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# Louis XVI & The French Revolution

# Little Louis

- Louis-Auguste de France was born August 23, 1754 in the Palace of Versailles
- 1 of 8 children to Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand and Maris-Josephe of Saxony
- His parents neglected him and focused their attention on his older (and more handsome) brother, Louis duc de Bourgogne
- He was very strong intellectually and enjoyed hunting and rough-housing with his younger brothers

# Dauphin at 11 Years Young

- His father died of tuberculosis on December 20, 1765 and he became Dauphin
- His mother then died on March 13, 1767 from a broken heart and tuberculosis
- He married 15-year-old Hapsburg Archduchess Maria Antonia (Marie Antoinette) on May 16, 1770 at only 16 years old
- Early in his marriage, the shy Louis failed to consummate the marriage which put a lot of pressure and strain on Marie Antoinette who was expected to produce an heir



# Wrong Place, Wrong Time

- Louis could not have picked a worse time to succeed to the throne than in 1774 (20 years old)
- The government was deeply in debt- unemployment rates in Paris were believed to be as high as 50%
- Resentment toward the monarchy was on the rise
- He felt unqualified for the job- he was indecisive and not firm enough to rule
- The crops failed which caused the prices of bread and other food to soar
- Famine was rampant
- And he was forced to marry a foreigner which upset many of the French

# Money Troubles

- Due to the huge national debt, Louis was forced to look for money elsewhere
- He was not granted the right to levy new taxes so he hired multiple advisors who tried to take out international loans, buy the country out of debt, and introduce new fiscal reforms- all of which did not work
- He lost the ability to rule as an absolute monarch and fell into a deep depression
- He called upon the Estates-General which had not been called to order in many years
- Through this he had to place his reputation on the line and eventually the Estates-General became more powerful than him “members of the Estates refused to remove their hats in the King’s presence, so Louis removed his to them.”

# Trouble Escalates

- By reinstating the Estates-General, the Third Estate came to power and thus wanted to be called the National Assembly
- With this change, Louis lost all control and the Tennis Court Oath happened and the former power of the King went to elected representative's of France
- The storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789) was the physical proof that radical change was ahead



# Power Shifts

- The mobs of Paris that stormed the Bastille felt that power was shifting to their side and forced the imprisonment of Louis and his family on October 5, 1789
- Louis attempted to secretly flee from Paris with his family to Montmedy, France (a royalist-fortress town in northeastern France) on June 21, 1791
- However, there were many flaws in the plan so it failed
- He and his family were arrested at Varennes-en-Argonne shortly after being recognized by a postmaster
- They were brought back to Paris on June 25 and immediately put on house arrest

# Arrest & Execution

- He was officially arrested on August 13, 1792- the National Assembly declared France to be a republic and abolished the monarchy
- He was charged with 33 crimes. Of which included “persisting in your designs against national liberty” and “you took an oath that you have not kept”
- After much deliberation Louis was sentenced to immediate death
- Before being executed on January 21, 1793 he was completely stripped of all titles and honors given to him by the government
- He gave a speech on the scaffold in which he reasserted his innocence and pardoned those responsible for his death
- He was guillotined as Citoyen Louis Capet (Citizen Louis Capet)
- His beheading was a rather gruesome one. Accounts tell that the blade did not completely sever his neck and they had to guillotine him again



# Fun Facts About Louis XVI & His Family

- Louis XIV of France really was as an unpleasant a fellow as he's been depicted. In 1674, when he was visiting a school at Clermont, he heard from the school's authorities that one of the children, a nine-year-old Irish lad named Francis Seldon, had made a pun about the king's bald head. Louis was furious. He had a secret warrant drawn up for the child's arrest, and young Seldon was thrown into solitary confinement in the Bastille. His parents, members of one of Europe's richest merchant families, were told simply that the child had disappeared. Days turned to months, months to years, and Louis himself passed away. But Francis spent sixty-nine years "in the hole" for making fun of the king's baldness.
- Louis XVI assisted in perfecting the guillotine (as a painless and more dignified method of execution). An amateur locksmith, the sharp triangular blade that would finish the job quickly was his idea. Ironic?

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