

# *The French Revolution*

# *Causes of the French Revolution*

On a piece of paper respond to the following:

1. Briefly list and describe **THREE** causes of the French Revolution. (Its okay if you are only guessing)
2. Which cause of the three do you think is the **MOST** important one? Briefly explain your choice.

# *18<sup>th</sup> Century France Before the Revolution*

- France was the most populous and powerful nation on the Continent of Europe
- France was the leading cultural center of Europe – French was the language of the intellectuals (Enlightenment and Philosophes)
- The ideas of the American Revolution stirred the French people
- In France two large groups of people (nobles and growing bourgeoisie were on a collision course)
- French society still largely governed by rules and customs dating back to the Middle Ages (The Old Regime)

# Europe in 1789



# Europe in 1815





Absolute monarchy

Growth of industry and the rise of the middle class

Growing burden of feudal dues

Increasing poverty

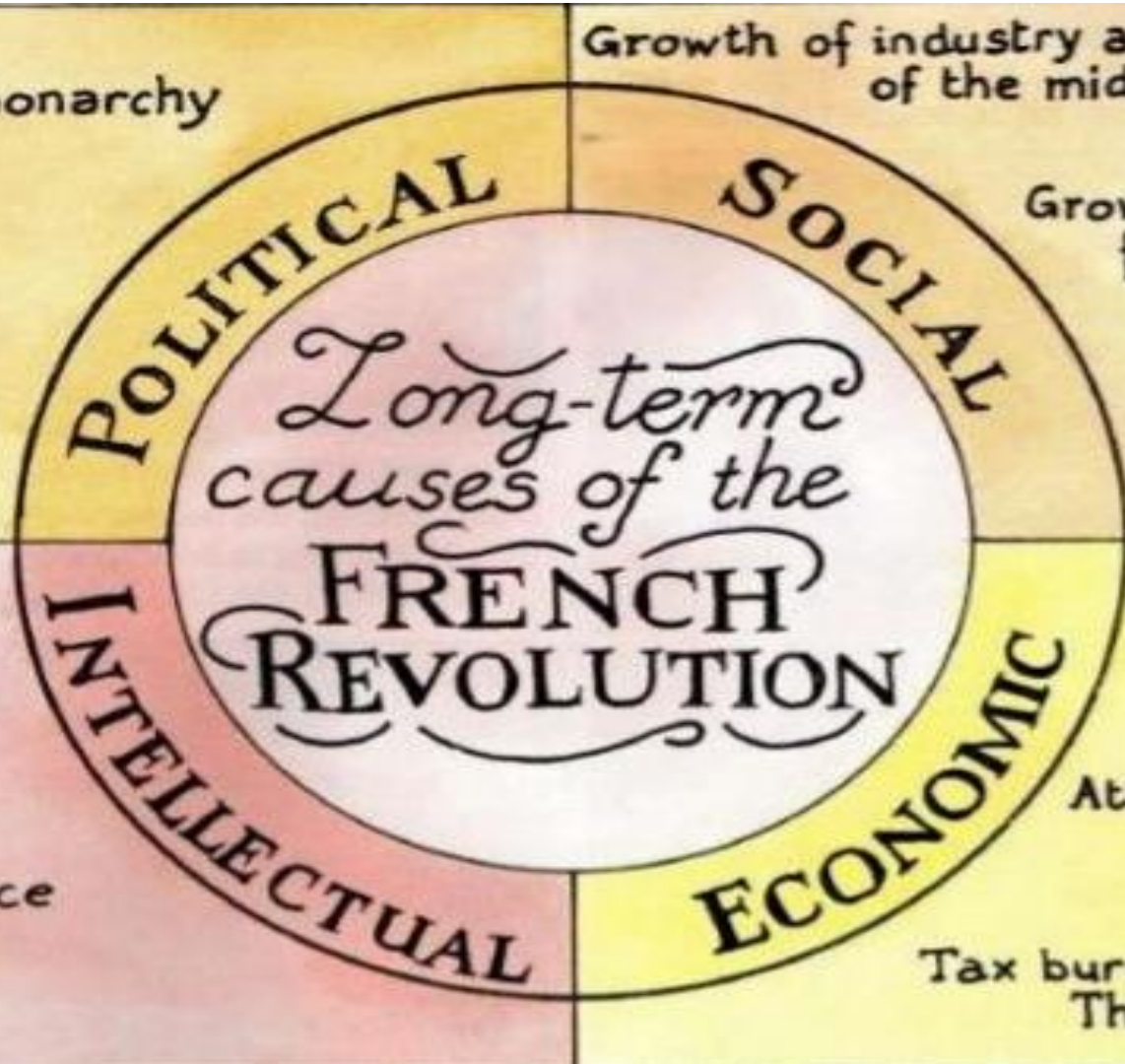
Growing government debt

Attempt to tax the nobles

Tax burden on the Third Estate

Growth of new ideas  
e.g. everyone is born equal

The influence of America





**The “Age of  
Montesquieu”  
(Constitutional  
Monarchy)  
1789-1792**

**The “Age of  
Rousseau”  
(The Republic)  
1792-1799**

**The “Age of Voltaire”  
(Napoleon’s Empire/  
Enlightened  
Despotism)  
1799-1815**

**Nat’l Assembly: 1789-  
1791**

**Nat’l Convention:  
1792-1795**

**Consulate:  
1799-1804**

**Legislative Assembly:  
1791-92**

**The Directory: 1795-  
99**

**Napoleonic Empire:  
1804-15**

# 18<sup>th</sup> Century French Society

**2<sup>nd</sup> Estate:**

**nobility**

(2-4% of pop;  
owned 25% of  
land

**1<sup>st</sup> Estate:**

clergy (1% of  
pop. owned  
20% of land

**3<sup>rd</sup> Estate:**

95% of population

Rich merchants,  
professionals, bourgeoisie,  
urban artisans, unskilled  
workers, and peasants





# *The Assembly of Notables 1787*

- I. Louis XVI summons the Assembly of Notables in 1787 to approve the king's new tax program or consent to remove their tax exemptions.
  - a) Nobles refused tax increases and demanded that control over all gov't spending be given to the provincial assemblies (that nobles controlled).
  - b) Louis refused. Nobles demanded that sweeping tax changes required approval of the Estates General.
  - c) The king then dismissed the nobles and established new taxes by decree

# *Towards Calling the Estates-General*

II. The Parlements, controlled by the nobility, blocked tax increases and new taxes.

- a) Asserted “fundamental laws” against which no king could violate such as national consent to taxation and freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.
- b) Louis tried to exile judges but protests swept the country and investors refused to advance more loans to the state.

# Key Terms

- 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Estates – 1<sup>st</sup> Estate is the clergy, 2<sup>nd</sup> are the nobles, 3<sup>rd</sup> is everyone else (roughly 97% of the population)
- Estates-General — a traditional decision making body of France roughly like the Parliament in England, but it met VERY infrequently, prior to 1789 its last meeting was 1614 (before that 1302)
