The French Revolution

The Old Regime (Ancien Regime)

• Old Regime – socio-political system which existed in most of Europe during the 18th century
• Countries were ruled by absolutism – the monarch had absolute control over the government
• Classes of people – privileged and unprivileged
  – Unprivileged people – paid taxes and treated badly
  – Privileged people – did not pay taxes and treated well
Society under the Old Regime

- In France, people were divided into three estates
  - **First Estate**
    - High-ranking members of the Church
    - Privileged class
  - **Second Estate**
    - Nobility
    - Privileged class
  - **Third Estate**
    - Everyone else—from peasants in the countryside to wealthy bourgeoisie merchants in the cities
    - Unprivileged class

### The Three Estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Privileges</th>
<th>Exemptions</th>
<th>Burdens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Circa 130,000</td>
<td>High-ranking clergy</td>
<td>Collected the tithe</td>
<td>Kept records of births, deaths, marriages, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Censorship of the press</td>
<td>Catholic faith held honored position of being the state religion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Control of education</td>
<td>Owned 20% of the land</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kept moral obligation (rather than legal obligation) to assist the poor and needy</td>
<td>Supported the monarchy and Old Regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Circa 110,000</td>
<td>Nobles</td>
<td>Collected taxes in the form of feudal dues</td>
<td>Owned 20% of the land</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Monopolized military and state appointments</td>
<td>Supported the monarchy and Old Regime</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paid no taxes</td>
<td>Supported the monarchy and Old Regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Circa 25,000,000</td>
<td>Everyone else: artisans, bourgeoisie, city workers, merchants, peasants, etc., along with many parish priests</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paid all taxes</td>
<td>Tithe (Church tax)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octrois (tax on goods brought into cities)</td>
<td>Corvée (forced road work)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Capitation (poll tax)</td>
<td>Vingtième (income tax)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gabelle (salt tax)</td>
<td>Taille (land tax)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feudal dues for use of local manor's winepress, oven, etc.</td>
<td>Supported the monarchy and Old Regime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What does this contemporary political cartoon say about conditions in France under the Old Regime?

Government under the Old Regime: The Divine Right of Kings

- Monarch ruled by divine right
  - God put the world in motion
  - God put some people in positions of power
  - Power is given by God
  - No one can question God
  - No one can question someone put in power by God
  - Questioning the monarchy was blasphemy because it meant questioning God

What the King Did

- Appointed the Intendants, the "petty tyrants" who governed France’s 30 districts
- Appointed the people who would collect his taxes and carry out his laws
- Controlled justice by appointing judges
- Controlled the military
- Controlled the military
- Issued warrants of arrest without cause, which were called "lettres de cachet"
- Made all laws
- Made decisions regarding war and peace
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**Economic Conditions under the Old Regime**

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

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**France Is Bankrupt**

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

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**Figure of Versailles as Seen from the Gardens**

This site of the picture is thrust over feet back. The portion seen in this picture crowns the chateau of Standards, is raised from the entrance front entrance which occupy the side of the main entrance the remodeled window on the second floor. It was in the grand ball that the Treaty of Versailles was signed to establish the peace among the French and ended the three issues of the Germanic.
Philosophy of the French Revolution:
The Enlightenment (Age of Reason)

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

- **Long-term causes**
  - Also known as underlying causes
  - Causes which can stem back many years

- **Short-term causes**
  - Also known as immediate causes
  - Causes which happen close to the moment the change or action happens

**Example:** A person is fired from his or her job.
- Long-term cause(s): The person is often late to work and is generally unproductive on the job.
- Short-term cause(s): The person fails to show up for work and does not call the employer.

**Key:** One typically does not happen without the other. Events which bring important change (or action) need both long-term and short-term causes.

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### Long-term Causes of the French Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everything previously discussed</th>
<th>Also</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutism</td>
<td>System of mercantilism which restricted trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjust socio-political system (Old Regime)</td>
<td>Influence of other successful revolutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor harvests which left peasant farmers with little money for taxes</td>
<td>England’s Glorious Revolution (1688-1689)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Enlightenment philosophes</td>
<td>American Revolution (1775-1783)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Short-term Causes of the French Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bankruptcy</th>
<th>Great Fear</th>
<th>Estates-General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caused by deficit spending</td>
<td>Worst fear in history</td>
<td>Louis XVI had no chance but the call for a meeting of the Estates-General to find a solution to the bankruptcy problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial ministers (Turgot, Necker, Calonne) proposed changes</td>
<td>Unemployed peasants found that rates at Estates-General were seeking greater privileges</td>
<td>All three estates had not met since 1614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But these were rejected</td>
<td>Attacks on nobles occurred throughout the country in 1789</td>
<td>Set in motion a series of events which resulted in the abolition of the monarchy, slave system, and the creation of a new socio-political system for France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly of Notables voted down taxation for the nobility in 1787</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparing for the Estates-General

