedes*)', dates from 1797.<sup>175</sup> It presents members of the Spanish upper class, whom Goya served as Court Painter, as donkeys with spurs riding on the back of peasants.

175. Janis A. Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828)*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), plate 93, 124.



# Key Words

## **Jean Bon Saint-André (1749–1813)**

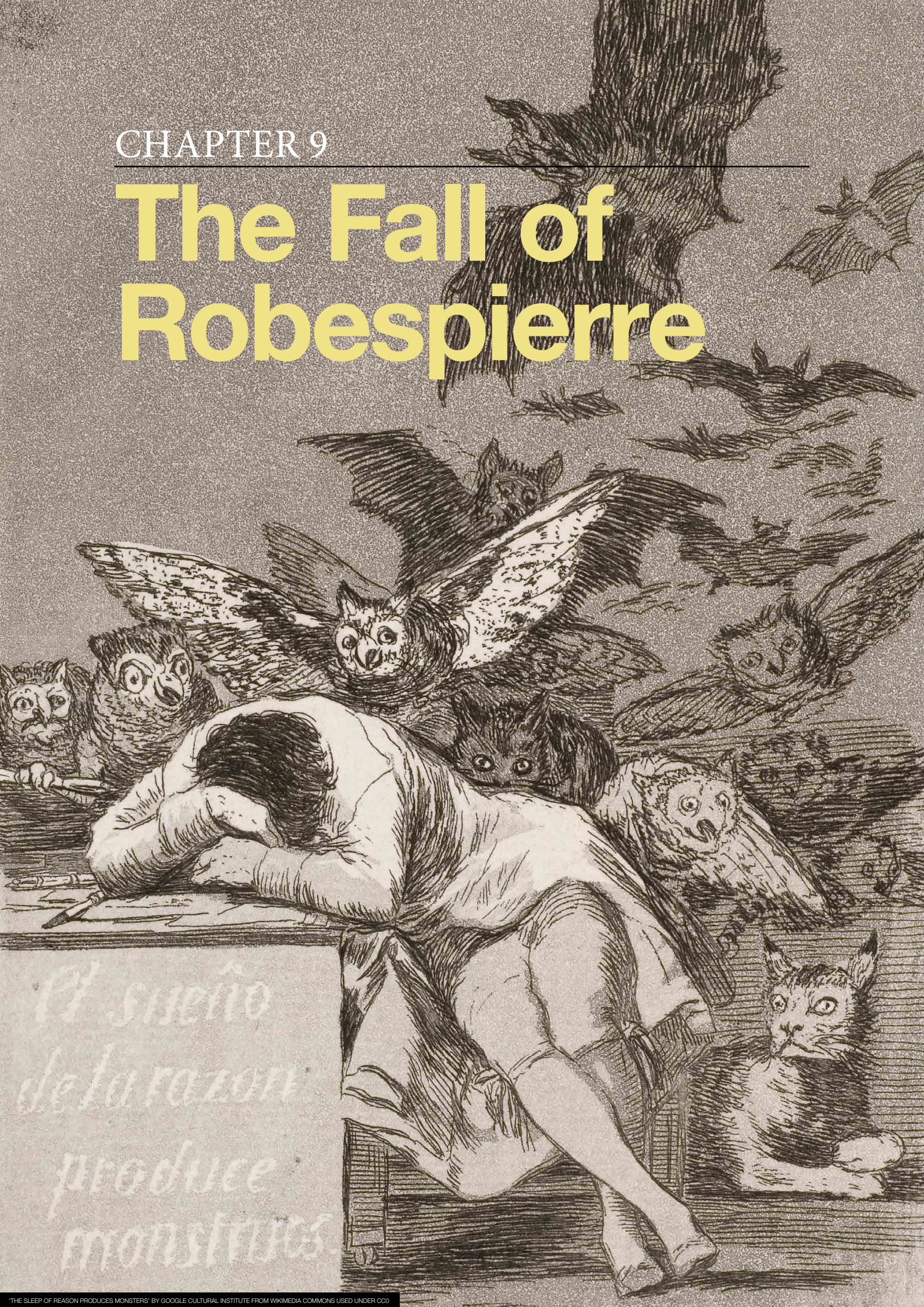
A radical Republican and Protestant clergyman, he was also a member of the Committee of Public Safety (*Comité du salut public* CPS) charged with superintending naval defense. Moderate in demeanour, he survived the Thermidorean anti-Jacobin reaction, going on to be Consul in Algiers, then a prisoner in Smyrna / İznik under the Ottoman empire and a prefect for Napoléon.

## **Représentants en mission**

Représentants en mission were members of the *National Convention* and their *sans-culotte* agents who had received full powers (as plenipotentiaries) to deal with crises relating to the church, war, counter-revolution and speculation in France in 1793–94. Between March 1793 and March 1794, représentants en mission came and went with their revolutionary armies (*armées révolutionnaires*) of *sans-culottes* and their portable guillotines in tow. The passing of the Law on Revolutionary Government (4 December 1793 / 14 *Frimaire* II) and the formal disbanding of the *armées révolutionnaires* (27 March 1794 / 7 *Germinal* II) signalled a new phase in Jacobin rule: the end of anarchic and anti-Christian terror. A new phase of centralised terror began. It culminated in the kangaroo courts of the Law of 22 *Prairial* II / 10 June 1794, and Robespierre's promotion of a new religion, the Cult of the Supreme Being, 20 *Prairial* II / 8 June 1794. Centralised terror lasted until the overthrow and execution of Robespierre (26–27 July 1794 / 8–9 *Thermidor* II).

## CHAPTER 9

# The Fall of Robespierre



By the end of 1793 the government of the Terror had achieved most of its goals, and so could have been expected to relax some of its harsher measures. In a speech of 25 December 1793 / 5 *Nivôse* II, Robespierre justified the sacrifices expected of the people on the threat from abroad and internally from counter-revolution. In another speech on 5 February 1794 / 17 *Pluviôse* II, however, Robespierre revealed he had a different goal for the Terror from that for which it had been established—the creation of a new society free from all the ills and weaknesses of the human condition, a world in which everyone would be as pure as the child of Rousseau, Robespierre himself. This misuse of the Terror would cost him his life: French men and women were prepared to put up with hardships in defence of the Revolution, but not for the illusions of a man corrupted by his own incorruptibility.

### Debating the Reign of ‘Eternal Justice’

This speech of 5 February 1794 / 17 *Pluviôse* II was occasioned in part by the struggle with the ‘citras’ or *indulgents*, a group around Danton and Desmoulins who wanted to relax the Terror, and the ‘ultras’ or *enragés*, a group around Hébert and the dechristianisers who wanted to increase the severity of the Terror. From a justification of the policies of the government, Robespierre goes on to outline his vision of the society towards which his vision of the Terror was directed: his ‘Report on the Principles of Public Morality’. Robespierre’s report to the National Convention followed a speech in which Robespierre claimed that ‘The Revolution owes its enemies nothing but death’.

But who were these enemies? And is there such a thing as ‘Eternal Justice’, the goal towards which Robespierre was aiming?

*What is the goal towards which we are heading? The peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality, the reign of that eternal justice from which the laws have been engraved not on marble and stone but in the hearts of all men, even in the heart of the slave who forgets them or of the tyrant who denies them.*

*We want an order of things in which all base and cruel passions will be unknown, and all generous and charitable feelings watched over by the laws; where ambition is the desire to merit glory and to serve the country; where distinctions are born only of equality itself; where the citizen is responsible to the magistrate and the magistrate to the people, and the people to justice; where the country assures the well-being of each individual, and where each individual enjoys with pride the prosperity and glory of the fatherland; where all its members grow by constant exchange of republican sentiments and by the need to merit the esteem of a great people; where the arts are decorations of the liberty that ennobles them; commerce, the source of public prosperity, and not just of the monstrous opulence of a few families.*

*In our country, we want to substitute morality for egotism, probity for honour, principles for customs, duties for proprieties, the rule of reason for the tyranny of fashion, contempt of vice for contempt of misfortune, pride for insolence, greatness of soul for vanity, love of glory for love of money, good folk for good company, merit for intrigue, genius for wit, truth for brilliance, the charm of happiness for the boredom of sensuousness, the greatness of man for the pettiness of the great; a people magnanimous, powerful, happy, for a people amiable, frivolous and wretched, that is to say, all the virtues and all the miracles of the republic for all the vices and all the absurdities of the monarchy...*

*Now what is the fundamental principle of democratic or popular government, that is to say, the essential force that maintains and inspires it? It is virtue: I am speaking of public virtue, which brought about so many wonders in Greece and Rome, and which must produce even more astounding ones in republican France: of that virtue that is none other than love of the fatherland and of its laws...If the mainspring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the mainspring of popular government in time of revolution is at the same time virtue and terror; virtue, without which terror is intolerable; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, stern and inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a particular principle as a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to the most urgent needs of our Country. It has been said that terror is the mainspring of despotic government. Would ours then resemble a despotism? Yes, just as the sword that shines in the hand of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the satellites of tyranny are armed. If the despot rules his brutalised subjects by terror, he is right as a despot. Tame the enemies of liberty by terror, and you will be right as the founders of the Republic. The government of the Revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny.<sup>176</sup>*

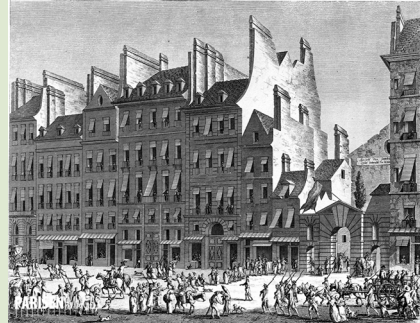
Shortly after this speech, and along with the other eleven members of the “Committee of Public Safety”, Robespierre eliminated his main rivals. Robespierre rounded first on Hébert, whose atheism angered him. Then Robespierre turned on Danton, whose way of life disgusted him.



**Politics as Performance.** Robespierre’s Festival of the Supreme Being, 20 *Prairial* II / 8 June 1794. Here are a number of illustrations of the festival organised by Robespierre to try to bring the country together by suggesting a new religion which, he thought, everyone patriotic could accept. It was called the ‘Cult of the Supreme Being’. It was Robespierre’s attempt to stabilise the Revolution. Robespierre was actually promoting an idea of a ‘civic religion’ — supposedly all-inclusive, non-dogmatic — first mooted by Rousseau in

176. La Gazette nationale (or Le Moniteur universel), No.139, 19 Pluviôse II / 7 February 1794; 3rd series, vol. 6, 402, 404’, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 297–298.

1762. This festival of the 'Cult of the Supreme Being' took place on 8 June 1794 / 20 *Prairial* II, one month and a half before Robespierre's fall. The festival and cult was established under a decree of 7 May 1794 / 18 *Floréal* II. The festival was well-attended and widely derided. Some suggest that it was the beginning of the end for Robespierre; people started to mock him—discreetly!—and not just to admire and fear him. The cult rituals were all so artificial and intellectual. Robespierre began the festival by ceremonially burning an effigy of atheism, seen as the source of so many recent evils. An artificial rock was assembled by a team managed by David in the *Champ de Mars*, now called the 'Field of Unity (*Réunion*)'. A tree of liberty surmounted the rock. A statue of Herakles / Hercules, the mighty warrior, also stood atop, on a Greek column. *Conventionnels* and other leaders, prominent among them Robespierre, and patriotic youths processed up the Rock or 'Mountain (*Montagne*, impliedly Jacobins in the National Convention)' towards liberty and wisdom.



Drawn by Duplessis-Bertaux engraved by Berthault Gobel's torture (bishop of Paris) 1794

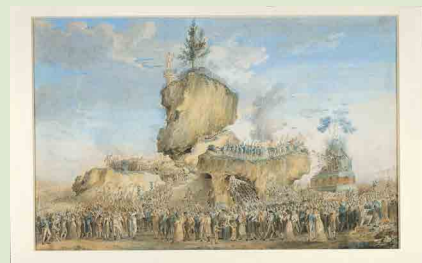


Was Robespierre's rational, anti-denominational, anti-dogma, highest common denominator religion honouring 'The Supreme Being' likely to appeal to the French people? Why did he do it?

