1958

2. The French Revolution, 1789-1815

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Abstract
"A torch lighted in the forests of America set all Europe in conflagration." Thus Voltaire had written concerning the impact of the American Revolution on the Old World. French intellectuals had long admired Newtonian science and Lockean political theory. The successful revolutions in England in 1688 and in America a century later emphasized the anachronistic nature of the status quo in eighteenth century France. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that in the year when Americans completed their revolution the French began a movement which was to involve practically the entire European continent, drastically reshape its social and political institutions, and make its repercussions felt even in the New World. [excerpt]

Keywords
Contemporary Civilization, French Revolution, Bourgeoisie, Monarch, Nobility, Political Influence

Disciplines
European History | History | Military History | Political History | Social History

Comments
This is a part of Section XI: The Revolutionary Years, 1776-1815. The Contemporary Civilization page lists all additional sections of Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, as well as the Table of Contents for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:
From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of “introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages.”

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems. A second edition, retitled Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker ’66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

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"A torch lighted in the forests of America set all Europe in conflagration." Thus Voltaire had written concerning the impact of the American Revolution on the Old World. French intellectuals had long admired Newtonian science and Lockean political theory. The successful revolutions in England in 1688 and in America a century later emphasized the anachronistic nature of the status quo in eighteenth century France. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that in the year when Americans completed their revolution the French began a movement which was to involve practically the entire European continent, drastically reshape its social and political institutions, and make its repercussions felt even in the New World.

The Frenchmen who first rebelled were not enslaved peasants or exploited workingmen, but the bourgeoisie who resented what they deemed an intolerable situation. As their wealth expanded during the eighteenth century without a corresponding advance in political influence or social prestige, they first sought moderate reforms within the monarchical system. Their early efforts were frustrated, as were those of Britain's American colonists, by entrenched privilege and a heedless king.

The roots of the upheaval in France go back at least to the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), whose rule paved the way for the frivolities and immoralities of his successor, Louis XV (1715-1774). The latter's wars and extravagances burdened Frenchmen with an enormous tax load from which the clergy and privileged nobility were largely exempt. The chief burden was borne by the commoners of the third estate with no opportunity for relief. The Estates General, which might have provided a sounding board for popular grievances, had not met since 1614.

In 1774, the weak, indolent, and stupid Louis XVI succeeded to the throne. A well-meaning but vacillating monarch; he began by appointing a new ministry headed by a capable financier. This minister, whose background and views were essentially physiocratic, offended the aristocracy by instituting a program of reform and economy, and at the behest of the court Louis dismissed him. His successors relied on fresh loans to cover any economic needs.
continuing deficits in the treasury and the public debt mounted. Intervention in the American Revolution had, it is true, humbled France's bitter foe and assured American independence, but at the cost of threatening to bankrupt France. Confronted with the need to impose new taxes, Louis summoned the Estates General to its first session in 175 years. This amounted to confession of failure of royal absolutism.

The assembly, composed of representatives of the three traditional estates, met at Versailles in May 1789. For decades the third estate had been paying the piper without enjoying the privilege of calling the tune. Its growing restiveness was perhaps most concisely expressed in the famous pamphlet written by a liberal cleric, the Abbe Sieyès (1748-1836). His essay (What is the Third Estate?) considered the grievances of the discontented in the following colloquy:

We have three questions to consider:
(1) What is the third estate? Everything.
(2) What has it been in the political order up to the present? Nothing.
(3) What does it demand? To become something.

All could sense by this dialogue that the third estate would no longer acquiesce in its political subordination. In addition, the bourgeoisie were galvanized by their status of social inferiority. Representatives of the third estate consequently brought with them thousands of lists of complaints and suggestions (cahiers) which included among their demands that "all offices and positions, civil, ecclesiastical, and military, shall be open to all orders." Furthermore, their instructions required them to vote the abolition of "all relics of serfdom." To achieve this, however, it was necessary to depart from the old practice of each estate's meeting and voting separately. Otherwise the third estate would be outnumbered two to one. Since the commoners had been granted a number of representatives equal to the other two estates combined, they demanded that the estates should meet together and vote by head.

