

The French Revolution

Beginning in 1789, France produced the most significant of the eighteenth-century revolutions. In some ways it was remarkably similar to the American movement that had preceded it. Both revolutions applied principles of the Enlightenment; both swept away traditional systems; both followed similar three-stage courses, moving from moderate to radical before a final conservative swing; and both helped set in motion modern constitutional government, along with democracy and nationalism. There were, however, striking differences. Unlike the American colonies, France had a classic Old Regime, with aristocratic privilege and monarchy. Instead of being far removed from the centers of civilization, it was the most populous and cultured state of western Europe. Its revolution, therefore, was more violent and more decisive.

The Explosive Summer Of 1789

During the summer of 1789, France faced a financial crisis, caused primarily by military expenditures and a parasitic aristocracy, which resisted any cuts in its returns from the treasury and any taxes on its wealth. Louis XVI had succeeded his grandfather in 1774. The young king was intelligent but indolent and dominated by his frivolous wife, Marie Antoinette, whose limited political vision and influence over her husband increased his problems. The result of this lapse of leadership was a political near-breakdown, followed by a sudden explosion of popular unrest and agitation.

Between Louis' succession and 1789, his finance ministers continuously struggled with a rapidly rising debt. It had increased by 400 million livres during French participation in the American Revolution and had reached a total of 4 billion livres in 1789 (equivalent to \$5.6 billion in 1980 dollars), when interest payments absorbed half of the national revenues. Robert Turgot (1727-1781), controller-general of finance, had proposed deep cuts in expenditure, but he was forced out by the nobles. His successor, Swiss banker Jacques Necker (1732-1804), after resorting to more exhaustive borrowing, was dismissed in 1781, and two succeeding ministers failed to deal with the problem. In 1788, Louis called an assembly of nobles, hoping that they might accept taxation and economy measures. They flatly rejected his requests, insisting that he call the Estates-General, which had not met since 1614. In this body, where the clergy and nobility traditionally voted separately, they hoped to dominate the Third Estate, including the middle-class majority of taxpayers.

Ultimately, Louis summoned the Estates-General, with more than 600 elected delegates representing the Third Estate. They were chosen during the spring of 1789, amid feverish excitement, and supplied by their constituents with lists of grievances, the famous cahiers, which involved a diverse mixture of reform proposals, including demands for a national legislature, a jury system, freedom of the press, and equitable taxes. Once the Estates-General had convened, the Third Estate insisted that voting should be by head rather than by chamber, because it had more members than the other two estates (clergy and nobles) combined. Six weeks of wrangling over this issue brought delegates from the Third Estate along with lesser numbers from the other two orders, to a meeting at an indoor tennis court. There, on June 20, 1789, they solemnly swore the historic tennis-court oath, agreeing not to disband until they had produced a French constitution. Later, after defying a royal order to reconvene separately, they declared themselves to be the National Constituent Assembly of France.

Within weeks, the king had completely lost control of the situation. Although grudgingly accepting the National Assembly, he had 18,000 troops moved to the vicinity of Versailles. Middle-class members of the Assembly, in near panic at the threat of military intervention, appealed for popular support. On July 14, an estimated 100,000 Parisian shopkeepers, workers, and women demolished the Bastille, liberating the prisoners. It had served as the most visible symbol of the Old Regime, and its fall clearly demonstrated the rapidly growing popular defiance. The event also destroyed Louis' courage and his municipal Parisian government, which was replaced by a middle-class council, with its own "national guard." Meanwhile, other urban uprisings and peasant violence in the country consolidated the Assembly's position.

As emotional tensions ran high throughout the country, the government faced a serious problem involving blacks. Although illegal in France, slavery was a legal foundation of the economy in the French West Indies, that remaining valuable gem of the French empire. Many wealthy French aristocrats and businessmen who owned plantations in Santo Domingo and Martinique feared that revolutionary rhetoric would promote slave rebellion. Another complication was provided by mulattoes, many of whom were wealthy planters themselves, who supported the slave system but complained about infringement of their civil rights, both in France and in the islands. Their petitions were enforced and carried further by an organization known as the Amis des Noirs ("Friends of the Blacks"), which capitalized upon the revolutionary atmosphere during the summer of 1789 to spread abroad antiracist ideas from the Enlightenment.

