

Chapter 21: The Revolution in Politics, 1775-1815

1. Liberty and equality
 - a. In the eighteenth century, liberty meant human rights and freedoms and the sovereignty of the people.
 - i. Liberals demanded that citizens' rights had no limits except those that assure rights to others.

“Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm another person.” --
The Declaration of the Rights of Man
 - ii. Revolutionary liberals believed that the people were sovereign, meaning the people alone had the authority to make laws limiting an individual's freedom of action.
 1. In practice, this system of government meant choosing legislators who represented the people and were accountable to them.
 - b. Equality meant equal rights and equality of opportunity.
 - i. But most liberals did not extend such rights to women.
 - ii. "Equality" pertained to equality of opportunity and legal equality, not economic equality.
 1. At the time, society was still legally divided into groups with special privileges (nobility and clergy) and groups with special burdens (peasants).
 - c. The roots of classical liberalism
 - i. The Classical Greek and the Judeo Christian traditions were the deep roots of liberalism.
 - ii. Liberalism's modern roots are found in the Enlightenment's concern for human dignity, human happiness on earth, faith in science, personal freedom and legal equality.
 - iii. These were best expressed by **Locke** and **Montesquieu**.
 1. Locke argued that if a government oversteps its proper function of protecting the natural rights of life, liberty, and private property, it becomes a tyranny.
 2. Montesquieu believed that powerful “intermediary groups” like the judicial nobility offered the best defense of liberty against despotism.
 - d. The attraction of liberalism
 - i. Liberalism was attractive to the prosperous, well-educated elites, also known as the **bourgeoisie**.
 - ii. Representative government did not mean democracy; It meant that men with property could vote for representatives.
 - iii. It lacked popular support because common people were more interested in economic issues and the protection of traditional practices and institutions.
2. The American Revolution (1775-1789)
 - a. Some argue that the American Revolution was not a revolution at all but merely a war for independence.
 - b. The origins of the Revolution
 - i. The British wanted the Americans to pay their share of imperial expenses.
 1. Americans paid very low taxes.
 2. Parliament passed the Stamp Act (1765) to raise revenue.

3. Vigorous protest from the colonies forced its repeal (1766).
 - ii. Although no less represented than Englishmen themselves, many Americans believed they had the right to make their own laws.
 1. Americans have long exercised a great deal of independence.
 2. Their greater political equality was matched by greater social and economic equality--there was no hereditary noble or serf class.
 - iii. The issue of taxation and representation ultimately led to the outbreak of fighting.
 - c. The independence movement was encouraged by several factors.
 - i. The British refused to compromise, thus losing the support of many colonists.
 - ii. The radical ideas of Thomas Paine, expressed in the bestselling *Common Sense*, greatly influenced public opinion in favor of independence.
 - iii. The Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson and passed by the Second Continental Congress (1776), further increased the desire of the colonists for independence.
 - iv. Although many Americans remained loyal to Britain, the independence movement had widebased support from all sections of society.
 - v. European aid, especially from the French government and from French volunteers, contributed greatly to the American victory in 1783.
 - d. Framing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights
 - i. The federal, or central, government was given important powers--the right to tax, the means to enforce its laws, and the regulation of trade--but the states had important powers too.
 - ii. The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government were designed to balance one another.
 - iii. The AntiFederalists feared that the central government had too much power; to placate them, the Federalists wrote the Bill of Rights, which spells out the rights of the individual.
 1. Liberty did not, however, necessarily mean democracy.
 2. Equality meant equality before the law, not equality of political participation or economic wellbeing.
 - e. The American Revolution impact on Europe.
 - i. It reinforced the Enlightenment idea that a better world was possible. Europeans watched the new country with fascination.
3. The French Revolution (1789-1791)
 - a. The influence of the American Revolution
 - i. Many French soldiers, such as **Lafayette**, served in America and were impressed by the ideals of the Revolution.
 - ii. The American Revolution influenced the French Revolution, but the latter was more violent and more influential; it opened the era of modern politics.
 - b. The breakdown of the old order
 - i. By the 1780s, the government was nearly bankrupt.
 1. Louis XV's attempts to raise taxes had been thwarted by the Parlements of Paris.
 2. France was forced to finance the American Revolution with borrowed money,

