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The Tennis Court Oath: A Pivotal Moment in the French Revolution

The Tennis Court Oath is a crucial event in the history of the French Revolution, marking a significant step towards the transformation of France's political landscape. In this passage, we will explore the major events leading up to and during the Tennis Court Oath, shedding light on its historical significance.

The Context

In the late 18th century, France was facing a financial crisis exacerbated by years of extravagant spending by the monarchy. King Louis XVI's attempts to reform the tax system met with resistance from the privileged classes—the clergy and nobility. Social inequality, economic hardship, and political discontent were on the rise.

The Estates-General and the Third Estate's Grievances

To address the financial crisis and growing discontent, King Louis XVI called for the convening of the Estates-General in May 1789. The Estates-General consisted of three estates: the First Estate (clergy), the Second Estate (nobility), and the Third Estate (common people). Each estate was to send representatives to discuss and propose solutions.

However, tensions arose over the issue of voting and representation. The Third Estate, representing the common people, argued for voting by headcount, which would give them greater influence, as they were the largest estate. The First and Second Estates insisted on voting by estate, where each estate had one vote. This deadlock led to a crisis.

The Tennis Court Oath

On June 20, 1789, the representatives of the Third Estate, frustrated by the lack of progress and determined to bring about political change, gathered at the Royal Tennis Court in Versailles. It was in this historic location that they took the Tennis Court Oath. Here are the major events of the Tennis Court Oath:

- **Assembly in the Tennis Court:** The representatives of the Third Estate, along with some sympathetic clergy and nobles, assembled at the Royal Tennis Court, where they found the doors locked by order of the king.



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- **Oath of Solidarity:** Led by figures like Jean-Sylvain Bailly and Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, the representatives took an oath of solidarity. They pledged not to disband until a new constitution was established that would limit the absolute power of the monarchy and grant rights and representation to all citizens.
- **Symbol of Unity:** The Tennis Court Oath symbolized the unity and determination of the common people to bring about political change and equality. It marked a clear break from the traditional structure of the Estates-General and signaled the birth of the National Assembly, representing the will of the people.
- **King's Response:** King Louis XVI initially resisted the demands of the Third Estate but eventually yielded to pressure. He allowed the Estates-General to proceed with voting by headcount, granting the common people greater influence.

The Impact

The Tennis Court Oath had a profound impact on the course of the French Revolution and France's political future. It symbolized the people's determination to challenge the old order and demand political change. The events following the Tennis Court Oath, including the storming of the Bastille, further escalated the revolution.

The National Assembly, born out of the Tennis Court Oath, played a pivotal role in drafting the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and ultimately the new constitution, which aimed to establish a more equitable and representative government. The Tennis Court Oath is remembered as a moment when the common people stood up against the absolute monarchy and set the stage for the transformative events of the French Revolution.