Another unique aspect of the summer upheaval was the aggressive roles played by women. In the cahiers they had presented demands for legal equality, improved education, and better conditions in the markets. They were present in large numbers at the fall of the Bastille. Later, as bread prices rose, they organized street marches and protests. On August 7, hundreds went to Versailles and praised the king for accepting the Assembly. A climax in this

drama came on October 5, when some 6000 women, many of them armed, marched to Versailles, accompanied by the National Guard. There a deputation of six women, led by a seventeen-year-old flower seller, Louison Chabray, met the king, who promised more bread for the city. Other women entered the hall where the Assembly was sitting, disrupted proceedings and forced an adjournment. The next day, after a mob stormed the palace and killed some guards, the king and his family returned to Paris as virtual prisoners, their carriage surrounded by women carrying pikes, upon which were impaled the heads of the murdered bodyguards.

The First Phase Of Middle-Class Revolution

Shortly after the march on Versailles, the Assembly achieved some political stability by declaring martial law, to be enforced by the National Guard. During the next two years, its leaders followed the Enlightenment in attempting to reorganize the whole French political system. Because most came from the middle class, with a preponderance of lawyers and a sprinkling of nobles, they were committed to change but also determined to keep order, protect property, and further their special interests. Thus, as they achieved their goals, they became increasingly satisfied and conservative.

The most dramatic action of the Assembly occurred on the night of August 4, 1789. By then, order had been restored in the cities, but peasants all over France were still rising against their lords - burning, pillaging, and sometimes murdering - in desperate efforts to destroy records of their manorial obligations. Faced with this violence and at first undecided between force and concessions, the Assembly ultimately chose concessions. Consequently, on that fateful night, nobles and clergy rose in the Assembly to denounce tithes, serfdom, manorial dues, feudal privileges, unequal taxes, and the sale of offices. In a few hours between sunset and dawn, the Old Regime, which had evolved over a thousand years, was completely transformed.

To define its political principles and set its course, on August 26 the Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Intended as a preamble to a new constitution, it proclaimed human "inalienable rights" to liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. It also promised free speech, press, and religion, consistent with public order. Property was declared inviolate unless required for "public safety," in which case the owner was to receive "just compensation." All (male) citizens were to be equal before the law and eligible for public office on their qualifications. Taxes were to be levied only by common consent. With its emphases upon civil equality and property rights, the declaration was a typical middle-class statement. ^4

[Footnote 4: For the text of the Declaration, see J. N. Larned, ed., *The New Larned History*, 12 (Springfield, MA, 1923), vol. 4, pp. 3301-3302.]

Understandably, the Assembly aimed its economic policies at freeing capitalistic enterprise. It assured payment to middle-class bondholders of government issues and financed this policy by sale of lands, confiscated from the church and from nobles who had fled the country. It sold to middle-class speculators much of this new public land; very little was ever acquired by peasants. The Assembly also abolished all internal tolls, industrial regulations, and guilds, thus throwing open all arts and crafts. It banned trade unions, decreeing that wages be set by individual bargaining. Except for a few remaining controls on foreign trade, the Assembly applied the doctrines of Adam Smith and the physiocrats, substituting free competition for economic regulation.

The Assembly's land policies conditioned its approach to organized religion. Having taken church property and eliminated tithes, many members were reluctant to abolish the state church completely, believing the church, if controlled, would help to defend property. Consequently, the Assembly passed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which made the clergy salaried public servants but abolished all archbishoprics and reduced the number of bishoprics. Monastic orders were simply dissolved. Incumbent churchmen were required to swear first loyalty to the nation, but only seven bishops and half the clergy conformed. The remainder became bitterly hostile to the government, exerting great influence, particularly among the peasants.

Another serious problem involved the West Indian colonies, blacks, and free mulattoes. News from France in 1789 brought quick and sometimes violent political reactions in Santo Domingo and Martinique, as planters, merchants, poor whites, mulattoes, and slaves hoped that the Revolution would further their diverse interests. French absentee planters and island delegates in the Assembly differed on trade policies and local colonial autonomy, but they concurred in their fanatic defense of slavery and their opposition to civil rights for free mulattoes. Meanwhile, mulattoes in France spread their pamphlets and petitioned the Assembly, supported by the Amis des Noirs, whose spokesmen also angrily attacked slavery in the Assembly hall. The chamber was left divided and nearly powerless. It first gave the island governments complete control over their blacks and mulattoes. Then, yielding to the radicals, it granted political rights to mulattoes born of free parents. Finally, as civil war racked the islands, it bowed to the planters and repealed its last measure in September 1791.

