

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BACKGROUND TO THE REVOLUTION



"Liberty Leading the People" by Eugène Delacroix

DISCUSSION

- “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable.”

WHAT IF...?

- What if you had no say in family concerns despite doing all the household chores?

FRENCH SOCIETY UNDER THE OLD REGIME

In France, people were divided into three estates:

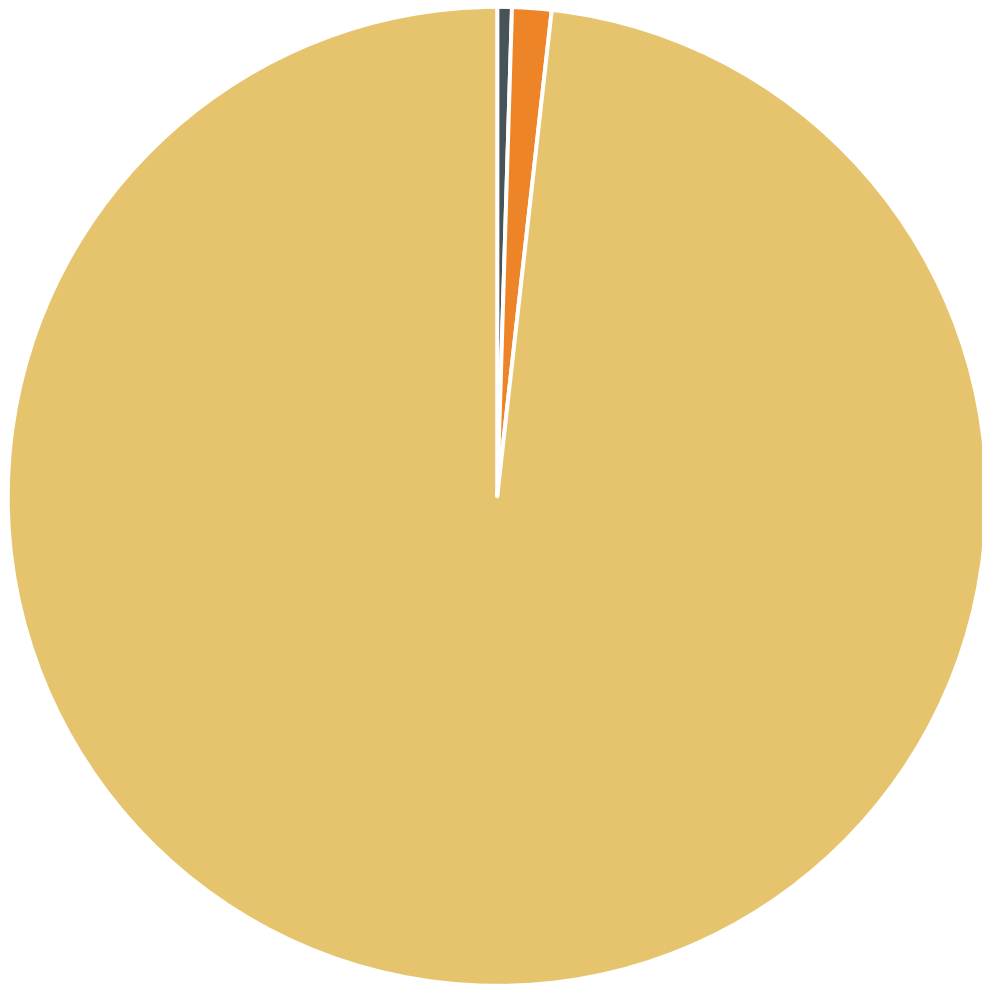
- First Estate – The Clergy
- Second Estate – The Nobility
- Third Estate - Everyone else –from peasants in the countryside to wealthy bourgeoisie merchants in the cities



FRENCH LADY ENTERING A SEDAN CHAIR

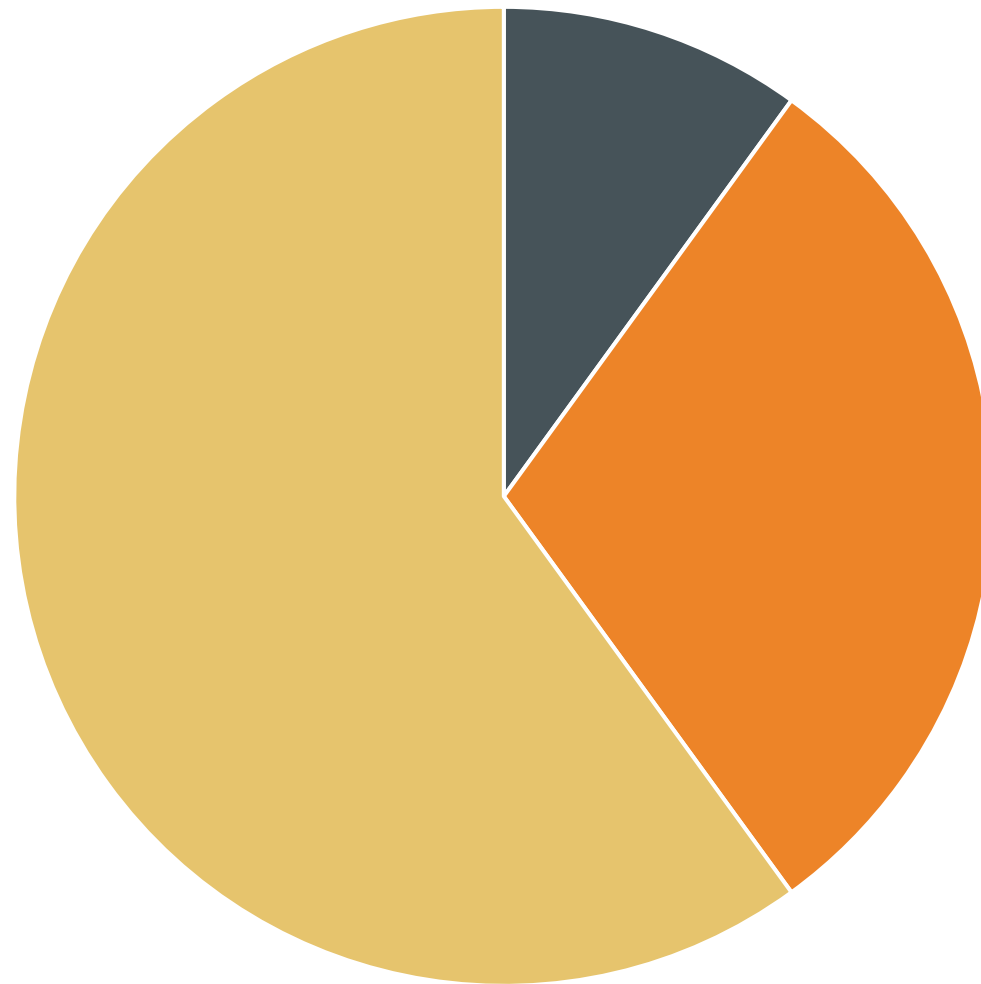
The sedan chair, used by the upper classes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was carried by two "chairmen." It had side windows, a hinged door at the front, and a roof that opened to allow the occupant to stand. It took its name from the town of Sedan, France. This engraving, made in Paris in 1777, shows the elegant costumes worn by the nobility and their servants.

