

- The French Revolution
- The Outbreak of the Revolution
- Women Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery

The French Revolution

The French Revolution was a major event in world history that began in 1789 and led to profound political and social changes in France and beyond. It marked the end of absolute monarchy and the rise of democracy and republicanism.

French Society During the Late Eighteenth Century

In 1789, France was divided into three Estates: the First Estate (clergy), the Second Estate (nobility), and the Third Estate (commoners including peasants, artisans, and the bourgeoisie). Only the Third Estate paid taxes, while the First and Second Estates enjoyed privileges and exemptions.

The country faced financial crisis due to long wars, extravagant royal spending, and support for the American colonies' independence. The population growth increased demand for food, but grain production could not keep pace, causing bread prices to rise and widening the gap between rich and poor.

The middle class, or bourgeoisie, emerged as an educated group opposing privileges by birth and advocating merit-based social positions. Enlightenment thinkers like Locke, Rousseau, and Montesquieu influenced revolutionary ideas about government and rights.

Exam Question

Q: What were the main social divisions in France before the Revolution and how did they contribute to unrest?

A: France was divided into three Estates. The First Estate (clergy) and Second Estate (nobility) had privileges and paid no taxes, while the Third Estate (commoners) bore the tax burden. This inequality caused resentment and unrest among the Third Estate.

The Outbreak of the Revolution

King Louis XVI called the Estates General in 1789 to propose new taxes, but the Third Estate demanded voting by head rather than by Estate, which was rejected. They declared themselves the National Assembly and vowed to draft a constitution.

On 14 July 1789, the people of Paris stormed the Bastille prison, symbolizing the start of the Revolution. The National Assembly abolished feudal privileges and tithes, confiscated Church lands, and drafted a constitution establishing a constitutional monarchy with separated powers.

Political clubs like the Jacobins, led by Robespierre, gained influence. In 1792, the monarchy was abolished and France was declared a Republic. Louis XVI was executed in 1793.

The Reign of Terror (1793–1794) was a period of severe repression under Robespierre, with mass executions of perceived enemies of the Republic. The Directory government followed, leading to political instability and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Exam Question

Q: Describe the significance of the storming of the Bastille.

A: The storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 was a symbolic act of rebellion against royal authority and marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Women Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery

Women actively participated in the Revolution, demanding rights such as voting and political representation. They formed clubs and newspapers to voice their interests. Laws were introduced to improve women's education, marriage rights, and employment opportunities. Women in France gained the right to vote in 1946.

The Jacobin regime abolished slavery in French colonies in 1848, ending the exploitation of enslaved people in the triangular trade that supplied European markets.

The Revolution also abolished censorship, allowing freedom of speech and press, which helped spread revolutionary ideas.

Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor in 1804, introduced reforms like protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures, but was defeated in 1815.

Exam Question

Q: What were the key changes for women during the French Revolution?

A: Women gained access to education, legal rights in marriage and divorce, opportunities for employment, and formed political clubs. However, full voting rights were only granted in 1946.

Solved Example

Question: "Robespierre's rule in France was known as the Reign of Terror." Justify the statement.

Answer: From 1793 to 1794, Robespierre led a period called the Reign of Terror characterized by severe control and punishment. Enemies of the Republic, including nobles, clergy, and political opponents, were arrested and executed by guillotine. The government imposed wage and price controls, rationed food, shut down churches, and enforced strict social equality measures. Robespierre was eventually arrested and executed in 1794.

Practice Set

- **Easy:** What were the three Estates in French society before the Revolution?
- **Moderate:** Explain the significance of the National Assembly's Tennis Court Oath.
- **Challenging:** Discuss the causes and consequences of the Reign of Terror.

Answer Key

- **Easy:** The First Estate (clergy), Second Estate (nobility), and Third Estate (commoners).
- **Moderate:** The Tennis Court Oath was a pledge by the Third Estate representatives not to disband until they drafted a constitution, marking a key step towards limiting royal power.
- **Challenging:** Causes included political instability and threats to the Republic; consequences were mass executions, suppression of opposition, and eventual fall of Robespierre.

Quick Reference

- **1789:** Start of the French Revolution and storming of the Bastille.
- **1791:** Constitution establishing constitutional monarchy.
- **1792:** Abolition of monarchy and declaration of Republic.
- **1793-1794:** Reign of Terror under Robespierre.
- **1804:** Napoleon crowned Emperor.

- **1848:** Abolition of slavery in French colonies.
- **1946:** Women granted voting rights in France.

Glossary

- **Bastille:** A fortress-prison in Paris symbolizing royal authority.
- **Estates General:** Assembly representing the three Estates of France.
- **National Assembly:** Revolutionary assembly formed by the Third Estate.
- **Constitutional Monarchy:** Government where the monarch's powers are limited by a constitution.
- **Reign of Terror:** Period of political repression and executions during the Revolution.
- **Guillotine:** Execution device used during the Revolution.
- **Jacobins:** Radical revolutionary political club.
- **Tithes:** Taxes paid to the Church.
- **Taille:** Direct tax on common people.

Year	Event	Significance
1774	Louis XVI ascends the throne	Beginning of financial crisis and royal mismanagement
5 May 1789	Estates General convened	Attempt to solve financial crisis; led to political conflict
14 July 1789	Storming of the Bastille	Symbolic start of the Revolution
4 August 1789	Abolition of feudal privileges	End of feudal system and privileges of clergy and nobility
1791	Constitution adopted	Established constitutional monarchy
21 September 1792	Monarchy abolished; Republic declared	End of monarchy and start of republican government
21 January 1793	Execution of Louis XVI	Marked radical phase of Revolution
1793-1794	Reign of Terror	Period of political repression and executions
1804	Napoleon crowned Emperor	Start of Napoleonic era
1815	Napoleon defeated at Waterloo	End of Napoleonic rule

1848	Abolition of slavery in French colonies	End of slavery under French rule
1946	Women granted voting rights in France	Achievement of women's political rights

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