The Assembly also dashed some high hopes for French women. The early Revolution enlisted many, not only from the poor rioting Parisians of the shops and markets, but also women of the middle class, whose salons were political centers. These hostesses included Theroigne de Mericourt (1762-1817), a Belgian courtesan who became a revolutionary street orator,

Madame de Stael (1766-1817), Necker's daughter and a popular novelist, and Madame Roland (1754-1793), a successful party strategist. Women were already prominent in the political clubs of this era. Etta Palm d'Aelders, a Dutch activist, formed a woman's patriotic society, and even proposed a female militia. In addition, some women were involved in a strong feminist movement. Olympe de Gouges (see ch. 20), charged the Assembly with securing the "inalienable rights" of women. The cause was taken up by the Amis de la Verite, a women's organization which regularly lobbied the Assembly for free divorce, women's education, and women's civil rights. Its pleas, however, were ignored.

After two years of controversy, the Assembly produced the Constitution of 1791, which made France a limited monarchy. It assigned the lawmaking function to a single-chambered Legislative Assembly, which was to meet every two years. The king could select ministers and temporarily veto laws but could not dismiss the legislature. The Constitution also created an independent and elected judiciary. Local government was completely reorganized on three levels - departments, districts, and communes - with elected officials relatively free of supervision from Paris. Despite rights guaranteed in the Declaration, only those male citizens who paid a specified minimum of direct taxes acquired the vote. Property qualifications were even higher for deputies to the Assembly and national officials. Women were made "passive citizens," without the vote, but marriage became a civil contract, with divorce open to both parties. Other individual rights under a new law code were guaranteed according to the principles of the Declaration.

These provisions, and other acts of the Assembly involving the colonies, blacks, and women, indicated the conservative orientation of the early Revolution, before September 1791. This was particularly true of the property qualifications on voting and office-holding, which guaranteed that the new monarchy would be largely controlled by the upper middle classes. Their concern now was to retain their supremacy by blocking further changes.

The Drift Toward Radicalism

After June 1791, when the king and his family attempted to flee the country, the Revolution drifted steadily toward radicalism. Although the attempt failed, Louis' action as well as the suspicion that he was conspiring with enemies of the Revolution turned many French people into republicans.

When the Legislative Assembly met in September 1791, it was plagued with troubles. The lower classes distrusted the Assembly because they were not represented. Peasants, angry because their priests had been dispossessed, and urban workers, worried about inflation and unemployment, petitioned the Assembly with their grievances. Mulattoes on Santo Domingo denounced the recent denial of their civil rights and launched revolts against the governor. The Assembly also learned that many foreign governments were displeased with its treatment of the French royal family and the nobles.

Factionalism within the Assembly reflected divisions and differences of opinion in the country. About a third of the deputies supported the constitutional monarchy. Another large group wavered from issue to issue, and a vocal minority wanted to scrap the monarchy and establish a republic. These radical deputies generally expressed sentiments originating with the Jacobin Club, a highly vocal organization of political extremists who met regularly at a former Dominican monastery. Although most members were from the middle class, they ultimately depended upon support from Parisian artisans and workers.

Sterile debate gave way to enthusiasm as the country slipped into foreign war during the spring of 1792. Leopold of Austria, brother of the French queen, joined the king of Prussia in declaring publicly that restoration of French absolutism was "of common interest to all sovereigns." In response, Theroigne Merincourt, just released from Austrian custody, addressed the Jacobin Club, eloquently pleading for overthrow of the monarchy and war against the Habsburg enemy. Her call echoed all over France. At the same time, raging civil war in the West Indies, which drove up sugar prices and encouraged speculative hoarding, turned popular opinion against the planters. Angry mobs of men and women stormed the warehouses, seized the sugar, and sold it at reasonable prices. The Assembly responded to both challenges by restoring civil liberties to free black and mulatto citizens and declaring war on Austria. French citizens went mad with fanatic patriotism. Thousands of recruits enlisted, and Merincourt organized a company of "Amazons," armed with pikes and muskets.

[Footnote 5: For the text of Leopold's Declaration of Pilnitz (August 27, 1791), see John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 223-224.]

Despite their enthusiasm and dedication, French armies suffered early defeats when Prussia allied with Austria against France. These misfortunes aroused further suspicion of Louis, which intensified when the Prussian Duke of Brunswick, commanding the invading army, threatened in June to destroy Paris if the French royal family were harmed. The faction of the radicals known as the Girondists, who mainly represented the middle class outside of Paris, used the proclamation as propaganda. They relied on the support of paramilitary organizations of men and women in the provinces and used a mulatto legion in the army to arouse popular support.

