1. The Third Estate, which made up the vast majority of the French people, were heavily taxed and discontented.
2. By meeting as a separate assembly, the Third Estate claimed the right to have their votes count as much as those of the clergy and nobles.
3. France was divided into three orders, or estates—the first, second, and third. About 130,000 people made up the First Estate, the clergy. The clergy were exempt from the taille, France’s chief tax.
4. The Second Estate, the nobility, had about 350,000 people. They held many of the leading positions in the state and had their own privileges.
5. Nobles wanted to increase their power at the expense of the monarchy.
6. The Third Estate, the commoners, was 98 percent of the population. The Third Estate was divided by differences in occupation, education, and wealth.
7. Peasants were 75 to 80 percent of the total population. Serfdom had been abolished, but peasants had obligations to landlords or relics of feudalism that they resented.
8. Artisans, shopkeepers, and other wage earners were another part of the Third Estate. They were hurting economically from a rise in prices higher than any increase in wages. They were ready for revolution.
9. The immediate cause of the French Revolution was the near collapse of the government’s finances. The French economy suffered a series of crises for 50 years, and the number of poor reached as high as one-third of the population. The poor lived in absolute squalor.
10. The French government continued to spend lavishly on wars and court luxuries. The queen, Marie Antoinette, was especially known for her extravagance.
11. The government of Louis XVI was finally forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General, the French parliament, which had not met since 1614.
12. Each order of French society had representatives in the Estates-General. In order to fix France’s economic situation, most members of the Third Estate wanted to set up a constitutional government that would abolish the tax exemptions of the clergy and nobility.
13. The Third Estate was much larger than the other two. It favored a system of each member voting, but the king upheld the traditional voting method of one vote per estate. The Third Estate reacted by calling itself a National Assembly and deciding to draft a constitution.
14. They were locked out of their meeting place and moved to a tennis court next door. There they swore they would continue to meet until they had finished drafting a constitution.
15. This oath is known as the Tennis Court Oath.
16. Peasant rebellions took place and became part of the Great Fear, a vast panic that hit France in 1789. Fearing invasion by foreign troops in support of the monarchy, people in the countryside formed militias.
17. One of the National Assembly’s first acts was to destroy the relics of feudalism, or aristocratic privileges. In August the assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
18. The declaration proclaimed freedom and equal rights for all men, access to public office based on talent, and an end to exemptions from taxation.
19. All citizens were to have the right to take part in the making of laws. Freedom of speech and press were recognized.
20. Louis XVI stayed at Versailles and refused to accept the laws of the National Assembly. Thousands of Parisian women armed with pitchforks, swords, muskets, and the like marched to Versailles.
21. A delegation of these women met with Louis XVI and told him how their children were starving. They forced the king to accept new decrees.
22. At the crowd’s insistence, the royal family returned to Paris, escorted by thousands of women with pikes. As a goodwill gesture, the king brought along flour from the Crown’s storerooms. The royal family was virtually held prisoner in Paris.
23. The National Assembly adopted its Constitution of 1791, which set up a limited monarchy with a king and a Legislative Assembly with the power to make laws. Only the most affluent members would be elected. Only men over 25 who paid a specified amount in taxes could vote.
24. Defeats in war and economic shortages led to new political demonstrations. Radicals formed the Paris Commune and organized a mob attack on the royal palace and Legislative Assembly. They captured the king and demanded the end of the monarchy.
25. The French Revolution was about to enter a more radical phase. Power went to the Paris Commune. Many members proudly called themselves the sans-culottes, or ordinary people without fancy clothes.
26. While the Committee of Public Safety was in power, thousands who opposed the government were executed.
27. The revolutionary government raised a huge army that successfully defended France against invasion.
28. The Girondins wanted to keep the king alive. The Mountain won and the king was beheaded, using the guillotine because they thought it was humane. The split got Marat, a Mountain, killed; Charlotte Corday, a Girondin, stabbed him to death in his bathtub.
29. A foreign crisis also loomed because the execution of the king outraged European monarchies. Spain, Portugal, Britain, and other monarchies formed a loose coalition to invade France.
30. The revolution would be destroyed. To respond, the National Convention formed the 12-member Committee of Public Safety, led first by Danton and then by Maximilien Robespierre.
Robespierre was a lawyer and activist, so known for his honesty that he was called “The Incorruptible.” He followed Rousseau’s ideas in *The Social Contract*, and he believed that anyone who would not submit to the general will as he interpreted it should be executed.

