

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Modern European History

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Unit 5 – Revolutions

#### The Revolution Ends

**Directions: Thoroughly annotate this reading.**

#### **The Committee of Public Safety**

The republican government of France now had to fight an international war and a civil war against royalist rebels. Continuing financial trouble, made worse by the costs of these new conflicts, led to skyrocketing food prices. The government decided to take emergency measures. In early April 1793, the Convention created the Committee of Public Safety to help guide the government. Made up of twelve men, the committee would claim more and more power for itself over the next year until it had established a totalitarian state which used terror and fear to subdue its opponents. It would claim to do this in the name of “liberty, equality, and justice.” Maximilien Robespierre was the spokesman of the Committee of Public Safety.

How to solve the crises facing France divided the Convention and led to a showdown between the Girondists and the Mountain. Worried about the influence of the Paris sans culottes on government policies, the Girondists argued that The Convention should be moved away from Paris.

The Girondists also arranged for the journalist Marat to be tried before the Convention’s Revolutionary Tribunal. Marat had advocated for more executions of people deemed traitors and for a temporary dictatorship. Marat was acquitted and carried from the court by cheering crowds. In June, the sans culottes stormed the Convention and successfully demanded that the Girondists be arrested and expelled from the assembly. The Mountain now had control of the assembly. A supporter of the Girondists named Charlotte Corday assassinated Marat in July 1793. The assassination fueled fears among members of Committee for Public Safety that there was a massive plot against them. Committee members believed the government was not strong enough to deal with France’s internal and external crises.

High prices and shortages of food and goods continued to plague the public. The Committee set maximum prices for food known as the “Law of the Maximum.” It also set about trying to win the war against foreign enemies as well as the civil war. To do this it established a military draft for all men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

The Committee dispatched forces to recapture cities held by rebel forces including Marseilles, Lyon, and France’s large naval base at Toulon. After the French army won Lyon and Marseilles, the rebels decided to surrender Toulon to the British navy. This provoked outrage against the rebels as well as fear. An influential populist newspaper (populist means appealing to ordinary people) called for radical measures - including violence and executions - to be taken against enemies of the revolution. This included those who were hoarding grain or other basic goods. In September 1793, thousands of sans culottes marched to

the Convention to demand drastic action against hoarders and other enemies of the Revolution. The Convention agreed immediately.

The Convention began a campaign to eliminate those perceived to be “treasonous.” It enacted the “Law of Suspects,” which limited judicial protections for those accused of a crime. It also expanded the definition of what was a political crime. Eventually, no one felt safe from suspicion.

In October 1793, Marie Antoinette was tried and executed, as were most of the Girondists. Former nobles were arrested and tried if they had not demonstrated loyalty to the revolution. Many others were swept up in what was known as “The Reign of Terror” or simply “The Terror.” It would last until July 1794 and during that time about sixteen thousand were tried and sentenced to death. Up to 500,000 went to prison as suspects and as many as ten thousand may have died in prison because of poor conditions.

The Terror spread beyond Paris, particularly to areas associated with rebellion against the republic. For example, after the city of Lyon was recaptured from royalist rebels, the Committee of Public Safety vowed to make Lyon an example. They issued a decree that the city should be destroyed. About two thousand were executed.

The draft and other measures enacted<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> by the Committee on Public Safety greatly strengthened France’s army. After defeating rebels in Lyon it proceeded to Toulon and drove out the British fleet. It was also able to end the civil war by defeating royalist rebels in the Vendée region of France. Historians estimate that up to 250,000 died in this rebellion, many of them women, children, and non-combatants.

### **French Society is Changed**

The writers of the Enlightenment had wanted to create a more egalitarian society based on principles of reason. Their ideas had inspired many of the participants in the French Revolution, including representatives of the Convention, who made dramatic changes to French society. It introduced the metric system and created laws for equal inheritances within families, including girls. Representatives to the Convention believed they had to reduce the role and power of the Catholic Church in order to remake French society. The Convention abandoned the Christian calendar and created a new calendar that renamed the months of the year, made weeks ten days long, and began with year one.

The Convention also removed responsibility for education from the church and put it<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> in the hands of the government. It required births, deaths, and marriages to be registered at city hall and not with the church. Divorce, prohibited by the Catholic Church, was legalized. Other matters were taken out of<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> the hands of the church with unintended yet severe consequences for many of the poor.

The intent of the Convention was to improve conditions for France’s many impoverished people. But the decision to take responsibility from the church for all the hospitals and charities that cared for the sick, the elderly, orphans, and the very poor proved to be a mistake because the government simply did not have

the money to provide the services that so many depended on. The controls on prices of food items put in place to help the poor did not work well either, bringing more suffering and hardship.

