

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION BEGINS

THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE

The Paris mob, hungry because of the lack of food from poor harvests, took the law into their own hands. On July 14th, 1789, the mob rioted and attacked the royal fortress prison called the Bastille. They saw the Bastille as a symbol of everything that was wrong with France. It was a symbol of the King and his government and the Paris mob wanted to destroy it, in order to arm themselves for defense against the King's rumored military attacks on French citizens. The mob kill the governor of the prison and soldiers in and out of Paris refused to stop the attack, showing that King Louis XVI had also lost control of the army.



Key Events and Themes:

- Paris 'mob' and the fall of the Bastille
- Peasant revolt across France
- The Declaration of the Rights of Man
- The New Constitution

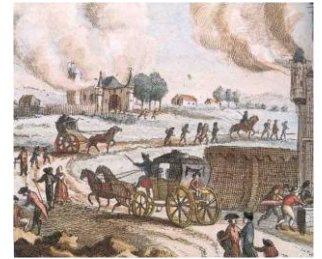
Feudal Documents Destroyed, 1789

Throughout France, peasants were losing patience. They took part in widespread attacks on the chateaux and palaces of their lords.

The whole country is in the greatest agitation. Many chateaux have been burned and other plundered. The lords hunted down like beasts. Their feudal documents burned. Their property destroyed.

(Travels in France-
Arthur Young, 1792)

As the feudal lord leaves, his peasants burn down his chateau.



THE DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN

The National Assembly passed a law on August 4, 1789 which abolished all feudal privileges and unjust taxation. There were to be no more church tithes, no feudal dues and no more private companies keeping part of the taxation. In August 12-26, the Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man; however, it did not include rights for women, the position of slaves in France or the French Empire. There was also nothing in the declaration about who would impose these new laws. By September 1789, the Assembly, with the King's approval appointed new middle class officials elected by the people to take charge of local government. They were called intendants, and they replace the former agents of the King.

THE NEW CONSTITUTION 1789-1791

Over the next two years, the members of the Three Estates, as the Assembly worked together to hammer out a new constitutions for France. The main features of this New Constitution were:

- The Assembly was to be elected every two years, by men who paid a certain level of taxation. About two thirds of the male population gained the vote, they were called 'active citizens.'
- The King was to be called "King of French," not "King of France."
- The King could delay the passing of a law for three years.
- 83 new departments were created to become centers for local government.
- Judges, deputies, tax-collectors and priests were to be elected by "active citizens."
- A new taxation system, based on income and a new currency the assignat, was created.
- Church lands were nationalized. Income from their sale would pay off government debt.
- The Church tax (tithe) was abolished.
- Marriages had to be celebrated as civil ceremonies in front of state officials, instead of religious ones. Divorce was introduced.
- Priests had to take oath of loyalty to the state; some saw this as an attack on the power of bishops and Pope.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION BEGINS

Primary Source 1:

Declaration of the Rights of man, 1789 – National Assembly (Excerpt)

The Representatives of the French people...believing that ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities, and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man; in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties...

Articles:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptable rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
6. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in the law. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities except that of their virtues and talents.
7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law.
9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.
11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print, with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.
13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.
17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

Source: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp

Primary Source 2:

The cartoon published in 1789 depicts members of the Three Estates working together to hammer out a new constitution for France.

