

19 – Revolution: 1763-1815

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, several factors combined to trigger a revolution in France: Enlightenment ideals that questioned the rigid class system of the old order, the loss of colonies, government overspending in the Colonial Wars and the American Revolution, and resistance to reform by the king and nobility. Transforming France from a monarchy to a republic and then to an empire, the French Revolution increased nationalistic impulses in countries across Europe.

KEY TERMS

Bastille	<i>Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen</i>	Reign of Terror
<i>cahiers de doléances</i>	directory	Republic of Virtue
Code Napoleon	estates (first, second, and third)	Robespierre
Committee of Public Safety	Estates-General	sans-culottes
Congress of Vienna	Great Fear	Society for Revolutionary Republican Women
Constituent Assembly	Jacobin Republic	Tennis Court Oath
Constitution of 1791	Louis XVI	Thermidorean Reaction
consulate	Napoleon Bonaparte	Toussaint L'Ouverture
Continental System	National Assembly	Women's March on Versailles
De-Christianization	nationalism	
<i>Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen</i>	old order	

KEY CONCEPTS

- Many longstanding social grievances led to the Revolution, especially the lack of any real power in the Third Estate, the largest of the estates and made up of commoners. The Revolution was sparked by a wheat famine, which pushed up the price of bread and amplified long-smoldering resentment of high taxes and exorbitant government debt.
- Political developments drove the French Revolution. From the initial reactions against the rule of Louis XVI to the Constitutional Monarchy of the Liberal Phase, through the execution of Louis XVI and the Reign of Terror, political ineptitude, corruption, and crisis caused many to want to change the government in France.
- The French Revolution was fed by the Enlightenment ideal that government should address the needs of its people. Although the new French Republic paid little attention to Enlightenment ideals, revolutionary armies, raised by a national draft, and later Napoleon's new military tactics spread the Enlightenment to much of the European continent.
- Economic and social reforms instituted by the Jacobin Republic included fixed prices and wages, a policy of de-Christianization, and an emphasis on equality and human rights. While women participated actively in the revolution and many hoped to gain rights as well, the improvement in the legal status of women was extremely short.
- Napoleon Bonaparte made many lasting domestic reforms, even as he curtailed rights within France and expanded the French Empire and influence. This control inspired nationalistic responses throughout Europe, which eventually led to his defeat by a coalition of European powers.
- Some such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, inspired by enlightened ideals, led a slave revolt in Saint Domingue. The overthrow of French rule led to the establishment of Haiti as a sovereign nation, while others condemned its violence and overthrow of traditional authority.
- Supporters of the Revolution, and later Napoleon, used the arts, especially painting and architecture, as propaganda.

For a full discussion of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapter 19.

Causes of the French Revolution

Problems of the Old Order

In France, there were long- and short-term causes stemming from the problems of the old order. One major issue was the rigid system of estates. The First Estate was composed of Catholic clergy, a minuscule

0.5 percent of the population owning about 10 percent of the land and exempt from feudal dues and other taxes. The Second Estate, the nobility, accounted for some 1.5 percent of the population and owned between 25 and 30 percent of the land. Also exempt from such taxes as the *taille*, nobles dominated the government. Both of these estates were divided, however, with some members aligned with the king.

Many of those who were not sympathized with the Third Estate, which comprised some 98 percent of the population yet had very little power. The Third Estate had various groups, from the growing bourgeoisie to the peasants, who made up 75 to 80 percent of the population. Each group had grievances against the government, ranging from economic concerns, such as taxes, rents, and the prices of goods to political concerns, such as a desire for a more liberal government.

