



NIAS-STIR Programme

National Institute of Advanced Studies



global politics

This Week in History

in collaboration with Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous)

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This Week In History # 02

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About This Week in History

This Week in History is the latest publication from NIAS Global Politics team at the Science, Technology, and International Relations (STIR) Programme at the National Institute of Advanced Studies.

The TWIH aims to examine major historical developments during the week, and their importance. It also aims to analyse the historic events in terms of their consequences/legacies, and their relevance to contemporary global politics, peace and conflict, and other relevant disciplines. We hope this will add value to two of our flagship publications - *Conflict Weekly* and *The World This Week*.

The TWIH is also a network and capacity-building initiative. It aims to build a network of academic institutions/departments teaching history. It also aims to build a network of young faculty and scholars, who will be interested in looking at history through contemporary global politics prism and vice-versa.

NIAS Global Politics join the Department of History at the Kristu Jayanti College in this initiative.

About the Department of History, Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru

The Department of History, Kristu Jayanti

College [Autonomous], was established in 2006 to cultivate the historical learning, critical thinking, and research abilities of the students. The Department offers the latest in curriculum, workshops, training, field visits, projects, and experiential learning activities for the holistic development of students. The Department organises interactive programmes on themes of archaeology, culture and heritage, contemporary history, and global politics. The History Club organises quizzes, paper presentations, book reviews, and several other competitions to inspire students to reveal their talents and creativity.

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8 July 1497:

Vasco Da Gama leaves Portugal, starting a new era of exploration

Prajwal TV

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Image Source: World History Encyclopedia

On 08 July 1497, Vasco Da Gama set sail for his first voyage with a fleet of four vessels from Lisbon in hopes of reaching India after a neglected project of finding a new sea route to Asia and outflanking the Muslim domination of the eastern Mediterranean and all routes that connected India to Europe. The King of Portugal Manuel I had appointed Vasco Da Gama to lead this expedition.

From Dias to Gama: The Sail to 08 July 1497

In the 14th century, under the leadership of Prince Henry, the 'Navigator,' Portugal had been steadily advancing its maritime knowledge and exploring the west coast of Africa and ways to find a sea route to India. By the late 15th century, Europe was gripped by the Renaissance and the call for exploration. By then, Europe had made great advances in the art of shipbuilding and navigation, building an eagerness to explore the East.

In 1487, before Vasco Da Gama set sail, King John II of Portugal had commissioned Bartolomeu Dias to find a route around Africa to India. In 1488, Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope, originally known as the Cape of Storms, proving that a sea route to India was possible after returning from a 16-month-long journey. Under King Manuel I, in 1495, that the ambitious plan to send an expedition to India was realised.

08 July 1497: Beginning of a New Era

On that day, Vasco da Gama departed Portugal, with a fleet of four ships to find a maritime route to India, which would establish a direct trade link for spices and other valuable commodities,

circumventing the Muslim monopoly of trade routes to India. Vasco Da Gama's fleet carried stone pillars called *padrão* to set up on the way as marks of discovery. The expedition sailed south along the coast of Africa, stopping at trading ports such as the Cape Verde Islands and Sierra Leone. After passing the Canary Islands, they reached São Tiago in Cape Verde, then took a detour to avoid Gulf of Guinea currents, reaching Santa Helena Bay on 07 November 1497. Delayed by adverse winds, they rounded the Cape of Good Hope on 22 November and reached Natal on Christmas Day, navigating uncharted waters, dealing with adverse weather conditions, and the health issues of the crew. The crew suffered from scurvy, prompting a month-long rest at the Quelimane River.

In March 1498, da Gama reached Mozambique, and Malindi, Mombasa (now in Kenya) on 14 April 1498, where they hired a pilot to navigate to India, reaching Calicut (modern-day Kozhikode) on 20 May 1498 on the west coast of India, marking the first direct sea route from Europe to Asia.

The Legacy of 08 July 1497

Vasco da Gama's successful trip in 1498 established Portuguese control in the Indian Ocean. Portugal quickly built a massive colonial and trading empire, controlling key ports and trade routes, allowing it to monopolise the lucrative spice trade. Da Gama's expedition also paved the way for more European explorations and imperial ventures. A direct sea link with India ended the Arabs and Turks' virtual monopoly on commerce in eastern products, particularly spices, who were historic adversaries of Christianity. Thus, business and religious aims complemented

and justified one another.

