The Age of Revolution: The French Revolution and Napoleonic Era

In 1789, France was widely considered a nation to be envied. It was the center of the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. French scientists—such as François Lavoisier (1743–1794), the “Father of Modern Chemistry,” and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), who were the first to study how forms of life adjust to the environment—led the world, French books were read everywhere, and French was the international language spoken among the educated and aristocratic circles of many countries. With a population of about 25.5 million, France was the most populous nation in Europe, and Paris, although smaller than London, was the cultural center of Europe. French exports to Europe were greater than those of Great Britain. Nearly half of the gold pieces circulating in Europe at the time were French.

Despite its power and appearance of wealth, France had deep-rooted problems. The French government had become corrupt and ineffective, clinging to an outdated social structure that carried over from the Middle Ages. Under this old order, or Ancien Régime (Old Regime), there were three estates, or orders, in society. The structure of this old order no longer corresponded to the real distribution of power or influence among the French. The government was also heavily in debt and unable to balance its budget or deal with the crisis of doing so.

Efforts to reform the country led to a series of events that ultimately ended in the bloody French Revolution that destroyed the Old Regime. As the French Revolution progressed from its moderate stage to its more radical phase, known as the “Reign of Terror,” other European nations became concerned because the Revolution’s slogan of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” threatened the established social order of the nineteenth century. The monarchs of England, Austria, Russia, and Prussia thus formed the Grand Alliance to stop the spread of the Revolution. The forming of this Alliance led to war with France.

The French Revolution also led to the rise of the legendary leader, Napoleon. In 1799, Napoleon, who called himself a “son of the Revolution,” seized control of France. From 1800 to 1815, Napoleon dominated the European continent. He was a military genius who established a French empire that controlled every European country except England. He was an efficient administrator who instituted a number of Enlightened reforms that captured the support of the people. He spread the idea of the French Revolution throughout Europe, but his ambition and repression of liberty contributed to his downfall. After losing many troops in the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812, Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Nations in 1813 by a coalition of European forces.

In 1814, the European nations met at the Congress of Vienna in an effort to undo the effects of the French Revolution and to turn back the clock to the way the world was prior to 1789. The representatives also sought to establish a policy of a balance of power to ensure that one person or country such as Napoleon or France would never dominate the European continent. This balance of power led to a hundred years of peace and prosperity in Europe. During this time, Europe became a powerful force in the world and extended its control over the areas of Asia and Africa.

The French Revolution

In 1789, the structure of French society, which fostered great inequalities among the people, led to a revolt against Louis XVI. The French Revolution led to a period of reform, chaos, and conservative reaction. Historians, such as Crane Brinton, acknowledge that democratic revolutions, such as the English Puritan Revolution of 1689, the American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution, may have a set of individual characteristics that are different from each other, but they follow a sequel of events that are similar to all democratic revolutions.
France under the Old Regime

The political, economic, and social conditions of eighteenth-century France was called the Old Regime. The class structure of France was divided along the following lines:

- **The First Estate.** The clergy of the Catholic Church represented about 1 percent of the population but owned about 10 to 15 percent of the land. They paid no direct taxes to the government except for a voluntary tax every five years. The Roman Catholic clergy of the First Estates included bishops and abbots but not the parish priests, who were often as poor as their parishioners.

- **The Second Estate.** Nobles and landowners in France consisted of less than 2 percent of the population and owned about 20 percent of the land. They also were exempt from taxes. Like the First Estate, the Second Estate was a privileged class. It collected feudal dues from the peasants, and its members held the best government jobs and army positions.

- **The Third Estate.** The middle class (bourgeoisie), urban lower classes, and peasant farmers comprised 98 percent of France’s total population and owned about 40 percent of the land. Although the middle class had grown in France, the majority of the Third Estate consisted of the peasants who lived on the land. The bulk of the taxes fell on the Third Estate. The most burdensome taxes were the taille (a tax on agricultural goods such as produce), capitation (poll tax), a tithe (a Church tax of about 10 percent), a gabelle (a salt tax), a vingtième (an income tax), and dues to the local lord for the use of his mill (wine press and so on). The bourgeoisie, the rising commercial and professional classes, paid fewer taxes than the peasants but felt unjustly treated. They were denied good jobs and wanted to reform a system that was outdated and did not give them political and social rights that were on par with their economic conditions.

The absolutism of the king denied the people both a voice in the government and a way for them to make their grievances known. By using lettres de cachet (letters bearing the royal seal), the king was able to put his opponents into jail indefinitely without charges, bail, or trial.

The immediate cause of the French Revolution was financial. In 1789, France was sinking under a mound of debts. The French debt stood at four billion livres and it could not be carried because revenue fell short of expenditures. France was not poor, but tax exemptions and tax evasions by the wealthy, as described in the Estates list earlier, had led the country to a serious financial crisis. The extravagant cost of maintaining the Versailles Court and the debts incurred from the wars of Louis XIV as well as the money raised to support the American War of Independence against France’s rival, Britain, added to the problem. By 1789, half of the income tax went just to pay off the interest on this enormous debt. The French debt was being held by aristocrats, merchants, manufacturers, and financiers.

