

French Revolution Notes

What is the French Revolution?

The French Revolution started in 1789, and dethroned the then existing political institutions, removed the French Monarchy, and cemented a just, responsible government. The siege of Bastille on 14 July 1789 led to the France revolution. It ended with Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power.

What Were the Causes of the French Revolution?

When it comes to the French Revolution notes, the very first step is to understand the reason that led to the revolt. Enlisted are the major reasons for the start of the revolution.

Social Causes (State of French Society in the 18th century)

Social causes were majorly because of the way the common people were bifurcated into different categories based on their earnings and classes. The French society was divided into 3 estates:

- The first estate consisted of the clergy class. These people were exempted from paying any taxes.
- The second estate consisted of the nobilities. On top of being exempted from taxes, they also enjoyed favourable feudal laws and privileges. One of those privileges was feudal dues extracted from the peasants.
- The third estate consisted of the majority of the population. It comprised big businessmen, merchants, lawyers, peasants, servants, and labourers. The third estate was oppressed with Taille taxes levied on essential daily items like salt and tobacco.

Economic Cause (Fight for survival)

The next point in the French Revolution notes is related to the economic causes that led to the beginning of the revolt.

- An overbearing population rise in France was one of the major causes of the French Revolution. The population grew from 23 million to 28 million in 1789. The increment in daily essentials was not met, breaking the society.
- The labour class was employed on fixed wages, which remained the same through inflation of prices. On top of it, the third estate had to meet three different taxes and feudal dues.

- All of this led to a subsistence crisis (people couldn't meet the necessities of living).

Political Causes

- 1774 saw the appointment of Louis XVI as the monarch king of France, also known as the puppet king. He faced an empty treasury, drained through years of wars. He was manipulated by the queen- Marie Antoniette.
- He was helping his overseas allies gain victory over Britain, their common enemy. But this drained their resources in an unprecedented manner.
- The heightened money demand to keep up necessities from the government caused a significant increment in taxes.

French Revolution Notes: The Role of Middle Class

The French Revolution was in major parts due to the rise of another social stratum, the middle class. The 18th century saw the rise of educated men who had the means to bring about large scale changes and get their voices heard. The middle class consisted of overseas tradesmen, manufacturers, and large scale business owners. They actively worked on spreading freedom philosophy and ideas against oppression. In the French Revolution notes, many political figures have been mentioned. Some of them have been listed below:

1. Charles Montesquieu
A nobleman by birth, he was outspoken against oppressive policies. He was a lawyer and fought for the division of power inside the government, against the absolute power of the government.
2. Jean Jacques Rousseau
He is also known as the architect of the French Revolution. He proposed a social contract between people and their representatives, and if the government is found in violation of this contract, they had the right to take action against them.
3. John Locke
A political thinker that refuted the divine doctrine and worked to empower the people.

The Outbreak of the French Revolution

Now that you have understood the primary reasons for the revolt, let us now, through the concise French Revolution notes go through the events that unfolded.

- Louis XVI held an assembly of estate generals calling the third estate representatives to pass bills on the new taxes.

- There were 300 representatives from the first two estates and 600 more educated, well-qualified representatives from the third estate. Women and artisans were denied entry.
- The third estate worked to abolish their voting system, where each estate had one vote. Instead, they wanted to introduce a new system of letting the entire assembly work as a whole, each representative getting one vote each.
- The king rejected the proposal, and the third estate representatives walked out of the assembly. They drafted a new constitution to limit the powers of the monarch of France drafted by Mirabeau and Abbe Sieyes.
- The revolt was strong enough to turn the tides in their favour, the constitution was accepted at the assembly.
- Tithe tax was abolished, and the clergy, as well as the nobles, gave up their privilege.

How France Became a Social Monarchy?

As the events unfolded, France moved towards becoming a social monarchy. This has been elucidated in the French Revolution notes as below:

- 1791 was when the national assembly drafted the constitution. It divided the powers to the judiciary, executive, and the legislature, taking away powers from just one institution.
- An indirect election was used as the method to make laws in the national assembly.
- Citizens above 25 years of age and tax payee of at least three days of labourer's wage were termed active citizens allowed to vote.
- Basic rights were ingrained in the constitution. Freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality of law, etc. were some of those rights.

French Revolution Notes: France Becomes a Republic

- Louis XVI started secret negotiations with the king of Prussia.
- Neighbouring countries wanted to seize the opportunities of the events ongoing due to the French Revolution. The National assembly declares war on Prussia and Austria.
- The 1791 constitution gave political rights to the rich section of the public. This led to a revolt in Paris against the people. Later, the Royal families were imprisoned and elections were held.
- The newly elected assembly was termed the Convection. It abolished the Monarchy in 1792 and made France a republic.

French Revolution Notes: Brutal Reign and Controlled Policies

- From 1793 to 1794, Robespierre Convection used strict policies and brutal punishment to gain effective control.
- All opposers were shut down, imprisoned, or incarcerated.
- If found guilty, they were mercilessly guillotined in public settings to send a message.
- Meat and bread were rationed, and peasants suffered losses due to selling at fixed prices set by the government.

Directory Rules France

- A new constitution abolished voting on non-propertied sections of society.
- It introduced a directory that was elected by two legislative councils.
- The clashing of the directory with the legislative paved the way to the rise of Military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The Rise and Fall of Napoleon Bonaparte

- In 1804, Napoleon seized the reins of France and declared himself the Emperor. He started conquering neighbouring nations and established his dominance by making kingdoms ruling through his family members.
- The feudal system was abolished. Bonaparte saw himself as a modernizer and introduced private property protection laws and equal weight & measure systems in decimals.
- Initially hailed as a liberator, his military tactics were soon termed crude, invading, and violent.
- The battle of Waterloo in 1815 saw his defeat.

French Revolution Notes: Some Important Dates and Events

Tabulated below are some of the important dates and events that outlined the causes and outcome of the revolt. French Revolution notes are incomplete without mentioning these dates!

Timeline	Events
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1774	Louis XVI becomes king in the most unstable time for the economy, and discontent rises, which leads to the French Revolution.
1789	Convection of Estate Generals, rejection and revolt at the National Assembly, the storming of Bastille and revolts in the countryside.
1791	The Constitution is drafted and used to limit the Monarch's powers and guarantee rights for everyone.
1793-94	France becomes Republic, Guillotine of the King, Jacobin republic gets squashed, and a Directory starts ruling France.
1804-1815	Bonaparte rises as a military dictator annexing kingdoms finally to be defeated at Waterloo.