The French Revolution and Napoleon
Four Phases of the French Revolution

1. A relatively moderate phase (1789-1792): A constitution is written, the king agrees to limits on his powers, and a Bill of Rights is promulgated.


3. A period of reaction against the violence and other excesses of the Revolution (1794-1799): This is sometimes called the Thermidorean Reaction. (Rule by the Directory).

4. The Napoleonic Phase (1799-1815): From Consulate to Empire.

*See Crane Brinton’s theory on revolutions*
Causes of the French Revolution

- The Court’s Lavish Lifestyle
- War Debts (American Revolution, etc.)
- Inequitable Tax Structure (nobles and clergy were exempt from taxation, e.g.)
- High taxes and related burdens (corvee, poll tax, tithe)
- Peasant unrest
King Louis XVI (r. 1774-1792)
Queen Marie Antoinette
The Estates-General – called into session by Louis XVI in 1789 in order to deal with the near bankruptcy of the French Treasury

- **First Estate** = The Clergy
- **Second Estate** = The nobility
- **Third Estate** = Everybody else (merchants, lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers, artisans, farmers, servants, non-commissioned officers and other soldiers, common laborers)
The Tennis Court Oath (20 June 1789)

- Members of the Third Estate were unable to meet in their designated meeting hall in Versailles to discuss changes in voting that would more accurately reflect their demographic strength.
- After getting locked out of this hall, they assembled instead in a nearby tennis court and swore an oath not to disband until they had drafted a new, more equitable constitution.
- Many of the leaders of this group were members of the bourgeoisie, or upper middle class (merchants, lawyers, bankers, and doctors.)
- They would soon declare themselves the National Assembly
Storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789)

-This attack occurred in Paris. A mob of some 7,000-8,000 citizens approached this prison-fortress in Paris looking for weapons. When denied entry, they attacked. After several hours, the garrison surrendered. Their commander, the Marquis de Launay, was beheaded and the prison-fortress was torn down. This event is commemorated every year as the French national holiday (their Fourth of July).
Over the course of the next three years, the Revolution gets progressively more radical.

- The National Assembly would put into place a new constitution.
- After seeing his powers reduced and fearing for his safety, the king would attempt to flee from France (in the so-called Nuit de Varennes) but fails.
- Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette will later be put on trial, condemned, and executed.
- The influence of radical sans-culottes like Gracchus Babeuf grew.
- In April 1792 warfare broke out between France and Austria.
A sans-culotte
Different views of the French Revolution

• Anti-French Revolution: see Edmund Burke and his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

• Pro-French Revolution: see Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Jefferson
  (N.B.: Jefferson had lived in Paris from 1784-1789)
The Committee of Public Safety

- Formed in response to both internal and external threats, real or imagined
- The Committee was granted many extraordinary powers
- The Committee was led by Maximilien Robespierre. Leading figures included St.-Just and Marat.
- One of the Committee’s most important duties was organizing the defense of France against various coalitions of European powers like Austria, Great Britain, and Russia.
- The Committee was also responsible for ordering the arrest of many citizens, summary trials, and executions.
Maximilien Robespierre

-Son of a lawyer, he became a lawyer himself; also served briefly as a judge during the Old Regime

-Very idealistic; inspired by the ideals of the Roman Republic and by orators like Cicero and Cato the Censor

-Rousseau and other Enlightenment figures had a marked influence on his thought

-Nickname among supporters: “The Incorruptible”

-Also known for his immaculate attire

-Became one of the leaders of the Jacobin Club

-Probably the driving force behind the Reign of Terror

-Eventually he will fall victim to the Terror as well (illustrating the German playwright Georg Buechner’s adage about a revolution devouring its own children, “Die Revolution ist wie Saturn, sie frisst ihre eignen Kinder.”)
The Execution of Robespierre and St-Just
Wars of the 1790s
The Directory

- An executive body of five members, it ruled France from 1794-1799
- Its rule was characterized by moderation
- It was also noted for its corruption
- The French economy stagnated for most of the time the Directory ruled
- Also, in contrast to the strict morals enforced during the Reign of Terror, this period was known for its lax morals
- For the most part, the French tolerated the Directory but were not enthusiastic about it
Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

- Born and raised in Corsica
- Member of a large family
- Attended military school in Paris
- An artillery officer, he moved up through the ranks of the army as a result of his successes on the battlefield
- Eventually joined the Directory
- Took power in a coup d'état
- Styled himself at first as First Consul; later became emperor (1804)
- Guilty of nepotism
- First marriage was to Josephine de Beauharnais, second to Marie Louise of Austria
- Ironically, he was probably more autocratic than Louis XVI
The Invasion of Egypt
Jean-François Champollion and the Rosetta Stone
Napoleon’s Domestic Program

- Civil Constitution of the Clergy
- The Concordat
- The Napoleonic Code – streamlined French laws but also weakened the status of women
- Education reforms (lycees, etc.)
Napoleon caused many things to change in France during his rule. Women’s clothing, for example, became more informal. (See for example this picture of Madame Recamier by Jean-Jacques David.)
Napoleon’s Foreign Policy – successes and failures

- The Concordat with the Catholic Church
- The Sale of Louisiana (known to Americans as the Louisiana Purchase)
- Loss of Haiti because of Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolt
- The Continental System (see the adjacent map) – it worked at first but later was to cause Napoleon to lose some allies (Russia, e.g.) to the British
The Battle of Trafalgar (1804) represented a major setback for Napoleon.

-Probably the most important sea battle of the Napoleonic Wars
-Napoleon sent out a combined Franco-Spanish force to break through an English blockade
-This effort failed as the British admiral, Lord Nelson, defeated Napoleon’s fleet
Napoleon’s Invasion of Russia (1812) as seen by Minard’s graph
The Grande Armée’s Retreat from Moscow

-Napoleon’s forces were ill-equipped to deal with the Russian winter
-They also suffered from guerilla attacks and Russia’s scorched earth policy
-Very few of the original army returned to France
-Within a couple of years, Napoleon is defeated and forced into exile on Elba
Napoleon’s Hundred Days

- Napoleon escapes from his exile on the island of Elba and returns to France
- The new French king, Louis XVIII, is forced to flee
- Many of Napoleon’s former supporters, including Marshall Ney, welcome his triumphal return
- Napoleon’s enemies, including England and Prussia, gather their forces to put an end to Napoleon once and for all.
- Napoleon marches north from Paris to meet his adversaries. The climactic battle will take place at Waterloo, a rural area in Belgium noteworthy for its rolling hills and mostly open spaces.
Waterloo
The Duke of Wellington
Now that Napoleon is definitively defeated, the victorious powers have to decide what to do with him and his diehard supporters. Some are executed (Ney, e.g.), others are removed from power. A few, like Talleyrand and Fouche, manage to stay in place.

The victorious powers meet once more in Vienna, at Prince von Metternich’s invitation, to establish a new order for Europe. In some cases national boundaries are redrawn. The Concert of Europe is also put in place. Countries like Austria and Russia are energetic in their efforts to restore the Bourbon monarchy in France in the person of Louis XVIII.
The Congress of Vienna (1815)
Map of Europe after the time of the Congress of Vienna
Napoleon is exiled to St. Helena