The representatives of the bourgeoisie appeared at Versailles armed with a deep sense of grievance, a revolutionary philosophy, and a program of reform. The philosophes had taught their lessons well to a receptive public whom circumstances had made apt pupils. The literary efforts of Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and others captured the imagination of many of the aristocracy, who, like Lafayette, were willing to fight for the new ideas either at home or abroad. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that an intellectually discontented, commercially prosperous, but politically impotent French middle class should have inaugurated Europe's greatest revolution.

The cahiers presented by the representatives of the third estate reveal that the middle class envisaged but moderate reforms at first. They desired a constitutional monarchy much like that which existed in England, the abolition of social and
economic barriers, the guarantee of individual civil rights, equality before the law, and an equitable system of taxation. Even these temperate proposals met with the hostility of both king and noble. The representatives of the third estate thereupon constituted themselves as a National Assembly, and when the king closed the doors of their meeting place they reconvened in an indoor tennis court. Now joined by some of the lower clergy and more idealistic nobles, they took the celebrated "Tennis Court Oath" (June 20, 1789), swearing never to separate or adjourn until they had drawn up a constitution for France. This was the real beginning of the active phase of the French Revolution, and the king capitulated temporarily by ordering the other delegates to sit with the National Assembly.

Many of the nobility, during the dramatic session of August 4-5, publicly renounced their feudal privileges before the National Assembly. Such radicalism alarmed the court, and conservatives persuaded Louis to oppose any change which would transfer power into the hands of the people. The king set his face against the popular reforms just as rumors spread that he was preparing a counter-revolutionary stroke. A series of popular uprisings followed, including an attack on a Parisian fortress, the Bastille, where political offenders were imprisoned. This action released few prisoners, but the date of the fall of the Bastille (July 14) became a French national holiday equivalent to the American Fourth of July. In the provinces the peasants sacked and burned local bastilles and chateaux. Law and order broke down and in the confusion reigning from one end of France to another the economic life of the nation approached a standstill. A mob of hungry women of Paris marched to Versailles in October, invaded the royal palace, and were dissuaded from further depredations only upon the king's promise to remove himself and his family back to the city. The royal family took up residence in the Palace of the Tuileries, where they found themselves virtual prisoners.

The National Assembly followed Louis to Paris and during the next two years drew up a constitution which incorporated a number of reforms already in force since 1789. This Constitution of 1791 provided for a limited monarchy, an elected parliament, a fair judicial system, the abolition of guilds, confiscation of church lands, and the right of peasants to dissolve their feudal obligations. Under the leadership of the Abbe Sieyes and the Count of Mirabeau (1749-1791), who were representatives of the clergy and lower nobility respectively, the National Assembly had provided France with an opportunity to effect peaceful change. As a preamble to the Constitution of 1791 the Assembly inserted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, drawn up in 1789 as a French equivalent of the English Bill of Rights and of the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution:

The representatives of the people of France, formed into a national assembly, considering that ignorance, neglect, or contempt of human rights, are the sole causes
of public misfortunes, and corruptions of government, have resolved to set forth, in a solemn declaration, these natural, imprescriptible, and unalienable rights: that this declaration being constantly present to the minds of the body social, they may be ever kept attentive to their rights and their duties: that the acts of the legislative and executive powers of government, being capable of being every moment compared with the end of political institutions, may be more respected: and also, that the future claims of the citizens, being directed by simple and incontestable principles, may always tend to the maintenance of the constitution and the general happiness.

For these reasons the national assembly doth recognize and declare, in the presence of the Supreme Being, and with the hope of his blessing and favor, the following sacred rights of men and of citizens:

I. Men are born and always continue free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can only be founded on public utility.

II. The end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression.

III. The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.

IV. Political liberty consists in the power of doing whatever does not injure another. The exercise of the natural rights of every man has no other limits than those which are necessary to secure to every other man the free exercise of the same rights; and these limits are determinable only by law.

