

CHAPTER 29

REVOLUTIONS AND NATIONAL STATES IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD

INTRODUCTION

The years 1776 and 1789 are pivotal dates in world history. The impact of the American revolution and the French revolution extended far beyond the borders of those two countries. Other revolts followed, and in spite of a conservative reaction in Europe, the world was not the same afterward. Some common elements of the revolutionary era:

- New ideals. The ideals of freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty first expressed by the philosophes of the Enlightenment (see Chapter 24) were now enacted. John Locke's theory of government as a contract between rulers and subjects inspired the leaders of the American revolution. Likewise, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of a "social contract" based on the "general will" found expression in the National Assembly of France.
- New governments. Vastly different governments emerged in the United States, France, and Latin America. However, most revolutionary governments began with written constitutions, statements of individual rights, and elected assemblies. Political power was generally the privilege of men of property. Only Haiti empowered all men regardless of race.
- New ideologies. Political theories emerged to address the dramatic changes of the age. Conservatism, liberalism, and later, socialism (see Chapter 30) differed in the understanding of change and authority and came to express the social and economic currents of the nineteenth century.
- Uneven social progress. Some changes, such as the abolition of feudal rights and obligations in France, were profound and permanent. Other changes, like the abolition of slavery in the Americas, came more slowly and piecemeal. Equal rights for women did not gain momentum until late in the nineteenth century.
- Nationalism. Popular sovereignty gave voice to a new form of identity. Based on notions of a common cultural and historic experience, nationalism was a powerful force in the nineteenth century. Ethnic minorities like the Greeks within the Ottoman empire demanded national independence, and scattered cultural groups like the Italians and the Germans created new states to house their national identities.

OUTLINE

I. Popular sovereignty and political upheaval

A. Enlightened and revolutionary ideas

1. Popular sovereignty: relocating sovereignty in the people
 - a) Traditionally monarchs claimed a "divine right" to rule

- b) The Enlightenment challenged this right, made the monarch responsible to the people
 - c) John Locke's theory of contractual government: authority comes from the consent of the governed
 - 2. Freedom and equality: important values of the Enlightenment
 - a) Demands for freedom of worship and freedom of expression
 - b) Demands for political and legal equality
 - (1) Condemned legal and social privileges of aristocrats
 - (2) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
 - c) Equality not extended to women, peasants, laborers, slaves, or people of color
 - 3. Ideals of Enlightenment were significant global influence
- B. The American revolution
 - 1. Tension between Britain and the North American colonies
 - a) Legacy of Seven Years' War: British debt, North American tax burden
 - b) Mounting colonial protest over taxes, trade policies, parliamentary rule
 - (1) Colonial boycott of British goods
 - (2) Attacks on British officials; Boston Tea Party, 1773
 - c) Political protest over representation in Parliament: Continental Congress, 1774
 - d) British troops and colonial militia skirmished at the village of Lexington, 1775
 - 2. The Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776
 - a) Thirteen United States of America severed ties with Britain
 - b) Declaration inspired by Enlightenment and Locke's theory of government
 - 3. The American revolution, 1775–1781
 - a) British advantages: strong government, navy, army, plus loyalists in colonies
 - b) American advantages: European allies, George Washington's leadership
 - c) Weary of a costly conflict, British forces surrendered in 1781
 - 4. Building an independent state: Constitutional Convention, 1787
 - a) Constitution guaranteed freedom of press, of speech, and of religion
 - b) American republic based on principles of freedom, equality, popular sovereignty
 - c) Full legal and political rights granted only to men of property
- C. The French revolution
 - 1. Summoning the Estates General
 - a) Financial crisis: half of government revenue went to national debt
 - b) King Louis XVI forced to summon Estates General to raise new taxes

