

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

## The French Revolution

Detail From *Triumph of Marat*, Bolly, 1794 (Musée des Beaux-Arts)

## The Old Regime



The Third Estate

- This cartoon from the era of the French Revolution depicts the third estate as a person in chains, who supports the clergy and nobility on his back.

## The Three Estates

- Before the revolution the French people were divided into three groups:
  - The first estate: the clergy
  - The second estate: the nobility
  - The third estate: the common people (bourgeoisie, urban workers, and peasants).
- Legally the first two estates enjoyed many privileges, particularly exemption from most taxation.

## The First Estate

- The first estate, the clergy, consisted of rich and poor.
  - There were very wealthy abbots, members of the aristocracy who lived in luxury off of wealthy church lands.
  - There were poor parish priests, who lived much like the peasants.

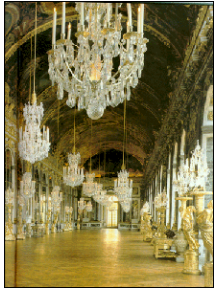
## The Second Estate

- The second estate, the nobility, inherited their titles and got their wealth from the land.
  - Some members of the nobility had little money, but had all the privileges of noble rank.
  - However, most enjoyed both privileges and wealth.

## The Third Estate

- The third estate, the common people, was by far the largest group in France.
- Everyone who was not a member of the first or second estates was a member of the third. It included:
  - Wealthy merchants, whose wealth rivaled that of the nobility
  - Doctors and lawyers
  - Shopkeepers
  - The urban poor
  - The peasants who worked the land.

## The French Royalty



Hall of Mirrors

- The royal family lived in luxury at the Palace of Versailles.

## Louis XIV



- Louis XVI was an awkward, clumsy man who had a good heart but was unable to relate to people on a personal level.
  - He often appeared unfeeling and gruff.
  - He was insecure and seems to have disliked being King of France.
- When one of his ministers resigned, he was heard to remark, *"Why can't I resign too?"*

## Marie Antoinette



- Marie Antoinette, in her early years as Queen, was flighty and irresponsible.
  - She spent huge amounts on clothes, buying a new dress nearly every other day.
  - Being Austrian, she was terribly unpopular in France and had few friends.

## The Palace of Versailles

- The King and Queen of France lived in luxury and splendor at the magnificent Palace of Versailles outside of Paris.



## The Financial Crisis

- The government of France, however, was bankrupt and was facing a serious financial crisis.
- The crisis resulted from:
  - An inefficient and unfair tax structure, which placed the burden of taxation on those least able to pay, the third estate
  - Outdated medieval bureaucratic institutions
  - A drained treasury which was the result of:
    - Aiding the Americans during the American Revolution
    - Long wars with England
    - Overspending

## Where is the Money?

- In this cartoon from the time, Louis is looking at the chests and asks *"Where is the tax money?"*
  - The financial minister, Necker, looks on and says *"The money was there last time I looked."*
  - The nobles and clergy are sneaking out the door carrying sacks of money, saying *"We have it."*



## The Nobility



- With the exception of a few liberals, the nobility wanted greater political influence for themselves but nothing for the third estate.

## Calling the Estates General

- The King attempted to solve the financial crisis by removing some of the nobles' tax exemptions.
  - However, the nobility saw themselves as special, with better blood, and entitled to all of their class privileges.
  - The *Parlement*, a judiciary organization controlled by the nobility, invoked its powers to block the King's move.
- He was forced reluctantly to call a meeting of the Estates General in 1788.



## The Estates General

- When the Estates General met, each estate solemnly marched into the hall at Versailles.
- The third estate dressed all in black, the nobility dressed in all their finery, and the clergy dressed in full regalia.

## To Vote by Head or by Order

- The delegates of the third estate insisted that the three orders meet together and that the vote be taken by head, rather than by order.
- Since there were far more delegates from the third estate, this plan would give them a majority.
- The King refused to grant their request.
- The third estate refused to budge.

