

UPRISING!: POLITICAL REVOLUTIONS OF THE 18TH, 19TH, AND 20TH CENTURIES

Chapter Two: The French Revolution

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Deeply embedded in thousands of personal stories is one of the most important and far-reaching legacies of the modern world—the French Revolution. This singular steppingstone—along with the event it attempted to model, the American Revolution—set much of the course for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of Western Civilization. Together, they created a future for democracy and helped bring down an age in which all-powerful kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and czars and czarinas forced their subjects to accept their rule and live under the typical harshness of absolute monarchies. From these revolutions, new nationalistic spirits rose around the world, from Europe to Latin America to Asia to Africa, and helped usher in new hope for common people everywhere.

To an extent, the changes brought about by these popular revolts continue to find advocates even today. Most of the countries of the world accept some level of democratic action and thought on the part of their people. Such fortunate citizens are recognized as having individual rights—including the power of the vote, the protection of a trial by jury, and representation by elected officials. Even the concept of being a “citizen” of a nation, of having an identity as an equal among, perhaps, millions of other citizens—the modern redefinition of the relationship between the people and their government—finds its modern roots in the American and French Revolutions.

Yet these two revolutions carry the weight of two extremely different histories. Only six years separated the end of the American Revolutionary War (1783) and the beginning of open rebellion against the French king Louis XVI (1789). But while both these revolutions began as expressions of the desire for all men to be free, they ended with completely different results.

In the American colonies, the revolution of George Washington, Patrick Henry, John and Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin seemed to follow a singular track from beginning to end: the point of their uprising was to redefine the relationship between the colonies and the Mother Country. In the end, the decision was to break all ties and establish an independent people and nation.

France’s revolution, on the other hand, became extremely complicated and multidirectional. Rarely did all the elements of support within the revolution even agree with one another. It opened in 1789 with a widely accepted goal of establishing moderate reforms while leaving the French monarchy intact. It was derailed by a narrow-minded group of paranoid politicians who ran the state through intimidation and terror and ordered the executions of both King Louis XVI and the queen, Marie Antoinette. It ended with the French economy and social structure in a shambles, no constitution, and government in the hands of a poorly run, ineffective committee that relied too much on support from the military for its own good. The French Revolution was, then, “not one event but many. It failed to achieve some of the changes that were desired in 1789, and it led to many that were not foreseen.”¹

Absolute Monarchy

Of all the places in Europe where revolution could have taken root and blossomed during the eighteenth century, France was one that few at the time might have expected. During the late 1600s and early 1700s, France was the dominant European power, a state with a strong monarch and the largest population (more than 20 million people) of any country on the Continent. Louis XIV (1661–1715) had exemplified the figure of the true absolute monarch. However, even though he was an autocratic ruler, he was a skillful administrator, led his people into successful wars, and oversaw a French economy that was growing in international scope and proportion. Even those of the peasant class were typically better off under Louis than others of their same class in Europe. Forty percent of France’s farmlands were owned by peasants.

French monarchs such as Louis XIV often held power by granting special favors to the upper class—the aristocracy—the socioeconomic group that traditionally opposed strong monarchies. In general, by the 1700s, the

people of France fit into one of three important classes—the clergy (the First Estate), the aristocracy (the Second Estate), and the Third Estate, or the commoners. Such classes had been in place for hundreds of years. Most of the taxes were paid by the Third Estate, since monarchs would grant the aristocracy special favors and exempt them from paying taxes. It was the tax issue perhaps more than any other that helped drive the nation of France into revolution.

The tax structure in France was complicated, lopsided, and unfair. Two types of taxes were common—direct and indirect. Of the direct taxes, perhaps none was hated in France more than the *taille*. This tax was paid only by those who were members of France’s Third Estate. The tax was not even the same from one province to another. However, it was paid “almost entirely by the rural population.”² The capitation, or poll tax, and the *vingtieme*, a form of income tax, were barely paid by the nobility, if at all. (The *vingtieme* [twentieths] was originally a five percent tax on income, but it had been doubled during the reign of Louis XIV.) Clergy were generally exempted from taxes, paying only the *don gratuit*, a miniscule tax at best.

These direct taxes were only half the story. Indirect taxes were equally burdensome, particularly the customs duties and the *gabelle*, or salt tax. In most of the provinces, anyone over the age of eight years was required to purchase seven pounds of salt annually, on which they were forced to pay the *gabelle*. This was because the government of France held a monopoly on the sale of salt. To add to the injustice, the tax varied from province to province. In some places the salt tax was high, while in others, salt was nearly tax-free. For this reason, salt prices in one province might be 12 times higher than in another province. However, the populace was forced, by law, to buy salt only in their home provinces. It was this combination of high and unequal taxation that set many against the French government. Since most of the tax burden was placed on the backs of those least able to pay, many members of the Third Estate were desperate for some relief.

While taxes played a significant long-term role in bringing about the French Revolution, there were other, more immediate reasons that had developed during the late eighteenth century. For one, the French economy, by the 1780s, was falling apart. During the late 1770s and early 1780s, King Louis XVI (1774–1793) supported the American Revolution by providing troops, war material, weapons, ships—and money. Entering the war as an American ally in 1778, the French monarch was not interested in democracy or independence as much as in giving France—one of Great Britain’s staunchest enemies—an opportunity to limit the power of the British monarchy. By the late 1780s, the French government was so deeply in debt that its annual interest payments were equal to half the government’s annual income.

Realizing the government was facing bankruptcy, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, the minister of finance, published a report in 1787 on the country’s desperate need for money, suggesting serious tax reform. But members of the nobility responded with loud opposition, and Louis XVI fired Calonne. A member of the clergy, Archbishop Lomenie de Brienne, followed Calonne as finance minister. His proposals were blocked by several of France’s parlements, or law courts, which were dominated by members of the nobility. In the parlement of Paris, representing nearly two out of every five French citizens, the magistrates refused to register the tax proposals. (One of the parlement’s purposes was to register all royal edicts, including those pertaining to taxes.)

As his father and his grandfather before him had done, Louis XVI banished the Paris parlement from the city in August 1787, but when the people expressed a loud protest, he called the parlement back into session in the French capital. For the next year the king engaged in a political tug-of-war with his parlements, again abolishing the Paris parlement in May 1788, only to reinstate the judiciary body in September.

