

FRENCH REVOLUTION, WORLD REVOLUTION

IN 1798 NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, LEADER OF FRANCE'S REVOLUTIONARY armies, invaded Egypt and attempted to win local hearts and minds by claiming, among other things, that the French people were Muslims. A year later, a group of French expatriates allied themselves with the sultan of the south Indian kingdom of Mysore to set up a Jacobin club in his kingdom and mobilize to fight the British. In 1802, when Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's forces invaded Guadeloupe to reinstate chattel slavery, his armies faced the former slaves. Both sides brandished tricolor flags, and men of both armies fought and died to shouts of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

The French Revolution constituted a foundational event in the rise of globalization. It lay at the heart of what historians have termed the age of revolution, influencing people throughout the Atlantic basin and beyond. Yet even as events in France had an impact far beyond the nation's borders, the global context helped shape the pace and direction of the Revolution at home. The barricades of revolutionary Paris arose from local concerns, but at the same time the conquerors of the Bastille often reacted to events beyond the nation's borders. The French Revolution was one of the great world wars of the modern era, a conflict fostered by continuing interactions between Parisian radical politics and developments abroad.



1.1. *The Storming of the Bastille, 1789.* Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The Revolution created the idea of universalism in modern France and welded the identity of the

French nation to that idea. The revolutionaries considered themselves motivated by principles applicable to all of humanity, and they fought for a better world as well as a more just France. At the same time they forged the identity of a nation, based on universalist principles. Thus was born the paradox of national universalism, which more than anything else has shaped not just the political culture but the very identity of France since 1789.

In many ways, the French Revolution created the idea of modernity, both for France and for the world in general. It was the first modern revolution, against which all subsequent political upheavals would be measured. It established the norm for the modern nation-state, grounded in both political institutions and the powerful political culture of nationalism. Finally, it created the modern idea of empire, radically reshaping this traditional political form. At the same time, it fundamentally reshaped social and cultural life in France, breaking down old social divisions and fostering new ones. Consequently the great Revolution became the lodestone of French national identity in the modern era, making France a global symbol of progressive change. However, it also tied France as a nation-state to the influences and fortunes of the wider world, inscribing a global dimension at the heart of the modern nation.



Map 1.1. France in 1789.

FRANCE AND EUROPE IN 1789

“Happy as God in France,” runs an old Yiddish saying, and indeed life for the French in the eighteenth century seemed fortunate in comparison to the rest of Europe and the world. France was a nation of unusual prosperity, blessed with abundant and fertile farmland, the greatest city on the European continent, and a lively commercial and intellectual life. When France went to war, for example during the Seven Years War, such conflicts were fought far away from the national homeland. The kind of military anarchy that had devastated central Europe in the Thirty Years War had no place in living memory. Above all, France had a

prosperous and independent peasantry, which made up the vast majority of the population. Many owned their land, if only a tiny parcel, and most (but not all) could generally live life free from want and starvation.

The substantial advantages of life in rural France, and to a significant extent in the country as a whole, appear more evident when compared with conditions in the rest of Europe. France occupied an intermediary position between the burgeoning capitalist societies of Britain and the Low Countries, on the one hand, and the more traditional societies east of the Rhine River, on the other. In contemporary England, life in the countryside was being rapidly transformed by changes such as crop rotation and better methods of swamp drainage, collectively known as the agricultural revolution. These new methods sharply raised agricultural productivity, and the increased food supply in turn prompted population growth, urbanization, and ultimately the industrial revolution. However, local peasants often did not benefit from such innovations. The enclosure movement, a key aspect of the agricultural revolution in England, rationalized farming by privatizing the village common land, often essential to the survival of the poorest peasants. New foodstuffs, most notably those miraculous American imports, corn and the potato, helped somewhat, but many of the most vulnerable farmers in Britain and the Netherlands found themselves confronting a choice between flight from the land or starvation.

In central and eastern Europe, by contrast, farming seemed to have improved little since the Middle Ages. Agricultural techniques remained traditional, and consequently productivity remained low. Peasants, the overwhelming majority, ate sparingly, mostly hard bread, and often worried about getting enough. Moreover, the independence of the French peasantry largely eluded them. In contrast to western Europe, the early modern era saw growing serfdom in the east. Far from owning land, many farmers in eastern Europe were still bonded to it. With relatively few cities or towns to offer an escape from the travails of rural life, peasants in east and central Europe often led a precarious existence.

