

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #152
The French Revolution
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[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today, as part three of this three part mini-series on the Age of Revolution, we are going to be talking about The French Revolution.

[00:00:33] As far as revolutions go, it's up there with the American Revolution as the political event that has had the most lasting impact on the world we live in.

The French Revolution

[00:00:44] Over a period of 10 years, Europe's most [populous](#)¹ country went from a [monarchy](#)² to a republic, and ended up becoming what most people today would call a [dictatorship](#)³.

[00:00:58] We will tell this story with the same format as the episodes on the Industrial Revolution and American Revolution.

[00:01:05] First, we'll discuss the causes of the revolution, then the [course](#)⁴, what actually happened, and finish by discussing the consequences.

[00:01:14] So, causes, [course](#), and consequences - I hope you'll enjoy it.

[00:01:19] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, the transcripts, and the key vocabulary for this episode and all of our other ones over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:36] This is also where you can check out becoming a member of Leonardo English, and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, I think it's just over 50 countries now, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally, improving their English in a more interesting way.

¹ having a large population

² a form of government with a king or queen at its head

³ a form of government with a ruler who took control by force

⁴ the way in which something progresses

The French Revolution

[00:01:53] So if that's of interest, and I certainly hope it is, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:02:02] OK then, The French Revolution.

[00:02:05] Our story starts, of course, in France.

[00:02:08] France in the 18th century was one of the most powerful countries in Europe, and therefore, the world.

[00:02:16] It was home to some of the most [influential](#)⁵ thinkers, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Denis Diderot.

[00:02:23] It was seen as a great defender of freedom, having supported the United States in its battle for independence against Great Britain, as we heard about in the last episode.

[00:02:35] Its population had grown from 18 to 26 million during the 18th century, and it was the most [populous](#) country in Europe.

[00:02:45] If this was all you knew about France in 1789, you could be forgiven for [scratching your head](#)⁶ and wondering why the country was thrown into revolution, its entire society turned on its head.

⁵ having a great effect

⁶ thinking hard trying to solve a puzzle

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[00:03:01] Beneath the surface though, beneath these [superficial⁷ soundbites⁸](#), not everything was [rosy⁹](#), it wasn't all OK.

[00:03:10] France was a deeply unequal society. It was in effect a [feudal¹⁰](#) society with corruption at every level in this unequal [pyramid¹¹](#).

[00:03:22] [Peasants¹²](#) worked the land for very little pay, while the [aristocrats¹³](#), the richest in society enjoyed a [luxurious¹⁴](#) standard of living.

[00:03:33] The financial and military support that France had provided to the United States of America had cost the country dearly, and the nation was very poor.

⁷ existing on the surface, not deep

⁸ short phrases that are easy to remember

⁹ easy and pleasant

¹⁰ according to a system which gave power to the upper class (nobles), but made life difficult for the working class (vassals)

¹¹ a system that is made with fewer people at its level as one approaches the top

¹² poor farmers

¹³ people belonging to the highest class in certain societies and having titles and offices, passed from generation to generation

¹⁴ extremely comfortable and expensive

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[00:03:44] It was also [impoverished](#)¹⁵, it had lost a lot of money, through lengthy wars against the British, including the so-called Seven Years' War, which went on from 1756 to 1763, which resulted in an expensive defeat for France.

[00:04:03] The large increase in population, combined with several years of bad weather and bad [harvests](#)¹⁶, had meant that there were food shortages throughout the country, and huge price increases.

[00:04:17] On the throne was King Louis XVI.

[00:04:21] Beside him was his queen, Marie Antoinette, a deeply unpopular woman due to her complete lack of [sympathy](#)¹⁷ towards normal French people, a love of spending large amounts of money and some unfortunate [prejudice](#)¹⁸ against her because she was Austrian.

[00:04:39] So, the French state owed large amounts of money, it had big debts, but France wasn't collecting enough money in taxes to pay its bills.

[00:04:50] Taxes in France in the mid 18th century were paid mainly by the poor, by the [peasants](#).