Recalling the Estates General

By that time, Brienne had been removed, and Louis had appointed a replacement, Jacques Necker. As had others before him, Necker advised the king to call the Estates General back into session. (Made up of the three estates, the Estates General was a medieval institution which traditionally had held power to advise French rulers and vote on establishing new taxes.) Throughout 1787 and 1788, nearly all of the country’s dozen or so parlements pressed the king to recall the Estates General, but the Estates General had not met for nearly 175 years. Through those years, French monarchs such as Louis’s grandfather, Louis XIV, had become so powerful that they had relied on the Estates General less and less, until the body was ignored completely. Desperate for answers, his treasury running out of money fast, Louis finally agreed and ordered the Estates General to take up session at his palace at Versailles, outside the city of Paris, in May 1789.

By spring, the situation across France had grown almost unbearable for the average peasant farmer. With the government nearly penniless, the country was experiencing an economic depression. As one modern historian noted:

In some ways, the timing of the great summons could hardly have been worse. The proclamation went out in August; the estates met the following May. In between, one of the century's worst harvests guaranteed that the majority of French people, at one of the most critical moments in the nation's history, would be hungry.³

On May 2, 1789, the delegates of the Estates General met with the king in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, a grand salon richly decorated with marble sculpture and lit up by 14 crystal chandeliers. As the members of the three estates prepared to enter the hall and the king's presence, it became clear to the members of the Third Estate they were considered less important. After ushering in the clergy and nobility of the other two estates, Louis XVI made the Third Estate to wait three hours before they were given audience—not in the Hall of Mirrors, but in a separate room and for only a short period of time.

It was one of the first clear signs to the members of the Third Estate they were going to be considered of secondary importance to the king during the confrontational days ahead. It was a station the Third Estate did not intend to accept. Prior to the May 1789 meeting at Versailles, several political pamphlets had been published and read by the members of the Third Estate. One such tract, titled *What Is the Third Estate?* and written by a priest, the Abbe Emmanuel Sieyes, asked and answered several important questions directly: "What is the Third Estate?" Answer: *Everything*. "What has it been until now in the political order?" Answer: *Nothing*. "What does it want to be?" Answer: *Something*.⁴

Such works and ideas often reflected the beliefs and political theories of the eighteenth-century French philosophes, or philosophers, men such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire. Neither philosopher accepted the idea that a royal monarch ruled by the will of God. Instead, they had argued, government should be directed by the will of the people. Rousseau had written one of the great slogans of the Enlightenment period, which spoke volumes: "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains."⁵

Although the Third Estate represented the masses of the peasants and poorer citizenry, it also represented the French middle class—lawyers, doctors, and professional men who did not fit into either of the old medieval institutions of the aristocracy or clergy. In fact, half of the delegates comprising the Third Estate in the Estates General in 1789 were lawyers. The Third Estate also included some priests, such as Abbe Sieyes, as well as some members of the nobility.

Another disappointment was how the estates were represented at Versailles. When the Paris parlement recalled the Estates General back in the fall of 1788, the court decided the estates would be equally represented with 300 delegates each, just as they had been during their last meeting in 1614. This was despite the fact that the Third Estate represented 98 percent of the country's 25 million people. The Third Estate quickly understood that the other two estates could easily vote them down on every issue, having the power of two-thirds of the vote. The king intervened, under the guidance of Jacques Necker, and doubled the number of Third Estate delegates to 600 in December 1788 in an effort to gain the support of the people. Yet even this "doubling of the Third" would not reflect the vast number of people the delegates of the Third Estate represented.

Many of the delegates of the Third Estate had arrived at Versailles unprepared to fall in line and obey the wishes of the king. They were anxious to spend their time changing the structure of the French government and were intent on expanding their power base as the true representatives of the people. When, on May 5, they were forced to listen to a three-hour-long lecture from Necker on the need for more taxes and on how the delegates must fall in line or be dismissed by the king, the Third Estate began making a psychological break from the existing French government.

The National Assembly

During the weeks that followed, the delegates of the Third Estate refused to do the king's business, took no votes, listened to no debate on taxes, and generally remained in a foul mood. Their appointed leader, Jean Sylvain Bailly, a noted French astronomer, stood firm in his resolve to steer away from what was expected by the king. At one point, First Estate clergymen were sent in to convince them to change their minds and their tactics, but the Third Estate only dug in its heels. By mid-June, things were beginning to turn in a different direction. Members of the clergy, poor parish priests generally, abandoned their colleagues and began joining the Third Estate. One priest declared: "The village priests may not have the talents of Academicians, but they have at least the sound common sense of villagers!"⁶ Approximately half of the clergy joined the Third Estate and as many as one out of five

members of the nobility also came over and began meeting with them. The enlightened tide of support was falling to the Third Estate.

Then, on June 17, the Third Estate and those who had joined its ranks took a bold step. Abbe Sieyes proposed a motion, which the delegates approved, declaring themselves a “National Assembly.” By definition, this assembly saw its members as “the only representatives legally and publicly recognized...by almost the entire nation.”⁷ With that one vote, the Third Estate took on the legislative power of all the estates. The delegates then formally invited anyone from the other two estates to join with them. On the June 19, the clergy voted to join with the National Assembly.

Events were now moving quickly out of the king’s grasp. Faced with a decision to support the National Assembly or defy it, Louis XVI chose defiance. On the rainy morning of June 20, when the National Assembly members arrived at their meeting chamber, they found themselves locked out on the king’s orders. (A note later arrived from Louis explaining the hall was being renovated.) As the delegates stood in the rain, one of their number, Dr. Joseph Guillotin, who would later invent a device for state executions, pointed to an indoor tennis court and suggested the delegates take refuge there.

The court, which had high ceilings painted black so the aristocratic sons who gathered there to play tennis could see the white ball, was soon packed with hundreds of excited and angry delegates who knew they were facing a stubborn king. President Bailly tried to call for order, but at times there were more than a hundred angry men on their feet, waving for attention and attempting to make themselves heard above the din. It was late in the afternoon before the meeting came to order. A motion was read, one amounting to a pledge among the delegates: “The National Assembly...decrees that every member...shall take a solemn oath not to separate...until the constitution of the realm is established on firm foundations.”⁸ All but one of the assembled delegates, their clothes wet with rain, took the oath.

