

# Reading Essentials and Study Guide



## The French Revolution and Napoleon, 1789–1815

### Lesson 2 Radical Revolution and Reaction

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

*What causes revolution? How does revolution change society?*

#### Reading HELPDESK

##### Academic Vocabulary

**domestic** relating to or originating within one’s country

**percent** a part of a whole divided into 100 parts

##### Content Vocabulary

**elector** an individual qualified to vote in an election

**coup d’etat** a sudden overthrow of the government

#### TAKING NOTES: *Differentiating*

**ACTIVITY** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list actions taken by the National Convention

Action taken by the National Convention
1.
2.
3.
4.

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## The French Revolution and Napoleon, 1789–1815

### Lesson 2 Radical Revolution and Reaction, *continued*

#### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The French Revolution was a time of disorder. The government repeatedly changed hands. Foreign powers threatened to intervene in France's government. Economic conditions in France showed little improvement. This lack of order and stability led to calls for new action. Many French citizens wanted to ensure the future of the revolution and improve the living conditions of the people in France.

#### The Move to Radicalism

**Guiding Question** *Why did the French Revolution become more radical?*

In September 1792, the newly elected National Convention began meeting. The Convention had been called to write a new constitution. It was also acting as the ruling body of France. Lawyers, professionals, and property owners dominated the Convention. Two-thirds of its deputies were under the age of forty-five. Most had some political experience because of the revolution. Almost all distrusted the king. So, it was no surprise that the National Convention's first major step was to abolish the monarchy. It established the French Republic on September 21.

After 1789, citizens had formed political clubs that held different social and political views. Many deputies belonged to these clubs. The Girondins (juh•RAHN• duhns) generally represented the clubs outside Paris. They feared the radical mobs of Paris. The Mountain represented the interests of the radicals in Paris. Many belonged to the Jacobins (JA •kuh• buhns) club. The Jacobins became more and more convinced that the king must be executed. They wanted to make sure he was not a center around whom opponents of the republic could unite.

In early 1793, the Mountain convinced the Convention to pass a decree that condemned Louis XVI to death. On January 21, the king was beheaded on the guillotine. Revolutionaries had adopted the guillotine because it killed quickly and, they believed, painlessly. The execution of the king created new enemies for the Revolution both at home and abroad. A new crisis occurred.

The execution of King Louis XVI contributed to the movement toward a new, radical phase of the revolution. The local government in Paris—the Commune—had a number of working-class leaders who wanted radical change. Georges Danton was one of these leaders. The Commune put constant pressure on the National Convention to adopt more radical positions. In fact, the National Convention itself still did not rule all of France. Peasants in western France and many people in France's major cities refused to accept the National Convention's authority. Many people in France's major cities also did not accept its rule.

A foreign crisis was also occurring. After the execution of the king, a coalition of Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Britain, and the Dutch Republic formed to fight against France. The French armies began to fall back. By late spring of 1793, the coalition was prepared to invade France. It was possible that the revolution would be destroyed, and the old regime reestablished.

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### Lesson 2 Radical Revolution and Reaction, *continued*



#### Reading Progress Check

*Identifying* What radical steps did the National Convention take?

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## The Reign of Terror

**Guiding Question** *How did the new French government deal with crises?*

The National Convention was faced with opposition in France and threats from foreign powers. The Convention gave broad powers to a special committee of 12. This group was called the Committee of Public Safety. Maximilien Robespierre, a radical Jacobin, soon dominated the Committee. For nearly a year, from 1793 to 1794, the Committee of Public Safety took control of the government. It needed to defend France from **domestic** threats. So, the Committee adopted policies that became known as the Reign of Terror.

As a temporary, or short-term, policy, revolutionary courts were established to prosecute counterrevolutionaries (people against the revolution) and traitors. Almost 40,000 people were killed in France during the Reign of Terror. Of those, 16,000 people died by the guillotine, including Marie Antoinette and Olympe de Gouges, who had written the Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen. Most executions occurred in towns that had openly rebelled against the Convention.

Revolutionary armies tried to bring rebellious cities under the control of the National Convention. Lyons was one of the cities that had rebelled against the National Convention during a time of crisis. The Committee of Public Safety decided to make an example of the city and about 1,880 citizens of Lyons were killed. Guillotining victims seemed too slow. The revolutionaries began to shoot the victims with grapeshot (a group of small iron balls) to speed up the killing. The victims fell directly into open graves as they were shot. One foreign visitor reported that a few hours after the executions, blood was still flowing in the street. He also saw many houses of aristocrats and churches that had been burnt and destroyed.

In western France, too, revolutionary armies were extremely cruel to the rebels and showed them no mercy. Perhaps the most terrible violence occurred in the city of Nantes. There victims were put on boats, and the boats were sunk in the Loire River.

People from all classes were killed during the Terror. Clergy and nobles were about 15 **percent** of the victims, while the rest of the victims were from the Third Estate. The Committee of Public Safety said that all the killing was only temporary. When the war and the domestic crisis had ended, the true “Republic of Virtue” would follow. Then the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen would become real.