- propelling the deficit upward.
3. Less than 20 percent of the entire national budget was available for productive functions of the state.
- ii. The French banking system could not cope with the fiscal problems, leaving the monarchy with no choice but to increase taxes.
 1. France could not repudiate their debt (reducing debt payments) because it had grown too weak for such an unpopular action against the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie.
 2. France had no central bank, no paper currency and no means of creating credit, preventing France from creating inflation to cover their deficits.
- c. Legal orders and social realities: the three estates
- i. The first estate, the **clergy**, had many privileges and much wealth, paid a “voluntary gift” instead of taxes, and it levied an oppressive tax (the **tithe**) on landowners.
 - ii. The second estate, the **nobility**, also had great privileges, wealth, and power, and it taxed the peasantry for its own profit.
 1. They enjoyed **manorial rights** that gave them exclusive rights to hunt and fish, village monopolies on baking bread and pressing grapes for wine, fees for justice etc.
 - iii. The third estate, the **commoners**, was a mixture of a few rich members of the bourgeoisie, urban workers, and the mass of peasants.
 1. The rich commoners, the bourgeoisie, could buy manorial rights as profitable investments.
- d. Revisionist historians challenge the traditional interpretation of the origins of the French Revolution.
- i. They argue that the bourgeoisie was not locked in conflict with the nobility, that both groups were highly fragmented.
 1. The nobility remained fluid and relatively open.
 - a. Commoners sought and obtained noble status through government service and purchase of expensive positions conferring nobility.
 2. Key sections of the nobility were no less liberal than the middle class.
 - a. Both the nobles and the middle class supported the Parlement of Paris’s opposition to the government’s taxes.
 3. The nobility and the bourgeoisie were not economic rivals.
 - a. Both looked to investment in land and government service as their preferred occupations.
 - ii. Nevertheless, the old interpretation, that a new social order was challenging the old, is still convincing and valid.
 1. The bourgeoisie increased in size, wealth and culture, becoming exasperated by archaic “feudal” laws restraining the economy.
- e. The formation of the National Assembly of 1789
- i. Louis XVI's plan to tax landed property was opposed by **the Assembly of Notables and the Parlement of Paris**.
 1. The Assembly of Notables was made up of important noblemen and high-ranking clergy, who, in return for their support, demanded that control over all

- government spending be given to the provincial assemblies.
2. After the government's refusal, the Notables said that such taxes required the approval of the Estates General, which had not met since 1614.
- ii. Popular demand forced Louis to give in and call for a meeting of the Estates General, the representative body of the three estates.
 1. Two-thirds of the delegates from the clergy were parish priests, making the nobles politically divided.
 2. A majority of the noble representatives were conservative, but fully a third were liberals committed to major change.
 3. The third estate representatives were largely lawyers and government officials, concerned with social status and prestige.
 4. The third estate wanted the three estates to meet together to ensure the passage of fundamental reforms.
 5. They all agreed that royal absolutism should give way to constitutional monarchy, that individual liberties should be guaranteed by law, and that the economic position of the parish clergy should be reformed.
 - iii. There was a dispute over voting in the Estates General.
 1. Before, the Estates General sat as three separate houses, each having one vote.
 2. After emerging victorious over the king, the nobles wanted to meet separately again.
 - a. Partially out of respect for tradition and partially to enhance their political position
 3. Some middle-class intellectuals wanted a single assembly dominated by the third estate.
 4. According to **Sieyès** in *What Is the Third Estate?*, the third estate constituted the true strength of the French nation.
 5. The government gave the third estate as many representatives as the clergy and the nobility combined, but retained the block voting system.
 6. In May 1789, the third estate protested by refusing to work until the king ordered the Estates General into a single assembly. Then they made the **Oath of the Tennis Court**, pledging not to disband until they had written a new constitution.
 - a. The third estate called itself the "National Assembly."
 7. Louis XVI ordered the three estates to meet together yet disbanded the Estates General by force because of pressure from his relatives and court nobles.
- f. The revolt of the poor and the oppressed
 - i. Rising bread prices in 1788-1789 stirred the people to action.
 1. The high prices were caused by poor harvests.
 2. High food prices decreased demand for manufactured goods, putting 1/4 of Parisians out of work by July 1789.
 3. They believed in the "just price" and believed that they should have steady work.