The challenge to the king and the monarchy’s long-established authority was direct, and Louis XVI’s response was immediate. He called a Royal Session of the Estates General, and, in the presence of the angry Third Estate, he vetoed the National Assembly’s challenge and ordered the delegates to return to their separate meetings and take up the business for which they had been summoned—taxation. He would not tolerate any attempt to create a constitution. As the king left the hall, followed by the vast majority of the gathered nobles of the Second Estate, the delegates of the Third Estate sat unmoving. They remained defiant, as one of their leaders, Comte de Mirabeau, stood and shouted to a royal official: “Tell your master that we are assembled here by the will of the people, and that we will leave only at the point of a bayonet!”⁹ President Bailly added his own shouts of defiance: “The nation is assembled here, and it takes no orders.”¹⁰ A serious clash of wills was, indeed, underway.

The king soon found himself locked in a conflict that pitted old ideas of royal rule against new theories of representative government. He was uncertain how to approach the complicated situation. In the days that followed, he was counseled to use force against the National Assembly. (One nobleman suggested that “He who wishes an omelette must not shrink from breaking eggs!”¹¹) But Louis XVI was, in the end, a weak-willed monarch who, on June 27, ordered the three estates to meet together, a victory the Third Estate savored. Before the end of the day, more than two out of every three members of the Estates General had joined the National Assembly. Within another two weeks, nearly all the remaining 400 delegates had also joined. Wasting little time, the delegates at Versailles began to hammer out the details of a national constitution, the first in the long history of the French people.

The Spread of Revolution

Defiance of the French government and a strong desire for political reform was not limited that hot summer of 1789 to events centered at Versailles. A revolutionary spirit was spreading across the countryside and throughout the streets of Paris itself. During the exciting weeks that followed the creation of the National Assembly, unrest swept across the city.

By July 13, more than 15,000 foreign troops, Swiss and German mercenaries hired by the king, were stationed in and around the city. Many of the king’s own guard had already thrown themselves in with the National Assembly the previous month. The French guards of the Paris garrison who had refused to take up arms against any revolutionaries had been imprisoned in their own barracks. Rumors flew across the city that the king intended to destroy the National Assembly. Such rumors were not far from the truth. Before the month was over, Paris witnessed extreme outbreaks of political violence, including street riots.

On July 14, when word reached the people of Paris that Louis had three days earlier fired Necker, the one man who had been advising the king to pursue a moderate course with the National Assembly, the city exploded.

Angry crowds filled the streets, joined by the French guards, who had liberated themselves from their barracks. Everywhere they could find them, citizens seized weapons, including those from a royal storeroom in the Tuileries Palace in Paris, where rioters stole “ornamental guns and some cannon given to King Louis by the king of Siam.”¹² One group of rioters engaged in a dawn raid of the Invalides, an old soldiers’ hospital, where they found 30,000 muskets stored. Armed with empty weapons, the rioters went in search of powder and shot. Rumors told of a large cache of gunpowder at an old fourteenth-century medieval prison on the outskirts of the city known as the Bastille. To the people of Paris, it was a hated symbol of tyranny and was allegedly filled with political prisoners. Its defensive garrison included a few dozen Swiss guards and 82 old soldiers.

A standoff developed between the rioters and the governor of the Bastille, Marquis Bernard de Launay, who repeatedly refused to surrender the fortress. When the rioters began firing on the troops manning the 90-foot-high walls of the inner fortress of the Bastille, the defenders fired off their cannon, killing several of the besiegers. But just after noon the mob managed to open up the outer drawbridge and swarmed into the inner court.

Late in the day, as Launay watched the rioters drag up the cannon of the king of Siam, he offered to surrender the gunpowder stored inside for free passage for himself and his men. Although the leader of the riot, Lieutenant Elie of the French guard, accepted the terms, the crowd did not. When the inner drawbridge was lowered, the mob swarmed in and took the garrison prisoner. In no time, three of the Bastille’s defenders were hanged on a city lamppost, while three others were hacked to death. As for Launay, his throat was cut and his head was severed and paraded around the angry streets of Paris on a pitchfork. Also among those killed in the storming of the Bastille were about one hundred of the besieging mob.

The rioters did find gunpowder stored in the Bastille, but no political prisoners. That summer, the old prison held only seven convicts, including two lunatics, four forgers, and a seventh who had been imprisoned for sex crimes.

While perhaps having little actual significance as a key event in the history of the early French Revolution, the actions taken by the rioters soon took on a symbolism of their own. Today, July 14 is celebrated as a French holiday of independence—Bastille Day.

Such events as the storming of the Bastille were difficult for the members of the National Assembly to understand. Additional acts of violence were also taking place, such as the raiding of castles, chateaus, and manor houses owned by members of the aristocracy. Outside Paris, rural peasants inspired by the fall of the Bastille attacked local symbols of authority, such as noblemen and their families. Aristocratic targets were killed and peasants tore through their victims’ homes in search of the documents that identified the peasants as serfs bound to certain landowners. Such records were burned and otherwise destroyed.

Across France royal authorities from Versailles to Paris to rural estates were losing their grip as revolutionary fever spread. Fearing for their lives, many members of the French aristocracy packed up their families and fled the country, including the king’s own brother, who sought asylum in Holland. Historians would later refer to the abandonment of France by its aristocracy as the “Great Fear.”

The Rights of Man

In the meantime, Louis XVI remained uncertain of the steps he should take in response to the events taking place around him. When he was awakened from sleep by one of his officials after the fall of the Bastille, Louis responded: “It is a revolt.” The courtier informed him: “No, Sire, it is a revolution.”¹³

On June 15, he dismissed his troops at Versailles as the National Assembly had requested. Revolutionaries convinced him to come into Paris to show his support for the revolution. The king agreed, but was so uncertain of what lay ahead for him in the city that he made out his will before leaving the palace at Versailles. The king arrived in Paris on July 17, and he accepted the tricolor, the symbol of the revolution, from the revolutionary mayor of the city, Jean Sylvain Bailly, who placed the cockade in the brim of the king’s hat. (The cockade was a circular symbol of three colors, including white, the color of Louis’s family, the Bourbons, and red and blue, the colors of Paris.)

The gathered crowd of Parisians cheered wildly. This action, plus the fact that Louis had not unleashed his mercenary troops to put down the revolution, indicated the king’s support for sweeping change in the French government. Perhaps, many thought, France could create a constitutional monarchy similar to Great Britain’s. During the days that followed, quiet was restored to the city and the countryside, as the revolutionary National Guard fanned out across the rural areas to maintain civil order. One of the great revolutionary figures, the Marquis de Lafayette, who had served George Washington during the American Revolution, was appointed as commander of the National Guard. Throughout much of the revolution, Lafayette remained a voice of moderation.

