

The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction
By William Doyle

Beginning with a discussion of familiar images of the French Revolution, garnered from Dickens, Baroness Orczy, and Tolstoy, as well as the legends of “let them eat cake”, and tricolours, Doyle leads the reader to the realization that we are still living with developments and consequences of the French Revolution such as decimalization, and the whole ideology of human rights. Doyle explores the legacy of the revolution in the form of rationality in public affairs and responsible government, and finishes his examination of the revolution with a discussion as to why it has been so controversial.

Questions for discussion

- What was the Ancien Regime and why did it collapse?
- How was it that a financial crisis brought about a social upheaval?
- Why did the liberal aspirations of 1789 lead to the Terror of 1793-4?
- What were the key issues that polarised French life between 1789 and 1802?
- Why did the Revolution develop into an attack on the Catholic Church?
- How far did war ‘revolutionise the Revolution’?
- Would it be better to speak of a civil war than of a revolution?
- How did the Revolution create both modern liberalism and conservatism?
- To what extent was the French Revolution a series of unforeseen and unforeseeable accidents?
- Why did post-revolutionary France prove so difficult to stabilise?
- Why did the ideals proclaimed in revolutionary France have such resonance outside?
- What was Napoleon’s relationship to the Revolution?
- How far should the Revolution be seen as an example of early or proto-socialism?
- Did the collapse of Communism mark the end of the French Revolution’s historic influence?
- Why does the French Revolution continue to arouse such intense controversy?
- What should we celebrate about the Revolution, and what should we condemn?
- Does the French Revolution still matter? Why?

Other books by William Doyle

Origins of the French Revolution (OUP, 1980, 3rd edn. 1999)

The Oxford History of the French Revolution (OUP, 1989, 2nd edn. 2002)

The Ancien Regime (Palgrave/ Macmillan, 1986, 2nd edn. 2001)

Further reading

N. Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France 1780–1804* (London, 2000).

F. Furet, *Revolutionary France 1770–1870* (Oxford, 1992).

G. Lewis, *The French Revolution. Rethinking the Debate* (London, 1993).

T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary. The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton, 1996).