However, the financial crisis was not due to national poverty; France was not bankrupt. Louis XVI (b. 1754, ruled 1774–1793) was a weak and indecisive ruler whose unpopular wife, Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), was considered a foreigner (she was a Hapsburg from Austria) and a vain, frivolous person who refused to cut expenses. Louis appointed a number of advisers, such as Swiss financier Jacques Necker who proposed to abolish tax privileges, but they were forced to resign after they proposed taxing the First and Second Estates. The king was fearful that taxing the First and Second Estates would weaken his royal power because these Estates wanted to exert greater political influence in the government. By 1786, the depressed economy and the lack of public confidence made it increasingly difficult for the government to obtain new loans. Louis XVI had no other option but to raise taxes. His adviser, Calonne, convened an “Assembly of Notables” (composed of high-ranking nobles and clergy) in 1787, hoping to gain endorsement for a general tax on all landowners. The nobles insisted that they wanted to share in the control of the government. A deadlock ensued and Louis dismissed his adviser. He tried to push the same program through the Paris Parlement (composed of 13 regional royal courts, and not to be confused with the English “Parliament”). When the Paris Parlement refused to grant Louis XVI the power to raise taxes unless a meeting of the Estates General was called, the king had run out of options. He was forced to reconvene the Estates General (described in the next section), a legislative body that included the representatives from all three Estates.
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The Meeting of the Estates General and Creation of the National Assembly

On May 5, 1789, the Estates General met at Versailles. The Estates General was first summoned in 1302 to Paris by Philip IV in order to obtain national approval for his anti-clerical program. The power of the Estates General was never clearly defined, nor did that body ever obtain the financial control which made the English Parliament a powerful institution. The Estates General did not meet as a single body but convened separately as regional units, and its power varied inversely with the power of the king. Thus, as royal absolutism gained greater control in France, the Estates General became less significant. The Estates General had not met since 1614 and people looked to the meeting with enthusiasm because conditions in the country were bad. Peasants were starving and there were riots in Paris. People looked to the Estates General to save the country.

The Estates General was made up of the First (clergy), Second (nobles), and Third (middle class, workers, and peasants) Estates. Each Estate had drawn up a list of grievances called cahiers de doléances. As part of the electoral process of 1789, the cahiers were intended to inform and instruct the deputies of local views and authorize reform. There was general consensus among the three Estates that the royal power had to be limited, that the Estates General had to meet regularly, and that the individual liberties had to be guaranteed by law. However, the middle class, especially the lawyers who primarily made up the Third Estate, placed a greater emphasis on protecting the citizens’ rights than the needs of the peasants. An immediate issue arose over the voting procedure.

The Estates General voted by unit and not by individual members. Each Estate had one vote. Therefore, the privileged classes—the First and Second Estates combined—could outvote the Third Estate. On June 17, 1789, after six weeks of deadlock over voting procedures, the Third Estate declared itself the National Assembly and was joined by much of the low-ranking clergy and some of the nobles. The renaming was effectively a claim that this new body was now sovereign.

Louis XVI locked the National Assembly's members out of the meeting hall. In retaliation, they met at an indoor tennis court at Versailles and took the Tennis Court Oath (June 20, 1789) not to disband until they had written a constitution for France.

The Tennis Court Oath officially began the French Revolution because power was coming from the National Assembly and not the king. On June 27, 1789, the king rejected violence and ordered the delegates to meet with the National Assembly. The National Assembly had become the legal form of government without resorting to violence. This body was to function as the legislative branch of government until the end of September 1791 and charged itself with writing a constitution. To reflect this mission, it called itself the National Constituent Assembly where the voting would be per capita and not by unit.

The Moderate Stage (1789–1792)

In the summer of 1789, food shortages, rising bread prices, and rumors that the king had sent troops to Versailles to dissolve the National Assembly incited people to action. On July 14, Paris mobs, looking for weapons, stormed the Bastille, a fortress symbolic of the Old Regime. The crowd cut off the head of the commander and marched around Paris with his decapitated head. This was a foreshadowing of the future. Disorder spread throughout France and set off what became known as The Great Fear. Peasants rose up against the nobles, burned castles, and destroyed records of feudal dues.

On August 4, 1789, at a stormy all-night session, the National Assembly’s legislators took two preliminary legal steps to end the abuses of the Old Regime:

- They abolished feudalism in terms of feudal dues and tithes owed by the peasants; nobles were forced to give up special status and their exemption from taxes; all male citizens could hold government, army, or Church office.
They created the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**. Issued by the Assembly on August 26, 1789, this document shows the influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke. It was modeled in part on the American Declaration of Independence, and contains the following decrees:

- Men are born free and equal before the law.
- Men are guaranteed freedom of speech, religion, and due process before the law.
- Taxes have to be paid according to the ability to pay.
- The right to rule rests not only on the king but also on the general will of the people.

The principles of the Declaration were captured in the slogan, “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” It became the symbol of the French Revolution.

In October, about 7,000 women marched to Versailles demanding bread. After protesting in front of an audience and the king, they eventually forced the royal family to return to the **Tuileries**, their palace in Paris. The royals were virtually prisoners there until their execution in 1793.

The National Assembly, fearful of the mob, returned to Paris. The Assembly now had a two-fold function: Solve the financial crisis and draw up a new constitution for France. The members, who were largely made up of the bourgeoisie class, addressed the following issues:

- **Financial measures.** To pay off the huge debt, they seized Church property and sold the land to aid the government.

