

The French Revolution

(mostly) through 1st Person Documents

Stage 1 – no documents assigned

Stage 2 – Doc. A: *A July 16th, 1789, report by the British ambassador to France. Stationed in Paris, he wrote the following about the Storming of the Bastille and the insurrection in Paris:*

“I have now to lay before Your Grace an account of the general revolt of July 14th, with the extraordinary circumstances attending it...

In the morning of Tuesday July 14th the Hospital of Invalids [the veterans’ retirement home] was summonsed to surrender and was taken possession of after a very slight resistance. All the cannon, small arms and ammunition found therein were immediately seized upon, and everyone who chose to arm himself was supplied with what was necessary...

In the evening a large detachment with two pieces of cannon went to the Bastille to demand the ammunition that was there ... the governor Marquis de Launey, contrary to all precedent, fired upon the people and killed several.

This proceeding so enraged the populace that they rushed to the very gates with a determination to force their way through if possible. The governor agreed to let in a certain number of them on condition that they should not commit any violence. These terms being acceded to, a detachment of about forty in number advanced and were admitted; but the drawbridge was immediately drawn up again and the whole party instantly massacred.

This breach [violation] of honours, aggravated by so glaring an act of inhumanity, excited a spirit of revenge and tumult such as might naturally be expected: the two pieces of cannon were immediately placed against the gate and very soon made a breach which... produced a sudden surrender of that fortress.

Marquis de Launey and [a few others] who had been noticed as being more active [at shooting at the people] than the rest, were seized and ... after a very summary trial before the tribunal there, ... put to death and Marquis de Launey had also his head cut off ... but with circumstances of barbarity too shocking to relate...

Thus, my lord, the greatest Revolution that we know anything of has been effected with, comparatively speaking — if the magnitude of the event is considered — the loss of very few lives. From this moment we may consider France as a free country; the king a very limited monarch, and the nobility as reduced to a level with the rest of the nation.”

Stage 3 – (2 docs!)

Doc. B) *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (the National Assembly, August 1789)*

The Representatives of the French people, organized in National Assembly, considering that ignorance, forgetfulness, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole causes of public miseries and the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man, so that this declaration, being ever present to all the members of the social body, may unceasingly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, and those of the executive power, may at each moment be compared with the aim and of every political institution and thereby may be more respected; and in order that the demands of the citizens, grounded henceforth upon simple and incontestable principles, may always take the direction of maintaining the constitution and welfare of all.

In consequence, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen:

Articles:

1. Men are born free and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be based only on public utility.
2. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The sources of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise authority that does not proceed from it in plain terms.
4. Liberty consists in the power to do anything that does not injure others; accordingly, the exercise of the rights of each man has no limits except those that secure the enjoyment of these same rights to the other members of society. These limits can be determined only by law.

5. The law has only the rights to forbid such actions as are injurious to society. Nothing can be forbidden that is not interdicted by the law, and no one can be constrained to do that which it does not order.

6. Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to take part personally, or by their representatives, and its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in its eyes, are equally eligible to all public dignities, places, and employments, according to their capacities, and without other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.

7. No man can be accused, arrested, or detained, except in the cases determined by the law and according to the forms it has prescribed. Those who procure, expedite, execute, or cause arbitrary orders to be executed, ought to be punished: but every citizen summoned were seized in virtue of the law ought to render instant obedience; he makes himself guilty by resistance.

8. The law ought only to establish penalties that are strict and obviously necessary, and no one can be punished except in virtue of a law established and promulgated prior to the offense and legally applied.

9. Every man being presumed innocent until he has been pronounced guilty, if it is thought indispensable to arrest him, all severity that may not be necessary to secure his person ought to be strictly suppressed by law.

10. No one should be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not upset the public order established by law.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man; every citizen can then freely speak, write, and print, subject to responsibility for the abuse of this freedom in the cases is determined by law.

12. The guarantee of the rights of man and citizen requires a public force; this force then is instituted for the advantage of all and not for the personal benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

13. A general tax is indispensable for the maintenance of the public force and for the expenses of administration; it ought to be equally apportioned among all citizens according to their means.

14. All the citizens have a right to ascertain, by themselves or by their representatives, the necessity of the public tax, to consent to it freely, to follow the employment of it, and to determine the quota, the assessment, the collection, and the duration of it.

