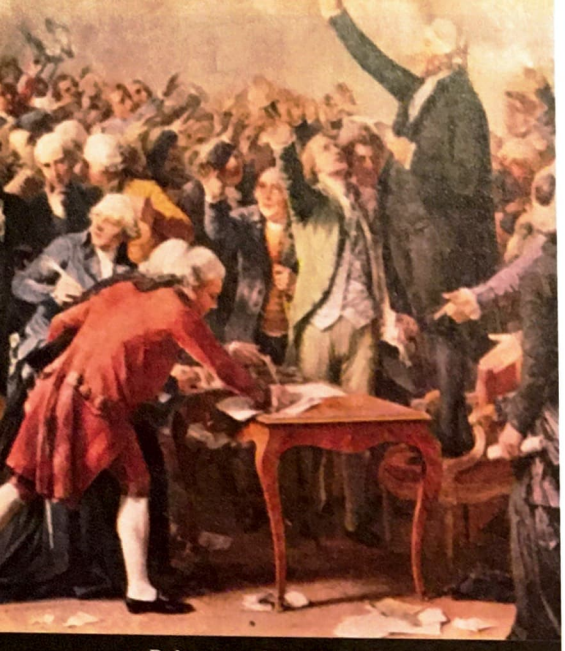


>> Delegates of the Third Estate took the Tennis Court Oath in June 1789 and vowed to create a new constitution.

3.6

On April 28, 1789, unrest exploded at a Paris wallpaper factory. A rumor had spread that the factory owner was planning to cut wages even though bread prices were soaring. Enraged workers vandalized the owner's home and then rioted through the streets.

Interactive Flipped Video

>> Objectives

Describe the social divisions of France's old order.

Trace the causes of the French Revolution.

Identify the reforms enacted by the National Assembly, including the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

>> Key Terms

ancien régime
estates
bourgeoisie
deficit spending
Louis XVI
Jacques Necker
Estates-General
cahiers
Tennis Court Oath
Bastille
faction
Marquis de Lafayette
Olympe de Gouges
Marie Antoinette

The French Revolution Begins

The Old Regime in France

The rioting reflected growing unrest in Paris and throughout France. In 1789, France faced not only an economic crisis but also widespread demands for far-reaching changes. By July, the hungry, unemployed, poorly paid people of Paris were taking up arms against the government, a move that would trigger the French Revolution.

In 1789, France, like the rest of Europe, still clung to an outdated social system that had emerged in the Middle Ages. Under this **ancien régime,** or old order, everyone in France belonged to one of three social classes, or **estates.** The First Estate was made up of the clergy; the Second Estate was made up of the nobility; and the Third Estate comprised the vast majority of the population.

First Estate: the Clergy During the Middle Ages, the Church had exerted great influence throughout Christian Europe. In 1789, the French clergy still enjoyed enormous wealth and privilege. The Church owned about 10 percent of the land, collected tithes, and paid no direct taxes to the state. High Church leaders such as bishops and abbots were usually nobles who lived very well. Parish priests,

however, often came from humble origins and might be as poor as their peasant congregations.

The First Estate did provide some social services. Nuns, monks, and priests ran schools, hospitals, and orphanages. But during the Enlightenment, *philosophes* targeted the Church for reform.

They criticized the idleness of some clergy, the Church's interference in politics, and its intolerance of dissent. In response, many clergy condemned the Enlightenment for undermining religion and moral order.

Second Estate: the Nobility The Second Estate was the titled nobility of French society. In the Middle Ages, noble knights had defended the land. In the 1600s, Richelieu and Louis XIV had crushed the nobles' military power but had given them other rights—under strict royal control. Those rights included top jobs in government, the army, the courts, and the Church.

At Versailles, ambitious nobles competed for royal appointments while idle courtiers enjoyed endless entertainments. Many nobles, however, lived far from the center of power. Though they owned land, they received little financial income. As a result, they felt the pinch of trying to maintain their status in a period of rising prices.

