

French Revolution

Focus

*It was the best of times,
It was the worst of times,
It was the age of wisdom,
It was the age of foolishness,
It was the epoch of belief,
It was the epoch of incredulity.*

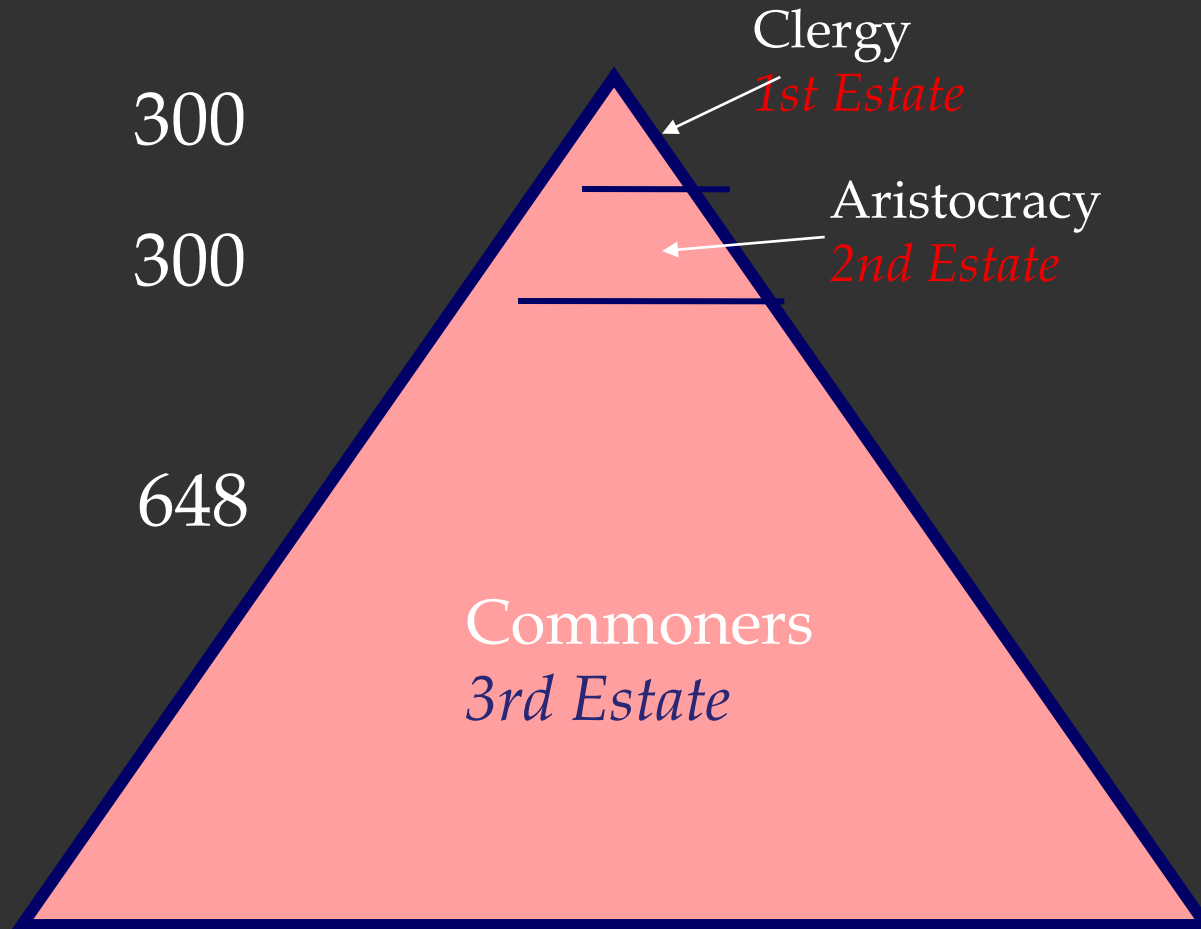
--Charles Dickens

A Tale of Two Cities

Causes of French Revolution

- French Social Division – 3 Classes
 - First Estate: the clergy (priests & Church officials)
 - Second Estate: nobility who had special privileges like tax exemption & collecting feudal dues. Nobles served as officers in military and held high positions at court
 - Third Estate: largest of the 3 estates; common people; included bourgeoisie – middle classes of merchants, professionals, store owners, urban workers, peasantry.

