Charlotte Corday was born in Argentan, July 27th, 1768. She was the fourth child in a poor noble family. Her mother died when Corday was 13. The Abbess of the Abbaye aux Dames at Caen, a friend of her mother’s, took charge of Corday and her younger sister, and brought the girls to live in the convent. There, Corday received an education and enjoyed reading the works of Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Guillaume Raynal. These works made her passionate about politics in France.
In 1790, convents were closed as part of the revolutionary process to dechristianize France.\(^1\) Corday went to live with her cousin in Caen, where she had more freedom to plunge into readings and discuss politics. She listened to the Girondins\(^2\) speeches and grew very fond of the Girondist groups in Caen. She respected them and believed the Girondist Party would ultimately save France. Gradually, though, the Girondin’s moderate approach to revolution lost influence, especially when France went to war with other European countries in 1792. The war did not go well, and other groups in the National Convention began to undermine Girondin authority.

\(^1\) The dechristianization of France occurred over several years during the early Revolution. National Constituent Assembly was formed from the Estates General, the parliament of France. It was followed by the Legislative Assembly (October 1791 to September 1792) and the National Convention (1792 to 1795).

\(^2\) Girondin: also known as Brissotin, a republican group which took moderate approach in revolutionary France, it did not support the execution of Louis XVI.
During Reign of Terror, the Jacobin party executed many Girondins by guillotine under the pretense that they were enemies of revolution. Jean-Paul Marat was a leading member of the radical Jacobin faction. As a journalist, he exerted influence through his newspaper, L’Ami du peuple ("The Friend of the People") and successfully instigated events like the September Massacre and the bread insurrection. Marat and Corday were ideological opposites.

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3 Reign of Terror: Conflicts between Jacobin and Girondin after Louis XVI died. Revolution government decided to take harsh measure against suspected enemies of the Revolution
4 Jacobin: also known as Montagnard, a republican group which took moderate approach in revolutionary France, they wanted to create revolutionary dictatorship and a strong central government.
As a Girondist sympathizer, Corday strongly opposed the Reign of Terror and she held Marat most responsible for the deaths of Girondins. She believed that Marat was a big threat to the Republic, and that his death would terminate the violence in France. Fearing an all-out civil war, she decided to take action.
On the 9th of July, 1793, Corday went to Paris and bought a six-inch kitchen knife. Upon arriving in Paris she discovered that Marat no longer attended party meetings because he had an incurable skin disease. Marat had to soak in a bath of medicinal herbs all day.
Corday went to Marat’s home, but was turned away by Marat’s wife, Simmone Evrard, twice. To gain access to Marat, in the evening, Corday brought a list of the names of Girondins, and told Simmone she was there to betray the Girondins. Marat agreed to meet her.
Marat worked from a bathtub because of his debilitating skin condition. While Marat was writing down the names of the Girondists that Corday provided, Corday pulled out the knife and plunged it into his chest. She had succeeded. Marat was murdered in his bath.
Marat became a martyr and he received a hero’s funeral, which became one of the greatest propaganda events during the Reign of Terror. Marat's assassination was his apotheosis. The painter Jacques-Louis David painted his *Death of Marat*, which beautified Marat’s diseased skin in order to glorify his figure, his role in the Revolution, and his death.
In contrast, Corday was captured and imprisoned at the Conciergerie, the antechamber to the guillotine. She was executed by guillotine only four days after she killed Marat, on the 17th of July, 1793. At the trial, Corday did not show any regret and testified she carried out the assassination alone. She justified her act, saying, ‘I killed one man to save 10,000’.
Public opinion on Charlotte Corday varied. People from outside of France tended to admire her but people in France consider her a villain. She was the second most hated woman after Marie Antoinette in revolutionary France. The French doubt her decision to target a dying man to bring peace to the Nation.

Also, Corday’s act led to more deaths, rather than ending the violence as she wanted. Since Jacobins believed Girondins were plotting with Corday to murder Marat, even though this collaboration was never proven. By the end of 1793, most of the Girondin deputies to the National Convention had been executed.

Despite Corday’s negative reputation within France, she is remembered for her bravery and determination to act. Even though she was a woman, who were often
considered uneducated and unpolitical, and were only good for raising children and cooking during that time. It was unprecedented that young woman like Corday would take a political stance and assassinate an influential person. Corday's act turned the attention of the revolutionary French government towards the growing demands of women's liberation. Her action impacted Europe in a whole, inspiring women to stand up and fight for their freedom.

Corday had a large influence on the revolution. Many artists created work about her in memory of her spirit. Writer Alphonse de Lamartine gave Corday the posthumous nickname *l'ange de l'assassinat* (the Angel of Assassination), as a testament of her bravery.
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