

# Reasons for the French Revolution

In the 1700s, France was the cultural capital of Europe, home to numerous Enlightenment thinkers, & had wealth from colonies

King Louis XIV was the most powerful king in Europe; After his death in 1715, Louis XV & Louis XVI continued to rule France as absolute monarchs

But, political & economic problems led to the French Revolution in 1789



King Louis XVI

One problem was France's unequal **social hierarchy** that was made up of **three classes (called estates)**



The clergy of the Roman Catholic Church made up the First Estate

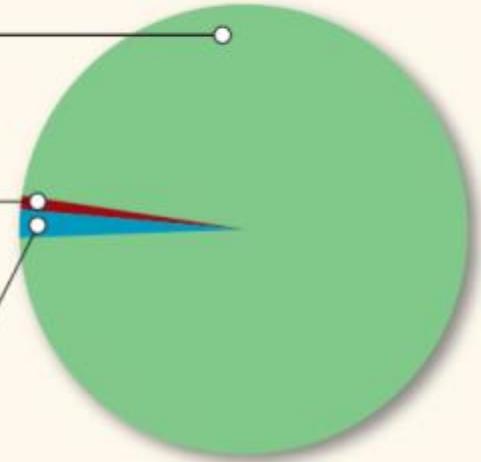
Owned 10% of land in France but paid little in taxes to the gov't

### Population of France, 1787

97% (Third Estate)

less than 1% (First Estate)

2% (Second Estate)



### Percent of Income Paid in Taxes

2% (First Estate)

0% (Second Estate)

50% (Third Estate)



One problem was France's unequal social hierarchy that was made up of three classes (called estates)

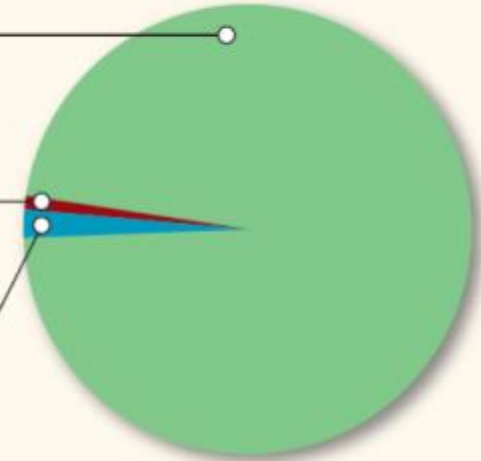


## Population of France, 1787

97% (Third Estate)

less than 1%  
(First Estate)

2% (Second Estate)



The Second Estate was made up of rich nobles

Owned 20% of French land but were exempt from paying taxes

## Percent of Income Paid in Taxes

2% (First Estate)

0% (Second Estate)

50% (Third Estate)



One problem was France's unequal social hierarchy that was made up of three classes (called estates)

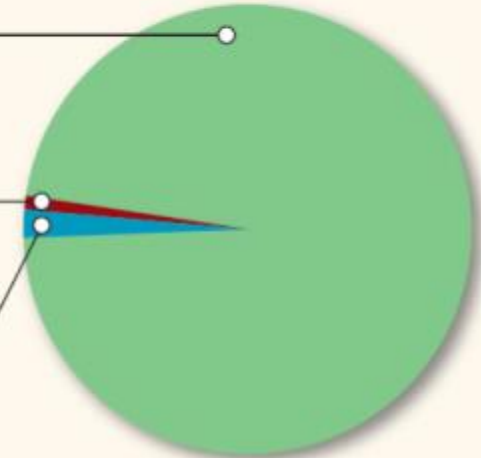


## Population of France, 1787

97% (Third Estate)

less than 1%  
(First Estate)

2% (Second Estate)



The Third Estate made up 97% of the population & included poor peasants but also the well-educated middle class (bourgeoisie)