### **De-Christianization**

Some revolutionaries took the campaign against the Church a step further. They concluded that resistance to their agenda came from the Catholic Church. The movement<sup>[1]</sup> was known as de-Christianization. It was not organized by the Committee for Public Safety or the Convention, but by government officials acting on their own.

In spite of this, de-Christianization became a part of the Terror carried out by local officials. This was particularly the case in the areas of France that had rebelled against the revolutionary government. In Paris, the Paris Commune closed all churches and renamed the cathedral of Notre-Dame “The Temple of Reason.” The word “Saint” was removed from street signs. Churches were vandalized or closed, and priests forbidden to wear religious clothing. If a priest was denounced by six citizens, he was subject to deportation from France. Many priests and nuns were forced to marry.

Robespierre worried that de-Christianization in such a religious country would create<sup>[1]</sup> a backlash against the republican government. He and the Committee on Public Safety warned about the danger of this anti-religious fervor and persecution. The Convention declared that religious freedom was one the founding principles of the Revolution. Nevertheless, by the spring of 1794, local authorities had closed most of the churches in France.

The fact that such a movement could begin worried the Committee of Public Safety. Robespierre worried about the lack of centralized control and took steps to centralize decision-making and put more authority in the hands of the Committee. The Committee claimed the power to hire and fire local officials. This represented a significant change from reforms enacted in 1789, when the public chose local officials through elections. Robespierre justified all of these actions in the name of liberty and equality.

### **The Terror Ends**

With France’s success ending its civil war and on the battlefields of Europe, some of the justifications for the Terror disappeared. To criticize the Terror was to risk being swept up in its wide net. Nevertheless, public doubts grew about the Committee’s methods.

In the spring of 1794, Robespierre began a campaign to promote civic virtues like justice, heroism, and modesty. The goal was to create a civic religion known as “The Cult of the Supreme Being.” Robespierre hoped this would unify France and not divide society like he believed Catholicism did. Robespierre’s prominent role in promoting “The Cult of the Supreme Being” led some to accuse him of trying to become a dictator.

In early June, a new law increased the government’s power to seek “enemies of the people,” defining treason more broadly and vaguely. For example, it was a political crime to “inspire discouragement.”

Witnesses were not necessary and prisoners were not allowed to have lawyers. Mass trials were held

where suspects were tried together even if their cases were unrelated. Representatives of the Convention feared that they too could be accused of treason.

June and July of 1794 came to be called “The Great Terror” as more than 1,500 were guillotined in Paris. Fear and doubts about the continuing necessity of the Terror provoked a backlash against the Committee for Public Safety. On July 27th, 1794, Robespierre was arrested. He, most members of the Committee, and more than one hundred others were sent to the guillotine. The Terror was over.

### **Thermidorian Reaction**

Robespierre’s arrest had fallen during the newly named month of Thermidor (derived from a French word that means heat). Other months were named for their seasonal characteristics. For example Floreal, which meant “flowering,” began at the end of April.

After the fall of Robespierre, the policies of the revolutionary government became far less radical. Today, the term Thermidorian Reaction, is used by historians to describe a reactionary moment in a revolution where a radical regime is replaced by a more conservative one.

The Convention set about revoking the harshest and most resented laws from the period of the Terror. Prisoners arrested during the Terror were released from prison. The Convention declared that religions could be freely practiced but that all religious ceremonies had to be held indoors and members of the clergy could not wear religious clothing. Many Catholics felt safe enough to practice their beliefs again. Catholicism underwent a tremendous resurgence throughout the country.

Public sentiment ran so strongly against the Terror and what it represented, that talk<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> of restoring the monarchy and replacing the republic began to increase. Those who hoped for this were known as royalists or monarchists.

In addition to rumblings from royalists hoping to restore a king to France, the Convention faced pressure from the sans culottes. Disastrous harvests had led to famine again in 1795. Crowds took to the streets in Paris calling for bread and a return to the radical policies of the previous year. Many of those who had organized influential protests by the sans culottes had fallen victims to the Terror. The Convention was able to suppress this new uprising without much difficulty. The influence of the sans culottes in Paris had decreased.

### **A New Constitution**

In 1795 the Convention prepared another constitution. It was France’s third constitution in five years. Designed to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a few that had made the Terror possible, it ended universal suffrage for men. Instead the new constitution required voters to be men who paid taxes or had served in the army. It established a bicameral legislature that selected an executive body called the Directory, which had five directors.