Many ambitious nobles came to hate absolutism and resented the royal bureaucracy that employed middle-class men in positions that once had been reserved for them. They feared losing their traditional privileges, especially their freedom from paying taxes.

Third Estate: From Middle Class to Peasantry The Third Estate was the most diverse social class. At the top sat the **bourgeoisie** (boor zhwah ZEE), or middle class. The bourgeoisie included prosperous bankers, merchants, and manufacturers, as well as lawyers, doctors, journalists, and professors.

The bulk of the Third Estate, however, consisted of rural peasants. Some were prosperous landowners who hired laborers to work for them. Others were tenant farmers or day laborers.

Among the poorest members of the Third Estate were urban workers. They included apprentices, journeymen, and others who worked in industries such as printing or cloth making.

Many women and men earned a meager living as servants, construction workers, or street sellers of everything from food to pots and pans. A large number of the urban poor were unemployed. To survive, some turned to begging or crime.

Widespread Discontent From rich to poor, members of the Third Estate resented the privileges enjoyed by

>> Analyze Political Cartoons What does this cartoon say about the relationship between the three social classes in France?

Interactive Cartoon

>> Merchants were among the bourgeoisie, France's middle class.

their social "betters." Wealthy bourgeois families in the Third Estate could buy political office and even titles, but the best jobs were still reserved for nobles. Urban workers earned miserable wages. Even the smallest rise in the price of bread, their main food, brought the threat of greater hunger or even starvation. In 1775, before the French Revolution, peasants rioted over the high price of bread in an event called the "Flour War."

Because of traditional privileges, the First and Second Estates paid almost no taxes. Peasants were burdened by taxes on everything from land to soap to salt. Though they were technically free, many owed fees and services that dated back to medieval times, such as the corvée (kawr VAY), which was unpaid labor to repair roads and bridges.

Peasants were also incensed when nobles, hurt by rising prices, tried to reimpose old manor dues. In towns and cities, Enlightenment ideas about equality led people to question the inequalities of the old regime. Why, people demanded, should the first two estates have such great privileges at the expense of the majority? Throughout France, the Third Estate called for the privileged classes to pay their share.

? CONTRAST How did the lives of the Third Estate differ from the lives of clergy and nobles?

France's Economic Crisis

Along with social unrest, France faced economic woes, especially a mushrooming financial crisis. The crisis was caused in part by years of **deficit spending.** This occurs when a government spends more money than it takes in.

A Nation in Debt Louis XIV had left France deeply in debt. The Seven Years' War and the American Revolution strained the treasury even further. Costs generally had risen in the 1700s, and the lavish court soaked up millions. To bridge the gap between income and expenses, the government borrowed more and more money. By 1789, half of the government's income from taxes went to paying the interest on this enormous debt.

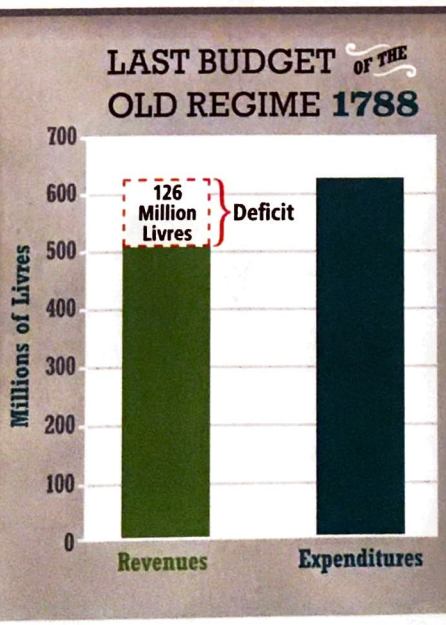
To solve the financial crisis, the government would have to increase taxes, reduce expenses, or both. However, the nobles and clergy fiercely resisted any attempt to end their exemption from taxes.

