

Outline of the French Revolution (1789-1799)

- I. The Old Regime—*Ancien Regime*
 - a. **Old Regime**—socio-political system which existed in most of Europe during the 18th century
 - b. Countries were ruled by **absolutism**—the monarch had absolute control over the government
 - c. Classes of people—privileged and unprivileged
 - i. **Unprivileged people**—paid taxes and treated badly
 - ii. **Privileged people**—did not pay taxes and treated well
- II. Society under the Old Regime
 - a. In France, people were divided into three estates
 - i. **First Estate**
 1. High-ranking members of the Church
 2. Privileged class
 - ii. **Second Estate**
 1. Nobility
 2. Privileged class
 - iii. **Third Estate**
 1. Everyone else—from peasants in the countryside to wealthy bourgeoisie merchants in the cities
 2. Unprivileged class

Estate	Population	Privileges	Exemptions	Burdens
First Estate	Circa 130,000; High-ranking clergy	Collected the tithe; Censorship of the press; Control of education; Kept records of births, deaths, marriages; Catholic faith held honored position of being the state religion (practiced by monarchy and nobility); Owned 20% of the land	Paid no taxes; Subject to Church law rather than civil law	Moral obligation (rather than legal obligation) to assist the poor and needy; Support the monarchy and Old Regime
Second Estate	Circa 110,000; Nobles	Collected taxes in the form of feudal dues; Monopolized military and state appointments; Owned 20% of the land	Paid no taxes	Support the monarchy and Old Regime
Third Estate	Circa 25,000,000; Everyone else: artisans, bourgeoisie, city workers, merchants, peasants, etc., along with many parish priests	None	None	Paid all taxes; Tithe (Church tax); <i>Octrot</i> (tax on goods brought into cities); <i>Corvée</i> (forced road work); <i>Capitation</i> (poll tax); <i>Vingtième</i> (income tax); <i>Gabelle</i> (salt tax); <i>Taille</i> (land tax); Feudal dues for use of the local manor's winepress, oven, etc.

III. Government under the Old Regime: The Divine Right of Kings

- a. Monarch ruled by **divine right**
 - i. God put the world in motion
 - ii. God put some people in positions of power
 - iii. Power is given by God
 - iv. No one can question God
 - v. No one can question someone put in power by God
 - vi. Questioning the monarchy was blasphemy because it meant questioning God

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IV. What the king did

- a. Appointed the *Intendants*, the “petty tyrants” who governed France’s 30 districts
- b. Appointed the people who would collect his taxes and carry out his laws
- c. Controlled justice by appointing judges
- d. Controlled the military
- e. Could imprison anyone at any time for any reason (blank warrants of arrest were called *lettres de cachet*)
- f. Levied all taxes and decided how to spend the money
- g. Made all laws
- h. Made decisions regarding war and peace

V. Economic conditions under the Old Regime

- a. France’s economy was based primarily on agriculture
- b. Peasant farmers of France bore the burden of taxation
- c. Poor harvests meant that peasants had trouble paying their regular taxes
 - i. Certainly could not afford to have their taxes raised
- d. Bourgeoisie often managed to gather wealth
 - i. But were upset that they paid taxes while nobles did not

VI. France is bankrupt

- a. The king (Louis XVI) lavished money on himself and residences like Versailles
- b. Queen Marie Antoinette was seen as a wasteful spender
- c. Government found its funds depleted as a result of wars
 - i. Including the funding of the American Revolution
- d. **Deficit spending**—a government spending more money than it takes in from tax revenues
- e. Privileged classes would not submit to being taxed

VII. Philosophy of the French Revolution: Enlightenment (Age of Reason)

- a. Scientists during the Renaissance had discovered laws that govern the natural world
- b. Intellectuals—**philosophes**—began to ask if natural laws might also apply to human beings
 - i. Particularly to human institutions such as governments
 - ii. *Philosophes* were **secular** in thinking—they used reason and logic, rather than faith, religion, and superstition, to answer important questions
 - iii. Used reason and logic to determine how governments are formed
 - 1. Tried to figure out what logical, rational principles work to tie people to their governments
 - iv. Questioned the divine right of kings

VIII. Long- and short-term causes

- a. Long-term causes
 - i. Also known as *underlying causes*
 - ii. Causes which stem back many years

