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# Friend of the People, Enemy to the Cause: Jean Paul Marat, Charlotte Corday, and the Consolidation of Jacobin Power in Revolutionary France

Claire Martin  
*St Mary's Academy*

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**“Friend of the People, Enemy to the Cause:  
Jean Paul Marat, Charlotte Corday, and the Consolidation of Jacobin Power in  
Revolutionary France”**

Claire Martin

PSU History 102/Honors Modern European History

Mr. Vannelli

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*“As for the ambitious views I’ve been accused of, here is my only response: I want neither position nor pension. If I accepted the place of deputy in the National Convention, it was in the hope of more effectively serving the fatherland...My only ambition is to assist in saving the people: let it be free and happy and all my wishes will be fulfilled.”*<sup>1</sup>

As the 18th century drew to a close across newly Enlightened Europe, the country of France plunged into a bloody and feverish scramble to overthrow the royal paradigm and usher in a new, democratic regime. During the volatile period of 1789 to 1795, many of the concepts that made up the backbone of the French Identity were challenged, from the legitimacy of religion to the legality of monarchy.<sup>2</sup> While thousands of enraged French citizens protested the insensitive pomp of their royalist leaders, groups of impassioned revolutionaries rose up to meet the call for change. Although these groups shared the common goal of liberty for the French people, they differed greatly in their visions for the hazy future of France. As the Revolution exploded across the country, two competing schools of thought emerged as the primary political parties of the new state: a sect of zealous radicals, known as the Jacobins, and a sect of moderate radicals, known as the Girondin.<sup>3</sup> Though almost congruous at the outset of the Revolution, these two political factions quickly divided and solidified into the two primary political opponents of the New Age.

In the wake of several violent demonstrations intended to renew revolutionary fervor, tensions rose between the fanatic Mountain faction of Jacobinism and rational Girondin theory. The totality of this conflict culminated in young Girondist Charlotte Corday’s assassination of prominent revolutionary writer and Jacobin supporter, Jean-Paul Marat. This murder, which heightened the sense of paranoia that pervaded the lives of French citizens and stirred nationalist fever in the Legislative Assembly, ultimately clinched the power of the

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<sup>1</sup> Marat, Jean-Paul. “Prospectus for the Journal of the Republic 1792.” *Journal of the Republic*. Translated by Mitch Abidor, Marxists: Jean-Paul Marat, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Gottschalk. *The Era of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1929), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, Michael L. “The Foundation of the Jacobin Clubs and the Development of the Jacobin Club Network.” *The Journal of Modern History* 51 (1979): 725. Accessed November 16, 2012.

radical Jacobins, led by a martyr (Marat) and a common enemy (Corday), with which to combat, humiliate, and ultimately oust the more conservative Girondin from the French political arena and clear the way for their new, secular order.

Although they would eventually become bitter rivals, then avowed enemies, in French politics, the Jacobins and the Girondin shared similar physical and ideological beginnings. Both factions were derived from a small group of reformist representatives from the outer districts of France, who wanted greater liberties for the French people.<sup>4</sup> The Jacobin Club found its revolutionary roots in a group of dissatisfied representatives from Brittany who met in a Dominican Convent on Jacobus Street after the Convocation of the Estates-General at Versailles (May 1789), while the Girondin began as twelve reform delegates from the Parisian Department of Gironde who met to demand civil liberties at the French Legislative Assembly (July 1788). By 1789, both groups identified as Parisian reformist parties under the leadership of rousing orator, Jérôme Pétion Brissot (1754-1793).<sup>5</sup> In a letter to a colleague, visiting Englishman and reformist, Arthur Young, described a meeting of the Club on January 17, 1790, as such: “In this club, the business that is to be brought into the National Assembly is regularly debated in an intelligent and gentlemanlike way.”<sup>6</sup> Both the Jacobins and the Girondin were acknowledged as intelligent and gentlemanlike during their early years; indeed, in almost every regard, they seemed flawlessly congruent. Both parties demanded an end to the monarchy in favor of a democratic republic, “like the one they saw taking shape in the fledgling United States,”<sup>7</sup> as well as a socialist distribution of wealth to the populace (including

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, Samuel F. “Problems of Law and Order during 1790, the ‘Peaceful’ Year of the French Revolution.” *The American Historical Review* 80 (1975): 862.