From these perspectives, French peasants, and the nation as a whole, were fortunate. Only a small minority were serfs, and popular ideology identified the country as the land of free men. At the same time, French commercial and landowning interests lacked the power of their British counterparts to force the enclosure of common lands. Consequently the landowning peasant remained a staple figure of the countryside and indeed the nation's image of itself. Traditional enough to offer many of the protections of earlier centuries against the harsh new logic of capitalism, yet modern enough to provide a vibrant urban sector and a high standard of living, eighteenth-century France did in many ways seem to outsiders a blessed land, one of prosperity and contentment.

So how did such a happy nation produce one of the great revolutions of modern times? The poorest of the poor do not usually trigger revolutionary upheavals, but rather those who have some social means and standing but feel unfairly restricted by the political and institutional structure of their society. Eighteenth-century France, having characteristics of a dying feudal order and a nascent capitalist one, illustrated this. In 1789 France had 26 million people, divided into three estates whose origins went back to the Middle Ages. The first estate, the Catholic Church, owned about 10 percent of the land in France and was dominated by officials of noble origin. The second estate, the nobility, constituted roughly 1–2 percent of the population yet owned a quarter of the land. The aristocracy dominated positions in government and administration, constituting the wealthiest sector of society. To an important extent the first two estates enjoyed exemption from major taxes like the *taille*, a tax on land.

The fact that the last of the three, the third estate, included everyone else in France and thus accounted for nearly 99 percent of the population, graphically demonstrated how obsolete this system of social rank and privilege had become. The peasantry, who alone accounted for four-fifths of the nation, owned roughly half of French land. This group varied widely, ranging from the wealthy farmers known as the “cocks of the village” down to the poorest landless peasants. France also had a substantial and growing middle class, concentrated in the cities and towns, as well as large urban working-class communities. The various social

classes of the third estate had little in common, except for the fact that they lacked the privileges of the first two estates. The middle class, or bourgeoisie, saw its share of the national wealth increase during the eighteenth century, yet its members lacked the social and political status that a noble title could bring. Many peasants paid substantial dues of feudal origin to aristocratic landowners, and they resented having to pay taxes not imposed on the nobility. The divisions between the estates were not absolute: the wealthiest members of the bourgeoisie not only lived like nobles but often socialized with them. Nonetheless, hatred of the nobility was widespread in France during the late eighteenth century, frequently serving to unite an estate that would soon don the mantle of the nation as a whole.

ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD

Hostility toward the nobility helped bring about the Revolution, but such hatred was nothing new in France. The rise of new ideas and values collectively known as the Enlightenment not only challenged the old feudal order but also provided an alternative to it. The relationship between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution is by no means clear-cut. Its main figures emphasized reform, not insurgency, and the majority of people in France knew little about it. It did, however, help undermine the status quo in French society and politics. Emphasizing progress, change, and the primacy of human reason over superstition and traditional authority, the Enlightenment provided a language revolutionaries could use in their assault against the reigning order of things in 1789.

Even more than the Revolution, the Enlightenment was both French and global at the same time. The flight of French Protestants from their homeland in the late seventeenth century played a key role in the origins of the intellectual movement. Not only did the exile of the Huguenots loom large as an example of irrational religious intolerance, but French Protestants based elsewhere in Europe attacked the established order far more harshly than critics within France. Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary*, which questioned the authority of the Bible, was a case in point. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the high point of the Enlightenment, intellectual circles devoted to its ideas could be found throughout Europe as well as across the Atlantic, in both North and South America. David Hume and Adam Smith in Scotland, Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendelssohn in Germany, and Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin in British North America all belonged to Denis Diderot's Republic of Letters. Even the works of French Enlightenment writers often took an international perspective, such as the Baron de Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and Voltaire's *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, and they frequently published their works abroad to avoid censorship laws in France.

At the same time, French thinkers dominated the Enlightenment. The vibrant intellectual and social life of the French capital, the largest city on the European continent, played a major role in this. By the late eighteenth century most Parisians could read, and many took part in the public culture of cafés and newspapers, whose numbers mushroomed during the eighteenth century. On the eve of the Revolution, Paris had one hundred Masonic lodges, drawing men from a wide variety of social backgrounds committed to Enlightenment values of progress. The city's famed salons, social gatherings usually hosted by women of the aristocracy, provided opportunities for Enlightenment thinkers, or *philosophes*, to spread their ideas among the Parisian elite. Also important, however, was the fact that France combined an active public sphere with a repressive monarchy and clergy. This clash between modernity and tradition, similar to that between feudal and capitalist views of society, made France's *philosophes* more focused than elsewhere on fighting the established order and thus championing the new. A key feature of modern French life, the politically engaged intellectual, was born in the Enlightenment.