Vasco da Gama remained in India for three months. When he returned to Portugal, he brought with him a large cargo that he sold in the European market for a large profit. The fact that Europeans would have had to pay 10 times as much for the same amount of pepper if they had bought through Muslim intermediaries elsewhere demonstrated the necessity of direct access to the pepper trade. Other profit-seeking merchants from European nations began their trek to India and traded directly; Afonso de Albuquerque expanded Portuguese influence further by capturing strategic ports such as Goa, Malacca, and Ormuz, solidifying their control over the Indian Ocean. Among the notable expeditions that followed, Pedro Álvares Cabral's voyage in 1500, which followed da Gama's route but veered

westward, led to the discovery of Brazil. Meanwhile, Ferdinand Magellan's expedition from 1519 to 1522 was the first to circumnavigate the globe, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

This network facilitated significant cultural exchanges, introducing new goods, ideas, and technologies across continents. However, the era of European exploration also had profound and often devastating impacts on indigenous populations. Under the pretext of protecting the factories and their trading activities, the Portuguese fortified these centres, European explorations evolved into colonisation which further led to exploitation, cultural disruption, and conflict, altering the lives of millions across countless communities.

14 July 1789:

The Storming of Bastille and the Start of French Revolution

Karthik Manoharan

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Image Source: History.com

On the morning of 14 July 1789, thousands gathered and stormed the Bastille prison in France, a symbol of power and despotism. The prison, guarded by a small garrison, retaliated against the crowd, resulting in the death or injury of 200. Nevertheless, the commander of the garrison was beheaded, and his head was carried on a pike through the French streets as a mark of victory, marking the beginning of the French Revolution.

Causes leading to the Storming of the Bastille
Social, economic, and immediate causes led to the storming of Bastille

First, the social divisions and inequalities.

France had 20 million people at the beginning of the 18th century, which increased by 8-10 million more by the end. Most of the population lived in small villages and a few cities, with Paris being the exception. While capitalism began to enter everyday life, leading to increased regional and international trade, daily life in the countryside remained mostly unchanged, with peasants struggling to make a living.

French society was divided into three orders: clergy, nobility, and common people, with the clergy further divided into higher and lower clergy. Privileges and social status were mainly determined by birth, with the higher clergy

living in luxurious and extravagant lifestyles without paying taxes, creating resentment among the common people. On the other hand, the lower clergy served the people and lived in poor conditions. Provincial nobles, while focused on solving the people's problems, did not enjoy the same privileges as the Court nobles. The Third Estate, a diverse class including farmers, cobblers, and other lower classes, faced various taxes such as Taille, Tithe, and Gable, while also enduring exploitation by the clergy and nobility through labor obligations. The bourgeoisie, composed of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and intellectuals, held wealth and status, yet were ranked as part of the Third Estate by the monarchy, influenced by the clergy and nobles. The bourgeoisie, along with the lower clergy and provincial nobles, played a significant role in inspiring the common people about their rights and inciting rebellion, hence the French Revolution is sometimes referred to as the "Bourgeoisie Revolution."

Social tensions surrounding inequality became a central issue during the Revolution, as representatives from the Third Estate sought equal representation. Pamphlets were published, arguing for a new concept of society where commoners had equal value to the other orders.

Second, the heavy taxation and the plight of the Third Estate

The wars of the king, his extravagant spending on the royal palace at Versailles, and

mismanagement resulted in a soaring national debt. Marie Antoinette's extravagant lifestyle added to the financial burden on the state. Meanwhile, the third estate, despite being deprived of basic rights, faced heavy taxation. Peasants endured multiple taxes, including taille, corvée, gabelle, franc-fief, and tithe, while the upper classes grew wealthier. The nobles and clergy enjoyed tax exemptions and accumulated wealth, further exacerbating the frustrations of the peasantry. Moreover, the French monarchy's support of the American War of Independence drained the royal budget. The cost of supporting the Americans and fighting Britain strained the French economy, adding to the financial crisis.