- **Religious matters.** The National Assembly abolished Church titles. They seized the land of the Church, and religious freedom was granted to all groups. In 1790, the **Civil Constitution of the Clergy** was approved, which subjected the Catholic Church to state control. The Civil Constitution declared that the Church was independent from the pope and that the Catholic clergy was to be paid by the government and elected by the people. The Civil Constitution ended papal authority over the Church in France and dissolved monasteries and convents.

- **Legislative matters.** In 1791, the National Assembly (also called the Constituent for its work on the new constitution) completed its task by producing a constitution. The Constitution of 1791 provided for a constitutional monarchy, limited the powers of the monarch, and created a legislative assembly. The elected legislative assembly passed the nation’s laws, collected taxes, and decided on issues of war and peace. Members of the assembly had to be property owners and were elected by taxpaying citizens. The National Assembly also divided France into 83 departments ruled by local assemblies, thus eliminating the provincial system. The assembly also extended rights to Protestants and Jews, and abolished slavery in France, but not in the colonies. This sparked an uprising by **Toussaint L’Ouverture** (1744–1803), a self-educated former slave, against the plantation owners in Hispaniola (Haiti). By 1794, slavery ended in all the French colonies and Haiti became the first independent state in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, Louis XVI’s brother, who was a leader of the émigré nobles and had fled the country in order to actively restore the Old Regime, convinced the king to flee France. On June 20, 1791, the royal family was captured near the French border town of Varennes and was escorted back to Paris by a taunting mob.

News of the Revolution created excitement and fear in Europe. European liberals and radicals hoped that the Revolution would lead to a reordering of society everywhere. However, conservatives, such as **Edmund Burke** (1729–1797) of Great Britain, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), predicted that it would lead to chaos and tyranny. Marie Gouze known to history as **Olympe de Gouges** (1745–1793), a butcher’s daughter, became a major radical in Paris and was disappointed with the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**, which did not grant equal rights for women. In her **Declaration of the Rights of Woman** (1791), which de Gouges addressed to Queen Marie Antoinette, she argued that women should be regarded as citizens and that they should have the right to own property and have equality of sexes in marriage. She also wanted improved education and the right to initiate divorces for women, and asserted that women are born free and have the same
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De Gouges’ book directly influenced the publication of the Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft’s (1759–1797) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Wollstonecraft argued that women should have the same political rights to vote and hold office as men. De Gouges was guillotined in 1793 in part because of her royalist policies and her criticism of Robespierre, the leader of the Reign of Terror. The works of Wollstonecraft and de Gouges marked the birth of the modern women’s movement for equal rights. In 1797, Wollstonecraft died of puerperal fever shortly after childbirth.

Some European monarchs were fearful that these revolutionary ideas would spread and endanger their countries. In August 1791, Frederick William II, the king of Prussia, and Emperor Leopold II of Austria (the brother of Marie Antoinette) issued the Declaration of Pillnitz. They threatened to intervene if necessary to protect the French monarchy. In retaliation, France declared war on Austria in 1792. The Revolution entered a new stage.

The Radical Stage (1792–1795)

The war went badly for the poorly equipped French soldiers. Prussia joined immediately with Austria, and by the summer of 1792, the two powers were on the verge of invading Paris. On July 25, Austria and Prussia issued the Brunswick Manifesto promising to destroy Paris if any harm came to the French king. The legislative assembly declared the country in danger. In Paris, the sans-culottes (which literally means “without breeches,” indicating their support of the trousers worn by the lower class) were committed to the working-class people and determined to push the Revolution in a more radical direction. Many believed that the king was conspiring with the invading army and was responsible for the battle disasters of the French army. On August 10, 1792, the Paris mob stormed the Tuileries and slaughtered the king’s guard. In September, the sans-culottes, under the leadership of Georges Danton, who was the Minister of Justice and had organized the defense of Paris against the Prussians, carried out the September massacres. The mob attacked the prisons and killed over 1,000 people, including nobles and clergy who they believed were traitors to the cause of the Revolution. Danton subsequently was killed during the Reign of Terror.

The Radicals took control of the National Assembly and called for the election of a new legislative assembly—the National Convention—based on universal suffrage. Meeting for the first time in September 1792, the National Convention abolished the monarchy and proclaimed France a republic. All members of the National Convention were Jacobins. However, there was a split between two factions within the Jacobins at the convention: the Girondists, named after a department in southwestern France, and the Montagnards (“mountains”), so named because their members usually sat high in the hall. The Girondists favored a decentralization of power and were fearful of the powers of the sans-culottes. They supported voting rights based on property ownership.

The Montagnards were led by Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794), a middle-class lawyer who represented the sans-culottes, the working class of Paris. Robespierre favored a strong central government with the power to help the poor and control the economy. Known as “Mr. Incorruptible,” he wanted to create a “Republic of Virtue” and accused the Girondists of sympathy toward the king.

In 1793, the National Convention put Louis XVI on trial. The trial split the convention. The Girondists wanted to imprison the royal family and exile him after the European powers had been defeated. The Montagnards wanted to execute him. On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI was beheaded by the fast-falling blade of a brand-new guillotine (Dr. Joseph Guillotin, a member of the legislature, had introduced the device as a more humane method of beheading rather than the uncertainty of the axe), and later that same year Marie Antoinette was beheaded. The execution of Louis XVI sent shock waves throughout Europe. England, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, and Prussia united in the first coalition to stop the spread of these revolutionary ideas. This became known as the First Coalition.