15. Society has the right to call for an account of his administration by every public agent.

16. Any society in which the guarantee of the rights is not secured, or the separation of powers not determined, has no constitution at all.

17. Property being a sacred to and inviolable right, no one can be deprived of it, unless legally established public necessity evidently demands it, under the condition of a just and prior indemnity.

Stage 3, Doc. C: "The French Revolution and the Catholic Church," by Gemma Betros, excerpted from: History Review, Issue 68, Dec. 2010

pre: What criticisms would followers of the Enlightenment have against organized religion?

¶1) The 18th-century Catholic Church attracted growing criticism from the philosophes, the intellectuals of the Enlightenment who systematically questioned every aspect of French government and society. The Enlightenment quest to promote reason as the basis for legitimacy and progress led to growing criticism of the Catholic church, especially in France. One philosopher complained in 1782 that Paris was 'full of priests and clerics who were occupied with nothing but 'useless and trifling' matters, such as spending their days in prayer (philosophes thought they should instead be working for the good of the nation). The vows taken by priests and nuns also led to concerns about individual liberty ...

2) Another issue is that the Church's revenue (total \$) in 1789 was estimated at an immense 150 million livres. It owned around six per cent of land throughout France, and its abbeys, churches, monasteries and convents, as well as the schools, hospitals and other institutions it operated, formed a visible reminder of the Church's dominance in French society. The Church was permitted to collect the tithe (tax), which was one-tenth of agricultural production, and was

exempt from direct taxation on its earnings. This prosperity (wealth) caused discontent and calls for the reform, especially in the context of the nation's bankruptcy.

3) The Nationalization of Property: On 2 November 1789, France's new National Assembly passed a decree that placed all Church property 'at the disposition of the nation' [meaning the government took over church land]. Expectedly, many in the Catholic church argued against this, and they were deemed "*counter-revolutionaries*." ***

Stage 4 – doc. D: *the events of October 1789, when the king and his family were forced to leave Versailles and take up residence in Paris, as described by a French aristocrat who was a delegate to the Estates General.*

"At six in the morning a crowd of women and armed men assembled at Versailles], summoned by the beating of drums. Shouts of rage against the royal bodyguards were heard. ... One of the National Guards led the way up the King's staircase... Some of the Bodyguard ran up and said: "My friends, you love your King and yet you even come into his palace to disturb him." No one answered.

The column continued to advance. The Bodyguard mustered in their hall. The doors were soon broken down and they were forced to evacuate it. The conspirators approached the Queen's apartments crying "We are going to cut off her head, tear out her heart, fry her liver – and that won't be the end of it." [A guard] ... called: "Save the Queen, they mean to kill her. I am alone facing two thousand tigers." One of [the conspirators] tried to stab him with his pike but he parried the blow. Another taking the pike by the head, struck him a blow with the butt which felled him to the ground... [the guard] streaming with blood, was left for dead.

... Meantime Madame Auger, first Lady of the Bedchamber, got the Queen into a petticoat and threw a cloak over her shoulders. The Queen then ran up the private staircase leading to the King's apartment and knocked at the door of the antechamber. In the noise and confusion her knocks were not heard and she waited for a few moments in fearful anxiety. At last the door was opened. The Queen entered and burst into tears calling, "Save me, my friends, my dear friends."

... The conspirators ... broke down the doors leading to the Queen's apartment and burst into her bedroom. Approaching the bed they stabbed it with their pikes. The men of the Bodyguard, who had barricaded themselves behind tables and stools, could not hold out for long. The tops of the tables were being knocked to pieces by repeated blows. ...

The whole chateau presented a picture of the deepest consternation [worry]. The Queen and the royal family had retired to the private apartments. As [their son] ruffled his sister's hair, he kept saying, "Mama, I'm so hungry." The Queen, with tears in her eyes, told him he must be patient and wait till the turmoil was over... "They're going to kill my son," cried the Queen, carried away by an involuntary spasm of fear. ...

Then, someone came to tell the Queen that the people were calling for her. She hesitated a moment. Lafayette said she had to show herself in order to calm the people. "In that case," she said with spirit, "I'll do it, even if it costs me my life." Then, holding the hands of her two children, she advanced to the balcony. "No children!" cried a man in the crowd, so the Queen handed over the Dauphin and the princess to Madame de Tourzel and advanced on to the balcony alone. One of the conspirators aimed his piece at her but shocked at the enormity of the crime he had planned, did not dare to carry it out.