National Assembly delegates labored intensely at Versailles writing a new constitution. Just weeks after the king's visit to Paris, the assembly produced a series of reforms, many voted on during the night of August 4 in a sudden and intense burst of enthusiasm. It proved a remarkable night of sweeping political change. As aristocrats within the National Assembly agreed to give up their feudal power, the assembly voted to abolish all serfdom and end special privileges for the aristocracy.

Before the end of the month, the assembly had voted to accept a document symbolizing the revolution and its developing ideals. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was largely the work of the Marquis de Lafayette, who patterned whole portions of the important political statement after the American Declaration of Independence. Lafayette and the author of the American document, Thomas Jefferson, were friends, and the American patriot was in Paris during the summer of 1789.

Although the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and the Declaration of Independence are different in many aspects, they do mirror one another in important ways. The words of Thomas Jefferson proved an inspiration to revolutionaries in Europe as well as in America. However, it appears that Jefferson's influence on the French document was not limited to merely providing an earlier document as a guide. For example, compare these two excerpts, the first from the French Declaration: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression....The source of all sovereignty is...in the nation." The following are words from the opening of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The French Declaration included an extensive list of each person's natural rights. The document reflected the best of Enlightened thought and would serve as the philosophical base for the constitution the National Assembly was intent on producing. It was a middle-class statement of basic liberties, including property rights and the concept of equality. No more would class rank determine a person's position in French society; each individual would stand before the law as an equal. There were guarantees of the freedom of speech, of the press, and of religious toleration. But at the core of the document was the statement that the power of the French government rested not in the hands of the monarch but with the citizens themselves.

The National Assembly voted to adopt the Declaration of the Rights of Men on August 26, 1789. Enthusiastic revolutionaries across France were soon reading the foundational document as hundreds of thousands of copies were printed.

With the passage of the Declaration and the recognition of the rights of French citizens, many people gained a renewed sense of drive and purpose regarding the revolution. However, when the king refused to sign the document, rumors soon spread that Louis XVI was not a true supporter of the changes enacted by the National Assembly. His words seemed to prove such suspicions, as he declared: "I will never consent to the spoliation [plunder] of my clergy or my nobility, and I will not sanction decrees which seek to despoil them."¹⁴ Perhaps he was thinking of himself as well, for the Declaration clearly shifted the base of power away from the monarchy and into the hands of the people.

The March on Versailles

Weeks passed, the king remained obstinate, the revolution's future seemed unclear, and the people of Paris were becoming more angry by the day. Making matters worse were serious bread shortages across the city that had plagued poorer Parisians for months. France had experienced several poor farming seasons, including that year's harvest. Bread riots had become common throughout the summer of 1789. On the morning of October 5, many of the bakers' shops in the slum neighborhoods had no bread for sale. Throughout the morning, angry working women gathered and rallied in the streets, breaking into buildings and stealing muskets. In time, their numbers had swelled to seven or eight thousand.

Under a stormy sky of gray, thousands of working women, fishwives, and a few men who joined their ranks (some even joined the march dressed in women's clothing) began marching out of the city to see the king himself at Versailles. They would demand that he supply them with food. Many of those who participated in the "March of the Women to Versailles" were armed with muskets, knives, pitchforks, pikes, and hand scythes.

Many of the women knew the way to Versailles. The queen, Marie Antoinette, had made a practice of inviting the market women of Paris to her palace every August 25, the feast day of Saint-Louis. At the 1789 event, 1,200

poor women of Paris had attended, delivering bouquets of flowers to the king and queen while carrying a banner reading: “Homage to Louis XVI, the Best of Kings.”¹⁵

After traipsing through an afternoon of rain, the women reached Versailles at around 5:30 P.M. They moved into the hall where the National Assembly was meeting, causing immediate pandemonium. Some of the women tore off their stockings and skirts and threw them over the gallery railings to dry out. The scene was chaotic, causing the delegates to halt their business: “Wet broadcloth, smelling of mud and rain, planted itself beside fastidious coats and breeches. Knives and clubs were set down on empty chairs, dripping onto papers printed with items of legislative debate.”¹⁶ The demand for bread came from every corner of the room, and the women insisted they be given an audience with Louis. When a small group was ushered in to speak to the king, their leader, a 17-year-old flower girl, lost her nerve and fainted in front of Louis. But Louis was charming, telling the women: “You know my heart. I will order all the bread in Versailles to be collected and given to you.”¹⁷

After Louis promised bread for Paris, the crowd settled down for the night as thousands of people tried to find any place they could to lie down and recover from an eventful day. Near midnight, Lafayette belatedly arrived at Versailles along with 20,000 National Guards to provide some protection for the king and to try and keep order. Later in the night, a small group of marchers broke into the bedroom of the queen and tried to assassinate her. (The guards stationed to protect her were carrying unloaded pistols, an order issued by Louis himself. Two guards were decapitated and their heads placed on pikes, then paraded around the Versailles grounds.) Only the intervention of Lafayette and some of his guardsmen saved the royal family. The attack had awakened many around the grounds. Lafayette convinced the king and queen to go out on a balcony and greet the people. But when they did, the mob below began to chant: “To Paris, to Paris!”

Writing the Constitution

The day had dawned with great change in store for the royal family. With Lafayette’s assurance of protection, the king and queen agreed to leave Versailles and take up residence in the city. That day, the huge crowd at the king’s palace—the Parisian women, the National Guardsmen, several of the members of the National Assembly—trudged back to Paris. Many of the women carried loaves of bread taken from the palace kitchens and wagons full of flour from the palace bins. It was a humiliating day for the royals, as many of the lower-class women shouted insults at the king and the queen, whom they hated greatly, calling the royal pair and their son, “the baker, the baker’s wife, and the baker’s lad.”¹⁸ The Austrian Marie Antoinette was not popular and was known as a spendthrift, wasting enormous sums on her clothing and jewelry while the French people starved. As the royals left Versailles, they could not know they would never set foot on the royal grounds ever again. The palace was boarded up, great iron locks were placed on its gates, and a handful of guards were left to keep looters out.