## What Is the Third Estate?

- "*What is the Third Estate?*" asked Abbe Sieyès. "*Everything!*"
- This liberal clergyman rallied the commoners of France to assert their power and take charge of the Estates General.
  - At his suggestion, they declared themselves the National Assembly and invited the other two orders to join them.
  - The next day they found their meeting hall locked.
  - At the suggestion of one of the delegates they moved to a nearby indoor tennis court.

## Debating the Course of Action

- There they debated their course of action.
  - Some wanted to return to Paris to the protection of the people.
  - Mounier, not ready to take such a revolutionary step, suggested instead that they swear an oath of allegiance not to disband until a constitution had been created for France

## Mounier's Suggestion



- *"Let us swear to God and our country that we will not disperse until we have established a sound and just constitution, as instructed by those who nominated us."*

-M. Mounier

## The Tennis Court Oath

- The delegates agreed and all but one of the 578 delegates signed it.
  - Their oath is known as the Tennis Court Oath.
  - It said: *"The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the kingdom... decrees that all members of this assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate... until the constitution of the kingdom is established on firm foundations..."* June 20, 1789



## King Asks Third Estate to Disperse

- Hearing of the oath, the King called a meeting of all three orders.
  - At the end of the meeting he ordered the third estate to disperse.
  - They refused.
- One of the delegates declared that *"We are here at the will of the people, . . . and . . . shall not stir from our seats unless forced to do so by bayonets."*

## Third Estate Triumphs

- The King was unwilling to use force and eventually ordered the first and second estates to join the new National Assembly.
- The third estate had won.

## The National Assembly

- The new National Assembly created the historic and influential document [\*The Declaration of the Rights of Man\*](#), which stated the principle that all men had equal rights under the law.
- This document has remained the basis for all subsequent declarations of human rights. (Compare [\*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights\*](#)).

## Declaration of the Rights of Man



- *"Men are born free and equal in their rights... These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression."*
- *The fundamental source of all sovereignty resides in the nation.*
- *The law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to take part personally, or through representatives, in the making of the law."*

## The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

- The National Assembly resolved the immediate financial crisis by:
  - Seizing church lands
  - Putting the church under the control of the State with [\*The Civil Constitution of the Clergy\*](#).
    - Abbe Sieyes fiercely resisted the passage of this legislation and accused the other delegates of "bourgeois envy."
    - But he was overruled.



## The Oath of Allegiance

- Clergymen were required to swear an oath to the new constitution.
  - Many refused to swear the oath and were placed under arrest.
  - The measure was very controversial to a nation of Catholics and drew support away from the new government.

## Revolution Spreads to Common People

- The Revolution, instigated by the nobility, and set in motion by the bourgeoisie, now spread to the common people.

## Conditions in Paris

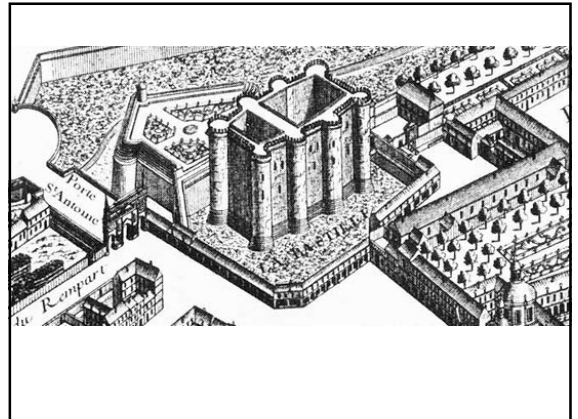
- Conditions were poor in Paris for the common people.
  - The price of bread was high and supplies were short due to harvest failures.
  - Rumors spread that the King and Queen were responsible for the shortages
- Then French troops marched to the capital.
  - Rumors spread quickly among the already restless mobs that the King was intending to use them against the people.
  - The dismissal of the Finance Minister Necker, who was popular with the third estate, ignited the spark.

## Mobs Search for Weapons

- Mobs roamed in search of weapons.
  - Although some muskets were found when they broke into a public hospital for wounded soldiers, there was no ammunition.
  - The ammunition was stored in the Bastille.

## The Storming of the Bastille

- On July 14, 1789, the mob, joined by some of the King's soldiers, stormed the Bastille.
- The commander of the Bastille, de Launay, attempted to surrender, but the mob would not accept it.
  - He was killed as they poured through the gates.
  - No guard was left alive.



