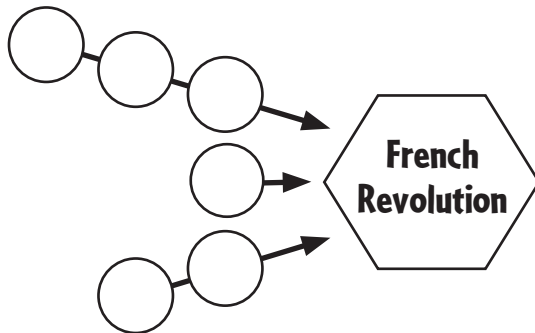


The French Revolution Begins

Big Idea

Social inequality and economic problems contributed to the French Revolution. As you read, use a diagram like the one below to list the factors that contributed to the French Revolution.



Notes

Read to Learn

Background to the Revolution *(page 576)*

Determining Cause and Effect

Why was Louis XVI forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General?

The French Revolution created both a new political order and a new social order. It is considered a turning point in European history.

Since the Middle Ages, the French population had been legally divided into three status groups, or **estates**. The First Estate held the clergy, the Second Estate held the nobles, and the Third Estate held everyone else. The First and Second Estates controlled most of the wealth of the kingdom but did not pay the *taille*, France's chief tax. The Third Estate contained vastly different people, from wealthy merchants to craftspeople to poor peasants to the **bourgeoisie**, or middle class. They all resented the old rigid social order.

The French aristocracy spent money lavishly during economic decline. Louis XVI was forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General, which contained representatives of all three estates, to raise taxes.

From Estates-General to National Assembly (page 579)**Making Inferences**

Why would the king support the old system of voting in the Estates-General?

Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General on May 5, 1789. Most of the Third Estate wanted to set up a constitutional government that would make the clergy and the nobility pay taxes, too. The Third Estate demanded that each deputy have a vote. The king supported the old system, which gave the First and Second Estate the power to outvote the larger Third Estate.

On June 17, 1789, the Third Estate declared that it was the National Assembly and would draft a constitution. Locked out of their meeting place they moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and swore that they would continue meeting until they had a new constitution.

Louis XVI prepared to use force against the Third Estate. After hungry Parisians destroyed the Bastille, in search of arms, the king's authority collapsed in Paris. Revolts then spread all over France. Peasant rebellions became part of a vast panic known as the Great Fear. The peasants were afraid that foreign troops would stop the revolts, so they broke into the houses of the lords to destroy the records of their obligations.

End of the Old Regime (page 581)**Drawing Conclusions**

Why did the French Revolution turn more radical?

In reaction to the peasant rebellion, the National Assembly abolished all legal privileges of the nobles and clergy on August 4, 1789. On August 26 it adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen that proclaimed that all men were free and equal before the law, that appointment to public office should be based on talent, and that no group should be exempt from taxation. It was not clear whether these rights were to include women.

Thousands of Parisian women marched to Versailles. They met with the king and forced him to accept the decrees.

The revolutionaries then decided to weaken the Church, because it had been a supporter of the old system. The National Assembly seized and sold Church lands, and a law was passed requiring that bishops and priests be elected by the people, not appointed by the pope.

The new Constitution of 1791 set up a limited monarchy. A Legislative Assembly would make the laws. However, only males over 25 who paid a certain amount of taxes could vote, and only relatively wealthy people could be deputies. Some people wanted more reform.

European leaders began to fear that revolution would spread to their countries. Austria and Prussia threatened to

use force to restore Louis XVI to full power. The Legislative Assembly declared war on Austria in 1792. Angry citizens protested this, and Paris radicals declared themselves a commune—a popularly run city council. They organized a mob attack on the royal palace and Legislative Assembly. They took the king captive and forced the Legislative Assembly to extend the right to vote to all adult males. Many members of the Paris Commune called themselves **sans-culottes**, because they wore long pants instead of the knee-length breeches favored by the nobles. Economic conditions and the threat of foreign intervention had made the revolution more radical.

Section Wrap-up

Answer these questions to check your understanding of the entire section.

1. Before the French Revolution, which group paid all the taxes?

2. Why did France declare war on Austria?

Informative Writing

Trace the conditions and events that led to the Great Fear.