¹⁵ made poor

¹⁶ the quantity of crops (plants grown to be used as food) gathered

¹⁷ feeling of understanding, support and compassion

¹⁸ an unfair opinion about someone, especially when formed without thought or knowledge

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[00:04:57] The richest people in French society paid very few taxes, and their lifestyles were [financed by](#)¹⁹ poor people's taxes.

[00:05:07] What's more, the system of collecting taxes was not only [inefficient](#)²⁰ but it also resulted in the tax collectors [so called tax farmers] themselves becoming rich.

[00:05:22] If you have listened to the episode from a couple of weeks ago about Tax, and remember our example of Arlette in Paris, it's clear that things have changed dramatically.

[00:05:34] King Louis XVI needed to find a way of generating extra money, and the simplest way to do that, or so he thought, would be to raise taxes.

[00:05:45] But although he was the king of France, he didn't have the power to just [snap his fingers](#)²¹ and put through a tax raise.

[00:05:54] To do that, he would need to call something called the States-General. This was a body, a national assembly, that represented the three classes of French society, as it had been divided.

[00:06:08] The first state, or class, was the [Clergy](#)²², the members of the church.

¹⁹ paid by

²⁰ not organised

²¹ make a sudden decision and expect everyone to follow it

²² people performing religious activities and services

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[00:06:14] The second class was the [nobility](#)²³, the richest and most powerful non-religious members of society.

[00:06:22] These two classes owned [the vast majority](#)²⁴ of all of the land, and with it, they controlled the money, and the country.

[00:06:31] And the third class was everyone else, the [commoners](#)²⁵.

[00:06:35] This third class, this everyone else class, represented 99% of French society. It was almost everyone.

[00:06:45] But the problem was that the voting system in this States-General was one vote for one class, it didn't matter that the third class represented 99% of the population, it only got one vote.

[00:07:01] And given that the first and second classes had very similar aims and motivations, remember that was the [Clergy](#) and the Nobility, they could [veto](#)²⁶, they could [vote down](#)²⁷ anything proposed by the third class, by everyone else.

²³ the highest class in certain societies

²⁴ almost all

²⁵ the social class of ordinary, common people

²⁶ an official right to refuse to accept something

²⁷ to refuse to accept something by voting

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[00:07:19] This States-General was called by Louis XVI in 1789, the first time it had been called since 1614, the first time in almost 200 years.

[00:07:32] But to state the obvious Europe was a very different place, and France was a very different country in 1789 compared to what it had been in 1614.

[00:07:44] Enlightenment ideas, which you might remember from the Enlightenment episode (which you can find on the website), had been [flourishing²⁸](#), there had been certain freedoms of the press and freedoms of speech that meant people could question the old ideas, they could ask themselves why things needed to continue in that way.

[00:08:06] Why was it right that the first two classes should be able to have effective control over the [legislation²⁹](#), when they represented a tiny minority of the population.

[00:08:19] The States-General couldn't come to an agreement, and to cut a long story short, the third class broke away and declared themselves to be a new National Assembly, and that they wouldn't stop until a new [constitution³⁰](#) of France was created.

²⁸ growing

²⁹ a set of laws according to which a state is governed

³⁰ the system of laws which states people's rights and duties

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[00:08:37] King Louis [relented](#)³¹, he gave up, there were limited reforms, and there was a feeling that change was [afoot](#)³² in France, there was change in the air, that finally the people were being given some of the power and representation that had been denied to them.

[00:08:56] According to an [eyewitness](#)³³ account, a historian of the revolution called François Mignet, people were, and I'm quoting here, "[intoxicated](#)³⁴ with liberty and enthusiasm" they were drunk with liberty and enthusiasm.

[00:09:12] But there were rumours of an [aristocratic](#)³⁵ [conspiracy](#)³⁶, that the King was about to send in the Swiss Guards, his own soldiers, to [crack down](#)³⁷ on the common people.

[00:09:25] On July 14th, a large group of Parisians, people from Paris, [congregated](#)³⁸ outside the Bastille, a large fortress in central Paris.

