12 The French Revolution

Crisis of the French monarchy

France emerged from Seven Years’ War deeply in debt

Its decision to help the American revolutionaries worsened its financial situation

The French monarchy could not tap the wealth of the nation through taxes to service and repay the debt

France was a rich nation with an impoverished government

Monarchy seeks new taxes

To resolve its financial difficulties the monarchy sought to bring the aristocracy under tighter control, but each scheme to tap the wealth of the nobility was blocked by the parlements (the aristocratic courts)

Both Louis XV and Louis XVI lacked the strength of character to wage a determined campaign against the aristocracy, thus they hesitated, retreated, and tied deception

In 1770 Louis XV’s chancellor René Maupeou pushed him to take direct action

Maupeou abolished the parlements, exiled their members to different parts of the country, and began to reorganize the government to increase efficiency

Louis XV’s death in 1774 doomed the program

Louis XVI restored the parlements in hopes of winning their support

France’s plan to underwrite the American Revolution was a political triumph, but it was a financial disaster

When in 1781 the director-general of finances revealed that a large portion of royal expenditures went to pensions for aristocrats and court favorites, he was driven from office

Nevertheless, this revelation made it difficult for later government officials to claim a need to raise taxes

In 1786 a new minister of finance proposed a new tax on land to be paid by all landowners regardless of social status

Local assemblies were set up to approve the land taxes

In the assemblies, voting power was based on the amount of land one owned rather than social status

These assemblies were designed to undermine the parlements and thus the power of the aristocracy

Aristocracy and clergy resist taxes

Support from high-ranking aristocrats and clergy for the plan was sought in an Assembly of Notables

Although the state treasury was nearly empty and creditors were demanding repayment, the Assembly refused to cooperate

Instead, it insisted that the Assembly had no right to consent to new taxes

The Assembly said that the authority for this power was vested in a medieval institution called the Estates General which hadn’t met since 1614

Since the aristocrats and the clergy dominated the Estates General, the king was not willing to convene such a meeting

In desperation, the finance minister appealed to the Assembly of the Clergy for help in meeting the payment of the national debt

The clergy not only refused to help, they reduced the contributions they had been making to the government

As pressure mounted, the king ultimately agreed to convene the Estates General in 1789

This development is seen as the death of the royal absolutism in France as it was established by Louis XIV

Revolutions of 1789

Social rank (class) conflict was not the cause of the ensuing revolution, but a strategy that its leaders used to further their objectives

When disagreements divided the propertied ranks, the bourgeois (middle ranks) turned to tradespeople and working people for support

But when revolution became too radical, upper and middle ranks joined forced to protect their shared interests

The power vacuum created by a weak monarchy created opportunities for new kinds of leaders to emerge

The development of print media and public debate and opinion encouraged debate on a wider scale than ever before in history and it contributed to the development of a new political culture

The concerns of articulate individuals prevailed over those of the collective ranks based on social status

Estates General becomes National Assembly

Three ranks were represented in the Estates General

First Estate: the clergy

Second Estate: the nobility

Third Estate: commercial and professional ranks

All of the ranks represented men of property, and this didn’t ensure their cooperation

Debate over organization and voting

A debate over the organization of the Estates General broke out before the meeting started

The aristocrats demanded that each estate be represented by an equal number of representatives

And the parlement of Paris ruled that each estate, not each delegate, should have one vote

This ensured that the First and Second Estates could always outvote the Third Estate

The Spokesmen for the Third Estate accused the aristocrats with hypocrisy for accusing the crown of violating the liberty of French citizens while they pursued the same action against the Third Estate

The royal council decided that the Third Estate would be its best ally for reform, and granted the Third Estate twice the number of representatives as the clergy and nobles

The king did not decree the method of voting until the Estates General had met at Versailles

The Cahiers de Doléances (list of grievances)

Those that met at Versailles brought a list of grievances that complained of government waste, indirect taxes, church taxes, corrupt clergy, and the hunting rights of the aristocracy