1. A panorama by Pierre Antoine Demachy (1723–1807) showing the 1794 Festival of the Supreme Being in the [Musée Carnavalet](#).
2. 'View of the Mound of the Champ de la Reunion on the Festival That Was Celebrated in Honor of the Supreme Being', (*Musée de la Révolution française*), Château de Vizille, near Grenoble (inventory item 85.38).
3. Thomas-Charles Naudet (1778–1810)'s watercolour of the Festival of the Supreme Being in the *Musée Carnavalet* in Paris (inventory D5976)<sup>177</sup> Another anonymous view is at this [website](#).



Unknown artist View of the Mound of Champ de la Reunion on the Festival That Was Celebrated in Honor of the Supreme Being 1790s



Thomas Naudet Festival of Supreme Being at Champs-de-Mars, 20 Prairial An II 1794

177. Musée Carnavalet, *La Révolution française. Le premier empire. Dessins du Musée Carnavalet, 22 février – 22 mai 1982*, (Paris: Musées de la ville de Paris, 1982), Plate 89, 102–103, 105.

Appalled by the terror, Camille Desmoulins, an old friend of Robespierre's, was prompted to act. Desmoulins decided to issue an appeal for a relaxation of the Terror that brought out one of the finest—albeit final—flowering of the journalism of the Revolution. This came when Desmoulins, acting as a spokesman for Danton, re-entered the field where he had made his mark in the first days of the Revolution. A schoolfriend and colleague of Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins appealed to his old friend in his new newspaper, significantly called '*Le Vieux Cordelier* (The Old Cordelier)', in contrast to the New Cordelier Club now under the control of Hébert and his extremists. Robespierre had permitted the first two numbers to appear. Emboldened, Desmoulins decided to publish subsequent numbers without permission. For this he was to lose his life.

*No longer do we have a paper that tells the truth, or at least the whole truth. I re-enter the arena with all the honesty and courage for which I am known. A year ago we were ridiculing, and with good reason, the so-called freedom of the English, who do not have unrestricted freedom of the press, and yet what honest man would today dare to compare France with England as regards freedom of the press? See with what audacity the Morning Chronicle attacks Pitt and his conduct of the war. What journalist in France would dare to criticise the blunders of our committees, of the generals, of the Jacobins, of the ministers, and of the Commune, in the way that the opposition criticise that of the British ministry? And I, a Frenchman, I, Camille Desmoulins, cannot have the freedom of an English journalist! I feel indignant at this. And do not tell me that we are in the middle of a revolution and that in a revolution it is necessary to suspend the liberty of the press. I have a storehouse of truths, which I will not open up entirely, but I will dispense just enough to save France and the Republic, one and indivisible.*<sup>178</sup>

Encouraged by the success of his first two numbers, and disguised as a translation of Tacitus, an ancient-Roman historian who described the tyranny of the first Caesars, Camille Desmoulins then launched an attack on the (supposedly temporary) revolutionary dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety (*comité du salut public*) and on the Law of Suspects (17 September 1793). The references to the Roman past were a transparent attack on the government of the Terror. Camille Desmoulins did not seek the prior permission of Robespierre for this number.

*There was formerly at Rome, says Tacitus, a law that specified crimes against the state and a law of treason, which carried the death penalty. These crimes of treason, under the republic, were reduced to four kinds: for deserting one's army in enemy territory; for fomenting sedition; for maladministration by ministers of public affairs and funds; for degrading the majesty of the Roman people. The emperors had only to add a few extra articles to this law so as to include both the citizens and entire cities*

178. '*Le Vieux Cordelier*, No. 1, 15 Frimaire II / 5 December 1793', pp. 5–6, 7, in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 289.

*in the proscription [i.e. arrest for treason]. Augustus was the first to extend this law of treason by including in it what he called counter-revolutionary writings. Under his successors, it did not take long for these extensions to become unlimited. From the moment when mere talk became an offence against the state, it was but a short step to make a crime out of the simplest of expressions, out of sadness, compassion, sighs, even silence....*

*Everything gave offence to the tyrant. A citizen was popular; this made him a rival of the prince, one who could excite civil war. *Studia civium in se verteret et si multi idem audeant, bellum esse. Suspect.* On the other hand, if one shunned popularity, keeping to one's own fireside, then this withdrawal brought attention on you and singled you out. *Quanto metu occultior, tanto famae adeptus. Suspect.* You are rich; then there's an imminent danger that you will corrupt people with your wealth. *Auri vim atque opes Plauti principi infensas. Suspect.* You are poor; well then! invincible emperor, you must keep close watch on this man. There's no one more enterprising than a man who has nothing. *Sylvam inopem, unde praecipuam audaciam. Suspect.* You are of a sombre, melancholy character, or slovenly dressed; what pains you is that public affairs are going well. *Hominem bonis publicis moestum. Suspect.*<sup>179</sup>*

Desmoulins concluded his third issue of *Le Vieux Cordelier* with a plea for clemency. Shortly after, a crowd of women petitioned the National Convention to release persons they considered wrongly accused. On 22 December 1793 / 2 Nivôse II, the Committee of Public Safety appointed a committee to review arrests, but it was suppressed four days later. Desmoulins had raised the key question: in the true interests of national security, was it really best to imprison the innocent rather than to let a single guilty person go free?

*Doubtless, the motto of republics is that it is better not to punish several culprits than that one single innocent should suffer. But is it not true that, in time of revolution, this maxim so full of reason and humanity serves to encourage traitors to the fatherland, because the extent of proof that a law favourable to the innocent demands is such that the cunning culprit avoids punishment? Such is the encouragement that a free people allows to its own disadvantage. It is an illness of republics, which derives, as we see, from the goodness of their nature. The motto of despotism is, to the contrary, that it is better that several innocents should perish than that a single culprit should escape. It is this maxim, said Gordon on Tacitus, which makes for the strength and security of kings. The Committee of Public Safety knew it well enough; and it believed that, to establish the Republic, it needed for the time the legal outlook of the despots. It thought, with Machiavelli, that in cases of*

179. 'Le Vieux Cordelier, No. 3, 25 Frimaire II / 15 December 1793', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 289–290.

*political conscience, the greater good effaces the lesser evil. For some time therefore, it drew a veil over the statue of liberty....*<sup>180</sup>

Further emboldened by the reception of his No. 3 issue, Desmoulins tore aside the mask of Tacitus, abandoned his ambiguous attack, and stepped up his demands for clemency.

*Some people have disapproved of my No. 3 where they say I took pleasure in making reproaches that tend to cast disfavour on the Revolution and on the patriots: they ought rather to speak on the excesses of the Revolution, and of professional patriots. They believe that number [has been] refuted, and everything justified by this single phrase: 'It is well known that the present state is not that of liberty, but be patient, one day you will be free.' These people apparently think that liberty, like childhood, has to pass through crying and tears in order to reach maturity. It is on the contrary the very nature of liberty that, in order to possess it, it is enough to desire it. A people is free the moment it wants to be such (you may recall that this was Lafayette's saying); it entered into the fullness of its rights, from 14 July. Liberty has neither age nor youth. It has only one age, that of strength and vigour.*<sup>181</sup>

Just as Desmoulins questioned the justice and efficacy of governments holding the innocent with the guilty in the 'national interest', so too he queried whether massive reprisals against any enemy only exacerbated the problem: One death = 10 enemies.

*You want to remove all your enemies by means of the guillotine! Has there ever been such great folly? Could you make a single man perish on the scaffold, without making ten enemies for yourself from his family or his friends? Do you believe that these women, these old men, these weaklings, these egoists, these stragglers of the Revolution, whom you imprison, are really dangerous? Of your enemies, there remain among you only the cowardly and the sick. The strong and the brave have emigrated. They have perished at Lyons or in the Vendée; the remainder do not merit your wrath. This crowd of Feuillants, of rentiers [i.e., people living off savings], of shop-keepers, whom you imprison in the conflict between monarchy and the republic, resembles only the Roman populace, whose indifference Tacitus described, in the combat between Vitellius and Vespasian....*

*I think quite differently from those who tell you that terror must remain the order of the day. I am sure, on the contrary, that liberty would be strengthened, and Europe conquered, if you had a committee of clemency. Such a committee would finish the Revolution; for clemency is also a revolutionary measure, and the most*

180. 'Le Vieux Cordelier, No. 3, 25 Frimaire II / 15 December 1793', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 289–290.

181. 'Le Vieux Cordelier, No. 4, 30 Frimaire II / 20 December 1793', in *Ibid.*, 293–294. Note, however, that this number did not appear until four days later.

*effective of all, when it is wisely distributed. Let imbeciles and rascals call me a moderate, if they want to.... At this expression committee of clemency, what patriot would not feel deeply moved? For patriotism is the plenitude of all the virtues, and consequently cannot exist where there is neither humanity, nor philanthropy, but instead a spirit barren and parched by its own egoism. Oh! my dear Robespierre! It is to you that I address these words; for I have seen the time when Pitt had none left but you to conquer, when, without you, our Argo would have foundered, the Republic would have fallen into chaos, and the clubs of the Jacobins and the Mountain would have become a tower of babel. O my old college comrade, you whose eloquent speeches will be read by posterity, remember well these lessons of history and of philosophy: that love is stronger and more lasting than fear; that admiration and religion are born from good deeds; the acts of clemency are the ladder of lies, as Tertullian tells us, by which the members of the Committees of Public Safety have been raised to heaven, and that no one has ever ascended there by bloody steps.*

*To those who accuse me of being too moderate in this fourth issue, I will for the present reply as Marat did, when, on a very different occasion, we reproached him with having been excessive in his paper: You have understood nothing of what I have been saying; Oh! my God! let me merely say this: you'll change your opinion soon enough.*<sup>182</sup>

Warned after the publication of his fourth number that he was 'skirting the guillotine', Desmoulins turned to a personal attack on Hébert, who had been attacking him, accusing Desmoulins of marrying a rich wife. Desmoulins armed himself with information from the official records concerning payments to *Père Duchesne*, indicting Hébert for theft against the nation. Hébert was unable to account successfully for the money he had received to help pay for his paper, and so replied with further invective of a personal nature. The exchange of polemics was carried out by Hébert and Desmoulins in the club as well as in their papers.

Robespierre's high-dudgeon, high-principle speech of 5 February 1794 / 17 *Pluviôse* II was no mere rhetorical flourish. His old friend Desmoulins would fall to the guillotine of Robespierrean virtue, arrested on 31 March 1794 / 11 *Germinal* II, executed on 5 April 1794 / 16 *Germinal* II. The seventh number of Desmoulins's *Vieux Cordelier* was never published. His bookseller Desenne was too afraid to publish it, even though Desmoulins had tried to make some prudent concessions to Robespierre's arguments about national security.

As we have seen, the ultra-radicals were also under pressure from Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety. Hébert's newspaper, *Père Duchesne* was closed down on 12 March

182. 'Le Vieux Cordelier, No. 4, 30 Frimaire II / 20 December 1793', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 294–95. Note, however, that this number did not appear until four days later.