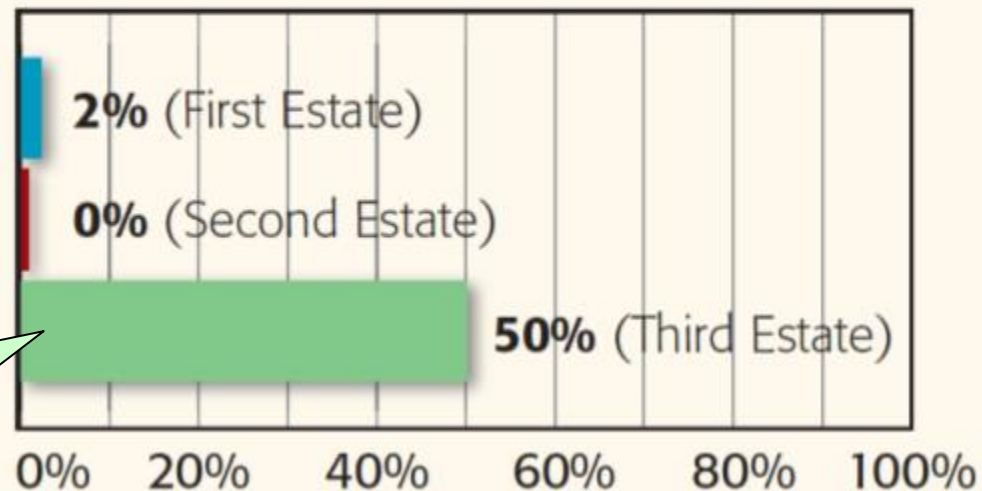
This group paid 50% of their income in taxes

## Percent of Income Paid in Taxes

2% (First Estate)

0% (Second Estate)

50% (Third Estate)





The members of the Third Estate resented the special treatment the First & Second Estates received

Members of the Third Estate gained inspiration from the Enlightenment ideas of John Locke, Voltaire, and others.

After the success of the American Revolution, the Third Estate began demanding democracy, equality, & liberty in France

Social tensions were made worse by a growing financial crisis in the 1770s & 1780s

The French government faced massive debts due to decades of lavish spending, expensive wars, & poor economic planning

By 1789, half the budget went towards *interest* on the national debt; 25% of people were unemployed

The excessive spending by King Louis XVI & his wife Marie Antoinette angered French citizens



Marie Antoinette, "Madame Deficit"

By 1789, France was out of money & faced a serious financial crisis

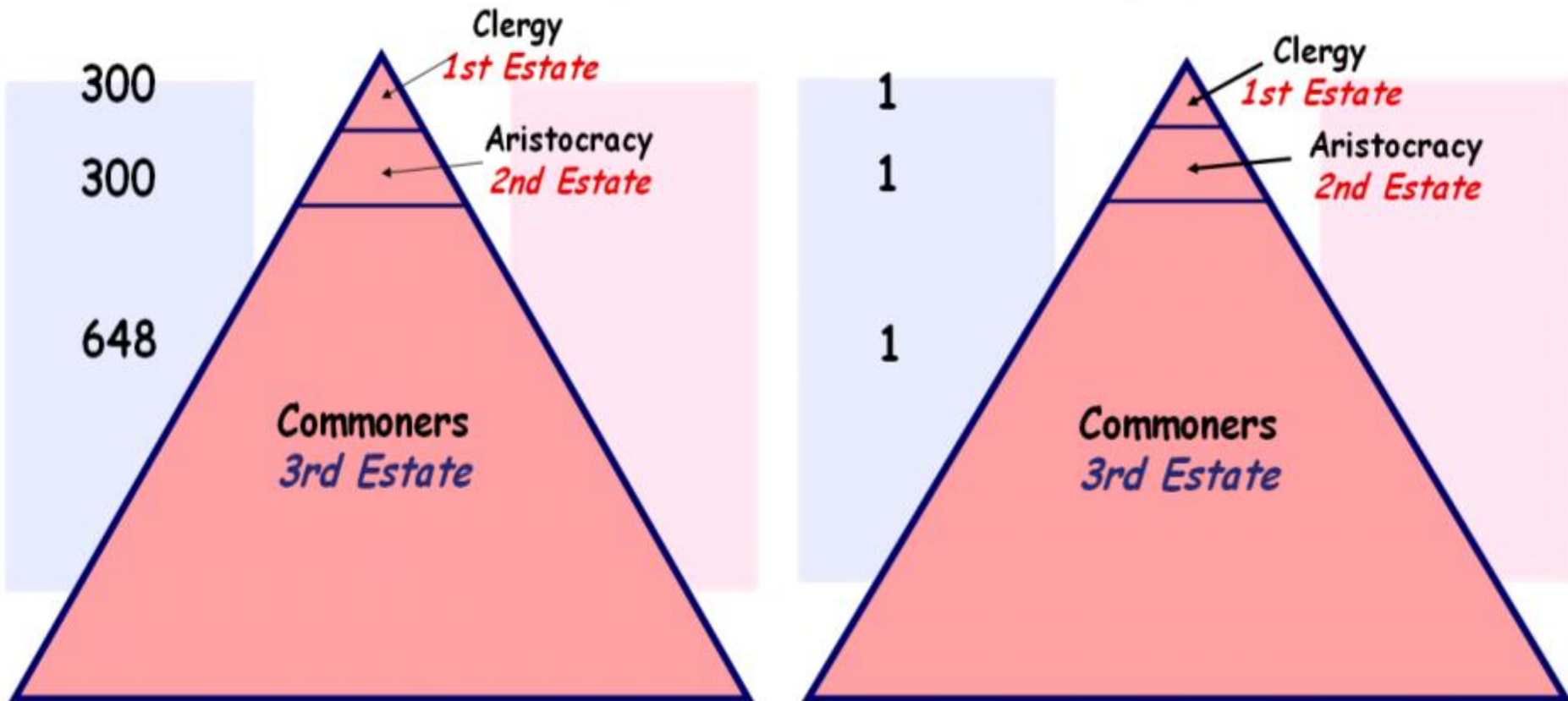
Louis XVI called an emergency meeting of the Estates-General where members from all 3 classes could advise the king



