

# The French Revolution



# The Old Regime or Old Order

- France was ruled by Louis XVI and his wife Queen Marie Antoinette
- France was an advanced and prosperous nation
- Beneath this was unrest caused by bad harvests, high prices, high taxes and questions raised by the Enlightenment
- There were severe economic problems in France



# French Class Structure

## The Privileged Estates

- The first Estate was the Roman Catholic clergy
- The church owned 10 percent of all land in France
- The clergy had access to high offices in the government
- The church paid about 2 percent of its income to the government



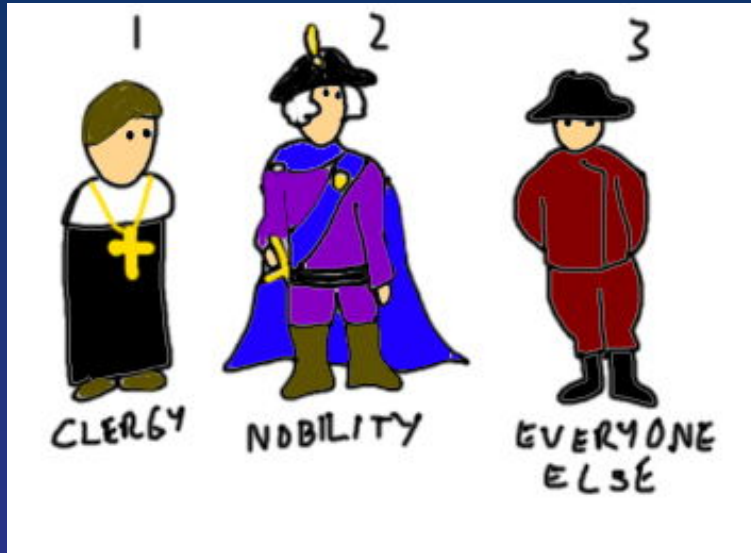
# The Second Estate



- Made up of wealthy nobles
- Was about 2 percent of the total population
- Owned 20 percent of the land and paid no taxes
- Rejected Enlightenment ideas as radical and threatening to their status and power



# The Third Estate



- 97 percent of the population belonged to the third Estate
- Consisted of three groups:

Bourgeoisie - were middle class, well educated merchants, factory owners, professionals and skilled artisans

Workers - formed the second group within the Third Estate

Peasants - formed the largest group within the Third Estate, about 80 percent of France's 26 million people



# Forces of Change and Weakened Leadership



- Growing resentment of lower classes contributed to the revolutionary mood in France
- New ideas about government from the Enlightenment were spreading among the Third Estate, “equality , liberty, democracy”
- France’s once prosperous economy had been strangled by tax burdens
- Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette borrowed huge sums to fund the American Revolution, continue their extravagant lifestyles and pay debts Louis had inherited
- Louis XVI was a weak leader who allowed the debt to become a serious problem
- The heavy tax burden on the Second Estate forced Louis XVI to summon a meeting of the Estates General, an assembly of representatives from all three estates to approve of the new taxes

# Estates General and the Beginning of the Revolution

- Estates General was dominated by the First and Second Estates, the two privileged Estates, they could out-vote the Third Estate
- The Third Estate wanted equality in the Estates General and equality in voting with the other two Estates, giving the Third Estate a larger voice in the government
- King Louis XVI sided with the nobles and clergy and insisted that the Estates General follow their medieval rules
- The Third Estate bolted from the gathering and declared that the Third Estate's new National Assembly was legitimate and would make the laws





