



# The French Revolution Begins

## MAIN IDEA

**ECONOMICS** Economic and social inequalities in the Old Regime helped cause the French Revolution.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Throughout history, economic and social inequalities have at times led peoples to revolt against their governments.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Old Regime
- estate
- Louis XVI
- Marie Antoinette
- Estates-General
- National Assembly
- Tennis Court Oath
- Great Fear

**SETTING THE STAGE** In the 1700s, France was considered the most advanced country of Europe. It had a large population and a prosperous foreign trade. It was the center of the Enlightenment, and France’s culture was widely praised and imitated by the rest of the world. However, the appearance of success was deceiving. There was great unrest in France, caused by bad harvests, high prices, high taxes, and disturbing questions raised by the Enlightenment ideas of Locke, Rousseau, and Voltaire.

## The Old Order

In the 1770s, the social and political system of France—the **Old Regime**—remained in place. Under this system, the people of France were divided into three large social classes, or **estates**.

**The Privileged Estates** Two of the estates had privileges, including access to high offices and exemptions from paying taxes, that were not granted to the members of the third. The Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy formed the First Estate, owned 10 percent of the land in France. It provided education and relief services to the poor and contributed about 2 percent of its income to the government. The Second Estate was made up of rich nobles. Although they accounted for just 2 percent of the population, the nobles owned 20 percent of the land and paid almost no taxes. The majority of the clergy and the nobility scorned Enlightenment ideas as radical notions that threatened their status and power as privileged persons.

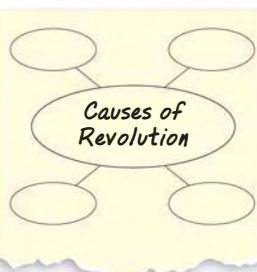
**The Third Estate** About 97 percent of the people belonged to the Third Estate. The three groups that made up this estate differed greatly in their economic conditions. The first group—the bourgeoisie (BUR•zhwah•ZEE), or middle class—were bankers, factory owners, merchants, professionals, and skilled artisans. Often, they were well educated and believed strongly in the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality. Although some of the bourgeoisie were as rich as nobles, they paid high taxes and, like the rest of the Third Estate, lacked privileges. Many felt that their wealth entitled them to a greater degree of social status and political power.

The workers of France’s cities formed the second, and poorest, group within the Third Estate. These urban workers included tradespeople, apprentices, laborers, and domestic servants. Paid low wages and frequently out of work, they often

## TAKING NOTES

### Analyzing Causes

Use a web diagram to identify the causes of the French Revolution.



## The Three Estates



### A First Estate

- made up of clergy of Roman Catholic Church
- scorned Enlightenment ideas

### B Second Estate

- made up of rich nobles
- held highest offices in government
- disagreed about Enlightenment ideas

### C Third Estate

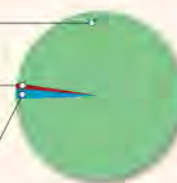
- included bourgeoisie, urban lower class, and peasant farmers
- had no power to influence government
- embraced Enlightenment ideas
- resented the wealthy First and Second Estates.

### Population of France, 1787

97% (Third Estate)

less than 1% (First Estate)

2% (Second Estate)



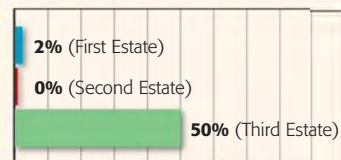
### Percent of Income Paid in Taxes

2% (First Estate)

0% (Second Estate)

50% (Third Estate)

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%



### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts and Political Cartoons

1. **Drawing Conclusions** How do the chart and the graphs help explain the political cartoon?
2. **Making Inferences** Why might the First and Second Estates be opposed to change?

went hungry. If the cost of bread rose, mobs of these workers might attack grain carts and bread shops to steal what they needed.

Peasants formed the largest group within the Third Estate, more than 80 percent of France's 26 million people. Peasants paid about half their income in dues to nobles, tithes to the Church, and taxes to the king's agents. They even paid taxes on such basic staples as salt. Peasants and the urban poor resented the clergy and the nobles for their privileges and special treatment. The heavily taxed and discontented Third Estate was eager for change.

### Vocabulary

*tithe*: a church tax, normally about one-tenth of a family's income

## The Forces of Change

In addition to the growing resentment among the lower classes, other factors contributed to the revolutionary mood in France. New ideas about government, serious economic problems, and weak and indecisive leadership all helped to generate a desire for change.