Key to Enlightenment philosophy was the belief that its ideals applied to all men at all times. Universalism defined the movement, both in France and on a global scale, for several reasons. Inspired by the scientific revolution, Enlightenment thinkers saw themselves as taking the general principles

governing the physical world and applying similar insights to the study of humanity and society. Just as nature was shaped by universal laws and standards, so too was the human experience. The central clash between the Enlightenment and the Church also shaped the universalist expectations of the former, a negative mirror of the Christian universalism long espoused by Rome. The emphasis of the *philosophes* on the centrality of the French language underscored the fact that the universalism of the Enlightenment was very much a *French* universalism; in 1780 King Frederick II of Prussia wrote an essay on German literature praising the clarity of French. As the Enlightenment gained power and influence in eighteenth-century France, so too did the assumption that French culture would play a central role in realizing its universalist aims. The French Revolution would go a long way toward putting that assumption into practice.

During the forty years before the Revolution broke out, French Enlightenment thinkers successfully challenged the authority of the Church and the monarchy. They demanded freedom of speech and of the press, and insisted that human reason, not religion or tradition, should be the supreme arbiter of human affairs. In 1751 Denis Diderot started publishing the massive *Encyclopedia*, a collective work featuring the work of leading *philosophes* that aimed at nothing less than the application of reason to all fields of human knowledge. Officially banned by the royal censors, the *Encyclopedia* was simply too massive and prominent to suppress entirely, so it soon reached a wide reading public. Editions of Enlightenment works published outside France, especially in Switzerland and the Netherlands, also undermined the efforts of French censors to restrict the new ideas. During the 1760s the *philosophes* established their dominance over Parisian intellectual life, infiltrating institutions of official royal culture like the Académie-française. By the time Voltaire and fellow *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau died in 1778, influential members of both the Church and the royal court had embraced their ideas, and France as a whole seemed to be moving along the path of reform laid out by the Enlightenment.

For this reason, although the ideas of the Enlightenment certainly influenced the upheaval of 1789, we must look elsewhere for its causes. Ultimately the Enlightenment preached reform, not revolution. The national universalism of the movement was one of its greatest legacies, but a different aspect of international concerns had a more immediate impact in triggering the birth pangs of modern France.

FROM CRISIS TO REVOLUTION

A combination of international concerns and domestic problems brought about the collapse of the ancien régime in France. The French monarchy had viewed France as the leading nation in Europe, devoting great energy and treasure to realizing French continental hegemony. The foreign policy ambition of Louis XIV had established a model of French greatness on an international scale. Yet it was an expensive model, and even though France was a wealthy nation the governments of the ancien régime were unable to mobilize its resources efficiently. As 1789 would demonstrate, absolute monarchy could no longer realize the dreams of French universalism; the Revolution would provide a new model for modern France.

The first major upheaval in what would come to be called the age of revolution took place not in France but in Britain's North American colonies. Although fundamentally different from France's great revolution in many important respects, the American war of independence foreshadowed it in at least two ways. First, it drew strongly on Enlightenment principles, thus demonstrating that that movement's vision of a progressive republic was indeed feasible. Second, it helped bring to a head the fiscal crisis of the French monarchy, thus directly precipitating the events of 1789.

The American revolution had an enormous attraction for the progressive intellectuals of France. Widely interpreted as an uprising for liberty and human rights against a despotic king, the cause of the American colonists seemed to draw directly from French Enlightenment philosophy. The American declaration of independence sounded major Enlightenment themes of liberty and human rights. The central roles played by *philosophes* like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson only added to its allure, as did the

opportunity it offered France to take revenge on Britain for the latter's seizure of Canada during the Seven Years War. As a result, the French monarchy found itself supporting a revolution for liberty and republicanism. The triumph of the Americans made their cause extremely popular in France. Benjamin Franklin, who lived in Paris between 1776 and 1785, was lionized by Parisians, and French soldiers who had fought in America returned full of admiration for the new republic.

