

Conflict, Crisis, and Reaction in the Late 18th Century

AP European History

Contextualizing 18th-Century States

Unit 5 covers the crisis of the old order: **global commercial competition, the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the settlement that followed**. Three of the course's key concepts converge here - models of **political sovereignty**, the expansion of **European commerce** into a worldwide network, and the spread of **Enlightenment** ideas.

The unit is best held as a single argument: commercial rivalry strained state finances, Enlightenment ideas supplied a language for challenging authority, and where the two met a revolution followed.

The Rise of Global Markets

The expansion of European commerce **accelerated the growth of a worldwide economic network**. Maritime competition among European states was no longer a side-show to European politics - overseas trade and colonies were now where European power was won and lost.

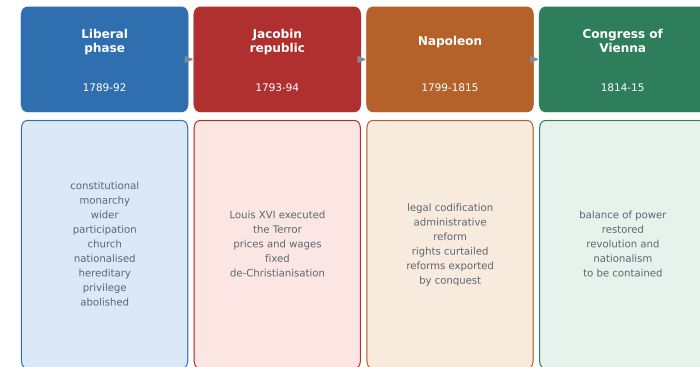
Britain's Ascendancy

Rivalry between Britain and France resulted in **world wars fought both in Europe and in the colonies**, with **Britain supplanting France as the greatest European power**.

Two consequences follow, and both are examinable. Britain gained commercial and naval dominance that shaped the next century. And France, having spent enormously on those wars, entered the 1780s with a **fiscal crisis** 财政危机 - which is the direct link between this topic and the next.

The French Revolution

One revolution, four phases - and questions name the phase



What outlasts all four: sovereignty belongs to the nation, not the monarch.

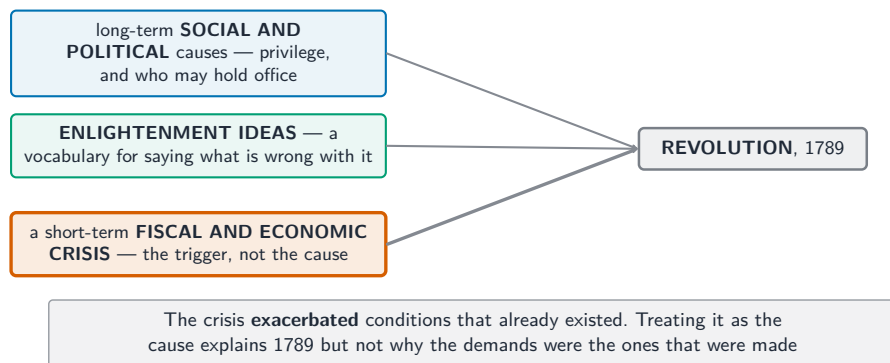
Questions almost always name a phase; knowing which one is being asked about is half the answer

The Revolution **resulted from a combination of long-term social and political causes, as well as Enlightenment ideas, exacerbated by short-term fiscal and economic crises**. That formula - long-term causes plus ideas plus a short-term trigger - is the CED's own and works for almost any causes question.

The CED then divides the Revolution into phases, and the distinction between them earns marks:

- The **first, or liberal, phase** 自由派阶段 established a **constitutional monarchy** 君主立宪, increased popular participation, nationalised the Catholic Church, and abolished **hereditary privileges** 世袭特权.
- After the execution of **Louis XVI**, the **radical Jacobin republic** 雅各宾共和国 led by **Robespierre** 罗伯斯庇尔 responded to opposition at home and war abroad by instituting the **Reign of Terror** 恐怖统治, fixing prices and wages, and pursuing a policy of **de-Christianisation** 去基督教化.
- **Revolutionary armies**, raised by **mass conscription** 大规模征兵, sought to bring the changes begun in France to the rest of Europe.

Women's participation is examinable and specific: women **participated enthusiastically in the early phases**, and while there were **brief improvements in their legal status**, they were **later excluded from political participation**. Both halves of that sentence are needed.



