

# Essay on french revolution

[History](#), [French Revolution](#)



The French Revolution that took place in 1789-1799 is one of the most popular political uprisings in world history. Throughout the 18th century, the traditional authoritarian French monarchy remained in power despite talk of reform. As the authority structures remained in place, economic revolutions took place within the French society causing dramatic changes. Moreover, the evolving social structure started to collide with the static political structure. This led to the clamor for reforms in order to create a constitutional monarchy, reform the financial and political landscape of the nation. The revolution was immediately followed by the by a dictatorship ( 1799-1815), which later fell to pave the way for the return of the monarchy. Going by the original goals set out in 1789, the French revolution was a failure by 1815.

The genesis of the French Revolution was a myriad of challenges facing the French citizens. The country was facing a dire economic situation; the food prices were too high, the wages had not increased by the same rates as the food prices and the rate of unemployment was very high. By that time, France had three categories of people: the privileged class consisting of the clergy and the nobility; the middle class consisting of professionals and the merchants; and the lowest class consisting of workers and peasants.

The peasants were heavily taxed by the government, and had other additional dues imposed on them by the church and the feudal lords (Frey & Frey, 2004). This meant that the meager earnings from their crops could not sustain them. In 1788, there was a crop failure in France, which led to a near famine (Frey & Frey, 2004). The bread prices skyrocketed, and many city workers were nearly starving. On the other hand, the middle class, consisting

of lawyers, merchants, manufacturers and government officials carried most of the tax burden. However, they did not have a voice in government. As this happened, the government continued with its opulent spending.

King Louis XV, for instance, had emptied the government's coffers with his extravagance. The succeeding King, Luis XVI, did not do much to cut extravagance. Instead, the government offered assistance to the American Revolutionary War, thus draining the government's resources. The country was almost running bankrupt, but the people were already heavily taxed. This prompted the King to call the States General on May 5, 1789 (Lefebvre, 2005). The States General consisted of the nobility, the third estate and the clergy.

The three groups agreed that there was a need for financial reforms, but the third estate wanted much more than that; they wanted a new constitution written. The King was now under pressure from members of the third estate, and he gave in to their demands. He agreed to convert the Estates General into a national assembly that would write the constitution. However, the King negated on his agreement with the Estates General leading to the outbreak of violence in Paris. The people stormed Bastille (the prison stronghold), which they termed as a symbol of oppression. The revolutionaries in Paris were encouraged by this revolt of the people, and they quickly took advantage to form a city government which the King acknowledged and visited (Lefebvre, 2005). The revolution wave quickly spread throughout France. The aristocrats began to fear the power of the people, and they soon gave up their privileges.

The new National Assembly enacted a new constitution, setting in place a

constitutional monarchy. The country was divided into 83 departments, which doubled up as the administrative units. All the administrative careers were opened to the people. The assembly also set out a system for elections including the posts in church, politics and the judiciary. The high offices were no longer a preserve of a few people. Taxes paid to the church, and the feudal lords were also abolished (Ross, 2002). Church properties got nationalized and sold off in lots. Other gains made during the revolution included religious tolerance and the recognition of the freedoms of speech. The press also enjoyed freedom, and people were no longer imprisoned without trial.

As these changes took place, the revolutionaries split into two groups: the ‘ Jacobins’ and the ‘ Girondins.’ The ‘ Jacobins’ were radical while the ‘ Girondins’ were against giving a lot of power to the poor. Eventually, the ‘ Jacobins seized control of the government and introduce many radical reforms. The ‘ Girondins’ continued to resist the radical measures put forward by the ‘ Jacobins’ and this led to a wave of terror meant to wipe out opposition. Anyone suspected to sympathize with the ‘ Girondins’ was wiped out (Hunt, 1984). Others were imprisoned as suspects. However, Robespierre and his leadership were taking the repression too far, and this led to his overthrow. The new government did not pursue radical ideas of the ‘ Jacobins’ any further but instead devised a new constitution. Political generals led by Napoleon Bonaparte later seized power in 1789. Napoleon reversed most of the radical reforms and even re-introduced absolute power. By the time, Napoleon was ousted out of power in 1815, most of the things the revolutionaries achieved had been reversed (Censer & Hunt, 2001).

The radical gains made during the French Revolution were quickly reversed during Napoleon's rule. For example, Napoleon reintroduced dictatorship to France. He also promoted religious intolerance by imposing Christianity as the only religion. In addition, under Napoleon's rule, the highest offices were reversed for relatives and close generals. Therefore, by 1815, the French revolution was already a failure because the things the revolutionaries stood for never materialized under Napoleon's Rule.

## References

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