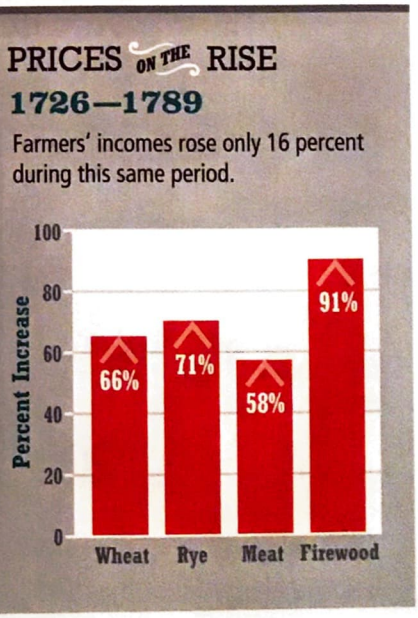
A Crumbling Economy Other economic woes added to the crisis. A general economic decline began in the 1770s. Then in the late 1780s, bad harvests set food prices soaring and brought hunger to poorer peasants and city dwellers.

Hard times and lack of food inflamed these people. In towns, people rioted, demanding bread. In the

FRANCE IN ECONOMIC CRISIS

By 1788, France's royal treasury was deeply in debt, while people were paying higher prices for food and other goods. These charts illustrate the dire economic conditions of pre-revolutionary France.





>> Analyze Charts As France's deficit grew, so did the suffering of the poor. How much did the price of firewood rise between 1726 and 1789?

countryside, peasants began to attack the manor houses of nobles.

Failure of Reform The heirs of Louis XIV were not the right men to solve the economic crisis that afflicted France. Louis XV, who ruled from 1715 to 1774, pursued pleasure before serious business and ran up more debts.

The next king, **Louis XVI**, was well-meaning but weak and indecisive. He did wisely choose **Jacques Necker,** a financial expert, as an advisor. Necker urged the king to reduce extravagant court spending, reform government, and abolish burdensome tariffs on internal trade. When Necker proposed taxing the First and Second Estates, however, the nobles and high clergy forced the king to dismiss him.

As the crisis deepened, the pressure for reform mounted. The wealthy and powerful classes demanded, however, that the king summon the **Estates-General,** the legislative body consisting of representatives of the three estates, before making any changes. No French king had called the Estates-General for 175 years. They feared that nobles would try to recover the feudal powers they had lost under absolute rule.

To reform-minded nobles, the Estates-General seemed to offer a chance of carrying out changes like the ones the English had achieved through the Glorious Revolution. They hoped to bring the absolute monarch under the control of nobles and guarantee their own privileges.

? DESCRIBE What were some of the main reasons France was in serious economic trouble in the late 1700s?

Louis XVI Calls the Estates-General

As 1788 came to a close, France tottered on the verge of bankruptcy. Bread riots were spreading, and nobles, fearful of taxes, were denouncing royal tyranny. A baffled Louis XVI finally summoned the Estates-General to meet at Versailles the following year.

The Cahiers In preparation, Louis had all three estates prepare **cahiers** (kah YAYZ), or notebooks, listing their grievances. Many cahiers called for reforms such as fairer taxes, freedom of the press, or regular meetings of the Estates-General. In one town, shoemakers denounced regulations that made leather so expensive they could not afford to make shoes. Servant girls in the city of Toulouse demanded the right to leave service when they wanted and insisted that "after a girl has served her master for many years, she receive some reward for her service."

>> **The poor made up the majority of the Third Estate. Here, they are shown rioting during the "Flour War," a brief 1775 uprising brought on by higher bread prices.**

The cahiers testified to boiling class resentments. One called tax collectors "bloodsuckers of the nation who drink the tears of the unfortunate from goblets of gold." Another one of the cahiers condemned the courts of nobles as "vampires pumping the last drop of blood" from the people. Yet another complained that "20 million must live on half the wealth of France while the clergy . . . devour the other half."

The Tennis Court Oath Delegates to the Estates-General from the Third Estate were elected, though only propertied men could vote. Thus, the delegates were mostly lawyers, middle-class officials, and writers. They were familiar with the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, and other *philosophes*, as well as with the complaints in the cahiers. They went to Versailles not only to solve the financial crisis but also to insist on reform.

