

His. 102: Intro. to Western Civilization

French Revolution

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French Revolution

Overview

- The year 1789 witnessed two far-reaching events: the **ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America** and the eruption of the **French Revolution**.
- Compared to the American Revolution, the French Revolution was more complex, more violent, and far more radical in its attempt to reconstruct both a new political and a new social order.

French Revolution

Background

- The long-range or indirect causes of the French Revolution must first be sought in the condition of French society.
 - Before the Revolution, France was a society grounded in the **inequality of rights** or the idea of privilege.
 - Its population of 27 million was divided, as it had been since the Middle Ages, into three orders, or **Estates**.

French Revolution

Background

- The **First Estate** consisted of the **clergy** and numbered about 130,000 people who owned approximately 10% of the land.
 - Clergy were exempt from the *taille*, France's chief tax.
 - Clergy were also radically divided:
 - The higher clergy, stemming from aristocratic families, shared the interests of the nobility;
 - While the parish priests were often poor and from the class of commoners.

French Revolution

Background

- The **Second Estate** was the nobility, composed of about 350,000 people who nevertheless owned about 25 to 30% of the land.
 - The nobility had continued to play an important and even crucial role in French society in the 18th century, holding many of the leading positions in the government, the military, the law courts, and the higher church offices.
 - The nobles sought to expand their power at the expense of the monarchy and to maintain their control over positions in the military, church and government.

French Revolution

Background

Second Estate (cont.)

- Moreover, the possession of privileges remained a hallmark of the nobility.
- Common to all nobles were tax exemptions, especially from the *taille*.
- The **Third Estate**, or the commoners of society, constituted the overwhelming majority of the French population.

French Revolution

Background

Third Estate (cont.)

- They were divided by vast difference in occupation, level of education, and wealth.
- The peasants, who alone constituted 75 to 80% of the total population, were by far the largest segment of the Third Estate.
 - They owned about 35 to 40% of the land, although their landholdings varied from area to area and over half had little or no land on which to survive.

French Revolution

Background

Third Estate (cont.)

- Serfdom no longer existed on any large scale in France, but French peasants still had obligations to their local landlords that they deeply resented.
 - These “relics of feudalism,” or aristocratic privileges, were obligations that survived from an earlier age and included the payment of fees for the use of village facilities, such as the flour mill, community oven, and winepress.

French Revolution

Background

Third Estate (cont.)

- Another part of the Third Estate consisted of skilled craftspeople, shopkeepers, and other wage earners in the cities.
 - In the 18th century, a rise in consumer prices greater than the increase in wages left these urban groups with a noticeable decline in purchasing power.
 - Their day-to-day struggle for survival led many of these people to play an important role in the Revolution, especially in Paris.

French Revolution

Background

Third Estate (cont.)

- About 8% of the population, or 2.3 million people, constituted the **bourgeoisie**, or middle class, who owned about 20 to 25% of the land.
 - This group included merchants, industrialists, and bankers who controlled the resources of trade, manufacturing, and finance and benefited from the economic prosperity after 1730.
 - The bourgeoisie also included professional people – lawyers, holders of public offices, doctors, and writers.

French Revolution

Background

Third Estate (cont.)

- Many of the members of the bourgeoisie had their own set of grievances because they were often excluded from the social and political privileges monopolized by the nobles.
- At the same time, remarkable similarities existed between the wealthier bourgeoisie and the nobility.
 - By obtaining public offices, wealthy bourgeoisie could enter the ranks of the nobility.
 - During the 18th century, 6500 new noble families were created.

French Revolution

Background

- Moreover, the new political ideas of the Enlightenment proved attractive to both aristocrats and bourgeois.
 - Both elites, long accustomed to a socioeconomic reality based on wealth and economic achievement, were increasingly frustrated by
 - a monarchical system resting on privileges and
 - on an old and rigid social order based on the concept of estates.
 - The opposition of these elites to the old order led them ultimately to drastic action against the monarchical regime.
 - In a real sense, the Revolution had its origins in political grievances.

