

Absolute Monarchy

My grandfather was the Sun King— but you may know him as Louis XIV of France. He was quite the absolute monarch!

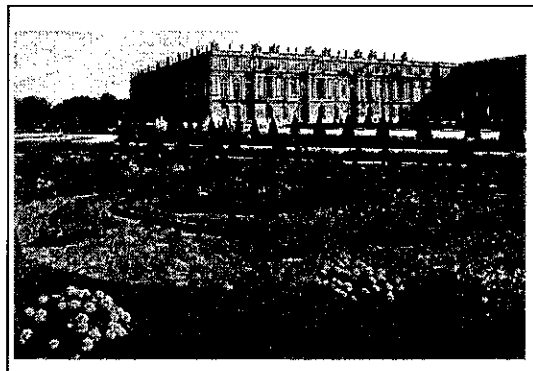


My mother was Maria Theresa, the Empress of Austria & an enlightened despot



Before the French Revolution France was ruled by absolute monarchs. The most famous of these absolute monarchs was the grandfather of Louis XVI (16), Louis XIV (14). As you may recall, Louis XIV (14) was known as the “Sun King” because all of France “revolved” around him and his whims.

Don't be confused: The king of France immediately before and during the Revolution was Louis XVI (16). His wife, the queen of France, was Marie Antoinette. Together they had several children, including two male heirs. The royal couple lived in chateau Versailles, the elaborate palace constructed by Louis XIV at a great cost to the people of France.



Under the absolute monarchy of France the people of France were denied basic liberties and had no say in the government despite the fact that France had an **estates general**, or parliament. The kings of France controlled the estates general and did not often call it into session. In fact, Louis XIV never called the estates general to meet during his 72 year reign!

Social Inequality

Since the Middle Ages, everyone in France belonged to one of three social classes or **estates**.

“ What is the third estate?

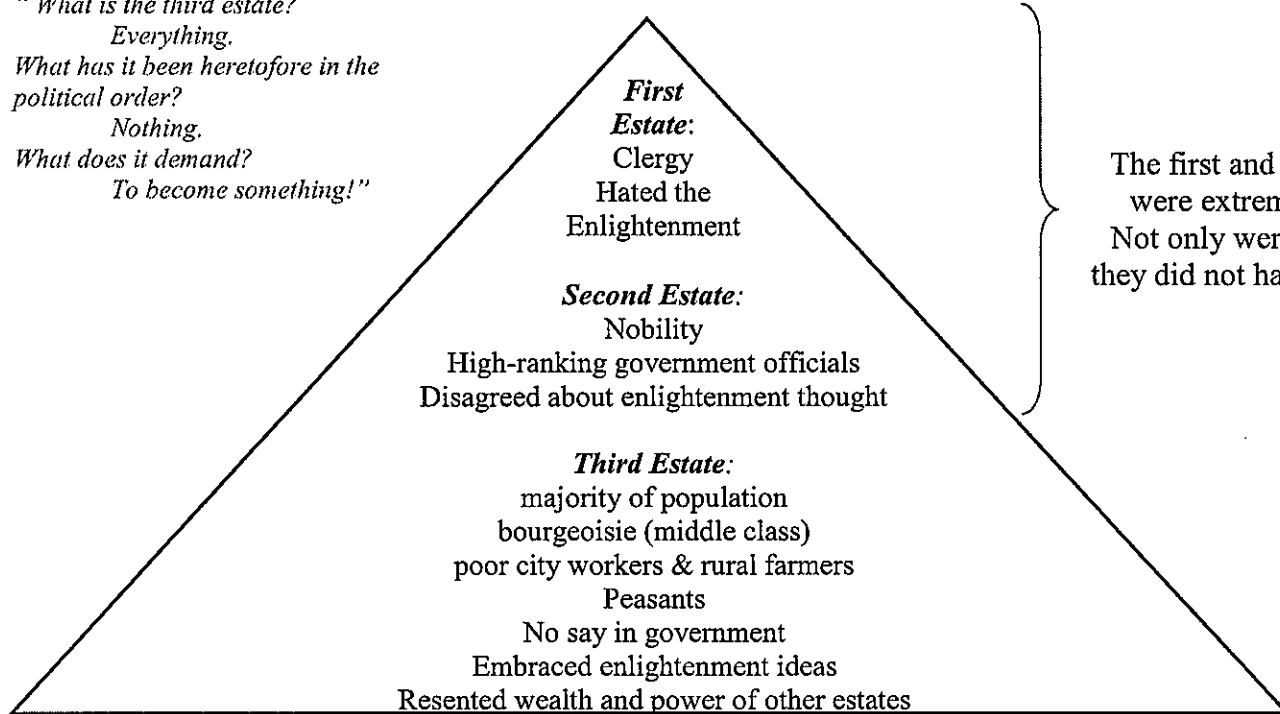
Everything.