The Reign of Terror (1793–1794)

By 1793, France faced even greater problems. Not only was the country at war with countries in opposition to the Revolution, but rising prices, unemployment, and a rebellion in Vendee (the western part of France) led by royalists and priests, also threatened the government. In the face of these problems, the sans-culottes joined with the Montagnards to oust the Girondists from the National Convention in May 1793.
These Radical Jacobins centralized all control in a 12-man Committee of Public Safety, which had dictatorial powers. The goal of the Committee was to save the Revolution from foreign and domestic enemies. The Committee subjected the entire nation to compulsory military service, and the war against the Coalition became a national mission. Between August 1793 and September 1794, France raised an army of over 1.1 million men, the largest Europe had ever seen. Troops from the port city of Marseilles set the theme with the call for people to rally around the fatherland. The song sung by these troops would become “La Marseillaise,” the national anthem of the French nation.

The French were victorious over the European Coalition because they had the ability to draw on the power of patriotic dedication to the nationalist state and a national mission. This was the foundation of modern nationalism, as citizens, reinforced by the ideas of democracy, were stirred by the danger of a common enemy. The Committee had turned the concept of a gentlemanly eighteenth-century game of war into a struggle between good and evil.

To protect the Revolution against domestic enemies, the Committee of Public Safety instituted a Reign of Terror, which lasted from late summer of 1793 to August 1794. The Committee arrested all persons suspected of treason and sentenced them to death. It is estimated that about 40,000 people lost their lives to the guillotine or to gunfire, or were drowned on barges set out to sea. The Reign of Terror had no respect for class origin. About 8 percent were nobles, 14 percent were bourgeoisie, mainly of the rebellious southern cities, 6 percent were clergy, and no less than 70 percent were of the peasant and working classes.

The Committee of Public Safety also instituted price and wage controls, food rationing, monetary controls to stop inflation, the metric system, and censorship of all written material. In late 1793, Robespierre, who had become the chief architect of the Reign of Terror, proclaimed a Republic of Virtue. This was his bold scheme to de-Christianize France and to promote revolutionary values. He removed Christian symbols from public buildings, turned the Cathedral of Notre Dame into a Temple of Reason, and created a new non-Christian calendar. His actions alienated many people, especially the Catholic majority.

Revolutionary women made their efforts to fight domestic enemies of the revolution. In 1793, the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women sought stricter controls on the prices of food and worked to find women who horded food. The women of the Society also wanted to train for military service and wanted to wear the revolutionary cap or cockade, usually worn only by men. In 1793, they were officially excluded from the army and Jacobins, who had begun to fear the turmoil the Society was causing, banned all women’s clubs and societies.

The Reactionary Stage (1795–1799)

By 1794, the Reign of Terror had spiraled out of control and its horrors turned the French people against the actions of the Jacobins. In March 1794, Robespierre executed Danton, one of the Jacobin Committee leaders, for arguing that it was time to end the Reign of Terror. Fearful that they might be next, the Convention decided to arrest Robespierre and he was guillotined on 8 Thermidor (July 28, 1794), one of the months of the new non-Christian calendar. The death of Robespierre began the Thermidorian Reaction. Tired of violence and virtue, the moderates regained control of the National Convention. A new constitution was written in 1795, which set up a republican form of government. The middle class was in control since only men of property could vote and hold office (women were not allowed to vote). The New National Convention set up two branches of the legislature: the Council of 500 (the lower house) and the Council of Elders (an upper house of 250 members over the age of 40). The Convention removed all economic controls, closed the Jacobin clubs, allowed Catholic services to be held again, and granted amnesty to those who were considered enemies during the Reign of Terror.

In 1795, the National Convention chose a five-member executive group that became known as the Directory. Attacked by the aristocracy and the sans-culottes, who were critical of the government’s economic policies, the Directory began to lose power. Unable to deal with the worsening inflation problem and fearful of a royalist uprising, it turned to the military for support. On October 5, 1795, a rebellion broke out in Paris and the Directory ordered a young general, Napoleon Bonaparte, to crush it. He saved the Republic, but the savior would ultimately be the destroyer of the government. Napoleon was rewarded for his loyalty with the command of the French army fighting the Austrians in Italy.
The Napoleonic Era (1799–1815)

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) was born on the Mediterranean island of Corsica (which had been owned by the Italians until annexed by the French), and was the son of a poor village lawyer. When the French Revolution began, he was a low-level military officer, but he quickly rose in rank and won important victories against the British and Austrians. He was a popular military general who appealed to the people who looked to a strong military leader to end the disorder and corruption that existed under the Directory.

In November 1799, he overthrew the Directory by a coup d’état (a swift overthrow of government by force) and formed a new government, the Consulate. The Consulate was made up of three Consuls, but all the power was vested in Napoleon as the First Consul. In 1802, the constitution made him Consul for life and in 1804, he was crowned Emperor. For each of these constitutional changes, Napoleon held a national plebiscite (a yes or no vote). The French people, hoping for stability, supported him at each step in his rise. Napoleon's popularity was due to his effective domestic policies, as described in the following list. His reforms provided efficient government and furthered the revolutionary principle of equality.

