

# *The French Revolution*

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*1789 - 1792*

# *Causes of the French Revolution*

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Causes of the French Revolution

# *France before the Revolution*

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- Absolute Monarchy:
  - Louis XVI & Marie Antoinette
- Controlled richest and possibly most powerful country in Europe
- Upper class set trends all over Europe (clothing, literature, art, enlightenment ideas)
- Majority of people didn't share wealth and rights of the upper class



# Divided Society

- Estates: order of French society
  - Determined a person's legal rights and their status
- Medieval, Antiquated use
- 1st and 2nd Estate: 200,000 people
- 3rd: 23 million people



# *French Estates*

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## **First Estate**: Catholic Clergy

Owned 10% of the land

Made up 1% of population

## **Second Estate**: Nobility

Owned 25% of land

Made up 2% of population

## **Third Estate**

Range from Middle Class (Bourgeoisie) to Peasantry

Owned 65% of land

Made up 97% of population

# Divided Society

- Members of third estate deeply resented privileges of first two estates
  - Only third estate required to pay taxes
  - Nobility required high positions in church, government, army
  - Only nobility allowed to hunt and carry swords
  - No matter how successful or well-educated, third estate member can never move up - determined solely by **birth**



# The Third Estate



Gentilhomme à la mode de 1695, jeune homme de la bourgeoisie en 1710,  
d'après des gravures du temps.

- **Bourgeoisie: middle class** (doctors, lawyers, merchants and business managers)
  - Tended to live in town
  - Well educated and relatively wealthy
  - Read Enlightenment works and believe in freedom and equality
- **Artisans: often quite poor**
  - Live in slums of Paris
  - Work in poor conditions
- **Peasants: extremely poor**
  - Live in rural areas of France
  - Owned 40% of the land—but remain poor because of feudal dues they owe the nobles, tithes to the church and land tax to the King
- **Worked hard, kept society going, but NO voice in government**

# *Growing Unrest*

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- Growing population → strain resources
  - Cost of living increase and increase on fees to use equipment (mills, etc.) → anger peasants
- Increase in prices and stagnant wages anger Artisans
- Lack of political power anger bourgeoisie
- Resenting King's absolute rule angered the nobles

# Growing Unrest

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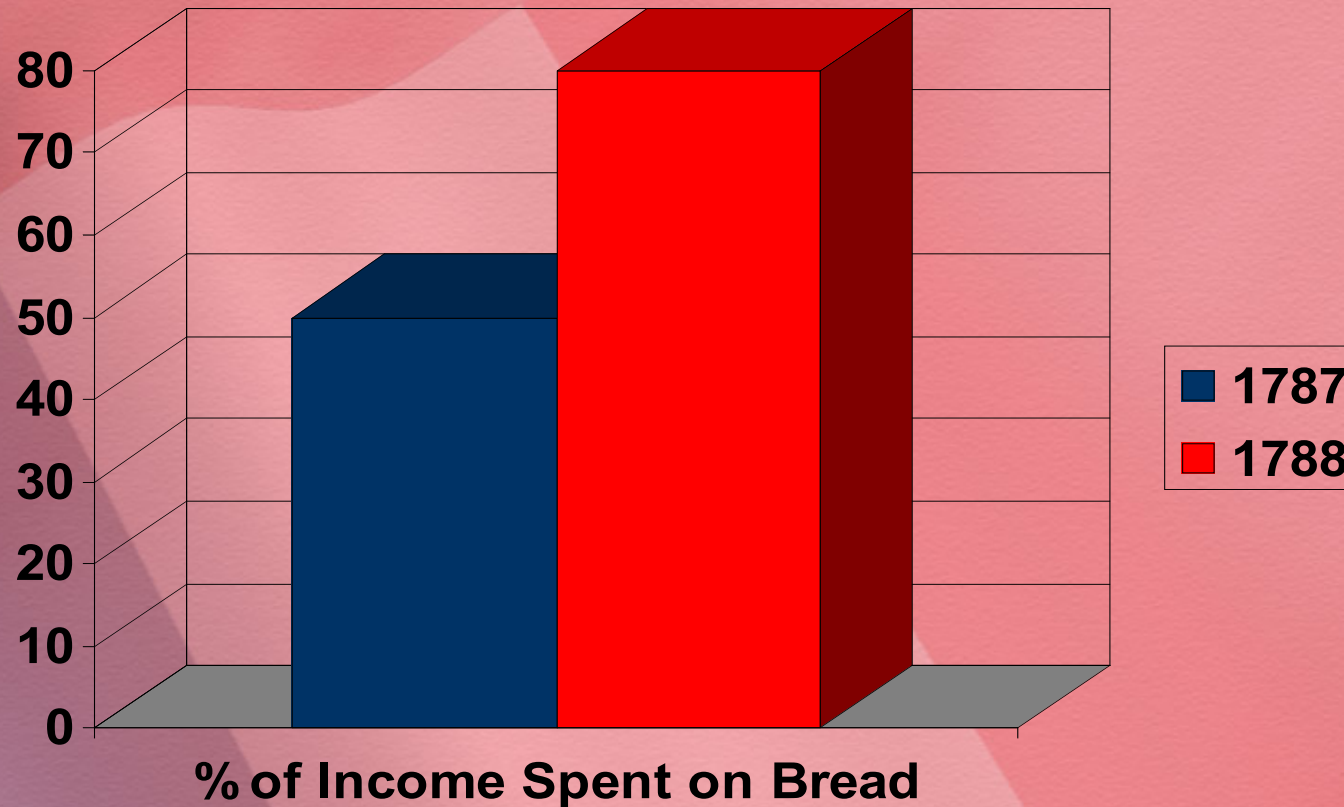
- Financial Problems