What has it been heretofore in the political order?

Nothing.

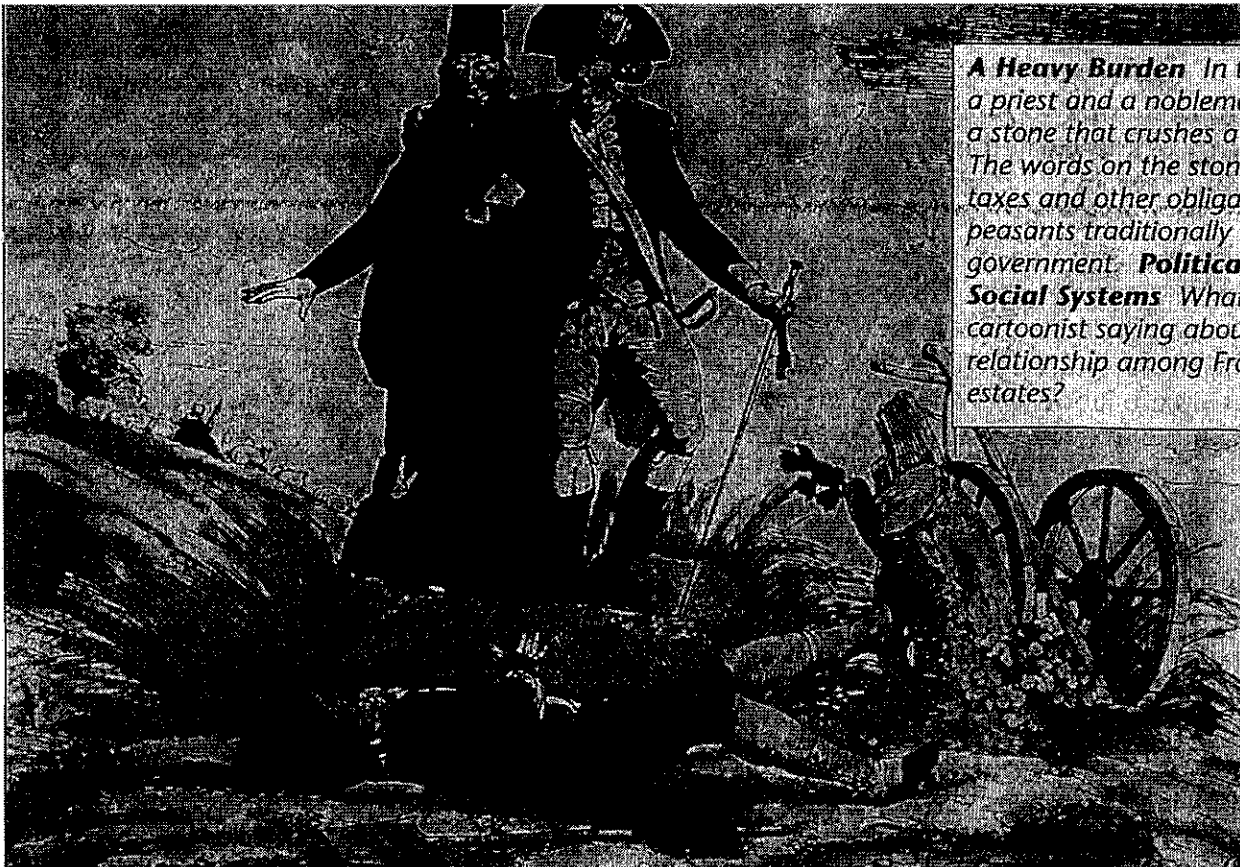
What does it demand?

To become something!”



The first and second estates were extremely wealthy. Not only were they rich but they did not have to pay taxes!

Based on the following cartoon, who paid the taxes and carried the financial burden of the wealthy in France?



A Heavy Burden In this cartoon, a priest and a nobleman stand on a stone that crushes a peasant. The words on the stone refer to taxes and other obligations that peasants traditionally owed to the government. **Political and Social Systems** What was the cartoonist saying about the relationship among France's three estates?

Economic Problems

Tensions in France became worse in the 1780s when economic problems began to crush the third estate. The government, with the lavish court at Versailles, and expensive wars and aid to the American Revolution, created a **deficit**. A deficit occurs when a government spends more money than it earns.