1794 / 22 *Ventôse* II. On 24 March 1794 / 4 *Germinal* II, Hébert took the same path to the guillotine to which he had gleefully directed so many others before him; he was observed as very fearful. Shortly before, however, Hébert had tried to justify his ferocity: Hébert's reasoning on the need for severe measures closely follows Marat's of 2 June 1790:

*You speak only of choking, killing, beheading, massacring, the Feuillants will tell me! You have a great thirst for blood, you miserable dealer in furnaces. Haven't you spilt enough? Too much, damn it! But whose fault is that? It's yours, you blasted dim-wits who held back the arm of the people when it was time to strike. If they had strung up a few hundred rogues in the early days of the Revolution, there would not have perished since more than a million Frenchmen... . We have acted like milk-sops; we have given our enemies time to strengthen themselves, to arm themselves to the teeth, and, to our cost, to divide us. It was only a snowball to begin with; but this ball became an enormous mass which only just failed to crush us. Let the past be a lesson to you; profit from the mistakes we made in order not to commit more in the future. No more mercy for these scoundrels, whom we dealt with leniently for too long, who would not do the same to us if they could once get their claws into us. A fight to the death between the men of the people and the enemies of the people has begun: it can only end when one of the two sides has destroyed the other...*<sup>183</sup>

Even *Révolutions de Paris* decided in March 1794 that the time for free speech was over. *Révolutions de Paris* remained at this time what it had throughout most of the Revolution, a voice of tempered radicalism. The editor, Prudhomme's reason—or excuse—for bringing his venerable journal to an end was that it was no longer required since the Revolution was over. In the final number of his *Révolutions de Paris*, Prudhomme made an Appeal to the Future Generations:

*You generations that will succeed us, more blessed than we, having learnt from our mistakes and become wise by our follies, it will doubtless be enough to have charted for you the main reefs. O my children, we shall leave you only roses to pick; your fathers will have had nothing but the thorns.*

*Children more blessed than your fathers, we have been forced to tolerate, to endure many things that would be loathsome to you, but which will remain unknown to you. In the first place, as public affairs become, in time, less numerous, less complicated, you will not see the National Assembly dividing off into small groups, who solve their difficulties by getting away from the eye of the sovereign people. Next, you will doubtless completely abolish payment for public officials, or indeed all positions will be paid the same. Where is the equality in paying one citizen more*

183. 'Le .Père Duchesne', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789–1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 300.

*than another? Such differences in salary still smack of aristocracy. With a free people there are no first and last places.*

*For too long have we allowed women to leave their homes to be present at the deliberations of the legislators, at the debates of the popular societies. You will recall their true, their unique vocation, and not permit them to deviate from it any more. They will continue to adorn the national feasts, but they will no longer interfere in public affairs...*

*You will look into what goes on in the detention houses: pending trial, you will scrupulously observe the law, which lays down that a detainee be heard within a day, and if it is possible at the very time of his detention. If the crime is the kind that detains the accused for some time, you will not leave him to languish in idleness. We have all been soldiers in order to conquer liberty and to reduce its enemies to silence. But the morals of a camp are not those that are needed to put to good use all the advantages that the republican government promises and guarantees. More blessed than we, you are almost certain to avoid that military spirit, inevitable during the storms of a long revolution.*

*Under the government that we bequeath as a heritage to you, you will have for its execution no need of all those violent means that typify even today the republic of Venice, which prolongs its precarious existence only by means of spies and informers, of hangmen and state inquisitors. Everything will work of its own accord, everything will flow from principles. The motherland will be neither a vixen nor a stepmother. You will see in her only a good mother of her family. You will love her, you will adore her. Every government, as wise as one would wish it, cannot long exist if it does not make itself loved. Every citizen must love the Republic as his mistress.*

*More blessed than we, you future generations who come after us, you will cling to the principles of republican government, as nature, whose example it is ever necessary to come back on, clings to the principles of its system: it is its slave. The constitution that we leave you is the most perfect thing that one could conceive to hold men together. Some people will perhaps still create circumstances and occasions to cover these principles with a veil, a veil suited to the intriguers and the ambitious. Tear this veil down immediately with an indignant hand, and punish the first among you who would dare to propose to silence for one moment those principles. They have been silent long enough; they have had only too much difficulty in making themselves heard above the cries of the suffering and in the midst of the tempests that have raged during the inauguration of the statue of liberty.*

*Finally, the republican government is a strong oak that we planted to give shade to our children. As soon as it has taken root, nothing must, nothing can shake it. It must protect and cover all Europe with its welcoming shade, and it must last as long as the soil that preserves and nourishes it.*<sup>184</sup>

## Thermidor and the New Bourgeois Society

The crushing victory of the French revolutionary army at Fleurus (in Hainault, in what is now southern Belgium) on 26 June 1794 changed everything. France was no longer in danger. Everyone everywhere was now re-assessing — so very circumspectly! — the need for terror. On 28 July 1794 / 10 *Thermidor* II, Robespierre was executed. Ironically part of the reason for the conspiracy against him in the Convention was that some provincial terrorists were being recalled to face the Revolutionary Tribunal for excessive severity. They decided to act against him first.



Lucien-Etienne Melingue *Matin du 10 thermidor an II 1877*



Images of the Robespierre's last days can be found on the Musée Carnavalet and British Library websites. This [1796 print](#) depicts Le Barbier's arrest on 9 Thermidor. A much later representation, dated 1877, by Lucien-Etienne Melingue and held at the [Musée de la Révolution](#) at Vizille, and Beys' 1799 representation of Robespierre's execution is on this [website](#).

Robespierre's condemnation in the National Convention and execution the next day was not met by any significant popular protest by the sans-culottes. This was the biggest fear of the conspirators, soon called *Thermidorians*, against him. One reason for popular indifference was the Cult of the Supreme Being. Robespierre had been seen as wanting to be a new pope of the Revolution. Other reasons for popular indifference to Robespierre's fate were the general failure of the laws on the Maximum (1<sup>st</sup> of 4 May 1793; 2nd of 29 September 1793 / 8 *Vendémiaire* II): under the Maximum wages had been easily controlled, but prices were still rising. Promises made to the people had failed to be realised. Speculation seemed rife.

184. 'Les Révolutions de Paris, No. 225, 25 Pluviôse-10 Ventôse II / 13-28 February 1794', in J.T. Gilchrist and W.J. Murray (eds.), *The Press in the French revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the years 1789-1794*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1971), 301-302.



**Unknown artist** *The execution of Robespierre and his supporters on 28 July 1794*

The execution of Robespierre was not meant to bring the Terror to an end, but in fact it was the signal for thousands of new arrests, trials and executions of radicals in 1794–96. This period through to the end of the Convention and the establishment of the Republican Constitution of the Year III (22 August 1795 / 3 Fructidor III), has generally been called the Thermidorean reaction.

For the People, in whose name the Revolution was carried out, their days of triumphant intervention in daily affairs were over. Two spontaneous demonstrations (*journées* or 'days') in the period before the new government of the Directory took over at the end of October 1795 were dismal failures. Known from the months in which they took place, Germinal and Prairial, they were a hopeless cry from a hungry populace during the worst harvests in living memory, a people lost for leadership and disillusioned by the gods who had failed them.



**Etienne Cherubin Leconte** *Great Hall of Five Hundred in Castle of Saint Cloud*  
18th Century



**Philippe Joseph Maillart** *Membre du Conseil des Anciens 1796-1799*



**Jean-Baptiste Lesueur** *The Bread Famine and the Pawnbroker 1790s*



**Unknown artist** *Conseil des Anciens 1797*

The third form of government elected to govern France since 1789 was known as the Directory: five people chosen by the new parliament, one resigning each year and being replaced by lot. The firm idea was that only people of property and substance should be able to vote. To be an active citizen, you now had to pay taxes to the equivalent of about 200 days wage labour in bigger towns, and 150 days worth in rural places and little towns, effectively reducing the active citizenry to around 30,000 people. Furthermore, the better to curb excesses, the new parliament was now to be divided into two chambers, British-style: a Council of 500, all aged 30 or more, could pass resolutions, which a Council of [250] Older People (Conseil des Anciens), all aged 40 or more, had also to ratify resolutions.

The Thermidorians withdrew subsidies for schooling for the poor (25 October 1795 / 3 Brumaire IV). There was no more writing about social welfare in their Declaration of Rights, as there had been in 1793. Their cause of political stability (on their terms), achieved chiefly by insisting on the exclusion of the poor and of radical democrats from political power, was assisted by the famine of 1795.

The **Jacobin Club** was suppressed, for a time, as was press freedom. Émigrés and non-juring priests could return from exile or from hiding, but they could not regain whatever they had lost, and they had to express loyalty to the Republic (25 October 1795 / 3 Brumaire IV). Most demurred. Meanwhile war continued, effectively forcing the revolution to maintain policies that were Republican and radical. Though the new legislative assemblies were elected by far fewer voters, and though they were more formal and conservative in tone, they still pursued an aggressive foreign policy, and they were still unwilling to compromise with émigrés, aristocrats, or with the Church. Wild speeches were discouraged in the new chambers. People grew weary with politics. Parisian *sans-culottes* were prevented from attending sessions of these Councils, let alone bursting into the chambers to threaten deputies as had occurred in 1792–95.



Nicolas-Antoine Taunay (1755–1830) was a painter keeping a low profile in provincial Montmorency at the height of the Terror. Sometime in 1795, certainly after the Jacobin Terror, but while a White (i.e., counter-Jacobin) Terror was well under way, Taunay painted “The Triumph of the Guillotine in Hell”<sup>185</sup>. This painting recalled the great medieval paintings of human hubris and demonic folly of Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516). Taunay’s painting is now in The State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (Государственный Эрмитаж item ГЭ 10234), having once been in The Museum of Revolution in St Petersburg, closed between 1989 and 1992, and re-opening as a Museum of the Political History of Russia. (It was not just the French Revolution that was difficult to process after the elapse of time.) A Revolutionary Tribunal is depicted in Taunay’s bitter allegory, centre right. In Taunay’s painting, David – a fellow artist with whom Taunay once knew when studying in Rome in the 1780s – is

185. Zoom-able image can be viewed [here](#); one detail is shown and discussed (in French) on this [website](#).

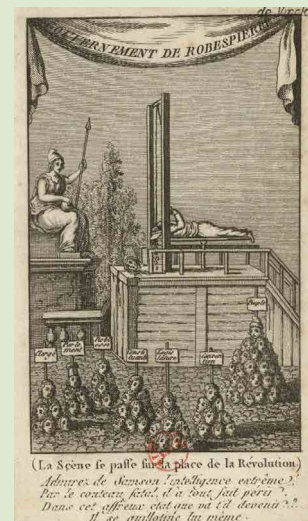
shown on the mountain top (with easel and painting frame) conducting Jacobin choirs, along with others, perhaps Robespierre or St Just (with quill pen), Marat lauded in the rear with a lyre. The artists' frame of reference may have been a play, "The Jacobins in Hell" performed in Paris in March 1795 (Germinal, Year II).



*Robespierre the murderer*. How is Robespierre presented by the Thermidorians?

Were they true friends of liberty and equality they professed to uphold? Judge the matter by examining three satirical cartoons of the *Thermidorian* era—9 *Thermidor* II to 4 *Brumaire* IV (27 July 1794 to 26 October 1795)—attacking Robespierre's reign of terror. Do these cartoons offer a fair critique of the origins, causes and consequences of the Jacobin terror?

1. The first cartoon, an anonymous print, sets out to show how far more ordinary people died during the terror of 1793–94 than clergy, *Parlementaires*, nobles, and members respectively of the Constituent Assembly (1789–91), Legislative Assembly (1791–92) or National Convention (1793–95). Notice how the cartoon shows us how hostile the revolutionaries still were to nobles and non-juring clergy. In spite of the overthrow of Robespierre; the Revolution was still very much alive and kicking. But one of its key problems now was a deep cynicism about politics and politicians. Is this problem common to other democracies?



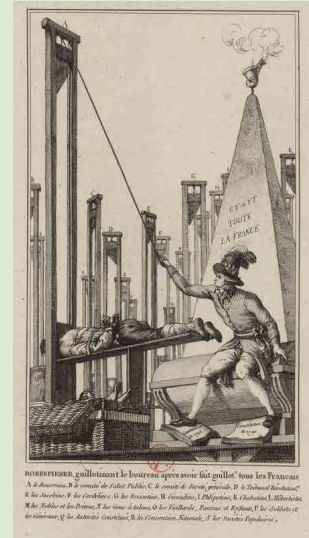
**Unknown artist** *Le  
Gouvernement de Robespierre*  
1794

2. The second of these satirical cartoons, by Alexis Chataignier, shows a blind-folded young man (France?) being led a merry dance toward death by a set of phoney-classical principles, seen as young women scantily clothed as Greco-Roman princesses, at the Bibliothèque Nationale.