³¹ became less strict, allowed something he had refused before

³² being in progress, happening

³³ a person who saw something happen

³⁴ emotionally excited, like being drunk

³⁵ related to people who belong to the highest class

³⁶ the act of secretly planning with other people to do something bad

³⁷ become stricter in making them obey

³⁸ came together, gathered

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[00:09:36] The Bastille was a symbol of royal power - it had been used as a prison, and it also contained large amounts of weapons that these protestors wanted to get their hands on.

[00:09:48] The protestors **stormed**³⁹ the Bastille, they broke into it, they killed the man who was in charge of it, and cut off his head and put it on a **pole**⁴⁰.

[00:09:59] And this day was for many the start of the French Revolution.

[00:10:05] Indeed, it's celebrated as a public holiday in France, in English it's called Bastille Day, July 14th.

[00:10:12] At the time, although the protestors inside the Bastille probably knew something exciting and important was happening, they weren't to know quite how important it was to be.

[00:10:25] Louis XVI was still king of the country, but it was clear that the balance of power had **shifted**⁴¹ away from him.

³⁹ moved with force against

⁴⁰ a long, thick stick

⁴¹ moved

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[00:10:34] By the end of August there were wide-sweeping⁴² reforms, requiring aristocrats to pay taxes, and reducing the tax burden⁴³ on the poorest, reducing the amount of tax that the poorest had to pay.

[00:10:48] The Catholic Church, which had previously held an iron grip⁴⁴ over the lives of ordinary French people, and required them to pay large amounts in taxes directly to the church, was also losing control.

[00:11:04] France was moving away from being a country controlled by king and church, to one controlled by its citizens.

[00:11:13] This might seem like a trivial⁴⁵ thing to us now, it might seem unremarkable⁴⁶ and obvious, but it was a huge shift⁴⁷ for French people at the time, who had previously been required to pay large taxes to landowners⁴⁸, the church and

⁴² acting in a large area

⁴³ weight

⁴⁴ complete control

⁴⁵ having little importance

⁴⁶ ordinary

⁴⁷ move, change

⁴⁸ people who own large amounts of land

The French Revolution

[aristocrats](#), suffering without enough food to put on their table while the richest in society enjoyed [lavish](#)⁴⁹ lives of [leisure](#)⁵⁰.

[00:11:39] Also in August of 1789 the Declaration of The Rights of Man and The Citizen was published, which was a [monumentally](#)⁵¹ important document.

[00:11:50] It was inspired by the Enlightenment thinkers, from Rousseau to Montesquieu, and by the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, 13 years before; it quickly [enshrined](#)⁵² in law the rights that applied to men in France.

[00:12:07] Unfortunately it was normally men, not women, and it didn't actually say anything against slavery, but it was a big step forward compared to the previous situation.

[00:12:20] The period from late 1789 through to early 1791 was actually relatively peaceful, especially considering what was to come.

⁴⁹ plentiful and expensive

⁵⁰ free time

⁵¹ to an extreme degree

⁵² kept as something holy

The French Revolution

[00:12:30] It was peaceful in terms of [bloodshed](#)⁵³, there weren't that many people being killed, but there was [intense](#)⁵⁴ debate about what sort of society France should become.

[00:12:43] What place did a [monarchy](#) have in the future of the country? What should be done with the king?

[00:12:50] The more [radical](#)⁵⁵ side was led by a man called Robespierre, who believed that the future of revolutionary France wasn't [compatible](#)⁵⁶ with the king: the king had to go.

[00:13:02] In any case, Louis XVI was losing power, and losing power fast.

[00:13:07] In 1791 he and his family tried to [flee](#)⁵⁷ the country, apparently in order to meet pro-Royalist soldiers who would join him in a [counter-revolution](#)⁵⁸, but he was recognised and brought back to Paris.

⁵³ killing and violence

⁵⁴ extreme or very strong

⁵⁵ extreme

⁵⁶ able to exist together without problems

⁵⁷ escape something due to being dangerous

⁵⁸ a revolution against the previous uprising

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[00:13:24] Louis XVI was now effectively **trapped**⁵⁹ in France, a prisoner in his own country, and with a **fraction**⁶⁰ of the power he had held a few years beforehand.

[00:13:37] Although large parts of the country were **swept up**⁶¹ in a revolutionary mood, not everyone was.

