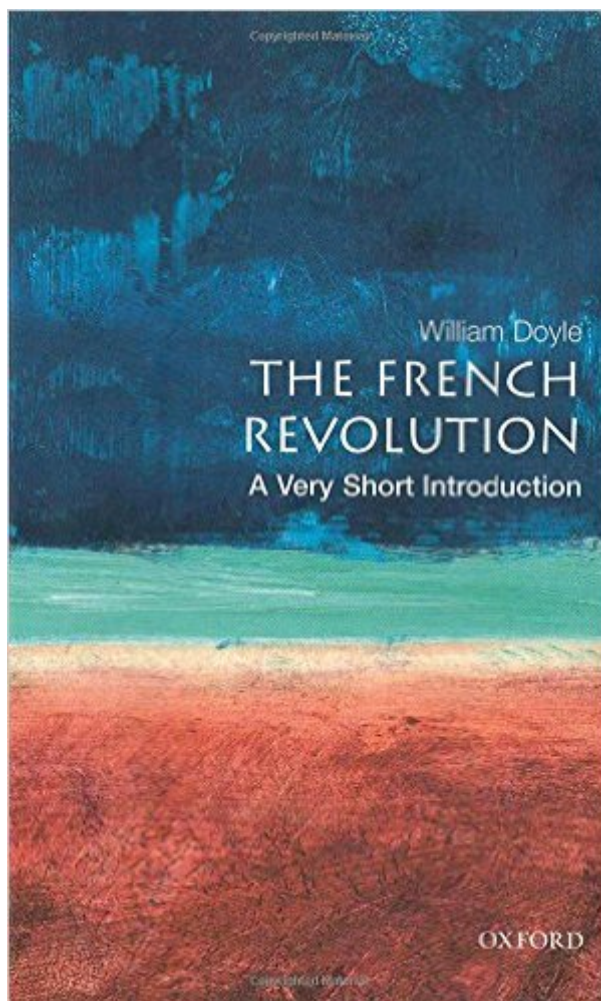


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# The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The French Revolution is one of the most significant events in world history. So much has been written about it that it can be difficult to find a good place to start exploring the subject. Well, look no

more. William Doyle has written a terrific introduction to the topic that is wonderful in its scope and yet concise. In this book he is more concerned with why the French Revolution mattered and has continued to matter, that with a retelling of what happened. Rather than a strict chronological approach, the six chapters of this book give the reader six different perspectives on the same event. Each adds depth to our understanding of the event and its place in history. Chapter one is called "Echoes" and it relates how this great upheaval was perceived by the rest of the world not only in the newspapers of the day but in fiction and drama. The Importance of Being Earnest, A Tale of Two Cities, and The Scarlet Pimpernel are discussed. The complete text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens is included in this chapter as well. "Why It Happened" is the second chapter. Here the author discusses the causes of the Revolution. This is mainly a description of the Ancien Regime's government and society during the reign of Louis XVI. The third chapter is called "How It Happened." In this chapter Doyle discusses the Revolution as a series of events that stretched over a number of years. He does an excellent job of showing how each event led to the next. The violent excesses of the guillotine are much more understandable in context. "What It Ended" is the name of the fourth chapter and my personal favorite. It is here that we see the impact that the Revolution had, not only in France, but throughout the world.

For those interested in a brilliant overview of the French revolution, written concisely, combining narrative and competent analysis, including a comprehensive time line and a noteworthy bibliography, Doyle's A Very Short Introduction, is well worth your investment and time. One of the more difficult writing tasks is to summarize an important and complicated historical event such as the French revolution, with any competence or erudition. Doyle's essay touches upon all aspects of the revolution's origins of development, including major personages, ideologies and significant events that contributed to its beginnings, processes and the revolution's present legacy in terms of its significant influence on society to present time. In the first chapter, Echoes, Doyle proposes that one cannot look at France or visit the country without seeing some aspect of the revolution. The Eiffel Tower, for instance, was the centrepiece of the great exhibition that marked the first centenary in 1889. He continues, "Nobody who lived in France, or visited it, could avoid these echoes, or echoes of Napoleon, who had marched under the tricolour, had tamed and harnessed the energies unleashed by the revolution, and whose nephew Napoleon III had ruled for 22 years before the Third Republic was established. (P.2) Doyle tackles this project in six comprehensive chapters.

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