<sup>5</sup> Gruben, David. “The Warmonger, Jacques Pierre Brissot.” *Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution*, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Young, Arthur. “[Letter sent January 17, 1790].” *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, “The Foundation of the Jacobin Clubs...,” 702.

a modified tax code), and minimized power in the clergy.<sup>8</sup> It was not until the arrival of the new French Constitution in the spring of 1791 that the Jacobins began to diverge from Brissot's modest vision of change and grow distinctly radical in their political aims.

The National Assembly's newly constructed French Constitution in 1791 promised French citizens "a sovereign Legislative Assembly" which would essentially govern the nobility and clergy, "thereby addressing the demands of the representatives without abolishing the monarchy altogether."<sup>9</sup> The Girondin celebrated the new Constitution as a civilized solution to the tension between the nobility and the Third Estate (or lower class), while the Jacobins saw it as a stalling tactic intended to disguise the deeper problem of monarchy as a system of government.<sup>10</sup> These opposing views on the degree of revisionism necessary to effect revolutionary change led to a boiling tension between the Jacobins and the Girondin that spread from the Legislative Assembly to the streets of Paris.

In the months following the release of the Constitution, the Jacobin demand for change grew increasingly radical until the club had morphed from a reform group into the zealous organization that would orchestrate the Reign of Terror. While the Girondin continued to speak out in favor of a representational monarchy, many Jacobins began promoting a more drastic political solution; namely, a people's republic that would strip the king and clergy of all power and authority. In July of 1791, two months before the release of the Constitution, the Jacobins had driven out a group of its more conservative members, who deserted to form the Feuillant's Club, a moderate branch of Jacobinism.<sup>11</sup> Historian Michael L. Kennedy calls this

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 703.

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911 edition. s.v. "Constitution of 1791."

<sup>10</sup> Brinton, Crane. "Political Ideas in the Jacobin Clubs." *Political Science Quarterly* 43 (1928): 253. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy, Michael L. "Jacobin Cavalrymen." *French Historical Studies* 17 (1992): 672. Accessed November 16, 2012.

departure “an exodus that left only the most radical, and most dangerous, behind.”<sup>12</sup> Without moderate Jacobins to dilute the fervor of the “most radical,” the club ballooned into a coalition of reckless and outspoken anarchists who believed that, “only total displacement of royalism could guarantee a fresh start.”<sup>13</sup> Naturally, the arrival of the cautious Constitution in September did not please this newly invigorated group of revolutionaries. Insulted at the compromise embedded in the document, the Jacobins spurned the Constitution and raised the call for a democratic regime in which all citizens held equal socioeconomic status and voted on policy via democratic convention. This new agenda only widened the growing schism between the club and the deliberately peaceful Girondin. By the time the monarchy was officially overthrown, in August of 1792, the fanatic Maximillian Robespierre had taken control of the Jacobins. Renamed “The Mountain,” Robespierre’s radical Jacobin sect finally turned upon the Girondin in open hostility.<sup>14</sup>

By taking and maintaining a public stance against the drastic and often violent actions of the Jacobins, the Girondin marked themselves as targets for anti-revolutionary accusations from the French populace as well as their political opposition. As nineteenth century historian Alphonse de Lamartine points out in his *History of the Girondin*, “The Girondists had proposed suspending the king and summoning of the National Convention, but they had agreed not to overthrow the monarchy until Louis XVI had become impervious to their counsels. That decision lay with the radicals.”<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1792, a group of Girondists publicly resisted an overthrow of the monarchy in Paris, fearing a total collapse of order in

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<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, “Jacobin Cavalrymen,” 686.

<sup>13</sup> Brinton, “Political Ideas in the Jacobin Clubs,” 240.

<sup>14</sup> Doyle, William. *Officers, Nobles, and Revolutionaries: Essays on Eighteenth-Century France*. (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), 75.

