

The meaning of the French Revolution

- “People” are sovereign ideal
- Beginning of nationalism as powerful political idea
- Birth of modern politics and divide between left and right
- Important step in the formation of a concept of universal human rights

Background of the French Revolution:

- War and taxes
 - Era of constant warfare in Europe, 1600-1815
 - Development of the military-fiscal state
 - Government finding resources to fund the military
 - Rise of absolute monarchy and strong, centralized government
- Social Changes
 - Expansion of trade and the population growth in Europe
 - Emergence of the middle (educated) classes and working class
 - Literacy and the formation of public opinion
- New ideas of government
 - Scientific discoveries and new faith in human reason
 - Belief that human beings are naturally free
 - Theory of contract government and rejection of both absolute monarchy and corporate society

Public Opinion and the Debate Over Royal Finances

- French war debts and the problem of royal finances
- Jacques Necker and *The Compte Rendu Au Roi (1781)*
 - Hired by Louis XVI to fix finances
 - Published a full report of royal finances to the public
- Opposition to Louis XVI's attempts at reform
- Popular demand for Necker's return and convention of an Estates General

What was the Estates General?

- An advisory board to the king
- First estate: the Church
- Second Estate: the nobility
- Third Estate: everyone else
- Voting carried out according to Estates



• didn't pay taxes

Advocating for the Third Estate

- Debate over the Estates General and argument for the Third Estate
- Abbé Sieyès's: *What is the third estate? And its impact*
- Popular enthusiasm for the Estates General as a chance to participate in politics
- Clergy and nobility's opposition to change

Revolt of the Third Estate

- Tennis Court Oath (June 20, 1789): Third Estate proclaims itself the National Assembly after being locked out of the Estates General
- Claims to legitimacy as representatives of the French nation
- Louis XVI recognizes the Assembly; drafting of the constitution begins

First Sparks of Revolution

- Louis XVI dismisses Necker; rumors of military activity
- Riots in Paris and the storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789)
- Emergence of revolutionary committees and violence in the countryside

End of the Beginning: the August Decrees

- Abolition of the privileges of the nobility and clergy
- Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (August 25, 1789)
- Creation of a constitutional monarchy (1791):
 - Louis XVI becomes King of the French

The Revolution Intensifies

- Fiscal deficits, assignats, and the nationalization of Church property
- Civil Constitution of the Clergy (July 12, 1790)
 - Bans all monasteries, priests and monks from France
- Persecution of refractory priests
 - Enemy of the French if priests don't take an oath to the state

Monarchy and the threat of war

- Louis XVI's discontent and gathering counter-revolutionary forces
- Role of émigrés outside of France
 - Nobles outside of France gathered to overthrow the government and Louis XVI supported them unofficially
- Austrian emperor's threat of war
- Seizure of émigrés property and drive to war