- c) Many representatives wanted sweeping political and social reform
 - d) First and Second Estates (nobles, clergy) tried to limit Third Estate (commoners)
2. The National Assembly formed by representatives of Third Estate, 17 June 1789
 - a) Demanded a written constitution and popular sovereignty
 - b) Angry mob seized the Bastille on 14 July, sparked insurrections in many cities
 - c) National Assembly wrote the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen”
 3. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity” was the slogan and values of the National Assembly
 - a) The National Assembly abolished the feudal system, altered the role of church
 - b) France became a constitutional monarchy, 1791
 4. The Convention replaced National Assembly under new constitution, 1791
 - a) Austrian and Prussian armies invaded France to restore *ancien régime*
 - b) France declared war on Spain, Britain, and the Netherlands
 - c) Convention abolished the monarchy and proclaimed France a republic
 - d) King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette executed, 1793
 - e) Radical Jacobins dominated the Convention in 1793–94 in a “reign of terror”
 - f) Revolutionary changes: in religion, dress, calendar, women’s rights
 5. The Directory, 1795–1799
 - a) A conservative reaction against the excesses of the Convention
 - b) Executed the Jacobin leader Robespierre, July 1794
 - c) New constitution
- D. The reign of Napoleon, 1799–1815
1. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)
 - a) Brilliant military leader; became a general in the royal army at age twenty-four
 - b) Supported the revolution; defended the Directory
 - c) His invasion of Egypt was defeated by British army
 - d) Overthrew the Directory and named himself consul for life
 2. Napoleonic France brought stability after years of chaos
 - a) Made peace with the Roman Catholic church and pope
 - b) Extended freedom of religion to Protestants and Jews
 - c) Civil Code of 1804: political and legal equality for all adult men
 - d) French civil law a model for law codes elsewhere in Europe and North America
 - e) Restricted individual freedom, especially speech and press
 3. Napoleon’s empire: 1804, proclaimed himself emperor

- a) Dominated the European continent: Iberia, Italy, Netherlands
- b) Defeated Austria and Prussia; fought British on high seas
- c) Disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812 destroyed Grand Army
- 4. The fall of Napoleon
 - a) Forced by coalition of enemies to abdicate in 1814, exiled on Elba
 - b) Escaped, returned to France, raised army, but was defeated by British in 1815

II. The influence of revolution

- A. The Haitian revolution: the only successful slave revolt in history
 - 1. Saint-Domingue, rich French colony on western Hispaniola
 - a) Society dominated by small white planter class
 - b) 90 percent of population were slaves working under brutal conditions
 - c) Large communities of escaped slaves, or maroons
 - d) Free blacks fought in American war, brought back revolutionary ideas
 - e) Widespread discontent: white settlers sought self-governance, *gens de couleur* sought political rights, slaves wanted freedom
 - 2. Slave revolt began in 1791
 - a) Factions of white settlers, *gens de couleur*, and slaves battled each other
 - b) French troops arrived in 1792; British and Spanish forces intervened in 1793
 - 3. Toussaint Louverture (1744–1803)
 - a) Son of slaves, literate, skilled organizer, built a strong and disciplined army
 - b) Controlled most of Saint-Domingue by 1797, created a constitution in 1801
 - c) Arrested by French troops; died in jail, 1803
 - 4. The Republic of Haiti
 - a) Yellow fever ravaged French troops; defeated and driven out by slave armies
 - b) Declared independence in 1803; established the Republic of Haiti in 1804
- B. Wars of independence in Latin America
 - 1. Latin American society rigidly hierarchical
 - a) Social classes: *peninsulares*, creoles, slaves, and indigenous peoples
 - b) Creoles sought to displace the *peninsulares* but retain their privileged position
 - 2. Mexican independence
 - a) Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1807 weakened royal control of colonies
 - b) 1810: peasant revolt in Mexico led by Hidalgo, defeated by conservative creoles
 - c) 1821: Mexico briefly a military dictatorship, then in 1822 a republic
 - d) South part of Mexico was split into several independent states in 1830s

3. Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) led independence movement in South America
 - a) Inspired by George Washington, took arms against Spanish rule in 1811
 - b) Creole forces overcame Spanish armies throughout South America, 1824
 - c) Bolívar's effort of creating Gran Colombia failed in 1830s
 4. Brazilian independence
 - a) Portuguese royal court fled to Rio de Janeiro, 1807
 - b) The king's son, Pedro, agreed to Brazilian independence, 1821
 - c) Became Emperor Pedro I in the independent Brazil (reigned 1822–1834)
 5. Creole dominance in Latin America
 - a) Independence brought little social change in Latin America
 - b) Principal beneficiaries were creole elites
- C. The emergence of ideologies: conservatism and liberalism
1. Conservatism: resistance to change
 - a) Importance of continuity, tradition
 - b) Edmund Burke viewed society as an organism that changed slowly over time
 - (1) American Revolution: a natural and logical outcome of history
 - (2) French Revolution: violent and irresponsible
 2. Liberalism: welcomed change as an agent of progress
 - a) Championed freedom, equality, democracy, written constitutions
 - b) Many liberals consider democracy dangerous because it promoted mass participation in politics
 - c) John Stuart Mill championed individual freedom and minority rights
- D. Testing the limits of revolutionary ideals: slavery
1. Movements to end slave trade: began in 1700s, gained momentum during revolutions
 - a) In 1807 British Parliament outlawed slave trade
 - b) Other states followed suit, though illegal slave trade continued from some time
 2. Movements to abolish slavery: more difficult because of property rights
 - a) In Haiti and much of South America, end of slavery came with independence
 - b) In Europe and North America, campaign against slave trade became campaign to abolish slavery
 - c) Abolition in Britain in 1833, France in 1848, the United States in 1865, Brazil in 1888
 3. Abolition brought legal freedom for slaves but not political equality
- E. Testing the limits of revolutionary ideals: women's rights

1. Enlightenment ideals and women
 - a) Enlightenment call for equality not generally extended to women
 - b) Women used logic of Locke to argue for women's rights
 - (1) Mary Astell attacked male dominance in the family
 - (2) Mary Wollstonecraft: women possessed same natural rights as men
2. Women crucial to revolutionary activities
 - a) French revolution granted women rights of education and property, not the vote
 - b) Olympe de Gouges's declaration of full citizenship for women too radical
 - c) Women made no significant gains in other revolutions
3. Women's rights movements gained ground in the nineteenth century in United States and Europe

III. The consolidation of national states in Europe

A. Nations and nationalism

1. Cultural nationalism: an expression of national identity
 - a) Emphasized common historical experience
 - b) Used folk culture and literature to illustrate national spirit (*Volkgeist*)
2. Political nationalism more intense in the nineteenth century
 - a) Demanded loyalty and solidarity from members of the national group
 - b) Minorities sought independence as a national community
 - c) Young Italy formed by Giuseppe Mazzini
3. Zionism: Jewish nationalism as a response to widespread European anti-Semitism
 - a) Movement founded by Theodor Herzl to create a Jewish state in Palestine
 - b) Anti-Semitism practiced openly in many countries of Europe
 - c) Jewish state of Israel finally created in 1948

B. The emergence of national communities

1. Congress of Vienna, 1814–15
 - a) Conservative leaders determined to restore old order after defeat of Napoleon
 - b) Succeeded in maintaining balance of power in Europe for a century
 - c) Failed in repressing nationalist and revolutionary ideas
2. Nationalist rebellions against old order throughout nineteenth century
 - a) Greek rebels overcame Ottoman rule in 1827
 - b) 1830 and 1848, rebellions in France, Spain, Portugal, German states, Belgium, Italy, and Poland
 - c) Conservative government usually restored afterward but ideals persisted

C. The unification of Italy and Germany

1. Cavour and Garibaldi united Italy by 1870
 - a) Mazzini's Young Italy inspired uprisings against foreign rule in Italy
 - b) Cavour led nationalists and expelled Austrian authorities in northern Italy, 1859
 - c) Garibaldi controlled southern Italy, delivered it over to King Vittore Emmanuele, 1860
2. Prussian prime minister Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) created a united Germany
 - a) In Germany, nationalist rebellion was repressed in 1848
 - b) Bismarck provoked three wars that swelled German pride
 - c) 1871, Prussian king proclaimed emperor of the Second Reich

IDENTIFICATION: PEOPLE

What is the contribution of each of the following individuals to world history? Identification should include answers to the questions *who, what, where, when, how, and why is this person important?*

Olympe de Gouges

John Locke

George Washington

Louis XVI

Marie Antoinette

Maximilien Robespierre

Napoleon Bonaparte

Toussaint Louverture

Simón Bolívar

Edmund Burke

John Stuart Mill

Klemens von Metternich

Otto von Bismarck

IDENTIFICATION: TERMS/CONCEPTS

State in your own words what each of the following terms means and why it is significant to a study of world history. (Terms with an asterisk are defined in the glossary.)