**Enlightenment Ideas** New views about power and authority in government were spreading among the Third Estate. Members of the Third Estate were inspired by the success of the American Revolution. They began questioning long-standing notions about the structure of society. Quoting Rousseau and Voltaire, they began to demand equality, liberty, and democracy. The Comte D'Antraigues, a friend of Rousseau, best summed up their ideas on what government should be:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

The Third Estate is the People and the People is the foundation of the State; it is in fact the State itself; the . . . People is everything. Everything should be subordinated to it. . . . It is in the People that all national power resides and for the People that all states exist.

COMTE D'ANTRAIQUES, quoted in *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*

**Economic Troubles** By the 1780s, France's once prosperous economy was in decline. This caused alarm, particularly among the merchants, factory owners, and



bankers of the Third Estate. On the surface, the economy appeared to be sound, because both production and trade were expanding rapidly. However, the heavy burden of taxes made it almost impossible to conduct business profitably within France. Further, the cost of living was rising sharply. In addition, bad weather in the 1780s caused widespread crop failures, resulting in a severe shortage of grain. The price of bread doubled in 1789, and many people faced starvation.

During the 1770s and 1780s, France's government sank deeply into debt. Part of the problem was the extravagant spending of **Louis XVI** and his queen, **Marie Antoinette**. Louis also inherited a considerable debt from previous kings. And he borrowed heavily in order to help the American revolutionaries in their war against Great Britain, France's chief rival. This nearly doubled the government's debt. In 1786, when bankers refused to lend the government any more money, Louis faced serious problems.

**A Weak Leader** Strong leadership might have solved these and other problems. Louis XVI, however, was indecisive and allowed matters to drift. He paid little attention to his government advisers, and had little patience for the details of governing. The queen only added to Louis's problems. She often interfered in the government, and frequently offered Louis poor advice. Further, since she was a member of the royal family of Austria, France's long-time enemy, Marie Antoinette had been unpopular from the moment she set foot in France. Her behavior only made the situation worse. As queen, she spent so much money on gowns, jewels, gambling, and gifts that she became known as "Madame Deficit."

Rather than cutting expenses, Louis put off dealing with the emergency until he practically had no money left. His solution was to impose taxes on the nobility. However, the Second Estate forced him to call a meeting of the **Estates-General**—an assembly of representatives from all three estates—to approve this new tax. The meeting, the first in 175 years, was held on May 5, 1789, at Versailles.

**Vocabulary**  
deficit: debt

## History Makers



**Louis XVI**  
1754–1793

Louis XVI's tutors made little effort to prepare him for his role as king—and it showed. He was easily bored with affairs of state, and much preferred to spend his time in physical activities, particularly hunting. He also loved to work with his hands, and was skilled in several trades, including lock-making, metalworking, and bricklaying.

Despite these shortcomings, Louis was well intentioned and sincerely wanted to improve the lives of the common people. However, he lacked the ability to make decisions and the determination to see policies through. When he did take action, it often was based on poor advice from ill-informed members of his court. As one politician of the time noted, "His reign was a succession of feeble attempts at doing good, shows of weakness, and clear evidence of his inadequacy as a leader."



**Marie Antoinette**  
1755–1793

Marie Antoinette was a pretty, lighthearted, charming woman. However, she was unpopular with the French because of her spending and her involvement in controversial court affairs. She referred to Louis as "the poor man" and sometimes set the clock forward an hour to be rid of his presence.

Marie Antoinette refused to wear the tight-fitting clothing styles of the day and introduced a loose cotton dress for women. The elderly, who viewed the dress as an undergarment, thought that her clothing was scandalous. The French silk industry was equally angry.

In constant need of entertainment, Marie Antoinette often spent hours playing cards. One year she lost the equivalent of \$1.5 million by gambling in card games.

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)



## Dawn of the Revolution

The clergy and the nobles had dominated the Estates-General throughout the Middle Ages and expected to do so in the 1789 meeting. Under the assembly's medieval rules, each estate's delegates met in a separate hall to vote, and each estate had one vote. The two privileged estates could always outvote the Third Estate.

**The National Assembly** The Third Estate delegates, mostly members of the bourgeoisie whose views had been shaped by the Enlightenment, were eager to make changes in the government. They insisted that all three estates meet together and that each delegate have a vote. This would give the advantage to the Third Estate, which had as many delegates as the other two estates combined. **A**

Siding with the nobles, the king ordered the Estates-General to follow the medieval rules. The delegates of the Third Estate, however, became more and more determined to wield power. A leading spokesperson for their viewpoint was a clergyman sympathetic to their cause, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (syay•YEHS). In a dramatic speech, Sieyès suggested that the Third Estate delegates name themselves the **National Assembly** and pass laws and reforms in the name of the French people.