Merchants began to suffer as inflation struck the cost of living increased. The heavy taxes faced by the third estates made it nearly impossible to conduct business.

Bad harvests in 1789 caused food prices to rise. Peasants and poor city dwellers often did not have enough to eat and began to riot, demanding bread. Meanwhile, it seemed as though Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were living the high life away from Paris, in Versailles. The royal family had posh parties and indulged in luxurious meals and entertainment.

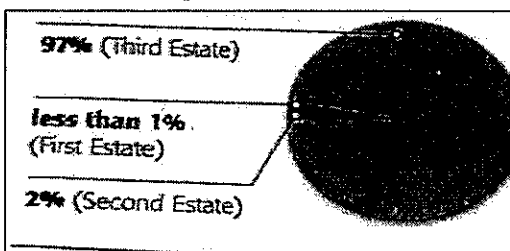
Let them eat cake!



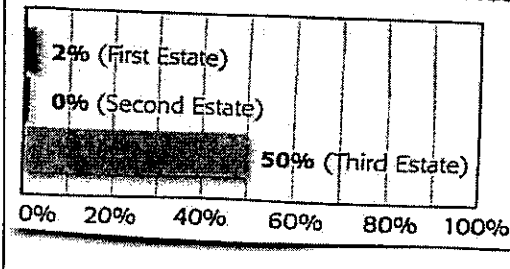
These shoes are expensive Madame! Did you know that your people have no bread?

Marie Antoinette NEVER said that! However, her luxurious lifestyle and the amount of money she spent on sweets, clothing, and entertainment earned her the not-so-sweet name "Madame Deficit." Anti-monarchy and pro-revolution newspapers spread this rumor and infuriated the people. The people began to turn against the King and Queen.

The Population of France



Percent of Income Paid in Taxes



Drawings of the King and Queen.



The Enlightenment & Other Revolutions

The Enlightenment

Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, Enlightenment thinkers were critical of France's absolute monarchy and called for democratic reforms. Enlightenment ideas led many French to question the traditional ways of ordering society. It was not reasonable, they believed, for the small amount of the population who composed the First and Second Estates to have privileges at the expense of the larger Third Estate.

"The Third Estate is the people and the people provide the foundation of the State... {the people} are, in fact, the State. Everything should be subordinated (come after) the people. It is in the people that all national power resides (lives) and for all the people that the state exists."

- Comte D'Antraigues

Other Revolutions

England's Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution provided examples of how existing authority could be challenged and ultimately, changed. The French were inspired by the American colonies' successful fight for liberty and equality in the American Revolution. It is ironic that Louis XVI spent so much money funding the Revolution that would inspire the French people to turn against him and ultimately condemn him and his family to death.



Louis XVI strategizing with American colonists





Aim: What were the causes of the French Revolution?



Cause 1: Absolute Monarchy

1. The King of France immediately before and during the Revolution was King _____ X _____.
2. The Queen of France immediately before and during the Revolution was Queen _____.
3. Who were the royal relatives of the ruling couple?
4. How did the absolute monarchy treat the people of France?
5. What is the Estates General? What was the problem with the Estates General?
6. Agree or disagree: Maria Theresa and Louis XIV would be happy with how Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette ruled France.

Cause 2: Social Inequality

1. In the 1770s, the social and political system of France– the **Old Regime**– remained in place. Part of the Old Regime was the estate system. What is an **estate**?
2. **Fill in the missing information:**

First Estate
Clergy

This estate despised The Enlightenment. Why?

Second Estate
Nobility

Third Estate
majority of the population
bourgeoisie (m _____ c _____)
poor workers and rural farmers

3. Who paid taxes? Who did not?
4. What is the cartoonist saying about the relationship between France's three estates?

Cause 3: Economic Problems

1. Define deficit:
2. What caused France's deficit?
3. Explain the effects of the 1789 harvest.
4. Why was Marie Antoinette called "Madame Deficit?"
5. Look at the graph. Who paid the highest percentage of their income in taxes?
6. Agree or disagree: The tax structure of France was fair.

Causes: Enlightenment and Other Revolutions

1. What were Enlightenment thinkers critical of?
2. What reforms did Enlightenment thinkers want in France?
3. What did the Enlightenment thinkers view as unreasonable?
4. What two Revolutions inspired the French Revolution?
5. What action of Louis XVI is ironic? What was the effect of this action?

Summary: What was life like in Pre-Revolutionary France?