- **The Concordat of 1801** made peace with the Catholic Church. Pope Pius VII renounced claims to Church property confiscated during the Revolution. The government could nominate bishops but the pope confirmed them and could remove them. Napoleon acknowledged that Catholicism was the religion of the majority of the French people but reaffirmed religious toleration for all. By this agreement, Napoleon protected the peasant owners of former Church land and pleased the overwhelmingly Catholic French population.

- **The Napoleonic Code** (1804) established a uniform legal system to replace an outdated and inequitable medieval system. Emphasizing the revolutionary principles of equality, the Code created equal treatment before the law, providing religious toleration for Protestants and Jews, and abolishing serfdom and feudalism. However, the Code undid some reforms of the French Revolution. Women lost most of their rights under the Code. Male heads of households regained complete authority over their wives and children.

- **Free public education** was expanded by Napoleon. He established a government-supervised public school system of uniform educational standards. The University of France, a government agency and not an educational institute of higher learning, controlled all levels of education.

- **The “Legion of Honor”** was a society created by Napoleon for public recognition of those who had rendered distinguished military and civilian service to France. Membership was based on merit, not social status, which was in accord with the principle of equality. Nevertheless, he practiced nepotism, placing his relatives on the thrones of countries that he conquered. Napoleon centralized government and directly placed local governments under national authority.

- **The Bank of France** was founded in 1800, and introduced a sound currency and balanced budget. Everyone was expected to pay taxes and there were no tax exemptions because of birthright. By collecting taxes fairly and paying off the debt, Napoleon restored the government to financial health. These measures pleased the bourgeoisie. Napoleon also encouraged business enterprises.

Napoleon Dominates Europe

When Napoleon assumed power in 1799, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and Great Britain formed the Second Coalition. Napoleon took command of the French forces, which were at war with the Second Coalition. He was able to win significant victories and by 1802 ended the war favorably for France. Napoleon was a military genius who was able to take advantage of the changes brought about by the French Revolution. He effectively used the levée en masse (the call to use all able-bodied men to rally around the country) to help spread the ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, with the emphasis on fighting for the fatherland. The troops called him the “little Corporal” because he defeated four armies larger than his own. They trusted him because he allowed them independence on the battlefield and combined the forces of light artillery, infantry, and cavalry to develop an effective fighting tool.
In 1805, France resumed war with the **Third Coalition** (Austria, Sweden, Russia, and Great Britain), and between 1805 and 1807 France had defeated all these countries except England. In 1805, Napoleon defeated the Austrian and Russian armies at Austerlitz. He then abolished the **Holy Roman Empire** and created the **Confederation of the Rhine**, reducing the number of German states from 300 to fewer than 100, an act for which he has sometimes been called the “Grandfather of German Unity.” In October 1806, Napoleon defeated the Prussian forces at the **Battle of Jena** and the Russians at **Friedland** in June 1807. Shortly after, Tsar Alexander I and Napoleon met privately on a raft in the middle of the Niemen River, not far from Tilsit, a border area between Prussia and Russia. The result of this meeting was the signing of the **Treaty of Tilsit** in July 1807, by which the French and Russian empires became allies against Great Britain. Alexander accepted Napoleon as the Emperor of the West and Napoleon continued to occupy Berlin with his troops, taking away about one-half of Prussian territory. In return, Russia received a free hand in its design on Switzerland, then a Swedish possession. King Frederick William II of Prussia, who was originally restricted to pacing nervously along the banks of the Niemen River, was eventually drawn into the negotiations as a mere formality. He had been defeated at Jena and had little military resources to resist any agreement.

By 1807, Napoleon’s Grand Empire dominated continental Europe from the Atlantic coast to the Russian plains. His empire included Spain, northern Italy, Naples, and parts of Germany and the newly independent Confederation of the Rhine. As Napoleon took control of each area, he instituted reforms. He stripped away the power of the nobles and their privileges in order to destroy the last vestiges of the Old Regime. In 1805, the British forces led by **Horatio Nelson** (1758–1801) destroyed the French navy at the **Battle of Trafalgar** during which he was killed. This battle gave England command of the seas and put an end to Napoleon’s plan to invade the British Isles. Unable to defeat the British navy, Napoleon decided to wage economic warfare through the **Continental System** instead. He forbade the European nations to import British goods. Napoleon considered England “a nation of shopkeepers” and believed that the Continental System would ruin the British economy. In the end, the Continental System was a failure. European nations needed British goods, and the French navy was not strong enough to prevent widespread smuggling. French commerce lost much of its business, and unemployment spread while the British found new markets in North America.

Resentment against the Continental System was one of the causes of nationalistic revival, which eventually ended Napoleon’s dream of complete European domination. Some other reasons for Napoleon’s decline include:

- **The Peninsular War** (1808–1814). Napoleon’s decision to put his brother Joseph on the throne of Spain’s Bourbon King Charles V angered the Spanish people and they revolted, waging a guerrilla war that tied down the French soldiers for a number of years. Eventually British and Spanish forces under the **Duke of Wellington** drove the French out of Spain.

