27 August 2012

State and Nation, Citizens and Subjects

Opera House, Place de la Bastille, Paris (1989) — photo Wikimedia
The Revolution of 1789 is often considered the beginning of modern France. Why?

France before 1789 was an “absolutist” monarchy structured by privilege.

It was a centralizing state. Was it a nation?

What happened in 1789?
- claims made in name of the “nation”
- a new definition of “revolution”
- abolition of privilege, invention of “rights”

“The French made, in 1789, the greatest effort that has ever been made by any people to sever their history into two parts, so to speak, and to tear open a gulf between their past and their future.”

King, by the grace of God,…

no democratic institutions

censorship

but not the same as twentieth-century totalitarianism

What is “absolutism”? 

Joseph Duplessis, *Louis XVI in his Coronation Robes* (1774)
privilege, from the Latin *privilēgium*

*prīvus* = single, individual
*leg* or *lex* = law

public, from the Latin *pūblicus* or *poplicus*

*populus* = people

France before 1789 is structured by privilege
Who is Privileged?

First Estate (Clergy)
- pays no “taxes”
- collects its own tax or tithe (dîme)
- separate ecclesiastical courts

Second Estate (Nobility)
- does not pay the taille
- collects feudal, seigneurial dues
- fishing, hunting, pigeon raising
- swords; coats of arms

BUT ALSO: master craftsmen and merchants in the guilds;
- residents of particular provinces;
- entities such as the parlements or the provincial estates.
To the Barbers, Wigmakers, Water and Steambath providers alone belongs the right to shave and style facial hair, to give baths, to make wigs, to offer steam baths, and to create all other sorts of hair products… others can interfere only at the risk of having their products, hair supplies, and utensils confiscated, and paying a penalty of 300 livres.

Article 58, Statutes of the Paris Wigmakers’ Guild (1718)
What is a state? What is a nation?

State = political, administrative entity; formed through law and bureaucracy

- city-states ancient Athens or Sparta; medieval Venice; eighteenth-century Geneva or Hamburg
- imperial states Roman Empire; Russian Empire; British Empire
- federal states United States of America; Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); Switzerland
- nation-states (today) France, Spain, Portugal

Nation = group of people who are believed to have something in common (“ethnicity,” language, culture, history)

Old-Regime France: a centralizing state. Was it a nation?
How are states and nations related to each other?

State = political, administrative entity; formed through law and bureaucracy

Nation = group of people who are believed to have something in common (“ethnicity,” language, culture, history)

Nation-State = ideal of making political and “ethnic” boundaries coincide

nationalism = ideology that argues that a “nation” has the right to political self-determination (most historians would say that this develops in the nineteenth century)

(please note) nationalism is not necessarily the same thing as “patriotism” or xenophobia (hatred/fear of foreigners)
First Meeting of the Estates-General in 175 Years

1780s financial crisis

Estates-General: a meeting of representatives of the three French “estates”
clergy, nobility, commoners
called on the same basis as in 1614; traditionally, voting was “by order”
Abbé Sieyes and *What is the Third Estate?*

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.

What are the essentials of national existence and prosperity? Private enterprise and public functions…

The Third Estate is a complete nation…

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, 1748-1836
It is not sufficient to show that privileged persons, far from being useful to the nation, cannot but enfeebles 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. … [They are not] just isolated individuals but a whole class who take pride in remaining motionless in the midst of general movement, and consume the largest part of the products without bearing any part in its production….

What is a nation? A body of associates living under a common law and represented by the same legislature. Is it not all too clear that the noble class has its own privileges and dispensations… It is thus outside the common order, outside the common law. Its civil rights make it a people separate from the nation.

What is the Third Estate?
abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes
January 1789

1789: the spread of a new political vocabulary.
Opening of the Estates-General
5 May 1789

The Tennis Court Oath, 20 June 1789

From the Estates-General to the National Assembly
The National Assembly, considering that it has been summoned to establish the constitution of the kingdom, to effect the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; that nothing can prevent it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be forced to establish itself; and, finally, that wheresoever its members are assembled, there is the National Assembly;

Decrees that all members of this Assembly shall immediately take a solemn oath not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established and consolidated upon firm foundations; and that, the said oath taken, all members, and each one of them individually shall ratify this resolution by signature.

Jacques-Louis David,
final preparatory sketch for “The Tennis Court Oath”
(painting never finished)
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)

Luc Olivier Merson after J-L David, *The Tennis Court Oath*

Jean-Baptiste Houël, *Storming of the Bastille*
watercolor, 1789

1789 and making of modern France: a new definition of Revolution
The night of August fourth

55+ proposals of privileges to be abolished
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

The Abolition of Privilege
The Abolition of Privilege: Night of August 4th-5th, 1789

Anxiety about:
- 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

Combined with idealism and the “heat of the moment”

But the entire “Old Regime” was based on privilege. What does it mean to abolish it?

General principle: abolish privilege (why did they do it?)
Abolish Privilege and “the Old Regime”

All taxes are illegal, but they should be paid anyway (June 17, 1789)

Abolish provinces
Divide France into uniform administrative units (departments)

Abolish venal offices
“nevertheless, officers holding these offices shall continue to exercise their functions and to enjoy their emoluments [fees] until the Assembly has provided a means to secure their reimbursement”

Abolish privilege but sanctify property.
Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, August 1789

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.
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<td>Oct. 5, 1789</td>
<td>women’s march on Versailles</td>
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<td>early 1790</td>
<td>first Church lands <em>(biens nationaux)</em></td>
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<td>civil constitution of the Clergy</td>
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<td>July 14, 1790</td>
<td>Festival of Federation</td>
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<td>Sept. 30, 1791</td>
<td>final meeting of Constituent Assembly</td>
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<td>Oct. 1, 1791</td>
<td>first meeting of Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>Aug. 10, 1792</td>
<td>monarchy abolished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 22, 1792</td>
<td>Republic declared</td>
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France is re-made as a constitutional monarchy.
# French Regimes since 1792

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<td>all of France governed by German military with collaboration of Vichy state, 1942-1944</td>
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<td>July Monarchy</td>
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