- Cahiers de doerance (or just **cahiers**) – lists of grievances created by participants in the Estates-General
- Lettres de Cachet – Orders directly from the king to silence, imprison, intimidate and shut down opposition. Used to imprison people without charges or a trial for indefinite periods of time
- Gabelle – a tax on salt, the French government had a monopoly on salt trade; smuggling was common, the tax was hated, punishments for violation were harsh

# *Document Analysis*

Using the same piece of paper complete the following on your own using the documents. You **WILL** be **SHARING THIS WITH THE CLASS**.

- Briefly **DESCRIBE** the contents each document in your own words
- Write a thesis based on your own knowledge and information obtained from the documents based on the following prompt:
  - “Was the French Revolution due more to social, political, economic or intellectual causes”.



# **France After the Calling for an Estates-General**

- Poor harvests and a dire financial situation gripped the country**
- Upwards of 25% of Paris was unemployed (in a city of 600,000), grain prices were high and tension was rising**
- The underground press and the pamphleteers were working overtime to express views about the pending meeting of the Estates-General**

# Abbe Sieyes

# Biographical Overview

- Full name was Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes
- Lived from 1748 to 1836
- Born in the South of France, educated in theology and studied the thinkers of the Enlightenment
- Was an ordained Catholic priest
- Wrote “What is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate?” a document akin to “Common Sense” for the American war of Independence
- Served in the Estates-General representing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate for Paris
- Helped Napoleon in his overthrow of the Directory in 1799



# **The Meeting of the Estates General**

- **By the summer of 1789 the Estates General was meeting in Versailles**
- **Each estate met separately and efforts by 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate members to meet together and to alter voting rules were thwarted (each estate had one vote)**
- **On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1789 the Tennis Court Oath occurred - 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate declares itself the "National Assembly" and pledges to meet until a constitution is adopted**
- **King's initially allows it - but then moves to crack down on the new National Assembly**



David's "*Tennis Court Oath*"  
1791



# Sieyes "What is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate?"

1. According to Sieyes, "what is necessary that a nation should subsist and prosper"?
2. Discuss his examination of the second question ("Who puts them forth") about the efforts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> estate to sustain society.
3. Describe and discuss how Sieyes views the nobility?
4. Discuss Sieyes views on what constitutes a nation. How does this compare to what you know about absolute France prior to the Revolution?
5. Explain how do you think this essay was received by the king, the nobility (2<sup>nd</sup> estate) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> estate. Include specifics from the text to support your analysis.

