

SOCIAL STUDIES (HISTORY)

CHAPTER-1: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(Notes)

Glossary

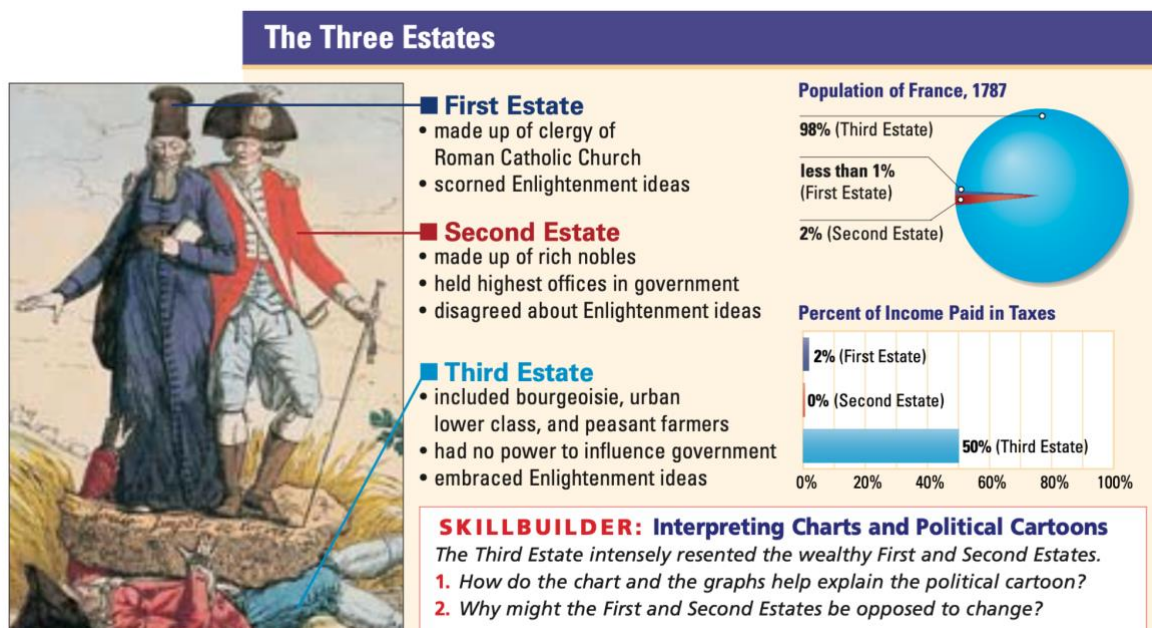
First Estate:	Top tier of French society also known as Clergy who had vast land, wealth and was exempted from taxes
Second Estate:	Middle tier of French society that consisted of the aristocrats and hold all the top positions in the government, parliament and in the army and navy. They were also exempted from taxation and led an extravagant life
Third Estate:	Everyone except Nobility nor Clergy were categorized in the bottom tier of French society that lacked political power, social status and was heavily taxed
The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen:	Basic principles adopted by France in 1789 aiming to provide all Frenchmen the basic rights of liberty, security, equal justice, fair taxes, religion, fair speech, and thought
Livre:	Unit of currency used in France till 1794
Tithe:	A tax levied by the Church equal to one-tenth of the agricultural produce
Passive citizen:	Those who were eligible by age (>25 years) to vote but couldn't vote due to income ineligibility

The French Revolution is regarded as a remarkable event in the history of the world. The storming of the Bastille prison on 14 July 1789 marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Causes of the French Revolution

Inequalities in French Society

- French society was divided into three estates. The first estate consisted of the clergymen, the second estate consisted of the nobles and the third estate consisted of the common people most of whom were peasants.

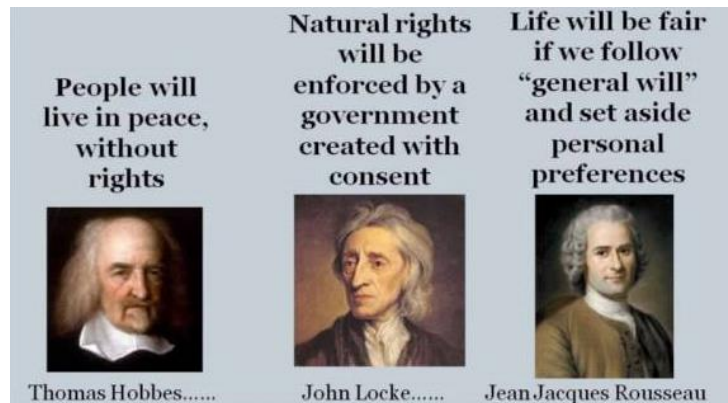


- While the peasants comprised about 90% of the French population, only few owned land. 60% of the land was owned by the members of the first two estates.