4. The people were afraid of being put at the mercy of aristocratic landowners and grain speculators.
- ii. Fearing attack by the king's army, angry Parisians **stormed the Bastille** on July 14, 1789.
 1. The people took the Bastille, and the king was forced to recall his troops.
 2. This uprising of the masses saved the National Assembly.
 3. All across France peasants began to rise up against their lords.
 - a. Some peasants reoccupied old commonlands, undoing the recent enclosures.
 - b. They also stopped paying taxes.
 4. The Great Fear, fear of vagabonds and outlaws, seized the countryside.
- iii. The peasant revolt forced the National Assembly to abolish feudal obligations.
 1. The duke of Aiguillon.
- g. A limited monarchy established by the bourgeoisie
 - i. The National Assembly's **Declaration of the Rights of Man** (1789) proclaimed the rights of all citizens and guaranteed equality before the law and a representative government, but not economic equality.
 1. "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights."
 2. "Natural rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression."
 3. "Every man is presumed innocent until proven guilty."
 4. "The law is an expression of the general will."
 5. "Every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely."
 - ii. Meanwhile, the poor **women** of Paris **marched on Versailles** and forced the royal family and the government to move to Paris.
 1. After the fall of the Bastille, many nobles left Versailles for foreign lands, decreasing the demand for luxuries, intensifying the general economic crisis.
 2. Increasing unemployment and hungry bellies pressured the women into revolt.
 3. Seven thousand women invaded the market, taking bread and invaded the royal apartments, slaughtering the bodyguards and searched for Marie Antoinette, whom they hated.
 - a. "Who's that talking down there? Make the chatterbox shut up. That's not the point: the point is that we want bread."
 - b. "We are going to cut off her head, tear out her heart, fry her liver, and that won't be the end of it."
 - c. Lafayette and the National Guard saved the royal family, but the crowd forced the king to go live in Paris.
 - iii. The National Assembly established a constitutional monarchy and passed major reforms.
 1. The nobility was abolished as a separate legal order.
 2. All lawmaking power was placed in the hands of the National Assembly, elected by the economic upper half of French males.
 3. Women's rights were both restricted and expanded.
 - a. Women's rights to seek divorce, to inherit property and to obtain

financial support from fathers for illegitimate children was expanded.

- b. However, the majority of comfortable, well-educated males believed that some aristocratic women used their sexual charms to manipulate weak rulers, helping corrupt the state, so they excluded women altogether from politics.
 4. The jumble of provinces was replaced by 83 departments.
 5. The metric system was introduced.
 6. Economic freedom was promoted by prohibiting monopolies, guilds, workers combinations, and barriers to trade within France.
 - iv. The National Assembly granted religious freedom to Jews and Protestants, nationalized the property of the church, and abolished the monasteries.
 1. The *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* nationalized church property.
 2. The money from the church property was used to create a new paper currency, the **assignats**.
 3. The property was sold to help finance the state.
 4. Peasants also bought land, strengthening the attachment to the new revolutionary order in the countryside.
 - v. This attack on the church turned many people against the Revolution.
 1. The common people disliked the attack on the church.
 2. The educated delegates to the National Assembly established a national church, with priests chosen by voters and forced them to take a loyalty oath to the new government.
4. World war and republican France (1791-1799)
- a. Foreign reactions and the beginning of war
 - i. Outside France, liberals and radicals hoped that the revolution would lead to a reordering of society everywhere, but conservatives such as **Burke** (in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*) predicted it would lead to chaos and tyranny.
 1. He defended inherited privileges in general and those of the English monarchy and aristocracy and glorified the unrepresentative Parliament.
 - ii. **Wollstonecraft** challenged Burke (in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), arguing that it was time for women to demand equal rights.
 1. She believed in the intellectual potential of women.
 2. Her ideas spilled over France's borders; Parallel ideas emerged from **Olympe de Gouges**.
 - iii. Fear among European kings and nobility that the revolution would spread resulted in the **Declaration of Pillnitz** (1791), which threatened the invasion of France by Austria and Prussia.
 - iv. The character of the National Assembly mutated, because it decreed that none of its current members would be eligible for election to the new Legislative Assembly.
 1. Its new, younger, more radical and less cautious members were called **Jacobins**.
 - v. In retaliation, the patriotic French deputies, most of them Jacobins, declared war on Austria in 1792.

"We will incite a war of people against kings. Ten million Frenchmen, kindled by the

fire of liberty, armed with the sword, with reason, with eloquence would be able to change the face of the world and make the tyrants tremble on their thrones.”