**Alexis Chataignier** *Le Peuple  
Français, Ou le régime de  
Robespierre 1794-1797*

3. This allegorical drawing by Hercy has the caption 'Robespierre guillotining the executioner after guillotining all of the French people' and can be seen on the Bibliothèque National.

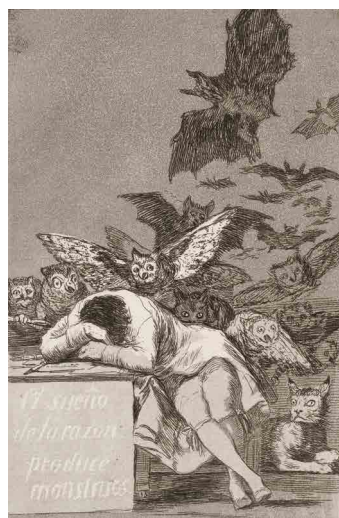


Unknown artist *Robespierre guillotinant le boureau apres avoir fait guillot 1794*

But the Executive Directory, 1795–99, was unable to provide stability while war continued, and without effective leadership. The Directory period was notorious for its corruption and immorality. Generals became steadily more important than politicians—and more admired. The Directory's politics were inconsistent. In its fumbling attempts to keep the extremists of Right and Left out of power it created a government that stumbled from crisis to crisis. It was finally—but not inevitably—replaced by a general, Napoleon Bonaparte.

### A Spanish artist looks back on the era of the French Revolution

One of the greatest artists of the era of the French Revolution was a former Spanish court painter, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), who was really no friend of either the **Old Regime** or the New Regime in Spain. Beginning in 1797, when Spain had already been enmeshed in wars with revolutionary France, Goya began a series of disturbing etchings about power and

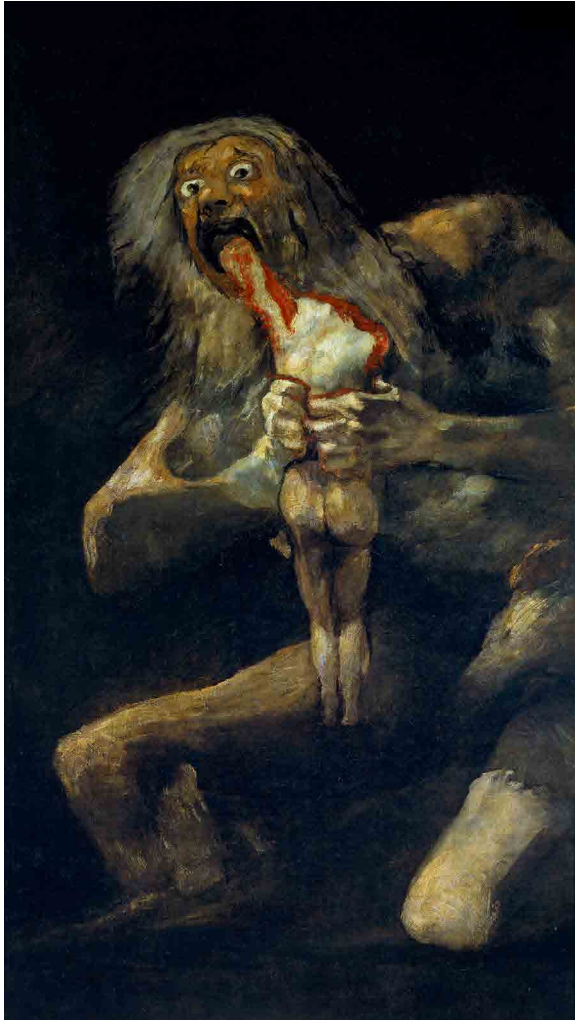


Francisco de Goya *The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters* 1799



Francisco de Goya *El Gigante o El Coloso* 1818

wars and violence. He executed them with a book in mind, but he never expected that the book would find a market. He was drawing and making aquatints to try to express things that were troubling him about his age of revolution and war.



Francisco de Goya *Saturn Eating Cronus* 1823

The first set of 80 of these prints was published in Madrid in 1799 under the title of *Los Caprichos* (caprices, whimsies, venturesomeness—his title is ironic). See the set [here](#). The National Gallery of Victoria is one of the few galleries in the world with a complete set of Goya's amazingly powerful images. Go to the NGV collection [website](#), type 'Goya Caprichos' into the Search field and explore the results. One *Caprichos* image—as suggestive as it is ambiguous—from the set is 'The sleep of reason produces monsters (*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*)'

Goya went on executing prints and paintings. One untitled print completed around 1812 shows a giant or colossus, a symbol for revolutionary France, perhaps, but equally it could symbolize the violence of the counter-revolution in Spain, or indeed all aspects of war and state-sponsored violence. Another painting, albeit from an even later era of the early 1820s, an era of dreadful counter-revolutionary oppression, now hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid. This image shows an evil (ancient Roman) God, 'Saturn eating

his own children (*Saturno devorando a su Hijo*)'. Goya seems to have been troubled by how his modern world was becoming more powerful and more violent, and he may not have wanted to distinguish between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence. Recall the ambiguity of the 1799 work, "The sleep of reason produces monsters". He wondered what forces and ideas were unleashing this power and violence. (He could never know that the twentieth century would re-double the power and violence.)



From your knowledge of the French Revolution, what answer would you give to Goya's fears and his uncanny question: "the sleep of reason causes monsters"?

Or, is this the wrong question – far too negative a point of view? Consider an alternative view, affirming the extraordinary achievements of the French Revolution as a transformation of the identity of a people. This view was published by Peter McPhee in 2006:

*The most revolutionary transformation of the French Revolution – indeed, of any revolution – was that from subject to citizen. The assumption that the sovereign will lay in a body politic of citizens rather than in a hierarchy of appointment speaks of an irreversible transformation of political culture. The evaporation by 1792 of the mystique of divine-right monarchy was the most fundamental shift in popular understandings of power. Even the seizure of power by Napoleon in 1799 and the restoration of the monarchy in 1814 could not reverse assumptions of citizenship, even if democratic republicanism could be outlawed.*<sup>186</sup>

Or consider the view of an historian of culture, Emmet Kennedy:

*[M]uch good came from the Revolution. Terrible as were its bloodiest moments, men and women of many stripes have found in it some ultimate benefit. The bleaker moments, the darker meanings of the Terror, have now been forgotten – something that could be said a century ago. From the Revolution emerged a freer, more egalitarian, more tolerant society, one in which the individual and the state, rather than the order [estate] or the corporation, were the ultimate points of reference.*<sup>187</sup>

In another work, published a decade later, Peter McPhee, presented another set of positive arguments, this time quoting the view of one of the greatest German philosophers, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who wrote in 1798 about the French Revolution:

*such a phenomenon in the history of the world will never be forgotten, because it revealed at the base of human nature a possibility for moral progress which no political figure had previously suspected. Even if we [i.e., literally Kant as a German living in East Prussia, and metaphorically as a European considering himself as immersed in revolutionary Europe] must return to the **Old Regime**, these first hours of freedom, as a philosophical testimony, will lose nothing of their value.*<sup>188</sup>

Review the ways in which the French Revolution

- changed notions of political power, **sovereignty** and governmental authority,
- how it changed ideas of and conditions for the freedom of people, what Kant called “these first hours of freedom”, and
- how it enabled what Immanuel Kant called “moral progress”, an enlarging of the possibilities

186. Peter McPhee, *Living the French Revolution, 1789-99*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 202.

187. Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), xxii.

188. Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), x.

for all kinds of people to change their world.

Now, debate and discuss your points of view. That is, after all, why histories are written and studied. History is all about the informed opinions we draw from the pasts, like the French Revolution, which helped make us. As you discuss, try to anchor your points of view in examples and evidence. Perhaps you might venture some conditional “if”s, “when”s and “but”s. You might want to trace how some things changed, and other things stayed much the same, even trying to suggest reasons why.

Were the delayed and considered responses of the artist Goya just too negative? Or somehow also prophetic? Could you still explain, excuse—even defend—the French Revolution? Or is there no such single thing as a Revolution? Your efforts to frame answers need to explore human hopes and human rights. You have to consider connections and chronologies, contingencies and contexts. Think of forms of power and forms of violence. Mull over people’s changing ideas, and try to discern systems of ideas (i.e., ideologies). Different groups can have different perspectives on the same thing, after all. The list can go on...

This is actually a list of the kinds of things the study of history can help you to develop. That’s why histories will never cease to be written. Enjoy the challenge, relishing how we can derive multiple meanings from the same world.

## **Five Ways of Thinking about the Outcome of the French Revolution... perhaps even any Revolution...**

The ball is now in your court. In this etextbook you have studied the French Revolution in so many aspects. Now it’s time to pull things together and to consider the outcomes of the revolution. It makes no sense to tell you outright what those outcomes are, as these matters are still the subject of debate, and always will be.

Searching for outcomes, it is rather to be expected that every student will pull things together differently. Informed points of view can still differ, as everyone who is honest knows. Think of politics and sports. While there can be no single right answer to a task seeking the outcomes of the French Revolution, there can still be many answers which are muddled and wrong. The answers might lack evidence. They might also be contradictory, unbalanced, or incoherent.

When you start to discuss the outcomes of revolutions, as this last section of this etextbook invites you, much depends on the standpoints of the observer and of the processes of observation they choose to adopt. Consider the analogy of spectators at the same sports event, who can still see things quite differently. This is why sports’ shows and sports’ discussions are often so much fun. Spectators’ perceptions, for instance, may have been affected by the place where they sat at the ground (i.e. the stand-point), by the TV and radio commentaries and/or camera angles which filtered what they saw or heard (i.e., the points of focus handed to them willy nilly), and

by their preferences for one of the teams (i.e., their team bias).

Mature thinkers also know these problems are normal. They know the social world, the world of human interpretation, unlike some aspects of mathematics and science, is seldom described by binaries of right and wrong, or indeed of black and white. Only adolescents are disgusted by bias. Adolescents betray immature mis-presumptions that there is only way to view the world, and that that way must be the only way. These problems with varying standpoints and fuzzy outcomes are actually part of the human condition. Mature thinkers realise, however, that this is normal; everybody has standpoints and these may not always be biases. Mature thinkers take all these factors on board when trying to frame a balanced and comprehensive point of view. They do so in three key ways:

- First, by becoming aware of how they propose to think through the outcomes. Experts call this metacognition: the capacity to question your own thinking. (This final discussion topic helps you develop your own metacognitive options.)
- Second, they look for evidence.
- Third, they draft and re-draft to clarify and to link every aspect of their points of view.

These three skills lie at the heart of higher education. You start to dismantle the trainer wheels and take off, on your own, in your own way, progressively acting more and more effectively, with less and less supervision. Remember that mature thinkers are neither closed down by complexities and contradictions, nor by ironies and inconsistencies. “What’s sauce for the goose is, or may not be, sauce for the gander”, the saying goes.

Now consider the following five thinking tricks or ways of thinking to help you revise your own studies and thinking about outcomes of the French revolution... indeed of any revolution. The modern terms for these thinking tricks are “satisficing” or “heuristics”. They are one foundation of the different way of learning found in universities. You build your own sound lines of argument, putting them together, your way. These are the places where you start to make knowledge, not just to receive it.