Short-Term Causes

Several short-term causes kindled the revolt against the French government. One was the Enlightenment and its ideals. Enlightenment belief in the value of education and the questioning of traditional sources of authority were used to justify ending the old system in France. Another short-term cause was the severe financial crisis, a result of debts for foreign wars and the court's lavish spending on both its privileged lifestyle and its rigid control of the government. That was caused by the fact that the First and Second Estates would not allow any input from the Third Estate. Furthermore, the bureaucracy of the government was housed at Versailles, so it was physically distanced from the Third Estate; there were tremendous costs associated with living and working at the palace. A wheat famine triggered bread riots, amplifying an already strained economic situation. A third short-term cause was Louis XVI's unresponsiveness. When confronted with the severity of the social, political, and economic situations, Louis refused to listen to his advisers, such as Maupeou and Calonne, who urged reform. Instead, he worked to maintain the old order.

The American Experience

There were many causes of the French Revolution, some of which were the events in Britain's North American colonies. Looking for new revenues after the Seven Years' War (known as the French and Indian War in North America), the British believed that the Americans should help pay for the war. Many colonists balked. Well-versed in

Enlightenment ideals and used to years of benign neglect by Britain, they were ready for independence. During the American Revolution, the colonists were split in their loyalties. France, however, smarting from defeats by Britain in previous wars in the colonies and on the continent, supported the Americans from the start through to the war's end, in 1781.

The American Revolution had a profound impact on Europe and around the world. In France, support for the Americans had weakened French coffers, contributing to the state's financial problems. But many took note of the fact that colonies could win independence from a major European power. Finally, the new United States government, drawing on Enlightenment ideals, had shown their practical application.

To discuss the French Revolution, you need to be able to describe the intellectual, social, economic, and political factors leading up to it. This is a common question on the AP exam. Another is the connection between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

The French Revolution

The First or Liberal Phase

In 1789, when Louis XVI was desperately in need of funds and called the Estates-General to find some, he unintentionally gave the Third Estate an opportunity to air its grievances. A meeting of representatives from all three estates, the Estates-General, was held at Versailles. Each estate had only one vote, putting the representatives of the Third Estate in an impossible situation: the first two estates could combine their votes to thwart the third.

The Third Estate presented the king with *cahiers de doléances* (petitions) requesting a variety of changes in France. Although Louis did not respond favorably to their concerns, some members of the clergy and the nobility spoke out in favor of the Third Estate. Because the number of Third Estate representatives was equal to the number of representatives for the other two estates combined, the support of those clergymen and nobles was significant when the Third Estate proposed voting by head (by person) rather than by order.

Garnering the support of clergymen, such as Abbe Sieyès, a member of the First Estate who wrote in favor of the Third Estate in *What Is the Third Estate?*, and thwarted by the First Estate's refusal to allow voting by head, the Third Estate declared itself the National Assembly. Locked out of their meeting room by Louis, members of the Third Estate moved to the palace tennis court, vowing to stay there until they had created a new constitution for France. This set them on a direct path of conflict with Louis, who threatened to dissolve the entire Estates-General.

Two important historical thinking skills are periodization and interpretation. These two skills combine

in the French Revolutionary era because different historians interpret the events differently. While one historian might make the case for the revolution beginning with the fall of the Bastille, another might cite the Tennis Court Oath or the bankruptcy of the French government as the start of the Revolution. Now add the skill of historical causation to the mix. Some historians look at the political causes of the Revolution as being the more important ones, while Marxist historians see economic factors as mattering more. And finally, when does the revolution end – in 1799 when Napoleon takes over or in 1815 when he is defeated and a Bourbon king returns to the throne? Being able to explain the differing interpretations of historical events is a necessary skill of the AP exam.

From that point, events across France pushed the Revolution forward. Incensed by the king's actions at Versailles and by the increasing military presence in France, Parisians stormed and seized the Bastille, a prison, and armory in Paris, on July 14, 1789. In the countryside, peasants, encouraged by the fall of the Bastille, attacked their lords and stole and burned records of their feudal obligations in what is known as the Great Fear.