During the Estates-General, the First & Second Estates voted to increase taxes on the Third Estate

The First & Second Estates decided to vote by order (1 vote per estate) rather than by head (by person)

These decisions angered the members of the Third Estate who believed their rights were being violated





The Third Estate formed a new National Assembly to make laws for the French people

In 1789, the National Assembly swore to a Tennis Court Oath promising a new constitution & limitations on the king's power



The National Assembly wrote their revolutionary ideals in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* which said:

“Men are born free and equal in rights”

Rights include “liberty, property, security, & resistance to oppression”

It guaranteed freedom of speech, & freedom of religion, & equal justice



Meanwhile, the economic crisis continued

Citizens were without food & faced starvation

Angry protestors in Paris demanded new reforms



When rumors circulated that the king was going to send his army to Paris, citizens attacked the prison Bastille to seize weapons to defend themselves



The storming of the Bastille in 1789 represented the beginning of the French Revolution

In 1791, Louis XVI finally agreed to a new constitution that limited his power & created a limited monarchy

But, Louis XVI failed to work with the National Assembly & France's problems continued

Fearing the spread of France's revolutionary ideas, Austria & Prussia assembled armies to restore France's absolute monarchy



Quick Class Discussion:  
What should the National Assembly do to solve France's problems?

In 1792, radicals took control of France & made important decisions:



War was declared against Austria & Prussia and 300,000 French soldiers were drafted into a national army in order to defend France

The French monarchy was overthrown & democratic republic was created called the National Convention

In 1793, King Louis XVI was arrested, convicted of treason, & executed by guillotine

# The Guillotine

Once the executioner cranked the blade to the top, a mechanism released it. The sharp weighted blade fell, severing the victim's head from his or her body.

Some doctors believed that a victim's head retained its hearing and eyesight for up to 15 minutes after the blade's deadly blow. All remains were eventually gathered and buried in simple graves.

*Tricoteuses*, or "woman knitters," were regular spectators at executions and knitted stockings for soldiers as they sat near the base of the scaffold.