<sup>15</sup> Alphonse De Lamartine. *History of the Girondists, or, Personal Memoirs of the Patriots of the French Revolution: From Unpublished Sources, Volume 2*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849), 43.

France.<sup>16</sup> If they expected to be met with sympathy from the crowds, however, they were sorely disappointed. Angered at this Girondin passivity, the French citizens took up arms against the protesters in the streets, calling them “*les ennemis de la révolution.*”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately for the Girondin, this public defiance of their rationalist approach to the revolution only foreshadowed the struggle for power to come.

As France closed in on 1793, the friction between the Jacobins and Girondin spiraled into an enmity that put both parties on the brink of civil war. Between September of 1792 and June of 1793, the new Mountain faction of the Jacobins, led by Robespierre, attempted to purge the Girondin from French politics for their continual attempts to undermine Jacobin activities. In early September of 1792, Robespierre ordered a flash massacre with his radical supporters intended to wipe out all Parisians suspected of being counterrevolutionary. Spectator and conservative revolutionary, Restif de la Bretonne, describes the grisly September Massacres in the following letter, dated 4 September 1792:

I arose, distressed by the horror. The night had not refreshed me at all, rather it had caused my blood to boil... I go out and listen. I follow groups of people running to see the "disasters"—their word for it. Passing in front of the Conciergerie, I see a killer who I'm told is a sailor from Marseilles. His wrist is swollen from use. I pass by. Dead bodies are piled high in front of the Châtelet... What pointless cruelty!...<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, Michael L. “The Best and the Worst of Times: the Jacobin Club Network from October 1791 to June 2, 1793.” *French Historical Studies* 56 (1984): 653. Accessed November 6, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Cosgrave, George and Gerstacker, Friedrich. “The French Revolution.” *California Historical Society Quarter* 17 (1938): 15. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Restif de la Bretonne, Nicolas-Edme. “[Journal dated September 4th, 1792].” Translator unknown. *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, 2001.

Although Bretonne's conservatism predisposes him to reject the activities of the Mountain, his account contains gruesome details, like the "swollen wrist" of a killer and the piles of "dead bodies," which indicate that the massacres were horrific even without his bias. With a mixture of shock and disgust, the Girondin objected to the massacres in public, crying, "*Ce n'est pas un revolution!*"<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, the Girondin counter enraged the Jacobins and Parisian revolutionaries alike. In response to Girondin protestations, the French people elected bitter ex-Girondist and ally of the Mountain, Jean Nicolas-Pache, mayor of Paris. His agenda "consisted primarily of initiating political uprisings meant to unseat the Girondin from the National Assembly."<sup>20</sup> By spring of 1793, as the country closed in on the Reign of Terror, nearly all Girondin had been ousted from the National Convention, thanks to their resistance to Jacobin "improvements,"<sup>21</sup> like the execution of King Louis XVI in January of 1793. The Mountain Faction of the Jacobins, with the help of Robespierre, had written and enacted the Constitution of 1793, which officially established the country of France as a republic. Enraged at their fall from grace and the violent new direction of the revolution, the Girondin decided, belatedly, to retaliate.

In April of 1793, a small group of Girondin arrested two men accused of "willfully attempting to unseat the Girondin from the Convention,"<sup>22</sup> a radical Mountain devotee named Jacques René Hébert and an extremist writer named Jean-Paul Marat. The remaining Girondin leaders hoped that the arrests of such well-known revolutionaries would demonstrate to the French proper the power they retained. However, their arrests quickly backfired. When it

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<sup>19</sup> Cosgrave, Gerstacker. "The French Revolution," 7.

<sup>20</sup> Restif de la Bretonne, Nicolas-Edme. "[Journal dated September 4th, 1792]." Translator unknown. *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Cosgrave, Gerstacker. "The French Revolution," 8.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, E.P. "Hunting the Jacobin Fox." *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 101. Accessed November 16, 2012.



came time for the defense in court, Marat gave a rousing oration that skewered the peaceful theorists for their lack of nationalism and ultimately turned the Revolutionary Tribunal to his side. Unintentionally, the Girondin had given a voice to one of their most impassioned critics. It took the jury less than an hour to acquit both men. The joy that his acquittal induced in the French people is a testament to the popularity of radicalism in the minds of the revolutionaries, and, conversely, the dwindling power of the moderates.<sup>23</sup>