The Fall of the Bastille

## Liberated Prisoners

- Later in the day the prisoners were released.
- There were only seven:
  - Two were convicted forgers.
  - One was a loose-living aristocrat put in prison by his own father.
- Nevertheless it was a great symbolic event, one which is still celebrated in France every year.



*Liberated prisoners parading later in the day*

## The Great Fear

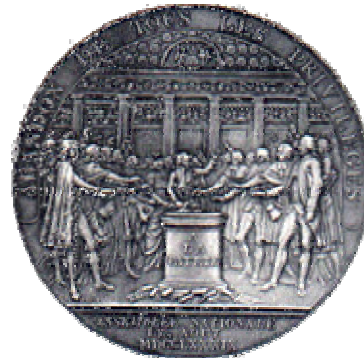
- By the end of July and beginning of August there were riots in the countryside.
- Peasants burned their nobles' chateaux and destroyed documents which contained their feudal obligations. It was called "The Great Fear."



*Burning chateaux as the peasants riot in the countryside*

## The Night of August 4

- The National Assembly responded to the Great Fear. On the Night of August 4, 1789, one by one members of the nobility and clergy rose to give up:
  - Feudal dues
  - Serfdom
  - The tithe
  - Hunting and fishing rights
  - Personal privileges.
- In one night feudalism was destroyed in France.



## Women's March to Versailles

- On October 4, 1789, a crowd of women, demanding bread for their families, marched toward Versailles.
- When they arrived, soaking wet from the rain, they demanded to see "the Baker," "the Baker's wife," and "the Baker's boy".
- The King met with some of the women and agreed to distribute all the bread in Versailles to the crowd.



*Women's march to Versailles*

## The King's Return to Paris

- Under pressure from the National Guard, the King also agreed to return to Paris with his wife and children.
- It was the last time the King saw Versailles.



## The Flight to Varennes

- Although the King reluctantly accepted the new constitution, he could not accept all the reforms (e.g., the Civil Constitution of the Clergy) and decided to leave the country.
- On June 20, 1791, the King and his family set out for the border in a carriage.
  - The King was disguised as a steward and his son was wearing a dress.
  - At the border village of Varennes, he was recognized and eventually apprehended.



*The apprehension of Louis XVI at Varennes*

## The Paris Mob

- The news of the King's flight destroyed the last of the King's popularity with the people of Paris.
- The popular press portrayed the royal family as pigs and public opinion plummeted.
- Increasingly there were demands for an end to the monarchy and the creation of a new kind of government, a republic.





*The Parisian Mob*

## The San-Culottes

- At the beginning of the revolution, the working men of Paris allowed the revolutionary bourgeoisie to lead them.
- But by 1790 the sans-culottes were beginning to be politically active in their own right.
  - They were called sans-culottes (literally, without trousers) because the working men wore loose trousers instead of the tight knee breeches of the nobility.
  - Eventually sans culottes came to refer to any revolutionary citizen.



*The sans culottes*



*The bourgeoisie*

## Simple Solutions

- Though the activity of the sans-culottes had been growing, after the King's flight to Varennes, they were spurred to greater political activity.
- They were uninterested in the complexities of politics, and looked for simple solutions.

## Attack on the Tuileries

- The royal family was living under house arrest in the Tuileries Palace.
- An angry mob got into the building on June 20, 1792, and found their way to the King.
  - The crowd shouted insults and was in an ugly mood.
  - The King remained calm and obediently put on the red cap of liberty (a symbol of revolution) at the mob's insistence.



*Mob placing the red cap of liberty on the King's head at the Tuileries*

## Pressure from the Paris Mob

- When the mob thrust a bottle of wine at the King, he drank a toast to the health of the nation but refused to change his position on the clergy.
  - Under the new constitutional monarchy, he had exercised his veto of a proposal to punish priests who refused to support the changes to the church.
  - A religious man, the King felt it would violate his conscience to agree to the mob's demands.
- The incident ended without bloodshed but by August the mob was back.



