

Vive la France! (a flick)



Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

Unit Q's

1. Who do you think is the most important person in a society? Why?
2. In the Roman Empire, who had the most power, and how did that change over time?
3. What was the role of the Church during the Middle Ages, and how did it affect society?
4. During the Renaissance, what major change occurred in how people thought about authority?
5. Why were the French people unhappy in the 1700s even though France was doing well economically?
6. What were the "Three Estates" in France, and how were they different from each other?
7. Why do you think only the Third Estate (98% of the population) paid taxes in France?
8. What was the role of the bourgeoisie in French society, and how did they differ from peasants?
9. Why did the French Revolution begin with the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789?
10. How did the National Assembly change the way France was governed?
11. What happened to King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette during the French Revolution?
12. What was the "Reign of Terror," and why did it happen?
13. How did Robespierre justify the use of terror during the revolution, and do you think it was effective?
14. What were the results of the French Revolution, and how did they affect the people of France?
15. What do you think the painting "*Liberty Leading the People*" symbolizes about the fight for freedom in France?
16. How could France have experienced a revolution through a different way? (opinionated)
17. In what ways was the revolution a success? In what ways was the revolution a failure? (opinionated)

In society, **who** is the most important person? (other than Mr. Barry) Is it an elected official? An office worker? A merchant? A banker? A lawyer? The person with the *most* money? A king? A queen? Is it the *largest* social class in the nation? Is it the largest amount of people who *have* money? This is actually an incredibly difficult question and there probably is not a correct answer: **Who is the most important person in a society?**

During the Roman Empire, we looked at the Caesars and armies. *They* were in charge. During the Middle Ages, we saw the rise of the feudal society with a king & Pope at the top of the hierarchy and serfs (#davis7) at the bottom! This society, we know, was based on social and economic power. In the Renaissance, the thinkers and inventors turned the world upside down when they *challenged* authority; the church. In the

Age of Exploration it was the powerhouse nations like Portugal, Spain, and France who had the money, the navy, and the military might who were the *most powerful*. In Africa, the kingdoms that had the most military and the latest technology dominated the continent.

The moment the French Revolution “started” was July 14, 1789 when a prison, **The Bastille**, was overthrown. French citizens were not happy in the 1700s even though their country was doing well on the world stage. France was a thriving nation in the mid 1700s. France had colonies in North America, they controlled parts of present-day Canada, and they had trading posts in the Caribbean islands. Their economy was killing it! In the 1770s, a brand new nation emerged and asked for France’s help; **America**.



In the 1770s, the US formed and they began fighting France’s largest enemy; Great Britain. Now, France was fighting Britain both in Europe **AND** in North America. Fighting Britain in North America and in Europe was hard for the French people! The wars were expensive, **very** expensive. France had nearly depleted all of its resources, food, and money to fight in these wars. For hundreds of years, French kings had ruled this empire and they ruled with absolute power over the people. Nobles ruled small villages below the kings and they were the second group of civilians who also had a lot of wealth. Unfortunately, more than **90%** of France

was made up of lower-class citizens who hardly had *any* food or money. Unfortunately, the money in France’s empire was not so evenly distributed, and the poor were getting frustrated...

The French people were divided into Three “estates” →

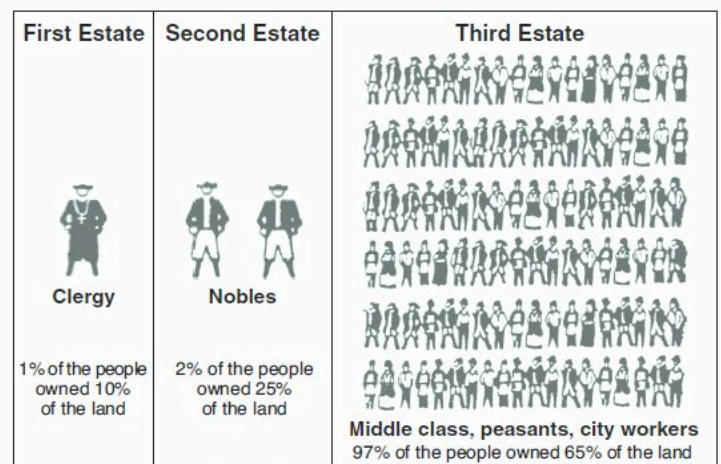
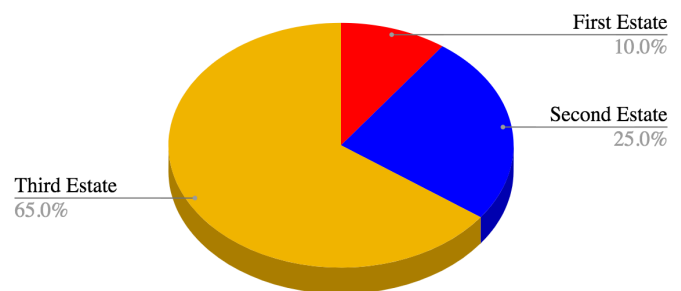
First Estate: (.5%) Catholic clergy, church officials, other appointed religious officials...

