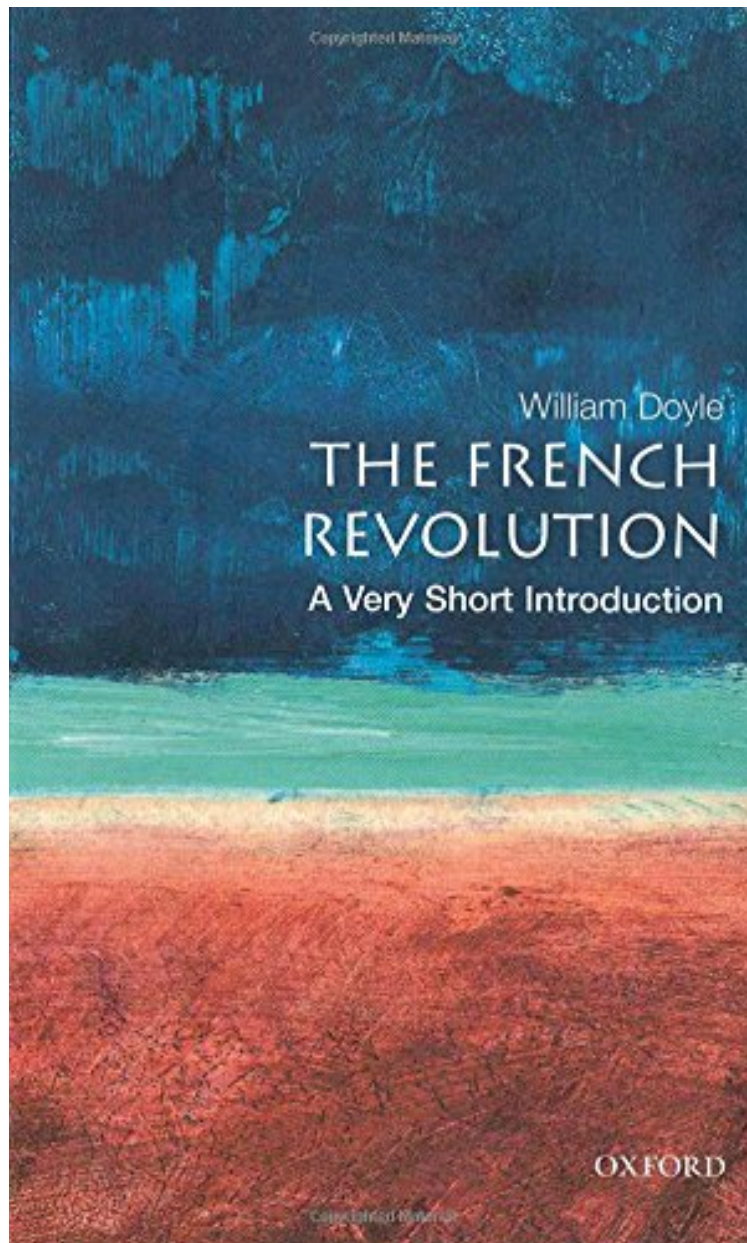


[FREE] The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction

# The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction

*William Doyle*

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**William Doyle : The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction:

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LawrenceAn excellent overview and summary. The last two chapters give a very clear summary of the upshots and legacy of the revolution.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Curious about the Revolution? Start here!By OlderThanYouThis is really an excellent overview of the Revolution (just over a hundred pages, plus the end material). The chapters are Echoes; Why It Happened; How It Happened; What It Ended; What It Started; and Where It Stands. The last chapter is a welcome and very interesting review of the celebration of the bicentennial of the Revolution in 1989, and a summary of the schools of interpretation which have held sway in the last fifty years (the Classic interpretation, Revisionism, and Post-revisionism). The index is serviceable; there is a nice timeline; a little end section on the Calendar which the Revolution produced (lots of details there); and, best of all, a wonderful section of suggestions for further reading, with several dozen books fit into six categories. Some of the books are classic works fifty and more years old, but probably most of them have appeared in the period 1960-2000, and offer a selection of the top volumes written in that period. I can't praise this book highly enough. If you are wondering where to start reading about the French Revolution, look no further.10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Quite revealing in many waysBy Marvin D. PipherI was somewhat disappointed, when I began reading this book, because it seemed to be taking the author much too long to get around to his subject: the French Revolution. But as I got deeper into it I began to see what the author was striving to do and had to agree that much of the story of the French Revolution, and the most important and intriguing part, took place before and continues to take place after the actual event. I also have to agree that, as the author said in the beginning, the story of the French Revolution and its impacts on society are so complex and take place over such an extended period of time that it is extremely difficult to adequately cover them in such a small tome as this (108 pages). That brevity forced this author to pick and choose his points of discussion and skip the more sordid details of the revolution. This makes his book somewhat difficult for a lay reader to grasp in its entirety, but it is well worth the effort.Prior to reading the book: my first thought upon hearing the word 'revolution' had always been of the American Revolution; the revolution which founded the United States of America. The French Revolution, besides being an almost complete mystery to me, had always seemed to be of lesser importance. Little did I know that the exact opposite is more likely the case. The American Revolution may have created a new nation, and that nation may have gone on to become the most powerful nation in the world; but, if I read this book correctly --- and I think I do --- the French Revolution had more of an impact --- changing the world and still changing it today.To illustrate, consider this: France's support for the American Revolution and its principles led many Frenchmen to wonder why those same principles didn't also apply to them. The subsequent revolution, by encouraging equality and freedom in France, then caused the greatest slave revolt in history, in Saint-Domingue, ultimately leading to the creation of the Nation of Haiti. The French Revolution also demonstrated to the people of other European nations that the old orders could be abolished and that sovereignty could rest with the people; rather than with sovereign kings, hereditary elites, or churches. Furthermore, by locating sovereign power in the 'Nation,' a king could be made the servant of the people rather than their master. This encouraged the overthrow of other monarchies throughout Europe. It also led to the retreat of the Holy Roman Empire from its association with sovereign secular states; coinciding with the promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility by the Vatican Council.Those who brought about the French Revolution, the enlightened, also thought that the established Church was the root of most of the evils in society. As a result, France became the first nation in Europe to attempt to eliminate Christian practice in all its forms, thereby becoming the first secular state in Europe. This ultimately prompted the first attempt at a communist revolution in history. Furthermore, based on the events of the French Revolution, Marxists/Socialists, such as Vladimir Lenin came to believe that there could be no true revolution without terror since, in the absence of legitimate authority, ruthless power must be used. They also believed that the clergy must be crushed and religion suppressed.Based on these considerations, any thoughtful reader can easily discern how the French Revolution has changed the face of Europe and impacted the world's social order, and any intelligent American reader can see how the beliefs stemming from that revolution are now drawing a bead on America's way of life. Quite revealing, to say the least.

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. Continuing with a brief survey of the old regime and how it collapsed, Doyle continues to elucidate how the revolution happened: why did the revolutionaries quarrel with the king, the church and the rest of Europe, why this produced Terror, and finally how it accomplished rule by a general. The revolution destroyed the age-old cultural, institutional and social structures in France and beyond. This book looks at how the ancien regime became ancien as well as examining cases in which achievement failed to match ambition. 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 of why it has been so controversial.About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues

in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

"[Doyle] writes on the French Revolution with more understanding, balance and clarity than any other historian, living or dead."--Tim Blanning, University of Cambridge  
About the Author William Doyle is Professor of History at the University of Bristol. His publications include *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (1990), *Origins of the French Revolution* (1999), *The Old European Order 1660-1800* (1992), and forthcoming from OUP, *Old Regime France* (2001).