Third, the growing demand for reforms

The immediate causes leading to the storming of Bastille include the demands for reform. Some members of the Assembly of Notables were open to fiscal reform and paying more taxes, but only if their privileges were guaranteed through institutional reforms. They wanted the king to call for regular assemblies of the Estates-General, which hadn't been done since 1614, to address the financial crisis and reduce the privileges of the nobles. However, implementing these reforms without the approval of the nobles could lead to accusations of despotism or tyranny. Yielding to the demands of the privileged classes in exchange for new taxes would compromise the king's absolute authority and suggest that his decisions were subject to the approval of the nation or nobility.

14 July 1789:

The Storming of Bastille and its continuation

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Image Source: NPR

The storming of the Bastille exposed the flaws in the French monarchy and cleared the way for a

change in the political power structure to one that was more centered on the needs of the

people. This created the groundwork for the development of modern-day democracy in France and was a prime example of the spirit embodied in the country's motto, "liberté, égalité, fraternité."

Unlike the American revolutionaries of 1776, the French revolutionaries of 1789 had greater aspirations than merely gaining their own independence. They aimed to establish fundamental values that would serve as the cornerstone for universal human freedom. The United States Declaration of Independence made reference to "liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness" in passing but did not elaborate on the meaning or means of realizing these rights. In addition to outlining a form of participatory democracy that would enable citizens to defend their own rights, the French "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" specified the rights that made up liberty and equality.

The French revolutionaries acknowledged, far more freely than their American counterparts, that the ideas of liberty and equality they had espoused raised important concerns concerning things like women's standing and the legitimacy of slavery. In contrast to the US, these issues were publicly and vehemently contested in France. The revolutionaries first believed that "imperious necessity" justified the continuation of slavery in France's foreign colonies, where 800,000 enslaved labourers outnumbered the 670,000 in the 13 American states in 1789, and that "nature" denied women the right to vote.

However, the revolution's legislators adopted increasingly drastic measures as it went on. In 1792, a law that redefined marriage and legalized divorce gave women the same legal rights to file for divorce and custody of their children. By that time, women had established political organizations of their own, some were openly serving in the French army, and Olympe de Gouges's powerful "Declaration of the Rights of Woman" had emphasized that they should be able to vote and hold public office. In the streets of revolutionary Paris, women's influence grew to such an extent that male politicians attempted to ban their activities. In 1794, in response to a widespread rebellion by African Americans held in slavery in Saint-Domingue, France's most valuable Caribbean province, the French National Convention outlawed slavery and granted full citizenship to those who had been slaves. Black general Toussaint Louverture was the formal commander-in-chief of French forces in Saint-Domingue by 1796; the island would gain independence from France in 1804. Black men were seated as deputies to the French assembly.

What after the French Revolution in 1789

The fallouts of the Bastille Fall continued to echo in France's history, much after the event came to an end. Following are some of the major developments that followed.

1848: The Second Revolution

Approximately fifty years after the end of Revolution, the populace rose again to overthrow King Louis-Philippe's government. Following Louis Napoleon's coup d'état, they proclaimed the Second Republic. These incidents took place in 1848 as a part of a wave of revolutions across Europe against the centuries-old monarchs in Austria, Germany, Italy, and Sicily.

1968: "Cobblestone" Student Protests

The protests began on university campuses, particularly at the University of Nanterre and the Sorbonne in Paris. The students were rebelling against the conservative, patriarchal society and the authoritarian rule of President Charles de Gaulle. They sought greater personal and political freedoms. The initial protests were sparked by issues like restrictions on visiting hours in student dorms and opposition to the Vietnam War.

After a violent altercation broke out between the university and the city's police, students at the esteemed Sorbonne University went to the streets. The protesters dug up and threw cobblestones at the police, leaving a renowned trail of destruction in their wake. Nearly 9 million workers, students, and civil servants joined the campaign, which ultimately overthrew official resistance and brought about the dissolution of the National Assembly as well as a 35 per cent increase in the minimum wage and a 10 per cent pay boost. However, it cost the protesting parties hundreds of injuries and seven fatalities.

1986: University Reform Protests

The student protests in France in 1986 were primarily focused on opposing proposed reforms to the higher education system. The proposed reforms of the French government planned to make changes to the national university system, including raising tuition fees to a maximum of around \$250 per year. Second giving universities more freedom to select their own students, rather than automatically admitting those with a high school diploma.