V. The law ought to prohibit only actions hurtful to society. What is not prohibited by the law, should not be hindered; nor should any one be compelled to that which the law does not require.

VI. The law is an expression of the will of the community. All citizens have a right to concur, either personally, or by their representatives, in its formation. It should be the same to all, whether it protects or punishes; and all being equal in its sight, are equally eligible to all honors, places, and employments, according to their different abilities, without any other distinction than that created by their virtues and talents.

VII. No man should be accused, arrested, or held in confinement, except in cases determined by the law, and according to the forms which it has prescribed. All who promote, solicit, execute, or cause to be executed, arbitrary orders, ought to be punished, and every citizen called upon or apprehended by virtue of the law, ought immediately to obey, and not render himself culpable by resistance.

VIII. The law ought to impose no other penalties than
such as are absolutely and evidently necessary; and no one ought to be punished, but in virtue of a law promulgated before the offence and legally applied.

IX. Every man being presumed innocent till he has been convicted, whenever his detention becomes indispensable, all rigor to him, more than is necessary to secure his person, ought to be provided against by the law.

X. No man ought to be molested on account of his opinions, not even on account of his religious opinions, provided his avowal of them does not disturb the public order established by the law.

XI. The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious rights of man, every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely, provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

XII. A public force being necessary to give security to the rights of men and of citizens, that force is instituted for the benefit of the community, and not for the particular benefit of the persons with whom it is intrusted.

XIII. A common contribution being necessary for the support of the public force, and for defraying the other expenses of government, it ought to be divided equally among the members of the community, according to their abilities.

XIV. Every citizen has a right, either by himself or his representative, to a free voice in determining the necessity of public contributions, the appropriation of them, and their amount, mode of assessment, and duration.

XV. Every community has a right to demand of all its agents an account of their conduct.

XVI. Every community in which a separation of powers and a security of rights is not provided for, wants a constitution.

XVII. The right to property being inviolable and sacred, no one ought to be deprived of it, except in cases of evident public necessity legally ascertained, and on condition of a previous just indemnity. *

It is hardly surprising that the king, beguiled by his beautiful consort, Marie Antoinette, joined the privileged classes in detesting the new order of things. Within and without France they intrigued against the new constitution and Louis secretly encouraged his brother monarchs to come to his aid. The hostility of the pope to the anticlerical phases of the revolution turned many of the clergy against the popular cause. In 1792, the monarchs of Austria and Prussia moved against France, promising "to put an end to the anarchy in the interior of France" and restore to the king "the legitimate

authority which is his due." The commander of the invading armies threatened to raze Paris to the ground if the new government did not surrender immediately. This tactless approach persuaded the revolutionary leaders that the security of the new government was seriously menaced by reactionaries from abroad and by counterrevolutionaries at home.

The fear thus engendered played into the hands of radical elements which from the first had objected to those articles in the Constitution of 1791 that provided for the retention of the monarchy, set up property qualifications for voting, and permitted domination of the new government by the bourgeoisie. The most powerful of the radical organizations was the Jacobin Club, led by such extremists as Georges Jacques Danton (1759-1794) and Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794). Sporadic riots and massacres enabled them to gain control of the revolution (1792). They proceeded to abolish the Constitution of 1791 and summon a new constituent assembly called the National Convention (1792-1795). Louis XVI was tried on charges of plotting with foreign enemies and was beheaded (1793), followed to the guillotine in a few months by Marie Antoinette. The Terror had begun.

Under the National Convention the meaning of liberty was narrowed to conform with Rousseau's interpretation of the general will. Equality referred to all citizens of the new French republic, in contrast to the previous status of the French people as subjects of the king. Fraternity embraced only French nationals, and the nationalistic theme which ran through the patriotic hymn of the Revolution, La Marseillaise, was "sacred love of fatherland." The Tricolor became the new French flag. French armies were now drawn from the rank and file of the population by the levee en masse. In accordance with the stress on rationalism even the old calendar was altered. The new year was to begin in September, the number of days in each month was fixed at thirty, and new "natural" names for the months were decided upon. The Goddess of Reason replaced the Virgin as an object of adoration. An attempt was made to bring about a rational codification of the law and the metric system of measurement was introduced by legislation.

