

# [The people of the french revolution](https://assignbuster.com/the-people-of-the-french-revolution/)

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The Bastille was taken on July 14th, 1789, and King Louis XVI was executed on January 21st, 1793; When people think of history they think of events like these, just a name and a date and nothing more (Luxardo, 1). The French Revolution was much more than that; it was millions of real people with lives and stories engaged in a battle for justice that went horribly wrong.

There were those who truly wanted equal rights for all, those who didn’t want change, those who craved power, and then there were the ones who just go caught up in the chaos of it all. At the time of the Revolution who you were was everything. The people are why the revolution happened and everything that happened affected them. A Brief Overview of the Revolution The period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is known as the Age of Absolution in France. During this period the kings and ministers of France began to gain more and more power over their subjects. In the 1770’s and 80’s new ideas regarding government caused people to start questioning the nobilities supposed “ divine right to rule;” the peasants began to feel that they should act out against the despotism they were subjected to.

The 1780’s was also a time of hardship for France. With the population growing to over 25 million, the number of people in France was outgrowing the agricultural capabilities of the land which led to widespread famines (Luxardo, 6). A combination of bad conditions, higher taxes, and radical ideas about government led to the formation of the National Assembly (France 44). In May of 1789, King Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates General. The Estates General was a group of representatives from the three classes: the clergy, the nobility, and the third estate which was the middle and lower classes, though only the middle was represented here.

The third estate representatives were angry that although they were the majority, they were overruled by the other two estates. The Third Estate then formed the National Assembly and the Revolution Began (Luxardo, 14-15). With the cry of “ Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!” the people of France took control; they brought the Royal family to Paris, and wrote the Declaration of Rights of 1789 (Schama). “ They recognized their own program in the great Declaration Rights of 1789. New rights, for more people, have been demanded ever since,” said Robert R.

Palmer, history professor and author of The World of the French Revolution about the immense significance of the Declaration. Despite the fact that they had the best intentions, when the Republic of France was formed, the Reign of Terror began. During the Reign, fifty-thousand were executed by the guillotine for reasons such as rebellion, federalism, and even just for holding certain opinions (Luxardo 65). Even after all of the work that the people did, and after the Reign of Terror, you would think they may have finally developed a fair system of government. They were not so lucky however, as in 1795 Napoleon Bonaparte took control of France ending the Revolution (Schama). Dates from Luxador pg 1 The Clergy The Clergy were the first of the three estates.

It was comprised of officials of the church such as priests and bishops. They made up a very small percentage of the population and experienced privileges such as tax exemptions. In 1788, the King attempted to make the Clergy pay taxes in order the help the nation’s financial problems. The Clergy refused claiming that they were protected by tradition (Luxardo 14-5, 24). After the Revolution the Clergy had been transformed into functionaries of the state. Their property had been seized and auctioned off.

Of the three estates of France, the Clergy was the least involved in the Revolution. The power that they had previously experienced was greatly diminished. This is just one of the many examples of the separation of church and state around this time period (Luxardo 46). Aristocracy The second of the estates, the aristocracy, was without question the most privileged and powerful. The primary rule of nobles was to assist the King and the royal family, and according to all accounts they constantly plotted to advance their own positions from within. Remaining a noble was also a time consuming endeavor, you had to stay rich, and trade could lower your rank.

The Noblesse depee, or the Aristocracy of the Sword were natural born aristocrats, only they could carry swords and become officers. Noblesse de robes, or aristocracy of the dress, were people born into the third estate who purchased their positions of nobility. Like the clergy, they were exempt from taxes and claimed they were protected by tradition (Luxardo 13-15, 18). Most noblesse depee felt that they were better than everyone, but there were some that truly saw the horror of what was happening to those of lower class than them. The Baillage, or royal court of Blois, summed this up by saying, “ it is the job of a social institution to allow everyone to achieve the greatest possible happiness.

” (Nobility of Blois) In an aristocratic home you would be likely to find lavish parlors and sitting room with abundant luxuries. They would have huge fires, private baths, and servants to tend to all of these things. The Palace of Versailles, the home of the royal family and court, was the most elegant and expensive of them all. It had an impressive 2, 143 windows, 1, 252 fireplaces, and 67 staircases as well as extensive gardens, including a fairy tale village. (Wright 15, 27) The halls of the palace were decorated with intricate molding and chandeliers. The aristocracy entertained themselves with balls and gambling at the palace.

(Luxardo 13) Only wealthy families like aristocrats could afford delicacies like roast meats and desserts. Their main drink was wine. (Wright 12-13) Aristocratic clothing consisted of elegant and extravagant gowns, frock coats, wigs, and knee-britches all made of the finest material in a variety of bright colors. (Luxardo 12) They got around the city in sedan chairs, stage coaches, and pony carriages. (Wright 8-9) Once the revolution was in full swing, the privileges and lavish lifestyle was basically over. ON October 6th of 1789, the royal family and the court were driven out of the palace and into Paris.