# Tennis Court Oath

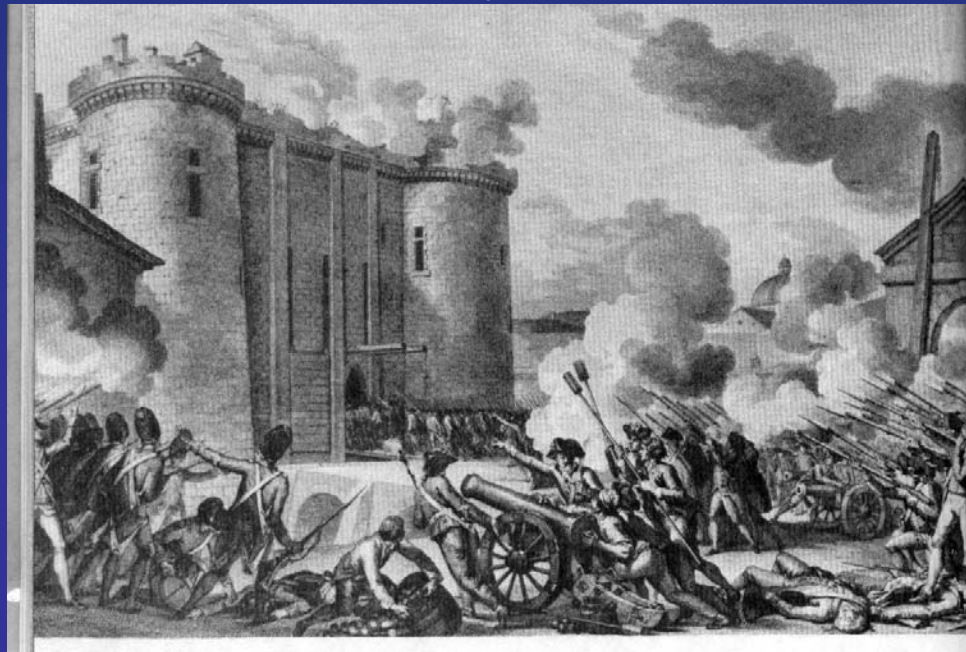


- The Third Estate voted on June 17, 1789 to establish the National Assembly which was a vote to end the absolute monarchy and begin representative government
- The Estates General responded by locking the Third Estate out of the meeting hall
- The Third Estate pledged to stay on in a makeshift chamber, a tennis court, where members signed the pledge, known as The Tennis Court Oath
- Louis XVI reacted to these events by surrounding the Palace at Versailles with his mercenary army of Swiss guards

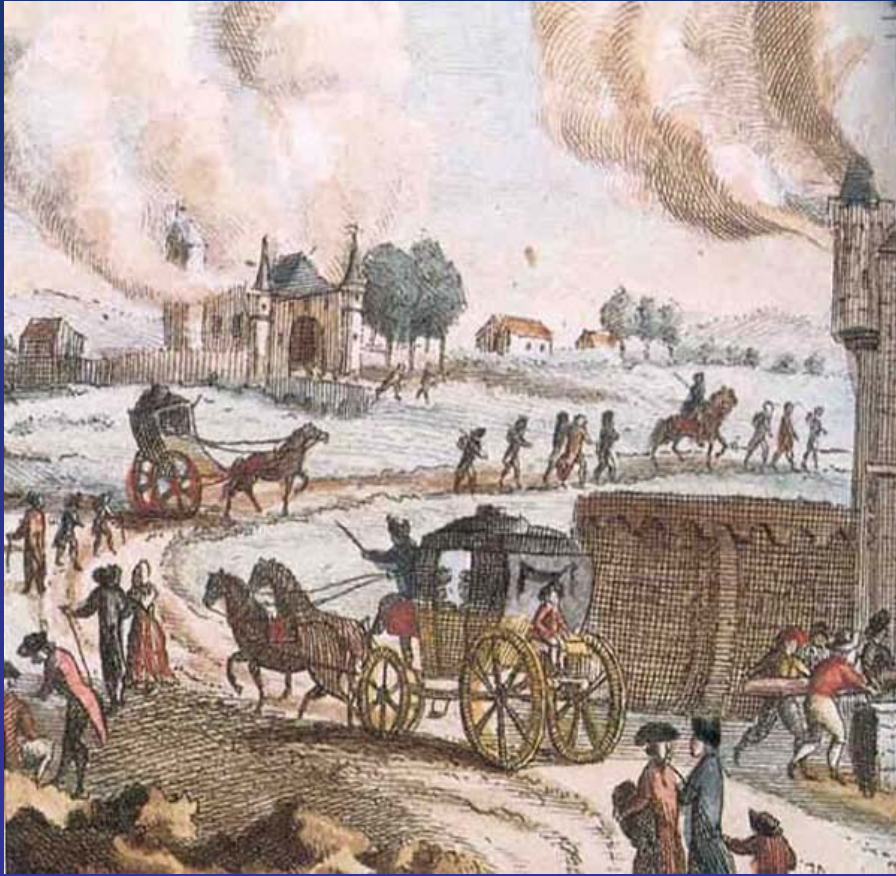


# French Revolution

- Fear and rumors of repression sent citizens of Paris to the streets
- On July 14, 1789 a group searching for weapons and gunpowder stormed the Bastille, a Paris prison
- Fall of the Bastille became a great symbolic act of the revolution to the French people and is still celebrated today on July 14<sup>th</sup> as Bastille Day



# Great Fear



- Rebellion quickly spread throughout France
- Peasants throughout the land stormed and burned noble's manor houses
- In October, 1789 Parisian women rioted over the rising price of bread and stormed the Palace at Versailles
- "let them eat cake" the famous quote allegedly from Marie Antoinette about the women rioters
- Louis XVI and his family left Versailles for Paris
- Fearing for their lives and property, the First and Second Estates joined with members of the National Assembly to sweep away their privileges – the Old Regime was dead
- Nobles and members of the First and Second Estates agreed to the changes out of fear rather than true commitment to the revolution