The National Convention anticipated the eventual establishment of constitutional government but assumed that it could be realized only through revolutionary government. "We must establish the despotism of liberty to crush the despotism of kings," declared one leader of the Convention. It fell to Robespierre, sometimes called "Rousseau in action," to justify the ruthlessness that followed. In a classic defense of harsh measures, "On the Principles of a Revolutionary Government," Robespierre appealed to the twin emotions of fear and patriotism among the French people (1793):

Citizens, members of the Convention! Success induces the weak to sleep, but fills the strong with even more power of resistance.
Let us leave to Europe and to history the task of lauding the marvels of Toulon, and let us arm for new victories of liberty!

The defenders of the Republic will be guided by Caesar's maxim, and believe that nothing has been accomplished so long as anything remains to be accomplished.

To judge by the power and the will of our republican soldiers, it will be easy to defeat the English and the traitors. But we have another task of no less importance, but unfortunately of greater difficulty. This task is the task of frustrating, by an uninterrupted excess of energy, the eternal intrigues of all enemies of freedom within the country, and of paving the way for the victory of the principles on which the general weal depends.

These are the big tasks that you have imposed upon your Committee of Public Safety.

Let us first demonstrate the principles and the necessity of a revolutionary government, after which we shall describe those factors that aim to paralyze the birth of such a government.

The theory of the revolutionary government is as new as the Revolution itself, from which this government was born. This theory may not be found in the books of the political writers who were unable to predict the Revolution, nor in the law books of the tyrants. The revolutionary government is the cause of the fear of the aristocracy, or the pretext for its calumnies. For the tyrants this government is a scandal, for most people it is a miracle. It must be explained to all, so that at least all good citizens may be rallied around the principles of the general weal.

The goal of a constitutional government is the protection of the Republic; that of a revolutionary government is the establishment of the Republic.

The Revolution is the war waged by liberty against its foes -- but the Constitution is the regime of victorious and peaceful freedom.

The Revolutionary Government will need to put forth extraordinary activity, because it is at war. It is subject to no constant laws, since the circumstances under which it prevails are those of a storm, and change with every moment. This government is obliged unceasingly to disclose new sources of energy to oppose the rapidly changing face of danger.

Under constitutional rule, it is sufficient to protect individuals against the encroachments of the state power. Under a revolutionary regime, the state power itself must protect itself against all that attack it.

The revolutionary government owes a national protection to good citizens; to its foes it owes only death.

Is the revolutionary government, by reason of the greater rapidity of its course and the greater freedom of its movements than are characteristic of an ordinary government, therefore less just and less legitimate? No, it
is based on the most sacred of all laws, on the general 
weal and on the ironclad law of necessity!

This government has nothing in common with anarchy or 
with disorder; on the contrary, its goal requires the 
destruction of anarchy and disorder in order to realize a 
dominion of law. It has nothing in common with autocracy, 
for it is not inspired by personal passions.

The measure of its strength is the stubbornness and 
perfidy of its enemies; the more cruelly it proceeds 
against its enemies, the closer is its intimacy with the 
republicans; the greater the severities required from it 
by circumstances, the more must it recoil from unnecessary 
violations of private interests, unless the latter are de­
manded by the public necessity. . . .

If we were permitted a choice between an excess of 
patriotism and a base deficiency in public spirit, or even 
a morass of moderation, our choice should soon be made. 
A healthy body, tormented by an excess of strength, has 
better prospects than a corpse.

Let us beware of slaying patriotism in the delusion 
that we are healing and moderating it.