The Number of Representatives
in the Estates General: Vote by Head!



The French Monarchy: 1775 - 1793



Marie Antoinette & Louis XVI

Impact of Enlightenment Ideas

- These ideas made many Frenchmen unwilling to accept the divine right of kings, and the privileged positions of the Church and nobility.
- Bourgeoisie resented special privileges of nobles.
- Underground press poked fun at the King and his unpopular queen, Marie Antoinette.

Financial Crisis

- Financial system of France was seen as unfair by many and inefficient for taxing.

Estates General

- Meeting of Estates General was called to help solve the problem of French debt due to its wars with England and high costs of helping the American colonists war for independence.
- Estates General – a national assembly in which each of the 3 social classes was represented in its own chamber.

National Assembly & The Storming of the Bastille

- When the meeting convened, delegates from the Third Estates (commoners) declared themselves to be a National Assembly.
- Fearing that King Louis XVI would break up the Assembly, those of the Third Estate seized the royal prison known as the Bastille in search for weapons. This action forced the King to recognize the new Natl. Assembly

“The Third Estate Awakens”

- Y The commoners finally presented their credentials not as delegates of the Third Estate, but as “representatives of the nation.”



- Y They proclaimed themselves the “National Assembly” of France.

Storming the Bastille, July 14, 1789

Y A rumor that the king was planning a military coup against the National Assembly.



Y 18 died.

Y 73 wounded.

Y 7 guards killed.

Y It held 7 prisoners [5 ordinary criminals & 2 madmen].

Declaration of Rights and Man

- **Third Estate**

- Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen - defined the individual and collective rights of all French citizens.
- All were “free and equal”
- Made France a constitutional monarchy - one limited by law and tradition

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

August 26,
1789



- ✓ Liberty!
- ✓ Property!
- ✓ Resistance to oppression!
- ✓ Thomas Jefferson was in Paris at this time.

Louis XVI “Accepts” the Constitution & the National Assembly. 1791



- “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” became the slogan for the Revolution.

- **Revolution**

Takes a Radical

Turn

France's Situation

- Poor agricultural harvest
- Angry Parisians drag King and royal family back to Paris
- King Louis XVI and family try escaping but are caught
- Monarchy was overthrown – France became a republic – govt where citizens elect their representatives
- Legislature, known as Convention, was elected

The French Constitution of 1791:

A Bourgeois Government

- ✓ The king got the “**suspensive**” veto [which prevented the passage of laws for 4 years].
 - He could not pass laws.
 - His ministers were responsible for their own actions.

- ✓ A permanent, elected, single chamber National Assembly.
 - Had the power to grant taxation.

- ✓ An independent judiciary.

How to Finance the New Govt.?

1. Confiscate Church Lands (1790)



One of the most controversial decisions of the entire revolutionary period.

More of the Radical Events

- King put on trial for crimes against his people and executed in 1793
- New French republic was seen as a threat to other European countries.
- Open rebellion in parts of France

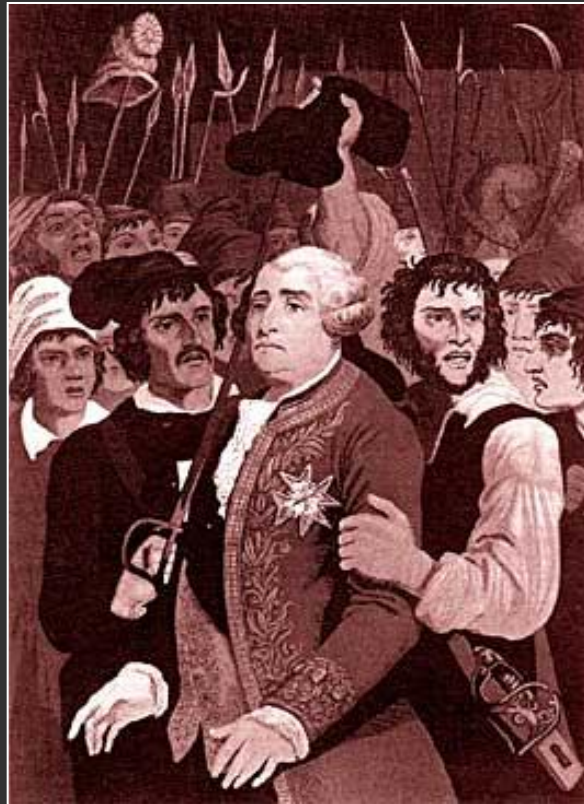
Committee of Public Safety and – – – Reign of Terror.