The chants sung by the women of Paris mocked their new relationship with the king:

*[Now] we won’t have to go so far
When we want to see our King
We love him with a love without equal
Since he’s come to live in our Capital.*¹⁹

That evening, October 6, the procession of thousands reached Paris and the royal family was placed in an old royal house, the Tuileries Palace, where no monarch had lived in a hundred years. The king’s son summed up his feelings about his new home in a few words: “It’s very ugly.”²⁰

With the virtual imprisonment of the king and his family, the revolution had taken a clear turn. While earlier events had been often focused on the work of the National Assembly at Versailles, the new center of the revolution was to be Paris. The National Assembly removed themselves to the city, meeting in the Manege—the grounds of a former riding school near the Tuileries, “a mere stone’s throw from the palace.”²¹

Yet even as the National Assembly continued its work on a constitution, many of the delegates who filled its ranks were not the same ones that had come as members of the Estates General. After the king’s removal to Paris, 300 members of the Assembly panicked, especially those loyal to the idea of continuing a monarchy. Many of them would leave France completely over the following year. From that point on, those who served in the National Assembly were members of one of three splinter groups within the revolutionary body. The largest was composed of moderates, called the Patriots and led by Lafayette, and included such men as Mirabeau and Abbe Sieyes. They wanted to see a constitution written that retained the monarchy. Another, smaller group, the Royalists or Monarchists, wanted the Revolution to come to an end and a powerful monarchy left intact, along with a reinstated

nobility. The third party, the Extremists, wanted to create a democracy similar to that of the United States, with no king or royal family. Their fiery leader was a Parisian lawyer named Maximilien Robespierre. (Since the Extremists were seated on the left and the Royalists on the right of the assembly hall at the Manège, the terms “left” and “right” remain today as words describing those who are “liberal” or “conservative.”)

Over the following two years, the National Assembly remained constant in its commitment to create France’s first constitution. Debates were usually emotional, and many sub factions existed within the ranks of the Patriots, Monarchists, and Extremists, slowing the progress on the constitution. There were protracted debates over how much power the monarchy should be allowed; what form a new legislature should take; whether court judges should be elected or chosen; how to put the Catholic Church under state control; and how to reorganize the country into new political divisions called departments, abandoning the traditional 140 bishoprics. Church-related issues often drew great divisions between the revolutionaries, especially those who were clergymen. In the end, the constitution, when finished, was only acceptable to about half the clergy involved.

During these two heady years of political debate and change, a political organization called the Jacobin Club was gaining new power on a street level across France, often taking control of local politics. Across the land, many moderates were being pushed aside, and the radicals, those who often projected the loudest voices and made the most promises to the peasants and poorer people, gained new ground daily. As the revolution appeared to take on a darker edge, the royal family became increasingly concerned about their own fates. By the early summer of 1791, Louis and Marie made a serious decision—they decided to try to escape France.

A Royal Escape

The escape plot was hatched by a Swedish nobleman, one loyal to the queen, named Axel Fersen. The main plan called for the royal family to sneak out of the Tuileries at night, despite the presence of hundreds of National Guardsmen patrolling the palace grounds, then move across the French countryside disguised as German noble family. On the evening of June 21, the escape unfolded. Fersen brought a coach to the palace and picked up the royal children, the king’s son dressed as a young girl. The king and queen sneaked out on foot, separately to avoid suspicion, she disguised as their children’s governess and Louis as a servant. At one point, Marie hid in the shadows undetected, while Lafayette passed close by, making his usual rounds. She also became “lost in the dark alleys round the Tuileries, taking half an hour before finding the carriage with its anxious passengers.”²² Once the family was free, they had only to endure a long carriage ride to the French border.

But from the beginning the escape went poorly. Despite Fersen’s insistence that the family travel in a speedy, light carriage, the king insisted that they make their escape in a large, heavy, black and green coach, with bright yellow wheels, one fit for a king. This slowed their movements (they even had two carriage accidents along the way), covering only about seven miles an hour. Yet the royal party remained in good spirits, relieved they would soon be free from the control of unpredictable revolutionaries.

Despite their slow speed, the party pushed on toward the French border. But their escape had been discovered, and revolutionary riders were sending the word out across the countryside. At the frontier town of Sainte-Menehould, a local postmaster first recognized the queen from his days in the cavalry and the king by comparing his face with the one of Louis that had been printed on the new money, the assignat notes. The postmaster, Jean Baptiste Drouet, raced ahead to the town of Varennes and alerted the local revolutionary guard. At around 11 P.M., the royal entourage reached the frontier village of Varennes, where the family was finally arrested after a long day of haphazard escape. They had nearly managed to escape from the clutches of the revolution. From Varennes to the border was less than 20 miles.

The return of the royal family to Paris was a five-day humiliation. People lined the roads and jeered as the royal carriage lumbered by. Although the weather was miserably hot, the royals closed themselves inside the carriage, leaving the curtains shut. On the evening of June 25, as the entourage reached the city of Paris, there was an ominous silence as the carriage slowly rolled through the streets. Lafayette, who had been humiliated by the royals and their escape, had “enjoined [the crowd] to remain absolutely silent to show the King...the feelings his trip had inspired.”²³ Signs across Paris read: “Anyone who applauds the King will be beaten.”²⁴ Louis and Marie reached the Tuileries against the backdrop of a gloomy silence. Against custom and to show their disrespect to the king, the Jacobins recommended that the crowd keep their hats on and refuse to salute the monarch. Even “several scullery-boys without hats covered their heads with their dirty, filthy handkerchiefs.”²⁵ The fates of Louis and Marie, as well as the monarchy itself, were now more uncertain than ever.

Revolutionary Parties

The king soon began rebuilding support for himself. He announced his support for the new constitution, which was completed and voted on by the National Assembly on September 30, 1791. The constitution marked the singular progress the revolution had made since the spring of 1789. Hundreds of delegates had stayed the course, living up to the promise they made on the tennis court at Versailles: with the constitution in place, the National Assembly disbanded. For many, the fall of 1791 seemed to mark the completion of the revolution. The constitution was completed and royal authority had been reined in, ending hundreds of years of absolute rule. Medieval serfdom and feudalism were done away with, along with special privilege for the nobility and clergy. The people could elect their own judges, and the Catholic Church had been stripped of its special powers.