[00:13:44] Many **aristocrats** had **fled**⁶² France to **reunite**⁶³ with relations in places like Austria, with the view that they would be safer there, and they could **mount an attack**⁶⁴ back on France and retake their country.

[00:13:59] And although the revolutionaries and the king didn't see eye to eye, they both supported the idea of going to war with Austria, which France did in 1792.

[00:14:11] For the revolutionaries, they wanted to **spread**⁶⁵ the idea of revolution throughout Europe.

[00:14:18] And King Louis XVI, why did he support the war?

⁵⁹ in a position from which it's difficult to escape

⁶⁰ a small part

⁶¹ very excited

⁶² left while escaping from danger

⁶³ come together again

⁶⁴ organise an attack

⁶⁵ spread the word, make known in a wide area

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[00:14:22] Well, he was a bit [stuck](#)⁶⁶, and thought that if France went to war and lost, then his relations in Austria would be happy to put him back on the French throne.

[00:14:35] The war didn't go particularly well for France to start off with. The Prussians had joined forces with the Austrians, and the French suffered numerous defeats.

[00:14:47] The Austro-Prussian army issued a document called the Brunswick Manifesto that said that if the French royal family was harmed, Paris would be burned to the ground, and no protester's life would be [spared](#)⁶⁷.

[00:15:01] The document was intended to [intimidate](#)⁶⁸ the French, but it had the opposite effect. They imprisoned the French royal family and on August 10th 1792 they [abolished](#)⁶⁹ the French monarchy.

[00:15:17] Five months later, on January 21st, 1793, Louis XVI was [executed](#)⁷⁰, after having been found guilty of the crime of [high treason](#)⁷¹, of [betraying](#)⁷² his country.

⁶⁶ not able to move

⁶⁷ kept alive

⁶⁸ frighten

⁶⁹ ended

⁷⁰ killed as someone who is sentenced to death

⁷¹ the crime of acting against one's country

⁷² doing something harmful to your country

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[00:15:31] As his head was [sliced off](#)⁷³ his body using a new device called the [guillotine](#)⁷⁴, this ended the near thousand year rule of absolute [monarchy](#) in France.

[00:15:43] Nine months later, his wife, the incredibly unpopular Marie-Antoinette, [met the same fate](#)⁷⁵.

[00:15:50] Now, it's worth spending a minute just talking about Marie-Antoinette.

[00:15:54] Firstly, probably the most famous quote of the French Revolution is [attributed](#)⁷⁶ to Marie-Antoinette, and that's "let them eat cake".

[00:16:04] That's how it's normally translated in English, which is actually a bit of a [mistranslation](#)⁷⁷. She said "let them eat brioche", which was very much a [luxury](#)⁷⁸ bread at the time, so it doesn't mean she was any less [out of touch](#)⁷⁹, but she wasn't literally saying cake like a birthday cake.

[00:16:23] And the second thing about this quote is that she probably never said it.

⁷³ cut off from

⁷⁴ a machine used in the past for killing criminals by cutting off their heads

⁷⁵ had the same thing happen to her

⁷⁶ is considered to have been said by

⁷⁷ something not accurately translated

⁷⁸ expensive, not necessary and very enjoyable

⁷⁹ in a state of not knowing what was happening

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[00:16:28] Sorry.

[00:16:29] The quote actually appeared in the writings of Rousseau when Marie-Antoinette was only 9 years old, so even though it might be the most famous quote from the French Revolution, it's not actually true.

[00:16:44] What does seem to be [undeniable](#)⁸⁰ though is that Marie-Antoinette was [hideously](#)⁸¹ [out of touch](#) with the [fate](#)⁸² of the common French person.

[00:16:54] At Versailles, the royal palace, she had her own farm built for her, so she could pretend to be a common farmer, but she was [presumably](#)⁸³ sitting down on a nice chair, [stroking](#)⁸⁴ a lamb and eating some brioche rather than getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning to milk the cows.

[00:17:14] In any case, by October 1793 she was being taken to the [guillotine](#) in a [cart](#)⁸⁵, to be publicly [executed](#).