- Committee began the Reign of Terror
- Robespierre – director of Reign of Terror
- **Robespierre & other radical leaders – followed Rousseau's idea of using force to achieve their goals.**
 - Savage repression
 - People denied right to defend themselves
 - Nobles, Catholic priests, and other suspected traitors were executed.
 - 40,000 estimated killed

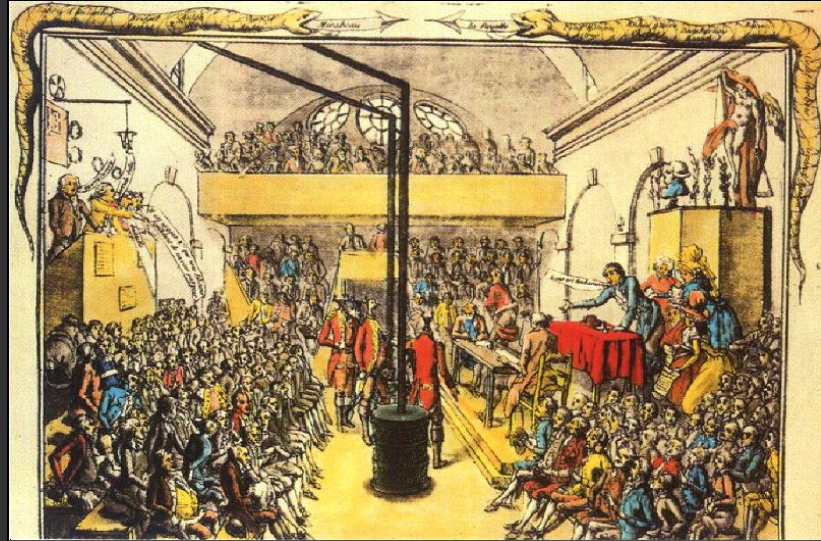
Robespierre – Reign of Terror



The Jacobins



Jacobin Meeting House



- They held their meetings in the library of a former Jacobin monastery in Paris.
- Started as a debating society.
- Membership mostly middle class.
- Created a vast network of clubs.

Guillotine

a) The engine of terror was the guillotine. Its fast falling blade extinguished life instantly.



The Reign of Terror

- *Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible.* -- Robespierre
- *Let terror be the order of the day!*
- The Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris alone executed 2,639 victims in 15 months.
- The total number of victims nationwide was over 20,000!



The “Monster”



The last guillotine execution in France was in 1939!

Robespierre's Fate

- **The Convention, French legislature, in fear of their own lives, arrested and executed Robespierre and his followers.**

Impact of French Rev

- Revolution challenged idea of divine right of kings and privileged nobility
- Revolution stood for democratic government and social equality.
- Shift from king and nobles to the bourgeois class.
- Removed feudal restrictions from France, resulting creation of capitalist economy
- Both Amer & Fr Rev served for citizens as models for other countries seeking political change.

COMPARISON OF THE AMERICAN AND FRENCH REVOLUTIONS

Issues of taxation helped spark each revolution. In each revolution, Enlightenment ideas contributed to the popular desire for more rights and liberties. The American Revolution was based on Locke; the French Revolution on Rousseau.

Each revolution sought to establish democratic principles of government. The American Revolution established a limited democracy in which only property-owners could vote. During its radical phase, the French Revolution established a democracy of all adult males.

The American Revolution guaranteed freedom of religion; the French Revolution challenged the role of the Catholic Church.

Both revolutions established republican governments, although the French Republic did not last. It was replaced by the dictatorship of Napoleon and then by Louis XVIII.

The American Revolution overthrew a distant colonial ruler. In the French Revolution, the people overthrew their own existing social order.

Both revolutions led to violence. However, the French Revolution proved much more violent than the American Revolution.