**Niall’s Notions: The French Revolution:**

As he begins his discourse on the French Revolution, Niall Ferguson quotes Edmund Burke: “‘am I seriously to felicitate a madman?” Later, he revisits Burke:

The French [have] rebelled against a mild and lawful monarch with more fury, outrage, and insult than ever any people has been known to rise against the most illegal usurper or the most sanguinary tyrant.

Ferguson notes the deep difficulty in the Revolutionaries printing of paper money, known as *assignats*, which was backed by nothing but confiscated church lands.

He also explores the ease with which the rights of the Constitution of September 1791 were violated.

When he describes the reasons behind the success of the American Revolution and the failure of the French, in his own style, Ferguson goes to a list of five key points:

1. First, France was increasingly centralized, whereas America was a naturally decentralized state.
2. Second, the French tended to elevate the general will above the letter of the law.
3. Third, the French revolutionaries attacked religion and the Church that upheld it, whereas American sectarianism provided a bulwark against the pretentions of secular authorities.
4. Fourth, the French ceded too much power to irresponsible intellectuals, whereas in America practical men reigned supreme.
5. The French put equality above liberty, meaning, according to Ferguson, that they chose Rousseau over Locke.

According to Ferguson, “French republics tended to violate individual liberties and to degenerate into autocracies”. Ferguson ends his discussion by noting the legacy of each revolution, stating that: “a conservative calculation is that twenty times as many Frenchmen as Americans lost their lives in defending their revolution. And this does not include the victims of internal repression”. He also states that “the French Revolution was also far more economically disruptive than the American” and that “the French had hyperinflation, culminating in the complete collapse of the *assignat* paper currency”.