### **Way 1: Thinking conceptually: Revolutions as Creating a New Society amid Continuity and Change**

Try to classify what you already know about the French Revolution by thinking across and within these five categories: the PESCI. Read down the column to see what PESCI means. Each capital reveals a realm of analysis for outcomes of the French Revolution in particular, and for revolutions in general. The key point is that you can observe change under one heading or sub-heading, and continuity across other headings and sub-headings. In this way, different students can argue for different outcomes of the revolution, depending on how they weigh the balances of continuities and changes. Way 3, discussed below, develops this thinking a bit further, by

focusing on the ironies in the history of revolutions:

**P - (New) Politics:**

Which new ruling élites and from where and when?

Which new languages of power and politics?

Which new forms of property?

Which new systems of government?

**E - Economics:**

How did the ways people produce things change?

Who prospered and who didn't?

How did the role of the state change in relation to the economy?

**S - Society:**

Did the foundation of the social order change?

Hints from great legal theorists and historical sociologists: *estates* to classes, birthright to meritocracy, custom to constitution, service to bureaucracy, mercantilism to free market, royal prerogative to public opinion.

Who held the whip-hands of power now, and did they hold it differently?

**C - Culture:**

Did the things people valued change?

Did people still have the same assumptions, fears and hopes?

Did people's dress and demeanour change?

**I - Ideology:**

By "ideology" we mean the occurrence of new sets of ideas, of new mindsets.

These sets of ideas can sometimes become so settled they are recognized as 'isms', like *Liberalism* or Nationalism.

In each case, what new justifications for power and authority do they offer?

**Way 2: The Analysis of Social Processes and Outcomes: New Social Stratifications — Town, Country, Across and Between**

When you apply this heuristic, you think about the outcomes of the French Revolution in social and geographic kinds of ways.

- Did rural dwellers and urban dwellers see things differently? When and why?
- Did all rural dwellers see things the same way?
  - Consider the perspectives of peasants and villagers (paysans), bigger independent farmers (gros fermiers) and holders of aristocratic, clerical and ex-aristocratic fiefs (seigneurs)

holding seigneuries). When and why did perspectives converge and diverge?

- Did all urban dwellers see things the same way?
  - Consider the *bourgeoisie* (i.e., career professionals, merchants, intellectuals) and the urban workers (le menu people in French, who when politicized came to be called les sans culottes). When and why did perspectives converge and diverge?
- How did different regions or provinces in France converge and diverge in their responses to the French Revolution?

### Way 3: Milan Kundera's Outcomes as Hats and Heads

In the opening of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*<sup>189</sup>, the Czech dissident writer, Milan Kundera tells an ironic story about how histories and memories try to come to terms with the outcomes of revolutions. Omissions (i.e., silences in the sources) can easily be overlooked by the unsuspecting. Omissions can also lie. (We know, for instance, that in ordinary life, especially in love lives, what people do not say may be just as important as what they do say.) What you see and notice can also mislead. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Kundera was thinking of the onset of the Czech Communist dictatorship, which lasted from 1948 to 1989. Kundera wrote his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* in his native Czech as *Kniha smíchu a zapomnění*. Kundera wrote it in 1978 and he wrote it in Paris, where he had been living in exile since 1975, having been repressed by the Communist regime in the 1950s and 1960s. The English version, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, appeared in 1981, a French translation in 1979. Here's how he opens his book of ironic outcome stories.

*In February 1948, the Communist leader Klement Gottwald [1896-1953, in power 1948-53] stepped out on to the balcony of a Baroque palace in Prague to harangue hundreds of thousands of citizens massed in Old Town Square. That was the great turning point in the history of Bohemia. A fateful moment of the kind that occurs only once or twice a millennium. Gottwald was flanked by his comrades, with [Vlado] Clementis [1902-52] standing close by him. It was snowing and cold, and Gottwald was bareheaded. Bursting with solicitude, Clementis took off his fur hat and set it on Gottwald's head. The propaganda section made hundreds of thousands of copies of the photograph taken on the balcony where Gottwald, in a fur hat and surrounded by his comrades, spoke to the people. On that balcony the history of Communist Bohemia [Czechia, today] began. Every child knew that photograph, from seeing it on posters and in schoolbooks and museums. Four years later [in 1952], Clementis was charged with treason and hanged. The propaganda section immediately made him vanish from history, and of course, from all photographs. Ever since, Gottwald has been alone on that balcony. Where Clementis stood, there is only the bare palace wall. Nothing remains of Clementis but the fur hat on*

189. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)

Gottwald's head.<sup>190</sup>



Kundera referred to a doctored photograph appearing in many search engines. Here's one from a book in Czech.

Milan Kundera’s novels tried to help Czechs and Slovaks undermine Communism. He thought there were good reasons to study history. Having an informed and critical historical imagination helped people mature as citizens, he argued. He thought that if the People (i.e., democracy) were actually to become Free, and if they were actually to triumph over Power (i.e., over exploitative absolutisms and dictatorships), then (informed) Memory (and Irony) must first disrupt (manipulated) Forgetting. By making a joke, based on a photograph, about the eerie and ongoing presence of the hat of the executed and air-brushed-away Vlado Clementis still sitting on the head of the man who ordered his execution, Klement Gottwald, Kundera conceived four key kinds of outcomes of revolutions. It’s a matter of heads and hats, so to speak, in respective old and new combinations. They go like this, and each is ironic:

<b>New Heads/Old Hats</b> New kinds of people in power ruling just as they did in the olden days and ways	<b>New Heads/New Hats</b> New kinds of people in power ruling in whole new ways
<b>Old Heads/Old Hats</b> Same old kinds of people in power ruling like they did in the olden days and ways	<b>New Heads/Old Hats</b> New kinds of people in power ruling like they did in the olden days and ways



Try applying this to the problem of the outcomes of the French Revolution. What’s old, what’s new, and in what ironic combinations?

Way 4: “It’s always the circumstances”: Milan Kundera’s Idea of outcomes of revolutions as a function of the choices people had to make in crises

History always surprises. We think we know better, but the more we know about the past, the less sure we become. In Kundera's terms when we study history, we find that things suddenly appear, in ways other than we might know them. So the key thing to do, in thinking about the outcome of the French Revolution in particular, and of revolutions in general, is to ask, “How might things have seemed to them then?” You save past people from our condescension. You have to try to suspend your hindsight. The sense of hindsight can mislead. Just because you

190. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)

think you know how things turned out does not mean past people should have known that too. Nothing historical was inevitable. In this way of thinking about outcomes and processes of revolutions, you are exploring instead “the pickle they were in”, so to speak. You examine circumstances, consequences, contradictions, confusions, and confrontations of events and situations – as they were experienced by past people in their time.

You are also asking whether the particular passions of the era and of revolutionaries contradicted their interests. Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century conservative critics of the French Revolution, like Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Louis Gabriel Ambrose de Bonald (1754-1840) and Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), thought the French revolutionaries erred by chasing ideas to extremes, sometimes ignoring their own best interests and certainly, so they thought, the interests of custom, faith, tradition and social stability. Then again, it was only possible to imagine conservatism after the French Revolution. A famous philosopher of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), once made the same point as did the conservatives about Enlightenment thinking and thinkers; he admired the *Sapere Aude* (Dar[ing] to Know) of the Enlightenment, but he still counselled in 1784 that the free thinking should not be shared too widely. We also tackled these issues when we discussed Voltaire’s ideas on equality (search for “the cook and the cardinal” and for “what does a horse owe to a horse”). We also tackled these issues when surveying the contexts and consequences of the Jacobin Terror, 1793-94, and indeed of the Thermidorian Terror, 1795-97. In the case of these two eras of Terror, we asked then whether the circumstances of failure and success in the threats posed by civil war and external war were a sufficient explanation for the onset and persistence of Terror. Did ideology and opportunism also play a part?

### Way 5: Key conceptual contrasts (to discuss) in the French revolutions

Try to generate a discussion as to the outcomes by explaining and offering evidence about some or all of these conceptual contrasts:

Old Regime / Ancien Régime	New Regime(s)
Estates: Laws can define different groups differently; together they make a kingdom	Citizens: Laws should define everyone (male) in the same way; together they make a nation.
Absolutism	1. Constitutional Monarchy 2. Republic 3. Plebiscite
Decree and then enable each province to register law their way	Decree on the single basis of a national representative deliberation and vote
Privilege as something you earn by service, birth and family distinction	Rational uniformity and careers open to talents (meritocracy)
Public Deference	Public Opinion
Tradition	Reform and Revolution

Look to be looked after: Paternalism	Assert your Rights
“Males rule, as always, OK”: Patriarchy	More capacity for Self-Expression, but the presumption is still that males will rule
Secure	Free
Faith	Personal Improvement
Belonging to a community	Freedom to contract
The Royal respects the Local	The National regularises the Local and makes it consistent
Guild	Chamber of Commerce
Catechism	Education
A solicitous and caring monarchy unites all in the public good	The public good is discovered through a public debate that eventually unites all
A hierarchical (vertical) social order, deference flowing up, care flowing down: self-expression is not required	An increasingly class-based (horizontal) social order in which individuals are free to pursue their own interests and to express themselves
Mercantilist regulation of the economy (albeit criticised within and without)	Laissez-faire: A presumption that it is better not to regulate the economy
Duty, precedence and service, often taken up by marriage and birthright	Election: may the best (man) win
Oppositional intelligentsia with few ties to government, who think they are “enlighteners”	Mass-mobilizing intelligentsia with deeper ties to government who believe in “expertise”
Respect for custom at every level: royal, aristocratic, village	Rationalize and make everything as consistent as possible
Shun, shame and exile	Imprison, reform and scrutinise
Painful public executions designed to awe the public and to deter enemies of the peace	Supposedly painless public executions designed to expose enemies of the people

## Conclusion

Together or individually, these five heuristics help you sharpen your thinking. As soon as you start using them, you will be making knowledge, not just receiving it, and you will be showing that you are more than ready for higher education. The skills you have mastered in your studies of history will help you no matter what your interests and no matter what your career.

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## Adrian Jones

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## William Murray

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## Ross Smith

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## Alice Garner

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## Ian Collier

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## Jacques-Louis David, Self-portrait, 1794

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## Jacques Louis David, Philip Mazzei, 1790-1791

'Philip Mazzei' by Jacques Louis David from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

## In a portrait (most likely made in 1787) by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803), Madame Roland is shown at her writing desk.