[00:17:23] It certainly wasn't how she thought she would be received when she, daughter of the Emperor and Empress of Austria, one of the richest and most powerful

⁸⁰ certainly true

⁸¹ in an extremely unpleasant manner

⁸² what happens to a person

⁸³ very likely but not said with certainty

⁸⁴ touching gently, petting

⁸⁵ an open vehicle that was used in the past

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[noble⁸⁶](#) families in Europe, moved from Austria to marry Prince Louis, at the age of just 14 years old.

[00:17:40] At the same time as this was all taking place, the more [moderate⁸⁷](#) revolutionaries had lost the [ideological⁸⁸](#) battle about the path that the revolution should take, and the political climate was ruled by the more [radical faction⁸⁹](#), led by Robespierre.

[00:17:58] France was thrown into a period now referred to as The Reign of Terror, where 40,000 people were killed for [counter-revolutionary⁹⁰](#) behaviour.

[00:18:09] But soon things got to Robespierre's head, he became drunk on his own power, and he ended up tasting the cold [steel⁹¹](#) of the [guillotine](#) himself in July of 1794.

[00:18:24] So, we have whizzed through this, we've gone very fast through this period, so let's just pause for a minute to [take stock⁹²](#).

⁸⁶ belonging in the highest society class

⁸⁷ not extreme

⁸⁸ related to a system of ideas and ideals

⁸⁹ a small group within a larger one

⁹⁰ related to a revolution against the previous uprising

⁹¹ a strong metal

⁹² stop and think

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[00:18:34] Over the period of 5 years, the entire French tax system was turned on its head, France got a new [constitution](#), the country declared the universal rights of man, the [monarchy](#) was [abolished](#), France declared war on Austria, the king and then queen were both [executed](#), the revolutionaries have been fighting among themselves, and tens of thousands of people have been killed.

[00:18:58] Quite a busy period in French history, right?

[00:19:01] During all this, a young army officer was [distinguishing](#)⁹³ himself through military campaigns, and [rising through the ranks](#)⁹⁴ of the French army.

[00:19:13] His name was Napoleon Bonaparte.

[00:19:16] He had [crushed](#)⁹⁵ a royalist [uprising](#)⁹⁶, a movement in support of the [monarchy](#), in 1795.

[00:19:23] He then won [decisive](#)⁹⁷ victories in what is now northern Italy in 1796, and after invading Malta and Egypt in 1798, he returned to France, [overthrew](#)⁹⁸ the

⁹³ making himself worthy of respect

⁹⁴ continuing moving to more important positions

⁹⁵ defeated completely

⁹⁶ an act of violent opposition

⁹⁷ that provided a particular result, important

⁹⁸ removed from power with force

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government that was in place, and declared himself to be the First Consul of France, essentially the most powerful person in the country.

[00:19:45] This was in 1799, and with it he declared that the French Revolution was over.

[00:19:53] Now, we have evidently [skipped over](#)⁹⁹ quite a bit here, but this is a not-so-brief summary of the [course](#) of the French revolution.

[00:20:01] Let's move on to the consequences, because the consequences are [far-reaching](#)¹⁰⁰ and long lasting, both in France and [further afield](#)¹⁰¹.

[00:20:12] Let's start with France.

[00:20:14] Of course, you will now know that there is now no [monarchy](#) in France.

[00:20:19] But Louis XVI wasn't the last king of France, and the First French Republic only lasted from 1792 to 1804, when Napoleon got power hungry and declared himself to be the Emperor of France.

[00:20:36] And France had Emperors, or kings in various different forms until 1870, almost 100 years after the French had first decided they didn't want a [monarch](#)¹⁰².

⁹⁹ not included

¹⁰⁰ of great influence and effect

¹⁰¹ in areas other than the nearest ones

¹⁰² absolute ruler, a king or queen

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[00:20:49] Since 1870 France has been a full republic, without a [monarch](#) - although the French newspapers do enjoy suggesting that various Prime Ministers have king-like [ambitions](#)¹⁰³.

[00:21:01] So, from a governmental and [constitutional](#)¹⁰⁴ point of view, the French revolution set France on the course of moving away from a [monarchy](#) and towards what it is now, a republic.