The Estates-General convened in May 1789. From the start, the delegates were deadlocked over the issue of voting. Traditionally, each estate had met and voted separately. Each group had one vote.

Under this system, the First and Second Estates always outvoted the Third Estate two to one. This time, the Third Estate wanted all three estates to meet in a

single body, with votes counted "by head." After weeks of stalemate, delegates of the Third Estate took a daring step. In June 1789, claiming to represent the people of France, they declared themselves to be the National Assembly. A few days later, the National Assembly found its meeting hall locked and guarded. Fearing that the king planned to dismiss them, the delegates moved to a nearby indoor tennis court.

As curious spectators looked on, the delegates took their famous **Tennis Court Oath.** They swore "never to separate and to meet wherever the circumstances might require until we have established a sound and just constitution." When reform-minded clergy and nobles joined the Assembly, Louis XVI grudgingly accepted it.

At the same time, though, royal troops gathered around Paris. Rumors spread that the king planned to dissolve the Assembly.

DESCRIBE Why did the Third Estate want the Estates-General to meet as a single body?

Storming the Bastille

On July 14, 1789, the city of Paris seized the spotlight from the National Assembly meeting in Versailles. The streets buzzed with rumors that royal troops were going to occupy the capital. More than 800 Parisians assembled outside the **Bastille,** a grim medieval fortress used as a prison for political and other prisoners. The crowd demanded weapons and gunpowder believed to be stored there.

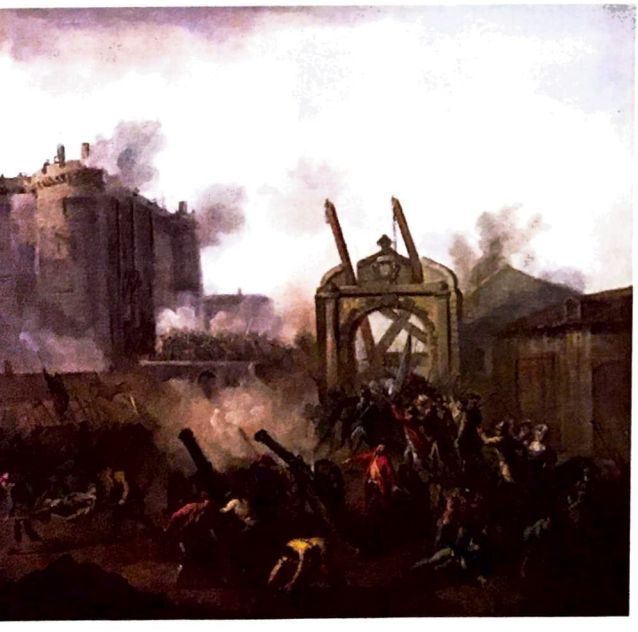
The commander of the Bastille refused to open the gates and opened fire on the crowd. In the battle that followed, many people were killed. Finally, the enraged mob broke through the defenses. Thomas Jefferson was at the time American minister to France and described the scene as one of chaos and violence.

> The people rushed against the place, and almost in an instant were in possession of a fortification, defended by 100 men, of infinite strength, which in other times had stood several regular sieges and had never been taken. . . . They took all the arms, discharged the prisoners and such of the garrison as were not killed in the first moment of fury, carried the Governor and Lieutenant governor to the Greve (the place of public execution), cut off their heads, and set them through the city in triumph to the Palais royal.
>
> —Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Jay, July 14, 1789

The mob killed the commander and five guards and released the handful of prisoners who were being held there. However, they found no weapons.

For the French, the Bastille was a powerful symbol of the tyranny, inequalities, and injustices of the old order. The storming of the Bastille signaled the end of the absolute monarchy and a step toward freedom. It also marked the beginning of the French Revolution. Today, July 14 is a national holiday when the French celebrate the birth of modern France.

IDENTIFY CENTRAL IDEAS What was the main motivation behind the Parisians' attack on the Bastille?



>> The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, was the opening event of the French Revolution.

