

Name: _____

Period: _____

The French Revolution: Moderate Stage

The Third Estate Organizes the National Assembly

Members of each of the three Estates were represented in the Estates-General, the parliament of France. The body had not met for many years, but in May of 1789, King Louis XVI called the Estates-General to meet in Versailles near Paris to discuss financial problems that faced the nation. He hoped to solve the problem by increasing taxes. From the beginning, there was a dispute over voting procedures. This confusion over voting procedures led to a power struggle among the three groups in the Estates-General. The clergy and the nobility, or the First and Second Estates, wanted each to have one so they could outnumber the Third Estate, two to one. The Third Estate felt that the three Estates should meet together and that each member should have a vote. Since there were as many members in the Third Estate as in the other two combined, this would give the Third Estate more of a chance to win reforms. French citizens came from all over the nation to cheer for members of the Third Estate – clearly the Estate represented the majority of the French population. Even some members of the clergy were in favor of giving peasants more rights and fewer taxes.

The king refused to change the voting procedure for the three Estates. The single vote of the Third Estate was outnumbered by the two votes of the First and Second Estates. In early June 1789, the powerless Third Estate went on strike and quit working. They formed a new organization and called themselves the *National Assembly* and considered themselves the legitimate government of France. This act was the first real act of the French Revolution.

On June 20th, members of the Third Estate found the hall where their National Assembly was meeting occupied by the king's troops. These members then moved to another large building – the royal indoor tennis court. There the Third Estate voted on its own plan. Members of the Third Estate said that their National Assembly would write a constitution for the country. They swore not to separate until they had a written constitution for France. Of the 577 members, all but one accepted this oath known as the Tennis Court Oath. The king realized that the National Assembly was powerful. He didn't want the Third Estate alone to draw up a constitution, so he ordered the first two Estates to join the Third Estate in the National Assembly. Fearing trouble, he also called for the army to come to Paris.

He told the National Assembly that the army was there to protect them. However, he told his wife and close advisors that the army was there to force the members of the National Assembly to go home. While the National Assembly was meeting, the people of Paris were going wild. Mob violence was everywhere. Believing that the king planned to dissolve the National Assembly and stop reforms, the citizens of France acted violently. The spirit of rebellion against the government had spread. People heatedly debated on the streets and cafes. Many fights broke out among people with conflicting views.

Increasing Violence

On July 14th, 1789 the first act of the Revolution took place. Mobs in Paris and other cities attacked the government prisons in search of weapons to defend the National Assembly against the king's troops. The government prison in Paris was called the Bastille (ba-steel). The attack on the Bastille became the symbol for the French Revolution. The prison was a symbol of everything wrong with France, most prominently the power and unfairness of the French monarchy. Today, the French celebrate July 14th as their Independence Day. It is still known as Bastille Day.

The Bastille was a famous prison in Paris that stood as a hated symbol of oppression to the people of France. It had been used to house political prisoners but was nearly empty by the time it was stormed and destroyed by revolutionists on July 14th, 1789. Ever since then, the people of France have celebrated that date as a national holiday in the same manner that we celebrate our Independence Day on the fourth of July. Bastille Day is celebrated with parades, music, and dancing in the streets.

The Rights of Man

In August of 1789, the National Assembly passed the Declaration of the Rights of Man. This gave all male citizens equal rights before the law. The new laws ended special privileges for the nobles and the clergy. The declaration stated that all political power came from the nation or the people. It also gave the people freedom of speech, of the press, and of religion, as well as the freedom to own property. Unfortunately, and very importantly, the National Assembly did not grant these rights to women.

A Limited Monarchy

Until the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Louis XVI had been an absolute monarch. He had complete and unlimited power over the French government and people, and Louis XVI did not want to give up his power. The new constitution created a limited monarchy that was similar to the British government, so Louis XVI's power was now restricted. However, the king still held the power to delay new laws.

A State-Controlled Church

The French government took over church lands. The Catholic Church lost its right to choose church officials and clergy. The assembly ruled that officials and priests were to be elected by property owners and paid as state officials. Many devout French peasants still supported their parish priests. Consequently, these changes in the Catholic Church divided the peasants and the bourgeoisie.

The King Moves to Paris

During September of 1789, the crowds in the streets grew angrier and violence increased. One night a crowd of people, after drinking too much wine, marched to Versailles. At three o'clock in the morning, the crowd reached the palace at Versailles. They yelled for Louis to come to the window of his bedroom. Afraid for his life and his family, Louis appeared. He promised to sign the Declaration of the Rights of Man. He also promised to move to Paris. By early October, both the royal family (Louis, his wife, and his children) and the National Assembly were in Paris. Louis had actually become a prisoner of the people. Every move he made was carefully watched. Meanwhile, the National Assembly began to write a constitution for France. In early 1791, a French constitution was completed. All the programs of the Old Regime were removed. Men were given equal rights, including the right to vote for their leaders. The king would remain, but his power was greatly limited now. However, there were still imbalances of power. For example, only property owners could hold office. After telling all of the French people that they had a new constitution, the National Assembly broke up on September 30th, 1791. From May of 1789 to September 30th, 1791, the French system of government and the whole French social system were changed. However, the Revolution was not over. In fact, it was just the beginning.

Name: _____

Period: _____

The French Revolution: Moderate Stage

Use the list below to write the correct term for each definition on the line provided.

Absolute Monarch Limited Monarchy Estates-General National Assembly

_____ French congress established by representatives of the Third Estate to enact laws and reforms in the name of the French people.

_____ Lawmaking body in France that had little power and represented three groups: the clergy (the First Estate); the nobles (the Second Estate); the common people (The Third Estate).

_____ A king or a queen who has complete or unlimited powers over the government and its people.

_____ A government headed by a king or queen who has restricted or limited power.

1. Why did the King call a meeting of the Estates General in 1789?
2. Why were the Representatives of the Third Estate displeased with the voting procedures?
3. Identify: The National Assembly and why it was formed?
4. What was the Tennis Court Oath?
5. Why did mobs storm the Bastille Prison and what did this act symbolize?
6. Describe some of the changes that came about after the Declaration of the Rights of Man was passed?
7. What major changes occurred after the French Constitution was completed in September 1791?