From 1793 to 1794 the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention tried to defend France from foreign and domestic threats. At home they began what came to known as the Reign of Terror. Revolutionary courts prosecuted enemies of the revolution. Close to 40,000 people were killed during this time. Anyone who had opposed the *sans-culottes* could be a victim.

The Committee took other steps to control France and bring order. It called the new order the Republic of Virtue, a democratic republic of good citizens. The titles “citizen” and “citizensess” replaced “mister” and “madame.”

Most of the men continued to believe that women should not participate in politics or fight, however.

France had defeated its foreign foes by the summer of 1794. Robespierre was obsessed with ridding France of its domestic enemies, however. Only then could the Republic of Virtue exist. Many deputies of the National Convention feared Robespierre, and they executed him.

The period of the Directory (1795 to 1799) was one of government corruption. People reacted against the Reign of Terror’s time of deprivation, some making great fortunes from graft. The Directory also faced political enemies from both royalists and radicals. It could not solve the country’s economic problems, and it was fighting the wars begun by the Committee of Public Safety. The Directory relied more and more on military might to stay in power. In 1799 a coup d’état—a sudden overthrow of the government—led by the popular general Napoleon Bonaparte toppled the Directory. Napoleon took power.

Napoleon, a popular general, overthrew the Directory, helped set up a new government, and eventually held complete power.

Napoleon brought stability to France and established a single law code that recognized the equality of all citizens before the law.

After major losses in Russia and Austria, Napoleon met his final defeat at Waterloo and was exiled.

Napoleon’s most famous domestic achievement was codifying French laws. Before the revolution France had up to 300 separate legal systems.

The most important part of the new unified codes was the Civil Code, or Napoleonic Code. It recognized equality before the law, the right to choose a profession, religious toleration, and the end of serfdom and feudalism. The Code also outlawed unions and strikes.

Napoleon’s Civil Code also undid revolutionary changes, such as making divorce easy for both men and women, and allowing children, including daughters, to inherit property. The new code made it harder for women to divorce.

Their husbands controlled their property when they married. Women were considered minors in lawsuits, and their testimony was considered less reliable than that of men.

Napoleon developed a powerful, centralized administrative machine with promotion based on ability. Opening government careers to individuals based on their ability was one change the middle class wanted.

Napoleon created a new aristocracy based on merit in the state service. He created 3,263 nobles between 1808 and 1814. More than half were military officers and from the middle class.

Napoleon now could create a new world order. His Grand Empire had three parts: the French Empire, dependent states, and allied states.

Napoleon sought to spread some of the principles of the French Revolution, including equality before the law, religious toleration, and economic freedom, through his empire. He urged his rulers to be constitutional kings.

Britain survived principally because of its sea power, which made Britain virtually invulnerable. Even so, Napoleon mounted a fleet for an invasion. Britain's defeat of a combined French-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar (1805) ended Napoleon’s dream of invading.

Napoleon tried to use the Continental System to defeat Britain. The Continental System was intended to stop British goods from reaching continental markets. Allied states resented being told they could not buy British goods, and this strategy failed as well.

Napoleon’s fall began with his invasion of Russia, which had refused to remain in the Continental System.

In 1812 a Grand Army of over six hundred thousand men entered Russia. Napoleon needed to score a quick, decisive victory. The Russians would not fight but kept retreating.

They burned their villages, and even Moscow, as they wanted to deny the French food and supplies. Lacking food, Napoleon left Moscow after two months to retreat.

The European powers and Napoleon, whom they called the “Enemy and Disturber of the Tranquility of the World,” fought again. At Waterloo in Belgium in 1815, Napoleon was defeated by a combined British and Prussian army under the Duke of Wellington.