Revolts in Paris and the Provinces

The political crisis of 1789 coincided with the worst famine in memory. Starving peasants roamed the countryside or flocked to towns, where they swelled the

ranks of the unemployed. As grain prices soared, even people with jobs had to spend as much as 80 percent of their income on bread.

The "Great Fear" In such desperate times, rumors ran wild and set off what was later called the "Great Fear." Tales of attacks on villages and towns spread panic. Other rumors asserted that government troops were seizing peasant crops.

Inflamed by famine and fear, peasants unleashed their fury on nobles who were trying to reimpose medieval dues. Defiant peasants set fire to old manor records and stole grain from storehouses. The attacks eventually died down, but they clearly showed peasant anger with the injustice of the old order.

Paris in Arms Paris, too, was in turmoil. As the capital and chief city of France, it was the revolutionary center. A variety of factions competed to gain power. A **faction** is a group or clique within a larger group that has different ideas and opinions than the rest of the group.

Moderates looked to the **Marquis de Lafayette,** the aristocratic "hero of two worlds" who had fought alongside George Washington in the American Revolution. Lafayette headed the National Guard, a largely middle-class militia organized in response to the arrival of royal troops in Paris. The Guard was the first group to don the tricolor—a red, white, and blue badge that was eventually adopted as the national flag of France.

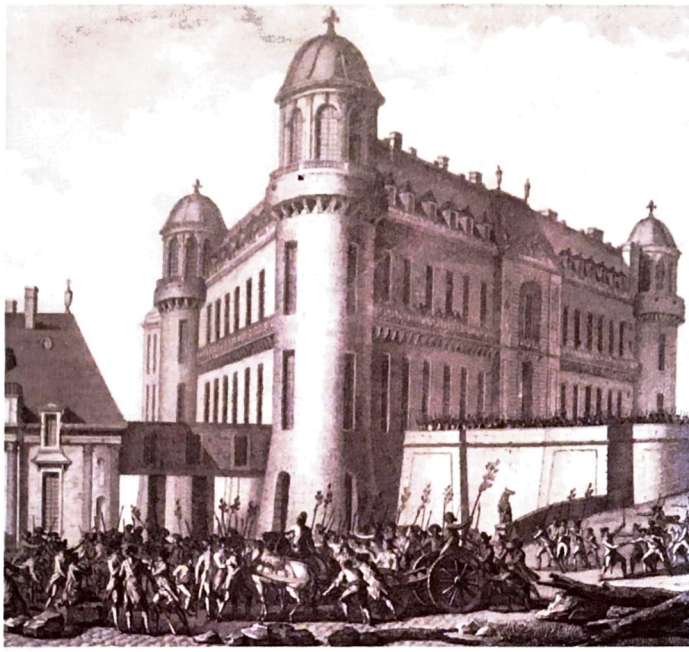
A more radical group, the Paris Commune, replaced the royalist government of the city. It could mobilize whole neighborhoods for protests or violent action to further the revolution. Newspapers and political clubs—many even more radical than the Commune—blossomed everywhere.

Some demanded an end to the monarchy and spread scandalous stories about the royal family and members of the court.

? IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS What stoked the "Great Fear"?

The National Assembly

Peasant uprisings and the storming of the Bastille stampeded the National Assembly into action. On August 4, in a combative all-night meeting, nobles in the National Assembly voted to end their own privileges. They agreed to give up their old manorial dues, exclusive hunting rights, special legal status, and exemption from taxes.



>> **Peasant rebellions during the Great Fear began amid rumors that the king and other aristocrats wanted to overthrow the Third Estate.**

An End to Special Privilege "Feudalism is abolished," announced the proud and weary delegates at 2 A.M. As the president of the Assembly later observed, "We may view this moment as the dawn of a new revolution, when all the burdens weighing on the people were abolished, and France was truly reborn."

Were nobles sacrificing much with their votes on the night of August 4? Both contemporary observers and modern historians note that the nobles gave up nothing that they had not already lost. In the months ahead, the National Assembly turned the reforms of August 4 into law, meeting a key Enlightenment goal—the equality of all male citizens before the law.