But for all these successes, the revolution was not over for many. While great strides had been made, France still faced both old and new worries. The economic problems that had led to the revolution had not been solved; in fact, they were worse. Food prices were high, bread was still in short supply, and bread riots were still plaguing the country. During the years of revolution, new paper money, called assignats, had been printed in large numbers, lowering its value. Inflation was a constant problem. In addition, the revolution had led such powers as Austria (Marie's home country) and Prussia to announce their intent to go to war against France to restore the monarchy to its full power. In late August, Austria and Prussia signed an agreement, the Declaration of Pillnitz, which included a clear statement to the French revolutionaries that both countries would "act promptly, by common consent and with such force as might be needed" to protect and preserve the French monarchy.

As the new Legislative Assembly (the body that replaced the National Assembly) met for the first time on October 1, 1791, the members faced these problems and more. Since the new constitution banned all former members of the National Assembly from holding office in the Legislative Assembly, the latter's members represented a new political group. Many were young, middle class, and untested in the fires of political leadership. Infighting and political rivalries soon overshadowed the French legislature.

While the Jacobins had been around since 1789, the political group had split into two factions, the Girondins and the Feuillants—both represented in the Legislative Assembly. The Feuillants were moderates who wanted to see the monarchy remain viable. One of their leaders was Lafayette, who had been one of the original Jacobins. The Girondins were idealists who sought a republican form of government, an end to monarchy, and the exportation of the revolution to other European countries.

There was yet another political group, one operating in the streets of Paris. This group, the Cordeliers, were urban workers, artisans, and small businessmen who did not feel the revolution had won them very much. By 1791, they were prepared to stake their claim to a portion of French political power as well.

That spring, with the constant threat posed to Marie Antoinette, Austria appeared ready for war. The Girondins were anxious to spread the revolution and succeeded in convincing King Louis to come before the Legislative Assembly and declare war on Austria (although the Jacobins, led by Robespierre, were officially opposed to war). The king's decision was a calculated political move on his part. He hoped that such a war would cause many French citizens to turn against the revolution and support him.

However, when the king made the call for war, it caused an immediate rift between the Girondins and the Jacobins. The French army performed badly in battle, and one French general was even hanged by his troops for cowardice. When things went poorly for the French troops in the field, the blame was placed on the shoulders of the Girondins, who had supported war. By midsummer of 1792, Paris was once again simmering with frustrated citizens, especially the Girondins. (Known as the "sans-culottes," the Girondins were comprised mostly of Parisian workers, who wore long pants instead of the knee breeches and stockings of the type worn by members of the aristocracy.)

The sans-culottes became furious with the king when he vetoed the Legislative Assembly's order that 20,000 *federes*, or provincial troops, be moved to the city to protect Paris. On the night of June 10, 1792, nearly 8,000 sans-culottes marched to the Tuileries Palace, armed with pikes, swords, and pitchforks. Shouting, "Down with the veto!" the crowd broke into the Tuileries, physically jostled the king, and forced him to put on the *bonnet rouge*, "the red stocking-cap that had recently appeared as the mark of the sans-culottes."²⁶ They ordered Louis to drink a toast to the revolution, while the queen and their son hid beneath a table. Yet, despite the immediate threat of the sans-culottes, the king refused to rescind his veto. The mob finally broke up and left, dissatisfied. But they would be back.

The Revolution of August 10

During the weeks that followed, thousands of sans-culottes began holding meetings, intent on pressing their goals for the Revolution. In Paris, they began calling themselves a revolutionary municipal assembly, and clamored for the destruction of the monarchy and the deposing of Louis. The group set a date—August 9—for the king’s removal; the sans-culottes promised a counterrevolution if it did not take place. However, the king stood firm, and the Legislative Assembly made no moves to remove him.

On the hot, muggy night of August 9, 1792, the revolutionary municipal assembly illegally took control of the city government and began marching to the Tuileries. In the outer courtyard, 4,000 National Guardsmen, cannon at their sides, were on duty to protect the palace and the royal family. But these guardsmen were actually sympathetic to the citizenry, and as the mob increased in number during the night, the guards finally turned their cannon to face the Tuileries.

Inside the palace, the royal family debated whether to leave or stand firm. Louis, as usual, vacillated. Marie Antoinette wanted to stay and face the mob. There were, after all, 900 loyal Swiss guards in the Tuileries, ready to protect the king. But an adviser informed her that protection would be impossible: “Madame,” he said, “all Paris is marching.”²⁷ As the angry crowd grew to 20,000, the royal family finally fled through the palace gardens to the adjacent Manege, taking refuge in the Legislative Assembly.

This marked the second time Louis and Marie had been forced to abandon a palace, and, as with Versailles, they would never return to the Tuileries. At the Legislative Assembly, the delegates had already left the meeting hall, fearing for their lives. The majority of them never returned to their seats again. The Revolution was collapsing in just one heat-driven, passionate night.

When the mob finally attacked the Tuileries on the morning of August 10, 1792, the destruction was frenzied and bloody. The Swiss guard fought hard, but 500 of their number fell as the mob attacked with fury. Then, word came that Louis had ordered a cease-fire. But even as the Swiss soldiers stopped firing, the sans-culottes surged into the palace, killing everyone inside, including all of the royal family’s servants. The bodies of the Swiss troops were mutilated, some of them even dragged through the city. The mob took from the palace what valuables they could find, destroyed the remaining furniture, then set the old royal house ablaze.

Before the end of the day, the Legislative Assembly was forced to depose the king and order the imprisonment of the royal family. Although the Girondins, who were quickly losing any power, requested the king be installed in yet another palace, the sans-culottes ordered the royals placed in a rundown, gloomy castle that had once housed an order of knights. Here, Louis, Marie and their family were still allowed 20 servants, but their surroundings were less than pleasant. Their guards often sang revolutionary songs to intimidate them, and one guard, knowing of Louis’s dislike of the smell of tobacco, made a habit of blowing his pipe smoke in the king’s face. As for the Legislative Assembly, it was forced to surrender to the sans-culottes, whose Insurrectionary Commune was taking over the government within Paris. The night of August 10 had changed everything for the French Revolution.

Historians recognize that the Revolution turned such a serious corner on the night of August 9–10 that the years of revolt after the attack on the Tuileries essentially comprised a second French Revolution. While these years were a continuation of earlier events, no one could have predicted the course the Revolution would follow by the fall of 1792. With the king’s power removed, the French people no longer lived under a constitutional monarchy, rendering the existing constitution invalid. A new constitution had to be written, this time by delegates elected to a national convention. Since many people refused to participate in these elections or were intimidated from doing so, a minority of French delegates elected the most radical of men, including many Jacobins.