French Revolution

Background

- The inability of the French monarchy to deal with new social realities and problems was exacerbated by specific circumstances in the 1780s.
 - Although France had enjoyed fifty years of economic expansion, bad harvests in 1787 and 1788 and the advent of a manufacturing depression resulted in
 - food shortages,
 - rising prices for food and other goods, and
 - unemployment in the cities.
 - The number of poor, estimated by some observers at almost 1/3 of the population, reached crisis proportions on the eve of the Revolution.

French Revolution

Background

- The immediate cause of the French Revolution was the near collapse of government finances.
 - French government expenditures were spiraling upward due to costly wars and royal extravagance.
 - On the verge of a complete financial collapse, the government of **Louis XVI** (r. 1774-1792) was finally forced to call a meeting of the **Estates-General**, the French parliamentary body that had not met since 1614.

Louis XVI (1754-1793)



French Revolution

Background

- The Estates-General consisted of representatives from the three orders of French society.
- In the elections for the Estates-General, the government had ruled that the Third Estate should get double representation (it did, after all it constituted 97% of the population).
 - Consequently, while both the First (the clergy) and the Second Estate (nobility) had about 300 delegates each, the Third Estate had almost 600, most of whom were lawyers from French towns.

Estates-General, 1789



French Revolution

Background

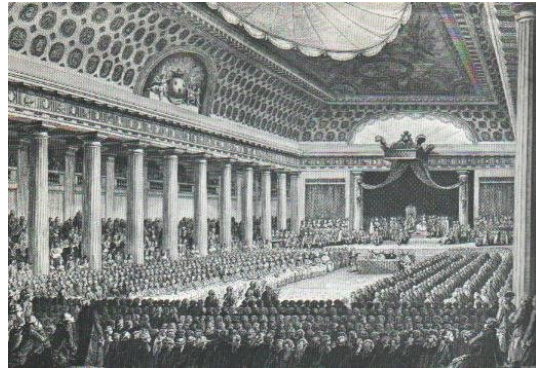
- In order to fix France's financial problems, most members of the Third Estate wanted to set up a constitutional government that would abolish the fiscal privileges of the church and the nobility.

French Revolution

Estates-General

- The Estates-General opened at Versailles on May 5, 1789.
- It was troubled from the start with the problem of whether voting should be by order or by head (each delegate having one vote).
- Traditionally, each order would vote as a group and have one vote; which meant that the First and Second Estates could outvote the Third Estate two to one.

Opening of the Estates-General, May 5, 1789



French Revolution

Estates-General

- The Third Estate demanded that each deputy have one vote.
 - With the assistance of the liberal nobles and clerics, this would give the Third Estate the majority.
- When the First Estate declared in favor of voting by order, the Third Estate responded dramatically.
- On June 17, 1789, the Third Estate constituted itself a “National Assembly” and decided to draw up a constitution.

French Revolution

Third Estate to National Assembly

- This was the first step in the French Revolution, because the Third Estate had no legal right to act as the National Assembly.
- But this revolutionary act was soon in jeopardy, as the king sided with the First Estate and threatened to dissolve the Estates-General.
- Louis XVI was prepared to use force.

French Revolution

Third Estate to National Assembly

- The common people, however, saved the Third Estate from the king’s forces.
- On July 14, a mob of Parisians stormed the **Bastille**, a royal armory, and proceeded to dismantle it, brick by brick.
- Louis XVI was soon informed that the royal troops were unreliable, and accepted the reality of the situation.

Storming the Bastille, July 14, 1789



French Revolution

Third Estate to National Assembly

- However, Louis' accepting this situation signaled the collapse of royal authority: the king could no longer enforce his will.
- The fall of the Bastille had saved the National Assembly.
- At the same time, popular revolutions broke out throughout France, both in the cities and in the countryside.

French Revolution

Third Estate to National Assembly

- Behind the popular uprising was a growing resentment of the entire landholding system, with its fees and obligations.
- The fall of the Bastille and the king's apparent capitulation to the demands of the Third Estate now led peasants to take matters into their own hands.
- Peasant rebellions occurred throughout France, serving as a backdrop to the **Great Fear**, a vast panic that spread like wildfire through France between July 20 and August 6; country estates were looted and burned as peasants went on a rampage.

