

The French Revolution

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Social Classes in France

The French social system was divided into three estates:

- First Estate: The clergy members were part of the First Estate, and this estate included only 1% of the population.
- Second Estate: The nobility were part of the Second Estate, and this estate made up only 2% of the population.
- Third Estate: The peasants and middle class, including the workers, made up this estate and made up 97% of the population. The bourgeoisie, or middle class, were also part of the Third Estate.

Unhappiness in France

People belonging to the Third Estate were unhappy with the social structure because they worked the hardest and made up 97% of the population, yet had no voice in government. The growing population put increasing demands on resources and the price of living increased. Also, peasants had to pay higher fees. This angered the peasants and they began calling for change.

The Bastille

The Bastille was a French prison that was destroyed brick by brick by the French people during the French Revolution.

National Assembly

The National Assembly was formed by the Third Estate because they wanted more of a say in government. The National Assembly had the Tennis Court Oath, an oath that promised that they wouldn't disband until a constitution was written. Under the Assembly, many reforms were passed and nobles had to pay taxes. The National Assembly also wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which gave men more freedoms. It also came up with the Constitution of 1791, which set up a unicameral legislature, or one house assembly. The Assembly eventually dissolved so a republic could form.

National Convention

The National Convention wrote the first democratic constitution, and they also allowed every man to vote. A republic was created, and many changes came to France. The Convention changed the calendar and the weights and measures system.

Reign of Terror

During the Reign of Terror, the Jacobins (*see People and Groups*), led by Robespierre, tried to crush all opposition. Many people were executed, including Danton and his followers. The Reign of Terror ended with the death of Robespierre.

Monarchies vs the Revolution

Other European monarchies feared that the Revolution would spread to their countries and they would lose power. This caused Austria and Prussia to declare war on France.

People and Groups of the French Revolution

Louis XVI

Louis XVI was the last king of France. He was not an effective ruler because he was easily swayed and couldn't make decisions. He also led his country into debt when he gave money to America in order to get revenge on Britain. The king thrived while his people starved, and this caused him to become a very unpopular ruler. He was beheaded during the French Revolution.

Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette was the wife of Louis XVI. She became known as "Madame Deficit" because of her spending habits. She was very disliked and unpopular, and she too was beheaded.

Maximilien Robespierre

Maximilien Robespierre was a leader of the Jacobins who was known for his extreme views and for ordering the executions of many people. When he himself was executed, the French Revolution died with him.

George-Jacques Danton

George-Jacques Danton was a revolutionary orator who stirred the people with a call to defend the revolution. He eventually decided that the revolution had gone far enough, but he and his followers, called Dantonists, were killed.

Jean-Paul Marat

Jean-Paul Marat ran a newspaper and he called for bloodshed during the French Revolution. After he was killed by Charlotte Corday, he became an idol of sorts.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte was a great French general and eventually became the Emperor of France. He realized people were tired of fighting, so he joined leaders in a coup d'etat, or a quick seizure of power from the Directory. As emperor, he had many reforms and limited press and speech. Education was controlled by the national government and lycees, or secondary schools, were set up. The Napoleonic Code combined feudal and royal laws into one, and this simplified the legal system.

Jacobins

Jacobins were extreme radicals who wanted change and most wanted the king killed.

Girondists

Girondists were more moderate in their desire for change and they wanted to protect the middle class.

Sans-Culottes

The *sans-culottes* were radicals during the revolution, and they were distinguished by the trousers they wore.

Émigrés

Émigrés were French nobles that fled the country during the French Revolution. They hoped to restore the king's power and wanted him to remain the ruler of France.