War and Revolution

As the National Convention held its first meeting on September 21, 1792, the delegates faced difficult challenges. Prussia had joined France’s war with Austria as an ally of the Austrians. The radical Jacobins, led by Maximilien Robespierre, called for the execution of Louis XVI, accusing him of treason. By October, the king went on trial before a Revolutionary Tribunal, which found the monarch guilty. Facing 33 counts against him, the king sat through the proceedings wearing a olive green silk coat, and answered questions succinctly and to the best of his ability. But when he heard the charge, “You have caused the blood of Frenchmen to be spilled,” he immediately leaped to his feet, shouting: “No sir! I have never shed the blood of Frenchmen.”²⁸

However, by late January 1793, Louis was found guilty. Although the Girondins wanted Louis’s life spared, the Jacobins and the sans-culottes made certain he was sentenced to death on the guillotine. On January 21, the king of France walked up the steps to the scaffold, his hands tied. He tried to deliver a speech, but the sound of military drums drowned him out. He managed only to get out the words: “People! I die innocent.” He then turned

to his confessor, a priest named Edgeworth, and told him: “I am innocent of that of which I am accused! I hope my blood will consolidate the happiness of all Frenchmen.”²⁹ The gathered populace stood in stunned silence as the guillotine dropped, followed by “a terrible scream, which was choked by the knife.”³⁰ As a guard on the scaffold picked up the severed head of Louis XVI, the crowd seemed to come alive, with shouts of “Vive la nation! Vive la republique!”

The Rise of Robespierre

The news of the death of the king of France rippled through every royal palace of Europe. Other European countries—England, the Netherlands, Spain—joined with Austria and Prussia in their war against the French and their revolution. These powers were already upset with the National Convention as a result of its offer two months earlier to “extend fraternal feelings and aid to all peoples who may wish to regain their liberty.”³¹ It was what the other monarchs of Europe had feared might happen: the French were intent on spreading their revolution to other countries.

As the war expanded further abroad, the Girondins at home were losing influence and power. When a Girondin general defected to the Austrians after losing several battles, the days of the Girondin Club were over. Leadership of the Revolution fell squarely into the hands of the Jacobins, who ordered the arrests of several Girondin leaders by the summer of 1793. Once again, the Revolution took a decisive turn, one that would prove the bloodiest and darkest of all.

Systematically, Robespierre began to extend his control over the remaining elements of the Revolution. He gained control of the new war cabinet, the Committee of Public Safety. When members of the National Convention protested Robespierre’s political power play, a mob surrounded the Manege where they were meeting, aiming cannon at the legislative hall until the offending delegates were turned over to them. Twenty-nine members were executed by guillotine. Everywhere, intimidation became the driving force of the Revolution. The Committee of Public Safety dealt harshly with anyone it perceived was less than completely loyal to the Revolution, a state of affairs that helped usher in the period of the Revolution known as the Reign of Terror.

For a time, Robespierre shared leadership of the Jacobins with a burly Parisian named Georges Danton, who had established the Insurrectionary Commune. Both men were middle-class lawyers who believed fervently in the Revolution and in the need to redirect events following the death of Louis XVI. Robespierre was intent on using the Revolution to completely reorder all of French society, government, and culture. For example, the calendar was changed. The year from September 22, 1792, to September 22, 1793, became the first year of the new French calendar. The seven-day week was replaced by a ten-day week (a move calculated by Robespierre to eliminate Sunday, the Christian day of worship). The months were renamed, taking on designations associated with nature, such as Floreal, the month of flowers (April 20–May 19); Thermidor, the month of heat (July 19–August 17); and Frimaire, the month of frost (November 21–December 20). When the National Convention voted in the new calendar, a Jacobin leader made its purpose clear:

It is time, since we have arrived at the summit of the principles of a great revolution, to reveal the truth about all types of religions. All religions are but conventions. Legislators make them to suit the people they govern. It is the moral order of the Republic, of the Revolution, that we must preach now, that will make us a people of brothers, a people of philosophies.³²

Radical leaders were intent on destroying many aspects of Christianity, associating it with the state and the clergy, many of whom had not supported the Revolution. Robespierre wanted to create a completely secularized world in which Enlightenment philosophy provided a new type of virtue. To maintain his new order, Robespierre encouraged ruthlessness, following his personal motto: “Virtue, without which terror is disastrous, and terror, without which virtue is powerless.”³³

During this phase of the Revolution, Christian institutions and beliefs were oppressed. Priests were mistreated, even executed. Churches were rampaged by revolutionary extremists. Some were rededicated as “Temples of Reason.” Sanctuaries were stripped of their valuable gold and silver artifacts, supposedly to support the French treasury. Church bells were taken, their metals melted down to make bullets and cannon for the war effort. Altars were destroyed, stained-glass windows broken, and hymnals burned. In the grand cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, a stage was set featuring a female opera singer dressed as Liberty, bowing “to the flame of Reason and seated...on a bank of flowers and plants.”³⁴

The Reign of Terror

Robespierre and Danton continued to take the Revolution in new, yet extreme, directions. With Danton's leadership, the Committee of Public Safety sought to negotiate out of the ever-expanding war, but when those efforts failed, Danton was removed from the committee during the summer of 1793. Meanwhile, Robespierre ordered the National Convention to write a second French constitution. This one was to include greater liberal goals, such as the vote for all adult males and a national system of public schools.

The redirected Revolution evoked sharp criticism, especially from the rural regions of the country. France was still plagued with food shortages as well as inflation. A new constitution was soon put on hold while Robespierre and his Jacobins tried to bring the counterrevolutionary rebellions under control. All critics of the Revolution were to be considered enemies of the state.

That summer, the National Convention passed the Law of Suspects, which gave the Revolutionary Tribunal broad powers to punish anyone in opposition to the Revolution. Many innocent citizens fell victim to the guillotine. A sickening pattern soon became widespread:

The victims were shepherded to the courtroom in the morning and, no matter how many of them there might be, their fate was settled by no later than two in the afternoon of that same day. By three o'clock their hair had been cut, their hands bound, and they were in the death carts on their way to the scaffold. Execution was almost always effected on the same day the sentence was imposed.³⁵

One of the Tribunal's victims was the queen herself. In October 1793, Marie Antoinette was found guilty of treason; she was executed on October 16. In all, the Reign of Terror executed approximately 40,000 people. Less than half of them—about 16,000—however, were dispatched by beheadings. Others were shot, floated out in the Seine River on barges and sunk, or left to languish in prison until they died miserable deaths.

