Absolute Monarchy and National Regeneration

Scandals, Loans, and Taxes
Enlightenment Sociability
bourgeois public sphere

cafés
print media
learned academies
freemasonry
the Salon

Great Chain of Being
absolutist public sphere

God
| King
| clergy
| aristocracy
| other people
| animals
| plants
| minerals

Frederick the Great received as a freemason. Stattsbibliothek Berlin.
Absolutism in the Public Sphere
Reform and Crises in France, 1760s-1787

Monarchy as an agent of change and reform
  war and early forms of nationalism
  universal taxation
  attempted liberalization of the grain trade

Crises of the 1770s-1780s
  desacralized monarchy?
  costs of participation in American war
  rising interest rates
  Diamond Necklace Affair

Both culminate in the Assembly of Notables, 1787
1715-1815: The Second Hundred Years’ War?

War of Spanish Succession 1701-1714 700,000 total casualties
War of Austrian Succession 1740-1748 450,000
Seven Years’ War 1756-1763 550,000
(just in Europe; probably > 1 million worldwide)

Monarchy as agent of change: war and state-building
Old-Regime France and the Growing Value of Empire

value of colonial trade increases ten-fold, 1700-1789

approx. 3700 French slaving voyages (3/month)
63% of people from Africa exported as slaves were shipped in the eighteenth century (5.5 million)

Of the 600 French ships that sailed to Saint Domingue annually:
460 sailed direct from France (not the triangle trade to Africa)
France exported to colonies: cloth, equipment, olive oil, flour, salt beef, salt cod, “luxuries” (mirrors, fans, carriages, etc.);
imported (1788) 95,000 tons sugar, 39,000 tons coffee, 550 tons indigo; re-export of colonial goods = 25% of French international trade


war and state-building: why did France fight?
“There are wars in which the people only take an interest because of their submission to the King, but this war is of a different nature. It is the English nation which, by unanimous agreement, has attacked our nation to deprive us of something that belongs to all of us.”


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F-Hubert Drouais, *The Count of Vaudreuil* (1758)
"A citizen’s control over his possessions is naturally unlimited; … taxation strikes a heavy blow against citizens’ legitimate liberty by making the right of property into an illusion."

*Points of Protest, agreed by the Parlement in Rouen* (1763).

Monarchy attempts change: *parlementaires* resist universal taxation
“They have called themselves the representatives of the nation, the indispensable interpreters of the king’s public will, and the watchmen over the government’s administration . . We owe it to the good of our subjects and to the interests of the magistracy itself, even more than to the interest of our royal power, to halt the development of these dangerous innovations. . . God alone has granted us our crown. The right to make the laws by which our subjects must be guided and governed belongs to us alone, without subordination or division…”

Louis XV to the parlements (1770).

1771 Chancellor Maupeou establishes new “superior councils” and refuses to deal with parlements

1774 Louis XV dies of smallpox

1774 Louis XVI crowned; re-instates parlements; appoints Turgot

1776 parlement of Paris refuses to enregister Turgot’s reforms (abolish guilds; free trade in grain. etc.)

“Louis XVI comes to the throne and restores the parlements”

ivory and wooden fan, around 1775.

Monarchy attempts change: from the “Maupeou coup” to Turgot
A desacralized monarchy?


F. Boizot, *My Lord the Crown Prince* [future Louis XVI]  
*Plowing a Field* (1769), detail.

$sacre$  
sacred

coronation
Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, and her Children* (1789).

Image (mis)management: Marie Antoinette

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie Antoinette, with a Rose* (1783).

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, and her Children* (1789).
Image (mis)management: Marie Antoinette
Public Opinion and State Finance

1776  Turgot fired; Necker appointed

1778  France enters American Revolution

1781  Necker’s *Compte rendu (Account)* shows surplus in “ordinary” budget;
      finances war by borrowing

Crises of the 1770s-1780s: Costs of the American War

[the Duke of Noailles was his father-in-law]
Public Opinion and the Monarchy

sordid scandal (sex and money)

Queen was not involved

What does it tell us about Court life?

What does it tell us about what people thought they knew about life at Court?

The Cardinal de Rohan

The Diamond Necklace (reproduction)
Credits
1. Palais Royal gardens, Paris. Built in the 1620s-1630s as the residence of Cardinal Richelieu (advisor to Louis XIII) the buildings and gardens later passed to the Orléans branch of the French royal family (hence the name). In the late 1770s, the duc d’Orléans began to rent out sections of it to retail businesses (cafés, restaurants), small theatres, and gambling halls, making it something like a very upscale eighteenth-century mall or perhaps a mini version of Las Vegas; photo credit unknown
8. Antoine Callet, Louis XVI, King of France and Navarre (1779), oil on canvas, 2.78 x 1.96 meters, Versailles; and Boizot, The Crown Prince Plowing (1769), engraving, BNF; photos www.photo.rmn.fr
9. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Marie Antoinette with a Rose (1783); Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, and her Children (1789); oil on canvas, 2.7 x 1.95 meters; www.photo.rmn.fr
10. Manufacture de Sèvres, 1788 [cow china]; chairs by Georges Jacob (1787); www.photo.rmn.fr
12. reproduction of “the diamond necklace” and engraving of the Cardinal de Rohan; www.photo.rmn.fr