[00:21:15] In terms of more European consequences, the decision of the continent's most [populous](#) country to [overthrow](#)¹⁰⁵ its [monarchy](#), [decapitate](#)¹⁰⁶ the king and queen, and [proclaim](#)¹⁰⁷ a republic had a [profound](#)¹⁰⁸ impact.

[00:21:31] For the royal families of other European countries, many of whom were of course closely related to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, the French Revolution was pretty scary. If the French people had [risen up](#)¹⁰⁹ and [got rid of](#)¹¹⁰ the [monarchy](#), what was to stop people in their own countries from doing exactly the same thing?

¹⁰³ strong wishes to be something

¹⁰⁴ related to the system of laws which states people's rights and duties

¹⁰⁵ remove from power with force

¹⁰⁶ cut off the head of someone

¹⁰⁷ announce something officially

¹⁰⁸ great and deep

¹⁰⁹ taken part in a revolution

¹¹⁰ removed

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[00:21:54] It was clear now that [monarchs¹¹¹](#) weren't [untouchable¹¹²](#), that they existed because the people of the country allowed them to exist, rather than because of some god-given right.

[00:22:08] Indeed, this idea of a king or queen being a representative of the people, rather than the people being his or her [subjects¹¹³](#), is one of the most important consequences of The French Revolution.

[00:22:21] The very idea of the nation state, of a country formed of its people, existed before The French Revolution, but the events of 1789 to 1799 really [underlined¹¹⁴](#) the fact that a country is composed of its citizens, and it's the citizens that have the power to decide the fate of the country.

[00:22:44] This is even more the case for the French Revolution than the American Revolution, as the American revolutionaries were [rising up¹¹⁵](#) against their [colonial¹¹⁶](#) masters, while the French were rising up against the entire political system of their own country.

¹¹¹ absolute rulers, kings or queens

¹¹² not able to be affected

¹¹³ people living under the rule of a monarch

¹¹⁴ presented as important

¹¹⁵ taking part in a revolution

¹¹⁶ related to the practice of one country controlling another one

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[00:23:02] In terms of French [nationalism](#)¹¹⁷, the events of the French Revolution brought the country together, and there was a new found sense of [unity](#)¹¹⁸ between French people, with everyone united around the Liberté, égalité, fraternité - the freedom, equality, and [brotherhood](#)¹¹⁹ that are at the centre of the French [Constitution](#).

[00:23:24] This phrase was first used by Robespierre in 1790, and has continued to be the national [motto](#)¹²⁰ of France to this day.

[00:23:33] And it has had a [profound](#)¹²¹ impact on the global concept of the rights of the individual, and what we now refer to as Human Rights.

[00:23:43] To stress, before the Declaration of The Rights of Man and of The Citizen, this really wasn't an obvious concept, at least in Europe.

[00:23:53] Society was deeply divided between rich and poor, the [aristocracy](#), [nobles](#)¹²² and the church and everyone else.

¹¹⁷ support of one's country

¹¹⁸ the state of being in agreement

¹¹⁹ the feeling of companionship and togetherness

¹²⁰ a short phrase that expresses a belief

¹²¹ a class of people who belong to a high social rank

¹²² people belonging to the highest class in certain societies

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[00:24:02] The French Revolution proposed that there were universal rights, universal [privileges](#)¹²³ that should be enjoyed by everyone, [regardless](#)¹²⁴ of who they were.

[00:24:13] And while the majority of French people today are very proud of the events and consequences of the French Revolution, not all are.

[00:24:23] I remember this being clear to me when I was about 14 years old. My brother and I were doing French exchanges.

[00:24:31] I had been sent to stay for a week with a boy called Sylvain, who had relatively left-wing, liberal parents.

[00:24:39] My brother had been sent to stay with a boy called Charles, whose family had a large house in the countryside with old paintings of [aristocratic](#) family members.

[00:24:51] The week we stayed with them was over the 14th July, and we experienced two differing ways to celebrate Bastille Day, the anniversary of the start of the revolution.

[00:25:04] With the family I was staying with there were great [festivities](#)¹²⁵, fireworks, we went out and it was a time of great joy.

[00:25:12] But when we went to find my brother, he had had a different experience.

