

The French Revolution

A Brief Outline

FOUR STAGES

- Moderate (1789-1792)
- Reign of Terror (1793-94)
- Reaction (1794-98)
- Napoleonic (1799-1815)

Why? A fed up people revolt against old ways, economic injustice, and poverty

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

The Old Regime – society before the revolution

Three Estates – divisions based on class and rank

1. Church – clergy which owned 10% of the land, paid no tax
2. Nobles – 2% of the population, owned 20% of the land, 70% of wealth
3. Third Estate – everyone else
 - bourgeoisie – craftsmen, merchants, professionals
 - working poor – worst off in the entire country
 - rural peasants – were de facto property of the landowners

1780s – A series of successive crop failures, food prices double

-government repeatedly raises taxes (esp. la taille – the salt tax)

Response of the Monarchy – Kings of the day believed they were put in their place by God

Louis XIV – died in 1715 leaving France with a huge debt after fighting numerous wars and building Versailles, his grand palace

Louis XV – Decadent, known for the line “Après Moi, le deluge” (after me, the torrent)

Louis XVI – careless, heartless, spendthrift, foolish – wrong man at the wrong time

- Most hated for his Austrian wife, Marie Antoinette
 - They lived extravagant lives
- He left the treasury empty, but did aid America in its revolution

MODERATE STAGE

Money Troubles

1788 – poor harvests leave tax revenues low, many rebellions needed quashing

1789 – Louis tried to tax the nobles

He calls the first *Estates General* (their congress) since 1607 (that's 182 years!)

King Louis unwittingly let intellectuals from around France gather

At the Estates General

The first and second estates dominated the talks, were given an uneven vote and advantage

The third estate urges reform, relief for the poor, and an equal voice

After weeks of arguing, the Third Estate leaves the talks and convenes on the King's

Tennis court.

The Tennis Court Oath – a vow to save France from her ruin

- Conservatives gather on the right, liberals on the left
- They call themselves “The National Assembly” and start making laws in

the name of the French people

July 14, 1789

Known as Bastille Day (France's 4th of July)

Random riots throughout the streets of Paris

- A mob showed up at the King's prison – la Bastille, they were looking for guns
- The guards gave up voluntarily, but history recorded it as a massive rush for the gates.

Word of the success caused riots in other cities

In the country, landlords were attacked by peasants: Food stores were looted.

In the weeks that followed, the king acted indecisively

Sentiment for his removal began to grow

August 4, 1789

National Assembly passed laws ending serfdom and feudalism – all class privilege

“Liberty, equality, fraternity” became the slogan of the times

Wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

Very much like our Declaration of Independence

Called for the creation of a limited power monarchy – like that of Britain

1789-1792 – The National Assembly

Royal family caught during an escape in 1790 – they are kept under constant watch

Church lands confiscated and sold to pay extraordinary public debt

Radicals called for death of the king and nobles – moderates tried for calm

Ideas were discussed in political clubs like Paris' *Jacobin Club*

Many parts of country periodically erupt into chaos

The assembly gave up the idea of limited monarchy and dissolved the legislature

Renamed themselves the National Convention and depose the king

The army won a key victory against Prussian and Austria

Emigres – nobles fled France for more friendly countries

Upper class people being targeted by mobs in random violence

Thousands of nobles killed by government decree

Summer of 1792 – Austria (then led by Marie Antoinette's brother) threatens war with France

The actions of the lower classes in France have nobles throughout Europe nervous

A coalition of countries (Britain, Prussia) join in the fight

The National Assembly officially dissolves the monarchy and declare France a republic

THE REIGN OF TERROR

In a time of crisis, people look to the strongest leadership available

Radicals (called Jacobins) seize control of the legislature and round up nobles for execution

Thousands sent to the 'national barber,' the guillotine (thought to be humane)

January 21, 1793

Radicals execute Louis XVI and his family by a narrow vote of the convention

Thousands gather in Paris for the event

Dozens vie for power, but many turned to Robespierre for leadership

Formed the *Committee for Public Safety*

Wanted a “republic of virtue”

Changed the names of the months and abolished Sunday (too old fashioned)

People with royal sounding names were killed

Kings and queens on playing cards were ordered changed

Orders thousands of executions, used spies all over the country

Public executions were relished by crowds in cities

People put to death for having undesirable views of the revolution

Including famous revolutionary leaders whom Robespierre saw as a threat to his
own power

