Bastille Day, the French national holiday, commemorates the storming of the Bastille, which took place on 14 July 1789 and marked the beginning of the French Revolution. The Bastille was a prison and a symbol of the absolute and arbitrary power of Louis the 16th's Ancient Regime. By capturing this symbol, the people signaled that the king's power was no longer absolute: power should be based on the Nation and be limited by a separation of powers.

Although the Bastille only held seven prisoners at the time of its capture, the storming of the prison was a symbol of liberty and the fight against oppression for all French citizens; like the Tricolore flag, it symbolized the Republic's three ideals: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for all French citizens. It marked the end of absolute monarchy, the birth of the sovereign Nation, and, eventually, the creation of the (First) Republic, in 1792.

Bastille Day was declared the French national holiday on 6 July 1880, on Benjamin Raspail's recommendation, when the new Republic was firmly entrenched. Bastille Day has such a strong signification for the French because the holiday symbolizes the birth of the Republic. As in the US, where the signing of the Declaration of Independence signaled the start of the American Revolution, in France the storming of the Bastille began the Great Revolution. In both countries, the national holiday thus symbolizes the beginning of a new form of government.

On the one-year anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, delegates from every region of France proclaimed their allegiance to a single national community during the Fête de la Fédération in Paris - the first time in history that a people had claimed their right to self-determination.
The French Revolution

The French Revolution had numerous causes which are greatly simplified and summarized here:

1. Parliament wanted the king to share his absolute powers with an oligarchic parliament.
2. Priests and other low-level religious figures wanted more money.
3. Nobles also wanted to share some of the king's power.
4. The middle class wanted the right to own land and to vote.
5. The lower class were hostile toward everyone and farmers were angry about tithes and feodal rights.
6. Some historians claim that the revolutionaries were opposed to Catholicism more than to the king or the upper classes.

Further Reading

- Cet article en français
- Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution, by Simon Schama (compare prices)
- French celebration ideas
- French vocabulary related to national holidays and patriotism
- Bastille Day in Santa Barbara
- Bastille Day ideas for French teachers - general
- Bastille Day ideas for French teachers - ages 3-11
- Bastille Day celebration ideas
- Bastille Day fruit salad
- Bastille Day online games
- Bastille Day picnic recipes
- Bastille Day in French Guiana
- French culture and history
- French Revolution
- Genealogy in France
- Olympe de Gouges and the Rights of Woman

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