French support for the American revolution also illustrated the less positive side of Enlightenment universalism. The new American state was not only a republic but a republic of slaveholders, and a major impetus for separation from Britain had been London's attempts to restrict the colonists' dispossession of America's native peoples. Moreover, the new republic enfranchised men only, suggesting that the Enlightenment offered relatively little to women. While in theory Enlightenment universalism applied to all people, the new American republic clearly demonstrated that ideas of liberty and human rights did not in fact apply to all. This would become a major issue during France's revolution and ultimately loomed large in the modern history of French universalism.

More concretely, the French crown's substantial expenditures in favor of American independence stretched its own finances to the breaking point. For the past century the monarchy's pursuit of power and *gloire*, both at home and abroad, had strained the nation's resources; for example, the cost of building Versailles was so high that Louis XIV destroyed the receipts. Two major wars in the mid-eighteenth century, the War of Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and the Seven Years War (1756–1763), revealed the financial weaknesses of France's government for all to see. The fact that the Church and the nobility, accounting for much of the nation's wealth, enjoyed immunity from many taxes was the central problem but not the only one. The tax farming system, in which the crown sold the right to collect taxes to private individuals, also limited its ability to raise needed revenue. As a result, the government turned time and time again to borrowing, becoming hopelessly mired in debt. By the middle of the eighteenth century the monarchy was desperately looking for ways to modernize its tax structure and gain control over its bureaucracy.

This was easier said than done, for the nobility and other vested interests fought hard to retain their privileges. Absolutist France had no functioning legislature; the closest equivalent, the Estates General, had last met in 1614. However, regional estates continued to meet in some provinces, usually resisting attempts at centralization and reform. More important were the thirteen *parlements*, aristocratic law courts that had the power to suspend the enforcement of new laws. Wealthy nobles dominated these courts and used their power to resist what they considered royal despotism, often inspired by Enlightenment thinkers. The *parlements* forestalled efforts by Louis XV to reform the national economy in the 1760s, leading to a political clash and their suspension in 1770 by Chancellor René Maupeou. This act did tame resistance to royal authority somewhat, but it also underscored the problems facing attempts at reform.

When Louis XVI was crowned king in 1774, he assumed power over an increasingly restive nation. Although French agriculture increased in productivity during the eighteenth century, it was outstripped by the country's dramatic population growth which crested in the 1770s. High levels of production during much of the century ensured that the additional mouths could be fed, but unfortunately starting in the late 1760s France experienced a series of poor harvests that drove up the price of bread, by far the most important food for most people in city and countryside alike. Food shortages led to a general economic crisis for the next two decades. The new king, well-intentioned but inexperienced, sought to restore public faith in the monarchy by restoring the *parlements* and liberalizing the economy. Comptroller-general Jacques Turgot introduced a series of reforms, notably the abolition of the guilds and of restrictions on the grain trade, accompanied by sharp limits to government spending. These measures proved effective in dealing with the government deficit but provoked widespread discontent. As a result, backing down in the face of resistance by the *parlements* as well as popular riots over the price of grain, in 1777 the king appointed the Swiss banker Jacques Necker to replace Turgot. Whereas Turgot had acted boldly, Necker

