World History Name:

Mr. Murray Date:

Radical Reformation Block:

Inflamed by their poverty and hatred of wealth, the [*SANS-CULOTTES*](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/sans_culottes.html) insisted that it was the duty of the government to guarantee them the right to existence. Such a policy ran counter to the bourgeois aspirations of the National Assembly. The *sans-culottes* demanded that the revolutionary government immediately increase wages, fix prices, end food shortages, punish hoarders and most important, deal with the existence of counter-revolutionaries. In terms of social ideals the *sans-culottes* wanted laws to prevent extremes of both wealth and property. Their vision was of a nation of small shopkeepers and small farmers. They favored a democratic republic in which the voice of the common man could be heard. In this respect, their ideology falls into line with that of [Thomas Paine](http://www.ushistory.org/paine/) (1737-1809), the English radical who argued that the best form of government was the one which governed least: government should guarantee basic natural rights and then lay off the citizen. In other words, and this is important to grasp, the social and economic ideas of the *sans-culottes* were politicized by the Revolution itself.

[](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/august10.html)On [AUGUST 10, 1792](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/august10.html), enraged Parisian men and women attacked the king’s palace and killed several hundred Swiss Guards. The result of this *journee* was the radicalization of the Revolution. Louis and Marie Antoinette were forced to flee the Tuileries and took refuge in the Legislative Assembly itself. The royal family was placed under house arrest, and lived rather comfortably, but the king could not perform any of his political functions. Although the revolutionaries had drafted a constitution, now they had no monarch.

By September, Paris was in turmoil. Fearing counter-revolution, the *sans-culottes* destroyed prisons because they believed they were secretly sheltering conspirators. More than one thousand people were killed. Street fights broke out everywhere and barricades were set up in various quarters of the city. All this was done in order to consolidate the Revolution – to keep it moving forward. On September 21stand 22nd, 1792, the monarchy was officially abolished and a republic established. The 22nd of September, 1792 was now known as day one of the year one. In December, Louis XVI was placed on [TRIAL](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/louis_trial.html) for violating the liberty of his subjects and on January 21, 1793, Louis was executed like an ordinary criminal. From this time on, the Revolution had no recourse but to move forward.

[](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/louis_trial.html)After the execution of Louis, the National Assembly, now known as the National Convention, faced enormous problems. The value of paper currency (*assignats*) used to finance the Revolution had fallen by 50%. There was price inflation, continued food shortages, and various peasant rebellions against the Revolution occurred across the countryside. France was close to civil war.

Meanwhile, the revolutionaries found themselves not only at war with Austria and Prussia, but with Holland, Spain and Great Britain. As the Revolution stumbled under the weight of foreign war and civil war, the revolutionary leadership grew more radical. Up to June 1793, moderate reformers had dominated the National Convention. These were the Girondins, men who favored a decentralized government in which the various provinces or departments would determine their own affairs. The Girondins also opposed government interference in the economy.

In June 1793, factional disputes with the Convention resulted in the replacement of the Girondins with the Jacobins, a far more radical group. The Jacobins and Girondins were both liberal and bourgeois, but the Jacobins desired a centralized government (in which they would hold key positions), Paris as the national capital, and temporary government control of the economy. The Jacobin platform managed to win the support of the *sans-culottes*. The Jacobins were tightly organized, well-disciplined and convinced that they alone were responsible for saving and "managing" the Revolution from this point forward. On June 22, 1793, 80,000 armed *sans-culottes* surrounded the meeting halls of the National Convention and demanded the immediate arrest of the Girondin faction. The Convention yielded to the mob and 29 Girondin members of the Convention were arrested.

The Jacobins now had firm control not only of the Convention, but the French nation as well. They were the government. And they now had even more pressing problems: civil war was everywhere, economic distress had not been lifted, they had to keep the *sans-culottes* satisfied, they suffered continued threats of foreign invasion and the nation’s ports had all been blockaded. They lived, dreading the possibility that if they failed, so too would the Revolution. Only strong leadership could save the Revolution. The Committee of Public Safety assumed leadership, in April 1793. As a branch of the National Convention itself, the Committee of Public Safety had broad powers which included the organization of the nation’s defenses, all foreign policy, and the supervision of ministers. The Committee also ordered arrests and trials of counter-revolutionaries and imposed government authority across the nation. What is amazing is that only twelve men controlled the CPS, although the CPS was ultimately led by [MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/robespierre.html) (1758-1794).