They demanded periodic meetings of the Estates General, more equitable taxes, more local control of administration, unified weights and measures, a free press, and equality of rights among all subjects of the king

The Estates General ground to a halt when the Third Estate refused to obey the king and decided to convene as a separate entity

On June 1, 1789, the Third Estate invited the clergy and the nobles to join it in dissolving the Estates General and to set up a new body

The National Assembly was created on June 17

The Tennis Court Oath

On the 20th members of the National Assembly, meeting on a tennis court after they were locked out of their meeting place, took an oath not to disperse until they had given France a constitution

Although the king ordered the assembly to desist, he backed down when a majority of clergy and a large number of nobles joined in the oath

The king then ordered the First and Second Estates to meet with the National Assembly and vote by head rather than by order

The National Assembly renamed itself the National Constituent Assembly and was composed of men from all three estates dedicated to the liberal reform of France

Fall of the Bastille

Many in the Assembly wanted to create a constitutional monarchy but Louis XVI’s refusal to cooperate prevented that

By opposing the diverse and opposing interests against the king’s power, he helped unite those forces against himself

The king tried to intimidate the Assembly by sending royal troops to Versailles and Paris where they met

And he made decisions of state without informing the Assembly

The presence of royal troops in Paris created anxiety due to recent bread riots there

The Parisians who met to elect representatives to the Third Estate continued to meet and formed a citizen militia

When the king dismissed the finance minister, they became convinced that he intended to attack Paris and the National Constituent Assembly

On July 14, more than 800 people marched to the fortress called the Bastille to demand weapons for the city’s militia

The forts governor lost control of the situation and his troops fired on the crowd

98 people died and many were wounded

The enraged crowd stormed the fortress, released some prisoners, and killed the fort’s governor and some soldiers

No weapons were found inside

The next day, the militia of Paris, calling itself the National Guard offered its command to the American Revolutionary War hero, the marquis de Lafayette

Lafayette suggested the guard’s insignia

The colors of Paris, red and blue, separated by a white stripe representing the crown

This design became the badge of the revolution and eventually the flag of France

The attack on the Bastille revealed that the National Constituent Assembly was not in control

As the word of the fall of the Bastille spread, mobs took to the streets and proceeded to attack government institutions

Louis XVI decided to court the allegiance of the Paris rioters

He wore the revolutionary badge (cockade) and went to Paris to authorize the National Guard and to recognize the Third Estate elector’s organization as the city’s government

The Great Fear and the surrender of feudal privileges

A “Great Fear” swept the countryside when rumors suggesting royal troops were to be sent to occupy the region

Chateaux were burned, public records were destroyed, and feudal dues repudiated as the fear spread through the rural areas

Peasants took possession of scarce food supplies and land

Several aristocrats and clergy in the National Constituent Assembly renounced their feudal rights, dues, and tithes in order to undercut the motivation of the rebellious peasants in order to restore order in the countryside

This development led others to divest themselves of their privileges

This act of renunciation meant that all French citizens were subject to the same and equal laws

This paved the way for the legal and social reconstruction of France

The National Constituent Assembly exploited the fear created by the popular uprisings to intimidate the king

But when the factions of the Assembly began to fight among themselves, the factions turned to the masses for support

The artisan and shopkeeping ranks were the best organized to respond and they demanded a price for their cooperation

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

On August 27, 1789, the National Constituent Assembly approved the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

A statement of principles that would guide the writing of a new constitution

It affirmed that all men were born free and equal with unalienable rights to liberty, property, and personal safety

Governments were said to exist to protect those rights

And all citizens were guaranteed equal protection before the law and equal opportunity of admission to public office

Due process of law, presumption of innocence until proof of guilt, and freedom of religion were affirmed

Taxation was to be apportioned based on ability to pay, and property was declared a right ordained by God

