Jean Paul Marat Biography

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Biography

Jean Paul Marat was a French intellectual and a leader of the French Revolution. His fanatical writings in the early 1790s poisoned the political climate, leading to the Reign of Terror in which political prisoners were murdered. Marat himself was the victim of political violence, dying at the hands of an assassin.

Marat was born on May 24, 1743, near Neuchatel, Switzerland. Educated by his father, Marat left home as a young man and spent several years in England. Although he earned a medical degree, Marat was more interested in writing about political theory, political reform, and science. Despite his many publications, the French intellectual establishment did not take his work seriously. Angered at this rejection, Marat began publishing a radical newspaper in 1789 that attacked political moderates. More ominously, he called for the people to use violence against these moderates. When the French monarchy fell in 1792, Marat's call for popular violence drew a receptive audience.

Elected to the National Convention in 1792, Marat proposed various reforms, including a graduated income tax, vocational training, and shorter terms of military service. He became the leader of the Paris Jacobin Club, a political faction that urged the government to assume dictatorial powers. Marat attacked the moderate deputies known as the Girondists and succeeded in having 23 Girondists purged from the convention in June 1793 under the threat of mob violence. Marat's action set in motion the ascendancy of the Jacobins, who waged a Reign of Terror on their opponents. However, Marat did not live to see this result. Charlotte Corday assassinated Marat on July 13, 1793.