History of France | Timeline and Facts

History of France Facts

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Also Known As:	French Republic, République Française
Government:	Prime Minister, Jean Castex
Capital:	Paris
Population:	(2021 est.) 65,404,000

Currency:	Euro
Form of Government:	republic with two legislative houses (Parliament; Senate [348], National Assembly [577])
Official Language:	French

History of France Timeline

France is a country in Western Europe that is formally known as the French Republic, French France, or République Française. This beautiful country is characterized by rich countryside and flowing rivers, making it one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources. Yet, the History of France is filled with brave warriors who defended their beloved country from Vikings, egotistical kings, and Nazis. Their past is as varied and exciting as their culture, so let's look at the major events and people who made France the country it is today.

People have lived in France for millions of years; in fact, this warm and fertile land helped the first people survive the Ice Age. Over time, many different cultures and tribes lived across Europe, including France, and these groups are characterized by their art, tools, and pottery.

The people living in Europe learned how to use bronze around 1700 BCE, and it revolutionized how they interacted with each other and built societies. By this time, the Gauls and Celts were becoming recognizable groups. They were closely related, but the Celts lived in tribes across Europe, and the Gauls were more centralized in France. In fact, during the Roman Empire, France was called "Gaul" because it was the land where the Gauls lived.

The Gauls appear to have had a well-established trading network. Although they were separate tribes, the Gauls used dirt and stone-covered roads and rivers to move their trading products – like salt, grain, and wooden goods – across the continent. They even had coins, and historians have found them all over Europe, proving their society was much more advanced than the Ancient **Romans** gave them credit for.

The Romans wanted to conquer Gaul because the land was rich with resources and people the Romans could use to further their plans. Subduing the Gallic culture would also help to prevent any uprisings from the tribes that could undermine Roman authority in general. At first, some of the Gallic tribes cooperated with Roman rule, but eventually, they grew tired of it – and Vercingetorix stepped into the history of France.

He was a Gallic prince, and in 52 BCE, he tried to unite the Gauls against the Romans in an attempt to drive the Romans out. Vercingetorix fought with Julius Caesar for several months before Caesar defeated the Gauls at Alesia. He went on to conquer most of Gaul for the Roman Empire, and it remained part of the empire until the fall of Rome.

The Germanic Tribes (History of France)

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The **Roman Empire** fell to **Germanic** tribes, one of those tribes being the Franks. The Franks filled some of the power vacua after Rome fell, and by the 740s CE, they were the most powerful dynasty in Western Europe. Having a strong family line isn't enough, though, and it was under the rule of Charlemagne that the Franks became the military and political rival of everyone in Europe.

Charlemagne had a deep craving for knowledge, so he always sought more education and travel opportunities. He also had a knack for organizing and running large governments, and historians believe that his network ran throughout the land of the Franks and even into the lands of their enemies. He was also well-versed in the art of war, and Charlemagne waged battle against many tribes and territories as he expanded his kingdom. Eventually, he conquered most of **Germany**, northern Italy, and France.

By 800 CE, Charlemagne was so powerful that Pope Leo III crowned him as Holy Roman Emperor. Because this Frank warrior-king was the most powerful man on the continent with armies across Western and Central Europe, historians today consider him to be the forefather to the idea of a united Europe, and he got his start in the heart of France. After Charlemagne died, his kingdom was divided among his descendants, which is where some historians believe we get the boundaries between France and **Germany** today.

His heirs fought with the Vikings for France, and some of the Vikings settled in Normandy as part of a treaty between the Viking leader, Rollo the Walker, and Charles III, a descendant of Charlemagne. William the Conqueror was the Duke of **Normandy** and a descendant of Rollo the Walker, and he launched the last successful invasion of England in 1066 CE as he fought to claim the English throne. For several centuries afterward, the English and French cultures merged, and the kings of England ruled over half of France either directly or through marriage. All of that changed during the Hundred Years' War.

The war started because the English attempted to claim the French throne for themselves. Although the English already ruled about half of France, the French king still refused to abdicate his throne and power. A war began that lasted for over a hundred years, but the fighting was on and off again. In the 1420s, the war was going badly for the French.

The English were led by **King Henry V**; he was a strong warrior. The French were led by **Charles VII**, who was struggling to hold the armies of France together under the English onslaught. Into this tumultuous time stepped Joan of Arc. She believed that she had seen visions from God directing her to go to Charles VII and tell him to drive the English out of France. She convinced Charles VII that her visions were truly from God, and she began to appear in battles.

Although Joan didn't engage in any fighting, she encouraged the soldiers and turned the war for political power into a religious crusade. In 1430, Joan was captured and sold to the English as a prisoner. They viewed her as Satan's agent, and after trying her for heresy, they burnt her at the stake on May 30th, 1431. Joan of Arc has since become a saint in France, remembered for her bravery in helping the French finally win the Hundred Years' War.