Jean-Paul Marat (24 May 1743 – 13 July 1793), though not technically a part of Jacobin Club, embodied and defended the Jacobin philosophy of extremism, making him a logical target for arrest by the floundering Girondin. Though rather sickly and deformed in person, Marat boasted what 20th century historian Gaston Martin calls “an incisive mind”; before taking up his pen for the radical cause, he also worked as a physician, scientist, and political theorist.<sup>24</sup> In 1788, on the eve of the Revolution, he wrote his first, fateful revolutionary pamphlet, “An Offering to the Nation,” in which he outlined the rights and privileges to which he believed all Frenchmen to be entitled. After the meeting of Estates-General in May of 1789, he penned and distributed two more: “The Constitution” and “Tableau of the Flaws of the English Constitution,” both of which delineated the substantial reforms to French policy Marat wanted implemented in the new Constitution. In September, he finally began his own paper; a newsletter he signed, *L’Ami du Peuple*.<sup>25</sup> Although the paper was technically illegal, Marat quickly secured legal copyright from the overwhelmed government. The articles in his paper, which he published every single day, attacked prominent and powerful Parisians, including the Corps Municipal, the Constituent Assembly, the Cour du Châtelet, and, of course, the

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<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, Michael L. “The Jacobin Clubs and the Press: ‘Phase Two.’” *French Historical Studies* 13 (1984): 483. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Martin, Gaston. *Jean-Paul Marat: L’œil et l’ami du Peuple*. (Paris: Les Éditions Rieder, 1938), 13.

<sup>25</sup> “Friend of the People”

Girondin. From the beginning, Marat supported radical Jacobin decisions, like the September Massacres of 1792. After the Jacobins declared France a republic, Marat changed the name of his paper to “*Le Journaux de la Republique Française.*”<sup>26</sup> His consistent corroboration of the radical choices of the Revolution helped him win over the jury at his trial in April of 1793.<sup>27</sup>

In the minds of the Girondin, Marat’s triumphant release from custody marked the time for surrender. However, one young Girondist named Charlotte Corday (27 July 1768 – 17 July 1793) saw it as the opportunity to turn the tables on the Jacobins. A “political theorist from the upper crust of Normandy,” Corday quickly “aligned herself with the Girondin” upon her move to Paris in 1792.<sup>28</sup> Repulsed by the September Massacres, fearful of a civil war between the Girondin and Jacobins, disgusted at the murders of the royal family, and outraged at the Jacobins’ incessant assaults on the Girondin at the Convention, Corday saw Marat’s easy elusion of prison as the final insult to her political brethren.<sup>29</sup> On July 13, 1793, she took the spiraling conflict into her own hands.

The morning of the 13th, Corday arrived at Marat’s apartment, claiming to have information on a Girondist uprising. Marat’s unsuspecting wife directed the young woman into the bathroom, where Marat was bathing. Drawing a knife from her sleeve, Corday stabbed the writer in the chest, simultaneously puncturing his lung, aorta, and left ventricle.<sup>30</sup> Marat cried out, “*Aidez-moi, mon ami!*”<sup>31</sup> and died.<sup>32</sup> Within three days, the twenty-five-year-old assassin was tried, convicted, and guillotined for willful murder and counterrevolutionary sympathies.

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<sup>26</sup> “Journal of the Republic”

<sup>27</sup> Martin, *Jean-Paul Marat: L’œil et l’ami du Peuple*, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Kindleberger, Elizabeth R. “Charlotte Corday in Text and Image: A Case Study in the French Revolution and Women’s History.” *French Historical Studies* 18 (1994): 972. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Kindleberger, “Charlotte Corday in Text and Image...” 973.

<sup>30</sup> Smart, Annie K. *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France*. (Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 165.

<sup>31</sup> “Help me, my friend!”

<sup>32</sup> Martin, *Jean-Paul Marat: L’œil et l’ami du Peuple*, 251.