- b. Short-term causes
 - i. Also known as *immediate causes*
 - ii. Causes which happen close to the moment the change or action happens
- c. Example: A person is fired from his or her job
 - i. Long term cause(s): The person is often late to work and is generally unproductive on the job
 - ii. Short-term cause(s): The person fails to show up for work and does not call the employer
- d. Key: One typically does not happen without the other
 - i. Events which bring important change (or action) need both long-term and short-term causes
- IX. Long-term causes of the French Revolution
 - a. Everything previously discussed
 - i. Absolutism
 - ii. Unjust socio-political system (Old Regime)
 - iii. Poor harvests which left peasant farmers with little money for taxes
 - iv. Influence of Enlightenment *philosophes*
 - b. Also
 - i. System of mercantilism which restricted trade
 - ii. Influence of other successful revolutions
 - 1. England's Glorious Revolution (1688-1689)
 - 2. American Revolution (1775-1783)
- X. Short-term causes of the French Revolution
 - a. Bankruptcy
 - i. Caused by deficit spending
 - ii. Financial ministers (Turgot, Necker, Calonne) proposed changes
 - 1. But these were rejected
 - iii. Assembly of Notables voted down taxation for the nobility in 1787
 - b. Great Fear
 - i. Worst famine in memory
 - ii. Hungry, impoverished peasants feared that nobles at Estates-General were seeking greater privileges
 - iii. Attacks on nobles occurred throughout the country in 1789
 - c. *Estates-General*
 - i. Louis XVI had no choice but to call for a meeting of the *Estates-General* to find a solution to the bankruptcy problem
 - 1. All three estates
 - ii. Had not met since 1614
 - iii. Set in motion a series of events which resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and a completely new socio-political system for France
- XI. Preparing for the *Estates-General*
 - a. Winter of 1788-1789
 - i. Members of the estates elected representatives
 - b. *Cahiers*
 - i. Traditional lists of grievances written by the people
 - ii. Nothing out of the ordinary

1. Asked for only moderate changes

XII. Meeting of the *Estates-General*: May 5, 1789

- a. Voting was conducted by estate
 - i. Each estate had one vote
 - ii. First and Second Estates could operate as a **bloc** to stop the Third Estate from having its way
 - iii. First Estate + Second Estate > Third Estate
- b. Representatives from the Third Estate demanded that voting be done by population
 - i. This would give the Third Estate a great advantage
- c. Deadlock resulted

XIII. Tennis Court Oath

- a. The Third Estate declared itself to be the **National Assembly**
- b. Louis XVI responded by locking the Third Estate out of the meeting
- c. The Third Estate relocated to a nearby tennis court where its members vowed to stay together and create a written constitution for France
- d. On June 23, 1789, Louis XVI relented
 - i. He ordered the three estates to meet together as the **National Assembly** and vote, by population, on a constitution for France
- e. "The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the kingdom, to effect the regeneration of the public order; and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to establish itself; and, finally, that wheresoever its members are assembled, there is the National Assembly;
"Decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that, the said oath taken, all members and each one of them individually shall ratify this steadfast resolution by signature."

XIV. Review questions

- a. What was the Old Regime?
- b. How does an absolute monarchy (absolutism) operate?
- c. Describe the size, privileges, exemptions, and burdens of the three estates.
- d. What is deficit spending?
- e. Describe the type of thinking used by the *philosophes*.
- f. What were the underlying (long-term) causes of the French Revolution?
- g. What were the immediate (short-term) causes of the French Revolution?
- h. Explain the debate over voting which occurred in the *Estates-General*.
- i. What was the Tennis Court Oath?

XV. Four phases (periods) of the French Revolution

- a. National Assembly (1789-1791)
- b. Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)
- c. Convention (1792-1795)
- d. Directory (1795-1799)