The Declaration was an indictment of the abuses of the absolutist monarchy

The Royal family forced to return to Paris

Suspicion grew that Louis XVI was contemplating military action

He had delayed ratification of the Declaration and the renunciation of feudalism

On October, 7, 1789, a crown of 7,000 armed Parisian women marched on Versailles to demand relief from a bread shortage

The king agreed to sanction the decrees of the assembly

But the crowd was suspicious of the king and they demanded that he move to Paris where his conduct could be monitored

Louis XVI had no choice but to move to his palace in Paris

This was the first mass insurrection to use the language of popular sovereignty against a monarch

The reconstruction of France

The National Constituent Assembly followed the king to Paris and the situation remained peaceful until the summer of 1792

In Paris the Assembly set about reorganizing France as a constitutional monarchy (copied from Britain)

It endorsed a policy of unregulated free trade

Protection of property

And it was anticlerical, or anti-church in its religious views

The aristocracy and the middle castes stood united on all these issues

Although the Assembly championed civic equality before the law, it opposed social equality and radical democracy (majority rule)

The intent was to leave political control of the nation to the propertied ranks

Political reorganization

Active and passive citizens

The constitution issued by the Assembly in 1791 established a unicameral Legislature as the chief political authority of the nation (copied from Britain)

An elaborate system of indirect election was created to minimize influence on the government from the masses

The citizenry was divided into two categories: active and passive

Active citizens were those who paid taxes equal to 3 days of local labor wages

Active citizens could vote for electors who would then vote to choose members of the legislature

Since there were higher property qualifications for service as an elector or legislator, only about 50,000 citizens out of 25 million people in France qualified to hold office

These constitutional arrangements reformed French society by making wealth rather than birth as the basis of political power

However, there was no distinction between forms of wealth, whether it was based on aristocratic estates or commercial property

Departments replace provinces

The Assembly also used rational methods of enlightenment science to reorganize local government and the judiciary

It replaced provinces that had evolved as part of French medieval feudal history with 83 departments of approximate equal size

The feudal courts and parlements were replaced with a uniform court system, and court procedures were simplified

Economic policy

The Assembly continued the economic policies advocated by Louis XVI’s reformist finance ministers

These involved removing restraints on commerce by suppressing guilds and liberating the grain trade

The Assembly also endorsed the metric system as the uniform standard of weights and measures

Workers’ organizations forbidden

The Assembly’s dedication to creating an economy free from all restraints meant that it was hostile to any attempt of workers to organize

A law was passed that forbade worker’s associations

Confiscation of church lands

When the new taxes instituted by the Assembly proved to be insufficient, it then confiscated the property of the Catholic Church and sold it

This was a decisive and divisive action

This action caused inflation by putting more wealth into circulation, and it invited religious schism and religious civil war

The Assignats

In December of 1789, the Assembly issued the assignats or government bonds (loans from the public) whose value was backed up by the revenue that was to be generated from the sale of church property

These bonds were initially limited, but public desire to buy them encouraged the Assembly to potentially liquidate the national debt

This created a large body of bondholders (lenders) with a direct stake in the survival of the revolution

However, the value of the bonds began to fall and inflation increased

The civil constitution and the clergy

The confiscation of church lands required a reorganization of the church

Without consulting the pope, the Assembly declared the Roman Catholic Church to be a branch of the state and the number of bishops were reduced

Priests and bishops were made salaried employees of the state and were to be elected like other state officials

This was a major mistake by the Assembly

Opposition from the clergy provoked the Assembly to demand that the clergy take an oath of loyalty to the state

Only a few of the clergy complied

Those who didn’t were removed from office

In February 1791 the pope condemned the Assembly’s measures against the church and the Declaration of the Rights of Man

This was the beginning of a Catholic Church offensive against liberalism and the revolution that continued throughout the nineteenth century

And this helps us understand the continuation hostility towards the Church and Catholics in Protestant countries, including the United States

Many French people found themselves having to choose between their religion and their loyalty to the revolution

