What is a revolution?

The word "revolution" is used in many different contexts, but it is usually meant to describe an aggressive overthrow of a government structure or social construct or a massive sudden change in societal values. The thing that most sets revolutions apart is that the change is total. A revolution generally represents a complete turnaround from one way of doing things to another way that is usually diametrically opposite. Most revolutions are motivated by the masses deciding to use their advantage to overwhelm their own leadership. In some societies, oppression can continue for hundreds of years before the people decide to act against it. On a fundamental level, many theorists believe that all governments actually serve at the pleasure of their people, even if it sometimes seems otherwise. When the people finally decide they've had enough, they usually have the power to topple dictators and poor leaders, and sometimes it is remarkably easy to do so. What triggers this isn't always obvious, but when it happens, it can sometimes be sudden and decisive.

**French Revolution** also called Revolution of 1789, the revolutionary movement that shook France between 1787 and 1799 and reached its first climax there in 1789. Although historians disagree on the causes of the Revolution, the following reasons are commonly adduced: (1) the increasingly prosperous elite of wealthy commoners—merchants, manufacturers, and professionals, often called the bourgeoisie—produced by the 18th century’s economic growth resented its exclusion from political power and positions of honour; (2) the peasants were acutely aware of their situation and were less and less willing to support the anachronistic and burdensome feudal system; (3) the [philosophes](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/456709/philosophe), who advocated social and political reform, had been read more widely in France than anywhere else; (4) French participation in the [American Revolution](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/617805/American-Revolution) had driven the government to the brink of bankruptcy; and (5) crop failures in much of the country in 1788, coming on top of a long period of economic difficulties, made the population particularly restless.

**American Revolution**: The American people were strongly independent. They wanted to do things for themselves. Great Britain was a long way away. The American people didn't want people an ocean away telling them how to live their lives. The British government decided to make the American colonies pay a large share of the war debt from the [French and Indian War](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/frenchandindianwardef.htm). Through the [Sugar Act](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/sugaractdef.htm), [Stamp Act](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/stampactdef.htm), and other taxes, the British tried to collect taxes that the American people considered harsh. The American people also thought that they should be able to send their own people to Britain's Parliament or at least vote for Britain's lawmakers. The combination of the harsh taxes and the lack of an American voice in Parliament gave rise to the famous phrase "taxation without representation." [Patrick Henry](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/patrickhenrydef.htm), [Thomas Paine](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/thomaspainedef.htm), and others called for an independent America, colonies free from British rule and interference. Americans started stockpiling guns and ammunition in violation of British laws. Their defense of such a stockpile led to the shots fired at [Lexington and Concord](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/wwww/us/lexingtonconcorddef.htm) and the beginning of the Revolutionary War.