

HANDOUT 1: CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

While there are numerous factors that caused the revolution, there are a few key events and philosophies that were prevalent in late 18th century France that most historians agree led to a society that was ripe for revolting.



FINANCIAL CRISIS AND FAMINE

The decadence of the monarchy, along with other factors like war and poor harvests, led to an extreme financial crisis in France during the second half of the 18th century. The famine and poor harvests caused the price of bread to skyrocket to the point where people had to choose between starvation and paying their taxes. People were going hungry and it appeared as if the monarchy just continued to spend carelessly. At the time of the Revolution, Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI (16) were known for spending carelessly. Marie Antoinette was called “Madame Deficit,” making fun of how much money she lost gambling. Louis XVI further added fuel to the fire by dismissing financial ministers who tried to bring about reform.

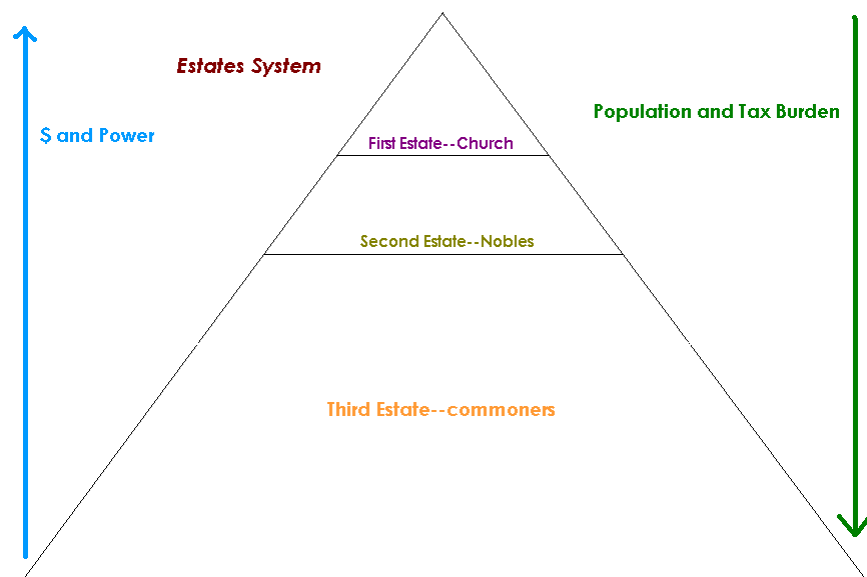
INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

While it can't be said that the American Revolution was a key factor in the French Revolution, the seed that the colonial uprising planted certainly cannot be ignored. The American Revolution ended in 1783, and the American victory inspired much thought regarding the idea of a government that serves the people. The writings of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau were highly influential as they circulated throughout society, accessible to the common man. Ideas from the Enlightenment like Life, Liberty, and Property, inspired the French Revolution's slogan: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, which means “Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood.”

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

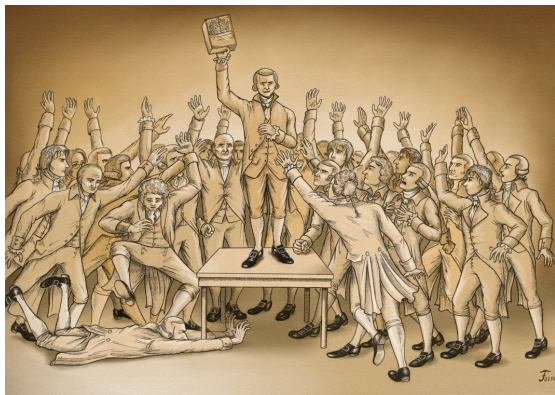
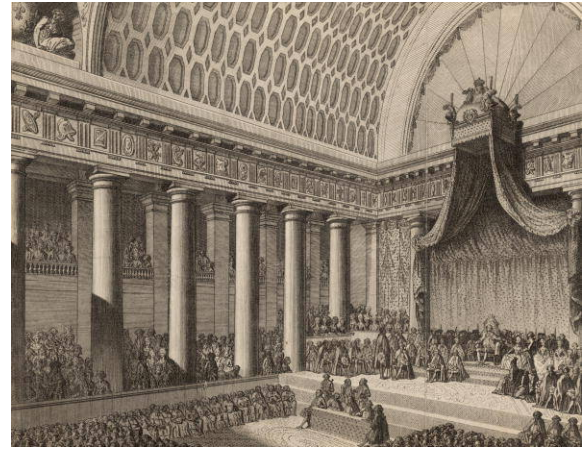
18th century France was still under a feudal system that further served to breed contempt of the poorer classes towards the nobility. This system was known as the “Old Regime” and “The Estates System.” The poorest 97% of the country was in the 3rd estate and paid about 50% of their income in taxes. The other two estates were made up of nobles and clergy members (people who work for the Church) they paid less than 1% of the taxes in France. The king ruled as an absolute monarch although there was an Estates General, a legislative body made up of members from all three estates.

However, even when the Estates General was called, it was organized in such a way that only those people in the first and second Estate had votes that counted. It was in this climate that the seeds of revolution were planted and watered.



HANDOUT #2: EVENTS OF THE REVOLUTION

Inspired by ideas of the Enlightenment, members of the Third Estate wanted to change how the Estates General worked in France. They voted to create the **National Assembly**, which would pass laws in the name of the French people. The National Assembly effectively eliminated the monarchy and was the first real act of revolution. The National Assembly was different from the Estates General because it gave power to the majority group in France, instead of the nobility and members of the Church. The National Assembly reformed France by eliminating the Estates System and creating the **Declaration of the Rights of Man**. The declaration outlined the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity (brotherhood).