After a long night of excited debate, the delegates of the Third Estate agreed to Sieyès's idea by an overwhelming majority. On June 17, 1789, they voted to establish the National Assembly, in effect proclaiming the end of absolute monarchy and the beginning of representative government. This vote was the first deliberate act of revolution.

Three days later, the Third Estate delegates found themselves locked out of their meeting room. They broke down a door to an indoor tennis court, pledging to stay until they had drawn up a new constitution. This pledge became known as the **Tennis Court Oath**. Soon after, nobles and members of the clergy who favored reform joined the Third Estate delegates. In response to these events, Louis stationed his mercenary army of Swiss guards around Versailles.

**Storming the Bastille** In Paris, rumors flew. Some people suggested that Louis was intent on using military force to dismiss the National Assembly. Others charged that the foreign troops were coming to Paris to massacre French citizens.

▼ The attack on the Bastille claimed the lives of about 100 people.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**A** Why did the Third Estate propose a change in the Estates-General's voting rules?

#### Vocabulary

*mercenary army*: a group of soldiers who will work for any country or employer that will pay them



## Social History

### Bread

Bread was a staple of the diet of the common people of France. Most families consumed three or four 4-pound loaves a day. And the purchase of bread took about half of a worker's wages—when times were good. So, when the price of bread jumped dramatically, as it did in the fall of 1789, people faced a real threat of starvation.

On their march back from Versailles, the women of Paris happily sang that they were bringing “the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's lad” with them. They expected the “baker”—Louis—to provide the cheap bread that they needed to live.

People began to gather weapons in order to defend the city against attack. On July 14, a mob searching for gunpowder and arms stormed the Bastille, a Paris prison. The mob overwhelmed the guard and seized control of the building. The angry attackers hacked the prison commander and several guards to death, and then paraded around the streets with the dead men's heads on pikes.

The fall of the Bastille became a great symbolic act of revolution to the French people. Ever since, July 14—Bastille Day—has been a French national holiday, similar to the Fourth of July in the United States.

## A Great Fear Sweeps France

Before long, rebellion spread from Paris into the countryside. From one village to the next, wild rumors circulated that the nobles were hiring outlaws to terrorize the peasants. A wave of senseless panic called the **Great Fear** rolled through France. The peasants soon became outlaws themselves. Armed with pitchforks and other farm tools, they broke into nobles' manor houses and destroyed the old legal papers that bound them to pay feudal dues. In some cases, the peasants simply burned down the manor houses.

In October 1789, thousands of Parisian women rioted over the rising price of bread. Brandishing knives, axes, and other weapons, the women marched on Versailles. First, they demanded that the National Assembly take action to provide bread. Then they turned their anger on the king and queen. They broke into the palace, killing some of the guards. The women demanded that Louis and Marie Antoinette return to Paris. After some time, Louis agreed.

A few hours later the king, his family, and servants left Versailles, never again to see the magnificent palace. Their exit signaled the change of power and radical reforms about to overtake France. **B**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Recognizing Effects

**B** How did the women's march mark a turning point in the relationship between the king and the people?

### SECTION

## 1

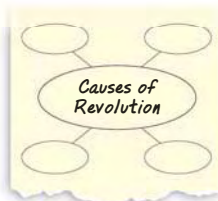
### ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Old Regime
- estates
- Louis XVI
- Marie Antoinette
- Estates-General
- National Assembly
- Tennis Court Oath
- Great Fear

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Select one of the causes you listed and explain how it contributed to the French Revolution.



#### MAIN IDEAS

3. Why were members of the Third Estate dissatisfied with life under the Old Regime?
4. How did Louis XVI's weak leadership contribute to the growing crisis in France?
5. How did the purpose of the meeting of the Estates-General in 1789 change?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Do you think that changes in the French government were inevitable? Explain.
7. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** Why do you think some members of the First and Second Estates joined the National Assembly and worked to reform the government?
8. **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** How were the storming of the Bastille and the women's march on Versailles similar? How were they different?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** In the role of a member of the Third Estate, write a brief **speech** explaining why the French political system needs to change.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A COLLAGE

Conduct research on how Bastille Day is celebrated in France today. Use your findings to create an **annotated collage** titled “Celebrating the Revolution.”





# 2

## Revolution Brings Reform and Terror

### MAIN IDEA

**REVOLUTION** The revolutionary government of France made reforms but also used terror and violence to retain power.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Some governments that lack the support of a majority of their people still use fear to control their citizens.