The National Assembly (later known as the Constituent Assembly) drew up the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which was based on the ideals of the *philosophes* and the American Declaration of Independence. On October 5, 1789, thousands of women from Paris marched on Versailles demanding bread for their children. They returned to Paris the next day with Louis XVI, his wife Marie Antoinette, and their son.

Two important documents followed, in 1790 and 1791. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy required that the Catholic clergy swear allegiance to the new constitution and be elected by and paid by the French people. The National Assembly drew up a new constitution creating a limited monarchy and ending absolutism in France.

During the course of 1791, the bourgeoisie gained more political power. The Jacobins, a political group composed mainly of wealthy members of the bourgeoisie, rose to a position of dominance as they spread the more radical ideas. Although many in the bourgeoisie supported Louis as a constitutional, or limited, monarch, he undercut their support when he and his family attempted to flee France.

Foreign powers, especially Austria and Prussia, worried about political changes in France and the possible overthrow of a monarch and his Austrian-born queen. France had declared war on Austria in April 1792. When an attack on the Austrian Netherlands failed and an Austrian-Prussian invasion seemed likely, Parisian mobs took the palace and the assembly, effectively ending the French monarchy. Political power passed to the new Paris

Commune, which was made up of more radical Frenchmen, including the sans-culottes.

The Jacobin Republic and the Reign of Terror

The revolution then took a bloody turn. Led by the brilliant attorney Maximilien Robespierre, the radical Jacobins were intent on maintaining the purity of their revolution. As a result, thousands of their supposed enemies were arrested and guillotined. At the same time, the National Convention tried Louis, found him guilty of treason, and sent him to the guillotine.

By 1793, the revolutionary factions were turning on one another. Compounding this, a foreign threat was posed by a large coalition of European nations. To protect France and the Revolution, the Committee of Public Safety was charged with drafting thousands of men for an army able to push the invaders out of France.

To protect the Revolution from its supposed enemies within France, the committee ordered the Reign of Terror. Thousands more were sent to the guillotine, including Louis's wife, Marie Antoinette; Olympe de Gouges, a former revolutionary Girondin and advocate for women's political rights; and simple peasants. In ridding itself of its enemies, the committee believed that it was setting in place a Republic of Virtue, one in which a belief in virtue would replace a belief in Christianity and one that only true enemies need fear, while loyal citizens feared nothing.

In addition to all the violence, bureaucratic efforts were aimed at creating and reinforcing the idea of a new order. To separate itself from the old order and the power of the Catholic Church, the National Convention instituted a policy of de-Christianization – for example, churches were closed, priests were encouraged to marry, and Notre Dame Cathedral was renamed the Temple of Reason. In addition, the calendar was completely remade. These efforts were not well received by the people, whose Catholic faith was strong.

Closing Stages

As the Revolution continued to attack those it perceived to be disloyal, infighting grew. France had defeated its foreign enemies, so domestically things should have been calmer. Robespierre pushed to continue the guillotining. By doing so, he made himself a target, and was himself guillotined on July 28, 1794. Robespierre's death marked the beginning of the so-called Thermidorean Reaction, an end to the chaos and violence.

In August 1795, a new constitution was written. It created a Directory run by five directors who relied on the military to help restore order. Under the Directory, the middle class was the big winner both economically and politically. The sans-culottes did not fare so well. The Directory was assailed by the right, especially monarchists,

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and by the left, the radical republicans, primarily the Jacobin remnant. It could not stand. By 1799 it was ripe for the coup *d'état* led by Napoleon.

AP Tip

Chronology is important when you are looking for causes and effects in history. To understand the French Revolution, develop a good timeline of the events from 1789 to 1815. One approach is to periodize the revolution by government or according to the degree of radicalism. You should be able to make a logical argument as to the beginning, stages, and ending of the French Revolution, and you need to be able to prove or defend that argument with evidence. The skills of historical argumentation and appropriate use of relevant historical evidence are imperative to do well on the exam.