'Madame Roland by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard - 1787' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

## Johann Julius Heinsius, Madame Roland, 1792

'Madame Jeanne-Marie Roland de la Platiere' by Johann Ernst Heinsius (1740-1812) © Bridgeman Art Library

## Unknown artist, Portrait of Manon Roland de la Platière, between 1790 and 1799

Madame Roland Lambinet' by Siren-Com from Wikimedia Commons used under CC BY-SA 3.0

## Germaine Necker (1766 - 1817) at the age of 14.

Germaine Necker (1766 - 1817) à l'âge de 14 ans. Sanguine de Carmontelle from Collection du Château de Coppet

## William Shepard, The Gouvernements, 1926

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## William Shepard, Ecclesiastical Map of France, 1789 and 1802, 1926

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## Louis Marie Sicardi, Miniature Portrait of Louis XVI, 1784

'A Miniature Portrait of King Louis XVI' from Treasures of the American Philosophical Society used with permission

## Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Marie Antoinette and Her Children, 1787

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## Robert Nanteuil, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, 1674

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**Hyacinthe Rigaud, Portrait of Louis XIV, 1702**

‘Louis XIV, King of France (1638-1715)’ by Hyacinthe Rigaud from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**A lettre de cachet allowed the king of France to send into jail arbitrarily anybody he did not approved.**

‘Lettre de cachet’ by Tangopaso from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

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**Illustration in the initial printing of Beaumarchais’ play The Marriage of Figaro, ACT 1.**

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**Jean-Jacques Rousseau dressed in Armenian coat and cap.**

Allan ramsay-jean-jacques rousseau (1712-1778)’ by google cultural institute from wikimedia commons used under CC0

**Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory Girl Feeding Chickens from the series known as the Enfants de Boucher circa 1770–80.**

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'The Galleries of the Palais Royal' by Louis Leopold from Getty Images

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**Maurice Quentin de La Tour, Madame de Pompadour in her Study, between 1749 and 1755**

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**Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs (inner courtyard) 22 avenue de Paris Versailles.**

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**Engraving depicting Le mariage de Figaro.**

PARIS 1784 -- BEAUMARCHAIS, Pierre Augustin Caron de (1732-1799). Le mariage de Figaro, ou la Folle journée, comédie en cinq actes et en prose. Seville [but Switzerland]: Comte d'Almaviva, 1785' © Bridgeman Art Library

**Jacques Louis David, Le Serment des Horaces, 1784**

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**Jacques Louis David, Les Licteurs rapportant à Brutus les corps de ses fils, 1789**

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'Ouverture des États généraux, à Versailles, le 5 mai 1789' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permission terms

**Unknown artist, Police Lieutenant Marc-René d'Argenson scattered the nuns from Port-Royal des Champs on 29 October 1709, 18th Century**

'Police Lieutenant Marc-René d'Argenson scattered the nuns from Port-Royal des Champs on 29 October 1709 Anonymous painting, 18th century, Port-Royal' © RMN-Grand Palais (musée de Port-Royal des Champs) / Michel Urtado

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'Cahiers de doléances de 1789 dans le département du Pas-de-Calais : accompagnés d'un glossaire historique et d'une bibliographie

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**Pierre-Michel Alix, Jean Silvain Bailly, 1795**

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**Jacques-Louis David, Le Serment du Jeu de paume, 1791**

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**Unknown artist, A faut esperer q'eu.s jeu la finira bentot : l'auteur en campagne, 1789**

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**Joseph Duplessis, Portrait of Jacques Necker, circa 1781**

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**Jean-Baptiste Lesueur, Sans-culottes carrying a model of the Bastille, 1793, Late 18th Century**

'Sans-culottes carrying a model of the Bastille, 1793' by Jean-Baptiste Lesueur from Wikimedia Commons used under CC BY-SA 4.0

**Pierre-Gabriel Berthault, Motion faite au Palais royal, par Camille Desmoulins. Le 12 Juillet 1789, 1802**

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**Map of France, 1791, showing former provinces (red) and départements (grey). From the The Historical Atlas (1926 revision) by William R. Shepherd.**

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**Unknown artist, Je suis sous le Rideau et je Reponds de Tout, 1791**

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**Henri Nicolas Vangorp, Société des amis de la Constitution, between 1791 and 1792**

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**Satire on the fall of the Bastille, July 1789.**

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**Unknown artist, The March on Versailles, also known as The October March, 1789**

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**Pierre-Gabriel Berthault, Intérieur d'un Comité révolutionnaire sous le régime de la Terreur, 1802**

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Guillotine at the place du Carrousel. Paris, on August 13, 1792. Engraving. Paris, musée Carnavalet. © Roger-Viollet

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'Sans Culotte Lighting his Pipe Young Butcher Bourgeois Going to Guard Huntsman Citizen Defending his Liberty Sans Culotte Keeping Guard' from WikiGallery used under CC0

**Unknown artist, President of a revolutionary committee, after the lifting of a seal, 1794**

'Président d'un Comité Révolutionnaire, après la levée d'un Scelé' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permission terms

**Jean François Sablet, Daniel Kervégan, Mayor of Nantes, 1794**

Jean François Sablet  
Daniel Kervégan, Mayor of Nantes, 1794  
oil on wood panel  
64.5 x 54.9 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased with funds donated by Andrew Sisson, 2010 (2010.514)

**Jacques-Louis David, Portrait d'un homme et de ses enfants, 1800s**

'Conventional Michel Gerard and his family' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**Marat is shown addressing a revolutionary crowd in 1792 in a painting by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), held in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Lille.**

'Lille PBA boilly triomphe de marat' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**The famous painting (1793) of the assassination of Marat (13 July 1793) by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).**

'Marat assassinated' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**A painting by Jean-Joseph Weerts from 1880 (nearly a century after the event) shows the fury of the sans-culottes at the point of arrest of Marat's assassin.**

'J. J. Weerts L'assassinio di Marat' from

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**Drawn by Raffet, engraved by Fournier, Charlotte Corday, 1847**

'Charlotte Corday' drawn by Raffet engraved by Fournier, 1847 from Antique Prints (P009932) used under Antique Prints non-commercial permission terms

**Paul-André Basset, Marat. L'Ami du peuple, 1793**

'Marat. L'Ami du peuple', by Bassett from The British Museum used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

**Unknown artist, Woman with basket before the entrance to a prison, 18th century**

'Woman with basket before the entrance to a prison', 1796, miniature on ivory, France, 18th century by DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI from Getty Images

**Jeanne-Louise (Nanine), Vallain La Liberte, 1794**

'Vallain-liberty' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**Jean-Baptiste Regnault, La Liberté ou la Mort, 1795**

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**Francisco de Goya, Tú que no puedes (Thou who canst not), 1799**

'Francisco de Goya, Tu que no puedes' open access image from the Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University used under DAC Open Access images Policy

**Drawn by Duplessis-Bertaux engraved by Berthault, Gobel's torture (bishop of Paris), 1794**

Gobel's torture (bishop of Paris), Hébert, Vincent, Chaumette and other Hébertists. Paris, on March 24, 1794. Engraving by Berthault after Duplessis-Bertaux. Paris, Musée Carnavalet. © Roger-Viollet

**Unknown artist, View of the Mound of Champ de la Reunion on the Festival That Was Celebrated in Honor of the Supreme Being, 1790s**

'View of the Mound of Champ de la Reunion on the Festival That Was Celebrated in Honor of the Supreme Being' by DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI from Getty Images

**Thomas Naudet, Festival of Supreme Being at Champs-de-Mars, 20 Priarial An II (8th June 1794), 1794**

'Festival of Supreme Being at Champs-de-Mars, 20 Priarial An II (8th June 1794)' by Naudet, Thomas Charles © Bridgeman Art Library

**Lucien-Etienne Melingue, Matin du 10 thermidor an II, 1877**

'Le matin du 10 thermidor An II' by Rama from Wikimedia Commons used under CC BY-SA 2.0 FR

**Unknown artist, The execution of Robespierre and his supporters on 28 July 1794, 1794**

'Execution de Robespierre et de ses complices conspirateurs contre la liberté et l'égalité : vive la Convention nationale qui par son energie et surveillance a delivré la Republique de ses tyrans' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permission terms

**Etienne Cherubin Leconte, Great Hall of Five Hundred in Castle of Saint Cloud, 18th Century.**

Great Hall of Five Hundred in Castle of Saint Cloud, watercolor by Etienne Cherubin Leconte (1766-1818), French Revolution, France, 18th century'by DEA / M. SEEMULLER from Getty Images

**Philippe Joseph Maillart, Membre du Conseil des Anciences, 1796-1799**

'Membre du Conseil des Anciences: ce conseil exmine les resolutions qui lui sont presentees par celui des Cinq-cents' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permssion terms

**Jean-Baptiste Lesueur, The Bread Famine and the Pawnbroker, 1790s**

'Jean Baptiste Lesueur (1749-1826), French School. The Bread Famine and the Pawnbroker. Gouache. Paris, Musee Carnavalet' by Josse Christopel from Alamy Stock Photo

**Unknown artist, Conseil des Anciens, 1797**

'Conseil des Anciens' from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**Unknown artist, Le Gouvernement de Robespierre, 1794**

'Le Gouvernement de Robespierre : (la scene se passe sur la place de la Revolution) 1794' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permssion terms

**Alexis Chataignier, Le Peuople Francais, Ou le regime de Robespierre, 1794-1797**

'Le Peuople Francais, Ou le regime de Robespierre' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permission terms

**Unknown artist, Robespierre guillotinant le boureau apres avoir fait guillot, 1794**

'Robespierre guillotinant le boureau apres avoir fait guillot' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permssion terms

**Francisco de Goya, The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters, 1799**

'The sleep of reason produces monsters' by Google Cultural Institute from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

**Francisco de Goya, El Gigante o El Coloso, 1818**

'El Gigante o El Coloso' from National Library of France used under BNF non-commercial permission terms

**Francisco de Goya, Saturn Eating Cronus, 1823**

'Saturn Eating Cronus' by Francisco de Goya from Wikimedia Commons used under CC0

# Glossary

## Abbé

An *abbé* was a leading clergyman, the abbot of a Roman Catholic monastery. A famous *abbé* was Emmanuel Joseph de Siéyès. By the eighteenth century, many monasteries were extremely wealthy institutions with extensive landholdings in the towns and the cities. Others marketed lucrative brands of wine, brandy or cheese, or controlled customs gates, mills and bridges, charging for access. Posts as *abbés* tended to be much sought after by wealthy sons of nobles or *bourgeois*, especially by sons who could make some claim to intellectual distinction. Many *abbés* never bothered to visit the monastery from which they derived their income. Many French peasants resented paying tithes and charges which supported these monasteries. Most French revolutionaries opposed the ongoing existence of monasteries in France, seeing them as upholding laziness and monopolising valuable lands. They were dissolved in 1790, and their lands nationalised. The *Jacobin Club* occupied the Parisian site of one such former monastery.

## Absolutism

Absolutism is the abstract noun describing the kind of absolute monarchy promoted by Louis XIV (born 1638, reigned 1643-1715). Louis XIV meant that he thought he had could wield unlimited authority over matters of public policy and foreign and military policy. Louis XIV built the Palace of Versailles to give expression to this idea. Everything was supposedly centred around him: the “The Sun King (*Le Roi Soleil*)”. Louis XIV evolved these ideas after the crisis of the *Fronde*. Louis XVI claimed that since royal authority was *divine sanctioned*, it was necessarily unlimited. The concept was always more of an idea than a reality in *Old Regime* (*ancien Régime*) France, however. The successors of Louis XIV, Louis XV (born 1710, reigned 1715-74) and especially Louis XVI (born 1754, reigned 1774-92, died 1793) were anxious not to appear as “despots”; they did not honour either the practise or the theory of Louis XIV’s theory of absolute monarchical authority.

## Bailly

Bailly went on to be the first mayor of Paris. He retired from public life late in 1791. Accused of helping order the repression of the democratic demonstrators at the military parade ground in Paris, the champ de Mars, on 17 July 1791, Bailly was arrested and tried in November 1793 and executed in the same champ de Mars on 12 November 1793 / 21 Frimaire II.

## Birthright

The concept of birthright describes a notion that rights and privileges can attach to a person purely by reason of their belonging to a special group defined by birth, not talent. Birthright underpins aristocracy and monarchy. The *liberal* opposing view emphasising talent was called

meritocracy and its promise was equality of opportunity, not the privilege of birth.

### **Bourgeois**

This word has terrorised generations of English-language students. It derives from *bourg* or town, and originally referred to a town-dweller, neither peasant nor noble. The collective noun is the bourgeoisie, while the adjective is bourgeois. The masculine singular form and plural forms of the noun are bourgeois, and the feminine singular is bourgeoise.