### TERMS & NAMES

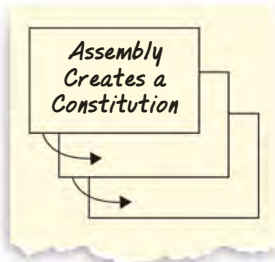
- Legislative Assembly
- émigré
- sans-culotte
- Jacobin
- guillotine
- Maximilien Robespierre
- Reign of Terror

**SETTING THE STAGE** Peasants were not the only members of French society to feel the Great Fear. Nobles and officers of the Church were equally afraid. Throughout France, bands of angry peasants struck out against members of the upper classes, attacking and destroying many manor houses. In the summer of 1789, a few months before the women’s march to Versailles, some nobles and members of clergy in the National Assembly responded to the uprisings in an emotional late-night meeting.

### TAKING NOTES

#### Recognizing Effects

Use a flow chart to identify the major events that followed the creation of the Constitution of 1791.



### The Assembly Reforms France

Throughout the night of August 4, 1789, noblemen made grand speeches, declaring their love of liberty and equality. Motivated more by fear than by idealism, they joined other members of the National Assembly in sweeping away the feudal privileges of the First and Second Estates, thus making commoners equal to the nobles and the clergy. By morning, the Old Regime was dead.

**The Rights of Man** Three weeks later, the National Assembly adopted a statement of revolutionary ideals, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Reflecting the influence of the Declaration of Independence, the document stated that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights.” These rights included “liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.” The document also guaranteed citizens equal justice, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion.

In keeping with these principles, revolutionary leaders adopted the expression “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” as their slogan. Such sentiments, however, did not apply to everyone. When writer Olympe de Gouges (aw•LIMP duh GOOZH) published a declaration of the rights of women, her ideas were rejected. Later, in 1793, she was declared an enemy of the Revolution and executed.

**A State-Controlled Church** Many of the National Assembly’s early reforms focused on the Church. The assembly took over Church lands and declared that Church officials and priests were to be elected and paid as state officials. Thus, the Catholic Church lost both its lands and its political independence. The reasons for the assembly’s actions were largely economic. Proceeds from the sale of Church lands helped pay off France’s huge debt.

The assembly’s actions alarmed millions of French peasants, who were devout Catholics. The effort to make the Church a part of the state offended them, even



◀ One of the people who stopped Louis from escaping said that he recognized the king from his portrait on a French bank note.

though it was in accord with Enlightenment philosophy. They believed that the pope should rule over a church independent of the state. From this time on, many peasants opposed the assembly's reforms.

**Louis Tries to Escape** As the National Assembly restructured the relationship between church and state, Louis XVI pondered his fate as a monarch. Some of his advisers warned him that he and his family were in danger. Many supporters of the monarchy thought France unsafe and left the country. Then, in June 1791, the royal family tried to escape from France to the Austrian Netherlands. As they neared the border, however, they were apprehended and returned to Paris under guard. Louis's attempted escape increased the influence of his radical enemies in the government and sealed his fate.

## Divisions Develop

For two years, the National Assembly argued over a new constitution for France. By 1791, the delegates had made significant changes in France's government and society.

**A Limited Monarchy** In September 1791, the National Assembly completed the new constitution, which Louis reluctantly approved. The constitution created a limited constitutional monarchy. It stripped the king of much of his authority. It also created a new legislative body—the **Legislative Assembly**. This body had the power to create laws and to approve or reject declarations of war. However, the king still held the executive power to enforce laws.

**Factions Split France** Despite the new government, old problems, such as food shortages and government debt, remained. The question of how to handle these problems caused the Legislative Assembly to split into three general groups, each of which sat in a different part of the meeting hall. Radicals, who sat on the left side of the hall, opposed the idea of a monarchy and wanted sweeping changes in the way the government was run. Moderates sat in the center of the hall and wanted some changes in government, but not as many as the radicals. Conservatives sat on the right side of the hall. They upheld the idea of a limited monarchy and wanted few changes in government. **A**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Recognizing Effects

**A** How did differences of opinion on how to handle such issues as food shortages and debt affect the Legislative Assembly?

### Connect to Today

#### Left, Right, and Center

The terms we use today to describe where people stand politically derive from the factions that developed in the Legislative Assembly in 1791.

- People who want to radically change government are called left wing or are said to be on the left.
- People with moderate views often are called centrist or are said to be in the center.
- People who want few or no changes in government often are called right wing or are said to be on the right.