- Debts increasing (Louis XIV→ extravagant spending such as the Palace of Versailles)
- Louis XVI: supported the American Revolution & Seven Years War/French & Indian War (wanted to defeat and weaken England) but increased debt significantly
- Marie Antoinette illustrates lavish spending of the court (later becomes a target and symbol of hatred of the monarchy) – “Madame Deficit”



# *Let Them Eat Cake?*

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- Crop failures cause bread shortages in 1788 & 1789 (many people—especially peasants—starving to death)

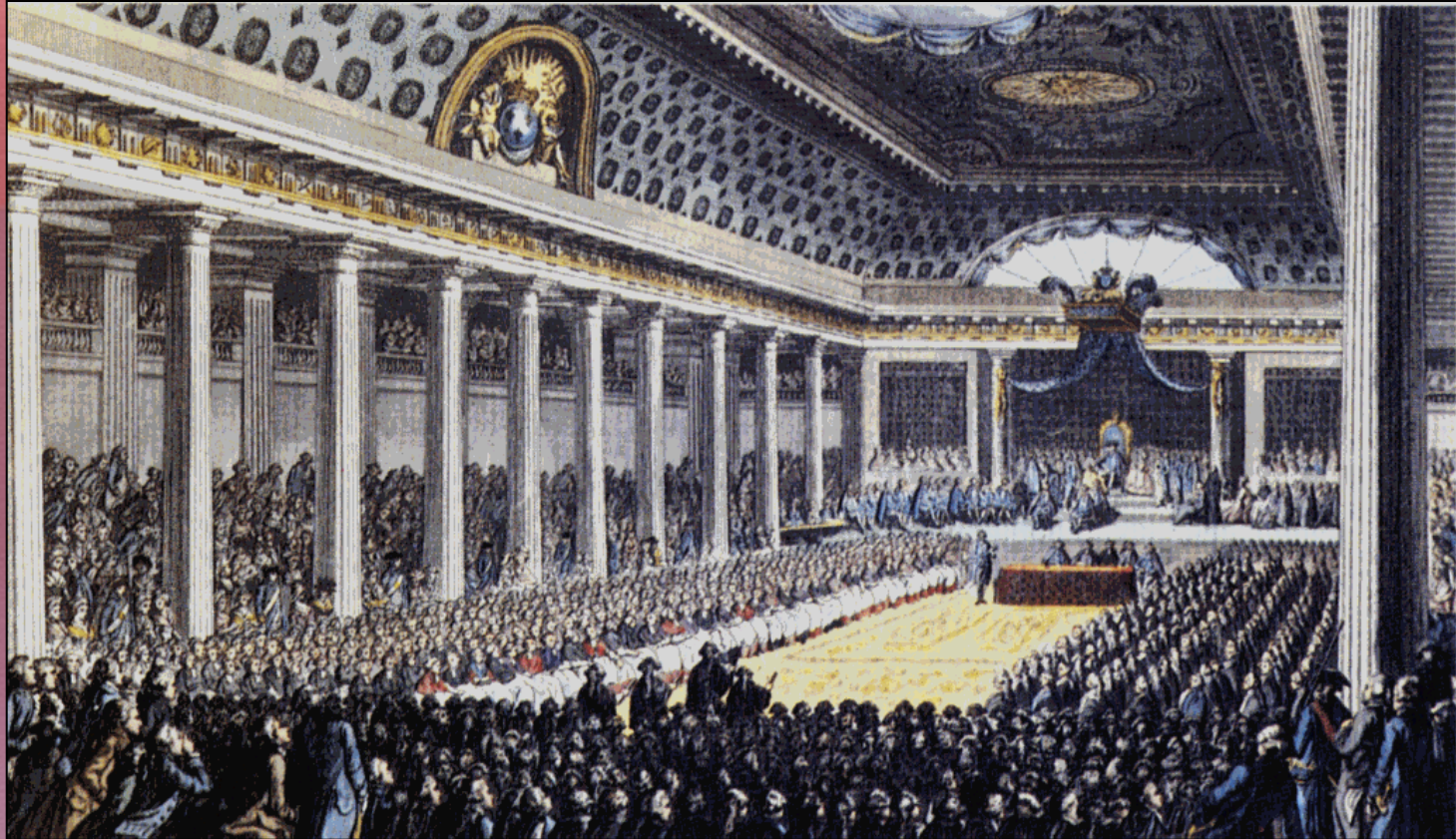
# *Louis 16<sup>th</sup> preventing Revolution*

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- First try to tax the first two Estates → they refuse
- Banks refused to lend money to the government
- May 1789: call the Estates-General
  - King hoped they would agree to tax the first two estates
  - Each estate has one vote—so the clergy and the nobles dominated the vote and stopped the tax
  - Third Estate want each individual vote to count—because they make up the majority and their votes would be weighed more heavily (also some clergy and nobles followed enlightenment principles)
  - King requires them to meet separate and each estate only have one vote

# *Estates General, 1789*

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First time called since 1614