### **Café**

The *café* is one of the most enduring developments that arose in eighteenth-century France. Like the experience of shopping and promenading in the **Palais Royal**, the café encouraged people to socialise in exciting new ways. The emerging habits of shopping, promenading and sitting around and chatting in cafés, and always being on display, put fashion, grace, wit, style and even sex appeal before birth, honour and tradition. A new social order was emerging. These exciting new developments were adopted by the **bourgeoisie** and the nobility alike. A way was being opened for the emergence of the politics of 1789: free trade, citizenship, open debate, and above all, a preference for the idea of citizenship instead of belonging to a social estate (*corps* or *état*): Why should the ugly and boring well-born be more privileged than the gorgeous and talented low-born? *Café Procope* is one of the earliest *cafés* in Paris. It was opened in 1686 by a Sicilian from Palermo, Francisco Procopio dei Coltelli, whose café was famous for hosting **theatre** folk (the famous **theatre** of *la Comédie française* is nearby) and in the eighteenth-century it was a favourite of **Enlightenment** figures like Diderot, d'Alembert and Voltaire. During the revolution, this café was favoured by radical democrats like Georges Danton, Fabre d'Eglantine and Camille Desmoulins, leaders of radical violence and popular democracy in 1792–93, but soon to be arrested and executed as *indulgents* in March 1794 for pleading for an end to the terror. The café is now renovated, very elegant, very expensive, a magnet for tourists who don't understand its revolutionary heritage. You can tour *Café Procope* [here](#). You can also glimpse the kinds of people who gathered in cafés. See this undated but probably late eighteenth-century print titled 'Establishment of New Philosophy: Our Cradle was a Café', at this [website](#). For an early nineteenth century Louis-Léopold Boilly painting of men playing draughts/checkers in the Café Lamblin in the Palais-Royal, go to this [site](#).

### **Divine sanctioned authority**

Divine sanctioned authority is authority thought to be directly linked to the authority of God. Judaism excepted, but only after Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon destroyed the Kingdom of Israel (*Judah*), this concept of divine ordained kings was especially linked to the great monotheist (one-God) religions: Zoroastrian Persia, fourth-century Rome under the Christian emperors and the Byzantine and medieval kingdoms, and Islam under the caliphs and Ottomans. The thinking behind divine sanctioned authority seemed to make sense for thousands of years: any division of authority was thought to lead to trouble and strife.

## Enlightenment

Enlightenment is a translation into English of Immanuel Kant's German noun, *Aufklärung*. Eighteenth-century educated people identified strongly with the concept that their fresh thinking so free from tradition and custom (*le droit coutumier*) was dispelling ignorance in the world: i.e., they thought they were “enlighteners” achieving outcomes of progress and freedom that they called “Enlightenment”. Eighteenth-century educated Germans like Goethe and Kant admired French [and Scots] Enlightenment thinkers, considering them as the leaders of European intellectual life. The equivalent French word was *philosophe*. French thinkers – but this term does not signify quite the same in English as in French. The French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century – like Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau – were not identifying themselves as capital-P Philosophers, but rather as critical thinkers and also as enlighteners. Another French word used was *lumières*, adapted from *illuminati* in Italian: “bringers/givers of light”. The equivalent self-descriptor of Russian educated thinkers was also a “bringer of light” to the darkness of custom and ignorance; *prosvetiteli* просветители in Russian.

## Estates

In the old societies of Europe, i.e., in the societies existing before the onset of revolutions, the status of people was defined by custom, religion and law according to “orders” or “estates”. People were generally born into their estate, i.e., into their legally defined social group. It was anticipated that most people, if they stayed ‘home’, would also stay in that group their entire life. Old-Regime people had a deeper sense of “belonging” than do modern people. Every language in Europe had a word or words for this concept of belonging to and being born in an estate. Your birthright and your birth status determined your “stations of life”, to use another such old-fashioned phrase. Notice the plurals. In France, the social estates were called “*corps*” or bodies; hence our notion of a “corporation” in English. In Germany, they were called *Stände*. In the Ottoman Empire, they were called *milletler*, and they separated people into different faith communities. Estates were known as *sosloviia* сословия in old Russia.

## Feudal

Medieval Europe (and early-modern Japan) was defined by a feudal system. The central authority of Rome in western Europe collapsed irredeemably in the fifth century. There was no longer any rule of law, only the memory of it. There was no established and stable pattern of constitutional or civil authority, again only the memory. The Roman Catholic Church alone was still in place, along with its fearful church congregations and monastic foundations. Roads often remained, but connected ruins. The Church had endured because it had always been adept at converting and cajoling barbarian pagan warrior chieftains. Under “feudalism (*la féodalité* in French)”, everybody from the humblest to the most powerful re-built their own security locally and from the ground up. This was the feudal system: kings, barons, knights, serfs, each bound together less by law and even by custom as by a hierarchy of reciprocal obligations. Homage and resources were handed up the hierarchy, and military protection and a faithful community of fellows was supposedly handed down the hierarchy. People traded the dead letters of their freedom under law and their citizenship for protection. They constructed

a de-centralised system of reciprocal obligations: land rights and food were traded for security. Starting with the eleventh-century era of the Norman conquests and the so-called twelfth-century Renaissance in Italy, Spain and France, the feudal system gradually unraveled, in part because of the slow rise of the power of kings who could eventually deploy artillery to tear down castles. The kings also benefitted from revenues derived from new forms of traded wealth in the towns. Thereafter, the great catastrophe of the Black Death, in the mid-fourteenth century, altered this balance even more, evolving a social system with far more free peasants or very long-term tenants, and rather fewer serfs, especially in England, Flanders, The Netherlands and France. After the Black Death, manual labour was now scarce; new social rules therefore applied. The new social rules in the countryside came to be described as *seigneurial* in France. When the French revolutionaries started to talk about the *Old Regime* (ancien régime) as “feudal”, they were actually re-labelling it as something archaic and offensive. Names matter, as every victim of a bully knows.

### **First Estate**

The First Estate was the clergy, the social group, in Old-Regime terms, closest to God.

### **Franks, The**

The Franks were the German tribe who conquered France. Merovingian Franks united the territory now known as France in a single state ruled by a single dynasty in the Sixth Century.

### **Fronde**

The Fronde was an effort to reign in the power of the monarchy in France. It was a coalition of high aristocrats and Parisian élites that began in 1648, and persisted through to 1652. This coalition tried to force a young and inexperienced Louis XIV (born 1638, reigned 1643-1715) to agree to limits on his power. France might then have become an English or Polish style constitutional monarchy. Louis XIV soon disagreed, but took some time to marshal the bureaucratic, clerical and noble support he needed in order to re-assert absolute monarchical authority.

### **Gabelle**

The Gabelle was a salt Tax.

### **Gauls, The**

Gauls were the original ancient Celtic people of France. They symbolised the nation. They were conquered by Julius Caesar for Rome in 50s BCE. A modern version of the Gauls, with all its nationalist connotations, is the cartoon character, ‘Astérix’.

### **Historiography**

The word historiography is a composite of two ancient Greek words: graphy meaning writing and history meaning conducting investigations about the past. Looking at historiography means trying to understand the agendas and the methods of historians. Historiography is all about

how people come to be able to 'write' history. Historiography is therefore the noun referring to the ways historians work out what happened, what was important, and what it meant in the long run. These are complex tasks. Historiography looks at derived meanings and methods. Often people in the past may have had limited understandings about what is 'really' going on in their lives and times. Think of children's understandings of family and neighbourhood life. Historians take whatever documents and traces they can find, and try to piece together a convincing picture. Historiography is a bit like a crime scene investigation. There are clues, but no-one can presume what happened. Different historians will have different ideas—just like the detectives arguing about their murder case. Sometimes a group of like-minded historians form a 'School' based on a particular set of ideas, with different interests, or drawing on different evidence. Reading analyses from different schools helps to strengthen our understanding. In short then...historiography just means seeing where different historians agree and disagree, rather than simply learning 'dates and names'. This is how new knowledge is made.

### **Intendant**

An Intendant was usually a well-educated royal appointee set up to govern a province in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century France, often in a mixture of collaboration and competition with longer established systems of local government in France. They were often despised by locals because they were young and precocious outsiders.

### **Invalides**

Les Invalides is a military hospital built for war veterans in 1670 by Louis XIV to the west of the city of Paris with gardens which ran up to the left bank of the Seine. See Janinet's print of the canons of the Invalides being seized by the people [here](#).

### **Jacobin Club**

The Jacobin Club was founded by radical patriots in April 1789: Siéyès and Antoine-Pierre Barnave were early members. Modelling themselves on American revolutionary societies, the members of this club called themselves the 'Society of Friends of the Constitution (*La Société des Amis de la Constitution*)', resolving never to disband until the job of writing a constitution for France was finished. They met first in Versailles. Like the king, they shifted their headquarters to Paris in October 1789, meeting first in the former library and then in the former church of the recently closed thirteenth century Dominican monastery of St Jacques (the Jacobins), located on the rue St Honoré (now the Place du Marché 115é), near St Roch and the Tuileries (now 1er arrondissement). After the Jacobin Club lost its more moderate members in 1790–91, including Siéyès and Barnave, the Jacobin Club of Paris, and its many provincial affiliates, became a formal centre (there was a steep membership fee) of radical political discussion in France, especially between 1792 and 1794. Robespierre and St Just were key club members. The Club was closed by order of the Convention on 12 November 1794 / 21 Frimaire III, though it revived weakly in 1795–96. Its buildings were demolished in the Napoleonic era to make way for a market in 1810. The Jacobin Club in the more radical era of 1792 is shown in another engraving, [here](#).

**Jean Bon Saint-André (1749–1813)**

A radical Republican and Protestant clergyman, he was also a member of the Committee of Public Safety (*Comité du salut public* CPS) charged with superintending naval defense. Moderate in demeanour, he survived the Thermidorean anti-Jacobin reaction, going on to be Consul in Algiers, then a prisoner in Smyrna / İzmit under the Ottoman empire and a prefect for Napoléon.

**Jeu de Paume**

The long room, high ceiling and big upper windows of this building for Royal Tennis Club still exist. David and members of his workshop made three sketches for a painting of the *Oath of the Tennis Court*. One of the studies for David's *Oath of the Tennis Court* is in Versailles. See David's painting of 1791 there in a reproduction (the original is in the [Musée Carnavalet](#)) on the back wall of the Jeu de Paume today. The other study by David, a coloured one, probably painted much later in the 1820s, is in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris and can be viewed [here](#). There is also an engraving by Pierre-Gabriel Berthault (1748–1819) of the *Oath of the Tennis Court* which was published in 1800 as one of a set of 46 engravings illustrating great moments in the history of the Revolution. It is based on an earlier engraving by Jean-Louis Prieur (1732 or 1736 to 1795). You can see Prieur and Berthault's version of the Oath on the [National Archives' ARCHIM site](#) at or at [Wikimedia Commons](#). These sites show the layout of the Jeu de Paume today: [Real Tennis History](#), or [Versailles Tourisme](#).

**Lettre de Cachet**

An earlier lettre de cachet, dating from 1703, can be found [here](#). No charge is mentioned in the King's letter; no charge needed to be listed; the King's order was enough. These French customs are in direct contrast to the English legal principle of *Habeas Corpus*, which specified that no person could be held in custody without a charge being laid and without a trial being conducted. This famous English law—customary since the 12th century, but often breached by powerful English monarchs—was enacted in 1640, as one element in Parliament's victorious struggle for supremacy over one Stuart monarch, Charles I. *Habeas Corpus* was subsequently codified in 1679, when another Stuart king, Charles II, was allowed to return. Threats by yet another Stuart monarch, James II, to abolish *Habeas Corpus* were one reason for the English Revolution of 1688 which deposed James II, installed Mary II and William II, and incorporated *Habeas Corpus* into an English Bill of Rights (1689). The rule was then applied in *Somerset's* case in 1771, when the English Courts refused to allow an American slave owner to bring his African-American slave to England, the Court declaring 'the air of England has long been too pure for a slave, and every man is free who breathes it'. Similar conventions applied in France. Although many **Enlightenment** thinkers, like Montesquieu and Voltaire, admired this English approach to liberty, the trade in slaves was nonetheless only abolished in the British Empire in 1807 and in the USA in 1865. The leaders of revolutionary France, after refusing to concede in 1790–92 that slaves in the Caribbean might also be citizens of France, went on to abolish slavery in October 1793, only for Napoléon Bonaparte to revive it in 1802.