Declaration of Independence*

Ancien régime

National Assembly

Jacobins

Directory

Civil Code

*Peninsulares**

Conservatism

Liberalism

Zionism

Congress of Vienna*

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In what specific ways did the ideals of the Enlightenment challenge long-held assumptions about government and social order?
2. What specific issues and concerns led the British colonies of North America to revolt against their sovereign? What was the outcome of that rebellion?
3. What were the principal causes of the French revolution of 1789? Were these concerns addressed by the revolution?
4. How was French society restructured during the most radical phase of the revolution (1793–94)? Were these permanent changes or short-lived ones?
5. Conventional wisdom holds that Napoleon ended the revolution when he proclaimed himself emperor in 1804. In what ways did he continue the ideals of the revolution? In what ways did he reverse the revolution?
6. What events led to the slave revolt of Saint-Domingue (Haiti)? Why was this rebellion successful when so many other slave revolts failed?
7. Describe the basic social structure of Latin American society in 1800. What factors led to the revolutions that followed?

8. What kind of states emerged in Mexico, Gran Colombia, and Brazil after the revolutions?
9. What factors led the Western powers to abolish the slave trade and then slavery in the nineteenth century?
10. What was the impact of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the events of the revolutionary era on the status of women? Give some specific examples.
11. Compare the unification of Italy with the unification of Germany.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

1. Compare the declarations on pages 789 and 804 in the textbook. Did Olympe de Gouges simply add the word *women* to the original declaration, or did she substantially change the meaning of the concept of citizenship in her declaration? Did she speak from the traditions of the Enlightenment, or did she challenge those traditions?
2. Under the ancien régime, the state was generally defined as the domain of the sovereign. How was this definition changed by the American and French revolutions? What are the elements of a national identity in the modern world? (And what is the place of minorities such as the Jews within this new concept of nationality?)
3. Compare the positions of a conservative and a liberal in the nineteenth century on the nature of political authority and political change. What would each ideology say about abolition of slavery? About women's rights?

STUDENT QUIZ

1. The ideas of the Enlightenment challenged the long-term assumptions about sovereignty and instead proposed that
 - a. true government stems from religious authority.
 - b. the best form of government is a democracy.
 - c. governments are bound to the will of the people.
 - d. all government is inherently unjust. Humans are better off living in a state of nature.
 - e. church and state should be entirely separate.
2. Which of the following could be considered an expression of enlightened ideas about government?
 - a. the Stamp Act of 1708
 - b. the Quartering Act
 - c. the Declaration of Independence
 - d. the Committee of Public Safety
 - e. the Congress of Vienna

3. The American colonists won their bid for independence primarily because
 - a. they had superior generals.
 - b. they were united in the cause of freedom.
 - c. colonial militias were more disciplined and better marksmen than British troops.
 - d. the French and the Dutch decided to support them against the British.
 - e. all of the above.

4. Embedded in the American Constitution is the principle of
 - a. universal male suffrage.
 - b. the abolition of slavery.
 - c. free enterprise.
 - d. westward expansion.
 - e. popular sovereignty.

5. Which of the following was *not* one of the causes of the French revolution of 1789?
 - a. a staggering national debt
 - b. accusation of treason against Louis XVI
 - c. resentment at the privileges of the aristocracy
 - d. the extravagance of Marie Antoinette and the court at Versailles
 - e. the opportunity presented by the summoning of the Estates General

6. Which of the following was *not* one of the provisions of the new French constitution of 1791?
 - a. France became a constitutional monarchy.
 - b. Church property was confiscated and clergy lost their privileged status.
 - c. Peasants were freed from the dues and services owed to their landlords.
 - d. All adult males were given the right to vote in national elections.
 - e. An elective, legislative body, the Convention, was established.

7. Under the rule of the Convention, French women
 - a. gained important property rights and the right to a divorce.
 - b. were proclaimed full citizens of the Republic.
 - c. lost economic power to their husbands.
 - d. were legally defined in terms of either their fathers or their husbands.
 - e. were granted the right to vote in national elections.

8. Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power as
 - a. a liberal noble who supported the Third Estate.
 - b. a military hero.
 - c. an opponent of Robespierre.
 - d. a supporter of Marie Antoinette.
 - e. none of the above.

9. In general, Napoleon championed
 - a. political freedom but not social equality.
 - b. equality under the law but not political freedom.
 - c. freedom of expression but only for the aristocracy.
 - d. all the rights of citizenship proclaimed by the National Assembly.
 - e. the restoration of the *ancien régime*.

