

## The Outbreak of the French Revolution

It is early July 1794, at the height of the Reign of Terror. A group of (deceased) figures who played a part in the Revolution have gathered in the afterlife. Although the French Revolution's principles of liberty, equality and fraternity will have a tremendous enduring influence, right now things are looking bad. Tens of thousands of people from all sectors of society are being purged for having the wrong religious or political views, for refusing to surrender grain to the government, for evading conscription or deserting the army, or simply because somebody else has denounced them for 'crimes against liberty'. French society seems to be disintegrating. Having watched its repercussions in horror, this group has come together to settle the question of who should be blamed for the outbreak of the Revolution.

### The monarchy



Louis XV      Louis XVI      Marie Antoinette

### The old order



Jean-Jacques Duval d'Eprémèsnil      Joseph Fouchon de Doué      Jean Marie du Lau

### Enlightenment figures



Voltaire      Benjamin Franklin      Antoine-François Momoro

### Third Estate revolutionaries



Jean-Sylvain Bailly      Camille Desmoulins      Reine Audu

### Chance



Fortuna

*N.B. This debate works better if everyone is looking to blame someone else and exonerate themselves, rather than some figures being happy to agree that they played a significant role in the Revolution (which doesn't leave much scope for argument). It is not intended to be a politicised commentary on the overall positive or negative value of the Revolution.*

## **Chance**

*Available to be blamed for factors such as the bad harvest of 1789.*

**Fortuna:** The Roman goddess of fate and luck. She had multiple different aspects, including Fortuna Annonaria, the luck of the harvest, and Fortuna Belli, the luck of war.

## **The monarchy**

*The most important figures of the French monarchy in the run-up to the Revolution.*

**Louis XV** (1710-1774): Louis XV was a controversial monarch. After military victories over Austria he chose to return the lands France had gained (Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1748), and in 1756 he established an Austrian alliance (Treaty of Versailles). He tried and failed to impose a tax on the privileged classes. With the Seven Years' War (1754/6-1763) France lost many overseas colonies to Britain and was left in dire financial straits. Louis was also criticised for his many mistresses, particularly the commoner Madame de Pompadour. His getaway 'Stag's Park' became a hotbed of debauchery in pamphlet literature.

**Louis XVI** (1754-1793): Louis XV's grandson was probably not the man to stave off revolution, being reportedly timid and indecisive. His first child did not arrive until eight years after his marriage, and public opinion accused him of impotency. Most of his attempts at reform were blocked by the nobility. In particular, Louis and his various finance ministers were not able to solve the problem of the budget deficit, exacerbated by involvement in the American Revolutionary War. He was forced to flee to Varennes in 1791, and was executed in January 1793.

**Marie Antoinette** (1775-1793): The marriage of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI cemented the recent alliance between France and Austria. Although she initially enjoyed some popularity, Marie Antoinette later became a criminal in the public imagination. She was blamed for her great extravagance. She was also accused of fraud (the Diamond Necklace Affair), siphoning money to Austria, and sexual deviancy, including incest with her son. She was executed in October 1793.

## **The old order**

*These figures represent the nobles and clergymen who battled to retain their ancient privileges.*

**Jean-Jacques Duval d'Epréménil** (1745-1794): A member of the Parlement of Paris, which blocked royal attempts to reform the taxation system. He defended the rights of the parlement against the monarchy, and called for the convocation of the Estates General. He also attacked Marie Antoinette over the Diamond Necklace affair. As the mood grew more revolutionary he switched to defending the monarchy, and refused to meet with the third estate. He was guillotined in April 1794.

**Joseph Foullon de Doué** (1715-1789): He replaced Jacques Necker as Controller-General of Finances in 1789, and was also a member of the Parlement of Paris. He was wealthy and conservative, and unpopular among farmers for his severe policies. Rumours circulated that he had declared that poor people without bread should eat hay instead. He fled Paris after the Storming of the Bastille, but was found and marched back to the city, where he was executed by a mob. His head was paraded on a pike, the mouth stuffed with hay.

**Jean Marie du Lau** (1738-1792): Lau was Archbishop of Arles, and a representative of the clergy at the convocation of the Estates-General in 1789. He was a traditionalist, and fell out with the mayor of Arles, who sided with the revolutionaries. He was killed during the September Massacres of 1792, and beatified in 1926 by Pope Pius XI.

## Enlightenment figures

*These figures represent the radical ideas of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution, as well as the ways in which they were spread through word of mouth and print culture.*

**Voltaire** (1694-1778): One of the foremost Enlightenment thinkers, Voltaire recognised the injustices of the *Ancien Régime* and advocated religious toleration, freedom of speech, and secularism. He wrote many thousands of letters, books and pamphlets, and his work became very famous, both within France and further afield.

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706-1790): Among other things, Franklin was a statesman, physicist, inventor and political theorist. He favoured republicanism and religious toleration. He was one of the founding fathers of America, and had a hand in drafting the Declaration of Independence. Between 1776 and 1785 he served as the American ambassador to France, where he associated with radicals and was instrumental in spreading the ideas of the American Revolution.

**Antoine-François Momoro** (1756-1794): Momoro was a Parisian printer, and is often credited with inventing the Revolution's catchphrase of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité'. He called himself the 'first printer of the national liberty', and specialised in radical newspapers and pamphlets. He was an advocate of social equality, and opposed to the monarchy and the Catholic church. Although he took a radical stance himself, he was not a supporter of Robespierre, and was guillotined in March 1794.

## Third Estate revolutionaries

*These figures represent the bourgeois and working class revolutionaries who propelled the Revolution forwards, particularly through the Tennis Court Oath (20 June 1789), the Storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789), the Women's March on Versailles (5-6 October 1789) and the storming of the Tuileries Palace (10 August 1792).*

**Jean-Sylvain Bailly** (1736-1793): An astronomer and mathematician, Bailly was a Parisian deputy to the 1789 Estates General. He was elected president of the newly formed National Assembly, and presided over the Tennis Court Oath. He served as the first mayor of Paris from July 1789 to November 1791; among other things, he helped to pass a decree establishing Jews as French citizens. He was judged too conservative, however, and was forced to step down. He later refused to testify against Marie Antoinette, and was guillotined in November 1793.

**Camille Desmoulins** (1760-1794): A journalist and politically radical pamphleteer. On 12 July 1789, after the dismissal of Jacques Necker, he is said to have jumped on to a table outside a café and called on the crowd to take up arms. The resulting riots evolved into the Storming of the Bastille. Desmoulins also took part in the attack on the Tuileries Palace. He was a representative at the National Convention, and voted for the execution of Louis XVI. Initially an ally of Robespierre's, he was among those who attacked Bailly as too conservative. However, he was horrified by the Reign of Terror. He urged moderation, and was executed as a counter-revolutionary in April 1794.

**Reine Audu** (unknown): Audu was a Parisian fruit-seller who participated in the Women's March on Versailles and was imprisoned as a result. She is said to have led eight hundred other women to the march. She was freed in 1791, and in 1792 the mayor of Paris rewarded her with a sword. Later that year she participated in the storming of the Tuileries Palace and was apparently shot in the thigh. She had periods of imprisonment, and seems to have died around 1794 having reportedly 'lost her senses'.