"Great Fear" in France, July 20-August 6, 1789



French Revolution

Tennis Court Oath

- The greatest impact of the peasant revolts and Great Fear was on the National Assembly meeting in Versailles.
- Locked out of the meeting hall for constituting itself the National Assembly, the Third Estate met on the tennis court at Versailles on June 20 and took the famous **Tennis Court Oath** not to disband until a new constitution had been created for France.
- One of the first acts of the National Assembly was to destroy the relics of feudalism or aristocratic privilege.

Tennis Court Oath of June 20, 1789



French Revolution

Third Estate to National Assembly

- On the night of August 4, the National Assembly voted to abolish the rights of landlords as well as the fiscal privileges of the nobles.
- And, on August 11 it issued the **Decree Abolishing Feudalism**.
- On August 27, the National Assembly adopted the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen**.

French Revolution

Declaration of the Rights of Man

- This Declaration, as a charter of basic liberties, affirmed the destruction of aristocratic privileges by proclaiming
 - an end to exemptions from taxation,
 - freedom and equal rights for all men, and
 - access to public office based on talent.
- All citizens were to have the right to take part in the legislative process.

End of class privileges



French Revolution

Declaration of the Rights of Man

- Freedom of speech and the press were coupled with the outlawing of arbitrary arrests.
- However, the Declaration also raised another important issue: Did its ideal of equal rights for all men also include women?
 - Many deputies insisted that it did, provided that, as one said, “women do not hope to exercise political rights and functions.”

French Revolution

Declaration of the Rights of Man

- **Olympe de Gouges**, a playwright, refused to accept this exclusion of women from political rights.
 - Echoing the words of the official declaration, she penned the **Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen**, in which she insisted that women should have all the same rights as men.
 - The National Assembly ignored her demands.

Olympe de Gouges, 1745-1793



French Revolution

March on Versailles

- In the meantime, Louis XVI, who had remained inactive at Versailles, refused to accept the decrees on the abolition of feudalism and the Declaration of Rights.
- On October 5, thousands of Parisian women described by an eyewitness as “detachments of women . . . Armed with broomsticks, lances, pitchforks, swords, pistols, and muskets,” marched to Versailles and forced the king to accept the new decrees.
- The crowd insisted that the royal family return to Paris.

French Revolution

March on Versailles

- On October 6, the king complied with the demands of the crowd and left with his family for Paris.
- As a goodwill gesture, he brought along wagonloads of flour from the palace stores.
- The royal family was escorted to Paris from Versailles by women armed with pikes (on some of which were the severed heads of the king's guards), singing "We are bringing back the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy" (the king, queen, their son).

Women's March on Versailles, October 5, 1789



French Revolution

Civil Constitution of the Clergy

- Because the Catholic church was seen as an important pillar of the old order, it too was reformed.
 - Most of the Church's lands were seized.
 - On July 12, 1790, the new **Civil Constitution of the Clergy** was put into effect, under which bishops and priests were to be elected by the people and paid by the state.
- The Catholic church, still an important institution in the life of the French people, now became an enemy of the Revolution.

Confiscation of Church lands

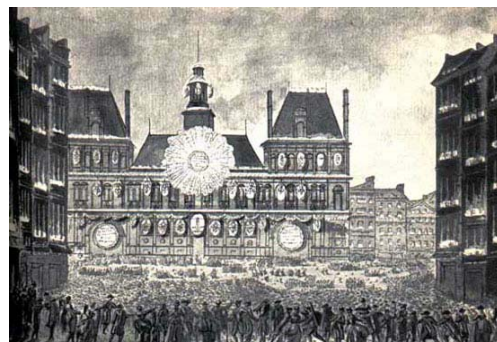


French Revolution

French Constitutional Monarchy

- By 1791, the National Assembly had finally completed a new constitution that established a limited constitutional monarchy.
 - There was still a monarch (now called "King of the French"), but a legislative assembly was to make the laws.
- The Legislative Assembly, in which sovereign power was vested,
 - was to sit for two years and
 - consisted of 745 representatives chosen by an indirect system of election, that preserved power in the hands of the more affluent members of society.

Proclamation of the French Constitution of 1791



French Revolution

Legislative Assembly

- Moreover, only active citizens (men over the age of 25 paying in taxes the equivalent of three days' unskilled labor) could vote for electors (men paying taxes equivalent in value to ten days' labor).
- This relatively small group of 50,000 electors then chose the deputies to the Assembly.
- By 1791, the old order had been destroyed but many people opposed the new order.