By its very nature, patriotism is energetic and en­
thusiastic. Who can love his country coldly and moder­
ately? Patriotism is the quality of common men who are 
not always capable of measuring the consequences of all 
their acts, and where is the patriot to be found who is 
so enlightened as never to err? If we admit the existence 
of moderates and cowards who act in good faith, why should 
there not also exist patriots in good faith, who sometimes 
err by excess of zeal? If, therefore, we are to regard 
all those as criminals who have exceeded the limits of 
caution in the revolutionary movement, we should be ob­
ligated to condemn equally the bad citizens, the enemies of 
the republic, as well as its enthusiastic friends, and 
should thus destroy the stoutest props of the Republic. 
There could be no other outcome than that the emissaries 
of tyranny would be our public prosecutors.

In indicating the duties of the revolutionary govern­
ment we have also pointed out the spots in which it is 
endangered. But the greater its power, the freer and 
swifter its actions, the more must they be subjected to 
the test of good faith. The day on which such a govern­
ment falls into unclean and perfidious hands is the day 
of the death of the Republic. Its name will become the 
pretext, the excuse of counter-revolution; its strength 
will be the strength of venom.

The establishment of the French Revolution was no 
child's play; it cannot be the work of caprice and care­
lessness, nor can it be the accidental product of the 
coalition of all the individual demands and of the revo­
lutionary elements. Wisdom and power created the uni­
verse. In assigning to men from your own midst the ter­
rible task of watching over the destinies of our country, 
you have placed at their disposal your abilities and your 
confidence. If the revolutionary government is not
supported by the intelligence and the patriotism and by
the benevolence of all the representatives of the people,
where else should it draw the strength enabling it to
face the efforts of a united Europe on an equal plane?
The authority of the Constituent Assembly must be re-
spected by all Europe. The tyrants are exhausting the
resources of their politics, and sacrificing their treas-
ures, in order to degrade this authority and destroy it.
The National Assembly, however, prefers its government to
the cabinets of London and all the other courts of Europe.
Either we shall rule, or the tyrants will rule us. What
are the resources of our enemies in this war of treachery
and corruption waged by them against the Republic? All
the vices fight for them; the Republic has all the virtues
on its side. The virtues are simple, poor, often ignorant,
sometimes brutal. They are the heritage of the unhappy,
the possession of the people. Vice is surrounded by all
the treasures, armed with all the charms of voluptuousness,
with all the enticements of perfidy; it is escorted by all
the dangerous talents that have placed their services at
the disposal of crime.

Great skill is shown by the tyrants in turning against
us -- not to mention our passions and our weaknesses --
even our patriotism! No doubt the germs of disunion which
they sow among us would be capable of rapid dissemination
if we should not hasten to stifle them.

By virtue of five years of treason, by virtue of feeble
precautions, and by virtue of our gullibility, Austria,
England, Russia and Italy have had time to set up, as it
were, a secret government in France, a government that
competes with the French government. They have their
secret committees, their treasures, their agents, they
absorb men from us and appropriate them to themselves,
they have the unity that we lack, they have the policy
that we have often neglected, they have the consistency
which we have so often failed to show.