August 10, 1792, attack on the Tuileries

## The End of Constitutional Monarchy

- On August 10, 1792, the mob attacked the Tuileries again.
  - This time the royal family barely escaped with their lives.
  - The king's guards were killed and the King and his family fled to the protection of the Assembly.
- The constitutional monarchy was over.

## Spreading the Gospel of Revolution

- The French Revolution took on the character of a religious crusade.
- It was not enough to have a revolution at home. The gospel of revolution must be spread to the rest of Europe.
- France declared war on Prussia and Austria and proclaimed that it advanced the cause of liberty.

## The French Flag

- The Marquis de Lafayette, commander of the new National Guard, combined the colors of the King (white) and the colors of Paris (blue and red) for his guardsmen's uniforms and from this came the Tricolor, the new French flag.



## The Marseillaise

Arise you children of our motherland,  
Oh now is here our glorious day !  
Over us the bloodstained banner  
Of tyranny holds sway !  
Of tyranny holds sway ! Oh, do you hear there in our fields  
The roar of those fierce fighting men ?  
Who came right here into our midst  
To slaughter sons, wives and kin.

### CHORUS

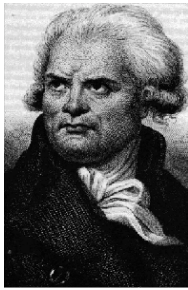
To arms, oh citizens !  
Form up in serried ranks !  
March on, march on !  
And drench our fields  
With their tainted blood!

## The September Massacres

- The country was embroiled in a foreign war.
- The new government had declared war against the powerful Austria and in the beginning it did not go well for France.
- Complicating matters was the fact that counter-revolutionary Frenchmen were working with Austria in the hopes of turning back the revolution.
- In France people saw counter-revolutionaries under every rock.

## Georges-Jacques Danton

- Georges-Jacques Danton, a revolutionary leader and a powerful orator, rose in the Assembly on September 2nd 1792 and boomed out these memorable words in his deep bass voice: "When the tocsin sounds, it will not be a signal of alarm, but the signal to charge against the enemies of our country. . . . To defeat them, gentlemen, we need boldness, and again boldness, and always boldness; and France will then be saved."



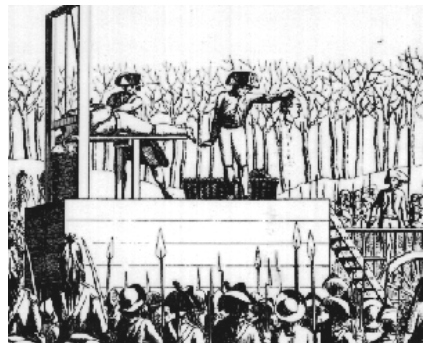
Georges-Jacques Danton: "Boldness and again boldness, and always boldness"

## Let the blood of the traitors flow

- Danton probably meant boldness in fighting the war against Austria. But many took his words to refer to enemies within France.
- The radical press took up the cry, "Let the blood of the traitors flow," and within hours of Danton's speech the streets of France did indeed run with blood.
- By September 7, over 1000 were dead.

## The Execution of Louis XVI

- The constitutional monarchy put in place by moderate revolutionaries gave way to a radical republic.
- The National Convention decided to put Louis on trial for his crimes.
  - Although his guilt was never an issue, there was a real debate in the Convention on whether the king should be killed.
  - They voted for his execution.
- On January 23, 1793 Louis Capet went to the guillotine in the Place de la Concorde, where a statue of his predecessor, Louis XV, once stood.
  - At the scaffold he said "I forgive those who are guilty of my death."



The execution of Louis XVI

## Two Radical Groups

- During the constitutional monarchy there were two radical groups vying for power, the Girondins and the Jacobins.
- Although both groups were more radical in their views than the moderates who had designed the constitutional monarchy, the Girondins were somewhat less radical.
- In late 1791, the Girondins first emerged as an important power in France.

## United in their Views

- At first the two parties were united in their views.
  - The Girondins were concerned about the plight of the blacks in France's colonies and were instrumental in passing legislation granting equal rights to all free blacks and mulattoes.
  - They wanted the declaration of war against Austria in early 1792 in the hopes that a show of strength would give them leverage with the King.