Second Estate: (1.5%) Nobles, military, & government workers...

Third Estate: (98%) Merchants, bankers, farmers, doctors, lawyers, professors...farmers and everyone else.

So...Who do you think paid **100% of the taxes** in France? If you said the Third Estate, you are correct! Seems odd? It was. Do you think this might impact how much money the government made? Do you think this had any impact on how much the government was able to spend? Why do you think the other two Estates were exempt from paying taxes?

Land Ownership By Estates



Source: Schwartz and O'Connor, *Democracy and Nationalism*, Globe Book Company (adapted)

Imagine today if the government only taxed the bottom 25% of the nation. Would the government have any money to spend on the rest of the nation? NO!!!!

At the top of the Third Estate were a social group called the ***bourgeoisie*** known as the middle class. These were the merchants, bankers, farmers, doctors, lawyers, professors. The bourgeoisie made up 20% of the Third Estate while farmers and peasants made up 80% of the class. Basically, France was made up of poor farmers...Members of the Third Estate had *no* voice in the government. They did not have the ability to talk in government meetings. In fact, they did not even get to *attend* the government meetings! Things needed to change...A social revolution was coming... :)

Let's backtrack a bit...For hundreds of years in Europe, it was the kings & queens that ruled their empires/nations. They were **the** rulers. They were **the** most powerful people in Europe. The people were not. The events that happened in France in the 1780s-1790s would literally turn the world upside down and shift the power of European nations, especially France. In the 1780s in France, things began to change.

In the century prior to the French Revolution (1600s), Europe experienced a mini-political revolution called the **Enlightenment**. The 1600s were a time of political change. Europe had almost *always* been ruled by kings, queens, and military leaders to take power. At this time, a *new* way of thinking took place where people **observed their social and political place in the world**. These people got their inspiration from the scientific thinkers of the time during the Scientific Revolution. These new philosophers, as they were called, challenged the old way of political and social change, which would have a tremendous impact on the French Revolution.



In 1788, France witnessed food shortages and rising prices of everyday goods, which is normal when a nation is at war. The rich still ate well, yet the poor often only had enough each day to get by. At the same time, the government was slowly going bankrupt because of the costly wars and the king's expensive habits of purchasing and spending. **King Louis XVI** (who always wore the latest fashion at a high cost) practically *drained* the French treasury department while renovating his elaborate palace, Versailles. Not only were the royal bank accounts slowly depleting, but there were a series of poor cereal wheat harvests, a drought, and a cattle disease that spread through the countryside.

The price of food then skyrocketed, and many unhappy civilians expressed their desperation and resentment toward the government. The people claimed they were paying too much in taxes and not receiving enough relief from the government. The people then began rioting, looting stores, and workers went on strike until the government helped the citizens.

When word of these problems reached King Louis XVI, he asked the nobles and clergy to contribute to paying taxes. At first, both the nobles and clergy were shocked. They then *refused* and called a meeting of the country's legislative body, the **Estates-General** (kinda like our Congress today). This meeting was actually their first meeting since 1619, which shows you how much the three estates "met" to talk about their problems. This meeting then took place at the Palace of Versailles (the pic). Because of the frustration, the clergy and nobles both refused to give up any of their powers or privileges to the rest of the government. This angered the Third Estate (98% of the nation). The Third Estate grew so angry that they declared themselves as their own government body and left the Estates meeting.