Napoleon

Napoleon's Rise

Born on the French island of Corsica, as a youth Napoleon Bonaparte moved with his family to mainland France, where he was given an outstanding military education. He rose quickly through the ranks of the army, winning amazing victories for the French against the European enemies of the revolution.

Napoleon's rise was based not only on his remarkable military prowess, but also on his personality. His strength of character, his concern for his troops, his intelligence, his ability to quickly assess situations, and his dogged determination made him a person who could win the heart of a country as well as its military victories.

In 1799, in its desire to find peace at the end of the revolution, France chose Napoleon to be the leader of her new republic, the Consulate, which succeeded the fallen Directory. He became the First Consul, eventually making his position good for life. In 1804, the French allowed Napoleon to crown himself emperor.

In stabilizing France after the devastation of the revolution, Napoleon put into place many changes. A great military leader, Napoleon built a large empire over most of western and central Europe and installed his family members on the thrones of various territories. His Grand Empire, at its peak in 1810, reached from Spain in the west to Poland (Grand Duchy of Warsaw), deep in the east. Forcing alliances with Russia, Prussia, and Austria, he reduced them to minor states. One of the first nations to try to stop the French Revolution and a major European power for centuries, Austria was a particularly important ally for him. Napoleon divorced his beloved first wife, the childless Josephine, to marry Marie of Austria, daughter of Austria's emperor. This marriage provided both a direct link to France's old enemy and a son.

Domestic Gains

Napoleon carried out many reforms, although several were made as Napoleon's despotism grew. Politically, he strengthened and centralized the French government. His law code, the Code Napoleon, guaranteed equal legal treatment, religious toleration, trial by jury, and an end to serfdom and the vestiges of feudalism. It also did away with primogeniture and allowed women equal inheritance rights. Although it also took away some rights, the code generally set in place many of the ideals espoused by the *philosophes* just decades earlier. Napoleon would later go against some of those ideals – for example, by censoring speech and the press and by ordering arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.

Napoleon did much to bring France back to its feet economically. He pleased the bourgeoisie by encouraging the growth of business, collecting taxes fairly and efficiently, and creating the Bank of France to oversee all of it. Government debts were paid promptly so that France could be seen as an economically stable nation.

Napoleon began rebuilding France with an eye to both efficiency and beauty. He built roads, bridges, and canals, infrastructure for France's developing economy. He dredged harbors to give France a base for both a worldwide economy and a powerful navy. Paris, devastated by the Revolution, needed help. Beautification of Paris would serve two purposes: glorification of France and glorification of Napoleon.

New schools provided more uniform standards and required courses that extolled France and its emperor. They grew at the expense of church schools, which had controlled French education for centuries.

The Catholic Church in France took the hardest hit. Besides losing control of education, the Church was forced by the Concordat of 1801 to abandon all claims to lands confiscated during the Revolution. The state could choose bishops, although the pope could still remove them, and the state would pay the salaries of all clergy, both Catholic and Protestant. The pope was forced to accept that Catholicism would not be reestablished as France's state religion – it would be recognized only as the majority religion. Later, in 1809, as part of his foreign policy, Napoleon annexed the Papal States and took the pope prisoner, making Napoleon the true enemy of the church, from which he was excommunicated.

Napoleon's Fall

Having subdued virtually the entire continent, Napoleon was left with only one major enemy, Britain. Along with the growth of nationalism across the continent, France's ill-conceived war against Russia, and his overreaching ambition, led to Napoleon's downfall.

Napoleon set out to defeat France's enemy, England, through economic warfare beginning after Trafalgar, in

1806. But the Continental System, his blockade of Britain from the continent, only made his position worse: Britain could still trade with the rest of the world, and nations across Europe resented French meddling with their trade. Further, in response to Napoleon's blockade, Britain blockaded the continent from any external trade, angering the nations under French control even more.