40-50,000 killed in all (including thousands of peasants!)

some killed for ridiculous reasons (one bartender for selling sour wine)

things were clearly out of control

REACTION STAGE

The Moderates React (1794-1798)

Former members of the National Assembly turn on Robespierre, he’s executed (7-28-94)

People are sick of the killing and disorder

The terror did not help to advance the revolution

Food prices still out of control

1795 – The National Assembly writes a new constitution

Much of the power given to intellectuals

Five-man directory formed

Army again under control of the Paris government

Other countries still threaten France for fear of spreading revolution

NAPOLEONIC STAGE

Napoleon Bonaparte (b. 1769)

Born on the island of Corsica, studied military history as a young man

Joined the army at 16 and trained as an artillery expert

By early 1790s, he is an upwardly mobile young officer

1795 – defends the National Assembly from a royalist uprising

“give them a whiff of grapeshot”

Given his first command out of France

1796 – captures the Italian city of Milan

1797-98 – assigned to disrupt British trade on the Mediterranean

He decides to invade Egypt, but his campaign did not go well

His navy was defeated by the famous Horatio Nelson, British admiral

HOWEVER, he controlled the information that got back to France

The people thought he was winning great battles

By 1799, he was the most famous man in France

COUP D’ETAT (overthrow of the state)

Upon his return, some urged him to seize power

He quickly made connections and deals to have himself placed in charge of the army
The legislature voted out the 5-man directory for a 3-man counsel
Napoleon was made one of the three, but used his army to control the government
He assumed the role of a dictator, or supreme ruler

Early Accomplishments

1. Strengthened and organized the military
2. A peace treaty with the Coalition (countries opposing France) was signed by 1802
3. Economic reforms
 - more equitable taxation
 - national bank to control inflation (increasing prices)
 - loans to businesses
4. Government reforms
 - reduced corruption
 - created public schools for many
 - appointed officials by merit
5. Religious reforms
 - promoted freedom and tolerance
 - government took control of church land
 - signed a peace agreement with the pope
6. The Napoleonic Code
 - new laws that guaranteed rights of speech, press, and religion
 - did put limits on individuals that favored the government

1803 – 23,000 French soldiers defeated by former slaves on the island of Haiti
-Napoleon sells Louisiana territories to the U.S.A. for profit and to spite Britain

1804 – France has an Emperor
At Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the Pope crowned Napoleon Emperor
French voters approved of this overwhelmingly

Why did they have a revolution only to elect another king/emperor?

THE GREAT MILITARY CAMPAIGN TO CONQUER ALL OF EUROPE

Very aggressive and determined style of leadership
The continent's biggest army, best equipped
1805 – His navy is destroyed soundly by Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar, off of Spain
He'd have to do his conquering on land
1805-1809 – He'll control all of Europe clear to Russia
His empire was big, but too hard to control
He placed puppet monarchs in every country he conquered
He'll only be able to control all these peoples and lands until 1812

NAPOLEON'S FALL

1811 – He divorces his wife Josephine, marries her grand-niece who bore him a son
1812 – A British blockade (denial of ships into ports) hurts France's economy
(the stopping of US ships will cause a war between America and Britain)
1808-1813 – He has trouble in Spain against guerillas (non traditional fighters)
Soldiers were usually lined up against one another on a battlefield
1812 – HIS BIGGEST BLUNDER – he tried to invade Russia

He left France with 422,000 men, he'll return with 28,000
Russians simply fled and burned their cities so the army had no food

- 1813 – other countries quickly ally themselves against France
they meet him in battle in Germany where Napoleon's young troops are trounced
the armies of Russia and Prussia march through France and into Paris
- 1814 – Napoleon accepts defeat and is banished to Elba, a small island south of France
Louis XVIII is named king (brother of beheaded Louis XVI)

THE HUNDRED DAYS

- 1815 – Upon hearing news that the new king was in trouble, Napoleon escapes and
returns to France
His troops eagerly join his side once again
The allied coalition quickly marshaled their troops back to Belgium where Napoleon was
trying to invade
-he is defeated by the British commander, the Duke of Wellington

His exile was to St. Helena, halfway between Africa and South America

1815 – The CONGRESS OF VIENNA

Austria will host all of the royal families from around Europe to devise ways to keep revolutions like
that in France from happening elsewhere