(The French Revolution, World Book) Many former nobles were arrested and even executed. (Luxardo 65) Some aristocracy fought the revolution and held onto their privileges until the bitter end, whereas others saw the need for change. The nobility of Blois even created a constitution that they felt France should adopt. Their constitution highlighted equality, personal liberties, and a fair justice system; they submitted this in 1789 though it was obviously never adopted. It demonstrated that there were aristocrats with radical ideas of equality. (Nobility of Blois) The Third Estate The third estate consisted of the common people, the middle and lower classes.

They made up 97% of the population of France, yet were always outvoted by the other two estates generals so they formed the National Assembly. With the help of leader like Maximillian Robespierre combined with their anger at their economic and social mistreatment, the third estate staged a revolution. (Luxardo 15-18, 21) This group ranged from wealthy merchants to street urchins, they were the ones that had to work for their living and they were the backbone of the country. As the only taxpayers and the only people who engaged in trade, the country couldn’t survive without them. (French Revolution, World Book) Despite this, the peasants were treated horribly by the aristocracy of France.

The conditions of the third estate in Paris were a world away from the extravagant luxury of the aristocracy. The middle class had their own modest dwellings, usually in the same buildings as their shops. The poor lived on the street or in poor houses where there were many families in one room. Disease was common due to the disgusting state of the streets and the close proximity of people in the poorhouses. Their diet didn’t help either.

Their diet consisted of soup and bread, but bread was overpriced and the breadlines were often violent. (Wright 12-15) The poor started destroying property; they marched to Versailles, and brought the king and queen to Paris all because of bread. (Rude) As far as clothing goes, the poor basically wore whatever they could find or afford. Revolutionaries would sport the tricolor in the form of a red, blue, and white rosette. To get around, middle class Parisians might hire a gutter-leaper to carry them over puddles, or a horse drawn cart.

The poor, of course, simply walked to get where they could. (Wright 8-11) Before the revolution the peasants were horribly mistreated by the aristocracy. Until August 4, 1789 France was under the feudal system. In the feudal system the peasants lived and farmed on land owned by a noble who acted as their landlord. The noble allowed them to live on his land as they followed his rules and paid taxes to him. Quite often the landlords would ask for far too much from the peasants.

The Count of Montjoye-Vaufrey for example treated the peasants on his lands tyrannically. The inhabitants complained of unfair tithes in which the Count would take around sixty percent of their crops leaving them with less than thirty percent for themselves after planting. The Count would require them to perform grueling physical tasks and if they didn’t perform them he would require a steep payment, “ Poor beggars are not exempt. They are seen going from door to door asking for bread in order to go and work for the seigneur, because recently he refuses all food to those required to work [for him]” said the inhabitants in a complaint about their requirement to work five days for the Count. The inhabitants taxes to the Count were twice as much as the taxes they already had to pay for the King.

(Inhabitants of Montjoye-Vaufrey) With treatment like this in the country and the poor conditions in cities it’s no wonder that the people of the third estate turned violent and rebelled. In the country the peasants burned down noble’s houses, and in the cities they tore stones from the streets and used them as weapons. (Luxardo, 18-19) During the reign of terror these people once again got the short end of the stick. Shopkeepers and Artisans made up thirty-one percent of those executed, peasants made up another twenty-eight percent. (Luxardo, 65) After the revolution, when Napoleon took control, the peasants and third estate once again were without the rights they deserved. (Schama) A Time of Change The clergy lost their authority and possessions.

The Aristocracy lost their traditional privileges and their station in society. The third estate lost the most of all. The people who were part nearly gained liberty but then lost it again. People of all classes lost their lives to the revolution and to the reign of terror. Society was turned on its head and as it struggled to get back up there was chaos.

This chaos traveled around the world through the war, through the conflict with their American allies, and through the horror of the reign of terror. (Luxardo) For all the people of France the period from 1789 to 1799 was a time of change. People turned from subjects to citizens, from aristocrats to people, from rulers to traitors titles were changing and while some like the change to citizens were welcomed but former titles such as that of the King and Queen led to their downfall. In their goal of creating a fair government the revolution was a failure but the effect on France made it almost unrecognizable. The people and the society were changed beyond the point of return.

The lives of everyone in France were changed whether they were revolutionaries or loyal to the King and the old regime everyone was caught up in revolution. The revolution was an act of the people that changed the world. History isn’t a clean textbook clear matter of dates and events. History is a chaotic, messy, complicated affair but, most of all history is the work of the people. ? Bibliography Inhabitants of Montjoye-Vaufey, Cahiers from Rural Districts: Attack on Seigneurial Dues, 1789 Eimrl, Sarel.

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