- One of the many reasons why the revolution broke out was because only the members of the third estate paid taxes to the state. The members of the first and second estates were exempted from paying any taxes to the king.
- The nobility and the clergy enjoyed many privileges in French society. The nobles extracted feudal dues from the peasants. The latter were also compelled to provide services to the noblemen by working in his fields and house. They also had to serve in the army.
- The church also collected religious taxes from the people known as 'tithes'. The members of the third estate had to pay direct tax to the state known as 'taille'. Indirect taxes were imposed on tobacco, salt and many other everyday items. Thus, the third estate was seething with financial difficulties.

The Rise of the Middle Class

- There was the rise and emergence of many social groups in France in the eighteenth century. They were traders, businessmen, lawyers and teachers. The traders and businessmen had acquired wealth through overseas trade.
- The administrative officials, lawyers and teachers were educated and believed that no group should be given special privileges merely on the basis of birth. They believed that the members of the first two estates should also pay taxes to the state.
- The middle class in France was inspired by the writings of social thinkers and philosophers. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau were two such thinkers who rejected the idea of the divine right of the king. Rousseau propounded that the Government should be based on a social contract drawn between the people and the Government.



- These ideas of philosophers were discussed everywhere - in coffee shops and in salons and spread among the common people. Inspired by these ideas, people began to oppose the special privileges enjoyed by the members of the first and second estates.



- The educated youth in France were inspired by the rights of liberty and equality which were ensued in the American Revolution.

- When the people learned that the king was planning to further increase taxes, they rose in revolt.

The Revolt Breaks

- Wars had drained the French treasury. The state was under heavy debt and had to pay hefty interests to creditors. To improve the finances of the state, the king decided to increase the taxes levied on people.
- When the king called the meeting of an assembly of the Estates Generals to pass proposals of new taxes, the members of the third estate walked out from the meeting demanding that every

person in the Assembly should have one vote contrary to the existing practice of one estate having one vote.

- The members of the third estate assembled in the indoor tennis court on 20 July 1789 determined to draft a constitution which would limit the powers of the king.
- During this time, the prices of bread rose in France and bakers began to hoard supplies. Agitated by the unavailability of bread, people including women stormed into shops. When the king ordered his troops to move into Paris, an agitated crowd stormed into the prison of Bastilles and liberated its prisoners.
- As the number of revolts began to grow, the French monarch recognized the French Assembly. His powers could now be checked by the Constitution.



France Becomes a Constitutional Monarchy

- The National Assembly consisting of the members of the third estate drafted the Constitution which limited the powers of the king, and the executive, legislative and judicial powers were assigned to different institutions.
- The National Assembly had the powers to frame laws for the country. The members of the National Assembly were elected by the body of electorates. This body of electorates was elected by citizens who paid taxes to the Government who were termed active citizens. Other men and all women had no voting rights.
- The Constitution of France guaranteed the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and equality before law.

Abolition of Monarchy in France

- Because the powers of King Louis XVI were reduced, he asked for help from the Prussian and Austrian monarchies. However, the revolutionaries in France formed a large army and declared a war against Prussia and Austria.
- The Jacobin Club in France was formed by the revolutionary forces of the country. It included small shopkeepers, watch makers, pastry cooks, printers, daily wage earners and servants.
- In 1792, when the supplies of bread reduced, the Jacobians along with people stormed the Tuileries Palace and imprisoned the royal family of France.



- This development led to the changes in the Constitution. Elections were held and everyone more than 21 years of age was given the right to vote. Monarchy was abolished and France became a republic.
- King Louis XVI was executed publicly on 21 January 1793 on the charges of treason. His queen Mary Antoinette was also executed later.

Reign of Terror

- The period from 1793 to 1794 is called the Reign of Terror. Robespierre, the head of the Jacobin Club, followed the policy of severe control and punishment. Clergymen, nobles and people who were considered enemies to the republic were guillotined. Even he ordered the killing of his own party members who did not agree to his methods and ways.



strictly that even his supporters turned against him. Finally, he was convicted by a court in July 1794 and was guillotined.

- After the fall the Jacobin Government, the wealthier middle class took the power into their own hands. They introduced a constitution which did not give voting rights to the non-propertied class.
- A Directory, an executive council, was appointed consisting of five members. This executive council frequently clashed with the legislative councils. This political instability paved a way for the rise of military dictatorship under Napoleon Bonaparte.



