

## Outline of the French Revolution

FIRST STAGE: June, 1789 to September, 1792. Period dominated mainly by the National Assembly. Moderate, middle-class phase with little violence.

- In the summer of 1788 King Louis XVI summoned the Estates-General to meet in May of 1789.
- June 17, 1789 — The third estate proclaims itself the National Assembly.
- June 20, 1789 — Oath of the Tennis Court marks the real beginning of the French Revolution.
- June 27, 1789 — King orders the delegates of the privileged classes to meet with the third estate in the National Assembly.
- July 14, 1789 — Destruction of the Bastille.
- Summer of 1789 — Revolt of the peasants (grande peur).
- August 4, 1789 — Destruction of feudal privileges in one night!
- September, 1789 — Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.
- November, 1789 — Secularization of the Catholic Church; confiscation of Church lands.
- August 27, 1791 — Declaration of Pillnitz by Austria and Prussia.
- October, 1791 — The National Assembly drafts a new constitution, the first of three in the course of the Revolution. France becomes a limited monarchy. The lawmaking powers are bestowed on a Legislative Assembly.
- October, 1791 to September, 1792 — The monarchy continues until suspended. In this period the power of the lower classes is on the rise. Legislative Assembly governs.

SECOND STAGE: September, 1792 to October, 1795. Period dominated by the National Convention. This phase witnessed the height of the Revolution and was dominated by the lower classes and the radical extremists; this resulted in the violent Reign of Terror.

On August 10, 1792, the Legislative Assembly voted to suspend the king and ordered the election, by universal manhood suffrage, of a National Convention to draft a new constitution.

In the period 1792 to 1797 the War of the First Coalition was waged against France and the Revolution.

- September 2-7, 1792 — The September Massacres at Paris. Suspects are taken from the prisons and, after hasty trials by improvised tribunals, are summarily done away with by the mob!
- September 21, 1792 — Abolition of the monarchy. France declared a republic. Beginning of the government of the National Assembly.
- January 21, 1793 — Execution of Louis XVI.
- April 6, 1793 — Committee of Public Safety takes power. Composed of 9 (later 12) members who exercised dictatorial power. Led by Robespierre.
- June 22, 1793 — Constitution of 1793 written. An out-and-out democratic system, it was never put into effect!

September, 1793 to July 1794 — The Reign of Terror. For this period the most reliable estimates place the number of executions at approximately 20,000 in France as a whole.

November 10, 1793 — Abolition of the worship of God. Cult of Reason established. New calendar instituted. New army created.

December of 1793 — Retreat of the Allies (coalition opposing France) across the Rhine. The French capture Worms and Speier, and take Toulon from the British. First appearance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a young artillery officer, closely connected with Robespierre and the Jacobins.

June 8, 1794 — Festival of the Supreme Being, a cult of which Robespierre is the high priest! The cult of reason had been abolished.

July 28, 1794 — On this date Robespierre and 21 of his lieutenants were beheaded, after no more pretense of a trial than he himself had allowed his opponents! In the last six weeks of his virtual dictatorship, no fewer than 1285 heads had rolled from the scaffold in Paris!

In the summer of 1794 the Reign of Terror came to an end, and soon afterward the Revolution passed into its third and final stage. The event which inaugurated the change was the Thermidorian Reaction, so called from the month of Thermidor (heat month—July 19 to August 18) in the new calendar. The execution of Robespierre represented the completion of a cycle. The Revolution had now devoured its own children. One after another the radical giants had fallen — Marat, Hébert, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just. The only remaining leaders of the Convention were men of moderate sympathies who, as time went on, inclined toward increasing conservatism and toward any kind of political chicanery which would keep them in power! Gradually the Revolution came once more to reflect the interests of the bourgeoisie. Priests, royalists, and others who had fled, returned from abroad to add the weight of their influence to the conservative trend.

THIRD STAGE: August 22, 1795 to November 9, 1799. Period dominated by the Directory and the conservative middle class. Least important stage of the Revolution.

August 22, 1795 — The National Convention adopts a new constitution, the third of the Revolution! This document lent the stamp of approval officially to the victory of the prosperous classes. The Legislative Body was to be composed of two houses, a lower house or Council of Five Hundred and a senate or Council of Ancients; executive authority was vested in a board of five men known as the Directory nominated by the lower house and elected by the upper house.

October 26, 1795 to November 9, 1799 — The Directory in power. This is a period of stagnation, wholesale corruption, and cynicism.

November 9, 1799 — Napoleon takes over the government by a coup d'état after having conspired with some of the directors and slipping into France secretly from Egypt. End of the Revolution!