- **The Invasion of Russia.** When Alexander I of Russia withdrew from the Continental System in 1812, Napoleon invaded, leading an army of about 600,000 men into Russia. The Russian army retreated and adopted a scorched-earth policy of burning crops and villages as they went along. Napoleon captured Moscow in September but found the city in ashes. Napoleon ordered the Grand Army to retreat because there was not enough food to supply his army during the winter. The 1,000-mile retreat from Moscow was a disaster in which Napoleon lost three-quarters of his army. In 1813, the combined forces of Russia, Prussia, and Austria defeated Napoleon at the **Battle of the Nations**.

On April 11, 1814, Napoleon abdicated his throne and after an attempted suicide was exiled to **Elba**, a small island off the Italian coast. The Bourbons were restored to power and **Louis XVIII** (1755–1824), brother of Louis XVI, was crowned the new king of France. The king accepted the Napoleonic Code and honored the land settlements made during the Revolution. However, in 1815, Napoleon escaped from Elba and marched to France. The king fled and Napoleon was welcomed back as a hero. His return lasted only 100 days, however. On June 18, the Allied army of Russia, Austria, Prussia, and Great Britain defeated Napoleon at the **Battle of Waterloo**. Louis XVIII returned and Napoleon was exiled to the remote island of **St. Helena** where he died in 1821.
The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815)

After Napoleon's defeat, the four great powers (England, Russia, Prussia, and Austria) and France met in Vienna in November 1814 (the Congress of Vienna) to draw up a peace settlement. Their goal was to redraw the map of Europe as it existed pre-1789 in order to ensure order and stability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diplomat</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prince Klemens von Metternich</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>To restore Europe to the way it was before the French Revolution. Metternich dominates the Congress and rejects the ideas of the French Revolution. He is a conservative who despises democracy and nationalism; his ideas influence Europe between 1815 and 1848 and his anti-democratic policies are followed by leaders in Western Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord Castlereagh</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>To ensure that France does not become a powerful nation again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czar Alexander I</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>To organize an alliance system (Holy Alliance) of Christian monarchs to fight revolutions throughout the world; also to become king of Poland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Périgord Talleyrand</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>To ensure that France retains the rank of a major power. Talleyrand proves to be the great mediator among the other major powers attending the Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl von Hardenberg</td>
<td>Prussia</td>
<td>To recover Prussian territory lost to Napoleon in 1807 and gain additional territory in northern Germany (Saxony).</td>
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</table>

Despite their different goals, the leaders of the Congress of Vienna agreed to establish a balance of power in Europe to ensure that one nation, like France, would never become politically and militarily strong enough to dominate the continent. The diplomats encircled France through the following:

- Adding Belgium and Holland to create the kingdom of the Netherlands, a much larger state north of France
- Giving Prussia lands along the Rhine River
- Enhancing Austrian influence over the Germans by creating the **German Confederation** of 39 states, with Austria designated as its official head.
- Allowing Austria to again take control of lands in Italy

The leaders also wanted to restore the power to monarchs based on the **principle of legitimacy**. This meant returning to power the ruling families deposed by more than two decades of revolutionary movement. Bourbon rulers were restored in France, Spain, and Naples. Dynasties were restored in Holland, and the Papal States were returned to the pope. The Congress recognized the British possession of overseas territories of Malta and Ceylon that were conquered during the Napoleonic wars. The Congress also acknowledged the status of Switzerland as an independent and neutral nation.