Counterrevolutionary activity

The revolution had other enemies besides the Church and devout Catholics

Many aristocrats who opposed the revolution had fled France and set up bases of counterrevolutionary activity

This included the king’s younger brother

He persuaded Louis XVI to flee France

Flight to Varennes

On June 20, 1791, the king left Paris for Metz

He was recognized at Varennes and was held there

On the 24th, soldiers forced the royal family back to Paris

Upon the king’s return, the Assembly sought to preserve the constitutional monarchy and announced that the king had been abducted

The public failed to buy the story and it became apparent that the king was the most prominent counterrevolutionary in France

Declaration of Pillnitz

Two months later, queen Marie Antoinette’s brother, Leopold II of Austria, and Prussian leader Frederick II, the Great, issued the Declaration of Pillnitz

In the declaration, the monarchs promised to intervene in France in order to protect the French royal family and to protect the monarchy if the major European nations supported them

The last provision rendered the declaration meaningless since Britain would never support such a move that might upset the balance of power on the continent

The declaration however, convinced the French revolutionaries that they were surrounded by hostile monarchists, and this increased the threat to the safety of the royal family

A second revolution

The National Constituent Assembly dissolved itself in September 1791 and the new Legislative Assembly took its place

The last act of the Constituent Assembly was to forbid any member of that Assembly to seek election to the new assembly

This created resentment among many French aristocrats due to their loss of position in the government and they began to plot against the new assembly

In western France, peasants resisted revolutionary changes, especially those that affected the church

Radical members of the new assembly sided with Parisian workers and women who believed that the revolution had not gone far enough

Outside of France, nations were becoming worried that the revolution was becoming a threat to their interest

By the spring of 1792 all of these pressures began to unravel the original political settlement of the revolution and encouraged the implementation of new revolutionary changes that were far more radical

End of the monarchy

Factionalism had plagued the Legislative Assembly

During the period of the Estates General, the Third Estate had established clubs to bring together persons with similar political philosophies

One of these clubs, the Jacobins took their name from a Dominican monastery in Paris where they met

The Jacobins were one of the best organized clubs

They embraced the most radical Enlightenment political theories, and they urged the previous assembly to establish a republic rather than a constitutional monarchy

A group of Jacobins called Girondists after the department of Gironde that many of them represented, assumed a leadership role in the Legislative Assembly

To defeat the forces of counterrevolutionaries, the Girondists passed laws confiscating the property of those who had fled France, as well as deprived resisting clergy of their state pension

The king vetoed these laws

In April 1792, the Girondists persuaded the Legislative Assembly to declare war on Austria and Prussia

The Girondists believed that war would solidify public support for the revolution and make the revolution more radical

Paradoxically, Louis XVI was in favor of the war since he felt it could help his status as well

Some historians also think that Louis XVI had nothing to lose, since if France was defeated in such a war, the power of his crown would be restored

The war radicalized the revolution and led to a second revolution that overthrew the constitutional monarchy and established a republic

To defend the nation the government had to mobilize all its resources and lend a sympathetic ear to appeals for rights from patriotic citizens that had previously been excluded from politics

For example, women petitioned the government for the right to bear arms to fight for the revolution

However, the war went badly, and the suspicion of the king’s loyalty increased when the Prussians warned of dire consequences if the royal family was harmed

On August 10, 1792, a large hostile crowd invaded the king’s Paris palace and forced the royal family to take refuge in the Legislative Assembly

This led to the imprisonment of the royal family in house arrest

The king was prohibited to exercising his political functions

The constitutional monarchy began to fall apart

The convention and the role of the sans-culottes

In July 1792, radicals from the working ranks declared Paris a commune and two months later the Paris Commune ordered the September Massacres in which aristocrats, priests, and prisoners were slaughtered

The Paris Commune then compelled the Legislative Assembly to decree universal male suffrage and to call for the election of a new Assembly in order to write a new constitution

