1787-1789

Salle de Jeu de Paume
(Indoor Tennis Court)
Versailles
August 1786  Controller-General Calonne suggests sweeping reforms to Louis XVI in attempt to avert bankruptcy; to avoid struggle with *parlements*, an Assembly of Notables is called

Feb-May 1787  Assembly of Notables meets, rejects all proposed reforms; Assembly dissolved and reforms sent to Paris *parlement*, which rejects them; *parlement* sent into exile but popular protest results in its recall; *parlement* demands that the King call the Estates-General

August 1788  France suspends payment on loans; Estates-General called for May

Jan. 1789  Sieyes publishes *What is the Third Estate?*

spring 1789  assemblies elect representatives and write *cahiers*

May 1789  King and Necker open the Estates-General; voting to be by order; representatives of the Third refuse to meet on that basis, eventually joined by some from First Estate in “the Commons”

June 17, 1789  the Commons takes the name “National Assembly”

June 20, 1789  Commons has to meet in Tennis Court; takes oath
July 1-8, 1789  Many members of First and Second Estate join the Assembly; Louis XVI orders army to surround Paris and Versailles.

July 12, 1789  Louis XVI dismisses Necker; word of this reaches Paris and prompts variety of protests (speeches in public places, looting, etc.).

July 14, 1789  A Paris crowd storms the Bastille Prison, looking for arms with which to defend itself against the army which is rumoredly about to attack; troops there largely refuse to fire on the crowd. Paris electors call themselves the Paris Commune and elect a mayor (Bailly) and commander of the National Guard (Lafayette). Municipal government passes largely into hands of electoral districts; similar “municipal revolutions” happen in many French cities.

Great Fear in the countryside

August 4, 1789  Meeting late into the night, the National Assembly votes to “abolish privilege.”

Oct. 5-6, 1789  Crowd of Parisians marches to Versailles; in aftermath, Court and Assembly re-locate to Paris.

Chronology—1787-1789
The Estates-General
why was it called to meet?
with what consequences?

The National Assembly and the storming of the Bastille
Versailles/Paris
elite/popular
political debate/crowd mobilization

The “abolition” of privilege (night of August 4th)
why?
with what consequences?

Court and Assembly move to Paris (Oct. 1789)
why?
with what consequences?
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old financial tricks no longer work
decades of overseas wars

appeal to “public” opinion
--but who is “the public”?

parlements repeatedly asserted that they were defending “tradition” against threatened despotism

“Citizens assembled by a Citizen King,
You will not betray his generous expectations.”

Why was the Estates-General called?—What’s different about the 1787 crisis?
First Meeting of the Estates-General in 175 Years

Estates-General: a meeting of representatives of the three French “estates” clergy, nobility, commoners

traditionally, voting was “by order”
The plan of this pamphlet is very simple. We have three questions to ask:
1st. What is the third estate? Everything.
2nd. What has it been until now in the political order? Nothing.
3rd. What does it demand? To become something.
It is not sufficient to show that privileged persons, far from being useful to the nation, cannot but enfeeble and injure it; it is necessary to prove further that the noble order does not enter at all into the social organization; [it is] a burden upon the nation

It is not possible in the nation to find a place for the caste of nobles. I know that there are countless individuals whose infirmities, incapacity, incurable laziness, or the weight of bad habits render strangers to the labors of society. ... But the worst possible arrangement would be where not just isolated individuals, but a whole class of citizens should take pride in remaining motionless in the midst of general movement, and should consume the largest part of the products without bearing any part in its production.

The noble order is not less estranged from the generality of us by its civil and political prerogatives.

*What is the Third Estate?*

abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes

January 1789
“Sire, King, if only you knew what was happening in France and what misery and poverty your humble people are suffering…”

cahier of the Third Estate of Angoulême

cahiers de doléances—“grievance notebooks”
written instructions to delegates
“to do” lists

30,000-60,000 drafted across France

many final versions based on model circulated by the Society of Thirty (liberal noblemen including Lafayette, de la Rochefoucauld, members of the Paris parlement)
1. prohibit export of grain
2. prohibit the English and the Americans from taking money out of the country
3. “suppress taxes on necessary goods, because they cause notably high prices”
4. suppress the “rights of the eldest” (all family property inherited by oldest son)
5. increase the pay of naval workers in Le Havre, who only get 24 sous per day, whereas in other places they get 28 or 30 sous per day
From the Estates-General to the National Assembly, May-June 1789
nineteenth-century engraving
based on Jacques Louis David's unfinished painting
June 20, 1789
Versailles

political elite
demands to write a constitution
“no taxation without representation”

July 14, 1789
Paris

ordinary Parisians
looking for weapons
create city-based militia
(National Guard)
The night of August fourth

55 or more proposals
  60% made by nobles
  25% by the clergy

50% of proposals made by liberals or radicals
> 25% by ultra-conservatives

3 proposals immediately rejected:
  complete religious freedom for Protestants
  emancipation of slaves in the colonies
  abolition of nobility

“In the future, only wealth, talent, and virtue will distinguish one man from another…. We are a nation of brothers. The king is our father and France is our mother.”

Claude Gantheret (wine merchant)
deputy from Dijon, writing to his brother-in-law, August 5, 1789.

Night of 4-5 August 1789, or Patriotic Delirium
Anxiety
Events in Paris (lynching of accused grain hoarders)
“Great Fear” in the countryside
  disastrous 1788 harvest
  high levels of unemployment
  hopes raised by calling of Estates-General
  rumors of armed invasion

Idealism and the “heat of the moment”

What is privilege? What is property?
The Event: October 5-6, 1789

Flanders Regiment rumored to have torn up national colors

Women’s demands:
  “We need bread, not laws”
  “The baker, the baker’s wife, and the baker’s boy” (Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, the Dauphin)

Skirmishes between King’s Guard and Paris National Guard

Court and Assembly move to Paris
King accepts Declaration of Rights
20 deputies quit the Assembly
Power dispersed
monarchy (King can veto Assembly’s decrees)
National Assembly
city governments
Paris electoral districts, or “sections”
rural unrest

“Public opinion”—where to find it?
National Assembly?
the press?
the sections?
the streets?
the countryside?

And what about the financial crisis?

“Louis XVI, King of the French and Restorer of Liberty”

October 1789—central effects of the Revolution (so far) and key questions
Credits
1. Indoor Tennis Court (salle de jeu de paume), Versailles; photo credit unknown.
photo from the website of the Archives municipales of Le Havre
8. gallica.bnf.fr
11. photo from the website of the Archives municipales of Le Havre; http.archives.ville-lehavre.fr
15. “Night of 4-5 August 1789, or Patriotic Delirium,” gallica.bnf.fr
17. “To Versailles, to Versailles!” engraving (Paris, 1789); gallica.bnf.fr