Even as the Revolution turned more destructive and paranoid, Robespierre began to question even the loyalty of his fellow leader, Danton. That November, Danton expressed his personal disgust for the mass executions: "Perhaps the Terror once served a useful purpose, but it should not hurt innocent people. No one wanted to see a person treated as a criminal just because he happens not to have enough revolutionary enthusiasm."³⁶ Robespierre turned on his revolutionary comrade, and, by April 1794, Danton was guillotined along with several other Jacobin leaders. As the cart carrying Danton and seventeen others to the guillotine passed by Robespierre's rented house, the former revolutionary leader shouted, "Vile Robespierre! You will follow me. Your house will be leveled and the ground where it stood will be sowed with salt!"³⁷ Danton's death preceded a bloody couple of months during which nearly 1,400 people were executed as enemies of the state. (Robespierre had ordered the Revolutionary Tribunals to decide each case as either death or acquittal.)

Robespierre's excesses were slowly turning people away from the Revolution. By the end of July 1794, the Parisian leader was arrested while attending a meeting of the Convention. Others among his followers were arrested as well. In desperation, Robespierre attempted suicide the following day. (He managed only to inflict a gunshot wound to his jaw, rendering him unable to speak.) After his arrest, Robespierre was condemned by the Revolutionary Tribunal and ordered to the guillotine. At 7 P.M. on July 27—Thermidor 9, by the revolutionary calendar—he was beheaded, as his "executioner ripped the bandage from his jaw, and he shrieked with pain. Moments later, his head toppled into the basket."³⁸ Ironically, the law used to condemn Robespierre was one he had written himself: "Any individual who usurps the nation's sovereignty shall be immediately put to death by free men."³⁹

The Directory

At last the horrors of the Revolution's Reign of Terror began to subside. Order and calm took over Paris as thousands of political prisoners were released from cells and holding warehouses around Paris and other cities. The Girondins were invited to join the National Convention. The Law of Suspects was suspended, the Committee of Public Safety abolished, and, by the following year, the National Convention had written a new constitution, the third penned since the French Revolution had begun in 1789.

Under this new constitution, several political gains of the Revolution were taken away, including the right of universal suffrage, allowing only people with property to vote. The government centered around a five-man committee known as the Directory, who were chosen by a two-house assembly. The Directory worked ineffectively, was unable to get the financial crisis under control, and came to rely increasingly on the power of the French military for support. During the four years of the Directory's leadership, the country continued to reel under a

corrupt government. Despite some successes in dealing with the problems of inflation and a discredited currency, the Directory became a target for a military coup. On November 9, 1799, a young French general who had seen field success during France's long war seized control of the government. A military dictatorship was established, the French Revolution officially ended, and General Napoleon Bonaparte soon became a new French dictator.

Assessing the Revolution

After ten years of revolution, France emerged a changed nation. But somewhere on the road to creating a new nation based on revolutionary thought, the mission had gone astray. At the end of the eighteenth century, France came under the control of not a royal dictator, but a military one. Yet a fourth constitution was written, this one with few of the republican ideals of the Revolution; instead, the vast majority of the French people supported this "new and highly authoritarian constitution."⁴⁰ Within just a few years, the general Napoleon became the Emperor Napoleon, and a new line of imperial rule was established. The irony was clear: "Throats that had yelled themselves hoarse crying the words of the old Revolutionary slogan "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!" were now shouting "Long live the Emperor!" with just as much enthusiasm. It was as if the Bastille had never fallen, the guillotine had never existed."⁴¹

Where had things gone wrong? The great strides made during the summer of 1789 through 1791 may have accomplished too much change too quickly. Many old French political and social traditions were simply thrown aside with little thought of how deeply they were engrained in the French way of life. These early reforms—the elimination of serfdom, the guaranteeing of individual rights, the limiting of royal power, control of the Church by the state—were so extreme, they left little wriggle room for later political compromise. After 1791, much of the Revolution remained focused on holding to these reforms, causing the revolutionaries to constantly remain on the defensive.

But why did the Revolution continue to bring further change to France even after the ratification of the constitution in 1791? Some of the blame may lie at the feet of the king, Louis XVI. Although the constitution left room for the continuation of the monarchy, many French people remained dissatisfied with Louis. His own responses to the Revolution were disappointing. His ineptitude may have cost not only his life, but the ultimate success of the Revolution of 1789. Louis's inability to provide adequate and consistent support to the Revolution caused the tide to sweep past him, resulting in the establishment of a republic in 1792 that did not need or want a king.

The final years of the Revolution fell victim to the excesses of a handful of bitter rivalries between different classes of French society. The war, also, brought on sheer paranoia and wartime hysteria that led to the Reign of Terror. But the Terror ultimately returned France to its senses once again, as the middle-class regained control of the Revolution, returning things to their center once more—at least for a while.

What, then, had the French Revolution actually accomplished? There were distinct failures and shortcomings, to be sure, but great strides had been made even if individual goals had not succeeded. As one historian summed up the Revolution's aftermath:

The citizen of 1795 possessed freedoms that the citizen of the Old Regime could not have dreamed of. He was governed by an assembly that he had elected; he was served by courts in which justice was free and equal for all men; he could work when and where he liked; and he owed no dues and duties to the aristocrats. Although a definite class structure still existed in society, the peasant was as respectable in the eyes of the law as was the priest or the high-born. Most important, land could be bought and owned by anyone with the right price and the determination to work it.⁴²

For the future of France, power was never to be centered in the hands of the aristocracy, but could be claimed by those who pursued power through their talents, personal achievement, and the push and enterprise of their character and will.

The year 1799 did not mark the true end of the French Revolution. Its spirit continued to turn events in the decades that followed, not only at home, but around the world. Revolutionaries from Europe to Africa to Latin America gained inspiration from the Revolution's loftier images—the Tennis Court Oath, the Bastille, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the tireless work of the National Assembly—and pursued their own dreams of better government, freer society, and the power of individual choice. Above all else, the French Revolution created for its citizens, and for those who faced tyranny abroad, a lasting legacy.