Several persons insisted that the King should come and live in Paris. The mob repeated loudly "We want the King in Paris". Lafayette suggested the only way to calm the disorder was for the King to agree to the people's wish and take up residence in the capital. The King promised to go to Paris on the same day, on the condition that he was accompanied by the Queen and his family. He begged the people to spare the lives of his Bodyguard. ...

The members of the Bodyguard showed themselves on the balcony... They threw their bandoliers down to the people, gave their hats to the Grenadiers and, borrowing forage caps from the latter, put them on their heads. The people applauded crying, "Long live the Bodyguard!" Rapturous joy succeeded the intoxication of fury. Peace was solemnly proclaimed. Frequent salvos of artillery and musketry announced the victory of the people and the King's departure for Paris...

The King left at noon. The heads of *Monsieurs des Hutes* and *de Varicourt* [two members of the Bodyguard executed by the mob] led the procession

on pikes. Following them were 40 to 50 members of the Bodyguard, on foot and unarmed, escorted by a body of men armed with sabres and pikes. ...

They were surrounded by men and women who compelled them to shout 'Vive la Nation!' and to eat and drink with them. A mixed bag of pikemen, Swiss Guards, soldiers of the Flanders Regiment, women plastered with [colors of the revolution] and carrying poplar branches and other women sitting astride on the guns, came before and after the King's coach. Every musket was wreathed in oak leaves, in token of the victory, and there was a continual discharge of musketry as the people cried "We are bringing the Baker, Mrs. Baker and the Baker's boy", slogans of gross insult to the Queen and threats against priests and the nobles. Such was the procession, barbarous [uncivilized] and criminal, that surrounded the King, Queen and royal family on the six hour drive to [Paris]..."

Stage V – no docs

Stage VI – 2 docs. 1st = Doc. E: R. Twiss (a Brit.): A Trip to Paris: July – Aug. 1792

The iron rails in the churches which part the choir from the nave, and also those which encompass chapels and tombs, are all ordered to be converted into heads for pikes.

I went once to Versailles; there is hardly anything in the palace but the bare walls, a very few of the ... tapestry and large pictures remaining, as it has now been two years uninhabited.

... The common people are in general much better clothed than they were before the Revolution, which may be ascribed to their not being as grievously taxed as they were.

Stage VI, 2nd doc, doc F: more from "The French Revolution & the Catholic Church," by Gemma Betros, excerpted from: History Review, Issue 68, Dec. 2010

On 12 July 1790 the Assembly went further and ordered that clergy were to be paid by government according to a new salary scale (decided by the government, not the church), and priests and bishops

were to be elected by citizens [rather than appointed by the Church].

The pope's refusal to approve the Constitution, together with growing criticism from conservative members of the Assembly, cast more doubt on the Church's support. In an attempt to resolve the issue, the Assembly decreed on 27 November 1790 that all clergy must take a public oath of loyalty to the Constitution or surrender their salary and position. This asked leaders of the Church to choose a first loyalty: Revolution or Church? ... In November the government stopped paying priests who did not take the oath, and prohibited their use of religious buildings. On 6 April 1792 it banned all forms of religious dress, to force people to see priests as 'citizens like any others'.

... On 10 August 1792 the Assembly ordered that all priests who had not sworn allegiance to the Revolution be arrested and deported. And fearing that counter-Revolutionary prisoners would try to escape, supporters of the French Revolution slaughtered over 1200 prisoners, including at least 200 priests. After the revolutionary government made it a goal to eliminate 'enemies of liberty' and 'enemies of the people', mounting numbers of priests and nuns were arrested and placed on trial. ... From here sprung a movement referred to as 'dechristianisation', which aimed to excise [remove] religion from French society. Even priests who'd sworn allegiance to the Revolution were advised to abandon the priesthood and were encouraged – or in some cases forced – to marry. Priests who continued to practice now faced arrest and deportation. In October 1793, public worship was forbidden and over the next few months all visible signs of Christianity were removed. Many of the priests who'd left the country by choice or deportation had used their position outside of France to criticize the revolution. This caused revolutionaries inside France to want revenge. Church bells were pulled down and melted, ostensibly for defense, crosses were taken from churches and cemeteries, and statues, relics and works of art were seized and sometimes destroyed. This caused considerable concern at official levels, not least because of the destruction wrought on France's artistic and cultural heritage. On 23 November 1793, churches were closed, to be converted into warehouses, manufacturing works or even stables.