French Revolution

Opposition to the New Order

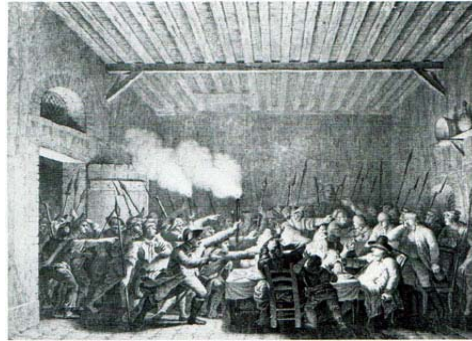
- Among those who opposed the new order were
 - Catholic priests,
 - nobles,
 - lower classes hurt by the rise in the cost of living,
 - peasants who remained opposed to dues that had still not been abandoned, and
 - political clubs like the **Jacobins** who offered more radical solutions to France's problems.

French Revolution

Opposition to the New Order

- The king also made things difficult for the new government when he sought to flee France on June 20, 1791 in disguise.
 - He was disguised as a steward and his son was wearing a dress.
 - However, at the border village of Varennes he was recognized and eventually apprehended.
 - Word of his attempted flight spread quickly and crowds lined the street to jeer at him when he was returned to Paris.
 - At this Louis remarked, "There is no longer a King in France."

Capture and arrest of Louis XVI, June 1791



French Revolution

Opposition to the New Order

- On August 27, 1791, the Austrian and Prussian monarchs, fearing the revolution would spread to their countries, invited other European monarchs to use force to reestablish the French monarchy.
- Insulted by this threat, the Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria on April 20, 1792.
 - The French fared badly in the initial fighting.
 - Defeats in war, coupled with economic shortages in the spring led to renewed political demonstrations, especially against the king.

French Revolution

Opposition to the New Order

- In August 1792, radical political groups in Paris took the king captive.
 - They then forced the Legislative Assembly to suspend the monarchy and call for a national convention to decide on the future form of government.
 - Representation was to be on the basis of universal male suffrage.
- With this the French Revolution entered a more radical phase.

French Revolution

National Convention

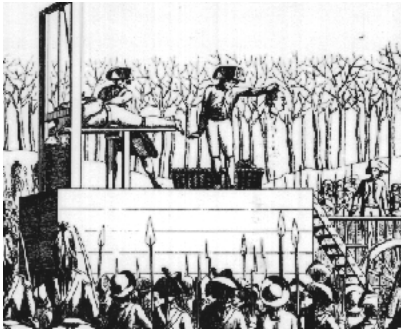
- In September 1792, the newly elected **National Convention** began its sessions.
 - It was dominated by lawyers and other professionals.
 - Two-thirds of its deputies were under 45, and almost all had gained political experience as a result of the Revolution.
 - Almost all distrusted the king.
- The Convention's first step on September 21 was the abolish the monarchy and establish a republic.

French Revolution

National Convention

- On January 21, 1793, the king was executed, and the destruction of the old regime was complete.
- However, the execution of the king strengthened the resistance of the old enemies of the Revolution and created new ones both at home and abroad.

Execution of Louis XVI, January 21, 1893



French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- In Paris, the local government, known as the **Paris Commune**, whose leaders came from the working classes, favored radical change and put constant pressure on the Convention, pushing it to ever more extreme positions.
- Moreover, the National Convention did not rule all of France.
- Peasants in western France and inhabitants of major provincial cities refused to accept the authority of the Convention.

French Communards, 1793



French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- A foreign crisis also loomed large.
 - By the beginning of 1793, after the king had been put to death, most of Europe – an informal coalition of Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Britain, the Dutch Republic and Russia – was pitted against the French.
 - Grossly overextended, the French armies began to experience reverses, and by late spring, France was threatened with invasion.
 - If successful, both the Revolution and the revolutionaries would be destroyed and the old regime reestablished.

French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- To meet these crises, the Convention gave broad powers to an executive committee of twelve known as the **Committee of Public Safety**, which came to be dominated by **Maximilien Robespierre**.
- For a twelve month period, from 1793 to 1794, in what came to be known as the **Reign of Terror**, the Committee of Public Safety took control of France.
- Initially, to save the republic from its foreign foes the Committee decreed a universal mobilization of the nation on August 23, 1793.

Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794)



French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- In less than a year, the French revolutionary government had raised an army of 650,000; by September 1794, it numbered 1,169,000.
- The Republic's army was the largest ever seen in European history, and it pushed the allies back across the Rhine and even conquered the Austrian Netherlands.
- The French revolutionary army was an important development in the creation of modern nationalism.

French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- Previously, wars had been fought between governments or ruling dynasties by relatively small armies of professional soldiers.
 - The new French army was the creation of a "people's" government.
 - Its wars were now "people's" wars, as the entire nation was to be involved in the war.
 - When dynastic wars become "people's" wars, warfare increased in ferocity and decreased in restraint.
- The wars of the French revolutionary era opened the door to the total war of the modern era.

French Revolution

Reign of Terror

- To meet the domestic crisis, the National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety established the so-called "Reign of Terror."
 - Revolutionary courts were instituted to protect the Republic from its internal enemies.
 - In the course of nine months, 16,000 people were officially killed under the blade of the **guillotine** – a revolutionary device for the quick and efficient separation of heads from bodies.
 - But the true number of the Terror's victims was probably closer to 30,000.

The Great Fear (1792-94)



French Revolution

Reign of Terror

- Most of the Terror's executions occurred in places that had rebelled against the authority of the National Convention.
- The Committee of Public Safety held that this bloodletting was only temporary.
- The end of the war and the domestic emergency would usher in a "republic of virtue" in which the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" would prevail.

French Revolution

Reign of Terror

- Revolutionary armies were set up to bring recalcitrant cities and districts back under the control of the National Convention.
- The Committee of Public Safety decided to make an example of Lyons, which had defied the authority of the National Convention.
 - By April 1794, 1,880 citizens of Lyons had been executed.
 - When guillotining proved too slow, cannon fire was used to blow condemned men into open graves.

French Revolution

Dechristianization

- The National Convention also pursued a policy of dechristianization.
 - A new calendar was instituted in which years were no longer numbered from the birth of Christ but from September 1792, the first day of the French Republic.
 - The new calendar also eliminated Sundays and church holidays.
 - In Paris the cathedral of Notre Dame was designated the **Temple of Reason**.

Notre Dame de Paris



French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- In November 1793, a public ceremony dedicated to the worship of reason was held in the former cathedral in which patriotic maidens adorned in white dresses paraded before a "temple of reason" where the high altar once stood.
- By the summer of 1794, the French had been successful against their foreign foes, making the Terror less necessary.

French Revolution

End of the Terror

- But the Terror continued, because Robespierre, who had become a figure of power and authority, became obsessed with purifying the body politic of all the corrupt.
- Many deputies in the National Assembly were fearful, however, that they were not safe while Robespierre was free to act and gathered enough votes to condemn him.
- Robespierre, who said, "Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible," went to the guillotine on July 28, 1794 as the Terror's last victim.

French Revolution

Radical to Reaction

- After the death of Robespierre, a reaction set in as more moderate middle-class leaders took control.
- The Reign of Terror came to a halt, and the National Convention reduced the power of the Committee of Public Safety.
- Churches were allowed to reopen for public worship.

French Revolution

The Directory

- In addition, a new constitution was ratified in August 1795 that reflected the desire for a stability that did not sacrifice the ideals of 1789.
- Five Directors, the **Directory** – acted as the executive authority.
- The period of the Revolution under the government of the Directory (1795-1799) was an era of stagnation and corruption, a materialistic reaction to the sacrifices that had been demanded in the Reign of Terror.

French Revolution

The Directory

- At the same time, the government of the Directory faced political enemies from both the left and the right of the political spectrum.
 - On the right, royalists who wanted to restore the monarchy continued their agitation.
 - On the left, radicals' dreams of wresting power were kept alive by continuing economic problems.

French Revolution

The Directory

- Battered by the left and the right, unable to solve the country's economic problems, and still carrying on the wars inherited from the Committee of Public Safety, the Directory increasingly relied on the military to maintain its power.
- This led to a coup d'état in 1799 in which a popular military general, **Napoleon Bonaparte**, seized power.

Napoleon Bonaparte