The French Revolution's Effects

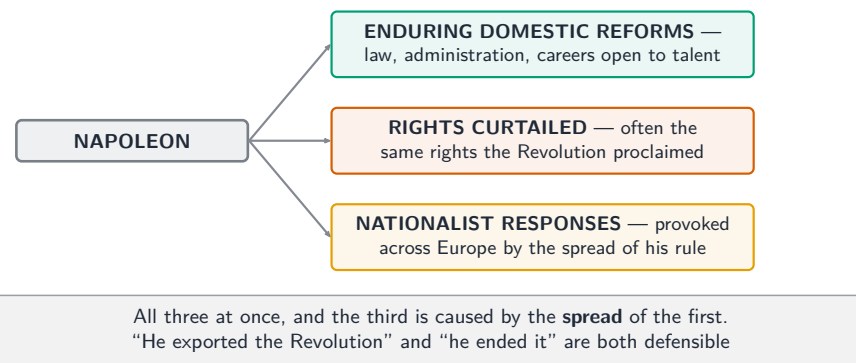
- Revolutionary ideals inspired a revolt of enslaved people led by **Toussaint L'Ouverture** 卢维杜尔 in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which became independent Haiti. This is the CED's demonstration that revolutionary principles, once stated universally, could not be confined to Europe.
- While many were inspired by the Revolution's emphasis on **equality and human rights**, **others condemned its violence** and its disregard for traditional authority - the origin of modern conservatism as a political position.

Napoleon's Rise, Dominance, and Defeat

As first consul and emperor, **Napoleon** 拿破仑 undertook **enduring domestic reforms** 持久的国内改革 - legal codification, administrative and financial reorganisation, a religious settlement - **while often curtailing rights** and manipulating popular opinion.

His **new military tactics** allowed him to exert direct or indirect control over much of the European continent, **spreading the reforms of the Revolution** to the territories he governed.

And his expanding empire **created nationalist responses throughout Europe** - people defined themselves against French rule, which is how the Revolution's own principle of the nation was turned against France. That irony is the topic's best essay material.



The Congress of Vienna

After Napoleon's defeat by a coalition of European powers, the **Congress of Vienna (1814-1815)** 维也纳会议 attempted to **restore the balance of power** and **contain the danger of revolutionary or nationalistic upheavals** in the future.

Note the two aims, because they are different things: a settlement among states, and a defence against a kind of politics. Unit 7 is largely the story of the second aim failing.

Romanticism

Romanticism 浪漫主义 emerged as a **challenge to Enlightenment rationality** 对启蒙理性的挑战. The CED grounds it precisely:

- **Rousseau questioned the exclusive reliance on reason** and emphasised the role of **emotions** 情感 in the moral improvement of self and society - so the challenge begins inside the Enlightenment itself.
- Consistent with Romanticism, **religious revival** 宗教复兴 occurred in Europe, including movements such as **Methodism** 循道宗.
- **Revolution, war, and rebellion demonstrated the emotional power of mass politics and nationalism.**

That last point is why Romanticism belongs in this unit rather than in an art chapter: the period had just proved that political movements run on feeling as much as on argument.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT CLAIM

reason is the reliable guide
what is universal matters most
society can be designed

THE ROMANTIC REPLY

emotion and intuition are evidence too
the particular — a nation,
a landscape — matters
Rousseau himself doubted reason alone

The Romantics had **evidence**: revolution, war and rebellion had just shown the emotional power of mass politics and nationalism — and Methodism the pull of religious revival

An argument, not a mood — which is what makes Romanticism usable in an essay about the **limits** of Enlightenment confidence

Continuity and Change in 18th-Century States

The unit's reasoning skill is **continuity and change**.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). AP European History short-answer questions here ask, for example, to “*Explain one way in which the French Revolution changed European political life in the period 1789 to 1815.*” A full-mark answer names the change and traces the mechanism: “*The Revolution established the principle that sovereignty belonged to the nation rather than to a monarch, and revolutionary armies raised by mass conscription carried that principle across Europe. Even where French rule was resented, populations began to define themselves as nations with a claim to govern themselves, so the idea outlasted Napoleon’s defeat.*” Notice that the answer survives 1815: a change question wants something that persisted.

Exam tips

- Use the CED’s causes formula: **long-term causes** + **Enlightenment ideas** + **short-term fiscal crisis**.
- Identify **which phase** a question is about. Liberal, radical, Napoleonic and the Vienna settlement did very different things.
- On women, give **both halves** - enthusiastic early participation, later exclusion.
- **Haiti** shows the Revolution’s principles escaping Europe. It is high-value and frequently omitted.
- Napoleon is a **both/and**: enduring reforms *and* curtailed rights. Neither alone is the answer.
- Romanticism’s challenge **begins inside the Enlightenment**, with Rousseau. That connection is more sophisticated than treating it as a simple reaction.