The Congress also provided for compensation, rewarding those states that had made considerable sacrifice to defeat Napoleon: Austria was given Lombardy and Venetia; Russia was given most of Poland and Finland; and Prussia was awarded the Rhineland and part of Poland. To enforce this settlement, Metternich organized the **Quadruple Alliance** of Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Britain. The purpose of the Alliance was to maintain the balance of power and to stop and suppress any revolutionary ideas of nationalism and democracy, which threatened to upset the Vienna settlement. The cooperation among the major nations of Europe is often referred to as the Concert of Europe. Alexander I organized the **Holy Alliance**, consisting of most European monarchs who pledged to rule by Christian principles. The Holy Alliance was ineffective, idealistic, and existed only on paper.
Even though the Congress of Vienna denied the principles of nationalism and democracy, the settlement lasted for 100 years. Europe would not see another war on the Napoleonic scale until World War I in 1914. During this hundred years’ period, Europe was able to direct its resources toward an Industrial Revolution that would directly affect the political, economic, and social fabric of the continent. The statesmen of Vienna, however, underestimated how this new Industrial Revolution would lead to the creation of a new alignment of social classes and the development of new needs and issues.
### Chronology of the French Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 5, 1789</td>
<td>The Estates General meets for the first time in 175 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 17, 1789</td>
<td>The Estates General becomes the National Assembly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 20, 1789</td>
<td>The Tennis Court Oath. Members of the Third Estate meet on tennis courts at Versailles and promise not to disband before they write a new constitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 27, 1789</td>
<td>Louis XVI recognizes the National Assembly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 14, 1789</td>
<td>Storming of the Bastille (celebrated as French Independence Day today).</td>
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<tr>
<td>July–August, 1789</td>
<td>The Great Fear sweeps the countryside.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 4, 1789</td>
<td>The National Assembly ends feudalism in France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 27, 1789</td>
<td>Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen is published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 5 and 6, 1789</td>
<td>Women march on Versailles; the royal family is forced to return to Paris.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November, 1789</td>
<td>The National Assembly confiscates Church property.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 12, 1790</td>
<td>The Civil Constitution of the Clergy is adapted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 20 to 25, 1791</td>
<td>The royal family is caught and arrested at the French border in a failed effort to escape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 27, 1791</td>
<td>Declaration of Pillnitz. Austria, Prussia, and other European monarchies express willingness to intervene in France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1791–1792</td>
<td>Legislative Assembly convenes. It abolishes slavery and grants religious tolerance to Protestants and Jews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 20, 1792</td>
<td>France declares war on Austria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 10, 1792</td>
<td>Sans-culottes storm the Tuileries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2–7, 1792</td>
<td>The September Massacre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 21, 1792</td>
<td>The National Convention meets. It abolishes the monarchy and creates a new government and constitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 21, 1793</td>
<td>Execution of Louis XVI of France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 16, 1793</td>
<td>Execution of Marie Antoinette.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1793–1794</td>
<td>Reign of Terror.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 28, 1794</td>
<td>Maximilien Robespierre is arrested and executed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1795–1799</td>
<td>The Directory rules France ineffectively and inefficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 1799</td>
<td>Napoleon overthrows the Directory and seizes control of the government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 15, 1801</td>
<td>Napoleon signs the Concordat with Pope Pius VII, giving the French government control over the Church in France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 27, 1802</td>
<td>The Treaty of Amiens with Great Britain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 18, 1804</td>
<td>Napoleon crowns himself Emperor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 21, 1805</td>
<td>Nelson defeats Napoleon at the Battle of Trafalgar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Battle of Jena—Prussia is defeated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Battle of Friedland—Russia is defeated; the Treaty of Tilsit is signed between France and Russia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1810</td>
<td>Napoleon marries Marie Louise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 24, 1812</td>
<td>France invades Russia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1813</td>
<td>The Grand Alliance defeats France at the Battle of Nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 11, 1814</td>
<td>Napoleon is exiled to Elba; Louis XVIII is crowned king of France.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1814</td>
<td>The Congress of Vienna meets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Napoleon escapes Elba and begins his rule of 100 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1815</td>
<td>Wellington defeats Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo.</td>
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</tbody>
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Sample Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following was the basic cause of the French Revolution?
   A. A majority of the French people wanted to replace the monarchy with the republic.
   B. France was a weak country and in economic decline in 1789.
   C. The past abuses of the Old Regime.
   D. The support of nobles for the absolute government of Louis XVI.
   E. The invasion of France by foreign countries.

2. The French bourgeoisie supported the French Revolution mainly because
   A. they believed in the Theory of Divine Right of Kings.
   B. they were not allowed to own property under the Old Regime.
   C. they resented their lack of political power under the Old Regime.
   D. they wanted a democratic form of government.
   E. the government set up a voting system based on universal male suffrage.

3. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adapted by the National Assembly in the French Revolution was
   A. a declaration of war against Austria and Prussia.
   B. a statement of the main principles of the French Revolution.
   C. a constitution establishing a republican form of government.
   D. a set of laws that confiscated Church property.
   E. an announcement of the French military victory over the enemies of the Revolution.

4. Which of these positions does Mary Wollstonecraft support in her book, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman?
   A. Edmund Burke’s belief that the revolution was creating chaos on the European continent
   B. That women should focus on economic progress over political progress.
   C. That the ideas of Olympe de Gouges were too radical.
   D. That inherited privileges were important in society.
   E. That the ideals of the French Revolution of liberty and equality should be applied equally to men and women.

5. Which social group had the greatest number of victims during the Reign of Terror (1793–1794)?
   A. Bourgeoisie
   B. Clergy
   C. Nobility
   D. Foreigners
   E. Peasants

6. Which was an important result of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790)?
   A. The Pope continued to appoint Church officials.
   B. The Church was made a department of the French states.
   C. The clergy were given power to open more monasteries and convents.
   D. Church officials received privileged positions in the Estates General.
   E. The Pope was required to pay the salary of the clergy.
7. All of the following are true about the Napoleonic Code EXCEPT that
   A. it provided equal treatment before the law.
   B. it guaranteed religious toleration and trial by jury.
   C. it abolished what remained of serfdom and feudalism.
   D. it is the basis of law in Latin America and is still used in France.
   E. it improved the rights of women.

8. In Goya’s painting, *The Third of May 1808*, the painter depicts the shooting of Spanish civilians by
   A. Napoleon’s troops.
   B. those involved in the Decembrist Revolution.
   C. Bismarck’s troops trying to eliminate Austria’s influence over Germany.
   D. Garibaldi’s Red Shirts trying to unify Sicily.
   E. the Estates General.