In addition, factions outside the Legislative Assembly wanted to influence the direction of the government too. **Émigrés** (EHM•ih•GRAYZ), nobles and others who had fled France, hoped to undo the Revolution and restore the Old Regime. In contrast, some Parisian workers and small shopkeepers wanted the Revolution to bring even greater changes to France. They were called **sans-culottes** (SANZ kyoo•LAHTS), or “those without knee breeches.” Unlike the upper classes, who wore fancy knee-length pants, sans-culottes wore regular trousers. Although they did not have a role in the assembly, they soon discovered ways to exert their power on the streets of Paris.

## War and Execution

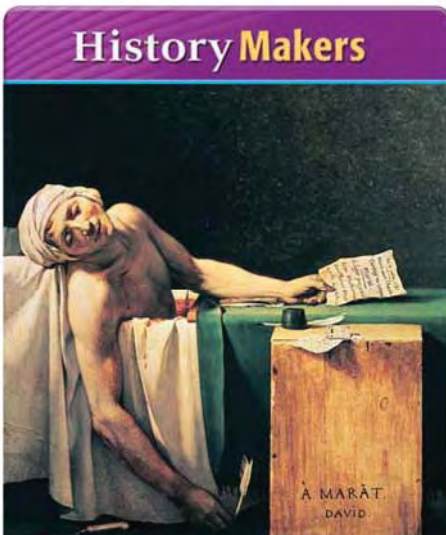
Monarchs and nobles in many European countries watched the changes taking place in France with alarm. They feared that similar revolts might break out in their own countries. In fact, some radicals were keen to spread their revolutionary ideas across Europe. As a result, some countries took action. Austria and Prussia, for example, urged the French to restore Louis to his position as an absolute monarch. The Legislative Assembly responded by declaring war in April 1792.

**France at War** The war began badly for the French. By the summer of 1792, Prussian forces were advancing on Paris. The Prussian commander threatened to destroy Paris if the revolutionaries harmed any member of the royal family. This enraged the Parisians. On August 10, about 20,000 men and women invaded the Tuileries, the palace where the royal family was staying. The mob massacred the royal guards and imprisoned Louis, Marie Antoinette, and their children.

Shortly after, the French troops defending Paris were sent to reinforce the French army in the field. Rumors began to spread that supporters of the king held in Paris prisons planned to break out and seize control of the city. Angry and fearful citizens responded by taking the law into their own hands. For several days in early September, they raided the prisons and murdered over 1,000 prisoners. Many nobles, priests, and royalist sympathizers fell victim to the angry mobs in these September Massacres. **B**

Under pressure from radicals in the streets and among its members, the Legislative Assembly set aside the Constitution of 1791. It declared the king deposed, dissolved the assembly, and called for the election of a new legislature. This new governing body, the National Convention, took office on September 21. It quickly abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic. Adult male citizens were granted the right to vote and hold office. Despite the important part they had already played in the Revolution, women were not given the vote.

**Jacobins Take Control** Most of the people involved in the governmental changes in September 1792 were members of a radical political organization, the Jacobin (JAK•uh•bihn) Club. One of the most prominent **Jacobins**, as club members were called, was Jean-Paul Marat (mah•RAH). During the Revolution, he edited a newspaper called *L'Ami du Peuple* (Friend of the People). In his fiery editorials, Marat called for



### History Makers

#### Jean-Paul Marat 1743–1793

Marat was a thin, high-strung, sickly man whose revolutionary writings stirred up the violent mood in Paris. Because he suffered from a painful skin disease, he often found comfort by relaxing in a cold bath—even arranging things so that he could work in his bathtub!

During the summer of 1793, Charlotte Corday, a supporter of a rival faction whose members had been jailed, gained an audience with Marat by pretending to have information about traitors. Once inside Marat's private chambers, she fatally stabbed him as he bathed. For her crime, Corday went to the guillotine.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**B** What did the September Massacres show about the mood of the people?