Foreign courts have for some time been spewing out on
French soil their well-paid criminals. Their agents still
infect our armies, as even our victory at Toulon will
show. All the bravery of our soldiers, all the devotion
of our generals, and all the heroism of the members of
this Assembly had to be put forth to defeat treason.
These gentlemen still speak in our administrative bodies,
in the various sections; they secure admission to the
clubs; they sometimes may be found sitting among us; they
lead the counter-revolution; they lurk about us, they
eavesdrop on our secrets; they flatter our passions and
seek even to influence our opinions and to turn our own
decisions against us. When you are weak, they praise our
cautions. When you are cautious, they accuse us of weak-
ness. Your courage they designate as audacity, your
justice as cruelty. If we spare them, they will conspire
publicly; if we threaten them, they will conspire secretly
or under the mask of patriotism. Yesterday they murdered
the defenders of liberty; to-day they mingle in the procession of mourners and weep for their own victims. Blood has flowed all over the country on their account, but we need this blood in the struggle against the tyrants of Europe. The foreigners have set themselves up as the arbitrators of public peace; they have sought to do their work with money; at their behest, the people found bread; when they willed it otherwise, the bread was not available; they succeeded in inaugurating gatherings in front of the bakeshops and in securing the leadership of bands of famished men. We are surrounded by their hired assassins and their spies. We know this, we witness it ourselves, and yet they live! The perfidious emissaries who address us, who flatter us -- these are the brothers, the accomplices, the bodyguard of those who destroy our crops, who threaten our cities, massacre our brothers, cut down our prisoners. They are all looking for a leader, even among us. Their chief interest is to incite us to enmity among ourselves. If they succeed in this, this will mean a new lease of life for the aristocracy, the hour of the rebirth of the Federalist plans. They would punish the faction of the Girondistes for the obstacles that have been placed in their way. They would avenge themselves on the Mountain for its splendid spirit of self-sacrifice, for their attacks are aimed at the Convention. We shall continue to make war, war against England, against the Austrians, against all their allies. Our only possible answer to their pamphlets and lies is to destroy them. And we shall know how to hate the enemies of our country.

It is not in the hearts of the poor and the patriots that the fear of terror must dwell, but there in the midst of the camp of the foreign brigands, who would bargain for our skin, who would drink the blood of the French people.

The Committee of Public Safety has recognized that the law does not punish the great criminals with the necessary swiftness. Foreigners, well-known agents of the allied kings, generals besmirched with the blood of Frenchmen, former accomplices of Dumouriez and Custine and Lamarlières have long been in custody and are yet not executed.

The conspirators are very numerous. It is far less necessary to punish a hundred unknown, obscure wretches, than to seize and put to death a single leader of the conspirators.

The members of the Revolutionary Tribunal, whose patriotism and rectitude can for the most part only be praised, have called the attention even of the members of the Committee of Public Safety to the deficiencies in the laws. We propose to you that the Committee of Public Safety be entrusted with the task of introducing a number of innovations in this connection, with the purpose of strengthening and accelerating the hand of justice in its procedure against intrigues. You have already commissioned the
Committee, in a decree, to this effect. We propose that you create the means by which its judgments may be accelerated against foreigners and against generals conspiring with the tyrants.

It is not enough to terrify the enemies of our country; we must also aid its defenders.

We ask that favorable conditions be created for the soldiers who are fighting and dying for liberty.

The French army is not only a terror to the tyrants, it is the glory of humanity and of the nation. In their march to victory, our victorious warriors shout, "Long live the Republic!" They die under the swords of the foe, with the shout, "Long live the Republic!" on their lips; their last words are paeans to liberty, their last gasps are exclamations of homage to their country. If the leaders of the army were as valiant as our soldiers, Europe would have been defeated long ago.

Any measure adopted in favor of the army is an act of national gratitude.

What we have done thus far for the defenders of our country and for their families seems far too little. We should increase the allowances one-third. The immense resources of the Republic permit it; our country demands it. We have also ascertained that the invalids, as well as the widows and children of those who have died for their country, are often injured by the formalities of the law, and by the indifference and ill-favor of subaltern officers. We demand that they be aided by official advocates, who will assist them in attaining their rights.

For all these reasons, I ask that the Convention adopt the following measures:

I. The public prosecutor assigned to the revolutionary tribunal shall at once draw up articles of indictment against Dietrich Custine, the son of the general condemned by law, Desbrullis, Biron, Barthélemy, and all the other generals and officers who were connected with Dumouriez, Custine, Lamarlières and Houchard. The public prosecutor shall also indict foreigners, bankers, and all other individuals having any communications with the kings allied against the Republic.

II. The Committee of Public Safety shall report at the earliest possible moment on the appropriate means for securing an improvement in the organization of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

III. Allowances and aids, as paid hitherto to veterans or their dependents, shall be increased one-third.

IV. A commission shall be appointed entrusted with the task of defending the rights of veterans and their dependents.

V. The members of this Commission shall be appointed by the Convention and shall be nominated by the Committee of Public Safety.