The Third Estate left the Estates General meeting on June 17, 1789. They left and planned to form what they then called the **National Assembly**. They worked on a new constitution for France and planned on re-creating the French social hierarchy to **give them more rights**. On June 20, 1789 the new National Assembly met at a nearby tennis court (Yes, you read that correctly) where they wrote a new French constitution calling for more representation in government and more social/political rights for the lower-middle class. This **tennis-court oath**, as it was called, was a revolutionary step toward an eventual overthrow of the French government. This assembly called for the abolishment of the feudal system and the creation of a declaration of rights of man. [\(Click Here for the Decl. of Rights\)](#) ← Does this stuff sound familiar?!?!?

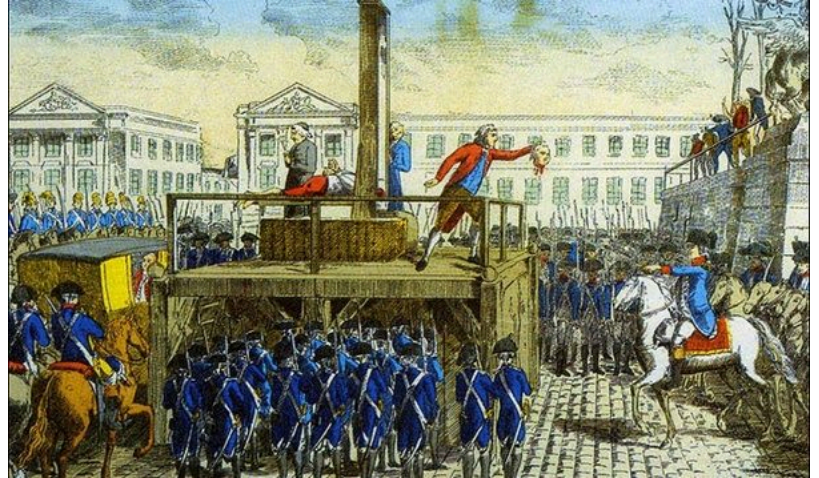
As June turned into July, more civilians grew restless about the dissolving of the French government. Events reached a **BIG** moment on July 14, 1789 when rioters stormed the Bastille fortress in an attempt to take gunpowder, weapons, and to send a message to the government that the majority of the people were upset with current French rule. The storming of the Bastille (a french prison/magazine) is kind of like how Americans celebrate July 4...



In July 1791 the National Assembly made France a **constitutional monarchy**. France was to be ruled by an elected assembly, and the king's power would be limited by that assembly. King Louis XVI did not want to accept this, nor did his ridiculous wife Marie Antoinette. The Assembly tried to answer questions like: who had voting rights? How much of the church clergy would influence the government? How much authority should the king have over the government & people? These questions were suddenly answered by the people in 1792 when King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette tried to flee France to Austria...

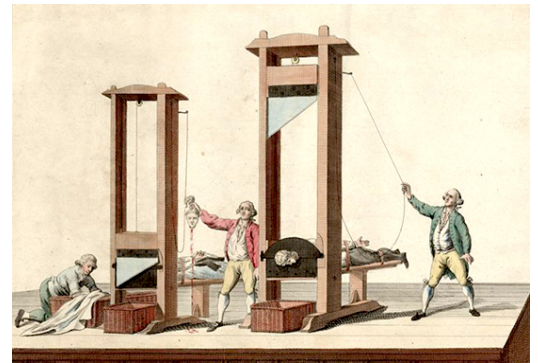
Think about how governments are formed. Think about how power is seized. Think about *who* the people are who do these types of things. Radicals and insurgents thought it was time for their voices to be heard by the summer of 1792. A group of extremists who met at the Jacobin monastery decided to take matters into their own hands. They called themselves the **Jacobins**. August 1792 turned into one of the bloodiest months in Europe as this extreme group called the Jacobins took over the French government. Below is a painting of King Louis XVI's beheading on January 21, 1793. I guess he lost his head in all of this ruckus. :)

The **Jacobins** rounded up political officials and massacred hundreds of people in an attempt to take over the government. In late 1792, this group of Jacobins captured King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, tried them for crimes against the state, and sentenced them to death via the guillotine. By the end of 1792, the radicals were in power and monarchy in France was no more...