## The Guillotine

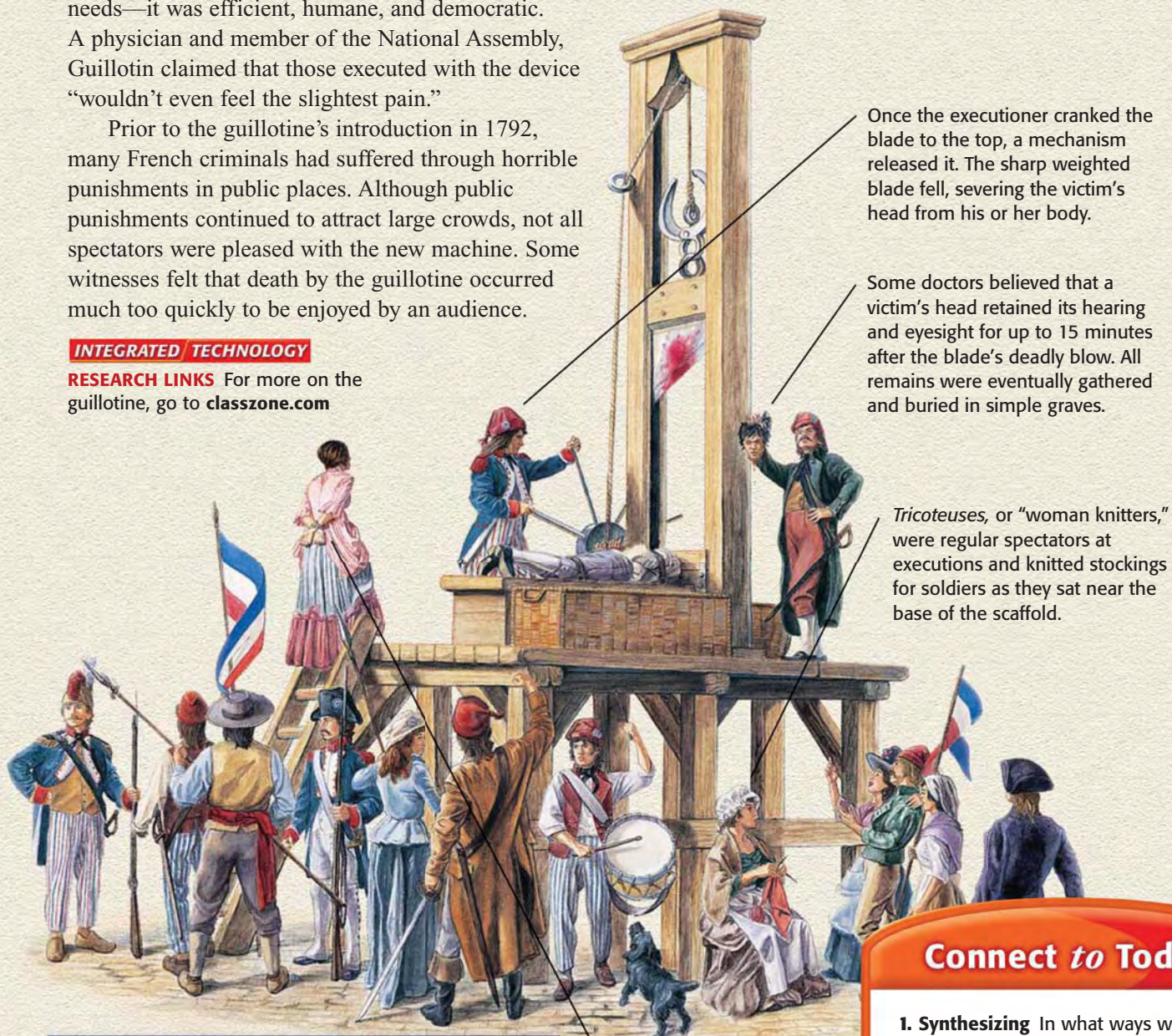
If you think the guillotine was a cruel form of capital punishment, think again. Dr. Joseph Ignace Guillotin proposed a machine that satisfied many needs—it was efficient, humane, and democratic.

A physician and member of the National Assembly, Guillotin claimed that those executed with the device “wouldn’t even feel the slightest pain.”

Prior to the guillotine’s introduction in 1792, many French criminals had suffered through horrible punishments in public places. Although public punishments continued to attract large crowds, not all spectators were pleased with the new machine. Some witnesses felt that death by the guillotine occurred much too quickly to be enjoyed by an audience.

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on the guillotine, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)



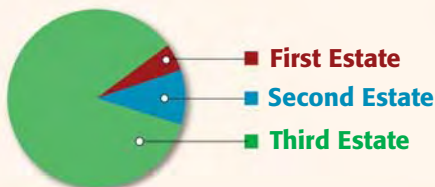
Once the executioner cranked the blade to the top, a mechanism released it. The sharp weighted blade fell, severing the victim’s head from his or her body.

Some doctors believed that a victim’s head retained its hearing and eyesight for up to 15 minutes after the blade’s deadly blow. All remains were eventually gathered and buried in simple graves.

*Tricoteuses*, or “woman knitters,” were regular spectators at executions and knitted stockings for soldiers as they sat near the base of the scaffold.