The constitutional convention which was named for the American Constitutional Convention met on September 21, 1792

The convention’s first act was to declare France a republic

A nation governed by an elected assembly without a king

Goals of the sans-culottes

The second revolution was the work of two factions

A faction of Jacobins more radical than the Girondists

And Parisians called sans-culottes

The term meant without breeches and referred to the long pants they wore in place of the knee-length breeches favored by aristocrats

The sans-culottes were shopkeepers, artisans, wage earners, and factory workers

To win the war the revolutionary government needed their support, and they were able to use that need a leverage to determine the course of the revolution

The sans-culottes knew what they wanted

Immediate relief from food shortages

Government limits on rising prices

And an end to social inequality

They were intensely hostile to aristocrats and suspected that the original revolutionaries were aspiring to create a new aristocracy

They envisioned a nation of small property owners who enjoyed the same political rights

They were antimonarchical, strongly republican, and distrustful of representative government

They were impatient and unwilling to trust their fates to anyone but themselves

The policies of the Jacobins

The goals of the sans-culottes were not in line with the Jacobins, since the Jacobins wanted representative government and an unregulated economy

However, after the attempted escape by the king, more extreme Jacobins called the Mountain (since their seats were at the top of the assembly hall) sided with the sans-culottes in an effort to win the war and to end the monarchy

Execution of Louis XVI

In December 1792, the king was put on trial for conspiring against the liberty of the people and the security of the state

The Girondists tried to spare the king’s life but the Mountain won his conviction

On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI was beheaded

The execution of the king put pressure on the government

Prussia renewed their offensive against France and pushed the French out of Belgium

Every major European power declared its opposition to the revolution

The Convention then declared war on Great Britain, Holland, and Spain (it was already at war with Prussia and Austria)

In March 1793, a royalist revolt erupted in western France and began to spread

In response to all these developments, the Mountain concluded that the Girondists were incapable of defending the nation from either of its foreign or domestic enemies

Europe at war with the Revolution

By 1792, the European monarchies were alert to the danger of French revolutionary ideas and aggression

The Declaration of the Rights of Man was a document that was applicable top the rest of Europe

And to prevent the spread of its revolutionary ideology, European governments instituted repressive domestic policies

Edmund Burke attacks the Revolution

In 1790, Edmund Burke, a British statesman, outlined the position taken in Europe in opposition to the French Revolution

Burke rejected Enlightenment rationalism as a realistic program for reform and predicted disaster for any government that failed to recognize the historical realities of a country’s traditions and the complexities of human social relations

He predicted turmoil as inexperienced people tried to lead France, and the events there unfolded much as he predicted

Suppression of Reform in Britain

In light of the situation in France, the government in Great Britain suppressed reform organizations and secured parliamentary acts that broadened the definition of treason, and curbed freedom of the press

Almost any opposition to the government was considered treasonous at the time

The end of enlightened absolutism in Europe

The French Revolution brought an end to the experiment of enlightened absolutism in eastern Europe as Austria and Prussia became involved in the counterrevolutionary struggle

Both Joseph II in Austria and Frederick II in Prussia suppressed popular uprisings in their empires

Catherine the Great denounced Enlightenment works and exiled Russian reformers to Siberia

In 1795 the eastern emperors announced that a constitutional monarchy had been established in Poland, thereby providing them with an excuse to partition sections of the country

War with Europe

The success of the Revolution in France was a setback for reform movements elsewhere in Europe

When French forces occupied the Austrian Netherlands in November 1792, the Convention declared that it would aid all peoples who wished to cast off the burdens of aristocratic and monarchical oppression

The Reign of Terror

The war transformed the way the French revolutionaries thought about themselves

They now believed that they were engaged, not in a struggle over national boundaries, but a defense of a bold new ideology that the world was determined to destroy

Thus, to protect the revolution, the government considered it necessary to employ extreme measures

The Republic defended

The Committee of Public Safety

In April 1793, the Convention created powerful committees to serve as a collective executive

