

Les miserables: an embodiment of post-revolution feelings

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



In *Les Misérables*, a French historical novel by Victor Hugo, many characters acted according to their convictions in liberalism, nationalism, and reactionaries. These characters appeared in the June Rebellion of 1832. Along with these characters, many nationalists, liberalists, who were unsatisfied with the current societal order, and even reactionaries, who were content with the prevailing regime, appeared during this time. They embraced post-French Revolution and Napoleonic themes relating to equality, overthrowing the monarchy, and wanting a will to return to the status quo. Many assisted in the June Rebellion and some even fought against it. The post French Revolution and Napoleonic themes are represented in characters, for Javert embodies the ideas of reactionaries, Enjolras of nationalism, and Gavroche of liberalism.

Javert, a conservative police inspector, embodies the ideas of reactionaries. Reactionaries hold political viewpoints that favor a return to the status quo of society. Nearly all of them, including Javert, rejected ideas of rebellion and the overthrow of monarchy, for those thoughts sought to change society. Being an elderly man, Javert saw the horrors of the French Revolution and evidently despised the turmoil and anarchy occurring everywhere. He is a law officer, for he sides with authority, which he believes enforces order. After Napoleon and the Concert of Europe, Metternich, the reactionary Austrian foreign minister, established laws to contain the people and impose order. These policies, such as the Carlsbad decrees of 1819 which impose censorship and repression in universities, appealed to the very traditional Javert. During the June Rebellion of 1832, Javert was horrified by the chaos in Paris and tried to notify the royalist army about the plans of the

revolutionists. As a result, he saw the rebellion as a threat to the current society and immediately sought to crush the revolt and incarcerate the revolutionists who were threatening the current social order. He was ultimately caught by the revolutionists when he was attempting to assist in preserving the current society. Javert embodies reactionary ideas for he abhors disorder and backs the status quo.

Enjolras, the leader of the Friends of ABC, embodies the ideas of nationalism. The ideology nationalism glorified the people united against the absolutism of kings and promoted self government. Nationalists such as Enjolras were middle and lower class men who were angered at the lack of representation citizens had in government and wanted an end to the monarchy. They felt that their blood spilled in the July Revolution was for nothing. Nationalists in Italy led by Mazzini also faced similar social crises, and opposition against repression as well as the will for self government led to revolution. After the July Revolution in France, Charles X being ousted by Louis Philippe seemed nothing more than a replacement of monarchs. This angered many nationalists, such as Enjolras who wanted self government and an end to tyranny, and the death of Lamarque, a popular critic of the monarchy, provoked the need for revolt. Therefore Enjolras organized and commanded a barricade against royalists in the June Rebellion of 1832. He fought against oppression until his death with the ideals of nationalism still strong within his heart. Enjolras embodies nationalism for his conviction in the tyranny of the monarchy and the right of the people to rule prompted him to take action against the government.

Gavroche, an adolescent who assisted the Friends of ABC, embodies the ideas of liberalism. Liberalists believe in the freedom of the individual and the corruptibility of the nobility. They were of the middle or lower class and wanted to maintain the liberal reforms achieved through the French Revolution and even some of Napoleon's liberal codes. Gavroche, an impoverished boy, spoke out against the rich who watched as the plebeians suffer. Poor harvests and harsh winters in the years before the June Rebellion had led to people being restless. Social unrest in this time resulted in many to speak out against the government, and Gavroche shouted for equality in parades in Paris and denounced the corrupt current monarch. He even rallied some to fight for bread and the belief of liberty and equality. Many other liberalists, such as the Friends of ABC also believed in the greater good of the people. Gavroche assisted them in their fight for the ideals left behind from the French Revolution and Napoleon, and ultimately died helping their cause. Gavroche embodies liberalism because he stirred the people to shout for liberty and equality and firmly believed in the unethicality of the nobility.

In *Les Misérables*, the post-French Revolution and Napoleonic ideals were not abandoned by many while others fought against them. Reactionaries like Javert clashed with nationalists like Enjolras and liberalists like Gavroche in the struggles of the June Rebellion of 1832. Where there are advocates of a certain belief, there are most certainly denouncers of that same belief. In consequence, societal conflict is always present.