

The French Start Out to Make a Small Revolution and End Up Making a Big One

I. Brief Historiographical Survey (Four Major Interpretations)

- A. Senseless Violence and Destruction
 - Edmund Burke, *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, 1790
- B. Rise of Liberty: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*
 - Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 1837
- C. Marxist, Class Struggle
 - Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, 1939
- D. Revisionist
 - William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 1980

II. Myths and Realities of Its Origins

A. Political

1. Despotic Rule of the Bourbon Dynasty?
2. Illogical Character of French Government?
3. Wars of the French Kings?
4. Lack of Effective Leadership at Crucial Times

B. Social and Economic

1. Rise of the Middle Class and Their Opposition of Mercantilism?
2. Survival of Privilege?
3. Inequitable System of Taxation?
4. Inability to Solve the Credit Crunch
5. Bad Harvests during 1780's

C. Intellectual

1. Contribution of Philosophes?
2. American Revolution?
3. Education
 - a. Grub Street Writers — Scandal and Slander
 - b. Lawyers and Civil Servants

III. Significant Results

- A. Medical Reforms
- B. Relatively Efficient and Centralized Tax System
- C. Reform of Legal Code — Equality Before the Law
- D. Nationalism — Ideology That Integrated Society from Top to Bottom
- E. Metric System of Measurement

James Burke, *Social Impact of New Medical Knowledge*, part 1

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) — hospitals
 Madame Helvetius (1719–1800) — salons
 Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis (1757–1808)
 Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) — infinitesimal calculus
 Fredrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854) — *Naturphilosophie*
 Marie François Xavier Bichat (1771–1802) — *Treatise on Membranes* (1800)
 Pierre-Simon Marquis de Laplace (1749–1827) — probability theory
 Napoleon I Bonaparte (1769–1821)

Population of France in 1789

First Estate:	Clergy	135,000	0.5%
Second Estate:	Nobility	400,000	1.6%
Third Estate:	Bourgeoisie	1,000,000	3.9%
	Non-agricultural workers	2,000,000	7.8%
	Farmers (landowning and tenant)	5,000,000	19.6%
	Sharecroppers	11,000,000	43.1%
	Day Laborers	5,000,000	19.6%
	Serfs	<u>1,000,000</u>	3.9%
		<u>25,500,000</u>	

Those Executed in Paris During the Terror (1793–1794)

Clergy	980	7%
Nobility	1158	8%
Upper Middle Class	1964	14%
Lower Middle Class	1488	11%
Working Class	4389	31%
Peasants	3961	28%
No class given	<u>200</u>	1%
	14,140	

from: J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, New York, 1945, p. 93.