Her death, however, did little to assuage the furious Jacobins. Unfortunately for the Girondin, their political opponents had only just begun to exact their revenge for the murder of their consummate advocate. Corday's intervention had finally given the Jacobins a direct route to political domination, and in the summer of 1793, they took it with alacrity.<sup>33</sup>

By depicting Jean-Paul Marat as a martyr and Charlotte Corday as an evil harlot in art and publication, the Jacobins aroused anti-Girondin sympathy from revolutionaries and moderate citizens alike. This exploitation of the various forms of mass communication convinced citizens to support the Jacobins' witch-hunt for lingering Girondin in France and, ultimately, to stand behind the Club's extremist policies. Once the Jacobins had secured the death sentence for Corday, their first maneuver was to make a point of celebrating the sentence loudly and in public, "so as to imply to French citizens that the assassin's death was the most supreme example of justice."<sup>34</sup> In the forty-eight hours between Corday's trial and execution, the radicals had spread an article of political propaganda across Paris beginning, "Heroes of the Revolution Capture Murdres of France's Best Friend."<sup>35</sup> By the time Corday ascended the scaffold, her final words, "I have died to save a hundred-thousand,"<sup>36</sup> could hardly be heard above the jeering profanities of the crowds.<sup>37</sup> The mayhem the Jacobins managed to stir in the crowd at the execution only foreshadowed the chaos they were about to ignite in the City of Light.

Using the promulgation of Corday as wicked and Marat as saintlike to appeal to the pathos of the crowds, the Jacobins began a campaign that concurrently raised sympathy for the

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<sup>33</sup> Gottschalk, *The Era of the French Revolution*, 203.

<sup>34</sup> Hunt, Lynn. "The Rhetoric of Revolution in France." *History Workshop* 15 (1983): 82. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Hunt, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in France," 82.

<sup>36</sup> Kindleberger, "Charlotte Corday in Text and Image...," 969.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

radical cause and sullied the Girondin cause permanently. Not a week after Corday's execution, the Jacobins published a series of political cartoons which characterized the young woman as a myriad of people and creatures widely acknowledged as "enemies to the revolution," including "a queen, a rabid Girondin, a harlot, and the devil."<sup>38</sup> These same drawings depicted Marat as "the paragon of virtues"; namely, "a hero, a martyr, an angel, and father of the revolution."<sup>39</sup> Though such deliberate antagonism through published art was not a new concept to French politicals, the number of serials published featuring Charlotte Corday and the Girondin Part soared beyond that of any papers previously. Unsurprisingly, as Marat's tragic story spread, so too did the credibility of the Jacobins, which dramatically increased their influence over the opinions of the French populace. Art historian David L. Dowd predicts that the percentage of Parisians that saw an image of the disgraced Girondists "probably surpassed ninety."<sup>40</sup> Such mass publicity suggests that the Jacobins used an extensive amount of money and authority to circulate the serials to a greater number of individuals following Corday's execution in July. Their scheme was successful. With such a wide audience, it came as no surprise to Parisians that the Jacobins' publications incited anti-Girondist protests across the city of Paris, in the fall of 1793. "Corday and Marat were everywhere that year," comments historian and rhetorician Lynn Hunt.<sup>41</sup> "Images of the two covered the city of Paris; *Corday* became synonymous with *heretic*, *Marat* with *martyr*."<sup>42</sup> The Club's media manipulation had both secured the approbation of French citizens and reignited their revolutionary (that is to say, anti-Girondist) zeal, as evidence by the widespread popularity of the publications and the

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<sup>38</sup> Dowd, David L. "Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 15 (1951): 543. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Dowd. "Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution," 544.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 544.