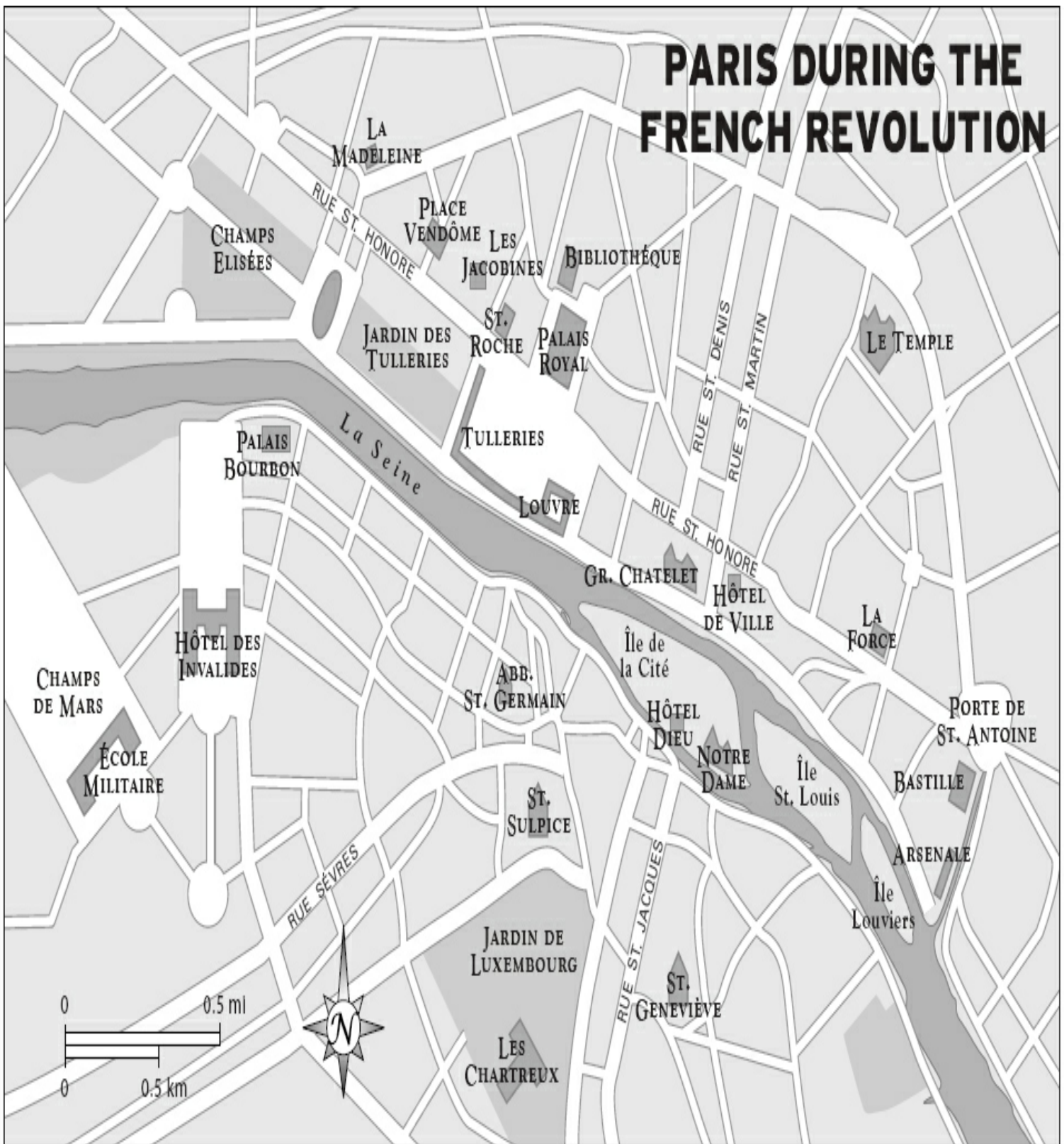
pursued a more hesitant policy of economic reform. Yet his proposals to collect taxes more efficiently and reduce government expenditures also encountered powerful opposition, leading to his dismissal in 1781.

By the 1780s France was clearly in a state of crisis, desperately needing economic reforms but lacking the political structures necessary to realize them. Interest payments on the national debt alone consumed over half of the crown's annual income. Matters came to a head in 1786. In August the latest comptroller-general, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, informed the king that France needed to repay the loans it took out to support America's war of independence but lacked the funds to do so. Like his predecessors he realized that the monarchy had to find a way to tax the Church and nobility, but he also understood the political resistance such measures would elicit. He therefore proposed that the king lay his case before the nation by convoking an Assembly of Notables to discuss the situation. The assembly met in January 1787 but proved unwilling to support Calonne's reforms. Louis XVI then replaced Calonne with the archbishop of Toulouse, Lomenie de Brienne, who dealt with the burgeoning opposition to the monarchy by abolishing the *parlements* altogether.

This was a fateful step. The government's prestige had already been weakened by the failures of earlier reform efforts and continuing economic stagnation. Abolishing the *parlements* caused a firestorm of protest, including major riots throughout the country. For many this was an act of despotism pure and simple, and opponents of the king began to call for convening the Estates General to counteract royal power and to address the problems confronting France. Faced with a tidal wave of opposition, Louis XVI and his ministers saw no alternative but to reinstate the *parlements* and, more significantly, to accept the call for a new Estates General. With this action the king appeased popular opinion for the moment. But in seeking to resolve the political crisis, he laid the basis for a revolution instead.

THE LIBERAL REVOLUTION

In 1789, therefore, France set about the process of convening the Estates General, scheduled to meet in May. Reviving an institution that last met 175 years earlier is easier said than done. One important question concerned the way the people of France would elect the new body. Traditionally, voting for the Estates General had followed its division into three estates: each would have the same number of representatives, and people would only vote for representatives of their own estate. Such a proceeding would have ensured that the first two estates, with less than 3 percent of the nation's population, would control the Estates General.