## Liberal

Along with the American Revolution, the French *Enlightenment* and the French revolution are often considered founding events of liberalism. The core conviction of liberalism was and still is that the individual does best when he or she is not subjected to rules, customs and stringent supervision. The liberal conviction valued and still values freedom of choice and freedom of expression as a better way to enable people to thrive. Liberals think people need to be made as free as possible to make their own way in the world. Liberals think that those with the most merit will then rise to the top, creating a meritocracy (rule by the best), not an aristocracy (rule by nobles), not a clerisy (rule by priests), not a monarchy (rule by a divine-sanctioned king or queen). Socialists critiqued liberals, conceding that while freedom was all very well, some measure of equality was also needed to give everybody the same chances in life; other merit might only be a cipher for privilege and wealth.

## Magistrates

Magistrates were people who had purchased, inherited, or had been appointed to *offices*, which were official positions, such as Secretary to the King. Under the *Old Regime*, most people paid for the offices they held, which meant that only people with enough money could obtain them. Each came with a title; most conferred nobility after several years; a few—like Secretaries to the King—conferred instant nobility. Prices paid reflected these considerations. Likewise, in order to raise more money for the state, an office of state or of a region or a municipality might be held by more than one person. During Louis XVI's era, for instance, there were hundreds of Secretaries to the King. Sale of offices—*la vénalité*—was a key fund-raiser for the *Old Regime*.

## Marly

The Royal Chateau at Marly was built by Louis XIV in 1678 as a hunting lodge, where he could escape his high-visibility life at Versailles. The chateau was demolished in 1799. The gardens, designed by André Le Nôtre, remain. This [site](#) is now a park in Paris. A selection of images of the Chateau, can be seen at: .

## Old Regime

Just as the Renaissance terms “Renaissance (re-birth)” and “Middle Ages (*Medioevo* in Latin, i.e. Medieval)” were a Renaissance way of disdaining the era preceding, so too the label, “Old Regime (*Ancien Régime* in French) is a put-down (i.e., a pejorative) created by the revolutionaries to diminish the standing of the era preceding their own. Generations tend to dismiss the achievements of those who go before. Different class cohorts in schools, each with own T-shirt, may be tempted to belittle their prior cohort as well.

## Palais Royal

When high officials of state were encouraged to build grandly in Paris, the *Palais Royal* complex was built by Cardinal Richelieu in the 1640s as a mansion (*hôtel*), garden and colonnade.

## Parlements

There were thirteen Parlements in *Old Regime* France. The *Parlement of Paris* was the most important. The thirteen were to be found in the so-called *Pays d'état* parts of France. The other parts of France had Provincial *Estates*. The French Parlements were not Parliaments in the English sense, even though the English word is similar to the French. The Parlements were courts of law, and they also had to register royal edicts in their locales. They were staffed by lawyer-nobles (*le noblesse de robe*). These lawyers could become some of the leading figures in their spheres of opinion if they chose to exercise their right to issue a remonstrance to royal edicts which they regarded as inconsistent with other laws. Remonstrances invariably made reputations and caused a stir, even though they could be over-ruled if the King came to the court in person and remonstrated with the remonstrance. The royal stamping of the foot, so to speak, was “a bed of justice (*un lit de justice*)”.

## Parlements of Paris

There were thirteen *Parlements*. The Parlement of Paris was the most important; its authority extended over half of the kingdom. View the seat of the Parlement of Paris, Le Palais de Justice, in the Île de la Cité in Paris [here](#). Other key *Parlements* were: Rouen (Normandy), Rennes (Brittany), Grenoble (Alpine east), Douai (north), Dijon (Burgundy), Metz and Nancy (Franco-Germanic northeast), Pau (Navarre, Pyrenees), Bordeaux (Guienne, southwest), and Toulouse (Languedoc). Search the internet to find images of these provincial *Parlements*.

## Paternalism

Paternalism is a particular aspect of male authority, whether of kings, fathers or uncles. In seeking to protect, the father-figure (*pater* in Latin) restricts the agency and the freedom of the people whom they claim to protect. Under paternalistic forms of authority, the subject persons are usually female, whether daughters or wives.

## Political and Government systems

In the *Old-Regime* system of government, there was no separation of powers. Through agents and appointees, the King exercised all legislative, judicial and executive powers. To make law, the King simply issued edicts. But edicts had to be registered before they became law. In *Pays d'états* (the ‘newer’ provinces, those with Provincial Estates (*États provinciaux*) and those with *Parlements* view the map [here](#)), the King’s edicts had to be registered in the Provincial Estates or in the 13 different regional *Parlements*. In the *Pays d'élections* (i.e. in the old heartland provinces), the King’s edicts might or might not need registration. The King’s nominee as Chancellor (*Chancelier*), backed by noble Secretaries (*Secrétaires*) headed up the King’s judicial, diplomatic and administrative work, mixing executive and judicial roles. The Comptroller General of Finances (*Contrôleur général des finances*) managed state budgets. Local administration in the towns, was handled by a confusing and varying mix of Town Councils (dominated by nobles ‘of the clock’—*noblesse de cloche*) and royal appointees (*Intendants* and their *Sub-Délégués*). Local administration in the countryside was managed by an equally confusing mix of *Intendants*, beholden to the king, and local tax courts and Provincial Estates

more likely to be out to preserve local conditions and privileges.

### Représentants en mission

Représentants en mission were members of the *National Convention* and their *sans-culotte* agents who had received full powers (as plenipotentiaries) to deal with crises relating to the church, war, counter-revolution and speculation in France in 1793–94. Between March 1793 and March 1794, *représentants en mission* came and went with their revolutionary armies (*armées révolutionnaires*) of sans-culottes and their portable guillotines in tow. The passing of the Law on Revolutionary Government (4 December 1793 / 14 *Frimaire* II) and the formal disbanding of the *armées révolutionnaires* (27 March 1794 / 7 *Germinal* II) signalled a new phase in Jacobin rule: the end of anarchic and anti-Christian terror. A new phase of centralised terror began. It culminated in the kangaroo courts of the Law of 10 June 1794 / 22 *Prairial* II, and Robespierre's promotion of a new religion, the Cult of the Supreme Being, 8 June 1794 / 20 *Prairial* II. Centralised terror lasted until the overthrow and execution of Robespierre (26–27 July 1794) / 8–9 *Thermidor* II.

### Second Estate

The Second Estate was the nobility.

### Seigneurial

Seigneur was a French name for a person, originally a noble, who owned the right to exact levies in produce or cash over lands that her or his family no longer owned. From the late medieval era in France, Flanders and The Netherlands, the peasants generally owned the lands they farmed, but they still had to compensate their descendants of their former *feudal* lords for the loss of the ancestral patrimonies. *Seigneurie* was the abstract noun in French for the rights to earn an income from lands which had once been owned by a noble. The holder of a *seigneurie* recorded his hunting rights over the lands and his rights to certain shares of the income from the land in a seigneurial deed, and he or she generally had the important privilege of adding a seigneurial title to their name: “van” and “van der” in Flemish-Dutch, “de” in French, and “von” in German. These titles were keenly sought, as they conferred status; they linked their holders to a distinct location, often was the base for a fine home (*château*). Seigneuries could also be bought and sold; i.e., you bought the title, the income stream, the big house, but not over some or all of the agricultural land that the peasants owned and tilled. These sorts of purchases were often resented by peasants, as the new owners might be absentee, they might not even be noble (*roturiers*), and they were probably wealthier people who had no customary ties with the villages and villagers funding the seigneurie.

### Sol

More commonly known as a ‘sou’, this was a copper or silver coin formerly used in France. Worth 12 deniers, it was a twentieth part of one livre.

## Sovereignty

The concept of sovereignty expresses an idea about the extent, scope and nature of the exercise of power. In early-modern France, sovereignty was conceived as absolute in the monarch. Montesquieu advocated the division of power; absolute power only encouraged despotism; power was better divided and shared. With Rousseau, there arose the ideas of the sovereignty of the people, or national sovereignty, and therefore of law as an expression of a contract between the rulers and the ruled so as to implement the general will. In the political crisis of 1788-89, there was a further change to ideas of representation: that sovereign authority is capable of being sub-allocated and represented. In this new thinking, if the people were to be considered truly sovereign, those who wielded power on their behalf should be their chosen representatives.

## St. Honoré

This is an elegant district in the west of the city, to the west of the Tuileries, on the right bank of the Seine.

## Tax Farmer

In France, many taxes were collected by people who ‘farmed’ them. They bid in a state auction for the right to collect particular taxes in particular towns and regions. The state received its revenues up-front, without having to employ its own agents. The ‘farmers general’ (*fermiers généraux*) made a profit simply by raising more funds than the state expected. **Tax farmers** were hated in France, as they were almost always extraordinarily wealthy. Allegations of corruption surrounded the auction process. **Tax farmers** routinely secured their revenues by bribing officials, hiring squads of private troops, imposing lucrative supply monopolies, and building walls around towns to force people to pass by their gates and pay their taxes.

## Theatre

Theatre was as important a venue for revolutionary ideas and for socialisation across *estates* (corps) as *cafés*, newspapers and shopping centres like the **Palais Royal**. The third work is an engraving by Claude-Louis Desrais (1746–1816): Boilly and Desrais’ works both seem critical of prostitution (or is it just loose living?) in the **Palais Royal**. This [site](#) glimpses the **Palais Royal** as it is today. [Theatre Database](#) is an excellent and detailed site with useful links to figures like Beaumarchais and Voltaire, whom we encounter shortly. Theatre crowds were not always ‘civilised’. Louis Binet’s [drawing](#) of c1798 of the Foyer of the Montansier Theatre (which was in the **Palais Royal**) focused on relations between theatre-going men and prostitutes. A disdainful [painting](#) by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), now in the Louvre, shows a raucous crowd of ordinary people trying to get inside a theatre, in the case l’Ambigu Comique in 1819, when free tickets are being handed out: . In 1830 he revisited the theme in his [painting](#) of ‘Une loge, un jour de spectacle gratuit’ (‘A theatre Box, on a free ticket day’).

## Third Estate

The Third Estate was ... everybody else, rich or poor, peasant or townsperson.

## Tom Paine

A great defender of the French Revolution, Tom Paine witnessed the Revolution first-hand from September 1789 to March 1790, and again in 1791 until July. He returned from England to Paris in September 1792, joining the National Convention, but was regarded with some distrust by the Jacobins in 1793 because he was English, and because of his opposition to excesses of Terror and the execution of the king. He was detained in Luxembourg prison in Paris, December 1793 to November 1794. His pamphlets defending the Revolution—its reforms (the *Rights of Man*, part 1: Feb. 1791), its republican democracy (the *Rights of Man*, part 2: Feb. 1792) and its anti-clericalism: *The Age of Reason* (1794)—helped shape British-Australian traditions of democratic radicalism. View the Thomas Paine [website](#) and History Guide [website](#) for more information.

## Walls (barrières)

Websites showing the work of architect Charles-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) show customs offices and gates (*barrières*) built by Farmers General (*fermiers généraux*) to funnel goods coming into Paris past tax collectors: his barrier gates still stand in Paris at St Martin, at Denfert-Rochereau (also known as the Barrière d'Enfer) and at Trône: respectively [here](#) [Christophe Civeton, pen and ink, 1829] and [here](#) and at this [site](#) (pencil and watercolour, 1790). As the tax walls were torn down in 1789, no one bothered about the gates! This is why they survived. Other gates built by Ledoux in 1784 are shown at [this website](#) and an early nineteenth century map tracing the 24-km walls and barriers around Paris can be found [here](#). Most large towns in **Old Regime** France had customs gates and walls. In Paris, the Farmers' General wall and most of its 65 gates were demolished by the revolutionaries after July 1789.

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## Version History

Version	Date	Change	Further notes
v1.1	31/05/2022	Replaced some licenced images.	Images that were expiring due to licence agreement ending were replaced with Creative Commons alternatives. 'Police Lieutenant Marc-René d'Argenson scattered the nuns from Port-Royal des Champs' image was removed due to no available Creative Commons alternative.
		Removed full URLs from body text and replaced with hyperlinked words.	



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