

Volume 1

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The Fall of the Bastille

Lead: It was July 11, 1789 and in Paris the Revolution seemed to be lost.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: Faced with what amounted to little more than open rebellion on the part of the members of the Estates-General, France's representative assembly, Louis XVI, King of France, was losing control of events. On June 20, excluded from their hall, the representatives of the vast majority of the French people had met in a nearby Indoor Tennis Court

and took the Tennis Court Oath, pledging not to disband until they had written a new constitution.

On June 23, the King made a conciliatory speech, but then secretly called an army of 18,000 troops toward Versailles and on July 11, prepared to use them to disband the Estates-General. At that point, the people of Paris intervened and saved the revolution.

Driving the people to act was a force as old as time, they were starving to death. In the fall of 1788 the price of bread on the streets of Paris was the highest in the 18th century. With the price of food slamming through the roof, the demand for other goods fell

apart and thousands of urban workers were thrown out of work. In July rumors spread that troops of the king, on the way to dismiss the National Assembly, would attack the city. Mobs began to scavenge for arms and powder to protect themselves. On July 14, several hundred gathered at the Bastille, the ancient prison/fortress in the heart of Paris. Its walls were 10 feet thick and it was manned by 80 retired soldiers and a scattering of hired Swiss guards. The commander of the Bastille refused to release the gunpowder, then he panicked and his men began firing into the crowd. Nearly 100 of the protesters were killed. And the crowd went wild. Finally, the prison surrendered and the governor was hacked to death by

the crowd which had by this time had clearly gotten out of control. The governor's head joined that of the mayor of Paris, stuck on pikes and paraded through the streets. The people of Paris had saved the Revolution.

"A Moment in Time" is produced at the University of Richmond. This is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Boscher, J.F. *The French Revolution*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Publishers, 1988.

Doyle, William. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1989.

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