

# The French Revolution (1789–1815)



# The Old Regime

Under the *ancient regime*, or old order, everyone in France belonged to one of three classes.

FIRST ESTATE	SECOND ESTATE	THIRD ESTATE
<p>The CLERGY</p> <p>Enjoyed enormous wealth and privilege</p> <p>Owned about 10 percent of land, collected tithes, and paid no taxes</p> <p>Provided some social services</p>	<p>The NOBILITY</p> <p>Owned land but had little money income</p> <p>Hated absolutism</p> <p>Feared losing traditional privilege, especially exemption from taxes</p>	<p>The <b>BOURGEOISIE</b> and PEASANTS</p> <p>Peasants were 90% of French population</p> <p>Resented privilege of first and second estates</p> <p>Burdened by taxes</p> <p>Many earned miserable wages and faced hunger and even starvation</p>

# Economic Trouble

- Economic woes added to the social unrest and heightened tension.
- For years, the French government had engaged in **deficit spending** that is, a government's spending more money than it takes in.
- Louis XIV had left France deeply in debt. Recent wars, a general rise in costs in the 1700s, and the lavish court were incredibly costly. To bridge the gap between income and expenses, the government borrowed more and more money.
- Bad harvests in the late 1780s sent food prices soaring and brought hunger to poorer peasants and city dwellers.

# Failure of Reform

- Louis XV (1715-1774) pursued pleasure before business and ran up more debt.
- He chose **Jacques Necker** as advisor. He advised the king to reduce court spending, reform government, abolish internal tariffs, and proposed taxing the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Estates.
- The nobles and high clergy forced his dismissal.



# Meeting of the Estates General

France's economic crisis worsened, bread riots spread, and nobles denounced royal tyranny.

Louis XVI summoned the Estates General, requesting each estate to draw up **cahiers**, or grievances.

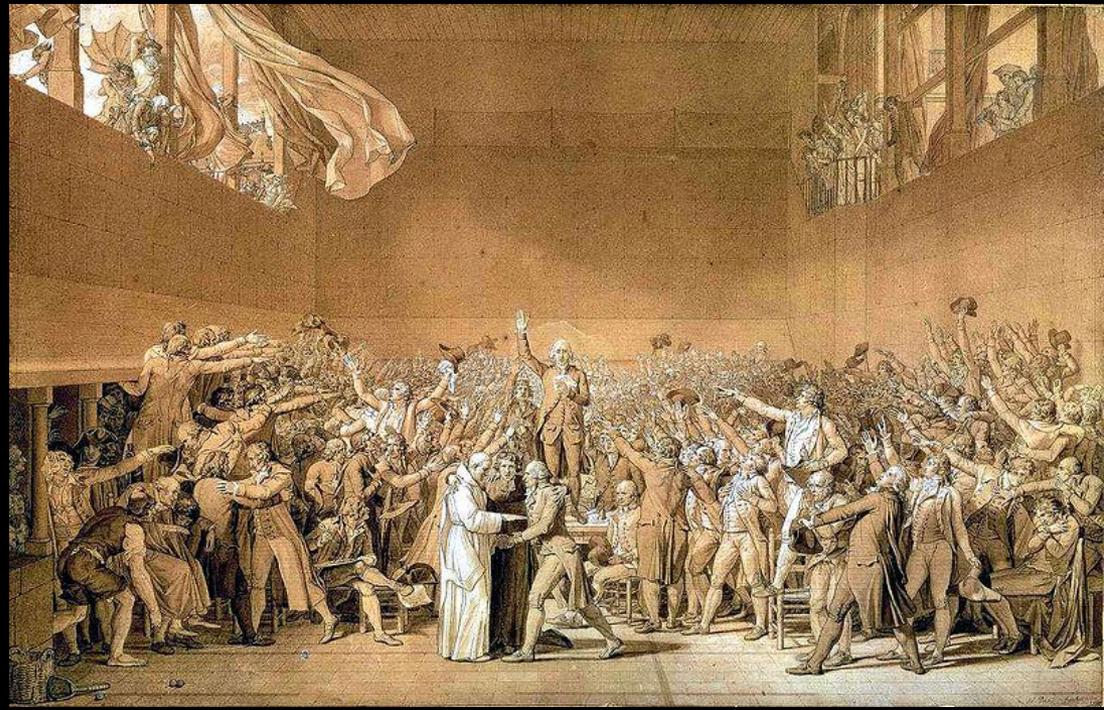
The Third Estate declared themselves to be the **National Assembly** and invited delegates from the other two estates to help them write a constitution.