Declaration of the Rights of Man In late August, as a first step toward writing a constitution, the Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. The document was modeled in part on the American Declaration of Independence, written 13 years earlier. All men, the French declaration announced, were "born and remain free and equal in rights." They enjoyed natural rights to "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." Like the writings of Locke and the *philosophes*, the declaration insisted that governments exist to protect the natural rights of citizens.

>> The ideals of the Enlightenment inspired the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

Interactive Illustration

>> On October 5, 1789, thousands of women marched on the royal palace at Versailles hoping to draw attention to their poor living conditions.

The declaration further proclaimed that all male citizens were equal before the law. Every French man had an equal right to hold public office "with no distinction other than that of their virtues and talents."

It affirmed the legal idea that no person could be arrested, tried or imprisoned except according to the law. In addition, the declaration asserted freedom of religion and called for taxes to be levied according to ability to pay. Its principles were captured in the enduring slogan of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

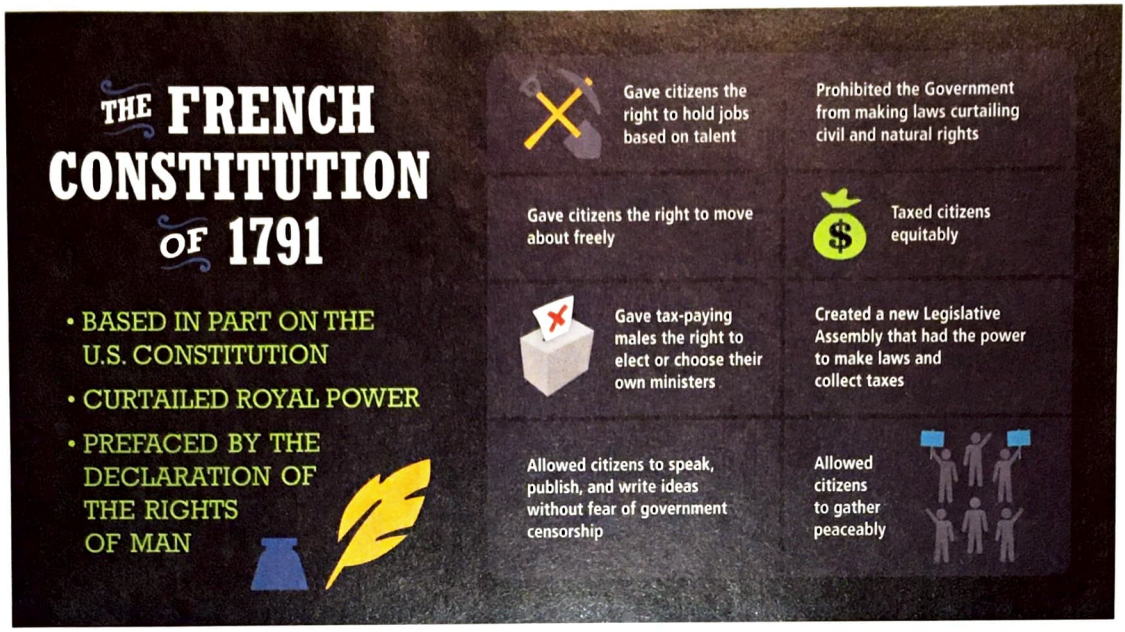
Some women were disappointed that the Declaration of the Rights of Man did not grant equal citizenship to them. In 1791, **Olympe de Gouges** (oh LAMP duh GOOZH) demanded equal rights in her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen. "Woman is born free," she proclaimed, "and her rights are the same as those of man." She called for all citizens, men or women, to be equally eligible for all public offices. De Gouges and other women who pushed the cause of women's rights were often ridiculed or sometimes imprisoned and executed.

Women March on Versailles Louis XVI did not want to accept the reforms of the National Assembly. Nobles continued to enjoy gala banquets while people were starving.