A few days later members of the third estate were locked out of their meeting room. They broke down a door to the tennis court at the palace of Versailles. They vowed to stay until they had a new constitution. This became known as the **Tennis Court Oath**. Some Nobles and members of the Clergy who favored reform also joined the Third Estate delegates.

Rumors began to spread that King Louis XVI was going to use the army to stop the uprising. In response, the people of France began to gather weapons and gunpowder. On July 14th 1789 a group of citizens **stormed the Bastille**, a prison that also served as a weapons stockpile. The fall of the Bastille became a great symbolic act of Revolution. Before long the rebellion spread, causing a wave of senseless panic called the Great Fear. Violence spread across France during the **Great Fear** and angry mobs forced Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI to return to Paris from Versailles. It was the last time that the King and his wife would see Versailles.



Other countries in Europe were fearful of the ideas of the French Revolution spreading to their own countries. Austria and Prussia wanted France to go back to an absolute monarchy so war is declared. Paris is attacked and in the Chaos the National Assembly's

constitution is removed and a group called the **Jacobins**, radicals in France who wanted a Republic, not a Democracy, take control. The Jacobins were led by **Maximilien Robespierre**. Robespierre leads as a dictator and uses fear to control the people of France. His rule becomes known as the "Reign of Terror." Robespierre killed anyone who opposed his ideas. Approximately 40,000 people were killed during the **Reign of Terror**. Robespierre is also responsible for the execution of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.



HANDOUT 3: RISE OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE AND THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA



What emerged from the rubble of the Revolution was an empire under Napoleon I. The revolution had caused the citizens a great deal of pain and suffering. They had witnessed the fall of a weak king and the rise of a dictator who reigned with fear and terror. The people were ready for a new leader. A popular general, **Napoleon Bonaparte** came to power after a **coup d'état** in 1799. A coup d'état is a sudden seizure and/or shift of power in a country. In this case, Napoleon seized control of France from the Jacobins. Napoleon was considered a national hero for his efforts defending the National Convention delegates during the early stages of the French Revolution. His is considered to be a military genius because of his ability to outsmart and outmaneuver his enemies during battle.

He was made first consul, then consul for life in 1802, and then **Emperor** in 1804. Traditionally the Pope would place the crown on an emperor's head but Napoleon places the crown on his own head. By 1812 Napoleon controlled most of Europe, with Russia, Britain and Portugal being the exceptions. Napoleon's dynasty did not last quite as long as the monarchy that had come before it—his collapsed in 1814 after a series of military defeats, including a failed invasion of Russia. He was briefly restored the following year, after escaping from his island exile at Elba. But his restoration was brief.

Following the famous defeat at the **Battle of Waterloo**, Napoleon was exiled once more—this time to an island much further away, St. Helena.



With Napoleon's defeat, Europe and France were left with no clear leader. In order to create stability in Europe a convention was held in Vienna, Austria. This became known as the **Congress of Vienna**. The congress set out to prevent future French aggression, restore a balance of power in Europe, and restore royal families in places where there had been revolutions, including France. By creating similarly sized and powerful kingdoms, the representatives at the Congress hoped to keep Europe peaceful for as long as possible. With the defeat of Napoleon, France was once again a Monarchy in 1814, just 25 years after the start

Name: _____

Class Block: _____

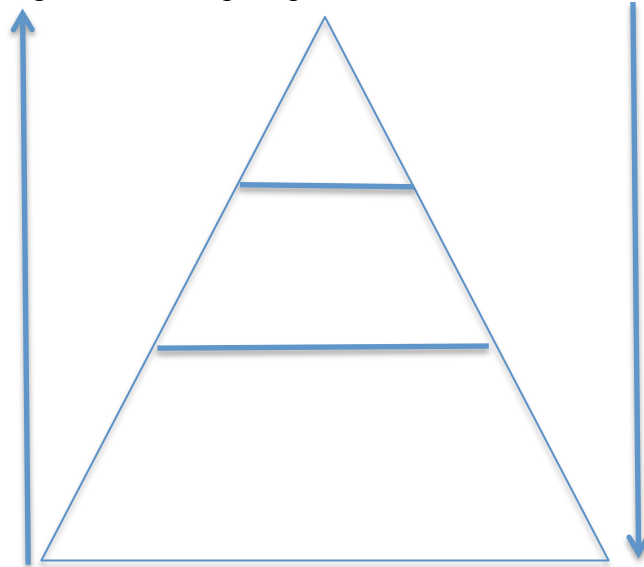
Date: _____

THE CAUSES, EVENTS, AND EFFECTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Directions: For homework, you will read your designated handout about the French Revolution and fill out the correlating portion of this handout. Tomorrow in class, you will be responsible for explaining your information with a group of classmates. Make sure that you have thoroughly read your handout, completed your questions, and that you are familiar enough with the content to explain it to others.

HANDOUT 1: CAUSES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

1. Copy the Estates System diagram into the space provided



2. Explain the meaning of the political cartoon. Based on your reading, who does each person in the cartoon represent? (Hint: think about the Estates System) Who's point of view is the artist drawing from? Why?

3. Why were famine and bread important when considering the causes of the French Revolution?

HANDOUT 3: RISE OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE AND THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

1. Why were the people of France ready for a strong leader like Napoleon Bonaparte?

2. What is a coup d'etat? Who did Napoleon seize power from?

3. Analyze the picture of Napoleon crowning himself Emperor. What statement is he making by placing the crown on his own head? (Hint: who normally would have placed the crown?)

*List and explain at least **three** events that occurred under Napoleon and describe the goals of the congress of Vienna. Cite specific examples from the text.*



Napoleon Crowns Himself Emperor



French Political Cartoon