Following the king's execution, France went to war with European powers because of the intense divisions between the different social classes in France. It was a mess. In June 1793, the Jacobins used the king's execution as a time to take power! A Committee of Public Safety was created to run the country to prevent further uprisings. This new body fell to a young lawyer named **Maximilien Robespierre** (the left) who took harsh steps to end unrest in France.

Robespierre unleashed a ten month period where he and his followers guillotined thousands of clergy, nobles, women, and children who opposed their seizure of power. In all, about 40,000 people died in this period known as the **"Reign of Terror."** It was pretty terrifying. (Get it?!) During this time, Robespierre tried to create what he called a "Republic of Virtue", or a new government in France. Clearly, we are seeing there is a lot of change in France when it comes to the government. He wanted new schools, new farming skills/practices introduced, and he tried to keep the prices of food under control so France would not continue into turmoil. All of this sounded great, however, he was still ordering the executions of those who opposed him! Even Robespierre was executed in 1794!



“If the basis of popular government in peacetime is virtue, the basis of popular government during a revolution is both virtue and terror; virtue, without which terror is baneful; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing more than speedy, severe and inflexible justice; it is thus an emanation of virtue; it is less a principle in itself, than a consequence of the general principle of democracy, applied to the most pressing needs of the patrie[homeland, fatherland]”

-Robespierre

After Robespierre was executed, government leaders elected a five-man council called **The Directory** (I know, there's a lot of people being elected and appointed in this whole revolution). This new council tried to handle food shortages, rising prices, and government banking to prevent things from getting worse. They tried to prevent other nations from invading France as well and did a decent job. It seemed the revolution *might* be coming to an end. In 1799, that idea was crushed. The Directory *failed* to do all of the above and the people were looking for a new leader to emerge...



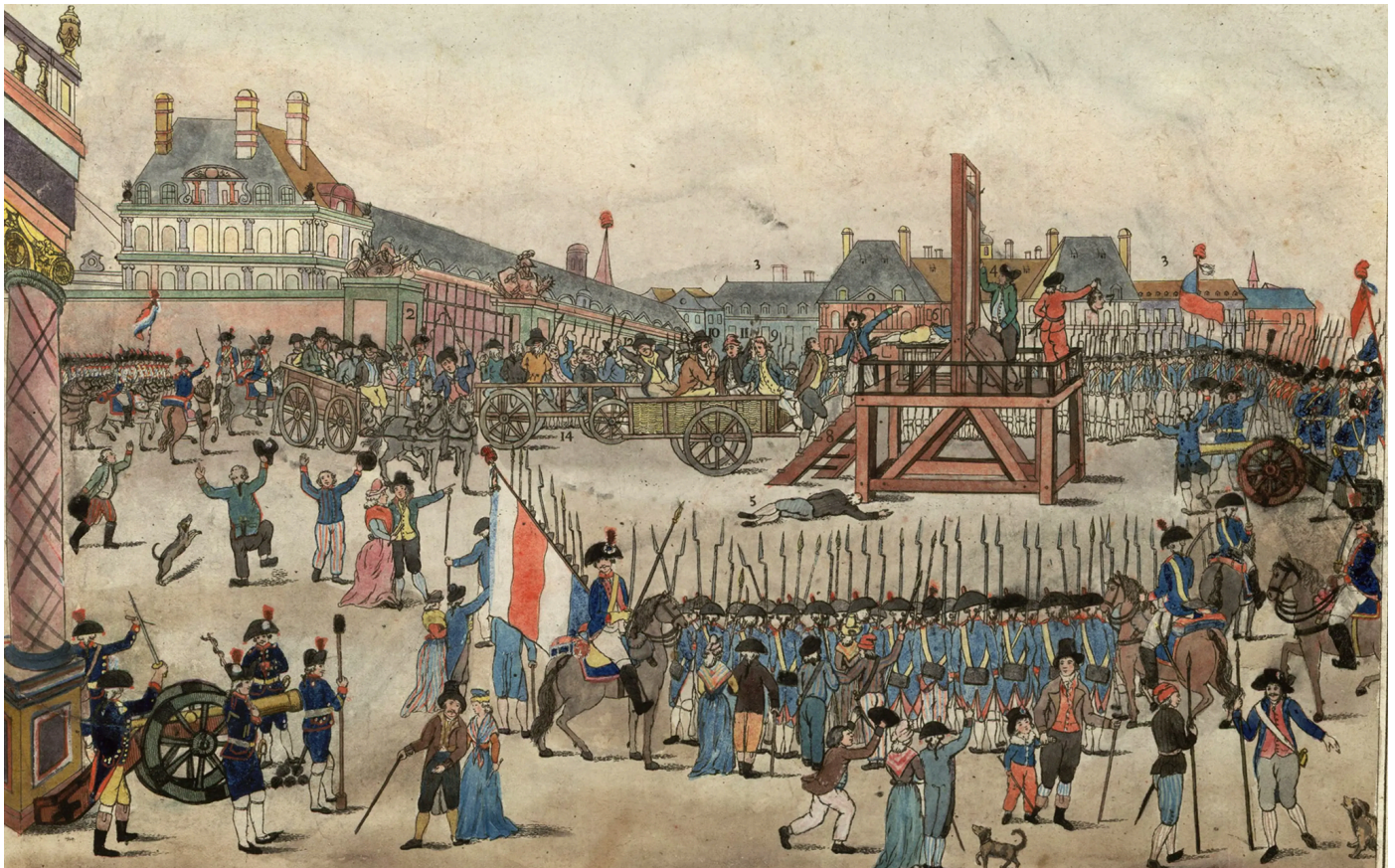
On November 9, 1799, as frustration with their leadership reached a fever pitch. A new leader emerged, **Napoleon Bonaparte**, who then staged a coup d'état, abolishing the Directory and appointing himself France's "first consul." The event marked the **end** of the French Revolution and the beginning of the Napoleonic era, in which France would come to dominate much of continental Europe. Napoleon's dismantling of the elected French government crushed people's liberties, freedoms, and political power as he became a dictator of France.

