

UNIT 2, SECTION 2: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

- **The Old Regime** - 1789 - everyone in France belonged to one of three classes: First Estate (clergy, 0.5%), Second Estate (nobility, 1.5%), Third Estate (vast majority, 98%)

First Estate - in 1789, the clergy still enjoyed enormous wealth and privilege

- owned about 10% of the land, collected taxes, paid no direct taxes to the state
- enlightened thinkers targeted the Church for reform
- many clergy condemned the Enlightenment for speaking out against the Church

Second Estate - nobles held top jobs in govt., army, the courts and the Church

- owned land, but had little money income
- had difficulty keeping their status in a period of rising prices, feared they'd soon have to pay taxes (traditionally, nobles didn't pay taxes)

Third Estate - a diverse group:

- bourgeoisie (middle class) - bankers, merchants, manufacturers, officials working for the king, lawyers, doctors, journalists, professors, skilled artisans
- rural peasants made up most of the 3rd Estate
- poorest members were city workers - many were unemployed, some turned to begging or crime
- discontent - 3rd Estate resented the privileges of the 1st & 2nd Estates
 - best jobs in society were reserved for nobles
 - heavy tax burden - peasants owed fees and services to nobles
 - ideas of the Enlightenment led people to question the old regime

Financial Crisis

- caused in part by deficit spending - govt. spends more \$ than it takes in
- govt. would have to raise taxes or decrease expenses, or both
- nobles didn't want to end their tax-free status

- a crumbling economy - 1780s - bad harvests -> high food prices, peasants and city dwellers began to starve
- lower class began attacking noble manors, people rioted during bread shortage
- failure to reform - King Louis XVI was a weak, indecisive leader
 - Jacques Necker - financial adviser - dismissed by king when he suggested taxing the 1st and 2nd Estates
 - pressure from the wealthy forced the king to call the Estates General (meeting of reps. from all estates to discuss govt. policies)

The King Takes Action - Louis XVI summoned the Estates General to Versailles in May 1789

- the Cahiers (kah-yay) - king had all 3 estates prepare notebooks (cahiers) listing their grievances
- reforms called for in the cahiers: fairer taxes, freedom of the press, regular meetings of the Estates General

The Tennis Court Oath

- delegates to the E.G. from the 3rd Estate were mostly lawyers, middle-class officials, writers - went to Versailles to solve the financial crisis and insist on reform
- debate over voting - 3rd Estate thought system was unfair (each estate was given one vote - 1st and 2nd Estates could outvote the 3rd)
- National Assembly - 3rd Estate delegates formed the National Assembly, invited delegates from the other estates to join - their plan: to write a constitution for France
- delegates were locked out of their meeting hall (ordered by the king), so members met at an indoor tennis court and took the Tennis Court Oath: they wouldn't leave until they had drafted a constitution
- King Louis XVI accepted the National Assembly, but sent troops to Versailles and Paris to intimidate anyone who wished to challenge his power
- the king brought back Necker for a second time, dismissed him again

The Storming of the Bastille - July 14, 1789 - Parisians assembled outside the Bastille (medieval fortress used as a prison) demanding weapons and gunpowder

- commander of the Bastille (Bernard Rene de Launay) gave the order to open fire on the crowd - 98 revolutionaries, 5 guards were killed - mob entered the fortress - de Launay's head was cut off, paraded on a pike - no weapons found, seven prisoners freed
- this action quickly became a symbol of the French Revolution

CREATING A NEW FRANCE

Revolts in Paris and the Provinces

The Great Fear - inflamed by famine and fear, peasants attacked homes of nobles, set fire to old manor records, stole grain from storehouses - this violence showed peasant anger with an unjust regime

Paris in Arms - revolutionary center - a variety of factions, or small groups competed to gain power

- **The National Guard** - moderate group led by Marquis de Lafayette (fought alongside George Washington) - a middle-class militia responding to arrival of royal troops in Paris - first to wear the tricolor (red, white and blue badge which later became the national flag of France)
- **Paris Commune** - more radical group - replaced the royalist govt. of Paris - could mobilize whole neighborhoods for protests and violent action against the king

Moderate Reforms

An End to Special Privilege - Aug. 4, 1789 - nobles in the National Assembly voted to end their special privileges (tax exemption, special legal status)

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen - late Aug. 1789 - modeled in part on the American Declaration of Independence - it declared the following:

1. all French men were "born and remain free and equal in rights"
2. they enjoyed natural rights of "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression" (like Locke, it said that govts. exist to protect citizens' natural rights)
3. all male citizens are equal before the law, can hold public office, have freedom of religion - taxes are to be levied according to ability to pay

- slogan of the revolution was "**Liberty, Equality, Fraternity**"

- Louis XVI was slow to accept reforms of the National Assembly

Women March on Versailles - Oct. 5, 1789 - thousands of angry Parisian women began marching toward Versailles (site of the king and queen's palace outside of Paris)

- their anger was directed at the queen (who was accused of being frivolous and extravagant)
- according to the radical press, when asked about the cries of hungry people for bread, Marie Antoinette replied, "Let them eat cake." (this story was untrue, but it helped inflame feelings against the queen)
- they refused to leave until the king and his family returned to Paris - the next morning, the king agreed - he and his family (along with the crowd) returned to the city - royal family lived in Paris' Tuileries Palace for the next 3 years (as virtual prisoners)

The National Assembly Presses Onward

Reorganizing the Church - Ntl. Assembly took a radical step: they put the French Catholic Church under state control - Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790): bishops & priests became elected, salaried officials - end of papal authority over the French Church - convents & monasteries dissolved

- many bishops & priests & peasants refused to accept it, pope condemned it

Constitution of 1791 - set up a limited monarchy, new Legislative Assembly had power to make laws, collect taxes, decide on issues of war and peace, lawmakers would be elected by taxpaying male citizens

- old provinces replaced with 83 depts. of roughly equal size, laws were reformed, old provincial courts were abolished, private property protected, free trade supported, some land seized by peasants returned to nobles, guilds abolished, labor unions for urban workers were forbidden

- reflecting Enlightenment goals, the Const. ended Church interference in govt. and ensured equality before the law for all male citizens

Louis's Failed Flight - June 1791 - the king and his family disguised themselves and attempted to escape France - escape failed when someone recognized the disguised king from his face on a piece of currency - soldiers escorted the family back to Paris - many saw the king as a traitor to the revolution

Reaction Outside France

Widespread Fears - European rulers increased border patrols to stop the spread of the "French plague" (movement of revolutionary ideas to other countries) - emigres (nobles and clergy who had fled France) told horror stories about how they'd been attacked by revolutionaries - enlightened rulers turned against French ideas

Threats From Abroad - Aug. 1791 - Declaration of Pilnitz - king of Prussia & emperor of Austria threatened to intervene to protect the French monarchy - French revolutionaries took threat seriously, prepared for war

War at Home and Abroad

Internal Divisions - a radical, middle-class group called the sans-culottes (meaning "without culottes") demanded that France be a republic (a govt. run by elected reps.) (upper-class men wore "culottes," or fancy knee breeches, while middle-class men wore trousers)

- one radical group in the Legis. Assembly who found support from the sans-culottes were the Jacobins, a radical group made up of middle-class lawyers and intellectuals

- opposing the radicals were moderate reformers and political officials who wanted no more reforms at all

War on Tyranny

- radicals soon controlled most of the Legis. Assembly - April 1792 - to spread the rev. and destroy tyranny abroad, they declared war on Austria, Prussia and Britain - fighting would continue on and off from 1792 to 1815