In those lands where hostility to the status quo was increasing, the socially and politically oppressed warmly accepted the propagation of the new ideas. Liberals, intellectuals, and men of good will saw in the revolution a new day of promise. In America, just recently emerging from a revolutionary experience of its own, Thomas Jefferson viewed the downfall of the Old Regime in France as an omen of hope for all mankind and many of his followers formed Jacobin Clubs and wore the symbolic tricolor cockade. On the Continent where there were regimes more reactionary than that of the Bourbons at Versailles, restless members of the middle class, avowed democrats, and radical intellectuals awaited their day of liberation. Although this was a consummation which seemed distant, their agitation prepared the ground for the growth of the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The effect of the new ideas radiated from France in concentric circles, and people nearest the French frontier were inclined to be most receptive, especially in Germany and Italy, which were still primarily mere "geographic expressions." In Spain, still the most medieval of European states, and in Russia, where the reforms of Peter the Great had but briefly disturbed long existing social institutions, intellectuals were flirting with the new doctrines. Even in England, whose people had enjoyed a modicum of constitutional government during the century since the Glorious Revolution, the upper classes felt relatively insecure.

By 1794 the excesses of the Terror brought a public reaction in France. The leaders of the National Convention fell victims to the tyranny which they had unleashed, and with the execution of Robespierre the bloody phase of the revolution ended. The government now passed into the hands of a group known as the Directory (1795-1799), which attempted to stabilize the Revolution. The Directory used the army against royalists and radicals alike, and when a revolt broke out in 1795 a young artillery officer, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), saved the day by turning cannon against a Parisian mob. This "whiff of grapeshot" fired at the rioters brought him to the attention of the grateful authorities. Deeming him an able and useful officer who could be trusted, the Directory straightway placed Napoleon in command of the army. Victories won in Italy and Austria so enhanced his reputation among the populace that, when in 1799 the Directory was revealed as venal and weak, Frenchmen turned to the general who seemed able to preserve order at home and guarantee victory abroad.

Napoleon was to give his name to the historical period covering the next sixteen years. He precipitated the fall of the Directory and proclaimed a new form of government, the Consulate, with executive power centered in his own hands. The dictatorship which he established a little more than a decade after the Tennis Court Oath marked the arrival of the final stage of the French Revolution. Napoleon had chosen to play a
role which earlier Washington had rejected. The basis of his appeal to and subsequent support by the French people is seen in a proclamation announcing his assumption of authority, in which he made his claim to be the heir of the Revolutionary tradition.

Citizens, a constitution is offered to you.

It brings to a close the uncertainties which the provisional government caused in our foreign relations, in the domestic and military condition of the republic. It places, in the institutions which it has established, the first magistrates whose devotion appears necessary to its activity.

The constitution is founded on the true principles of representative government, on the sacred rights of property, equality, and liberty.

The powers which it institutes, will be strong and stable; such as they ought to be in order to guaranty the rights of the citizens, and the interests of the state.

Citizens, the Revolution is settled on the very principles with which it began. IT IS ENDED. *

In 1804, Napoleon took the title of emperor. Disillusioned liberals throughout the Continent might repudiate his increasing authoritarianism, but for the next eleven years he dominated European politics. At home he brought some needed reforms and consolidated some of the gains won in the Revolution. Perhaps the outstanding example of Napoleon’s contribution was the Napoleonic Code (1804-1810), a complete codification of French civil and criminal law, drawn up under Napoleon's supervision on the basis of work already begun. The code provided one law for all Frenchmen and is noteworthy because of its merger of the old and the new. For example, it combined equality before the law with a reemphasis on the authority of the state, the husband and the father. The emperor felt that his future fame would be based on this achievement if on nothing else. Much of the code is still followed in Europe and even in some parts of America today.