The 1986 demonstration compelled the French government to give in to public demands, much like the movement that had taken place two decades earlier. The public was greatly incensed by a proposed bill pertaining to university

selection criteria, resulting in yet another round of bloodshed, shattered glass, and flames in the Paris streets. After a student was assaulted and killed by police, the demonstrations reached a catastrophic peak. The minister who had presented the bill subsequently resigned and it was rejected.

2018: The Yellow Vest Protests

When more than 300,000 protesters nationwide organized against a government-imposed levy on

gas and diesel last year, the streets of Paris were once again set on fire.

For weeks on end, demonstrators set fire to automobiles, stopped gas stations, blocked roads, and vandalized public property. The demonstrations developed into a far larger backlash against President Emmanuel Macron's government. The protests, which have persisted, albeit in a lower scale, long into 2019, have gained recognition as one of the biggest the city has witnessed in decades.

14 July 1789:

The Storming of Bastille and its Legacy

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Image Source: Britannica

The storming of Bastille on 14 July 1789 left a legacy of social change, economic upheaval, political revolution, and lasting historical significance. Liberal, socialist, and nationalist philosophies developed during the French Revolution, continue to influence political thought and movements for decades. Thus, it has an impact on modern democracy, human rights, and social justice.

The Bastille Day

France celebrates Bastille Day (La Fête Nationale) on July 14 to honour the revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Bastille's fall symbolised the end of absolute monarchy and the beginning of democracy in France. Literature, art, and popular culture immortalize the Bastille, such as in Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities" and Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables". Place de la Bastille, in Paris, marks the ancient fortress with a square with the July Column, commemorating the 1830 Revolution.

The Road to Social Equality

Bastille inspired the Third Estate (peasants, craftsmen, and bourgeoisie) to oppose the social structure and demand more rights and freedoms. It was the beginning of the National Assembly that abolished serfdom and feudal dues; the event helped abolish feudalism. This signified a major shift towards equality. The debate's central idea, "citizen" vs. "subject," served as the foundation for most modern democratic societies, prioritizing individual rights and political engagement. The 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens' leaves an undeniable legacy. The National Assembly adopted this fundamental statement, inspired by the Bastille, which proclaimed universal liberty, equality, and brotherhood, influencing democratic movements worldwide.

Bastille's reverberation across the continent

Symbolised by the storming of the Bastille, the philosophical concepts that emerged from the French Revolution had a global influence. The Revolution raised enduring philosophical questions regarding the limits of political authority, the function of the state, and the balance between liberty and security. These debates continue to influence the state of contemporary political philosophy and discourse.

The uprisings in Haiti (1791–1804), Latin America (1810–1825), and the 1848 European uprisings were inspired by the French Revolution, symbolised by the Bastille storm. The unassailable impact of the revolution is the emergence of the idea of human rights worldwide. The belief that everyone has inalienable rights influences international law and human rights discourse. The events surrounding the Bastille and the subsequent revolutionary declarations further solidified universal human rights. It became a fundamental philosophical principle that certain liberties are inherent to all human beings, irrespective of their nationality or status.

The Era of Enlightenment, Equality Before Law and Separation of Power

The revolutionary concept impacted the Napoleonic Code, which modernised legal systems in many countries and upheld civil freedoms and equality before the law. The Bastille's philosophical legacy is profound, as it embodies and symbolizes several key Enlightenment ideas and principles that have significantly influenced contemporary

thought. One of the main ideals of the Enlightenment is the concept of reason and rationality over superstition and tradition. Philosophers Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu criticized the arbitrary power of the monarchy and the church, advocating for a society based on reason and justice. John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau became proponents of natural rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and property. The revolution gave practical expression to Rousseau's philosophical concept of the social contract, which states that governments (legitimate authorities) must derive their authority from the consent of the governed and must uphold the general will of the people.

The Montesquieu concept of power separation and the implementation of checks and balances has had a long-lasting impact on all modern governments around the world. Immanuel Kant and other philosophers emphasized the fundamental concept of individual dignity, arguing that we should view each person as an end in themselves, not just a means to an end. This principle resonated with the revolutionary ethos, influencing the establishment of new legal and social norms during and after the revolution.

The philosophical legacy of the Bastille is therefore intricate and extensive, reflecting the revolutionary spirit and the transformative ideas of the Enlightenment, which aimed to establish a more rational, equitable, and just society.