Map 1.2. Paris during the French Revolution.

This was not at all to the liking of many members of the third estate, however. In the fall of 1788 a radical cleric, Abbé Sieyès, published *What Is the Third Estate?* a pamphlet claiming that the third estate represented the nation as a whole and should rule the Estates General. Sieyès's pamphlet was one example of a vast outpouring of writings prompted by the summoning of the Estates General. In organizing the elections, royal officials called on people throughout France to submit lists of grievances (*cahiers de doléances*), and thousands did so. French writers also published over 3,000 pamphlets in 1789 and founded 184 new newspapers. This formidable mobilization of public opinion forced the king to agree to “doubling

the third,” giving the third estate as many representatives as the first and second combined. Far from resolving the issue, however, this move only increased the determination of many members of the third to fight for full legislative control. The alliance between aristocrats in the *parlements* and bourgeois activists that had forced the king to bow before the challenge to absolutist rule was already breaking down.

The question of representation would dominate the new legislative body. The Estates General that opened on May 3, 1789, in Versailles represented a wide range of opinion among its twelve hundred deputies. A strong majority supported the king, whereas others pushed for more radical steps, including a written constitution and freedom of the press. Immediately deputies wrestled with the issue of how to vote: by estate, as most of the clergy and nobility wished, or by head, the solution desired by members of the third estate. As it became clear that Louis XVI would side with the first two estates, thus handing them effective control of the Estates General, members of the third decided to recast themselves as a unified legislature, which the deputies of the other estates were free to join. On June 17 they, along with a few clerical deputies, unilaterally proclaimed the creation of the National Assembly. The king rejected this challenge to his authority and on June 20 locked the third estate deputies out of their meeting halls. They responded by adjourning in emergency session to a nearby tennis court, the only location large enough to house them, and swearing not to leave until they had written a constitution for France.

The Tennis Court Oath showed that France would not go back to 1614. After denouncing the move by the third estate, on June 27 Louis XVI capitulated, ordering the deputies of the other two estates to join the third in the new National Assembly. The delegates of the third greeted their victory with an outpouring of joy and emotion; one deputy literally died of happiness. The deputies then set about the task of establishing a constitutional monarchy that would balance the legitimate powers of the king with a strong, popularly based legislature. A complex task, to be sure, but in the afterglow of the creation of the National Assembly many considered it eminently feasible. As events would soon show, however, such a view failed to reckon with national popular opinion and activism. The interactions between legislators and militant citizens would become a key theme of the French Revolution, giving the movement its fundamentally transformative character.

The elections to the Estates General and the crafting of the *cahiers des doléances* had mobilized, indeed created, public opinion on a scale unprecedented in France. Millions throughout the country followed the deliberations of the newly elected deputies, and were incensed by noble and clerical resistance to the idea of a National Assembly. Popular anger was fueled by the continued economic downturn and the harsh winter of 1788–1789, which sharply increased unemployment and sent the price of bread climbing to new heights. Louis XVI’s initial support of the first two estates, and his decision to assemble troops around Paris, further stoked popular suspicion of a royalist plot to starve the people of France into political submission. The breaking point came when the king dismissed Jacques Necker, whom he had recalled to replace Lomenie de Brienne as comptroller-general in the fall of 1788. Many viewed Necker as the one pro-reform moderate among the king’s counselors (doubling the Third was his idea, for example), and they saw his dismissal as proof that the king intended to suppress the revolution by force.

The people of Paris responded immediately and powerfully. Officials announced Necker’s dismissal on Sunday, July 12, and Parisians taking their Sunday strolls began debating the news, then crowding into theaters and museums to demand action. At the Palais Royal, a popular gathering spot, the young Camille Desmoulins harangued listeners to arm themselves and resist despotism. Soon a crowd of several thousand had formed and began searching for firearms to challenge the king’s soldiers. By the next day armed mobs of Parisians were attacking granaries and customs houses, even a monastery, to obtain stores of grain. On Tuesday, July 14, the insurgency culminated with the armed seizure of the Bastille, a royal fortress and prison that, to many, symbolized royal despotism and tyranny. The Bastille was only lightly held and counted only a few prisoners in 1789, but the prison governor’s rash decision to fire on the mob unleashed its anger, prompting attackers to smash their way into the fortress with cannon taken from the Invalides, a

military museum and hospital in Paris. The victors cut off the poor governor's head and paraded through the city with it suspended on a pike, a grisly demonstration of the power and anger of the Parisian crowd.