### Beheading by Class

More than 2,100 people were executed during the last 132 days of the Reign of Terror. The pie graph below displays the breakdown of beheadings by class.



Before each execution, bound victims traveled from the prison to the scaffold in horse-drawn carts during a one and one-half hour procession through city streets.

### Connect to Today

**1. Synthesizing** In what ways was the guillotine an efficient means of execution?

See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R21.

**2. Comparing** France continued to use the guillotine until 1977. Four years later, France abolished capital punishment. Conduct research to identify countries where capital punishment is still used. Use your findings to create a map titled “Countries Using Capital Punishment.”



the death of all those who continued to support the king. Georges Danton (zhawrzhdahn•TAWN), a lawyer, was among the club's most talented and passionate speakers. He also was known for his devotion to the rights of Paris's poor people.

The National Convention had reduced Louis XVI's role from that of a king to that of a common citizen and prisoner. Now, guided by radical Jacobins, it tried Louis for treason. The Convention found him guilty, and, by a very close vote, sentenced him to death. On January 21, 1793, the former king walked with calm dignity up the steps of the scaffold to be beheaded by a machine called the **guillotine** (GIHL•uh•TEEN). (See the Science & Technology feature on page 659.)

**The War Continues** The National Convention also had to contend with the continuing war with Austria and Prussia. At about the time the Convention took office, the French army won a stunning victory against the Austrians and Prussians at the Battle of Valmy. Early in 1793, however, Great Britain, Holland, and Spain joined Prussia and Austria against France. Forced to contend with so many enemies, the French suffered a string of defeats. To reinforce the French army, Jacobin leaders in the Convention took an extreme step. At their urging, in February 1793 the Convention ordered a draft of 300,000 French citizens between the ages of 18 and 40. By 1794, the army had grown to 800,000 and included women.

## The Terror Grips France

Foreign armies were not the only enemies of the French republic. The Jacobins had thousands of enemies within France itself. These included peasants who were horrified by the king's execution, priests who would not accept government control, and rival leaders who were stirring up rebellion in the provinces. How to contain and control these enemies became a central issue.

**Robespierre Assumes Control** In the early months of 1793, one Jacobin leader, **Maximilien Robespierre** (ROHBZ•peer), slowly gained power. Robespierre and his supporters set out to build a "republic of virtue" by wiping out every trace of France's past. Firm believers in reason, they changed the calendar, dividing the year into 12 months of 30 days and renaming each month. This calendar had no Sundays because the radicals considered religion old-fashioned and dangerous. They even closed all churches in Paris, and cities and towns all over France soon did the same.

In July 1793, Robespierre became leader of the Committee of Public Safety. For the next year, Robespierre governed France virtually as a dictator, and the period of his rule became known as the **Reign of Terror**. The Committee of Public Safety's chief task was to protect the Revolution from its enemies. Under Robespierre's leadership, the committee often had these "enemies" tried in the morning and guillotined in the afternoon. Robespierre justified his use of terror by suggesting that it enabled French citizens to remain true to the ideals of the Revolution. He also saw a connection between virtue and terror:



### PRIMARY SOURCE


The first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror. If the basis of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the basis of popular government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror: virtue without which terror is murderous, terror without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing else than swift, severe, indomitable justice; it flows, then, from virtue.

**MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE**, "On the Morals and Political Principles of Domestic Policy" (1794)

The "enemies of the Revolution" who troubled Robespierre the most were fellow radicals who challenged his leadership. In 1793 and 1794, many of those who had led the Revolution received death sentences. Their only crime was that they were

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Primary Sources

 How did Robespierre justify the use of terror?



considered less radical than Robespierre. By early 1794, even Georges Danton found himself in danger. Danton's friends in the National Convention, afraid to defend him, joined in condemning him. On the scaffold, he told the executioner, "Don't forget to show my head to the people. It's well worth seeing."

The Terror claimed not only the famous, such as Danton and Marie Antoinette, the widowed queen. Thousands of unknown people also were sent to their deaths, often on the flimsiest of charges. For example, an 18-year-old youth was sentenced to die for cutting down a tree that had been planted as a symbol of liberty. Perhaps as many as 40,000 were executed during the Terror. About 85 percent were peasants or members of the urban poor or middle class—for whose benefit the Revolution had been launched.



▲ At his trial, Georges Danton defended himself so skillfully that the authorities eventually denied him the right to speak.

## End of the Terror

In July 1794, fearing for their own safety, some members of the National Convention turned on Robespierre. They demanded his arrest and execution. The Reign of Terror, the radical phase of the French Revolution, ended on July 28, 1794, when Robespierre went to the guillotine.

