**REIGN OF TERROR:** The Reign of Terror, which took place from the summer of 1793 to the summer of 1794, was the most violent episode of the French Revolution. The Reign of Terror took place during a period sometimes referred to as the Montagnard Dictatorship, as the radical Montagnard faction dominated the [French National Convention](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) and thereby controlled [France's](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) government.

The [Montagnards](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) implemented extremist policies to stabilize the country amid civil strife and foreign invasion. The civil war in Brittany and Vendée—known as the [Vendéan Revolt](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution)—continued unmitigated, forcing the government to divert substantial forces there. The more moderate [Girondins](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution), who escaped persecution in Paris, incited the so-called Federalist Risings in major cities in Normandy and Provence. In August 1793, in a major blow to the Revolutionary government, the Federalists surrendered the strategic port city of Toulon and the entire French Mediterranean fleet to the British. Meanwhile, the Prussian and Austrian armies threatened France from the north and northeast.

To deal with these threats, the Montagnards issued the levée en masse in August 1793, which mobilized the resources of the entire nation to fight the [revolution's](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) enemies and in doing so transformed the nature of military conflict. The decree proclaimed that "all Frenchmen are in permanent requisition for the services of the armies. The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes and shall serve in the hospitals; the children shall turn linen into lint; the old men shall be-take themselves to the public squares in order to arouse the courage of the warriors and preach hatred of kings and the unity of the Republic." Eager citizen-soldiers poured into the French armies, helping to turn the tide of war.

In September 1793, terror was transformed into official government policy, and extreme measures were adopted to implement radical economic and social programs. The Constitution of 1793, although never implemented, provided for direct representative [democracy](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) with a guarantee of [universal male suffrage](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution). The Law of the Maximum introduced state control over prices and wages. Rudimentary social security was provided under the Law of 22 Florial (on May 11, 1794), which promised a small income and free housing to the aged, ill, or disabled. The Decrees of Ventôse (February–March 1794) confiscated the property of emigrés and "recognized enemies" of the nation, which was then distributed to the socially disadvantaged. Plans were laid to create a free [public education](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) system, with elementary education compulsory for all.

While professing democratic ideals, the Montagnards governed as [dictators](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution). Special legislation was passed limiting [civil liberties](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) and expanding the government's authority. In September 1793, the Law of Suspects made it possible to arrest any person who, by their conduct, associations, talk or writings, had shown themselves partisans of tyranny or [federalism](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution). The [Committee of Public Safety](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution), a 12-member [executive](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) committee with vaguely defined powers and under the leadership of [Maximilien Robespierre](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution), assumed executive power, while the [Revolutionary Tribunal](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) rendered swift but hardly impartial justice. Government representatives were sent on missions to provinces and armies, wielding supreme political and military authority.

The Montagnards used the Reign of Terror for a partisan political purpose as well as a means of stabilizing the country. They attacked their rivals and succeeded in executing early leaders of the Revolution, sending to the [guillotine](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) members of the royal family, feminists, and the leading Girondins, decapitating their most dangerous opponents. The executions were used to eliminate any threat to the Revolutionary government, and the bloody blade of the guillotine became a grisly symbol of this turmoil. The total number of executed remains unknown and varies from as low as 14,000 to as high as 40,000. Contrary to popular view, most of the people executed were not aristocrats and priests but rather workers and [peasants](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution).

This period also saw further [secularization](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) of French society as churches and monasteries were closed and de-Christianization begun. A new calendar was adopted to reflect the ideals of the Revolution, while a civil religion dedicated to the Supreme Being sought to replace traditional beliefs.

By early 1794, the French radicals believed that these harsh methods seemingly had paid off, as France's military situation improved. The Revolutionary armies drove the Austrian-Prussian armies away from French borders and invaded neighboring [Belgium](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution), [Netherlands](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution), and German principalities. The Revolutionary government also suppressed Federalist uprisings inside France, with its representatives employing ferocious methods to eliminate persons they perceived as enemies of the Revolution.

At Nantes, Jean Baptiste Carrier had hundreds of prisoners chained in barges that were sunk in the Loire River; while in Lyons, Collot d'Herbois and [Joseph Fouche](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) had prisoners tied to stakes in open fields and mowed them down with canister shot fired from cannons. As the situation stabilized, some revolutionaries suggested that the terror should end, which caused the Montagnards to split into factions, with Robespierre and his allies advocating a radical program of continued terror, while [Georges Danton](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) and his supporters calling for moderation.

In April 1794, Danton and his allies were arrested and, after a sham trial, executed. Robespierre and his supporters became more isolated and conspicuous, insisting on continuation of the terror and the creation of a "Republic of Virtue." However, by June 1794 the Montagnards, never a solid bloc, disintegrated and collapsed in the [coup](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) of the 9th of [Thermidor](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309915?terms=french+revolution) (July 27, 1794). Robespierre and his followers were executed the following day.

