CHAPTER 10

The French Revolution

THE CRISIS OF THE FRENCH MONARCHY

- The French monarchy emerged from the Seven Years’ War defeated and in debt; support of the American Revolution further endangered its financial stability. Louis XV and Louis XVI were unable to solve taxation disputes with the parlements.
- Jacques Necker issued a report blaming the aristocratic government for France’s financial troubles. In 1786, Charles Alexandre de Calonne proposed new taxes, like the gabelle on salt and a new tax on landowners, regardless of status. An Assembly of Notables met with Calonne and claimed they had no authority to consent to new taxes; only the Estates General had that right. In 1788, Louis XVI agreed to convene the Estates General in 1789.

AP® KEY CONCEPTS

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THE REVOLUTION OF 1789

- The Estates General consisted of the First Estate (the clergy), the Second Estate (the nobility), and the Third Estate (wealthy members of the professional middle class). The organization of the Estates General was a source of initial debate. After the calling of the Estates General, new conflicts between aristocrats and the bourgeoisie emerged.
- The Cahiers de Doléances were lists of grievances presented to the monarch. The Third Estate petitioned the king for equality of rights among the king’s subjects. After a standoff, the Third Estate invited the clergy and nobles to join them in creating a new legislative body. On June 17, the body declared itself the National Assembly. Members pledged their loyalty in the Tennis Court Oath and renamed their group the National Constituent Assembly.
- On July 14, more than 800 Parisians stormed the Bastille in search of weapons for the citizen militia they had formed in response to the presence of royal troops in the city and their frustrations with Louis XVI. The crowd stormed the fortress, released prisoners, and killed troops as well as the governor.
- The “Great Fear” that swept the countryside was driven by peasants who felt that they were reclaiming what was rightfully theirs but what had been lost to aristocrats over time.
- In August of 1789, the Assembly set forth the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, a document that claimed that all men were “born and remain free and equal in rights.” Louis XVI was forced by a group of women to return from Versailles to Paris.

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THE RECONSTRUCTION OF FRANCE
- The National Constituent Assembly declared that only “active citizens”—men paying annual taxes equal to three days of local labor were allowed to vote for electors, who, in turn, voted for members of the legislature. Women could not vote or hold office. This law transferred power from aristocratic wealth to anyone with accumulated land or property.
- In local and judicial administration, eighty-three départements replaced ancient provinces.
- The National Constituent Assembly suppressed guilds, liberated the grain trade, and established the metric system.
- The Roman Catholic Church was reconstructed by the Assembly into a branch of the secular state by the issuance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.
- Disgruntled aristocrats known as émigrés left France and resettled in areas near the French border where they plotted counterrevolution.

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THE END OF THE MONARCHY: A SECOND REVOLUTION
- A group of deputies from the Third Estate, called Jacobins, pressed for more radical reform. In the Legislative Assembly, a group of Jacobins known as Girondists ordered the émigrés to return or suffer loss of property and demanded that clergy who had refused to take the oath to support the Civil Constitution do so or lose their state pensions. Louis XVI vetoed both acts.
- In August of 1792, a Parisian crowd invaded the Tuileries Palace and forced Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to take refuge in the Legislative Assembly. Louis effectively lost his power, which was now in the hands of the Paris Commune, a committee of representatives from wards of Paris. During the September Massacres, the Paris Commune murdered about 1,200 people in jails, many of whom were aristocrats or priests. Following these acts, the Convention, a new assembly, declared France a republic. In December of 1792, Louis XVI was executed; one month later, France was at war with England, Holland, Spain, and Prussia.

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EUROPE AT WAR WITH THE REVOLUTION
- Edmund Burke, a British statesman and Irish-born writer, condemned the Revolution for its extreme measures in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). Other European leaders, like William Pitt in England, and rulers in Prussia, Russia, discouraged popular uprisings.
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   I. In much of Europe, absolute monarchy was established over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
   IV. The French Revolution posed a fundamental challenge to Europe’s existing political and social order.

THE REIGN OF TERROR

- War brought new challenges for the Republic of France. The revolutionary government established a series of committees to protect its new creation. The Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety were created to carry out executive duties of the government. A levée en masse, or military conscription, for all males in the population was mobilized to defend the country. This citizen army led to the Reign of Terror, a period marked by quasi-judicial executions from autumn 1793 to mid-summer 1794. The Christian calendar, with its religious holidays, was replaced by a secular calendar, and other places of worship were “de-Christianized.”

- Executions were increasingly arbitrary, with sans-culottes revolutionaries serving as victims as well as persecutors. Marie Antoinette and other members of the royal family were the first victims. Maximilien Robespierre, a powerful member of the Committee for Public Safety, who established the “Cult of the Supreme Being,” a civic religion modeled after the views of Rousseau, had encouraged the execution of key republican political figures, including his Committee colleague Jacques Danton. Robespierre also became a victim of the terror he had helped create and was executed. The Reign of Terror claimed more than 25,000 victims.

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THE THERMIDORIAN REACTION 385–390

- The Thermidorian Reaction involved political reconstruction, and abandoned the Constitution of 1793. In its place, the Convention issued the Constitution of the Year III, which provided for a legislature of two houses. The upper body, or Council of Elders, consisted of men over forty who were husbands or widowers. The lower Council of Five Hundred consisted of men of at least thirty years old who were either married or single. The executive body was a five-person Directory, chosen by the Elders from a list submitted by the Council of Five Hundred.

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