When reform-minded clergy and nobles joined the Assembly, Louis grudgingly accepted it.

# The Tennis Court Oath

- The National Assembly met in May 1789 to draw up a new constitution, but they were deadlocked over the issue of voting.
- A few months later the Assembly found the doors locked and moved their meetings to an indoor tennis court.
- They took the **Tennis Court Oath**, swearing “never to separate and to meet whenever the circumstances might require until we have established a sound and just constitution.”

Sketch by Jacques-Louis David  
of the National Assembly  
taking the Tennis Court Oath



# Storming the Bastille

On July 14, 1789, more than 800 Parisians gathered outside the **Bastille**, a medieval fortress used as a prison. They demanded weapons believed to be stored there.

The commander of the Bastille opened fire on the crowd, and a battle ensued, in which many people were killed.



The storming of the Bastille quickly became a symbol of the French Revolution, a blow to tyranny. Today, the French still celebrate July 14 as Bastille Day.

The storming of the Bastille,  
14 July 1789

# Four Phases of the French Revolution



- 1789 – 1791 The moderate phase of the **National Assembly** turned France into a constitutional monarchy.
- 1792 – 1793 Violence escalated leading to the
- 1793 – 1794 **Reign of Terror**
- 1795 – 1799 Period of reaction to the extremism, known as the **Directory**.
- 1799 – 1815 The Age of Napoleon consolidated many revolutionary changes.

# Reforms of the National Assembly

## REFORMS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

### Political

- Proclaimed all male citizens equal before the law
- Limited the power of the monarchy
- Established the Legislative Assembly to make laws
- Granted all tax-paying male citizens the right to elect members of the Legislative Assembly

### Social and Economic

- Abolished special privileges of the nobility
- Announced an end to feudalism
- Called for taxes to be levied according to ability to pay
- Abolished guilds and forbade labor unions
- Compensated nobles for lands seized by peasants

### Religious

- Declared freedom of religion
- Took over and sold Church lands
- Placed the French Catholic Church under control of the state
- Provided that bishops and priests be elected and receive government salaries

# Popular Revolts

The political crisis of 1789 coincided with the worst famine in memory. Starving peasants roamed the countryside or flocked to the towns. Even people with jobs had to spend most of their income on bread.

- In such desperate times, rumors ran wild and set off what was later called the “Great Fear.”
- Moderates looked to **Marquis de Lafayette**, the aristocrat who had fought alongside George Washington in the American Revolution to lead the National Guard (militia) against royal troops in Paris.
- A radical group called the **Paris Commune** replaced the royalist government of Paris. Various factions, or small groups, competed for power.
- In the countryside, peasants attacked the homes and manors of nobles.

# Foreign Reaction

Events in France stirred debate all over Europe.



Idealized *sans-culotte* by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845).

- Supporters of the Enlightenment applauded the reforms of the National Assembly. They saw the French experiment as the dawn of a new age for justice and equality.
- European rulers and nobles denounced the French Revolution.
- In 1791, the monarchs of Austria and Prussia issued the **Declaration of Pillnitz**, in which they threatened to intervene to protect the French monarchy.
- Revolutionaries from the working-class, called **sans-culottes**, in France took the threat seriously and prepared for war.

# Women in the Revolution

Women of all classes participated in the revolution from the start.

Many women were very disappointed when the **Declaration of the Rights of Man** did not grant equal citizenship to women.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* by Olympe de Gouges was published in 1791.



- The text is dedicated to Marie Antoinette, whom de Gouges described as “the most detested” of women.
- It is ironic in formulation and exposes the failure of the French Revolution, which had been devoted to gender equality.

Women did gain some rights for a time. However, these did not last long after Napoleon gained power.

# Radicals and the Convention

Radicals took control of the Assembly and called for the election of a new legislative body called the **National Convention**.

In April 1792, war of the worlds between French Revolutionaries and European monarchs moved to the battlefield.

They granted **suffrage**, or the right to vote, to all male citizens, not just to property owners.



Jean-Paul Marat

The convention set out to erase all traces of the old order.

It voted to abolish the monarchy and declare France a republic.