The capture of the Bastille not only furnished modern France with its major national holiday but permanently inscribed the French Revolution in the history and geography of Paris. Parisians were not the only ones to react to the debates in the National Assembly, however. Provincial cities also witnessed conflict as supporters of the assembly seized power from royal officials. At the same time rumors of marauding brigands in the pay of the nobility swept throughout the countryside, prompting peasants to rise up in arms and attack the chateaux of the aristocracy across France, often burning records of seigneurial dues and reclaiming common lands. If the attack on the Bastille made the Revolution in Paris, this so-called Great Fear gave it a national scale and impact. The violent acts taken by hordes of French men and women made the Revolution a reality far beyond the debates in Versailles.

Again, in the face of such turmoil Louis XVI saw no alternative to conceding. He had consistently failed to grasp the significance of the movement or to anticipate effective means of controlling it. When the Duke of Liancourt informed him that the Bastille had been taken, the king asked, "Is it a revolt?" The duke replied, "No sire, it is a revolution."¹ The king soon accepted the demands of the crowd, recalling Necker and sending the royal troops back home to the provinces. Deciding not to flee the country, he instead traveled to Paris and formally accepted the new tricolor cockade, uniting the red and blue of the city of Paris with the white of the monarchy. Clearly the king had lost control of events, and it was now up to the National Assembly to chart out the future of France.

The members of that body thus had to confront a radically changed political landscape. While many rejoiced that the king no longer threatened the Revolution, they were often aghast at the turmoil in Paris and the countryside. France had known peasant revolts before, but this threatened to turn into a national insurgency against property rights in general. The deputies thus felt they had to act to prevent the nation from descending into anarchy. Accordingly, on August 4 they passed the first major legislation of the Revolution, a decree abolishing feudalism. It targeted all feudal obligations and distinctions. In one sense the assembly was simply enacting in theory what the nation's peasants had already effected in practice. Nonetheless, this was a radical measure: it essentially abolished the nobility and the entire notion of a society based on castes in favor of a nation of citizens. The assembly followed this up on August 27 with the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Inspired by Enlightenment thinking and America's declaration of independence, the seventeen-article declaration established that men were citizens, not subjects, and that sovereignty resided in the nation, not the king. Like much Enlightenment writing, the declaration used the language of universalism, suggesting from the outset that the French Revolution should and could apply to all of humanity. The declaration and the abolition of feudalism were impressive achievements that would transform France, remaining bedrocks of the nation's political culture to the present day.

While the National Assembly debated, the new citizens of France went about organizing political life in earnest. What often started as spontaneous meetings in cafés gradually turned into organized political clubs, the ancestors of modern political parties. Most of these clubs supported the cause of the Revolution, in part because popular agitators sometimes attacked conservative groups. The most prominent was known as the Jacobin Club, from the name of the monastery in Paris where it met. By 1791 it could claim over four hundred provincial affiliates. One of its early leading members was a young lawyer from Arras, Maximilian Robespierre, destined to become the leader of the radical Revolution. Clubs generally charged dues, which meant they were limited to the middle classes, and usually excluded women, who sometimes responded by forming their own political clubs. Nonetheless, the clubs played a vital role in spreading awareness of the Revolution throughout the population. French municipal governments were also reorganized in ways that facilitated popular activism. The city (*commune*) of Paris was divided into forty-eight sections, which would become centers of revolutionary militancy. Finally, the National Guard, a citizens' militia first

established in Paris in July to defend the National Assembly, offered ordinary Frenchmen the ability to fight for the Revolution.

Events in October 1789 made it clear that an aroused citizenry was not prepared to give the king or National Assembly a blank check. Continued high bread prices, as well as Louis XVI's failure to endorse the new declaration publicly, stoked popular anger. Rumors of a lavish army banquet in Versailles where soldiers trampled on the tricolor cockade produced an explosion. On October 5, thousands of women gathered in Paris in protest, carrying arms and dragging cannon. They marched the twelve miles to the royal palace at Versailles, demanding an audience with the king. When the crowd broke into the royal apartments the next morning and massacred two palace bodyguards, the king accepted their demands that he and his family move back to Paris. They soon set out, "the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's son," accompanied by the mob and followed by the members of the National Assembly. Henceforth the king and government would work in Paris under the watchful eyes of the city's militant citizenry.