9. What was a major goal of the Congress of Vienna?
   A. To establish democratic governments in all European nations
   B. To maintain a balance of power in Europe
   C. To preserve the reforms of the French Revolution
   D. To encourage nationalism
   E. To reestablish the Holy Roman Empire

10. The most influential figure at the Congress of Vienna was
    A. Talleyrand.
    B. Metternich.
    C. Napoleon Bonaparte.
    D. Nicholas II.
    E. Otto von Bismarck.
Multiple-Choice Questions: Answers and Explanations

1. C. The Old Regime, which described the political, economic, and social conditions in Europe before 1789, was marked by absolutism in government, inequality among classes, and unequal and burdensome taxation. In 1789, France was divided into Three Estates. The First Estate was made up of the clergy and the Second Estate was composed of the nobles. They made up about 2 percent of the population, but owned about 40 percent of the land and paid no taxes. The Third Estate was made up of the middle class (bourgeoisie), city workers, and the peasants who comprised 98 percent of the population, controlled 60 percent of the land, and paid a variety of different taxes, such as the tithe to the clergy and feudal dues to the nobles. A majority of the French people supported the monarchy until 1791. In 1789, France was one of the wealthiest countries in Europe and not in economic decline. The nobles supported Louis XVI but wanted more influence in the decision-making process. The foreign powers invaded France in 1792, two years after the French Revolution had begun.

2. C. The French bourgeoisie supported the French Revolution mainly because they resented their lack of political power under the Old Regime. The bourgeoisie (middle class) included prosperous bankers, merchants, and manufacturers who propped up the French economy. They also included the officials who staffed the royal bureaucracy. The estates system allowed the clergy and the nobles to monopolize all the benefits while the majority received very little. The French bourgeoisie did not support the belief in the Divine Right Theory. They still were loyal to the monarchy but one with less absolute power. They did not support democracy. The middle class owned about 40 percent of the land but had little or no political influence.

3. B. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was a statement of the main principles of the French Revolution. The declaration guaranteed basic civil rights and that all political sovereignty rested in the hands of the people, not the king. It also proclaimed that all male citizens were equal before the law. Its principles captured the slogan of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” The declaration established a constitutional monarchy, not a republican form of government. The Civil Constitution of the clergy led to the confiscation of Church land. The declaration was a statement of political principles and not an announcement of any military victories.

4. E. Mary Wollstonecraft was directly influenced by the ideas of Olympe de Gouges. She accepted her belief that women should have the same rights as men. Wollstonecraft also stressed, like de Gouges, that women should be given improved educational opportunities in conjunction with political rights. Her goals were to achieve economic and political freedom and to not sacrifice economic freedom for political gains. As a firm believer in liberty and equality, Wollstonecraft rejected Edmund Burke’s ideas about the fear of freedom and the ideas of privileges based on birth.

5. E. Of the 40,000 who died during the Reign of Terror, about 70 percent were from the peasant class. About 15 percent were bourgeoisie and the remaining 15 percent were clergy and nobility. There were no major executions of foreigners.

6. B. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which was passed by the National Assembly, denied the power of the pope’s control of the Catholic Church in France. The clergy became salaried officials of the state. The clergy were elected by the people and were independent from the pope. The clergy were denied special privileges and the government dissolved monasteries and convents.

7. E. The Napoleonic Code did not improve the rights of women. The Code had several weaknesses in regard to women: Women could not vote; a wife owed obedience to her husband, who had total control over property; and an unmarried woman could not be a legal guardian. The Code recognized civil marriages and divorces; however, it was easier for a man to sue for divorce than a woman. Male heads of households regained complete authority over their wives and children. The Napoleonic Code embodied the Enlightenment principle of equality of all citizens before the law, religious toleration, and trial by jury. The Code also abolished the remnants of serfdom and feudalism. It is still the basis of law in Latin America and France.
8. A. The painting, *The Third of May 1808*, shows the execution of Spaniards by Napoleon’s troops. In 1808, Napoleon replaced the king of Spain with Napoleon’s brother, Joseph, who introduced liberal reforms that sought to undermine the Spanish Catholic Church. The Spanish remained loyal and conducted a campaign of hit-and-run raids. These attacks kept Napoleon bogged down when troops were needed elsewhere. The painting does not depict events associated with the Decembrist Revolution, Bismarck, programs of Nicholas I, or the Estates General.

9. B. A major goal of the Congress of Vienna was to maintain a balance of power in Europe. Following Napoleon’s defeat, diplomats of the victorious nations and France met in Vienna from 1814 until 1815. This was a peace conference to reconstruct war-torn Europe. Although the leaders of the Congress had different objectives, they were determined to turn back the clock of Europe to the time before the French Revolution. They wanted to establish a balance of power, or a distribution of military and economic power, to prevent any one nation from becoming too strong. To ensure this balance of power, Prince Metternich of Austria created the Concert of Europe. The Concert included all the major European states and pledged to maintain the balance of power and to suppress any uprising inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution. The representatives of the Congress of Vienna did not support establishing democratic governments in all European nations. They opposed the French revolutionary ideas of equality and democratic governments. Napoleon brought about the end of the Holy Roman Empire. The leaders of the Congress of Vienna were interested in stopping the spread of democracy and nationalism and not interested in reestablishing the Holy Roman Empire, which Napoleon had destroyed.

10. B. Prince Metternich of Austria was the most influential figure at the Congress of Vienna. This is because Metternich set a pattern of anti-democratic policies that was followed by most of the rulers of Europe. For 50 years, he was the most influential diplomat in Europe. Talleyrand of France was not the most influential figure at the Congress because he played a secondary role to Metternich. Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled at St. Helena and did not attend the meeting in Vienna. Nicholas II of Russia and Otto von Bismarck of Germany were leaders of their respective countries in the middle of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.