Population of Estates



■ First Estate ■ Second Estate ■ Third Estate ■

Land Ownership



■ First Estate ■ Second Estate ■ Third Estate ■

THE THREE ESTATES

- The First Estate, the clergy, numbered around 130,000 people out of a population of around 27 million people and they owned 10% of the land
- The Second Estate, the Nobility, numbered around 350,000 people and owned between 25-30% of the land.
- The Third Estate was divided into two categories: the middle class and the peasants. At least half of the peasants had little to no land to live on.

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL – MIDDLE CLASS OF THE 3RD ESTATE

- Middle class was another part of the 3rd Estate
 - These were merchants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, writers (professional type of people)
 - Middle class was unhappy with privileges held by nobles.
 - They didn't want to abolish nobility they just wanted the chance to improve positions for themselves*
 - They shared similar goals to some nobles such as new political ideas from the Enlightenment, the idea of social mobility, and dislike of absolute monarchy.

FIRST AND SECOND ESTATES

Estate	Pop.	Privileges	Exemptions	Burdens
First	130,000 Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collected the tithe • Censorship of the press • Control of education • Kept records of births, deaths, marriages, etc. • Catholic faith held honored position of being the state religion (practiced by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid no taxes • Subject to Church law rather than civil law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral obligation (rather than legal obligation) to assist the poor and needy • Support the monarchy and Old Regime
Second	350,000 Nobles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collected taxes in the form of feudal dues • Monopolized military and state appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid no taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the monarchy and Old Regime

THE THIRD ESTATE

Estate	Pop.	Privileges	Exemptions	Burdens
Third	26,500,000 •Everyone else: artisans, bourgeoisie, city workers, merchants, peasants, etc.,	none	none	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Paid all taxes•Tithe (Church tax)•Octrot (tax on goods brought into cities)•Corvée (forced road work)•Capitation (poll tax)•Vingtième (income tax)•Gabelle (salt tax)•Taille (land tax)•Feudal dues for use of local manor's winepress, oven, etc.

What does this contemporary political cartoon say about conditions in France under the Old Regime?



GOVT. UNDER THE OLD REGIME: THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS

Monarch ruled by **divine right** with the mindset:

- God put the world in motion
- God put some people in positions of power
- Power is given by God
- No one can question God
- No one can question someone put in power by God
- Questioning the monarchy was blasphemy because it meant questioning God

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND FINANCIAL CRISIS

- France's economy was based primarily on agriculture
- Peasant farmers of France bore the burden of taxation
- Poor harvests meant that peasants had trouble paying their regular taxes
 - Certainly could not afford to have their taxes raised
- Bourgeoisie often managed to gather wealth
- But were upset that they paid taxes and nobles did not

FINANCIAL CRISIS

- The king (Louis XVI) lavished money on himself and residences like Versailles
- Queen Marie Antoinette was seen as a wasteful spender
- •Government found its funds depleted as a result of wars
 - Including the funding of the American Revolution
- **Deficit spending**—a government spending more money than it takes in from tax revenues
- Privileged classes refused to being taxed





ADDITIONAL WOES

- In addition to the frivolous spending other factors lead to the near collapse of the French economy.
- The bad harvests in 1787 and 1788 and a slow down in manufacturing lead to food shortages, rising prices for food, and unemployment.

FINANCIAL CRISIS – THE MONEY TRAIL

- 1/2 money went to pay interest on debt
- 1/4 went to pay for the army & navy
- Country and Royal Court operated on other 1/4



PRIMARY SOURCE

- “All the country girls and women are without shoes or stockings; and the plowmen at their work have neither shoes or stocking to their feet. This is a poverty that strikes at the root of national prosperity.”

- an English traveler in France

THE ESTATES-GENERAL

- With France on the verge of financial collapse, Louis XVI was forced to call a meeting of the Estates-General, representatives of all three Estates, with the intent to raise new taxes.
- This was the first meeting of the E-G since 1614, 175 years, as the French kings were so powerful.