The Committee of General Security and the Committee of Public Safety handled most of the duties of the government

The Committee of Public Safety was led by three men who were committed republicans and enemies of the Girondists

Jacques Danton

Maximilien Robespierre

Lazare Carnot

The Committee had almost dictatorial powers and they believed that their duty was to save the revolution from its mortal enemies at home and abroad

They courted the sans-culottes and suppressed many of the rights that the revolution claimed to protect

Chief among these was the right to life

The internal instability and civil conflict in France prompted a rigorous search for internal enemies of the revolution

These developments quickly got out of hand

The levee en masse

In early June 1793 the sans-culottes invaded the Convention and expelled the Girondists and place the Mountain in control

On June 22, the Convention approved a fully democratic constitution but delayed its implementation until the end of the war

In August the Committee on Public Safety issued an order for the total military mobility of the nation for the war effort

The creation of a citizen army for the first time in modern Europe

There had been one in America

A Reign of Terror ensued as the sans-culotte demanded a rapid transformation of society

The Republic of Virtue

The threat of foreign armies closing in on France made it easy to do away with legal due process

The revolution’s leaders believed that they had created something new in world history, a republic of virtue where the concern for the common good replaced aristocratic corruption

Every aspect of society was now to be transformed for the benefit of the masses

Everything was redefined to express the egalitarian spirit of the revolution

The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

During the impassioned months of the Reign of Terror women organized to fight the internal enemies of the revolution

A Society of Revolutionary Women was formed in May 1793

It promoted stricter controls on the price of food, persecution of food hoarders, and the indictment of women who were considered insufficiently revolutionary

When the Convention began to suppress women in October 1793, making it illegal for them to organize politically, Olympe de Gouges, author of the Declaration of the Rights of Women, opposed the Terror, and accused the Jacobins of corruption

She was guillotined in November 1793

Women were eventually excluded from serving in the army and were shut out of the galleries of the Convention

So much for a break with tradition in favor of radical revolution

De-Christianization

The most dramatic attempt of the republic of virtue’s determination to break with the traditions of the past was its attempt to de-Christianize France

In October 1793, the Convention declared that the day the French Republic was established, instead of the birth of Christ, was the historical pivotal point of the reference of time

Thus time, and the calendar were reformed based on revolutionary concepts

The cathedral of Notre Dame was declared a Temple of Reason, and churches were closed, believers persecuted, and priests forced to marry

Of course, this roused opposition and drove a wedge between the radicals in Paris and French citizens in the provinces

In May 1794, the worship of reason was deemed to be too abstract for most people, and the revolution then endorsed the Cult of the Supreme Being based on Rousseau’s vision of a deistic civic religion

Robespierre

In late 1793 and early 1794 Robespierre became the chief figure on the Committee of Public Safety

Robespierre was utterly selfless and committed to the republic, but he was also a shrewd politician

He had opposed the war in 1792 because he feared that it might strengthen the monarchy

He argued against de-Christianization as a political mistake

For Robespierre, the republic of virtue entailed renunciation of selfish gains from political life

However, this sense of selflessness (love?) enabled him to overlook issues of morality and he viewed the Terror as nothing more than an instrument of swift republican justice

Progress of the Terror

During the summer of 1793 the Convention established tribunals to search out the enemies of the republic

However, the definition of “enemy” shifted as the political situation shifted over the months

Eventually the term was applied to staunch republicans who made the mistake of opposing the will of the dominant faction of the government

The tribunals began by executing Marie Antoinette and other members of the royal family along with some aristocrats

Some Girondists followed

By early 1794, the search for enemies of the revolution spread into the provinces and begun to involve members of every rank and status, including sans-culottes

Thousands were put to the guillotine and other forms of execution

Revolutionaries turn against themselves

In late winter of 1794, Robespierre began to manipulate the Terror to remove anyone who threatened him, on the left and the right

He executed some sans-culottes leaders who were pushing for more price controls, social equalization, and de-Christianization