By autumn, anger again turned to action. On October 5, about six thousand women marched 13 miles in the pouring rain from Paris to Versailles. "Bread!" they shouted. They demanded to see the king.

Much of the crowd's anger was directed at the queen, **Marie Antoinette.** She was the daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria. Ever since she had married Louis, she had come under attack for being frivolous and extravagant. She eventually grew more serious and even advised the king to compromise with moderate reformers. Still she remained a source of scandal. "Death to the Austrian!" the women who marched on Versailles shouted.

Lafayette and the National Guard eventually calmed the crowd. Still the women refused to leave Versailles until the king met their most important demand—to return to Paris. Not too happily, the king agreed. The next morning, the crowd, with the king and his family in tow, set out for the city. At the head of the procession rode women perched on the barrels of seized cannons. Crowds along the way cheered the king, who now wore the tricolor.



>> **Analyze Charts** The Constitution of 1791 turned France upside down by destroying the old order. What powers did the Legislative Assembly now have?

In Paris, the royal family moved into the Tuileries (TWEE luh reez) palace. For the next three years, Louis was a virtual prisoner.

DESCRIBE Why did the women who marched on Versailles want King Louis XVI to return to Paris?

Reforms of the National Assembly

The National Assembly soon followed the king to Paris. Its largely bourgeois members worked to draft a constitution and to solve the continuing financial crisis.

Controlling the Church To pay off the huge government debt—much of it owed to the bourgeoisie—the Assembly voted to take over and sell Church lands. In an even more radical move, the National Assembly put the French Catholic Church under state control. Under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, issued in 1790, bishops and priests became elected, salaried officials. The Civil Constitution ended papal authority over the French Church and dissolved convents and monasteries.

Reaction to the Civil Constitution was swift and angry. Many bishops and priests refused to accept the document while the pope condemned it.

Large numbers of French peasants, who were conservative concerning religion, also rejected the changes. When the government punished clergy who refused to support the Civil Constitution, a huge gulf opened between revolutionaries in Paris and the peasantry in the provinces.

The Constitution of 1791 The National Assembly completed its main task by producing a constitution. The Constitution of 1791 set up a limited monarchy in place of the absolute monarchy that had ruled France for centuries. A new Legislative Assembly had the power to make laws, collect taxes, and decide on issues of war and peace. Lawmakers would be elected by tax-paying male citizens over age 25.

To make government more efficient, the constitution replaced the old provinces with 83 departments of roughly equal size. It abolished the old provincial courts, and it reformed laws.

To moderate reformers, the Constitution of 1791 seemed to complete the revolution. Reflecting Enlightenment goals, it ensured equality before the law for all male citizens and ended Church interference in government. At the same time, it put power in the hands of men with the means and leisure to serve in government.

>> Revolutionaries captured King Louis XVI as he tried to escape.

The Royal Family Tries to Escape Meanwhile, Marie Antoinette and others had been urging the king to escape their humiliating situation. Louis finally gave in. One night in June 1791, a coach rolled north from Paris toward the border. Inside sat the king disguised as a servant, the queen dressed as a governess, and the royal children.

The attempted escape failed. In a town along the way, Louis's disguise was uncovered by someone who held up a piece of currency with the king's face on it. A company of soldiers escorted the royal family back to Paris, as onlooking crowds hurled insults at the king. In place of the old shouts of "Long Live the King!" people cried, "Long Live the Nation." To many, Louis's dash to the border showed that he was a traitor to the revolution. As new crises arose, the French Revolution entered a new, more radical phase.

? **DESCRIBE** How did the National Assembly try to reform the French Catholic Church?

ASSESSMENT

1. **Apply Concepts** How did France's social divisions in the late 1700s contribute to the revolution?
2. **Draw Conclusions** Why was the conflict between the clergy and the Third Estate the most divisive in the course of the revolution?
3. **Compare** How might the complaints of a peasant and a merchant compare during the revolution?
4. **Identify Cause and Effect** What characteristics of the Third Estate helped fuel the Revolution?
5. **Connect** What did the Tennis Court Oath foretell about the coming events of the French Revolution?