The French nation, particularly Paris, responded to Brunswick's manifesto with fury maintained by the Jacobin leaders' impassioned oratory against the

king and the moderates. The most effective of the Jacobins was Georges-Jacques Danton (1759-1794), the deputy prosecutor for the Paris Commune, an enormous brute of a man with a voice of commanding power, who mesmerized angry audiences as he denounced the king as a traitor. Supported by Paris mobs, the Commune seized power from the Legislative Assembly, deposed the king, and executed some 2000 suspected royalists in the notorious "September massacres." It then called for a national convention, with members elected by universal male suffrage, to draw up a new constitution. Jacobin hysteria spread throughout France, even after September 22 when the newly assembled National Convention declared France a republic.

Debate over the fate of the king and the nature of the new constitution intensified the contention between moderates and radicals. Danton shared leadership of the radicals in the Convention with Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) an idealistic and fanatic follower of Rousseau, and Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793), publisher of *Ami du Peuple*, a newspaper which violently and consistently denounced traitors and counterrevolutionaries. Opposing Danton, Robespierre, and Marat were the Girondists, who also favored war but feared mob violence and democratic reforms. Most of them wanted to postpone the king's trial, but they lost ground during the fall. The Jacobins finally triumphed in the crucial debates that led to the king's execution in January 1793.

Imbued now with a new fighting spirit, French armies defeated the foreign invaders and went on the offensive, occupying the Rhineland, Belgium, Nice, and Savoy. These French victories so fired the hopes and imaginations of the Jacobins that they insisted on exporting the Revolution by force. The National Convention, which the Jacobins now controlled, announced that France would "grant fraternity to all peoples who wish to recover their liberty." ⁶ It then declared war on all tyrants and ordered the inhabitants of all countries to accept the principles of the Revolution. Alarmed by the execution of the king and this proclamation, England, Holland, Spain, and Sardinia joined Austria and Prussia in a general coalition against France. In the spring of 1793, four armies of the coalition crossed the French frontiers.

[Footnote 6: *Ibid.*, p. 181. Quotation is from the Convention's decree of November 19, 1792.]

Louis' execution plus worsening conditions among the Paris poor widened the breach between Jacobins and Girondists and brought matters to a desperate crisis. When Girondists staged uprisings in Marseilles, Lyons, Bordeaux, and Toulon, Jacobins in the Paris Commune called a howling mob into the Convention hall on May 31, 1793 and purged the National Convention of any remaining Girondists. Other Girondists throughout France were placed under surveillance.

The Jacobin Republic

The Convention was now a council of the most extreme Jacobins, but the transition of power was not completed until after July 12, 1793, when Charlotte Corday, a young Girondist sympathizer, came to Paris from Caen and murdered Marat. He had been the revered leader of the extreme left, known as the Enrages, and his death infuriated the street people. The resulting wave of anti-Girondist hysteria brought the Convention under the domination of Robespierre, who remained in power until the late spring of 1794. During that time, revolutionary France reorganized itself, suppressed internal strife, and drove out foreign invaders, thus bringing to climax the success of the radical Jacobin party.

The regime achieved its success largely through rigid dictatorship and terror. The Convention created a twelve-member Committee of Public Safety, headed first by Danton and after July by Robespierre. Subordinate committees were established for the departments, districts, and communes. These bodies deliberately forced conformity by fear, using neighbors to inform on neighbors and children to testify against their parents. Suspects, once identified, were brought to trial before revolutionary tribunals, with most receiving quick death sentences. Between September 1793, and July 1794, some 25,000 victims were dragged to public squares in carts - the famous tumbrels - and delivered to the guillotine. Ultimately, the Terror swallowed most of the revolutionaries, including Danton in April 1794 and Robespierre himself in July 1794.

While it lasted, the Jacobin dictatorship was remarkably successful in its war efforts, mobilizing all of France to fight. The convention made all males between eighteen and forty eligible for military service, a policy which ultimately produced a force of 800,000, the largest standing army ever assembled in France. Officers were promoted on merit and encouraged to exercise initiative. The government also took over industries and directed them to produce large quantities of uniforms, arms, medical supplies, and equipment. In Paris alone, 258 forges made 1000 gun barrels a day. Between 1793 and 1795, the French citizen armies carried out a series of remarkably successful campaigns. They regained all French territory, annexed Belgium, and occupied other areas extending to the Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees, thus gaining, in two years, the "natural frontiers" that Louis XIV had dreamed about. By 1794, Prussia and Spain had left the coalition and Holland had become a French ally. Only England, Austria, and Sardinia remained at war with France.