¹²³ rights, advantages

¹²⁴ in spite

¹²⁵ celebrations

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[00:25:18] While most of France was celebrating, the old [aristocratic](#) family he had been with had basically closed their doors and not even [acknowledged](#)¹²⁶ the fact that it was a day of any importance.

[00:25:32] [Presumably](#) this family had [ancestors](#)¹²⁷ who had lost their heads in the revolution, so it was no time for celebration.

[00:25:40] And even outside France, politicians and leaders are often [cautious](#)¹²⁸ when asked about The French Revolution.

[00:25:49] Margaret Thatcher, the ex Prime Minister of Britain, said “It resulted in a lot of [headless](#)¹²⁹ [corpses](#)¹³⁰, (headless bodies), and a [tyrant](#)¹³¹ (a dictator)”.

[00:25:59] She is of course talking about Napoleon.

¹²⁶ accepted, admitted

¹²⁷ persons that are related to someone but lived a long time ago

¹²⁸ careful

¹²⁹ having their heads cut off

¹³⁰ dead bodies

¹³¹ dictator, a cruel ruler

The French Revolution

[00:26:02] In the interests of [balance](#)¹³² and [fairness](#)¹³³, perhaps we should end with a quote from the Charles Dickens' novel A Tale of Two Cities, which centres on Paris and London during the period of the French Revolution.

[00:26:17] Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of [foolishness](#)¹³⁴, it was the [epoch](#)¹³⁵ of [belief](#)¹³⁶, it was the [epoch](#) of [incredulity](#)¹³⁷, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of [despair](#)¹³⁸."

[00:26:44] OK then, that is it for today's episode on The French Revolution, and with that comes the end of this mini-series on The Age of Revolution.

[00:26:55] The historians among you will note that The French Revolution definitely wasn't the end of the Age of Revolution, as it and the American Revolution actually [inspired](#)¹³⁹ revolutions throughout Europe and [further afield](#) during the 19th and 20th centuries.

¹³² considering the importance in comparison to something else

¹³³ being fair and just

¹³⁴ lack of good sense or judgement

¹³⁵ era, time

¹³⁶ trust in ideas

¹³⁷ the state of being unable to believe something

¹³⁸ complete loss of hope

¹³⁹ filled someone with the will and ability to do something

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The French Revolution

[00:27:11] But we have to end somewhere, and what better place to end with the most famous revolution in Europe.

[00:27:18] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:27:22] Especially for the French listeners out there, what do you think the lasting impact of The French Revolution has been? How would France have been different without it?

[00:27:32] I would love to know - for the members among you, you can head right in to our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:27:45] And as a final reminder, if you are not yet a member of Leonardo English but you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, to unlock the transcripts, the subtitles, the key vocabulary, and all of the bonus episodes, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com

[00:28:08] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:28:13] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Populous	having a large population
Monarchy	a form of government with a king or queen at its head
Dictatorship	a form of government with a ruler who took control by force
Course	the way in which something progresses
Influential	having a great effect
Scratching your head	thinking hard trying to solve a puzzle
Superficial	existing on the surface, not deep
Soundbites	short phrases that are easy to remember
Rosy	easy and pleasant
Feudal	according to a system which gave power to the upper class (nobles), but made life difficult for the working class (vassals)
Pyramid	a system that is made with fewer people at its level as one approaches the top

The French Revolution

Peasants	poor farmers
Aristocrats	people belonging to the highest class in certain societies and having titles and offices, passed from generation to generation
Luxurious	extremely comfortable and expensive
Impoverished	made poor
Harvests	the quantity of crops (plants grown to be used as food) gathered
Sympathy	feeling of understanding, support and compassion
Prejudice	an unfair opinion about someone, especially when formed without thought or knowledge
Financed by	paid by
Inefficient	not organised
Snap his fingers	make a sudden decision and expect everyone to follow it
Clergy	people performing religious activities and services
Nobility	the highest class in certain societies
The vast majority	almost all
Commoners	the social class of ordinary, common people