Napoleon's quote below...

"The only way to lead people is to show them a future: a leader is a dealer in hope."

Results of the French Revolution

1. **End of Absolute Monarchy:** The French Revolution put an end to the system where kings had all the power. King Louis XVI was executed, and monarchy (rule by kings) was replaced by a new government system where the people had a say.
2. **Rise of Republican Government:** France became a republic, meaning that the country was no longer ruled by a king or queen. Instead, it was governed by elected officials who represented the people.
3. **Feudalism in France was over.** Middle & lower classes gained power!
4. *Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood* was unofficially established between the people - Nationalistic feeling of being "French." People saw themselves as citizens of France, not just as subjects of the king.
5. One of the Revolution's main goals was to create a fair society where all people, no matter their background, were treated equally under the law. This led to the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen**, which stated that all people have basic rights to freedom, equality, and property.
6. **Rise of New Leaders (like Napoleon):** After the Revolution, France went through a period of chaos, but eventually, a leader named **Napoleon Bonaparte** rose to power. He took control of the government, ended the revolution's chaotic period, and declared himself emperor, but also spread some of the Revolution's ideas across Europe.



Liberty Leading the People, Eugene Delacroix (1830)



In 1830, a famous French artist named Eugène Delacroix painted a well-known image to remember France's second revolution, which happened in July of that year. This painting was inspired by the events of earlier revolutions, including the one in 1799. At that time, a military leader named Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power during the French Revolution. He took control of the government in a sudden and forceful way, known as a **coup d'état**, and later crowned himself emperor in 1804. Napoleon ruled France until 1814, when his attempt to invade Russia failed badly. After being defeated in battle, he was exiled to a remote island where he died at the age of 51.

After Napoleon was exiled, the family of the former King Louis XVI regained the throne in France. However, in 1830, another revolution broke out, and this royal family was overthrown as well. The painting by Delacroix was created to represent both of these revolutions in France. In the artwork, a woman named **Liberty** leads a group of people over a barricade, stepping on the bodies of those who had fallen in battle. She holds a flag in one hand and a musket in the other, representing France's struggle for freedom.

The fallen bodies form a "pedestal" beneath her feet, showing that Liberty rises above everything else. Liberty is depicted as barefoot and wearing very little clothing, symbolizing how freedom stands strong no matter the cost. The people fighting beside her come from different social classes. There's a man wearing a top hat, representing the **bourgeoisie** (the middle class), and a young boy holding pistols, dressed like a worker. This shows that people from all walks of life, from rich to poor, were fighting together for the same cause: freedom.

The painting is a powerful reminder of France's long battle for liberty and equality, both in the 1790s and again in 1830.