XVI. National Assembly (1789-1791)

- a. Louis XVI did not want a written constitution

- b. When news of his plan to use military force against the National Assembly reached Paris on **July 14, 1789**, people stormed the **Bastille**
- XVII. Uprising in Paris
 - a. People of Paris seized weapons from the Bastille
 - i. July 14, 1789
 - ii. Parisians organized their own government which they called the **Commune**
 - iii. Small groups—**factions**—competed to control the city of Paris
 - b. Uprising spread throughout France
 - i. Nobles were attacked
 - ii. Records of feudal dues and owed taxes were destroyed
 - iii. Many nobles fled the country—became known as **émigrés**
 - iv. Louis XVI was forced to fly the new tricolor flag of France
- XVIII. Goodbye, Versailles! *Adieu, Versailles!*
 - a. Parisian commune feared that Louis XVI would have foreign troops invade France to put down the rebellion
 - i. Louis XVI's wife, Marie Antoinette, was the sister of the Austrian emperor
 - b. A group of women attacked Versailles on October 5, 1789
 - i. Forced royal family to relocate to Paris along with the National Assembly
 - ii. Royal family spent next several years in the Tuileries Palace as virtual prisoners
- XIX. Changes under the National Assembly
 - a. Abolishment of guilds and labor unions
 - b. Abolition of special privileges
 - c. Constitution of 1791
 - d. *Declaration of the Rights of Man*
 - e. Equality before the law (for men)
 - f. Many nobles left France and became known as *émigrés*
 - g. Reforms in local government
 - h. Taxes levied based on the ability to pay
- XX. *Declaration of the Rights of Man*
 - a. Freedom of religion
 - b. Freedom of speech
 - c. Freedom of the press
 - d. Guaranteed property rights
 - e. "Liberty, equality, fraternity!"
 - f. Right of the people to create laws
 - g. Right to a fair trial
- XXI. *Declaration of the Rights of Women*
 - a. Journalist **Olympe de Gouges** argued in her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* that women are equal citizens and should benefit from governmental reforms just as men did
 - b. **Madame Jeanne Roland** also served as a leader in the women's rights movement, and was able to heavily influence her husband (a government official)
 - c. Women did gain some rights during the French Revolution, but these were designed for purposes other than liberating women
 - i. Women could inherit property, but only because doing so weakened feudalism and reduced wealth among the upper classes
 - ii. Divorce became easier, but only to weaken the Church's control over marriage
- XXII. End of special privileges
 - a. Church lands were seized, divided, and sold to peasants
 - b. **Civil Constitution of the Clergy** required that Church officials be elected by the people, with salaries paid by the government
 - i. 2/3 of Church officials fled the country rather than swear allegiance to this

- c. All feudal dues and tithes were eradicated
 - d. All special privileges of the First and Second Estates were abolished
- XXIII. Reforms in local government
 - a. The 30 provinces and their “petty tyrants” (*Intendants*) were replaced with 83 new departments
 - i. Ruled by elected governors
 - b. New courts, with judges elected by the people, were established
- XXIV. Constitution of 1791
 - a. Democratic features
 - i. France became a **limited monarchy**
 - 1. King became merely the head of state
 - ii. All laws were created by the **Legislative Assembly**
 - iii. Feudalism was abolished
 - b. Undemocratic features
 - i. Voting was limited to taxpayers
 - ii. Officers were reserved for property owners
 - c. This new government became known as the **Legislative Assembly**
- XXV. Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)
 - a. Royal family sought help from Austria
 - i. In June, 1791, they were caught trying to escape to Austria
 - b. Nobles who fled the revolution lived abroad as *émigrés*
 - i. They hoped that, with foreign help, the Old Regime could be restored in France
 - c. Church officials wanted Church lands, rights, and privileges restored
 - i. Some devout Catholic peasants also supported the Church
 - d. Political parties, representing different interests, emerged
 - i. **Girondists**
 - ii. **Jacobins**
- XXVI. Opposition to the new government
 - a. European monarchs feared that revolution would spread to their own countries
 - i. France was invaded by Austrian and Prussian troops
 - b. In the uproar, the Commune took control of Paris
 - i. Commune was led by **Danton**, a member of the Jacobin political party
 - c. Voters began electing representatives for a new convention which would write a republican constitution for France
 - i. A **republic** is a government in which the people elect representatives who will create laws and rule on their behalf
 - ii. Meanwhile, thousands of nobles were executed under the suspicion that they were conspirators in the foreign invasion
- XXVII. Convention (1792-1795)
 - a. On September 22, 1792, the **Convention** met for the first time
 - b. Established the First French Republic
 - c. Faced domestic opposition and strife
 - i. **Girondists** were moderates who represented the rich middle class of the provinces
 - ii. **Jacobins** (led by **Marat, Danton, Robespierre**) represented workers
 - d. Faced opposition from abroad
 - i. Austria, England, Holland, Prussia, Sardinia, and Spain formed a Coalition invading France
- XXVIII. Abolishment of the monarchy
 - a. The Convention abolished the monarchy
 - i. As long as the royal family lived, the monarchy could be restored
 - ii. Put the royal couple on trial for treason
 - 1. Convictions were a foregone conclusion
 - iii. **Louis XVI** was guillotined on January 21, 1793
 - iv. **Marie Antoinette** was guillotined on October 16, 1793

- v. Daughter Marie-Thérèse was allowed to go to Vienna in 1795
 - 1. She could not become queen because of Salic law, which did not allow females to succeed to the throne
- vi. Son Louis-Charles, a.k.a. Louis XVII (lived 1785-1795), was beaten and mistreated until he died in prison