The French Revolution

Veto	an official right to refuse to accept something
Vote down	to refuse to accept something by voting
Flourishing	growing
Legislation	a set of laws according to which a state is governed
Constitution	the system of laws which states people's rights and duties
Relented	became less strict, allowed something he had refused before
Afoot	being in progress, happening
Eyewitness	a person who saw something happen
Intoxicated	emotionally excited, like being drunk
Aristocratic	related to people who belong to the highest class
Conspiracy	the act of secretly planning with other people to do something bad
Crack down	become stricter in making them obey
Congregated	came together, gathered
Stormed	moved with force against
Pole	a long, thick stick

The French Revolution

Shifted	moved
Wide-sweeping	acting in a large area
Burden	weight
Iron grip	complete control
Trivial	having little importance
Unremarkable	ordinary
Shift	move, change
Landowners	people who own large amounts of land
Lavish	plentiful and expensive
Leisure	free time
Monumentally	to an extreme degree
Enshrined	kept as something holy
Bloodshed	killing and violence
Intense	extreme or very strong
Radical	extreme

The French Revolution

Compatible	able to exist together without problems
Flee	escape something due to being dangerous
Counter-revolution	a revolution against the previous uprising
Trapped	in a position from which it's difficult to escape
Fraction	a small part
Swept up	very excited
Fled	left while escaping from danger
Reunite	come together again
Mount an attack	organise an attack
Spread	spread the word, make known in a wide area
Stuck	not able to move
Spared	kept alive
Intimidate	frighten
Abolished	ended
Executed	killed as someone who is sentenced to death

The French Revolution

High treason	the crime of acting against one's country
Betraying	doing something harmful to your country
Sliced off	cut off from
Guillotine	a machine used in the past for killing criminals by cutting off their heads
Met the same fate	had the same thing happen to her
Attributed	is considered to have been said by
Mistranslation	something not accurately translated
Luxury	expensive, not necessary and very enjoyable
Out of touch	in a state of not knowing what was happening
Undeniable	certainly true
Hideously	in an extremely unpleasant manner
Fate	what happens to a person
Presumably	very likely but not said with certainty
Stroking	touching gently, petting
Cart	an open vehicle that was used in the past

The French Revolution

Noble	belonging in the highest society class
Moderate	not extreme
Ideological	related to a system of ideas and ideals
Faction	a small group within a larger one
Counter-revolutionary	related to a revolution against the previous uprising
Steel	a strong metal
Take stock	stop and think
Distinguishing	making himself worthy of respect
Rising through the ranks	continuing moving to more important positions
Crushed	defeated completely
Uprising	an act of violent opposition
Decisive	that provided a particular result, important
Overthrew	removed from power with force
Skipped over	not included

The French Revolution

Far-reaching	of great influence and effect
Further afield	in areas other than the nearest ones
Monarch	absolute ruler, a king or queen
Ambitions	strong wishes to be something
Constitutional	related to the system of laws which states people's rights and duties
Overthrow	remove from power with force
Decapitate	cut off the head of someone
Proclaim	announce something officially
Profound	great and deep
Risen up	taken part in a revolution
Got rid of	removed
Monarchs	absolute rulers, kings or queens
Untouchable	not able to be affected
Subjects	people living under the rule of a monarch
Underlined	presented as important

The French Revolution

Rising up	taking part in a revolution
Colonial	related to the practice of one country controlling another one
Nationalism	support of one's country
Unity	the state of being in agreement
Brotherhood	the feeling of companionship and togetherness
Motto	a short phrase that expresses a belief
Aristocracy	a class of people who belong to a high social rank
Nobles	people belonging to the highest class in certain societies
Privileges	rights, advantages
Regardless	in spite
Festivities	celebrations
Acknowledged	accepted, admitted
Ancestors	persons that are related to someone but lived a long time ago
Cautious	careful
Headless	having their heads cut off

The French Revolution

Corpses	dead bodies
Tyrant	dictator, a cruel ruler
Balance	considering the importance in comparison to something else
Fairness	being fair and just
Foolishness	lack of good sense or judgement
Epoch	era, time
Belief	trust in ideas
Incredulity	the state of being unable to believe something
Despair	complete loss of hope
Inspired	filled someone with the will and ability to do something

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com