On the other hand, he executed conservative republicans for their lack of commitment to the war

On June 10, 1794, he secured the passage of a law that increased the murderous efficiency of the tribunals by permitting them to convict suspects without hearing substantial evidence

Fall of Robespierre

On July 26, 1794, Robespierre made a speech accusing unnamed leaders of the government of conspiring against the revolution

The vague references in the speech caused the members of the Convention to act on their instinct of self-preservation

The next day, the members shouted Robespierre down when he rose to make another speech

That night Robespierre was arrested and was executed the following day

Robespierre had destroyed rival leaders without creating any followers of his own

Thermidorian Reaction

By the late summer of 1794, the uprisings in the provinces had been crushed and the foreign wars were going well

A growing sense of security and a conviction that the revolution had become too radical persuaded the revolutionaries to end the Terror

Despite the fact that the majority of the victims of the Terror, over 25,000, were peasants and sans-culottes, the public began to fear that the sans-culottes had become too powerful

The end of the Terror

The so-called Thermidorian Reaction began in July 1794 and inaugurated a new constitutional regime

Thermidor was the revolutionary name for summer

Wealthy members of the middling ranks replaced the sans-culottes as the voices that influenced the government

The Convention allowed the Girondists to return and there was a general amnesty for all political prisoners

The power of the Committee of Public Safety was greatly reduced, and notorious laws were repealed

Some people responsible for the Terror were removed from office and leaders of the Paris Commune were executed

The Paris Commune was outlawed, and the Jacobin Club was closed

There was a backlash called the White Terror where people who had been involved in the Terror were attacked and murdered

Jacobins were executed by mob action, but some Jacobins were executed by the Convention

The republic of virtue yielded to common sense and social stability as life began to return to normal

The Convention allowed Catholic services to be held and priests returned to their pulpits

The Thermidorians and their successors had seen enough of political and social radicalism and reform

They were attracted by the stability of traditional institutions, and they wanted a return to family life as it had been before the revolution

Establishment of the Directory

The fully democratic constitution adopted in 1793 had never gone into effect, and the Convention now replaced it with the Constitution of Year III

This provided for a bicameral legislature

A Council of Elders composed of married or widowed men over 40 years old

A Council of 500 consisting of males at least 30 years old

The executive was a five-person Directory chosen by the Elders from a list submitted by the Council of 500

Property qualifications determined who could vote, but all soldiers could vote regardless of property ownership

The Directory moderated, but did not try to reverse the revolution

By 1795 permanent changes had taken place in France

Assumptions of civic equality had replaced traditional distinctions of rank and birth

Social status was determined by property ownership

People who never had any political power now had some to a limited degree

Representation had been established as a principle of government, but it wasn’t clear who would be permitted representation

The post-Thermidorian course of the French Revolution was a victory for the middle ranks whose wealth stemmed from commerce, the professions, and land

The largest new propertied portion of the population to emerge from the revolutionary turmoil was the peasantry

Removal of the Sans-culottes from political life

With the war effort succeeding the Convention severed its ties with the sans-culottes

The Thermidorians repealed price controls and returned to an unregulated economy

As a result, the winter of 1794-95 brought the worst food shortages

Royalists tried to take advantage of the discontent and on October 5, 1795, they inspired rioting in Paris against the Convention

A general named Napoleon Bonaparte commanded the cannon that dispersed the riotous crowd in favor of the Convention

Earlier in March 1795, the Convention concluded peace with Prussia and Spain and took steps to prevent extreme democrats and royalists from winning seats in the Council of 500

The following year, the Convention again had to beat back the radicals and executed the leader of a movement that advocated radical democracy and greater equality of property

The Directory lacked a broad base of political support, but it survived because the army was willing to sustain it while France was still at war with Austria and Great Britain

The instability of the Directory and the deepening involvement of the army in its politics, however, were to have profound consequences not only for France but for the entire Western world