The radical leaders of the National Convention feared that “enemies of the revolution” would try to overthrow the new republic

In 1793, radical Maximilien Robespierre slowly gained control of the National Convention

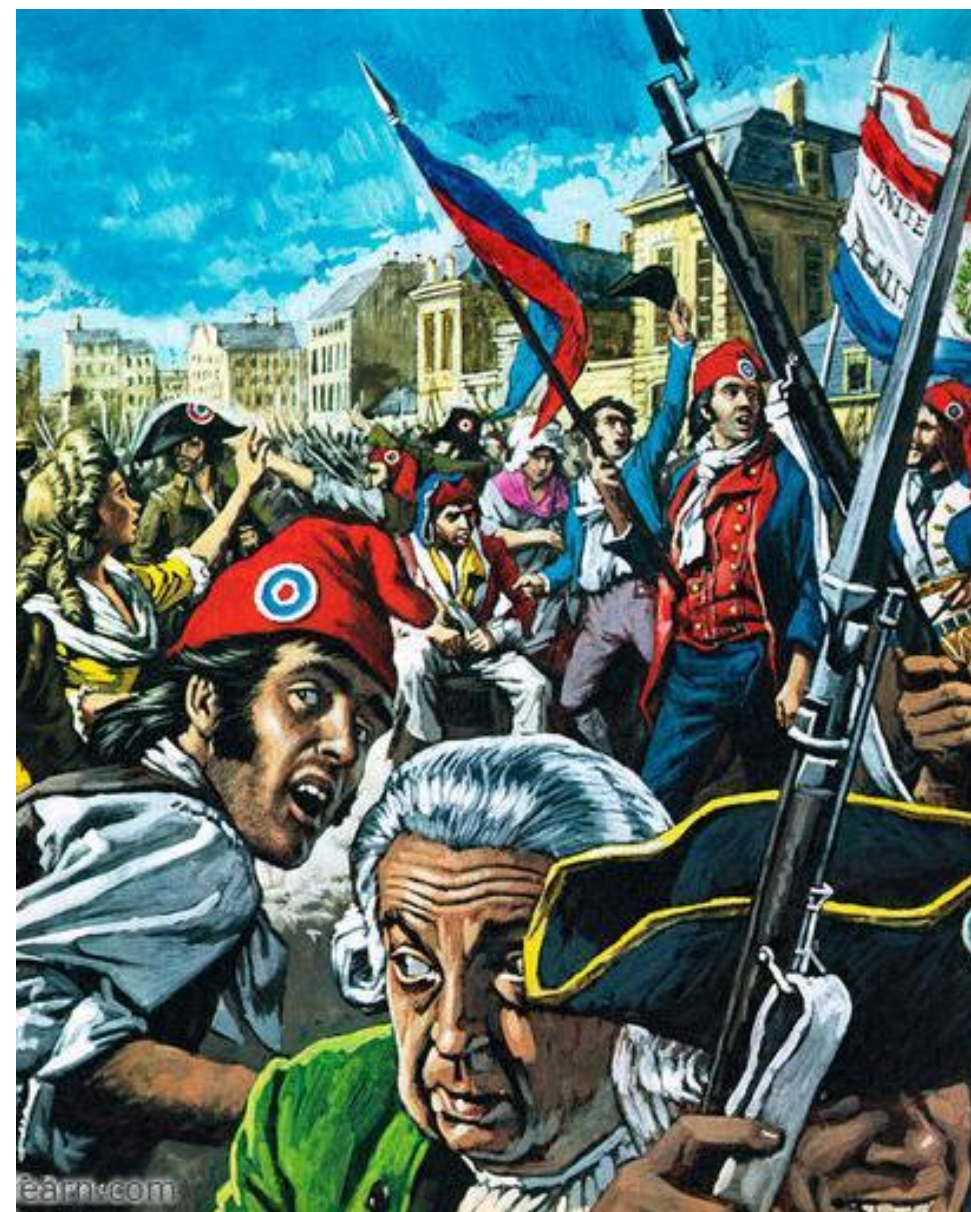
From 1793 to 1794, Robespierre executed 40,000 “traitors” during an era known as the Reign of Terror

The Reign of Terror ended when French citizens turned on Robespierre & executed him





The revolution came to an end in 1795,  
but France was in chaos



The economic crisis had  
not been solved &  
people faced starvation

England, Holland, Spain  
joined Austria & Prussia  
in the war against France

The National Convention  
was replaced by France's  
third gov't in six years  
called the Directory

The Directory proved to  
be ineffective & corrupt

# Napoleon Bonaparte



In 1799, a French military general named Napoleon Bonaparte led a coup d'état & seized power in France

As emperor of France, Napoleon introduced needed reforms, defeated foreign armies, & conquered a massive French empire