Abroad Napoleon engaged in a series of military adventures and "liberations," carrying the revolutionary gospel with his invasions of foreign lands. Between 1805 and 1808 he attained the zenith of his power and influence, but after this period his fortunes underwent a steady decline until his final defeat and forced exile in 1815. His egotism led him into further aggressions which in turn provoked reaction among the conquered peoples. The spirit of nationalism which his conquests aroused in Spain, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere was turned against him. His great military strength was drained by his foolhardy invasion.

of Russia in 1812 and by the British-supported resistance in Spain and Portugal. With the myth of his military invincibility destroyed, Napoleon's enemies redoubled their efforts and defeated him in two successive battles, at Leipzig (1813) and at Waterloo (1815).

Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power through the chaos of Revolutionary France, whose concepts of equality and fraternity he professed to preserve by merging them with the traditions of stability and authority of the Old Regime. Only by understanding this can we appreciate the appeal of Napoleon to Frenchmen and other Europeans. His own evaluation of his role reveals his intense egotism and his consequent failure to realize fully his opportunity to consolidate the liberal ideals of the Revolution. In exile on the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic, Napoleon still clung to the illusion that history would justify his methods, as the following, written in 1816, attests:

I closed the gulf of anarchy and cleared [away] the chaos. I purified the Revolution, dignified Nations and established Kings. I excited every kind of emulation, rewarded every kind of merit, and extended the limits of glory! This is at least something! And on what point can I be assailed on which an historian could not defend me? Can it be for my intentions? But even here I can find absolution. Can it be for my despotism? It may be demonstrated that the Dictatorship was absolutely necessary. Will it be said that I restrained liberty? It can be proved that licentiousness, anarchy, and the greatest irregularities still haunted the threshold of freedom. Shall I be accused of having been too fond of war? It can be shown that I always received the first attack. Will it be said that I aimed at universal monarchy? It can be proved that this was merely the result of fortuitous circumstances, and that our enemies themselves led me step by step to the determination. Lastly, shall I be blamed for my ambition? This passion I must doubtless be allowed to have possessed, and that in no small degree; but at the same time, my ambition was of the highest and noblest kind that ever, perhaps existed!... That of establishing and of consecrating the Empire of reason, and the full exercise and complete enjoyment of all the human faculties! And here the historian will probably feel compelled to regret that such ambition should not have been fulfilled and gratified!... This is my whole history in a few words. *

Born in a spirit of hope and optimism, the French Revolution came eventually to influence all of Western Civilization.

It dealt a death blow to the vestiges of feudalism still extant, and served as the vehicle through which ideals of nationalism, liberalism, and democracy were introduced into nineteenth century Europe. Many states adopted a tricolor or similar flag as a symbol of national unity, their patriotic hymns became national anthems, and their armies came to be made up of patriots rather than mercenaries. In France particularly, with but few interruptions, government was henceforth carried on by discussion. French political institutions were efficiently centralized. Crane Brinton believes that France is "perhaps the most completely unified great nation in the world today."

In France, the atmosphere turned more favorable for the entrepreneur. Business became a wholly honorable profession, as it had not been before. French agriculture came to reside in the hands of small, independent, peasant proprietors who helped make France one of the most economically self-sufficient of European states. The new France, and to a lesser degree the rest of Europe, saw the advance of social democracy. Educational opportunity broadened and society was pervaded by a growing feeling that one man was as good as another. Although the authority of institutionalized Christianity and entrenched privilege was greatly reduced, the idea of authority remained strong. Nevertheless, the notion spread through Europe that authority was no longer sacrosanct. Unquestionably the upheaval in France furthered the idea that revolution was a cure for all the social ills besetting modern man, and since 1776 and 1789 revolutions themselves have gained almost the status of an institution.

In the realm of ideas the French Revolution brought far-reaching changes in the European mind. As the principles of the Enlightenment spread on the heels of Napoleon's invading armies the old loyalties to church, monarchy, and caste were weakened. But the excesses of the Terror in time inspired a reaction against the secularistic and materialistic thought of the Enlightenment. The intellectual and spiritual conflict made of the first part of the nineteenth century a period of social discord in which liberalism and nationalism, idealism and materialism struggled for supremacy.