Flushed with their victories, the Jacobins enacted domestic reforms reflecting a peculiar combination of hysteria and reason. They abolished all symbols of status, such as knee breeches, powdered wigs, and jewelry. Titles were discarded, and people were addressed as "citizen" or "citizeness."

Streets were renamed to commemorate revolutionary events or heroes. The calendar was reformed by dividing each month into three weeks of ten days each and giving the months new names; July, for example, became Thermidor (hot) to eliminate reference to the tyrant Julius Caesar. The Revolution took on a semireligious character in ceremonies and fetes, which featured young attractive women as living symbols for reason, virtue, and duty. Along with these changes came a strong reaction against Christianity: churches were closed and religious images destroyed. For a while a "Worship of the Supreme Being" was substituted for Roman Catholicism, but finally in 1794 religion became a private matter.

Despite their stated beliefs in free enterprise as an ideal, the Jacobins imposed a number of economic controls. The government enacted emergency war measures such as rationing, fixed wages and prices, and currency controls. It also punished profiteers, used the property of emigres to relieve poverty, sold land directly to peasants, and freed the peasants from all compensatory payments to their old lords.

Colonial problems, which had confounded the National and Legislative Assemblies, were met head-on by the Jacobin Convention. The grant of citizenship to free blacks and mulattoes of the islands in 1792 had drawn the mulattoes to the government side, but colonial armies, enlisted by the governors, faced determined insurrection from royalists and resentful escaped slaves. Sometimes the two forces were united, with support from Spain or the British. In the late spring of 1793, the harried governor of Santo Domingo issued a decree freeing all former slaves and calling upon them to join against foreign enemies. His strategy narrowly averted a British conquest. Subsequently, the Convention received a delegation from Santo Domingo and heard a plea for liberty from a 101-year-old former slave woman. The chamber responded by freeing all slaves in French territories, giving them full citizenship rights.

Unfortunately, the revolutionary women in France were not so successful. At first, the radicals welcomed women as supporters, but after the Jacobins gained power they regarded revolutionary women as troublemakers. By the spring of 1794, the Convention had suppressed all women's societies and imprisoned many, including Olympe de Gouges. She was soon sent to the guillotine for her alleged royalist sympathies. The Jacobin legislature continued to deny women the vote, although it did improve education, available medical care, and property rights for women.

Because they regulated the economy and showed concern for the lower classes, the Jacobins have often been considered socialists. The Constitution of 1793, which was developed by the Convention but suspended almost immediately because of the war, does not support this interpretation. The new constitution guaranteed private property, included a charter of individual liberties, confirmed the Constitution of 1791's accent on local autonomy, and provided for a Central Committee, appointed by the departments. The greatest difference, in comparison with the earlier constitution, was the franchise, which was now granted to all adult males. Although the Jacobin constitution indicated a concern for equality of opportunity, it also revealed its authors to be eighteenth-century radical liberals, who followed Rousseau rather than Locke.

End Of The Terror And The Conservative Reaction

The summer of 1794 brought a conservative reaction against radical revolution. With French arms victorious everywhere, rigid discipline no longer seemed necessary, but Robespierre, still committed to Rousseau's "republic of virtue," was determined to continue the Terror. When he demanded voluntary submission to the "General Will" as necessary for achieving social equality, justice, and brotherly love, many practical politicians among his colleagues doubted his sanity. Others wondered if they would be among those next eliminated to purify society. They therefore cooperated to condemn him in the Convention. In July 1794 he was sent, with twenty of his supporters, to the guillotine, amid great celebration by his enemies.

Robespierre's fall ended the Terror and initiated a revival of the pre-Jacobin past. In 1794, the Convention eliminated the Committee of Public Safety; the next year it abolished the Revolutionary Tribunal and the radical political clubs, while freeing thousands of political prisoners. It also banned women from attendance in the Convention hall, an act which symbolized the return to a time when women's political influence was confined to the ballroom, the bedroom, or the salon. Indeed, as the formerly exiled Girondists, emigre royalists, and nonconforming priests returned to France, Parisian politics moved from the streets to private domiciles of the elite. Outside of Paris, by the summer of 1795, armed vigilantes roamed the countryside, seeking out and murdering former Jacobins. Everywhere, the earlier reforming zeal and patriotic fervor gave way to conservative cynicism.

