

# Enlightened Absolutists & The French Revolution

## (circa 1740 – 1795)

### POLITICAL: BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

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FRANCE: Louis XV rules France with mistress Madame de Pompadour. Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 unites Austria and France together against Prussia and Great Britain. Seven Years War (1756-1763) occurs in both New World (where it is termed the French & Indian War) and even extends into India. France loses Canada and its former claims in India. War ends with Treaty of Paris 1763.

ENGLAND: British gain Canada, and expand into India. France will support the Colonists against the British in 1776 in partial revenge for their great losses in this global war. PRUSSIA: Frederick the Great had snatched Silesia from Maria Theresa in 1740. In the Seven Years' War, he fights alone while Britain is preoccupied in North America. Elizabeth of Russia dies and her heir makes peace with Prussia in a great fluke of history. Frederick returns to rule Prussia as an Enlightened Despot. He reforms legal codes, social programs and state schools. He supports the Junkers, (landlords) against the Serfs.

AUSTRIA: Maria Theresa's father tried to secure the Pragmatic Sanction, so she could inherit her lands intact. Her son Joseph I rules with her, then alone. His reforms include abolishment of serfdom, few taxes, and religious freedom. He is thwarted every step of the way and thus became autocratic and less enlightened. He dies bitter and sad over failed reforms.

RUSSIA: Catherine the Great rules (1762-1791) after taking power in a coup which kills her husband. She begins with enlightened ideals, but revolt of peasant Pugachev forces her to limit her enlightened reforms at the cost of maintaining power. She does gain more territory and ports on Black Sea.

### POLITICAL – THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Pre-revolutionary outbreaks in the Dutch Republic and Poland. Fiscal Crisis led Louis XVI to call for meeting of Estates General in 1789. Estates vote as a block, only one vote each. At Versailles in June 17, Third Estate declares itself National Assembly with some members of clergy and aristocrats joining in. Bastille falls on July 14, 1789. Women march on Versailles and retrieve King and Queen. 1790 – Civil Constitution of Clergy – Church brought under state control. *Assignats* (paper money) issued from confiscated Catholic lands. 1791 – King and Queen attempt to escape and were recaptured. 1792 – France declares preemptive war on Austria. War hysteria and mistrust led to September Massacres. 1792-France at war, Valmy first great victory in September. 1792-1793 – Power struggle between Girondins and the Mountain. Jacobins succeed in taking power. 1793 – Execution of Louis XVI, ensuing revolt in the Vendee. By July, Robespierre heads Committee of Public Safety. The Terror begins. Marie Antoinette executed in October. 1794 – Slavery abolished in colonies. Fall of Robespierre in July 1795. Directory government (5 directors) Napoleon has success in Italy. 1799 – Napoleon takes reigns of government in coup.

ITALY, BELGIUM, SAVOY All were affected by French Revolutionary armies who cross borders to liberate people

SWEDEN: Gustavus is killed by sympathetic revolutionary.

HAITI: Toussaint L'Ouverture led slave revolt. Haiti will eventually establish republic. Failure in Haiti will lead Napoleon to sell the Louisiana Purchase to United States in 1803.

In the surrounding states of France, there is hope and panic revolutionary armies topple rulers. The French army moves into Italy under the leadership of the brilliant Napoleon Bonaparte.

### ECONOMIC:

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Adam Smith publishes *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. A book ahead of its time, the ideas of invisible hand, free market and laissez-faire stress free trade without government controls. FRANCE: Limited reforms hampered by crop failures and recalcitrant nobles. Jacques Turgot tries to reform and is dismissed. French middle class is deeply frustrated at Old Regime.

REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE: *Assignats* issued as money backed by confiscated church lands. Robespierre calls for general conscription. Old Regime possessions were sold to raise money for war effort, price limits go into effect: all efforts go into war economy to ensure France's survival.

ENGLAND: Industrialization in textile trade continues. The domestic system (or putting out) of production will be replaced by factories. Clothing begins to be more plentiful for 3rd estate.

### RELIGIOUS

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Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Conflicts created when church is brought under state control. Lands were confiscated. Clergy forced to swear oaths to state. Many supporters were disenchanted by Revolution's handling of Catholic Church. De-Christianization begins under Robespierre with Cult of Reason, Goddess of Liberty, and Cult of Supreme being. The Revolution will take on a decidedly Atheist tone with intent to overthrow old order.

### SOCIAL

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Feudal duties abolished on August 4, 1789 – land distribution begins. Aristocrats (called *Émigrés*) flee abroad. Dress changes to Roman/Grecian style. Sans-culottes adopt pants. Songs (La Marseilles) show revolutionary spirit. Calendar is renamed, Sundays eliminated. Metric system, however, is instituted. Divorce laws were loosened. Equal inheritances established among children

(including girls).

National Convention votes to make primary school free. *Women* participate in March on Versailles. Olympe de Gouges writes *Declaration of the Rights of Women*. Women's clubs were formed supporting revolution. Over time, many women resist the revolution because of pagan ideals and high food prices.

## INTELLECTUAL

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Abbé Seiyès (sympathetic nobleman) publishes pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* American Revolution inspires ideas of Liberty, Equality, Justice, Brotherhood (Fraternity). *Declaration of Rights of Man* copies *Declaration of Independence*. Though greeted with enthusiasm, many wrote against the revolution depending on their view. Newspapers sympathized with French ideas, but viewed the ensuing Terror with disgust. Royal governments opposed – revolutionary ideas spreading. Edmund Burke, English writer, criticizes revolution and extols change brought about by time and tradition with emphasis on continuity. Burke's writings support the newly emerging conservatism. Thomas Paine, however, wrote in favor of American and French Revolutions. Both men influential.

## ARTISTIC

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Very little private art patronage because of the upheaval. Marat, ally of Robespierre was assassinated by Charlotte Corday, a royalist, in 1793. Jacques Louis-David portrays him as a revolutionary martyr in painting, *Death of Marat*. Other subjects were classical heroes from Greece and Rome. Aristocratic estates and Catholic Churches were vandalized as symbols of Old Regime. Tri-color is the new flag, and cockades were worn on hats. New buildings were based on classical designs of ancient Rome/Greece.