[](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/robespierre.html)In Robespierre's utopian vision, the individual has the duty "to detest bad faith and despotism, to punish tyrants and traitors, to assist the unfortunate and respect the weak, to defend the oppressed, to do all the good one can to one's neighbor, and to behave with justice towards all men." Robespierre was a disciple of [Rousseau](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/r/rousseau.htm)--both considered the general will an absolute necessity. For Robespierre, the realization of the general will would make the Republic of Virtue a reality. Its denial would mean a return to despotism. Robespierre knew that a [REPUBLIC OF VIRTUE](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/virtue.html) could not become a reality unless the threats of foreign and civil war were removed. To preserve the Republic, Robespierre and the CPS instituted the Reign of Terror. Counter-revolutionaries, the Girondins, priests, nobles, and aristocrats immediately fell under suspicion. [Danton](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/151217/Georges-Danton) (1759-1794), a revolutionary who sought peace with Europe, was executed.

The CPS also closed the numerous political clubs of the *sans-culottes.* The CPS feared spontaneous action, that is, that the revolutionary leadership might pass into other hands. About 17,000 people died as a result of the Terror. The choice instrument, was the [guillotine](http://www.historywiz.com/guillotine.htm) -- it was quick and humane. In 1794, there were mass executions at Lyons. Boats were fired upon and sunk at Nantes -- 500 were killed in one execution. About 15,000 people perished officially and over 100,000 people were detained as suspects.

[](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/thermidor.html)Robespierre and the CPS resorted to the Terror but not because they were blood-thirsty madmen. They did, however, wish to create a temporary dictatorship in order to save the Republic (a Roman idea). By the summer of 1794, there seem to be less need for the Terror. The Republic seemed a reality, an aristocratic conspiracy had subsided, the will to punish traitors decreased, and most *sans-culottes* went home to tend to business. And, as the need for the Terror decreased, so too did Robespierre's power and leadership. Some members of the Convention, fearing for their own lives, ordered the arrest of Robespierre. On July 27, 1794, (the [NINTH of THERMIDOR](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/thermidor.html)) Robespierre was arrested and guillotined the next day -- the *sans-culottes* made no attempt to save him. With the 9th of Thermidor, the machinery of the Jacobin republic was dismantled. Leadership passed to the property owning bourgeoisie, that is, those men of the moderate stage of the Revolution.

By 1795, the government had passed into the hands of the five-man Directory. The new legislature sat in two chambers: the Council of 500 and the Ancients (or Senate). The Directory tried to preserve the Revolution of 1789 – they opposed the restoration of the *ancien regime* as well as popular democracy. They refused to leave the door open for either the excessive radicalism of the Jacobins or the spontaneity of the *sans-culottes*. The Directory muddled on until 1799. By this time the French Revolution was over and the French tried to get back to business as usual. Radicalism had been effectively thwarted as well. But France was still at war with the rest of Europe. And because of the war, leadership began to pass into the hands of generals. One of these generals would seize control of the government in November 1799. And on December 2, 1804, this general, [Napoleon Bonaparte](http://www.fsu.edu/~napoleon/), would declare himself Emperor of the French -- the new Augustus Caesar. As François Furet [*The French Revolution, 1770-1814*, (Blackwell, 1996)] has remarked:

*Ten years after 1789, the French Revolution had largely become in public opinion that very special something which eluded [Benjamin] Constant's analysis: a universalist nationalism, in which the historian can discern its component elements of anti-aristocratic passion and rationalism, transfigured by the idea of the nation's historico-military election. The Directory could no more identify this mixture of sentiments than it could reassure those whose interests were threatened. On both sides there was the implicit demand for a king, but one who was radically different from other kings, since he would be born of the sovereignty of the people and of reason. This was where Napoleon Bonaparte, king of the French Revolution, was born. In 1789, the French had created a Republic, under the name of a monarchy. Ten years later, they created a monarchy, under the name of a Republic.* (215)

With all this now behind us, what did the Revolution accomplish? First, the Revolution weakened the political influence and leadership of the aristocracy. The aristocrats lost their privileges based on birth because from this point on, privilege would now be based on property and wealth. As the *sans-culottes* quickly realized, one evil simply replaced another. Second, because careers were open to talent, the bourgeoisie had access to the highest positions in the state. In fact, throughout the 19th century, the French state was a bourgeois state which echoed middle-class needs and values. Third, the Revolution transformed the dynastic state of the *ancien regime* into the modern state (natural, liberal, secular and rational). The state was no longer just a federation of provinces, it was not the private property of the king. Instead, the state now belonged to the people. The individual, formerly a subject in the old order, was now a citizen, with specific rights as well as duties. Lastly, the Revolution managed to give practical application to the ideas of the *philosophes* -- equality before the law, trial by jury, the freedom of religion, speech and the press. In the 19th century, all these ideas led to the quickening pace of reform. And in that century, the voices of the *sans-culottes* would be heard once more. All these developments were accelerated by the Industrial Revolution itself. While the French Revolution politicized the *sans-culottes*, the Industrial Revolution industrialized them. Both events had the ultimate effect of making the European working classes.