There was to be one last gasp of idealism, although it was outside the revolutionary mainstream. Francois-Noel Babeuf (1760-1797) was a radical journalist and true believer in the spirit of the Enlightenment, who expected utopia from the Revolution. To its success, he sacrificed his worldly goods and his family; his wife and children went hungry while he moved into and out of jails before 1795. An earlier follower of Robespierre, he later condemned his former mentor as a traitor to the principle of equality. According to Babeuf, liberty was not possible while the rich exploited the poor; the solution had to be a "society of equals," where the republic would guarantee efficient production and equitable distribution of goods. Babeuf's nascent socialism, so out of tune with his times, was suppressed in May 1796, along

with his attempted uprising against the government. At his trial, despite his heroic oratory, the support of his long-suffering wife, and his self-inflicted stab wound, he was condemned and sent to the guillotine.

Before it dissolved itself in 1795, the Convention proclaimed still another constitution and established a new political system known as the Directory, which governed France until 1799. Heading the new government was an executive council of five members (directors) appointed by the upper house of a bicameral (two-house) legislature. Deputies to the two chambers were selected by assemblies of electors in each department. These electors were chosen by adult male taxpayers, but the electors themselves had to be substantial property owners. Indeed, they numbered only some 20,000 in a total population of more than 25 million. Government was thus securely controlled by the upper middle classes, a condition also evident by the return to free trade.

The Directory was conspicuously conservative and antidemocratic, but it was also antiroyalist. A Bourbon restoration would have also restored church and royalist lands, which had been largely acquired by wealthy capitalists during the Revolution. Politicians who had participated in the Revolution or voted for the execution of Louis XVI had even greater reason to fear restoration of the monarchy.

In pursuing this antiroyalist path at a time when royalist principles were regaining popularity, the Directory had to depend on the recently developed professional military establishment. In 1797, for example, the army was used to prevent the seating of royalist deputies. The Directory encouraged further military expansion, hoping to revive the patriotic revolutionary fervor. Of three armies it sent into Austrian territory, two failed, but the one led by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) crossed the Alps in 1796 to crush the Austrians and Sardinians. After 1797, only England, protected by its fleet, remained at war with France. The French Revolution was over, but its momentous Napoleonic aftermath of military dictatorship was just beginning.

Significance Of The French Revolution

The French Revolution, as evidenced by the Napoleonic dictatorship which it produced, was an immediate failure; for France at the turn of the nineteenth century, had secured neither liberty, nor equality, nor fraternity. Except for certain prosperous members of the middle classes, the French economy promised less for most people in 1796 than it had two decades earlier. Most discouraging was the realization that the Revolution had betrayed its own ideals, leaving the French people cynical and disillusioned.

The Revolution, nevertheless, had brought great changes. It had abolished serfdom and feudal privileges, created a uniform system of local government, laid the groundwork for a national education system, started legal reforms that would culminate in the great Napoleonic Code, abolished slavery in the colonies, and established the standardized metric system. The ideal, if not the practice, of constitutional government had been rooted in the French mind. Moreover, French armies, even before 1800, had scattered abroad the seeds of liberalism, constitutionalism, and even democracy. The most striking result of the Revolution in its own time was its violent disturbance of old orders; from Ireland to Poland, nothing would ever be the same again.

Long-term results of the Revolution may be evaluated much more positively than its immediate effects. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, many former idealists saw dark curtains drawn over windows through which the Enlightenment had once shone so brightly. This blackout, however, was only temporary. Even before Napoleon experienced his first major defeat at Leipzig in 1813, his enemies had adopted that philosophy of liberation which had fired French imagination in the early 1790s. The spirit of radicalism was revived again among English working-class rioters in 1817. Every other European liberal movement of the nineteenth century borrowed something from the French Revolution.

Another result was equally significant but less promising. The Jacobin republic spawned a fanatic and infectious patriotism, most effectively exploited by Napoleon. When this was combined with the self-righteous idealism of the Enlightenment, it produced a mass hysteria that seems common to the most modern peoples as they first become aware of their national identities. A parallel development was French militarism, symbolized later by Napoleon. The concept of the nation in arms - military conscription and the marshalling of an economy for war - appears familiar today. This modern note was a forerunner of industrial society, with its complexities, interdependence, and mass conformity. France in 1800 was not yet industrialized, but it was ripe to be and was already populous enough to experience some tensions evident in modern industrial societies.

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