The October 1789 march highlighted the central role of women in the revolutionary process. Most of the leading revolutionaries were male, and the political work of the National Assembly detailed the rights of men as citizens, while largely excluding women. Many of the new political clubs admitted men only. Yet women insisted on their right to a political voice, and time and time again used the platform of the streets to make that voice heard. As October demonstrated, they often led the revolutionary crowds. Thus the distinction between legislative and popular politics that did so much to shape the Revolution was also a gendered distinction. The Revolution thus created a space to allow for the expression of female political agency. In 1791 Olympe de Gouges would take the Declaration of the Rights of Man as a model for her Declaration of the Rights of Women.

The move to Paris in October 1789 calmed the situation, and the National Assembly, installed in its new quarters, got to work drawing up a constitution for France. For the next two years the political situation was relatively calm, allowing the nation's representatives to draft a number of foundational laws that transformed France from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. According to the terms of the constitution of September 1791, the king would remain in power and have the right to delay (but not fully veto) legislation. Real power would rest in a Legislative Assembly, to be elected by all adult males who paid the equivalent of three days wages in taxes annually. The National Assembly formally abolished the nobility, the guilds, and the *parlements*. It got rid of the traditional provinces, dividing France up instead into eighty-three *départements*. It also created a new system of law courts to administer justice from the village to the national level.

The National Assembly devoted particular attention to the question of religion. It separated religion from citizenship, confirming the civil equality of Protestants and then granting the same rights to Jews. These moves provoked some controversy, especially in areas with a history of competition between Protestants and Catholics, but most accepted them. Dealing with the Catholic Church was more difficult. In November 1789 the assembly voted to expropriate the Church's landed property and sell it to private concerns, enabling France to avoid bankruptcy and winning the loyalty of those (mostly wealthy bourgeois) who acquired the new lands. The next year the assembly took further moves to restructure the Church, including popular election of priests. But the move that provoked the most controversy, and ultimately massive counterrevolution, was the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, passed by the assembly in July 1790. The constitution made all Catholic priests civil servants and required them to swear allegiance to the nation. This new law split the Church, and France, in two: nearly half of all French priests refused to accept it, especially in the west and south of the country, and within a year the pope had formally denounced it and the Revolution in general. This clash of universalisms, between the Church and the revolutionaries, would play a key role in the history of the Revolution and modern France as a whole.

Taken collectively, the actions of the National Assembly created the institutional structures of modern France, making the country a model for people throughout the world. It constituted a liberal revolution,

implementing the values of freedom of speech, religion, and the press, as well the accountability of government to its citizenry. It was equally a bourgeois revolution, limiting the franchise to people of means (though the breadth of the franchise, enabling nearly half of all French men to vote, was radical in Europe at the time) and in general defending property rights. The 1791 Le Chapelier law, for example, outlawed trade unions in France. Moreover, by excluding women and the slaves of the Caribbean from politics, it demonstrated the limits of Enlightenment universalism.

Nonetheless, the achievements of the National Assembly represented real progress for France, and many at the time considered the Revolution essentially over. It had, after all, accomplished the main goals of Enlightenment reformism, affirming freedom of expression, the equality of all citizens before the law, and constitutional monarchy. Yet the Revolution did not end. Starting in 1791, it took a new, radical turn that plunged France and all of Europe into unprecedented turmoil. The reasoned moderation of the National Assembly ultimately satisfied neither the right-wing opposition, concentrated among the conservative nobility and the Church, nor the *menu peuple*, the working people and others of modest means in Paris and throughout France. The clash between those forces prevented any quick or easy stabilization.

Another central factor was the increasing internationalization of the revolutionary movement. The liberal Revolution of 1789–1791 had been essentially a domestic affair, taking place in a France consumed with its own problems. This would change after 1791, making the Revolution increasingly a European and even global event. Those outside France regarded the nation's transformation with horror or admiration but rarely indifference, and many saw it as key to their own condition. At the same time, many French revolutionaries felt inspired by a mission to spread the achievements of the Revolution beyond the nation's borders. In consequence, the idea of universalism à la française achieved a new urgency and concrete level of expression that would permanently mark the new French nation.

TRANSNATIONAL FRANCE



*The Modern History
of a Universal Nation*

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