10. Which of the following is *not* a correct explanation of why the Haitian revolution succeeded?
- Five hundred *gens de couleur* were veterans of the American revolution.
 - The large maroon population supported the revolution.
 - Toussaint Louverture was an effective strategist.
 - The revolutionaries had the support of British and Spanish forces.
 - The French army was struck down with yellow fever.
11. In leading the revolutions of South America, Simón Bolívar advocated
- that Spanish colonial rule be replaced with an indigenous monarchy.
 - that ethnic nationalism be the basis of the new states.
 - popular sovereignty.
 - the abolition of slavery and full male suffrage.
 - all of the above.
12. Revolutions in Latin America were frequently a power struggle between what two groups?
- masters and slaves
 - peninsulares* and *crioles*
 - European and indigenous peoples
 - Europeans and mestizos
 - colonial militias and European mercenaries
13. Which Latin American state gained independence as a monarchy?
- Brazil
 - Haiti
 - Mexico
 - Peru
 - Venezuela
14. A political conservative in the nineteenth century would be likely to advocate
- the restoration of the French monarchy after the defeat of Napoleon.
 - limiting suffrage to men of property.
 - censorship as a reasonable means of preventing social unrest.
 - government support of the established church.
 - all of the above.
15. A political liberal in the nineteenth century would be likely to advocate
- returning freed slaves to Africa.
 - the confiscation of church property by the state.
 - universal suffrage for all men and women, regardless of race.
 - written constitutions and representative government.
 - all of the above.
16. The first European power to abolish the slave trade was
- Britain.
 - France.
 - Portugal.
 - Spain.
 - the United States.

17. The last country to abolish slavery was
- Brazil.
 - Britain.
 - France.
 - Haiti.
 - the United States.
18. The American women's rights movement began
- at the Constitutional Convention.
 - concurrent with the antislavery movement.
 - after the Civil War, when women saw how freed slaves benefited from the vote.
 - not until the twentieth century.
 - none of the above.
19. Which of the following would *not* be an example of cultural nationalism?
- the study of language
 - the study of history
 - collecting folk songs and fairy tales
 - anti-Semitism
 - All are examples of cultural nationalism.
20. Theodor Herzl's Zionism was the direct result of
- his shock at a government order revoking the citizenship of all French Jews.
 - his shock at the army's persecution of Alfred Dreyfus.
 - his frustrated desire to emigrate to America.
 - a religious revelation that European Jews should return to the Holy Land.
 - a wave of persecution against Jews living in the Ottoman empire.
21. The German people united behind King Wilhelm because
- he promised them a constitutional monarchy.
 - he was the rightful heir to the Holy Roman Empire.
 - the wars engineered by Bismarck generated strong nationalist sentiment.
 - the Prussian army defeated all other claimants to the throne.
 - all of the above.

MATCHING

Match these figures with the statements that follow.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| A. Simón Bolívar | G. Louis XVI |
| B. Mary Wollstonecraft | H. Maximilien Robespierre |
| C. John Locke | I. Olympe de Gouges |
| D. John Stuart Mill | J. Napoleon Bonaparte |
| E. Toussaint Louverture | K. Otto von Bismarck |
| F. Edmund Burke | L. Klemens von Metternich |

- ___ Conservative Austrian diplomat who sought a balance of power between the nations of Europe.
- ___ Radical Jacobin leader associated with the worst excesses of the French revolution.
- ___ Political theorist of the seventeenth century who inspired the revolutions of the eighteenth century.
- ___ Leader who, when he plotted with Austria to invade France, destroyed the possibility of a constitutional monarchy and invited his own execution.
- ___ English feminist who argued that the ideals of the Enlightenment—natural rights, consent of the governed—should also be applied to women.
- ___ Revolutionary who, armed with an education, organizational skills, and a determined army, liberated his island colony from French rule.
- ___ Considered the “George Washington” of Latin America.
- ___ Leader who, although regarded as one of the greatest military leaders of any age, committed the fatal mistake of overconfidence.
- ___ French feminist who insisted that women should become full citizens of revolutionary France, an idea for which she was eventually executed.
- ___ Prime minister of Prussia and architect of German unification.
- ___ Spokesman for British conservatism who accepted change that was gradual and consistent with tradition.
- ___ Spokesman for British liberalism who argued for complete freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

SEQUENCING

Place the following clusters of events in chronological order. Consider carefully how one event leads to another, and try to determine the internal logic of each sequence.

