

French Connections



6. Two Revolutions

THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT that the American and French revolutions were connected. The Marquis de Lafayette, inspired by events in America, bought a ship to sail over to Philadelphia to join the colonists in their fight. Later, he returned to Paris to add his voice to that of Benjamin Franklin to beg for French help. Later still, in the context of the French revolution, he drafted a *Declaration of Human Rights* after consulting with Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the *Declaration of Independence*. Although each section of this class focuses on one particular person, the overall theme is how history may be told through painting—and if told, how it may be slanted or even altered to achieve certain political ends. *rb.*

A. How is History Told?

We look at a painting of an obscure sideshow in the Revolutionary War, and consider what it has to tell us about the ways in which paintings can preserve historical memories generally.

Copley: *The Death of Major Pierson* (Tate, 1783)

♪ **The History Guy:** *The Battle of Jersey*

B. The Man Who Lost Canada

The **Marquis of Montcalm** lost both his life and the city in the Fall of Quebec (1759). The French no longer blame him for this loss, and indeed he showed many extraordinary qualities. We look at how his death, and that of his opponent James Wolfe, have been portrayed in art.

Penny: *Death of General Wolfe* (1763, Oxford)

West: *Death of General Wolfe* (1770, NG Canada)

François Watteau: *Death of General Montcalm* (c.1783, NG Canada)

♪ **Cooper:** *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Montcalm and Munro
(film 1992, Patrice Chéreau, Maurice Roëves)

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C. The Polymath

Printer, journalist, inventor, philanthropist, politician, man of science, and even musician, **Benjamin Franklin** virtually defines the term “polymath.” We look at two videos and a couple of portraits.

- ♪ **Ken Burns:** Benjamin Franklin, the glass harmonica
- West:** *Franklin Drawing Energy from the Sky* (1816, Philadelphia)
- ♪ **Ken Burns:** Franklin in Paris
- West:** *The Treaty of Paris* (1783, Winterthur Museum, Delaware)

D. Man in the Shadows

Despite his importance to both revolutions, the **Marquis de Lafayette** has seldom been given a foreground position in paintings of the period. But he appears as a character in several movies.

- Trumbull:** *Surrender at Yorktown, 1781* (1820, US Capitol)
- Lafayette:** *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789)
- ♪ **Film:** *La Fayette*, Lafayette before the Continental Congress
- ♪ **Film:** *The French Revolution*, Declaration of the Rights of Man

E. Eyewitness to History

The career of painter **Jacques-Louis David** took him from before the start of the Revolution to after the exile of Napoleon. But more than being a mere eyewitness, he took an active part in Jacobin politics.

- David:** Depictions of Napoleon (1801, 1806, 1812)
- David:** *Brutus* (1789, Louvre)
- David:** *Tennis Court Oath, June 20, 1789*
- David:** *Death of Marat* (1893, Brussels)
- Roques:** *Death of Marat* (1893, Toulouse)
- Tony Robert-Fleury:** *Charlotte Corday in Caen* (Bayonne)
- ♪ **Montage** of depictions of Charlotte Corday

F. The G-Men

Antoine-Jean Gros became Napoleon’s favorite wartime painter. **Théodore Géricault** watched events from the outside. But both painted works intended to reflect or even shape public perception.

- Gros:** *Napoleon at Arcole* (1796, Versailles)
- Vernet:** *Napoleon at Arcole* (1826, private)
- Gros:** *Napoleon Visits the Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804, Louvre)
- Géricault:** *Chasseur Officer Charging* (1812, Louvre)
- Géricault:** *Wounded Cuirassier Leaving the Field* (1814, Louvre)

James Fenimore **Cooper** (1789–1851, *American novelist*), John Singleton **Copley** (1738–1815, *American painter*), Jacques-Louis **David** (1748–1825, *French painter and politician*), Benjamin **Franklin** (1696–1790, *American polymath*), Théodore **Géricault** (1791–1824, *French painter*), Antoine-Jean **Gros** (1771–1835, *French painter*), Edward **Penny** (1714–91, *British painter*), Guillaume-Joseph **Roques** (1757–1847, *French painter*), John **Trumbull** (1756–1843, *American painter*), Horace **Vernet** (1789–1863, *French painter*), François **Watteau** (1758–1823, *French painter*), Benjamin **West** (1738–1820, *American-British painter*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/FrenchConnections
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