French public opinion shifted dramatically after Robespierre's death. People of all classes had grown weary of the Terror. They were also tired of the skyrocketing prices for bread, salt, and other necessities of life. In 1795, moderate leaders in the National Convention drafted a new plan of government, the third since 1789. It placed power firmly in the hands of the upper middle class and called for a two-house legislature and an executive body of five men, known as the Directory. These five were moderates, not revolutionary idealists. Some of them were corrupt and made themselves rich at the country's expense. Even so, they gave their troubled country a period of order. They also found the right general to command France's armies—Napoleon Bonaparte.

### SECTION

## 2

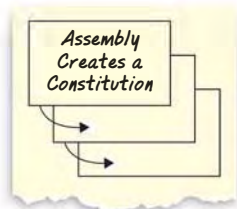
### ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Legislative Assembly
- émigré
- sans-culotte
- Jacobin
- guillotine
- Maximilien Robespierre
- Reign of Terror

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Do you think this chain of events could have been changed in any way? Explain.



#### MAIN IDEAS

3. What major reforms did the National Assembly introduce?
4. What did the divisions in the Legislative Assembly say about the differences in French society?
5. How did the Reign of Terror come to an end?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **SYNTHESIZING** How did the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" sum up the goals of the Revolution?
7. **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** What similarities and differences do you see between the political factions in the Legislative Assembly and those in the U.S. government today?
8. **ANALYZING CAUSES** What factors led to Robespierre becoming a dictator?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **REVOLUTION** Working in small teams, write short **biographies** of three revolutionary figures mentioned in this section.

#### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY INTERNET ACTIVITY

Use the Internet to conduct research on governments that use terrorism against their own people. Prepare an **oral report** on the methods these countries use.

**INTERNET KEYWORD**  
*human rights*

## The French Revolution

Over time, people have expressed a wide variety of opinions about the causes and outcomes of the French Revolution. The following excerpts, dating from the 1790s to 1859, illustrate this diversity of opinion.

### A SECONDARY SOURCE

#### Charles Dickens

In 1859, the English writer Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, a novel about the French Revolution for which he did much research. In the following scene, Charles Darnay—an aristocrat who gave up his title because he hated the injustices done to the people—has returned to France and been put on trial.

His judges sat upon the bench in feathered hats; but the rough red cap and tricolored cockade was the headdress otherwise prevailing. Looking at the jury and the turbulent audience, he might have thought that the usual order of things was reversed, and that the felons were trying the honest men. The lowest, cruelest, and worst populace of a city, never without its quantity of low, cruel, and bad, were the directing spirits of the scene. . . .

Charles Evrémonte, called Darnay, was accused by the public prosecutor as an emigrant, whose life was forfeit to the Republic, under the decree which banished all emigrants on pain of Death. It was nothing that the decree bore date since his return to France. There he was, and there was the decree; he had been taken in France, and his head was demanded.

"Take off his head!" cried the audience. "An enemy to the Republic!"

► In this illustration from *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sidney Carton goes to the guillotine in Darnay's place.

### B PRIMARY SOURCE

#### Edmund Burke

Burke, a British politician, was one of the earliest and most severe critics of the French Revolution. In 1790, he expressed this opinion.

[The French have rebelled] against a mild and lawful monarch, with more fury, outrage, and insult, than ever any people has been known to rise against the most illegal usurper, or the most [bloodthirsty] tyrant. . . .

They have found their punishment in their success. Laws overturned; tribunals subverted; . . . the people impoverished; a church pillaged, and . . . civil and military anarchy made the constitution of the kingdom. . . .

Were all these dreadful things necessary?

### C PRIMARY SOURCE

#### Thomas Paine

In 1790, Paine—a strong supporter of the American Revolution—defended the French Revolution against Burke and other critics.

It is no longer the paltry cause of kings or of this or of that individual, that calls France and her armies into action. It is the great cause of all. It is the establishment of a new era, that shall blot despotism from the earth, and fix, on the lasting principles of peace and citizenship, the great Republic of Man.

The scene that now opens itself to France extends far beyond the boundaries of her own dominions. Every nation is becoming her ally, and every court has become her enemy. It is now the cause of all nations, against the cause of all courts.



### Document-Based QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, summarize the attitude toward the French Revolution expressed in each of these excerpts.
2. Why might Edmund Burke (Source B) be so against the French Revolution?
3. In Source C, what is the distinction Thomas Paine is making between nations and courts?