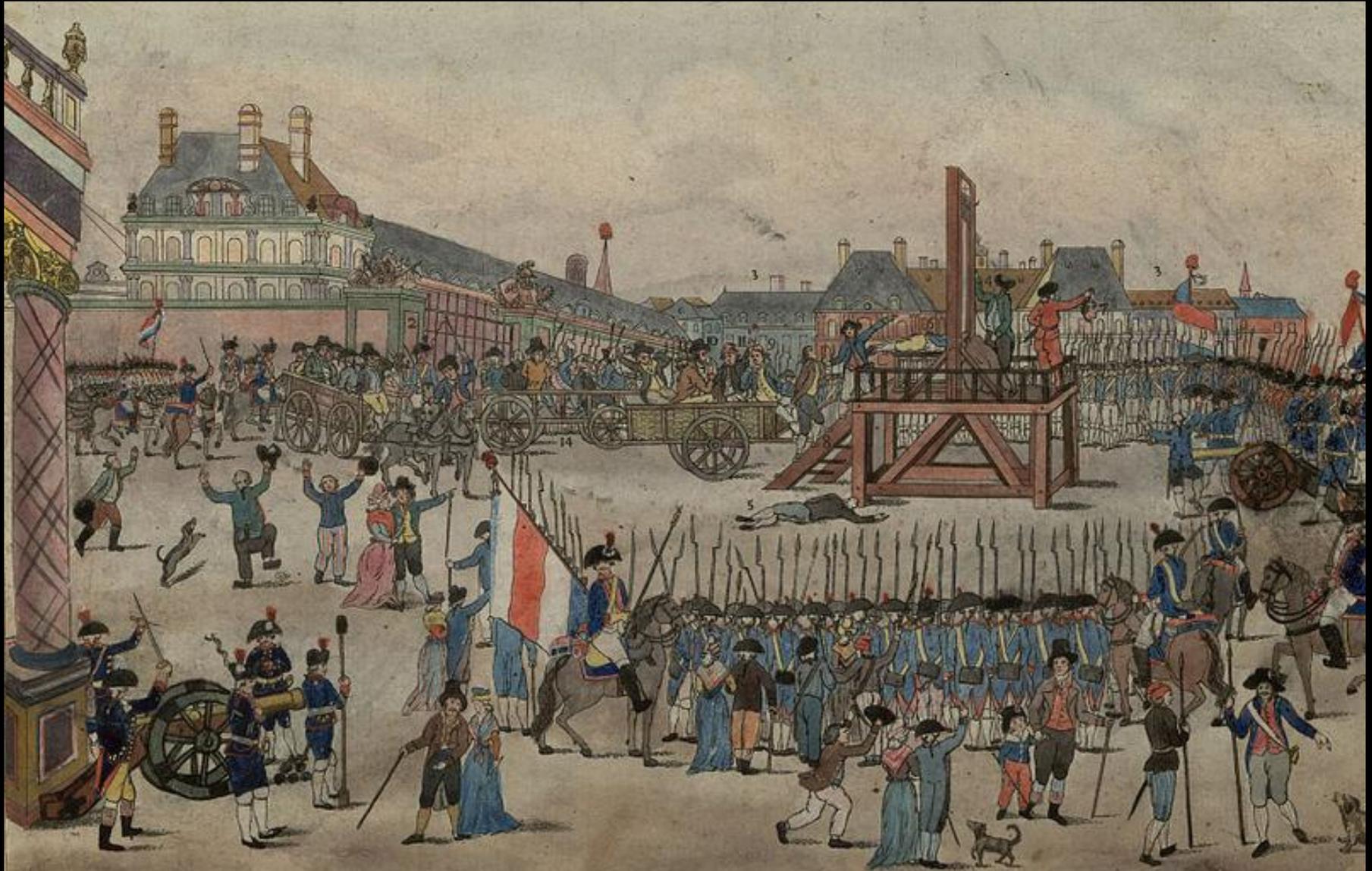
The **Jacobins**, who controlled the Convention, seized lands of nobles and abolished titles of nobility.

# From Convention to Directory

- By early 1793, France was at war with most of Europe. Within France, peasants and workers were in rebellion against the government. The Convention itself was bitterly divided.
- To deal with threats to France, the Convention created the Committee of Public Safety.
- The **Reign of Terror** lasted from about July 1793 to July 1794. Under the guidance of **Maximilien Robespierre**, some 40,000 people were executed at the guillotine.
- In reaction to the Reign of Terror, moderates created another constitution, the third since 1789. The Constitution of 1795 set up a five-man **Directory** and a two-house legislature.



# The execution of Robespierre



# Changes in Daily Life

By 1799, the French Revolution had dramatically changed France. It had dislodged the old social order, overthrown the monarchy, and brought the Church under state control. Many changes occurred in everyday life:



- New symbols, such as the tricolor, emerged.
- Titles were eliminated.
- Elaborate fashions were replaced by practical clothes.
- People developed a strong sense of national identity.
- **Nationalism**, a strong feeling of pride and devotion to one's country, spread throughout France.