**French Republic Culture Under the National Convention**

The French Revolution

From: Sites of Encounter: Religion, 2013

**History Standards: 10.2.4**

Explain how the ideology of the French Revolution led France to develop from constitutional monarchy to democratic despotism to the Napoleonic empire.

**CCSS Standards: Reading, Grade 9-10**

1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

6. Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

9. Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

**Writing**

2. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Guiding Question:**

In what ways did the National Convention attempt to change traditional French religious beliefs?

To what extent were the de-Christianization policies of the National Convention successful?

**Overview of Lesson:**

Students will review the documents and use them to answer the guiding questions. This can be done in teams, as a jigsaw, or individually. The process should prepare students for a DBQ. Students should use the 6Cs to help them analyze each document. The lesson will likely take more than one day. Teachers should model one or two documents before letting students try on their own.

**The French Republic**

***Historical Context:* Once in power, the National Convention began a policy of de-Christianization. On November 24, 1793, the National Convention adopted a revolutionary calendar to replace the Gregorian calendar (established by the Roman Catholic Church in 1582). New Year’s Day was moved from January 1 to September 22, the founding date of the French Republic, and this date in 1792 marked the beginning of Year One. The months were renamed, assigned a uniform 30 days and divided into 3 weeks of 10 days each (*décade*). The remaining 5 days of the year were to be celebrated as republican festivals (*sans*-*culottides*) in honor of Virtue, Intelligence, Labor, Opinion, and Rewards. The revolutionary calendar continued through the republican era but was eventually abolished by Napoleon I in 1806.**

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| **Source #1:**  Gilbert Romme, head of the calendar reform committee, “Report on the Republican Era,” speech before the National Convention, September 20, 1793.  *The Church calendar was born among an ignorant people. For eighteen centuries it has served to mark the progress of fanaticism, the debasement of nations, the persecution and disgust experienced by virtue, talent, and philosophy under cruel despots. We are finished with*  *royalty, the source of all our ills.* |

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| **Source #2:**    **\*Note: The Gregorian calendar system returned in 1806.** |

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| **Source #3:** French official. Taken from Spielvogel textbook, *Western Civilization*, 4th edition.  *The new calendar faced intense popular opposition, and the revolutionary government relied primarily on coercion to win its acceptance. Journalists were commanded to use republican dates in their newspaper articles. But many people refused to give up the old calendar, as one official reported: “Sundays and Catholic holidays, even if there are ten in a row, have for some time been celebrated with as much pomp and splendor as before. The same cannot be said of decadi, which is observed by only a small handful of citizens.”* |

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| **Source #4:** |

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| **Source #5:**  “Instruction Concerning the Era of the Republic and the Division of the Year,” decree of the National Convention, October 5, 1793.  *Soon commerce and the trades will be summoned to new progress through uniformity of*  *weights and measures, which will eliminate incoherence and inexactitude. The arts and history*  *also require a new measurement of time, freed from all errors that credulity and superstitious*  *routine have handed down to us from centuries of ignorance.*  *It is this new standard that the National Convention today presents to the French people; at the*  *same time, by its exactness, simplicity, and detachment from every opinion not sanctioned by*  *reason and philosophy, it shows the character of our revolution.* |

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| **Source #6:**  François-Sebastien Letourneux, Minister of Interior, circular to all *départements* and municipalities, November 9, 1797.  *After having been the calendar of all Frenchmen for several years, the republican calendar is*  *at present only that of the public officials. The enemies of the Republic attack it furiously.*  *They say that the interval between days of rest is too long, that the artisan and farmer cannot*  *work nine days in a row. This objection must be welcomed by the lazy. Industrious and active*  *citizens are grateful to their legislators for having reduced the number of days spent in rest.*  *Our enemies also say, either in bad faith or great ignorance, that the new division of time is*  *contrary to that of nature. Yet the new calendar was the work of our most skilled astronomers,*  *and was conceived only to correct the vices and errors of the old.* |

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| **Source #7:**  Government official in the French town of Steenwerck, Picardy, letter to superiors, March 3, 1798.  *The short time the people spend in the republican temple [a former church] celebrating Tenth*  *Day and revolutionary festivals is an affront to republicans. Entirely decorated with all the old*  *signs of fanaticism, the building displays no symbol of liberty, equality, or the republic. No*  *matter where one looks, one sees only images, crucifixes, confessionals, and chapels —all as*  *under the monarchical regime.* |

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| **Source #8: "View of the Mound of Champ de la Reunion on the Festival That Was Celebrated in Honor of the Supreme Being"**  In this watercolor of the Festival of the Supreme Being, we see a procession that includes a woman wearing a Phrygian cap paraded past a statue of Hercules holding two smaller statues of Liberty and Equality, towards a Liberty tree, atop the hill. In the foreground, a patriotic woman explains the meaning of the spectacle to her young son, an allegory of the instructive intent of the entire festival.  **supreme festival of being** |

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| **Source #9:** Pierre-Joseph Denis, a former Girondin imprisoned during the Terror and then recalled to the National Convention, Opinion on the Decades, 1795.  *The Jacobins were able to overthrow the religion of our fathers and trample underfoot the venerated objects of the people.*  *They were able to make the infernal Robespierre the first pope of Deism. It was through his mouth that the French*  *rendered homage to the Supreme Being. The new calendar was an act of despotism forced on the people, and the*  *festivals based on it were detestable.* |

1. **In what ways did the National Convention attempt to change traditional French religious beliefs?**
2. **To what extent were the de-Christianization policies of the National Convention successful?**