

The French Revolution - Timeline

May 1789

Meeting of the Estates-General

As a result of public pressure, Louis XVI called the representatives to meet at Versailles. The representatives brought *cahiers de doléances* (lists of grievances) to share with the king in the hope of encouraging political change. Little was settled during these meetings, due to disagreements between the king and the three estates.

June 1789

Creation of the National Assembly and the Tennis Court Oath

After the failure of the meeting of the Estates-General, many of the representatives of all three estates proclaimed themselves to be the *National Assembly*.

On June 20, the king locked them out of their regular meeting room and they assembled at a nearby tennis court. There, they swore not to disband until France had a constitution in what became known as the *Tennis Court Oath*.

14 July 1789

Storming of the Bastille

The king refused to recognize the legitimacy of the National Assembly. He assembled royal troops near Paris. Rumours of an attack by the king spurred crowds to storm the royal prison, the Bastille, to release prisoners and collect weapons to use for defence.

4 August 1789

Abolition of the Feudal System

Due to rumours of a poor economy and the scarcity of food, fear and panic in the countryside led to attacks on the estates of the nobility.

The National Assembly abolished the Estates-General, ending the feudal system and gaining legislative power in France.

August 1789

Creation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

In 1789, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was passed by the National Assembly. It described the rights of individuals and guiding democratic principles.

The French Revolution - Timeline

October 1789

March on Versailles

In October 1789, several thousand people marched to Versailles to protest the high price of bread. The protesters discovered the plans of the royal family to flee France. They forced the king and his family to return to Paris, where they would have less opportunity to escape.

1790

Creation of a Constitutional Monarchy

In 1790, the National Assembly wrote a new constitution for France that kept the country a monarchy, but transformed the distribution of political powers. It proclaimed France a *sovereign nation*, made all government officials subject to the law, dissolved the royal administration, and shifted power from Paris to 83 individual districts. It also limited the powers of the king and gave most of the power to an elected legislative assembly. Other actions of the National Assembly included:

- the elimination of the nobility as a legally defined class
- the granting of the same civil rights to all citizens
- the incorporation of the Church within the state, stripping clergy of their property and special rights

1790–1793

Emergence of the Jacobins and Girondins

Between 1790 and 1793, two different political groups emerged, the Jacobins and Girondins. The Girondins were moderates who wanted to maintain the monarchy, while the Jacobins were radicals who wanted to establish France as a republic. The Jacobins stormed the Tuileries Palace in August 1792, where the royal family was, and the king was suspended from his duties by the elected Legislative Assembly.

The French Revolution - Timeline

April 1792

France Declares War on Austria

With the changes to the political structure of France, many nobles fled to Austria and Prussia and attempted to mobilize foreign powers against the new government of France. This threat of an invasion led to the declaration of war on Austria in 1792, the beginning of a series of conflicts known as the French Revolutionary Wars. Prussia, the largest of the German states, joined the Austrians against France a few weeks later.

September 1792

National Convention and Declaration of France as a Republic

The National Convention, comprising representatives from the Jacobins and the Girondins, voted to remove the monarchy and establish a republic.

January 1793

Trial and Execution of Louis XVI

Louis XVI was tried and found guilty of treason by the new republic. He was sentenced to death, but his execution was not supported by all of France.

August 1793

Levée en Masse (Conscription)

Facing a series of military losses against Austria, Prussia, and Great Britain, the government instituted a *levée en masse* (mass conscription) to provide additional soldiers for France's military efforts.

The French Revolution - Timeline

October 1793

Execution of Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI, was arrested and tried for a number of charges, including treason. She was found guilty and executed.

1793–1794

Reign of Terror

Facing civil unrest across the country, the revolutionary government—the National Convention—arrested and executed up to 40 000 perceived enemies of the republic in what became known as the *Reign of Terror*.

1795

The Emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte was trained in the French military and quickly advanced through the ranks during the early years of the Revolution. During a coup, he repelled attackers with his celebrated “**whiff of grapeshot.**”

November 1799

Napoleon Bonaparte Leads a Successful Coup against the French Republic and becomes Leader of France

Napoleon was approached to organize a coup against the government in France. His successful overthrow of the Directory led to new leadership by the organizers of the coup, Abbé Sieyès and Roger Ducos. But Napoleon had more ambitious plans. He manipulated the situation and was elected First Consul, the new leader of France.

1800–1804

Napoleon Creates Reforms in France

As leader, Napoleon centralized administration of the government departments, created the lycée school system, implemented a tax system, the Bank of France, a set of civil laws (the Napoleonic Code), and road and sewer systems.

The French Revolution - Timeline

1804

Napoleon Is Declared Emperor of France

Napoleon's success in reforming France and expanding French influence throughout the country made him very popular with the people. They voted overwhelmingly to make him "Consul for Life." With that power, he was able to crown himself Emperor of France. Despite the relative stability under Napoleon's rule, his position was threatened by a series of assassination attempts. Proposals to further solidify his position as leader were brought forward. The question of Napoleon's appointment as Consul for Life was put to the people of France: 3 509 000 voted "Yes" out of a total of 3 580 000 votes cast. In 1804, the constitution was rewritten again, France was reinvented as an empire, and Napoleon Bonaparte was crowned its first emperor.

1804–1814

Napoleon Builds His Empire

During his reign as emperor, Napoleon expanded French control and influence well beyond the country's borders. As part of his strategy to expand his empire, he placed his brothers on the thrones of Spain and the Kingdom of Italy, and married off his sisters to other royal families.

Napoleon's conquests and expansion served to spread new ideas associated with the revolution throughout Europe, in particular the Napoleonic Code, which became the basis for the legal systems of many European countries.

1805–1814

Napoleon's Empire at War and the Continental System

Napoleon expanded his empire by claiming territories on behalf of France. Concerns about his expansion led to wars for most of his reign with the coalitions of Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, and Russia. These were attempts to control Napoleon's expansion.

Napoleon also had economic disputes with Britain. In response to Britain's funding of military efforts against his empire, Napoleon created the Continental System, an embargo prohibiting his allies and territories within his empire from trading with Britain. It had limited success in controlling Britain.

March–June 1815

The Hundred Days and the Battle of Waterloo

Napoleon's reign ended with his defeat at Leipzig, a Germanic state. He was removed as emperor and exiled to a remote island in the Atlantic called Elba. The coalition of nations that defeated Napoleon helped Louis XVIII return as the monarch of France.

Napoleon escaped from Elba and returned to France. He seized control of France again and ruled for a period of time known as *The Hundred Days*.

In response to Napoleon's second reign, another coalition was formed at Waterloo, in Belgium, and Napoleon was defeated once again.

Again, Napoleon was exiled. He remained under arrest on the island of St. Helena until his death, six years later.