- Winter of 1788-1789
  - Members of the estates elected representatives

- Cahiers
  - Traditional lists of grievances written by the people
  - Nothing out of the ordinary
    - Asked for only moderate changes

Meeting of the Estates-General: May 5, 1789

- Voting was conducted by estate
  - Each estate had one vote
  - First and Second Estates could operate as a bloc to stop the Third Estate from having its way

◊ First Estate + ◊ Second Estate - vs. ◊ Third Estate

- Representatives from the Third Estate demanded that voting be by population
  - This would give the Third Estate a great advantage
- Deadlock resulted
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First Estate = 1 Vote or 130,000 Votes

Third Estate = 1 Vote or 260,000 Votes

Second Estate = 1 Vote or 116,000 Votes

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Tennis Court Oath

On June 23, 1789, Louis XVI relented. He ordered the three estates to meet together as the National Assembly and vote, by population, on a constitution for France.

The Third Estate relocated to a nearby tennis court where its members vowed to stay together and create a written constitution for France.

Louis XVI responded by locking the Third Estate out of the meeting.

The Third Estate declared itself to be the National Assembly.

On June 23, 1789, Louis XVI relented. He ordered the three estates to meet together as the National Assembly and vote, by population, on a constitution for France.

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Tennis Court Oath by Jacques Louis David
The Tennis Court Oath

"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."

Review Questions

1. What was the Old Regime?
2. How does an absolute monarchy (absolutism) operate?
3. Describe the size, privileges, exemptions, and burdens of the three estates.
4. What is deficit spending?
5. Describe the type of thinking used by the philosophes.
6. What were the underlying (long-term) causes of the French Revolution?
7. What were the immediate (short-term) causes of the French Revolution?
8. Explain the debate over voting which occurred in the Estates-General.
9. What was the Tennis Court Oath?

Four Phases (Periods) of the French Revolution

- National Assembly (1789-1791)
- Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)
- Convention (1792-1795)
- Directory (1795-1799)
National Assembly (1789-1791)

- Louis XVI did not actually want a written constitution
- When news of his plan to use military force against the National Assembly reached Paris on July 14, 1789, people stormed the Bastille

Uprising in Paris

- People of Paris seized weapons from the Bastille
  - July 14, 1789
  - Parisians organized their own government which they called the Commune
  - Small groups – factions – competed to control the city of Paris

- Uprising spread throughout France
  - Nobles were attacked
  - Records of feudal dues and owed taxes were destroyed
  - Many nobles fled the country – became known as émigrés
  - Louis XVI was forced to fly the new tricolor flag of France
Goodbye, Versailles!  Adieu, Versailles!

- Parisian Commune feared that Louis XVI would have foreign troops invade France to put down the rebellion
  - Louis XVI’s wife, Marie Antoinette, was the sister of the Austrian emperor
- A group of women attacked Versailles on October 5, 1789
  - Forced royal family to relocate to Paris along with National Assembly
  - Royal family spent next several years in the Tuileries Palace as virtual prisoners

Tuileries Palace (Paris, France)

Changes under the National Assembly
- Abolishment of guilds and labor unions
- Abolition of special privileges
- Constitution of 1791
- Declaration of the Rights of Man
- Equality before the law (for men)
- Many nobles left France and became known as émigrés
- Reforms in local government
- Taxes levied based on the ability to pay
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Declaration of the Rights of Man

- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of the press
- Guaranteed property rights
- “Liberty, equality, fraternity!”
- Right of the people to create laws
- Right to a fair trial

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Declaration of the Rights of Woman

- 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.
- 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).
- Women did gain some rights during the French Revolution, but these were designed not to liberate women.
- Women could inherit property but only because doing so weakened feudalism and reduced wealth among the upper classes.
- Divorce became easier, but only to weaken the Church’s control over marriage.
End of Special Privileges

- Church lands were seized, divided, and sold to peasants
- Civil Constitution of the Clergy required that Church officials be elected by the people, with salaries paid by the government
  - 2/3 of Church officials fled the country rather than swear allegiance to this
- All feudal dues and tithes were eradicated
- All special privileges of the First and Second Estates were abolished

Reforms in Local Government

- The 30 provinces and their “petty tyrants” (Intendants) were replaced with 83 new departments
  - Ruled by elected governors
- New courts, with judges elected by the people, were established

Constitution of 1791

- Democratic features
  - France became a limited monarchy
  - King became merely the head of state
  - All laws were created by the Legislative Assembly
  - Feudalism was abolished
- Undemocratic features
  - Voting was limited to taxpayers
  - Offices were reserved for property owners
- This new government became known as the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Assembly (1791-1792)