The Convention also proposed that two-thirds of the new assembly be composed of members of the Convention. This met resistance from the royalists. They saw this measure as an effort by supporters of the republic to avoid elections and hold on to power. When twenty-five thousands royalists began an insurrection in Paris in October to overturn the constitution, it was put down by the army led by a young general named Napoleon Bonaparte.

The Directory faced a continuing struggle to solve France's economic problems. Some<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> of their policies helped stabilize the economy as did slightly better harvests. Nevertheless, hardship, hunger, and the great contrasts between the extremely wealthy and the poor remained. Political struggles among the Jacobins, royalists, and other factions continued. These struggles, and memories of the Terror created an atmosphere where the political stakes were very high.

One group, led by François-Noël Babeuf, came to be known as the "Conspiracy of Equals." Babeuf favored a redistribution of property to all. (Today, some see his ideas as a forerunner to Marxism and Communism.) Babeuf's plan to overthrow the government was discovered and he was sent to the guillotine.

In the spring of 1797, elections were held for one-third of the seats of the legislature. When substantial numbers of royalists were elected, three of the five directors conspired with the army to void the elections and remove many of the royalists from government. The principle of governing with the consent of the people had fallen by the wayside. Instead, the Directory governed because it was backed by the army. The Directory "adjusted" the elections of 1798 and 1799 to suit its needs as well.

### **Napoleon Bonaparte Takes Paris**

While political struggles continued in France, France's armies were very successful during the time of the Directory. France defeated Prussia and conquered parts of Italy and Austria. The wars brought profits to the government and created heroes for the public to admire. One of these heroes was the ambitious general Napoleon Bonaparte.

The French government began to think of ways to strike at its traditional enemy, Great Britain. Napoleon was named head of the force to invade England. He also persuaded the Directory to send his troops to invade Egypt. There French forces suffered a defeat at the hands of the British navy and Napoleon's soldiers were left behind in Egypt. The decision to invade Egypt also made allies of the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire against France. Napoleon's reputation did not suffer in France with the troubles of his army in Egypt. Instead he returned to France to take advantage of political developments.

In November 1799, the political situation had shifted once again. The Jacobins<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> had recovered some of their political strength and created harsh new laws against counter-revolutionaries. Some feared a return to the Terror. Among them was author Abbé Sieyès, who had written *What is the Third Estate?* in 1789 who believed that France could only face its external threats and solve its internal problems with

a more authoritarian government. He turned to the popular army general Napoleon Bonaparte for help. In early November, the army led by Bonaparte ordered the assembly to disband itself and appoint Sieyès, Bonaparte, and another man named Roger Ducos as France's leaders. Sieyès had planned to lead this new government, but Bonaparte out-maneuvered him and took the most powerful position of First Consul for himself. He would rule France for the next sixteen years.

### **Conclusion and Legacy**

The events of the French Revolution were over, but Napoleon would not demonstrate loyalty to the principles with which it began, placing stability above liberty and rights. During his reign, he would concentrate power in his hands and create a police state that severely restricted political expression. He enacted reforms to make the government efficient, reformed the legal system, and ended the struggle over the role of the Catholic Church by signing an agreement with the pope. He would commit France to building a foreign empire and crown himself emperor in 1804. It was this quest for foreign empire that would eventually lead to his defeat in 1815, but his actions would change international politics forever.

In another sense, the Revolution was not over. It would continue to have profound effects that would stretch across borders and time. In France, it had transformed the relationship between the people and the government. It had ended an absolute monarchy, and challenged the power of the church and hereditary nobles. Over the next century, these ideas would begin to take root in other parts of Europe and across the world as well.

Yet the French Revolution was not only about lofty ideas. It was also an example of the misuse of power by government. During the Terror, more than sixteen thousand were executed and hundreds of thousands were imprisoned by <sup>the</sup> a government who intended to terrorize its political opponents into submission. It was a far cry from the rights espoused so fervently in 1789 and is one of the dark episodes of history.

The Revolution also had terrible costs in terms of loss of life. The civil war in France led to the deaths of about 250,000. France's European wars during the revolutionary period and the reign of Napoleon resulted in the death of some five million people. In many ways, the French Revolution was as much about power and violence as it was about progressive political ideas.

Nevertheless, the political ideas of the French Revolution have had a lasting impact. Equality and rights became important political issues. The ideas in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen would influence political reformers around the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Finally, the French Revolution was an important source of a number of principles of government that are widely accepted today: in particular the idea that citizens are equal before the law and should have equal opportunity, and that the authority of the state must come from its people.