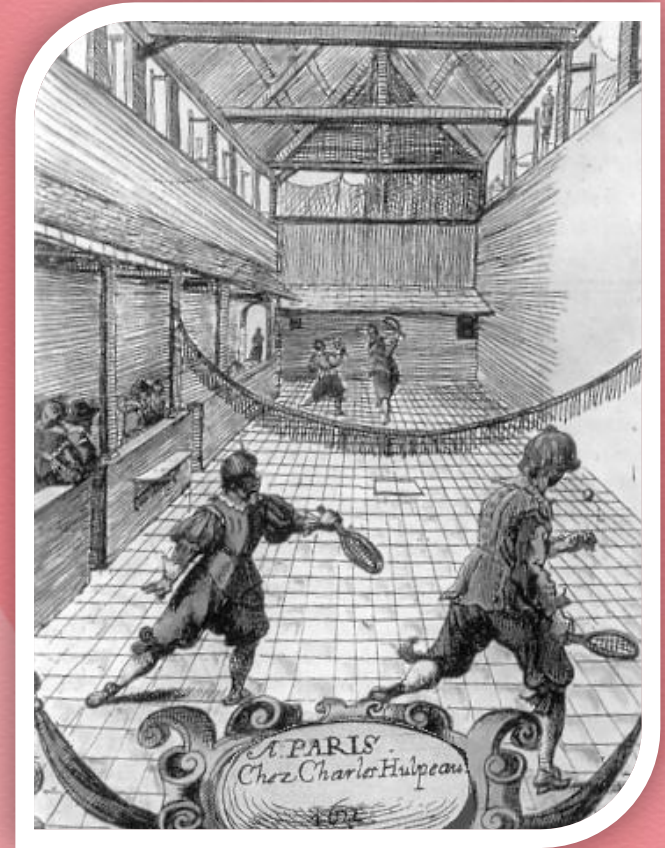


“Therefore, what is the Third Estate? Everything; but an everything shackled and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged order? Everything, but an everything free and flourishing. Nothing can succeed without it, everything would be infinitely better without the others”

-- Abbe Sieyes

# Louis 16<sup>th</sup> “preventing” Revolution

- Third Estate eventually locked out of Estates-General
- Gather at neighboring tennis court and create the National Assembly
  - “True” representation of the French nation
  - Tennis Court Oath: promised not to disband until they write a new constitution for France – End of absolutist monarchy



Royal Tennis

# *Start of a Revolution*

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- King gathered more troops around Palace of Versailles and in Paris
- Third Estate (bourgeois) afraid king planned stop the National Assembly from creating a constitution
- Citizens want to protect National Assembly
- July 14, 1789: storm the Bastille
  - Symbol of oppression
  - People take politics into their own hands - defend National Assembly
  - French Independence Day eventually
- The Great Fear – Rebellion spreads to country side



# Constitutional Government

- The Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen:

- Inspired by American Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights

- Included ideas from Enlightenment writers: Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau

- Stated:

- All people equal before the law - end noble privilege
- Guaranteed freedom of speech, press and religion
- Protected people from unfair arrests and imprisonment
- Failed to give equal rights to women (did get right to own property)



# *Differing Opinions in the National Assembly*

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- Marquis de Lafayette: leader of National Assembly
- National Assembly split — Many different views on a new government
- Changes:
  - Nobles agreed to end feudal dues and to be taxed (had to give in—feared for their lives)
  - All male citizens could hold public offices



# *Reaction of Louis 16<sup>th</sup>*

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- King refused to accept the Declaration of Rights
  - People afraid he would take action to end the National Assembly
- People want Louis and Marie Antoinette to move to Paris (leave Versailles) to prove his support of National Assembly
  - Also believed he was out of touch with the needs of the people – living in his lavish palace while people of Paris starved in the streets
- Women's March to Versailles
  - Women demanding bread (to feed their family) marched to Versailles (October 1789)
  - Guards could not restrain the mob and Louis agrees to move to Paris

# Women March

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# *National Assembly & the Church*

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- Money still a problem
  - Solution: take church property (10% of all French land) and sell most of it to pay off debt
- Clergy very strong:
  - Solution: Civil Constitution of the Clergy:
    - put French Church under government control
    - Clergy are now elected, salaried officials
  - Pope condemned action
  - Created a rift in revolutionaries (many conservative peasants disagreed with this action)

# *Constitution of 1791*

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- 1791 Constitution completed
  - Constitutional Monarchy – severely limits the king's power
  - Unicameral Legislature (one-house assembly) with elected officials
  - Suffrage for tax paying males
- Moderates: happy with the result
- Most French people unhappy:
  - Some believed reforms had gone too far, others thought not far enough
- Differing beliefs led to unrest and violence throughout France, especially in Paris

# *Decline of the Monarchy*

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- Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette nervous about unrest and violence disguise themselves and attempt to escape to Austria
  - Someone recognized them and soldiers arrest them and return them to Paris
- Louis, a virtual prisoner, distrusted by the people (now most people want a republic—with no King)

# Decline of the Monarchy

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- Neighboring countries with Monarchies get nervous
- French Revolutionary leaders are afraid Austria will try to reinstate Louis (Marie Antoinette is Austrian)
  - Declare war on Austria in 1792 – created total chaos in France
- King arrested by radicals – eventually charged and killed
- September Massacre: the killing of imprisoned clergy and nobles
- Radicals take over National Assembly and rewrite constitution (again)