<sup>41</sup> Hunt, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in France," 83.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

counterrevolutionary protests which they provoked. The research of both Dowd and Hunt seems to signify that by the end of 1793, the Jacobins had a tight hold on public opinion, for Paris devoured the Jacobins' version of Marat's heroism and Corday's villainy in sweeping numbers.<sup>43</sup>

As thousands of Parisians subscribed wholeheartedly to the Jacobins' biased account of Marat's murder, they were also inundated with the writings of Marat himself. Determined to keep the impassioned ideas of their deceased sympathizer alive, the Jacobins reprinted his papers every day, in order to continue disseminating his ideas. His condemnations of "moderate Republicans" and the Girondin spread far and wide, thanks to the combined effect of curiosity in his death and the dogged efforts of the Jacobins to keep circulating his thoughts. Martin Gaston writes in his biography of Marat that, "no one heard his words more loudly than after he had ascended the scaffold."<sup>44</sup> By reprinting and republishing Marat's many pieces of impassioned revolutionary writing in the wake of his untimely murder, the leaders of the Jacobins ensured that Marat's libertarian words would be read several times over by a sympathetic populace.

While the Jacobins won the citizens over in print with their heroic champion of liberty and his cruel murderess, they also gained ground in government. The overwhelming amount of support the radicals garnered from the public factored greatly into the National Parliament's choice to endorse Jacobin agenda in the fall of 1793. The Jacobins' newfound control over the views of the French citizens filtered into the government, thus giving the Club inimitable power over French legislature. The fresh wave of nationalist and anti-Girondist fervor, which the Jacobins had precipitated by slandering Corday and the Girondin, resulted in the Trial of

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<sup>43</sup> Kennedy, "The Jacobin Clubs and the Press: 'Phase Two,'" 475.

<sup>44</sup> Martin, *Jean-Paul Marat: L'œil et l'ami du Peuple*, 253.

the Girondists (also known as the “Trial of 21”) in October of 1793. Convicted of treason, twenty-one prominent Girondists from Parliament stood trial against a jury made up entirely of Jacobins, Jacobin sympathizers, and Marat sympathizers. It took the jury an astonishing twelve minutes to find all twenty-one men (including Girondin hero, Brissot) guilty of treason for counterrevolutionary effort and sentence them all to death. On October 21, 1793, the men were guillotined alphabetically in a few hours.<sup>45</sup> This decisive flash of a court case expelled the last Girondists with any real political power from French politics, marking one of the first legislative examples of the Jacobins’ success in heightening revolutionary fervor after their crusade against Charlotte Corday.

In the months following the Trial of 21, remaining Girondists were captured and killed by Jacobins and their lay supporters. The Law of 22 Prairial, a Jacobin document which had been passed on June 10, 1793, strained the judicial process in France down to indictment and prosecution, making the hunt for Girondin almost too easy for the Jacobins. Throughout the winter of 1793, Robespierre and his Mountain faction demanded the heads of dozens of people in the Girondin Party and those suspected of being in the Girondin Party.<sup>46</sup> One such victim was Olympe de Gouges, a renowned feminist writer who had many Girondist friends in Paris. Though she herself was not a Girondist, de Gouges was guillotined on November 3, 1793 for trumped up charges; her death remains a prime example of the counterrevolutionary paranoia that the Jacobins managed to stir during the Reign of Terror.<sup>47</sup> Very few escaped this final purge, but those who did followed the pattern of the *émigrés*<sup>48</sup> in previous years, traveling to Spain, England, and America. All Girondin not guillotined were automatically conscripted into

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<sup>45</sup> Kennedy, “The Jacobin Clubs and the Press: ‘Phase Two,’” 486.

<sup>46</sup> Gottschalk, *The Era of the French Revolution*, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Smart, *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> “Emigrants”

the French Army, thanks to *levée en masse*,<sup>49</sup> France's first military draft, issued on August 16, 1793.<sup>50</sup> While the Jacobins relentlessly pursued the Girondin, they enlisted a staggering number of fanatic French citizens to aid them, which helped validate the Law of 22 Prairial and stave off protesters. By winter of 1793, the Jacobins had incarcerated more than one-hundred citizens for allegiance to the Girondin without holding a single court case. The radicals' inflammatory anti-Corday and anti-Girondist movement had caused the French citizens to corroborate even the Jacobins' autonomous authority to evict counterrevolutionaries without due process of law.<sup>51</sup>

