

Revolutions Across Time

Revolution—which is a sudden or significant change in the old ways of doing things—can occur in many areas, such as government, technology, or art. In Unit 5, you studied political revolutions in Europe and the Americas, in which people rebelled against unjust rulers to gain more rights. Each revolution led to major changes in governmental, social, and economic structures. In these six pages, you will gain a better understanding of those revolutions by examining their similarities and differences.

English Civil War and Glorious Revolution ▶

In 1642, civil war broke out between those who supported Parliament and those who supported the king. Parliament won and set up a commonwealth, led by Oliver Cromwell. In time, he became a dictator. After his death, the monarchy returned, but tensions built anew. In 1688, Parliament ousted King James II, shown at right, in the Glorious Revolution and invited William and Mary to rule.



1642

1776

1789

1791



◀ American Revolution

After 1763, Americans began to resent British rule. Clashes such as the Boston Massacre, shown at left, took place. The colonies declared their independence in 1776. War ensued, and the United States won its freedom by defeating Britain.

▼ French Revolution

Beginning in 1789, the French people rose up to overthrow their king. The uprisings included the march by hungry women shown below. Differing goals soon split the revolutionaries. Several years of terror followed. Napoleon restored order and eventually made himself emperor of France.

▲ Latin American Revolutions

From 1791 to 1824, revolutions took place in Haiti, Mexico, and the huge Spanish empire that spread across Central and South America. By the end of that period, nearly all of Latin America had gained its independence from European control. One of South America's great liberators was José de San Martín, shown in the painting above.



Model of a Revolution

From his study of the French Revolution, historian Crane Brinton developed a model of the stages that revolutions often go through. The model below is based on his work. Compare it with the revolutions you learned about in this unit.

STAGE 1 Fall of the Old Order

Revolutions usually cannot occur until a ruler becomes weak. Often this weakness results in problems such as starvation and unfair taxes. Anger builds until the ruler is overthrown.

STAGE 2 Rule by Moderates

The people relax because they think they have achieved their goal. A moderate group rules. But simply overthrowing the old order rarely solves the problems that led to the revolution.

STAGE 3 The Terror

When people realize that the old problems still exist, they look for someone to blame. Radicals take control, push for more extreme changes, and execute "enemies of the revolution."

STAGE 4 Turn from Radical Rule

In time, the violence sickens people, and the use of terror ends. The former radicals adopt a more gradual plan for effecting change.

STAGE 5 Military Rule

The terror often kills most of a country's leaders. Then the turn from radicalism makes people doubt revolutionary ideals. A military leader steps into the gap and becomes dictator.

STAGE 6 Restoration

When the dictatorship ends, through death or overthrow, a power vacuum results. The order that existed before the revolution is restored.

Comparing & Contrasting

1. Which of the revolutions on the time line, besides the French Revolution, is most like the model? Explain.
2. Which revolution is least like the model? Explain.