A. Napoleon:

- ___ Taking advantage of a chaotic politic scene, he is appointed to the Directory, then disbands the Directory and proclaims himself consul for life.
- ___ An alliance of his enemies defeats him, twice—and exiles him from France.
- ___ After successfully defeating the enemies of France, he crowns himself emperor.
- ___ He establishes his reputation as a general in defense of the revolution.
- ___ An impoverished noble from Corsica, he secures a military appointment at a young age.
- ___ In his worst military decision, he invades Russia in the winter and loses most of his army.

B.

- ___ The Stamp Act and Tea Act
- ___ The Declaration of Independence
- ___ The Boston Tea Party
- ___ The Peace of Paris
- ___ End of the Seven Years' War

C.

- ___ Radical Jacobins seize control of the Convention.
- ___ Napoleon seizes power and proclaims himself emperor.
- ___ A hereditary monarchy rules France.
- ___ The Directory executes Robespierre and ends the “reign of terror.”
- ___ A hereditary monarchy again rules France.
- ___ The Third Estate forms a National Assembly.

QUOTATIONS

For each of the following quotes, identify the speaker, if known, or the point of view. What is the significance of each passage?

1. "The great questions of the day will not be settled by speeches or majority votes—that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by *blood and iron*."
2. "Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of women are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason."
3. "Those who have served the revolution have plowed the sea."
4. "Liberty, fraternity, equality!"
5. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
6. "No taxation without representation!"

MAP EXERCISES

1. On an outline map of Europe, indicate all the states that were directly controlled by Napoleon and those states that were at one time allied with Napoleon. Assume that the states not included in this system were enemies of Napoleon. From this map alone, can you predict some of the reasons for Napoleon's downfall? (See Map 29.2, page 794 in the textbook.)



2. On an outline map of Latin America, locate and label all the following countries. Indicate as well the date of independence for each one. (See Map 29.3, page 800.)

- Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Central America, Chile, Gran Columbia, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, United States of America, Uruguay
- Simón Bolívar dreamed of a United States of South America. What were some of the barriers to this vision?



CONNECTIONS

In fifty words or less, explain the relationship between each of the following pairs. How does one lead to or foster the other? Be specific in your response.

- John Locke and the Declaration of Independence
- Olympe de Gouges and Toussaint Louverture
- *The Social Contract* (Rousseau) and the Committee of Public Safety
- The Congress of Vienna and Bismarck

FILMS

The Crossing (2000). By December of 1776, the revolution was unraveling. Washington badly needed a victory to regain the confidence of his men and the Continental Congress. On Christmas Eve, he led his troops across the Delaware River and surprised the British celebrating the holiday in their barracks. With Jeff Daniels.

The Patriot (1999). Although British forces were notoriously brutal in the South, this film grossly overstates British atrocities toward civilians. That the hero owns a plantation but no slaves is also not credible. Watch this one for the battle scenes. With Mel Gibson.

Jefferson in Paris (1995). Nick Nolte plays Thomas Jefferson as the United States ambassador to Paris just before the French Revolution. Interesting character study: Jefferson enjoys high-minded discussions about rights and freedom, while still dominating his family and his slaves. With Thandie Newton as the slave girl Sally Hemmings and Gwyneth Paltrow as Jefferson's daughter.

Revolution (1985). Al Pacino is an unwilling foot soldier in the Continental Army; Donald Sutherland is a sadistic British general. Historically accurate, particularly the battle sequences.

A Tale of Two Cities. Charles Dickens's classic tale about the French Revolution has been filmed many times. The 1935 black-and-white version is a classic. The more recent Masterpiece Theatre production is longer, but faithful to the book—avoid the 1980 film. Whichever you see, count on an epic tale of love, heroism, and sacrifice.

The Scarlet Pimpernel (1982). Anthony Andrews plays a British agent who acts the part of a simpering dandy while smuggling French aristocrats out of Paris to safety during the Revolution. Jane Seymour plays his French wife. There is also a splendid 1934, black-and-white version starring Leslie Howard.

War and Peace (1956). Tolstoy's sweeping romance set in Russia at the time of Napoleon's invasion. Starring Audrey Hepburn, Mel Torme, and Henry Fonda. (Or watch the 1967 Russian version with subtitles.)