# Assembly Reforms France



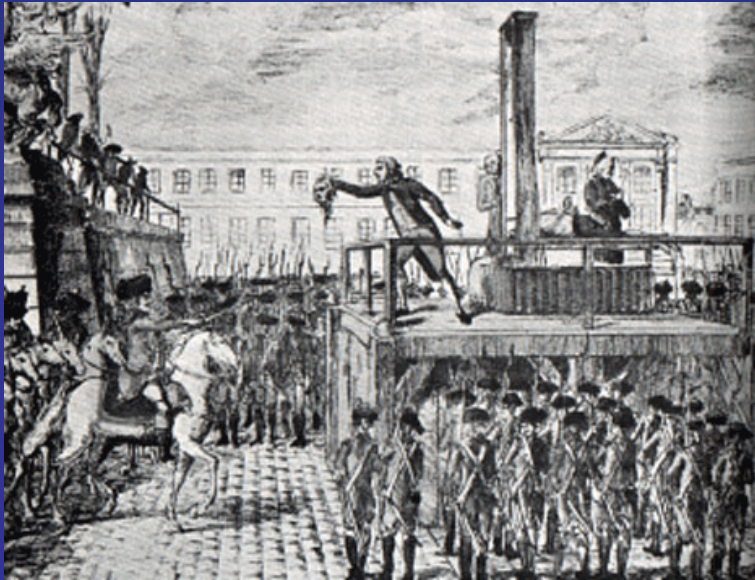
- It issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, “men are born free and remain free and equal in rights”
- Guaranteed citizens equal justice, freedom of speech, and religion
- Adopted the expression "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"
- Confiscated church lands and sold them and ordered that priests were to be elected and paid as state officials
- Devoted Catholic peasants were offended by the combining of the church and state
- In June of 1791 Louis XVI and his family were captured trying to escape to Austria and returned to Paris under armed guard
- The national Assembly set up a constitution that established a constitutional monarchy
- The National Assembly split into three groups: left, right and center politically



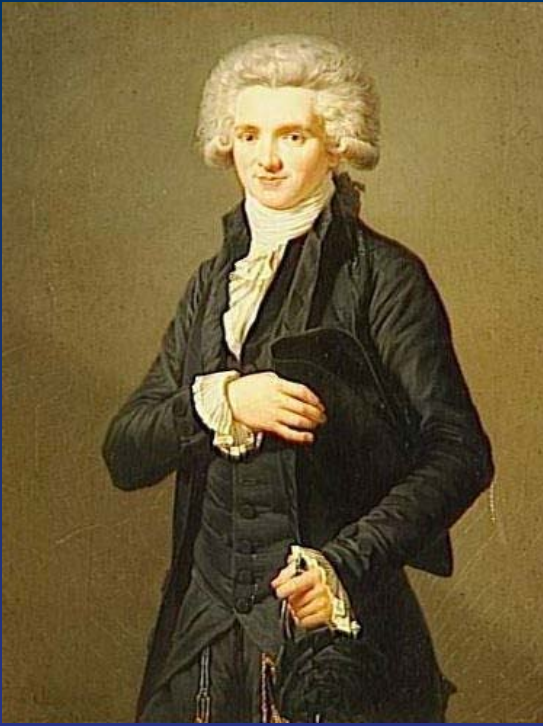
# War and Execution



- Fearful monarchs in Europe sought to reign in France and wanted Louis XVI reinstated as an absolute monarch
- The legislative Assembly responded by declaring war on Austria and Prussia
- Mobs took to the streets killing nobles and priests
- Louis XVI and family were imprisoned
- A new government was formed amid the chaos
- The new government was called the National Convention. Led by a group known as Jacobins and their radical leader Jean-Paul Marat
- The convention tried Louis XVI for treason, convicted and executed Louis XVI on January 21, 1793 by guillotine (a new execution device invented during the French Revolution by a doctor)



# Reign of Terror



- Jacobins leader Robespierre gained control and power
- In July, 1793 he became virtual dictator of France
- He used the Committee of Public Safety to try and execute enemies of the state
- Many people died, most by the guillotine, including Marie Antoinette
- An estimated 40,000 people were executed during the Reign of Terror
- Members of the national Assembly began to fear for their own lives and turned on Robespierre and had him executed on July 28, 1794 ending the Reign of Terror
- Moderate leaders drafted a new plan of government in 1795, the third since 1789
- The new government, known as the Directory, consisted of a two-house legislature and an executive branch made up of five men known as the Directory
- Order was finally brought to France