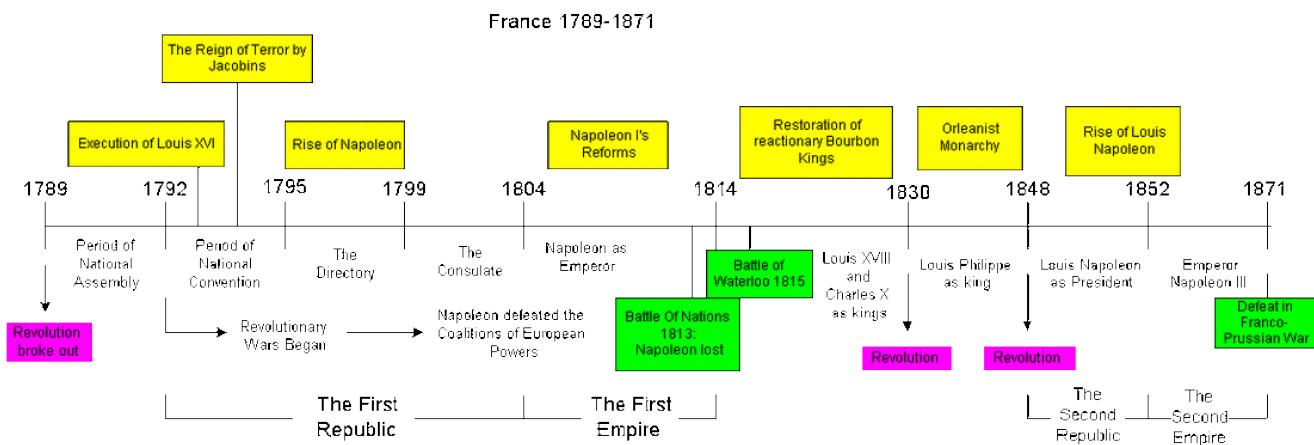
Women's Participation in the Revolution

- Women were active participants in the French Revolution. Women in France were not empowered.
- Most of the women of the third estate had to work to earn their livelihood. They worked as seamstresses/ tailors, sold flowers and vegetables or worked as domestic servants in the houses of wealthy families.
- Women started their own clubs in order to raise their own voices. A famous women's club was the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. This club demanded that women be given the same



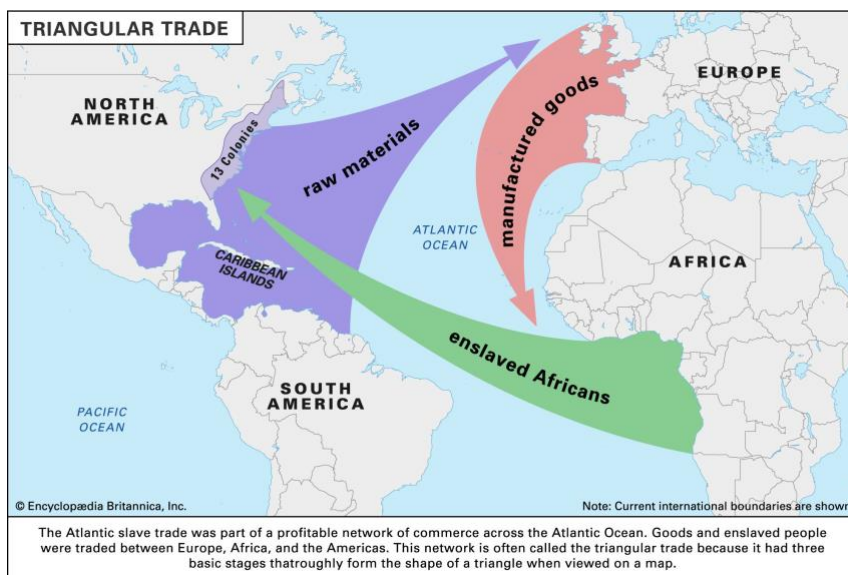
political rights as men. Women till now had no right to vote.

- In the beginning, many laws were implemented to improve the condition of women in French society. Schooling was made compulsory for all girls. Fathers could no longer marry off their daughters without obtaining their consent. Divorce was made legal, and women began to be trained for various jobs.
- During the Reign of Terror, many laws were issued which ordered the closing of women's clubs. Many women were tried and guillotined/beheaded/executed.
- Women's struggle to demand equal voting rights however continued. The French women were finally granted voting rights in 1946.



The Abolition of Slavery

- One of the important reforms of the Jacobin Club was the abolition of slavery in French colonies.
- Slaves were brought from Africa by the Europeans and were then sold to plantation owners. Because of the employment of slaves in the colonies, the growing demands for sugar, coffee and indigo by the European markets were met.
- The system of slavery was hardly criticized in France. This was because slaves were important in the plantations.
- After being banned by the Jacobins, slavery was again reintroduced by Napoleon Bonaparte.



The French Revolution brought several changes in the everyday lives of the French. Censorship was abolished in 1789. As a result, books, pamphlets and other printed materials flooded the markets of France. Freedom of press and speech created an atmosphere where people could freely discuss and criticize the working of institutions.

Napoleon Bonaparte along with his troops carried on

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the ideas of the French Revolution in Europe. He introduced laws such as protection of private property and the uniform systems of weights and measurements. However, he also placed his successors on the throne of the countries which he invaded. He thus came to be regarded as an invader.

The ideas of liberty, equality and democratic rights were the greatest gifts of the French Revolution to the world.