In addition to the Terror, the Committee of Public Safety took other steps to control and shape French society. Robespierre called this new order the Republic of Virtue. It would be a democratic republic made up of good citizens. In fact, “citizen” and “citizeness” were the titles for members of the new society, and they were to replace the old titles of “mister” and “madame.” The use of the new titles showed support for the republic. Women wore long dresses that copied clothing worn at the time of the ancient Roman Republic.

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According to Robespierre, good citizens would be formed by good education. A law was passed to give primary education to everyone, but it was not widely put into effect. Another law abolished slavery in French colonies.

People in France were upset about high inflation, or the rising costs of goods and services. As a result, the Committee of Public Safety tried to control the prices of essentials such as food, fuel, and clothing. However, the controls did not work well because the government had no way to enforce them.

From the beginning, women had been active in the revolution, even though they had no official power. During the radical phase of revolution, women watched the sessions of the National Convention. They forcefully made demands of it. In 1793 two women started the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women in Paris. Most members of the society were working-class women. They declared that they were ready to defend the republic. Most men, however, believed that women should not participate in either politics or the military.

The Convention also followed a policy of de-Christianization. Its members believed that religion encouraged superstition, rather than the use of reason. The word saint was removed from street names. Churches were looted and closed by revolutionary armies. Priests were encouraged to marry. In Paris, the cathedral of Notre Dame, the center of the Catholic religion in France, was changed into a “temple of reason.” In November 1793, a public ceremony was held in the former cathedral to worship reason. Patriotic young women in white dresses walked before a temple of reason placed inside the church.

Another example of de-Christianization was the use of a new calendar. Years would no longer be numbered from the birth of Jesus. Instead, years were numbered from September 22, 1792, the first day of the French Republic. The calendar contained 12 months. Each month had three 10-day weeks, and the tenth day of each week was a day of rest.

The changes in the calendar had a major effect on religion in France. There were no more Sundays and no more religious services on Sundays or church holidays. However, Robespierre slowly understood that most French did not accept these efforts at de-Christianization. France was still strongly Catholic.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Questioning** Why did the French government use force against its own people?

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## A Nation in Arms

**Guiding Question** *How did the new French government deal with crises?*

As foreign troops gathered near the borders of France, the revolution seemed to be in danger. To save the republic, the Committee of Public Safety issued a decree to raise an army. It asked young men to fight. But it also asked all citizens to join in defending France. For example, old and married men, who remained at home, were asked to prepare food and transport supplies and guns for the army. Women

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were asked to make clothes and tents for soldiers, and to nurse wounded soldiers. Old soldiers were asked to go to public squares to encourage young soldiers and talk about hatred for kings and the unity of the republic.

The new French government raised a huge army in less than a year, and by September 1794, it had over a million soldiers. It was the largest army ever seen in Europe. It pushed the invaders back across the Rhine. It even conquered the Austrian Netherlands. Before this time, wars were the business of rulers, who fought enemies with paid, professional soldiers. The new French army was created by a people's government. Its wars were now people's wars.

The French had largely defeated their foreign enemies by the summer of 1794. There was less need for a Reign of Terror, but it still continued. Robespierre was determined to get rid of all corruption in France. Many deputies in the National Convention feared Robespierre. They decided to act because they did not want to be the next victims of the Terror. They gathered enough votes to condemn him, and Robespierre was guillotined on July 28, 1794.



#### Reading Progress Check

*Summarizing* How did the French army become the people's army?

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## The Directory

**Guiding Question** *How did the constant transition within the French government influence its effectiveness?*

After the death of Robespierre, a reaction set in as more moderate middle class leaders took control. The Reign of Terror came to a halt. The National Convention reduced the power of the Committee of Public Safety. Churches were allowed to reopen. Finally, the Constitution of 1791 was scrapped and a new constitution was created.

The Constitution of 1795 established two legislative houses, or bodies. A lower house was called the Council of 500, and its job was to write laws. An upper house of 250 was called the Council of Elders, and its job was to accept or reject the laws. Members of both houses were chosen by **electors** who met certain requirements. Only those who owned or rented property worth a certain amount of money could vote in elections. In fact, only 30,000 people in all of France met the requirements and were qualified to vote. This was a major change from the universal male suffrage that had been demanded by the Paris Commune.

Under the new constitution, the executive was a committee of five, which was called the Directory. It was chosen by the Council of Elders. The Directory, which lasted from 1795 to 1799, became known mainly for its corruption. People were tired of the sufferings and sacrifices of the Reign of Terror. During the Directory, some people made large amounts of money from government contracts or by lending money to the government at very high interest rates. They took advantage of the government's serious money problems during these difficult times.

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At the same time, the government of the Directory faced political enemies from both conservatives and radicals. The conservatives wanted to bring back the monarchy. Other people want to create a more radical regime like Robespierre's. Economic problems continued, and the Directory found no solution to them. Finally, France was still fighting expensive wars against foreign enemies.

Because of all these problems, the Directory depended more and more on the military to stay in power. One military leader betrayed the government. In 1799 the successful and popular general Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Directory. It was a **coup d'état** (KOO day-TAH), a sudden overthrow and change of the government. Napoleon then seized power in France.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Evaluating** Did the transition from the Committee of Public Safety to the Directory help respond to the French people's needs?

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