

AIM: How did France change during the French Revolution's 'liberal phase' (1789-1792)?

DO NOW: Please answer the question in your binder

Imagine you are living in France in the late 1700s. Your parents are merchants who earn a good living. However, after taxes they have hardly any money left. You know that other people are even worse off than you, while the nobility lives in luxury and pays practically no taxes. Many people in France are desperate for change, but they are uncertain how to bring about that change. Some think that representatives of the people should demand fair taxes and just laws. Others support violent revolution. You wonder what will happen next. *Q: Would you try to change the government? How? Would you take part in a violent revolution? Why or why not?*

Q1: What was the Estates-General? What was unfair about it? How did the Third Estate respond?

When Louis XVI could not raise more money to finance the government, he called the **Estates-General** into session for the first time in 175 years. Under the medieval rules, each estate had one vote. The first two estates could always outvote the Third Estate. The Third Estate felt that each representative should be given a vote. The king ordered the Estates-General to follow the medieval rules. Determined to wield power, the delegates of the Third Estate withdrew from the Estates General and formed the **National Assembly**. Three days later, the Third Estate delegates found themselves locked out of their meeting room. They broke down a door to an indoor tennis court, pledging to stay until they had drawn up a new constitution. This pledge became known as the **Tennis Court Oath**. In response to these events, Louis stationed his mercenary army of Swiss guards around Versailles.

Q2: Why did people 'storm' the Bastille? Why do you think this day is still celebrated today in France?

In Paris, rumors flew. Some people suggested that Louis was intent on using military force to dismiss the National Assembly. Others charged that the foreign troops were coming to Paris to massacre French citizens. People began to gather weapons in order to defend the city against attack. On July 14, a mob searching for gunpowder and arms stormed the **Bastille**, a Paris prison. The mob overwhelmed the guards and seized control of the building. The angry attackers hacked the prison commander and several guards to death, and then paraded around the streets with the dead men's heads on pikes. The fall of the Bastille became a great symbolic act of revolution to the French people.



Q3: What was the Great Fear? How would you feel if you were a French noble in 1789?

Before long, rebellion spread from Paris into the countryside. From one village to the next, wild rumors circulated that the nobles were hiring outlaws to terrorize the peasants. A wave of senseless panic called the **Great Fear** rolled through France. The peasants soon became outlaws themselves. Armed with pitchforks and other farm tools, they broke into nobles' manor houses and destroyed the old legal papers that bound them to pay feudal dues. In some cases, the peasants simply burned down the manor houses.

Q4: What reforms were made in the August Decrees?

On August 4, 1789, noblemen joined other members of the National Assembly in what is known as the August Decrees. In the course of a few hours, feudalism was abolished. The nobles and clergy lost their special privileges. The assembly adopted the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**. Its first article declares that “all men are born free and equal in rights.” The Declaration provided the people of France with freedom of speech, religion, and the press. It also guaranteed the right of the people to participate in the government. In keeping with these principles, revolutionary leaders adopted the expression “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” as their slogan. Such sentiments, however, did not apply to everyone. When writer Olympe de Gouges published a declaration of the rights of women, her ideas were rejected. Later, in 1793, she was declared an enemy of the Revolution and executed.



Q5: How did the new government change the Church in France? Why were these changes controversial?

Many of the National Assembly's early reforms focused on the Church. The assembly took over Church lands and declared that Church officials and priests were to be elected and paid as state officials. Proceeds from the sale of Church lands helped pay off France's huge debt. The assembly's actions alarmed millions of French peasants, who were devout Catholics. The effort to make the Church a part of the state offended them, even though it was in accord with Enlightenment philosophy. They believed that the pope should rule over a church independent of the state. From this time on, many peasants opposed the assembly's reforms.

Q6: What happened to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in October, 1789?

In October, thousands of Parisian women rioted over the rising price of bread. Carrying knives, axes, and other weapons, the women marched on Versailles. First, they demanded that the National Assembly take action to provide bread. Then they broke into the palace, killing some of the guards. The women demanded that Louis and Marie Antoinette return to Paris. After some time, Louis agreed. A few hours later the king, his family, and servants left Versailles. Their exit signaled the change of power and radical reforms about to overtake France.



Q7: Why did the King and Queen try to escape? How did this impact their reputation?

By 1791, the Assembly had written a Constitution, which set up a limited monarchy and a representative assembly. It declared that people had natural rights and that it was the job of the government to protect those rights. As the National Assembly restructured the government, some of the king's advisers warned him that he and his family were in danger. In June 1791, the royal family tried to escape from France to the Austrian Netherlands. As they neared the border, however, they were apprehended and returned to Paris under guard. Louis's attempted escape increased the influence of his radical enemies in the government and sealed his fate.