## Jean-Paul Marat

- When Jean-Paul Marat, a Jacobin journalist who showed little regard for the truth, was arrested for attacking Girondins, the people of Paris turned even more toward the Jacobins.
- The people loved Marat and he seemed to love them too.
- When he was acquitted of the charge, the crowds swarmed around him, scooped him up on their shoulders and carried him to the Convention, cheering all the way.

## The Rise of the Jacobins

- When the constitutional monarchy fell and the King was put on trial for treason in December, the Girondins argued against his execution.
- The Jacobins thought he needed to die to ensure the safety of the revolution.
- When the Jacobins were successful the tide turned against the Girondins.
- The Jacobins in the National Convention had 22 Girondin leaders arrested and executed. The Jacobins had won.

## The Death of Marat

- A final Girondin blow was struck, however, when Charlotte Corday, a Girondin sympathizer, gained entrance to Marat's bath and stabbed him.
- Marat immediately became a martyr to the revolution. He was given a hero's funeral and the procession lasted 7 hours.



The Death of Marat by Jacques-Louis David

## The Reign of Terror

- After the death of Louis in 1793, the Reign of Terror began.
  - Marie Antoinette led a parade of prominent and not-so-prominent citizens to their deaths.
  - The guillotine, the new instrument of egalitarian justice, was put to work.
- Public executions were considered educational. Women were encouraged to sit and knit during trials and executions.
- The Revolutionary Tribunal ordered the execution of 2,400 people in Paris by July 1794. Across France 30,000 people lost their lives.

## Watch Committees

- The Terror was designed to fight the enemies of the revolution, to prevent counter-revolution from gaining ground.
- Most of the people rounded up were not aristocrats, but ordinary people.
  - A man (and his family) might go to the guillotine for saying something critical of the revolutionary government.
  - Watch Committees around the nation were encouraged to arrest "suspected persons, ... those who, either by their conduct or their relationships, by their remarks or by their writing, are shown to be partisans of tyranny and federalism and enemies of liberty" (*Law of Suspects, 1793*).

## Suspension of Civil Liberties

- Civil liberties were suspended.
  - The Convention ordered that "if material or moral proof exists, independently of the evidence of witnesses, the latter will not be heard, unless this formality should appear necessary, either to discover accomplices or for other important reasons concerning the public interest."
  - The promises of the Declaration of the Rights of Man were forgotten.
  - Terror was the order of the day. In the words of Maximilien Robespierre, "Softness to traitors will destroy us all."

## Maximilien Robespierre

- "Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible"



## Republic of Virtue

- Robespierre was the mastermind of the Reign of Terror.
  - He was the leader of the Committee of Public Safety, the executive committee of the National Convention, and the most powerful man in France.
  - He explained how terror would lead to the Republic of Virtue in a speech to the National Convention: "If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once *virtue and terror*: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible..." *Speech on Terror*
- The old maxim "the end justifies the means" describes Robespierre's policy well.

## The Last Victim of the Reign of Terror

- Even the radical Jacobins, the supporters of Robespierre, come to feel that the Terror must be stopped.
  - Danton rose in the Convention calling for an end to the Terror. He was its next victim.
  - When Robespierre called for a new purge in 1794, he seemed to threaten the other members of the Committee of Public Safety.
- The Jacobins had had enough.
  - Cambon rose in the Convention and said "It is time to tell the whole truth. One man alone is paralyzing the will of the Convention. *And that man is Robespierre.*"
  - Others quickly rallied to his support.
  - Robespierre was arrested and sent to the guillotine the next day, the last victim of the Reign of Terror.

## The Directory

- People had grown tired of the instability and bloodshed of the revolution and were ready for something more moderate.
- By 1795, the republic was gone, and 5 men with business interests had the executive power in France.
- This new government was called The Directory.
  - It was far more conservative than the Jacobin republic had been.
  - It was also ineffectual.

## Napoleon Bonaparte

- The people readily accepted the coup d'etat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799.
- The revolution was over. Or was it?



## Sources

- Adapted from *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité: The French Revolution* by Jennifer Brainard. See <http://www.historywiz.com/frenchrev-mm.htm>