



The Jacobins of the French Revolution

During the constitutional monarchy there were two radical groups vying for power, the Girondins and the Jacobins. Although both groups were more radical in their views than the moderates who had designed the constitutional monarchy, the Girondins were somewhat less radical. In late 1791, the Girondins first emerged as an important power in France. At first the two parties were united in their views.

The Girondins were concerned about the plight of the blacks in France's colonies and were instrumental in passing legislation granting equal rights to all free blacks and mulattoes.

They wanted the declaration of war against Austria in early 1792 in the hopes that a show of strength would give them leverage with the King. The Jacobins grew increasingly critical of Girondin policies.

During the September massacres later that year, the Girondin leaders tried to persuade the crowds out of their bloody attacks. The Jacobins, who understood the Parisians better than the provincial Girondins, encouraged the violence. They continued to attack the feeble Girondins.

When Jean-Paul Marat, a Jacobin journalist who showed little regard for the truth, was arrested for attacking Girondins, the people of Paris turned even more toward the Jacobins. The people loved Marat and he seemed to love them too. When he was acquitted of the charge, the crowds swarmed around him, scooped him up on their shoulders and carried him to the Convention, cheering all the way.

When the constitutional monarchy fell and the King was put on trial for treason in December, the Girondins argued against his execution. The Jacobins thought he needed to die to ensure the safety of the revolution. When the Jacobins were successful the tide turned against the Girondins. The Jacobins in the National Convention had 22 Girondin leaders arrested and executed. The Jacobins had won.



Charlotte Corday

A final Girondin blow was struck, however, when Charlotte Corday, a Girondin sympathizer, gained entrance to Marat's bath and stabbed him. Marat immediately became a martyr to the revolution. He was given a hero's funeral and the procession lasted 7 hours.