In the years to follow, France dealt with conflicts over religion, and they established an absolute monarchy. These battles, massacres, and assassinations bloodied the pages of French history of France. One of the most influential kings to come out of these violent times was King Louis XIV, who reigned from 1643 to 1715. Though remembered as a trendsetter, he was a king who could not rule independently, having become king at the age of four, so he had regents helping him until 1661.

When he finally took the kingship for himself, he abolished the role of the chief minister and took all governing power for himself. His ability to hold sway in court and across the nation earned Louis XIV the nickname " The Sun King" because everything revolved around him. France was wealthy and internationally influential during his rule, and he was determined to increase his country's influence and riches. Louis XIV spent money on wars and his court and palace; both were expensive and would eventually come back to haunt France.

At the time, though, Louis XIV wanted to show off French prosperity! One of his most remarkable projects was building the Palace of Versailles, boasting 700 rooms in the main building. The king kept a grand court there, partly for pleasure and partly to bankrupt the other nobles. They were required to wear fashionable clothes, feed themselves, and participate in court gambling as entertainment. A few days at Versailles could financially ruin a noble family, putting the French into the king's debt.

The lavish spending on lifestyles and wars ultimately bankrupted France and led to the French Revolution in 1789. Like his fathers before him, Louis XVI engaged in excessive spending, and he had little interest in running the country. As the middle class developed, the king's belief that he was appointed by God and could do what he liked began to clash with the growing demands for rights among the common people. Louis XVI tried to fix the economic problems of France by increasing taxes, but the commoners had no money left for taxes.

They were poor, hungry, and angry. The king tried to fix things by calling in the Estates-General to hear complaints and receive permission to raise taxes again, but the Third Estate (which represented everyone who wasn't a noble or a priest) walked out and swore to write a new constitution for France. This oath was called the Tennis Court Oath, and at first, Louis XVI supported them. But advisors whispered in his ear against the Third Estate, and in July of 1789, the king turned against the Third Estate, and the French Revolution began to spiral out of control.

A mob stormed the Bastille in July of 1789, showing that the people were intent on war, and in 1792, the king and royal family were arrested for crimes against the state. Louis XVI was beheaded by the guillotine by the revolutionaries in 1793, and France descended into the Reign of Terror. Thousands of people died as different revolutionaries seized and then fell out of power.

The Reign of Terror ended in 1794, and the French established a new government with a new constitution to try to prevent such bloodshed from happening again in the modern era. However, it wasn't long before the French had moved from a monarchial government to have an emperor. Napoleon Bonaparte was already part of the new government, but his dynamic personality and ambition gave him the power to declare himself emperor in 1804,

although he had been running the French government for several years before that. He is widely regarded today as the greatest general of his time, and he aspired to expand History of France.

The French army was carefully trained and drilled, making it the best army in Europe at the time – making Napoleon nearly unstoppable. He fought battles in **Italy**, **Germany**,

Austria, **Spain**, **Russia**, and **Egypt**. The other European countries were alarmed at Napoleon's almost unrelenting advancements, and they banded together to defeat him. They were successful the first time in 1813 after his defeat in Russia, and the leaders of Europe banished Napoleon to the island of Elba. But Napoleon had other plans.

He escaped and launched a campaign that historians now call The Hundred Days. He rounded up support in France and met the other armies of Europe at the Battle of Waterloo. Although Napoleon was defeated there, he is remembered as one of the History of France's greatest generals. After Napoleon was permanently exiled, the French socially moved into the modern era. The industrialized and began referring to themselves as "citizens," not "subjects."

France had several other political revolutions and revolts, and in 1848, the Second French Republic took Charles Louis Napoléon Bonaparte as their president. He was the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, and in 1852, he was elected Emperor of the French and ruled France for eighteen years. Most of his reign was peaceful, but he was forced to abdicate in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War.

This ushered in the Third French Republic. France also spent the 1800s making alliances with other European countries; all European countries did so for fear that one of the others would start a war. By 1914, Europe was a tangle of alliances, so when a Serbian shot the Austrian heir, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, France was pulled into **World War I** as part of the Allied Powers. France thought it would win the war easily, but its casualties were staggering. Much of the war was fought in the History of France, thus destroying the country.

By the time the war ended in 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles, morale was low, and the French were exhausted. They had only a few years to rest, though, before they were pulled into **World War II**. Germany invaded France in 1940 and steamrolled its way into Paris. France surrendered, but many of the French continued to fight, both with English and American troops and secretly from the interior of their country as the French Resistance.

The Resistance was key to disrupting German holdings in France, showing that the French still had their historic military spirit. Germany was eventually defeated, and

France established the Fourth French Republic. Although France is still recovering from the World Wars, they are a highly developed nation and respected worldwide. Their history of France has shaped them into a people concerned about their country, brave in battle, and proud of their culture.