



The French Revolution

The French Revolution was an important period in the history of Western Civilization. During this time, France's absolute monarchy was replaced with a republican government. The Roman Catholic Church was also forced to give up much of its power.

France would still swing between republic, empire, and monarchy for 75 years after the revolution ended. But this event is seen as a major turning point in the age of democracy.

Many political, social, and economic factors led to the revolution. The old rulers were destroyed by their own rigidity. The rising middle class allied itself with workers and the poor. They were influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment.

In the months before the revolution, food was scarce. The price of bread was so high that workers could not afford it. Unemployment was **rampant**. Those who were caught stealing risked being beheaded by the guillotine. King Louis XVI failed to deal with these problems effectively.

As the revolution proceeded, the king began to fight with his officials, which led to much bloodshed. The national debt was out of control, and taxes were too high.

By this time, King Louis XVI tried to have the National Assembly closed. So, they had their meeting on a tennis court and vowed not to take a break until France had a constitution.

On July 11, 1789, King Louis tried to banish the reformist minister, Necker. Many of the citizens of Paris flew into open rebellion. On July 14th, they stormed the Bastille prison and killed its governor. They freed criminals and killed the mayor of Paris. The frightened king signed an agreement to give the people a constitution. This saved him for a while.

The slogan of the revolution was, "Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death!" This slogan is still used. It has become the rallying cry for people trying to overthrow oppressive governments.

The noblemen of France were not safe. Some tried wearing their servants' clothes while many others fled the country. Many changes took place. Towns lost their powers of heavy taxation, and the church lost most of its power and land.

By 1793, King Louis XVI was condemned to death. He was charged with conspiracy against public liberty and the general safety. On January 21, his head was chopped off by the guillotine. On October 16, **Queen Marie Antoinette** followed him.

By 1795, a new constitution was ratified. It installed a new legislature called the Directory. It consisted of 500 representatives. During this time, a general named Napoleon Bonaparte gained much power. By 1799, he staged a coup, and five years later, he declared himself emperor. This brought the republican phase of the French Revolution to a close.

7. The word **rampant** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) serious
- (B) widespread
- (C) uncommon
- (D) increasing

8. According to paragraph 1, all of the following are true EXCEPT:

- (A) The French Revolution was a significant event in Western history.
- (B) Absolute monarchs controlled France before the revolution.
- (C) The French people formed a new government after the revolution.
- (D) The Roman Catholic Church welcomed the revolution.

9. According to the passage, which of the following is NOT true of the factors that led to the revolution?

- (A) Old rulers were destroyed by their rigid ways.
- (B) The rising middle class joined the workers and poor people.
- (C) Napoleon started a group that began the revolution.
- (D) Enlightenment ideas influenced the people.

10. Which of the following can be inferred about the guillotine?

- (A) It was a chair for royalty to sit upon.
- (B) It was highly regarded by the king of France.
- (C) It was a device used to enact death sentences.
- (D) It was used to chop off the hands of criminals.

11. According to the passage, why did some noblemen flee the country?

- (A) Because they were in great danger
- (B) Because they did not like living a lower-class lifestyle
- (C) Because the Roman Catholic Church had too much power
- (D) Because King Louis XVI was sentenced to death

12. In stating that **Queen Marie Antoinette followed him**, the author means that the queen

- (A) walked behind him
- (B) was also killed
- (C) went to jail for life
- (D) became the new king