The fifth government of the French Revolution, the French Directory ruled revolutionary [France](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), and French conquests in [Europe](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), between the establishment of the new French Constitution of 1795 and the French[*coup d'état*](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) of 1799.

**THE DIRECTORY:** Under the Constitution of 1795, France was governed by five directors. The directors were to be chosen by a bicameral [legislature](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) elected on a [property qualification](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) and divided into the [Council of Five Hundred](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) and an upper chamber of 250 "ancients." The ministers, the executive administrators of the country, were responsible to the directors rather than the legislature. Fear of a repetition of the [Reign of Terror](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) that had been inflicted on the country by the [Committee of Public Safety](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), which had combined executive and legislative power, argued for their separation.

Under the Directory, France was ruled by the middle classes and the profiteers of [revolution](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution)—the newly rich military contractors and [financiers](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) that the revolution had created.  The Directory extended the "Thermidorian reaction" toward less ideological government after the Terror. After the puritanism of the Terror, it became quite fashionable again to display one's wealth, and for women, to display one's body as well.

The directors themselves were not vivid or remarkable personalities, although some, notably [Lazare Carnot](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), were excellent administrators. The one man to serve as a director for the entire period was [Paul Barras](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), an ex-aristocrat widely and correctly thought to be corrupt.

Although most of the powers at war with revolutionary France, such as [Spain](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) and [Prussia](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), made peace in 1795, war continued with [Austria](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) and [Great Britain](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution). The war with Austria was mostly fought in [Italy](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) under the leadership of the charismatic young general [Napoleon I](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution), who began his career under the Directory as a follower of Barras. The Peace of Campoformio in 1797 ratified French conquests in Italy and the [Netherlands](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution). Peace talks with Great Britain, however, were unsuccessful. Loot from the wars helped the Directory stabilize the French currency.

Internally, the Directory faced challenges from right and left. In 1796, a left-wing conspiracy led by Gracchus Babeuf was defeated with little difficulty. In 1797, a number of monarchists in the legislature, with the sympathy of some of the directors themselves, attempted to move France back to [monarchy](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution). This movement was crushed by Barras and by the army, whose leaders were afraid that a return to monarchy would lead to peace.

The Directory's control over the legislature proved temporary, and most directors were replaced in July 1799. What ultimately proved fatal was the regime's dependence on the army, by this point fighting a new war against a [coalition](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311879?terms=french+revolution) of European powers. Napoleon overthrew the Directory in the famous French *coup d'état* of 1799, but many of his achievements built on the administrative accomplishments of the directorial regime.

**THE CONSULATE:** Created by the Constitution of 1799, the French Consulate was the sixth and last government of the French Revolution. It was an executive body of three men, called consuls. The three consuls were [Napoleon I](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution), J. J. Cambacérès, and C. F. Lebrun. The Consulate-led government lasted from December 12, 1799 until the Imperial Constitution was adopted in 1804 and Napoleon was made emperor.

On November 9-10, 1799, Napoleon and a small group had overthrown the government created by the Constitution of 1795, the [French Directory](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution), because they wished to provide France with a stronger executive (the executive under the Directory was a committee of five equals). Emmanuel Sieyès, who had helped plan the[*coup d'état*](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution)*,* drew up the Constitution of 1799, which provided that all Frenchmen over 21 would meet in an assembly and select one-tenth of their number, who then selected one-tenth of their members to meet at the departmental capital. These men selected another one-tenth of their number to create a national list.

The [constitution](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution) provided for a Conservative Senate (also called Senate), a Tribunate, and a Legislative Body. The members of the Senate were appointed for life by the consuls. The Senate then chose the members of the Tribunate and Legislative Body from the national list. Because it ended the direct participation of most Frenchmen in the selection of national leaders and thus struck at the very heart of what the French Revolution was about, the end of the [revolution](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution) is traditionally given as the date the Constitution of 1799 was ratified by a [plebiscite](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution).

The constitution gave greater powers to the first consul, Napoleon, and he used these to great effect. Napoleon tried to alleviate the tensions that had grown during the revolution; [refugees](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution) who had fled during the revolution were permitted to return to France, various laws requiring French clergy to submit to state authority were lifted, and Napoleon reached the [Concordat (1801)](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution) with the pope, which reestablished Catholicism in France. The actual day-to-day operations of the government were overseen by the Council of State, composed of 29 men chosen by the first consul. In 1802, the constitution was amended to make Napoleon sole consul for life, and in 1804, the [republic](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/311878?terms=french+revolution) ended with the creation of the empire.