XXIX. Memorable Jacobins

- a. Georges Danton – Reign of Terror
- b. Maximilien Robespierre – Reign of Terror
- c. Jean-Paul Marat
 - i. Because of debilitating illness, Marat was eventually forced to work from home
 - ii. He was assassinated (in the tub while taking a medicinal bath) by Charlotte Corday, a Girondist sympathizer, in July, 1793

XXX. Growing coalition against the French

- a. Convention drafted Frenchmen into the army to defeat the foreign Coalition
 - i. These troops were led by General Carnot
 - ii. The people supported military operations because they did not want the country back under the Old Regime
- b. Rouget de Lisle wrote the “Marseillaise”
 - i. Became the French national anthem
 - ii. Inspired troops as they were led into battle
- c. After two years
 - i. Coalition was defeated
 - ii. France had gained, rather than lost, territory

XXXI. Reign of Terror: September 5, 1793-July 27, 1794

- a. Despite military successes, the Convention continued to face problems domestically
- b. **Danton** and his Jacobin political party came to dominate French politics
- c. **Committee of Public Safety**
 - i. Headed by **Danton** (and later **Robespierre**)
 - ii. Those accused of treason were tried by the Committee’s **Revolutionary Tribunal**
 - iii. Approximately 15,000 people died on the **guillotine**
 - 1. Guillotine became known as the “national razor”
 - 2. Included innovative thinkers like Olympe de Gouges and Madame Jeanne Roland

XXXII. End of the Reign of Terror

- a. Members of the Girondist political party tried to end the Reign of Terror initiated by the Jacobin political party
 - i. This opposition to the Committee of Public Safety caused many Girondists to be tried and executed for treason
- b. Eventually, even Georges Danton wanted to end the executions
 - i. This resulted in Danton being tried and executed for treason
- c. Maximilien Robespierre became leader of the Committee of Public Safety
 - i. He continued the executions
 - ii. Convention came to blame Robespierre for the Reign of Terror
- d. **Thermidorean Reaction**
 - i. July 27, 1794 – ended the Reign of Terror
 - ii. Convention sent Robespierre and other members of the Committee of Public Safety to the guillotine
 - 1. Robespierre was guillotined on July 28, 1794

XXXIII. Constitution of the Year III of the Republic (1795)

- a. With the foreign invaders vanquished and the Reign of Terror at an end, the Convention was finally able to inaugurate its new constitution
- b. Constitution of the Year III of the Republic (1795) created the **Directory**

XXXIV. Government under the Directory

- a. Executive
 - i. 5 directors appointed by the legislature
- b. Legislature
 - i. Lower house (500 members) proposed laws
 - ii. Upper house (250 members) voted on these laws
 - iii. 2/3 of the legislature would initially be filled by members of the Convention
- c. Qualifications
 - i. Girondists (middle-class party) had defeated the Jacobins (working- and peasant-class party)
 - ii. Girondists' constitution stated that **suffrage** (the right to vote), as well as the right to hold office, were limited to property owners

XXXV. Other parting reforms passed by the Convention

- a. Adopted the metric system
- b. Dealt the final blow to feudalism by abolishing primogeniture (the system whereby the oldest son inherited all of his father's estate)
- c. Drew up a comprehensive system of laws
- d. Ended debt imprisonment
- e. Ended slavery in France's colonies
- f. Established a nationwide system of public education

XXXVI. Directory (1795-1799)

- a. The Directory suffered from corruption and poor administration
- b. The people of France grew poorer and more frustrated with their government
- c. Despite, or perhaps because of, these struggles, the French developed a strong feeling of **nationalism**—they were proud of their country and devoted to it
- d. National pride was fueled by military successes
- e. It would be a military leader—**Napoleon Bonaparte**, coming to power through a **coup d'état** (military overthrow of the government)—who would end the ten-year period (1789-1799) known as the French Revolution

XXXVII. Review questions

- a. What Paris building was stormed on July 14, 1789?
- b. What human rights were established in France by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*?
- c. How did Olympe de Gouges fight for women's rights?
- d. What were *émigrés*, and why did French revolutionaries view them as a threat?
- e. Name and describe the two political parties that competed for power in revolutionary France.
- f. What was the Committee of Public Safety?
- g. Describe the Reign of Terror and explain how it eventually came to an end.
- h. Were the "excesses" of the French Revolution justified? Why or why not?
- i. Looking back at the first half of 1789, could the French Revolution have been avoided? If so, how?