Though the Reign of Terror kept France suspended in bloody, revolutionary turmoil, the tables eventually did turn on the seemingly unstoppable Jacobins. After Robespierre's fall in July of 1794, the hunt for the Girondists quickly fizzled out, having lost its principal and most aggressive proponent.<sup>52</sup> As French radicals reevaluated the rampant, bloodthirsty zeal which had propelled the Terror, the few Girondists left in Paris tentatively raised their heads for the first time in almost a year, holding their first public meetings in over a year. In September of 1794, these Girondists tried to reenter the Convention. Though they were denied entry, the Jacobins did not persecute them upon discovering their political party; a conspicuous indication that the movement to eliminate the Girondin was coming to an end.<sup>53</sup> Between the fall of 1794 and the spring of 1795, Jacobin and public attitude toward the moderates softened into tolerance, then respect.<sup>54</sup> On March 5, 1795, the Girondin were formally reinstated into the Convention and officially recognized as peaceful revolutionaries. The reversal of public

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<sup>49</sup> "Rise of the masses"

<sup>50</sup> Cosgrave, Gerstacker, "The French Revolution," 14.

<sup>51</sup> Kennedy, "The Jacobin Clubs and the Press: 'Phase Two,'" 492.

<sup>52</sup> Kennedy, Michael L. "The 'Last Stand' of the Jacobin Clubs." *French Historical Studies* 16 (1989): 312. Accessed November 16, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, E.P., "Hunting the Jacobin Fox," 98.

<sup>54</sup> Kennedy, "The 'Last Stand' of the Jacobin Clubs," 312.

opinion regarding the politics of the Girondin became complete on October 3, 1795, when an official holiday was created, commemorating the Girondin as “Martyrs of Liberty.”<sup>55</sup> After four years of fierce antipathy and hundreds of senseless deaths, the Girondin finally received the confirmation they had fought so hard to win.

Although the Girondin eventually enjoyed validation from the political and social spheres of Paris, it was not until long after Charlotte Corday’s failed attempt. Marat’s assassination worked counterintuitively to her plan; the organization she had hoped to overthrow by removing a central figure only grew more powerful in the months and years following the assassination. The death of the man she had been convinced would kill “one-hundred-thousand”<sup>56</sup> innocent citizens incited a revolutionary spirit in the very people she had tried to protect; a spirit that could not be extinguished. 20th century historian Elizabeth R. Kindleberger calls the backfiring of Corday’s assassination attempt “a testament to the tight hold that Jacobinism had on France in the early 1790s,”<sup>57</sup> referring, no doubt, to the radical attitude that the Jacobins had stirred in France prior to Marat’s death, during the overthrow of the monarchy and the September Massacres.

Ironically, Corday’s wish of preventing a civil war between the Girondin and the Jacobins *did* come true; she simply secured the victory of the enemy party, rather than her own. The Girondin dissipated almost instantaneously once the Jacobins began their tirade to avenge the death of their loyal adherent, Marat. It is worth noting, however, that the division between the radical Jacobins and conservative Girondin arrantly fits the civil war paradigm. Though it is easy to see the French Revolution as a clash between extremes (monarchy and democracy, religion and secularism), the conflict that raged between these two levels of

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<sup>55</sup> Thompson, E.P., “Hunting the Jacobin Fox,” 97.

<sup>56</sup> Kindleberger, “Charlotte Corday in Text and Image...,” 998.

<sup>57</sup> Kindleberger, “Charlotte Corday in Text and Image...,” 975.



revolutionary thought reveals a more nuanced layer of the Revolution; a layer concerning the varying degrees of reformism.

Revolutions of thought can usher in hope, but they can also usher in discrepancies of vision in the men and women who shape them. From the Jacobins' initial rejection of the Constitution of 1791 to their administration of the Reign of Terror, the French Revolution is unique in that it consistently chose radicalism over moderate change, when presented with the choice. In times when national identity undergoes alteration, it can become difficult to toe the line between radical change and a collapse of the entire system. It was this delicate equilibrium that the Girondin tried so desperately to maintain throughout the Revolution. However, the fanaticism of the Jacobins proved infinitely more popular because it promised the most definitive and immediate change. The juxtaposition of the fanatical Jacobin reformists to the moderate Girondin theorists reveals all the tension that can arise when there is a variance in the revolutionary fervor from one political group to the next, and thus, the very danger of revolution itself.

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