1. But France was soon retreating before the armies of the First Coalition.
2. A war of patriotic fervor swept France.
- vi. In August of 1792 a revolutionary crowd attacked the royal palace and the Legislative Assembly imprisoned the king.
- vii. Following were the **September Massacres**; angry crowds, believing that the counter-revolutionary aristocrats and priests were aiding the foreign invaders, slaughtered half the men and women in the prisons.
- b. The "second revolution" and rapid radicalization in France
 - i. The National Convention proclaimed France a republic in 1792.
 1. A new popular culture was created:
 - a. New calendar without saints' days and renamed days and the months after the seasons of the year.
 - b. Citizens were expected to speak like "brothers" to one another, using "thou" instead of "you."
 - c. Less successful in villages, because they had little interest in politics and retained their strong belief in Catholicism.
 - ii. However, the convention was split between the **Girondists** and the **Mountain**, led by **Robespierre** and **Danton**.
 1. Girondists were more radical.
 - iii. King Louis XVI was tried and convicted of treason by the National Convention and guillotined in early 1793.

"I am innocent and shall die without fear. I would that my death might bring happiness to the French, and ward off the dangers which I foresee."
 - iv. French armies continued the "war against tyranny" by declaring war on nearly all of Europe.
 1. However, they requisitioned food and supplies and plundered foreign invaders, becoming more like foreign invaders than liberators.
 2. Supported and encouraged in their resistance by devout Catholics, royalists and foreign agents, peasants in western France revolted against being drafted into the army.
 - v. In Paris, the struggle between the Girondists and the Mountain for political power led to the political rise of the laboring poor.
 1. The Girondists and the Mountain hated privilege and wanted to temper economic liberalism with social concern, but there was personal animosity.
 2. Each group feared the other becoming a dictatorship.
 - vi. The **sans culottes**--the laboring poor--allied with Robespierre's the Mountain, because their immediate interests were economic.
 1. They began to demand radical political action to guarantee them their daily bread.
 2. After all power passed to the Mountain, the Mountain joined the **Committee of Public Safety**, which had been given dictatorial power to deal with the national emergency.

3. Leading provincial cities revolted, leaving the federal government with only the areas around Paris and on the eastern frontier.
- c. Total war and the Terror
- i. Robespierre established a planned economy to wage total war and aid the poor.
 1. The government fixed maximum allowable prices on key products and instituted rationing.
 - a. Bakers had to make the “bread of equality,” made of a mixture of all available flours.
 2. Workshops were nationalized to produce goods for the war effort, and raw materials were requisitioned.
 3. Robespierre cooperated with the sans-culottes in bringing about a *state-controlled economy*--particularly fixing the price of bread.
 4. An "emergency socialism" system of production and manufacture arose.
 5. They drew on the explosive power of patriotic support of nation and the war effort.
 - ii. Under Robespierre, the **Reign of Terror** was instituted to eliminate opposition to the Revolution, and some 40,000 people were jailed or executed.
 1. Responsible only to the **Committee of Public Safety**, revolutionary courts tried rebels and “enemies of the nation” for political crimes, ignoring normal legal procedures.
 2. The Reign of Terror strengthened the belief that weak King Louis XVI was replaced with a bloody dictatorship.
 - iii. The war became a national mission against evil within and outside of France, and not a class war.
 1. Ideas of common tradition and democracy combined with the danger of foreign and internal foes to encourage nationalism.
 2. War became a life-and-death struggle between good and evil.
 3. A huge army of patriots (800,000) was led by young generals who relied on mass attack to overwhelm the enemy.

“No maneuvering, nothing elaborate. Just cold steel, passion and patriotism.”
- d. The Thermidorian reaction and the Directory (1794-1799)
- i. The Committee of Public Safety’s goal was an ideal democratic republic with neither rich nor poor, using unrestrained despotism and the guillotine to chop down any in opposition.
 - ii. Fear of the Reign of Terror led to the execution of its leader, Robespierre, by radicals and moderates, the middle-class lawyers and professionals.
 - iii. The period of the Thermidorian reaction following Robespierre's death was marked by a return to bourgeois liberalism.
 1. Economic controls were abolished; the poor lost their fervor for revolution.
 - a. Prices were allowed to rise sharply, angering the sans-culottes, but they were put down.
 2. Riots by the poor were put down and rural women brought back the Catholic church and worship.
 3. The middle class wrote another constitution to protect their power; **the**

Directory, a five man executive body, was established.