- Royal family sought help from Austria
  - In June, 1791, they were caught trying to escape to Austria
- Nobles who fled the revolution lived abroad as émigrés
  - They hoped that, with foreign help, the Old Regime could be restored in France
- Church officials wanted Church lands, rights, and privileges restored
  - Some devout Catholic peasants also supported the Church
- Political parties, representing different interests, emerged
  - Girondists
  - Jacobins

Opposition to the New Government

- European monarchs feared that revolution would spread to their own countries
  - France was invaded by Austrian and Prussian troops
- In the uproar, the Commune took control of Paris
  - Commune was led by Danton, a member of the Jacobin political party
- Voters began electing representatives for a new convention which would write a republican constitution for France
  - A republic is a government in which the people elect representatives who will create laws and rule on their behalf
  - Meanwhile, thousands of nobles were executed under the suspicion that they were conspirators in the foreign invasion
Convention (1792-1795)

- On September 22, 1792, the Convention met for the first time
- Established the First French Republic
- Faced domestic opposition and strife
  - Girondists were moderates who represented the rich middle class of the provinces
  - Jacobins (led by Marat, Danton, and Robespierre) represented workers
- Faced opposition from abroad
  - Austria, England, Holland, Prussia, Sardinia, and Spain formed a Coalition invading France

Abolishment of the Monarchy

- The Convention abolished the monarchy
- As long as the royal family lived, the monarchy could be restored
- Put the royal couple on trial for treason
  - Convictions were a foregone conclusion
- Louis XVI was guillotined on January 21, 1793
- Marie Antoinette was guillotined on October 16, 1793
- Daughter Marie-Thérèse was allowed to go to Vienna in 1795
- She could not become queen because of Salic law, which did not allow females to succeed to the throne
- Son Louis-Charles, a.k.a. Louis XVII (lived 1785-1795) was beaten and mistreated until he died in prison
The three most memorable Jacobins were Georges Danton, Maximilien Robespierre, and Jean-Paul Marat. Because of a debilitating illness, Marat was eventually forced to work from home. He was assassinated (in the tub while taking a medicinal bath) by Charlotte Corday, a Girondist sympathizer, in July, 1793. The Death of Marat by Jacques-Louis David

Growing Coalition against the French
• Convention drafted Frenchmen into the army to defeat the foreign Coalition
  – These troops were led by General Carnot
  – The people supported military operations because they did not want the country back under the Old Regime
• Rouget de Lisle wrote the "Marseillaise"
  – Became the French national anthem
  – Inspired troops as they were led into battle
• After two years
  – Coalition was defeated
  – France had gained, rather than lost, territory
Reign of Terror: September 5, 1793 – July 27, 1794

- Despite military successes, the Convention continued to face problems domestically.
- Danton and his Jacobin political party came to dominate French politics.
- Committee of Public Safety – Headed by Danton (and later Robespierre).
- Those accused of treason were tried by the Committee's Revolutionary Tribunal.
- Approximately 15,000 people died on the guillotine, including innovative thinkers like Olympe de Gouges and Madame Jeanne Roland.

The Guillotine became known as the "National Razor."
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**End of the Reign of Terror**

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

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**Constitution of the Year III of the Republic (1795)**

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

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**Government under the Directory**

- **Executive**
  - 5 directors appointed by the Legislature.

- **Legislature**
  - Lower house (500 members) proposed laws.
  - Upper house (250 members) voted on these laws.
  - 2/3 of the Legislature would initially be filled by members of the Convention.

- **Girondists** (middle-class party) had defeated the Jacobins (working and peasant-class party).
- Girondist constitution created new qualifications (the right to vote, as well as the right to hold office, were limited to property owners).
### Other Parting Reforms Passed by the Convention

- Adopted the metric system
- Ended debt imprisonment
- Ended slavery in France’s colonies
- Draw up a comprehensive system of laws
- Ended primogeniture (the system whereby the oldest son inherited all of his father’s estates)
- Dealt the final blow to feudalism
- Established a nationwide system of public education

### Directory (1795-1799)

- The Directory suffered from corruption and poor administration.
- The people of France grew poorer and more frustrated with their government.
- 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.
- National pride was fueled by military successes.
- It would be a military leader – Napoleon Bonaparte, coming to power through a coup d'état – who would end the ten-year period (1789-1799) known as the French Revolution.

### Review Questions

1. What Paris building was stormed on July 14, 1789?
2. What human rights were established in France by the Declaration of the Rights of Man?
3. How did Olympe de Gouges fight for women’s rights?
4. What were émigrés, and why did French revolutionaries view them as a threat?
5. Name and describe the two political parties that competed for power in revolutionary France.
6. What was the Committee of Public Safety?
7. Describe the Reign of Terror and explain how it eventually came to an end.
8. Were the “excesses” of the French Revolution justified? Why or why not?
9. Looking back at the first half of 1789, could the French Revolution have taken place if its course?