Stage VII, doc G: *The Execution of Louis XVI, according to Henry Essex Edgeworth de Firmont (a priest who, upon the king's request, accompanied the king to his execution), 21 Jan. 1793*

“The unfortunate Louis XVI ... cast his eyes upon me, to assist him in his last moments, if condemned to die. He would not make any application to the ruling party.... The message he sent me was touching beyond expression.... A King, though in chains, had a right to command, but he commanded not. My attendance was requested merely as a pledge of my attachment for him, and as a favour, which he hoped I would not refuse. But as the service was likely to be attended with some danger for me, he dared not to insist. ... Being obliged ... I resolved to comply with what appeared to be at that moment the call of Almighty God; and ... made answer to the most unfortunate of Kings, that whether he lived or died, I would be his friend to the last ...

The King finding himself seated in the carriage, where he could neither speak to me nor be spoken to without witness, kept a profound silence. I presented him with my breviary, the only book I had with me, and he seemed to accept it with pleasure: he appeared anxious that I should point out to him the psalms that were most suited to his situation, and he recited them attentively with me. The gendarmes, without speaking, seemed astonished and confounded at the tranquil piety of their monarch, to whom they doubtless never had before approached so near.

The procession lasted almost two hours; the streets were lined with citizens, all armed, some with pikes and some with guns, and the carriage was surrounded by a body of troops, formed of the most desperate people of Paris. As another precaution, they had placed before the horses a number of drums, intended to drown any noise or murmur in favour of the King; but how could they be heard? Nobody appeared either at the doors or windows, and in the street nothing was to be seen, but armed citizens—citizens, all rushing towards the commission of a crime, which perhaps they detested in their hearts.

The carriage proceeded thus in silence to the Place de Louis XV, and stopped in the middle of a large space that had been left round the scaffold: this space was surrounded with cannon, and beyond, an armed multitude extended as far as the eye could reach. As soon as the King perceived that the carriage stopped, he turned and whispered to me, 'We are arrived, if I mistake not.' My silence answered that we were. One of the guards came to open the carriage door, and the gendarmes

would have jumped out, but the King stopped them, and leaning his arm on my knee, 'Gentlemen,' said he, with the tone of majesty, 'I recommend to you this good man; take care that after my death no insult be offered to him—I charge you to prevent it.' ... As soon as the King had left the carriage, three guards surrounded him, and would have taken off his clothes, but he repulsed them with haughtiness: he undressed himself, untied his neckcloth, opened his shirt, and arranged it himself. The guards, whom the determined countenance of the King had for a moment disconcerted, seemed to recover their audacity. They surrounded him again, and would have seized his hands. 'What are you attempting?' said the King, drawing back his hands. 'To bind you,' answered the wretches. 'To bind me,' said the King, with an indignant air. 'No! I shall never consent to that: do what you have been ordered, but you shall never bind me ...'

The path leading to the scaffold was extremely rough and difficult to pass; the King was obliged to lean on my arm, and from the slowness with which he proceeded, I feared for a moment that his courage might fail; but what was my astonishment, when arrived at the last step, I felt that he suddenly let go my arm, and I saw him cross with a firm foot the breadth of the whole scaffold; silence, by his look alone, fifteen or twenty drums that were placed opposite to me; and in a voice so loud, that it must have been heard at the Pont Tournant, I heard him pronounce distinctly these memorable words: 'I die innocent of all the crimes laid to my charge; I pardon those who have occasioned my death; and I pray to God that the blood you are going to shed may never be visited on France.'

He was proceeding, when a man on horseback, in the national uniform, and with a ferocious cry, ordered the drums to beat. Many voices were at the same time heard encouraging the executioners. They seemed reanimated themselves, in seizing with violence the most virtuous of Kings, they dragged him under the axe of the guillotine, which with one stroke severed his head from his body. All this passed in a moment. The youngest of the guards, who seemed about eighteen, immediately seized the head, and showed it to the people as he walked round the scaffold; he accompanied this monstrous ceremony with the most atrocious and indecent gestures. At first an awful silence prevailed; at length some cries of 'Vive la République!' were heard. By degrees the voices multiplied, and in less than ten minutes this cry, a thousand times repeated, became the universal shout of the multitude, and every hat was in the air.

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