

I. The Move to Radicalism

A. Led by the minister of justice, **Georges Danton**, the *sans-culottes* sought revenge on those who had aided the king and resisted the popular will. Thousands of people were arrested and massacred.

B. One of the more important radical leaders was **Jean-Paul Marat**, who published the radical journal *Friend of the People*. He argued that the poor had a right to take from the rich whatever they needed, even by violence.

C. The National Convention met in 1792, acting not only as a constitutional convention but also as a sovereign ruling body. Its first act was to end the monarchy and establish the French Republic. The members disagreed over the king's fate. Two **factions**, or dissenting groups—the urban Mountain and the rural Girondins—of the **Jacobin** political club divided over the issue. The Girondins wanted to keep the king alive. The Mountain won and the king was beheaded, using the guillotine because they thought it was humane. The split got Marat, a Mountain, killed; Charlotte Corday, a Girondin, stabbed him to death in his bathtub.

D. France had other domestic problems besides a split in the National Convention. The Paris Commune pressured the convention to enact more and more radical measures, and parts of France refused to accept the rule of the convention.

E. A foreign crisis also loomed because the execution of the king outraged European monarchies. Spain, Portugal, Britain, and other monarchies formed a loose coalition to invade France. The revolution would be destroyed. To respond, the National Convention formed the 12-member **Committee of Public Safety**, led first by Danton and then by **Maximilien Robespierre**.

F. Robespierre was a lawyer and activist, so known for his honesty that he was called “The Incorruptible.” He followed Rousseau's ideas in *The Social Contract*, and he believed that anyone who would not submit to the general will as he interpreted it should be executed.

II. The Reign of Terror

A. From 1793 to 1794 the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention tried to defend France from foreign and domestic threats. At home they began what came to be known as the **Reign of Terror**. Revolutionary courts prosecuted enemies of the revolution. Close to 40,000 people were killed during this time. Anyone who had opposed the *sans-culottes* could be a victim.

B. Revolutionary armies were sent to subdue rebellious cities. **Lyon** was made an example of as some 1,880 citizens were executed and much of the city destroyed. In the city of **Nantes**, the revolutionary commander executed his victims by sinking them in barges in the Loire River.

C. Clergy and nobles made up about 15 percent of the Terror's victims. The rest were bourgeoisie and peasants.

D. The National Convention established a military school to train young men to be patriots. Its thousands of recruits were to have high moral standards and be enthusiastic patriots, but most just wanted to go home. The plan to train patriots failed. Many of these young men turned against the revolutionaries responsible for the Reign of Terror.

E. The Committee took other steps to control France and bring order. It called the new order the Republic of Virtue, a democratic republic of good citizens. The titles “citizen” and “citizeness” replaced “mister” and “madame.” Agents were sent all over France to implement laws dealing with the wartime emergency. The Committee also established schools to produce good citizens and tried to establish price controls on necessities, though the controls failed.

F. The women who convinced Louis XVI to return to Paris stayed involved in the revolution.

In 1793 two women founded the working-class Society for Revolutionary Republican Women and were ready to defend France. Most of the men continued to believe that women should not participate in politics or fight, however.

Unit 4: French Revolution Outlined Notes #2 (Continued)

(Reign of Terror Continued)

G. To establish an order built on reason, the National Convention had a de-christianization policy. The word *saint* was removed from street names and churches were closed. The cathedral of Notre Dame was rededicated as a “temple of reason.” A new calendar was adopted. Years were numbered from September 22, 1792, the first day of the French Republic, and not from Christ’s birth. The calendar contained 12 months with each month having three weeks of 10 days, with the tenth day a day of rest. This practice eliminated Sundays.

H. Robespierre realized, however, that France was too Catholic to be de-christianized.

III. A Nation in Arms

A. To save the republic from foreign nations, the Committee of Public Safety called a universal mobilization in 1793. By September of 1794 France had an army of 1,169,000. It pushed the countries invading France back across the Rhine and conquered the **Austrian Netherlands**.

B. The French revolutionary army changed the nature of modern warfare and was an important step in creating modern nationalism. Previously, smallish armies fought wars between governments and ruling dynasties. The new French army was a people’s army fighting a people’s war on behalf of a people’s government. Warfare also became more destructive.

C. France had defeated its foreign foes by the summer of 1794. Robespierre was obsessed with ridding France of its domestic enemies, however. Only then could the Republic of Virtue exist. Many deputies of the National Convention feared Robespierre, and they executed him.

D. After Robespierre’s death, the Terror ended, and the more radical Jacobins lost power.

Robespierre was called “The Incorruptible.” Did he remain incorruptible? (*It appears not. Given his rabid persecution of his “enemies,” it appears that absolute power did finally corrupt him.*)

IV. The Directory

A. The National Convention created a new constitution reflecting the desire for stability. The Constitution of 1795 established a legislative assembly of two chambers, the Council of 500 and the Council of Elders. **Electors** (individuals qualified to vote in an election) chose the 750 legislators. There were only 30,000 electors, due to a qualification requirement of owning a certain amount of property.

B. From a list presented by the Council of 500, the Council of Elders elected five directors to act as the executive committee, or Directory. The period of the Directory (1795 to 1799) was one of government corruption. People reacted against the Reign of Terror’s time of deprivation, some making great fortunes from graft.

C. The Directory also faced political enemies from both royalists and radicals. It could not solve the country’s economic problems, and it was fighting the wars begun by the Committee of Public Safety.

D. The Directory relied more and more on military might to stay in power. In 1799 a **coup d’état**—a sudden overthrow of the government—led by the popular general Napoleon Bonaparte toppled the Directory. Napoleon took power.