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The French Revolution

The French Revolution took place in 1789 and brought about a total transformation in the political and social order of France. Before the revolution, King Louis XVI (the king of France) ruled by absolute monarchy. The society was organized into three estates, which were the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. Even though the first two estates (the clergy and the nobles) enjoyed wealth and privileges, the third Estate (the house of commoners) had to bear the weight of high taxation, poverty, high food prices and unemployment. On the other hand, France was in a financial crisis due to unnecessary government expenditures that were meant to fund wars.

Inspired by enlightened thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, the frustration among common citizens grew rapidly, and the people started demanding equality, freedom, and a say in governance. King Louis XVI called for the Estates-General in May 1789 to discuss and address the Kingdom's economic crisis. However, due to disagreements over voting issues, the commoners (Third Estate) formed the National Assembly and vowed to create a constitution that would limit the king's power.

The most famous event of the French Revolution took place on July 14, 1789, when an angry mob attacked the Bastille prison in Paris. Although not many people were incarcerated in this prison, it was regarded as a symbol of royal oppression, and its destruction was very significant for the rebels. From there, the idea of a revolution began to spread rapidly, and feudal privileges were abolished shortly after that.

Despite a constitutional monarchy being established in France in 1791, political tensions continued to rise. The French citizens could no longer trust their king considering he had attempted to flee the country. The radical revolutionaries began to grow in strength, and in 1792, a republic was proclaimed with the monarchy abolished completely. King Louis XVI was put to death by guillotine in 1793. His wife, Queen Marie Antoinette, met the same fate that same year.

However, the revolution took a different turn and became more violent, a period often referred to as "the Reign of Terror", which was headed by Maximilien Robespierre. Many individuals were executed for being labeled as opponents of the revolution. Even though the Reign of Terror was meant to protect the republic, it brought about fear and instability. Robespierre was later arrested and executed in 1794.

Napoleon Bonaparte was able to take advantage of the political instability during the 1790s to assume power in France. He took over the government in 1799, thereby putting an end to the revolution. Although it was violent, the French Revolution had a long-lasting impact on France and other parts of the world. The revolution helped promote democracy and equality among people in France and other parts of the world.