- a. They supported French military expansion as a solution to economic problems.
 - b. The people were disgusted with this behavior, voting in conservative and even monarchist deputies for peace.
 - c. However, their votes were nullified by the army.
- iv. A military dictatorship, under **Bonaparte**, was established in order to prevent a return to peace and monarchy.

5. The Napoleonic era (1799-1815)

a. Napoleon's rule of France

- i. Before, Napoleon was a brilliant military leader.
- ii. Napoleon appealed to many, like Abbé Sieyès, who looked for a strong military leader to end the country's upheaval.
- iii. Napoleon was named first consul of the republic in 1799.
- iv. He maintained order and worked out important compromises.
 1. His **Civil Code of 1804** granted the middle class equality under the law and safeguarded their right to own property.
 - a. It was a bargain to keep his power.
 2. He confirmed the gains of the peasants.
 3. He centralized the government, strengthened the bureaucracy, and granted amnesty to nobles.
 - a. He established the Bank of France.
 4. He signed the **Concordat of 1801** with **Pope Pius VII**, which guaranteed freedom of worship for Catholics.
 - a. He didn't care about religion; he just wanted their support.
- v. Napoleon brought order and stability to France but betrayed the ideals of the Revolution by violating the rights of free speech and press and free elections.
 1. Women had no political rights; they lost many gains they had made, and the Napoleonic Code reestablished the power of the male in the family.
 - a. They favored **family monarchy**, where the power of the husband and father was as absolute over the wife and children as that of Napoleon over his subjects.
 2. **Fouché** handled the spy system and the enforcement of France's police state.
 3. There were harsh penalties for political offenses.

b. Napoleon's wars and foreign policy

- i. He defeated Austria (1801) and made peace with Britain (1802), the two remaining members of the Second Coalition.
 1. The **Treaty of Lunéville** gave Austria's former Italian possessions and German territory to France.
 2. The **Treaty of Amiens** gave France the freedom to do whatever it wanted with its new possessions.
- ii. Another war (against the Third Coalition--Austria, Russia, Sweden, and Britain) resulted in British naval dominance at the **Battle of Trafalgar** (1805).

- iii. Napoleon used the fear of a conspiracy to return the Bourbons to power to get himself proclaimed emperor in 1804.
- iv. The Third Coalition collapsed at Austerlitz (1805), and Napoleon reorganized the German states into the **Confederation of the Rhine**, declaring himself “protector”
- v. In 1806, Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Jena and Auerstädt.
 - 1. In the **Treaty of Tilsit** (1807), Prussia lost half its population, while Russia accepted Napoleon's reorganization of western and central Europe.
 - 2. Russia also joined with France in a blockade against British goods.
 - 3. Napoleon's Grand Empire had three parts:
 - a. First, ever expanding France
 - b. Second, dependent kingdoms with Napoleon's family as their heads
 - c. Third, independent but allied states of Austria, Prussia and Russia
- vi. Napoleon's Grand Empire in Europe meant French control of continental Europe.
 - 1. Napoleon introduced many French laws, abolishing feudal dues and serfdom in the process.
 - 2. However, he also levied heavy taxes.
 - 3. French rule sparked patriotic upheavals and nationalism in other countries.
- vii. The beginning of the end for Napoleon came with the Spanish revolt (1808) and the British blockade.
- viii. The French invasion of Russia in 1812 was a disaster for Napoleon--over 500,000 died or were taken prisoner.
 - 1. Napoleon invaded because **Alexander I** of Russia defied Napoleon, trading with Great Britain.
- ix. Napoleon was defeated by the Fourth Coalition (Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain) and abdicated his throne in 1814, only to be defeated again at Waterloo in 1815.
 - 1. The Fourth Coalition was cemented together by the **Treaty of Chaumont**.
- x. The Bourbon dynasty was restored in France under Louis XVIII.
- xi. The new monarch, Louis XVIII, issued the **Constitutional Charter**, which accepted France's revolutionary changes and guaranteed civil liberties.

6. Summary

- a. The French revolution left a range of political options and alternative visions of the future--including liberalism, assertive nationalism, radical democratic republicanism, embryonic socialism, and selfconscious conservatism.