This economic warfare amplified rising nationalism in Napoleon's empire. Countries that, for various reasons, had accepted French control rose against France. Italian and German states saw the growth of nationalism, a sense of unity built on shared language, ethnicity, and religion. Inspired by the French Revolution, people across Europe saw that they could apply Enlightenment ideals, especially self-determination, without Napoleonic control. Napoleon had made enemies of entire countries, not just their leaders.

The breaking point was Napoleon's war against Russia. Tsar Alexander I had been Napoleon's chief ally on the east. But Russia suffered economically under the Continental System, so in 1812 it resumed trade with Britain. Angered by this breach, Napoleon invaded. This disastrous attack devastated his army. It also shone a bright light on his weaknesses, especially his rash, ego-driven decision making. Russia used a variety of ploys, such as poisoning wells and destroying crops and animals, to outwait Napoleon. He and his troops were trapped by an early, hard winter, and only a remnant of his once aptly named Grand Army escaped Russia.

Within two years, after European nations rallied to fight him and win a decisive battle at Waterloo, in Belgium, Napoleon was banished to the island of Elba. Within a year he gathered forces and came back to France and removed the new king, Louis XVIII, from power. But European nations allied again, and in a decisive victory at Waterloo, defeated Napoleon. He was again removed and exiled, this time to St. Helena, where he died in 1821.

AP Tip

Another common AP exam topic is the link between Napoleon and the French Revolution and its predecessor, the Enlightenment. As you read, note the ways in which Napoleon reflected and rejected the ideals of the Enlightenment and the goals and actions of the French Revolution.

The Legacy Of The French Revolution And Napoleon

The French Revolution and Napoleon brought about considerable social change. Although women had influenced the Enlightenment through its salon culture, they did not play a major role during the French Revolution. They did take part in early spontaneous

protests, and with a powerful spokesperson in Olympe de Gouges, who wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, gained a few rights, such as more freedom in managing their children. Later, during the more radical phases, women were not allowed to join many of the clubs and political groups, and could not run for elected office. In response, they formed their own political clubs, most notably the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women. Men shut them down, however, believing, like Rousseau, that women's focus should be home and children. Later, under the Code Napoleon, women lost the few rights they had gained during the Revolution. One injustice that was addressed was slavery. During the Revolution, the government wavered on the issue, but in the end it abolished slavery in France and throughout the empire.

There was considerable political change, too. Most important was the emphasis on democracy. Beginning with the National Convention, the French spoke of liberty, equality, and fraternity, democratic principles based on Enlightenment ideals. These were the basis for such changes as the prohibition of primogeniture, the end of imprisonment for debt, a planned education system, and enactment of a republican constitution and codified law.

Napoleon's law code has had an enduring impact – it is the basis of current law not only in France, but in countries around the world. The streamlining of the national government and the de-emphasizing of local control led France to its unitary system of government, which is still in place. Finally, the nationalism that bloomed during the Revolution and under Napoleon remains vibrant; along with the French, people around the world celebrate Bastille Day and sing “La Marseillaise.”

This period also brought geopolitical changes. The major development occurred when Napoleon gained control of most of Europe. He ended the Austrian-dominated Holy Roman Empire and put in its place the Confederation of the Rhine (under Napoleon) and its successor, the German Confederation (after 1815). Napoleon had transformed an empire that had been one of the Austrian Habsburgs' important territorial holdings, involving hundreds of small German states, into a union of thirty-nine larger states. The formation of these larger states, thus breaking the control of hundreds of local German princes, set the stage for further German unification and the creation of the state of Germany in 1871.

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AP Tip

As you study various eras in European history, note the lives of women in different social and economic classes. Here, compare women's lives during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era with women's lives during other eras, especially those of conflict and revolution.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic era were followed by a period of reaction. Conservative governments across Europe were alarmed by France's tumultuous quarter-century, and they sought to end revolutions and restore the old order. In response to both the Revolution and the conservative reaction to it, strong feelings of nationalism took hold in Europe and led to the creation of new countries and the dissolution of old ones.