From privilege to rights: revolution, citizenship, and nation
The Revolution of 1789 is often considered the beginning of modern Europe. 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”

From the 1789 Revolution come three key terms and issues in the history of nineteenth-twentieth-century Europe (and colonies):

RIGHTS: Who has them? What is their source?
NATION: Who is a nation? What “rights” do nations have?
REVOLUTION: Are other sorts of change possible?

structure—what made 1789 so revolutionary?
Joseph Duplessis, *Louis XVI in his Coronation Robes* (1774)

King, by the grace of God,… 
no democratic institutions 
censorship 
but *not* the same as twentieth-century totalitarianism
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”

Why did Louis XVI call the Estates-General and with what consequences?
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

1789 and making of modern France: new political vocabulary.
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. … [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 mane 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.
The Tennis Court Oath (*serment du jeu de paume*) 20 June 1789

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)

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

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

Why did the National Assembly do it?

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.

abolish privilege: what does this mean in practice?
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.
“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death”

Is violence conceptually inherent in ideas of “rights” and the nation as formulated by National Assembly?

Or is violence necessary to protect rights from those who would prefer to retain privilege?

“Would that I might die, seeing my country free and its people, happy.”

Georges Couthon, member of National Convention, guillotined July 1794 as a “terrorist.”

Do revolutions have to be violent?
Debt, Deficit, and the Costs of Revolution: Nationalization of Church Property

*biens nationaux* (national properties)

10% of property in France estimated to be far greater

Nov. 1789 Church properties put “at disposal” of the nation

spring 1790 first sales of *biens* at auction

“This too great weight can only be bad for you, We must, gentlemen, we must take it from you”

print (1790?) gallica.bnf.fr
Civil Constitution of the Clergy (decree voted July 12, 1790)

parish priests all paid by the state

State becomes responsible for poor relief, nursing, education

bishops to be elected by all voting citizens (including Protestants and Jews)

all members of the clergy have to take oath of loyalty to the Nation

March 1791 condemned by Pope

May 1791 priests who refuse to take oath can still preach, but have to find their own buildings, pay own expenses, etc.

“I swear to uphold the Constitution with all my power”

plate, Musée Carnavelet (Paris) www.photo.rmn.fr
Who Took the Oath?*

52% of parish clergy (26,542)

57% of those in Paris

41% of clergy in towns of 8000-20,000
32% in towns of 20,000-50,000
25% of clergy in provincial towns with populations over 50,000

Claims made for “the nation” divided as much as they united.


Revolutionary religious policy, 1790-1792
May 1792    Refractory priests (those who did not take the oath) can be deported at the request of twenty active citizens

August 16, 1792    Paris city government (Commune) prohibits religious processions

March 1793    “deported” priests still in France subject to execution

August 27, 1793    All refractory priests to be deported

November 1793    republican calendar adopted (no more Sundays)
                 dechristianization encouraged by Representatives on Mission

December 1793    Convention re-affirms freedom of worship

May 1794    Robespierre attacks atheism; calls for Festival of Supreme Being

June 9, 1794    Festival of Supreme Being
                 (20 prairial II)

divisive issues: national church and non-national clergymen
National Assembly votes that King can “suspend” (delay) legislation by veto, but not overturn it

--votes that King cannot declare any “offensive” wars

Paris crowd invades palace at Versailles; demands that royal family live in Paris (October 1789)

My dear brother,

I agree with you: the situation is bad and it is getting worse. …
All around me, it seems they are resigned to accepting a very small role to play, but I do not like to see the power of the throne given up so cheaply. … …
Marie Antoinette to her brother, Emperor Joseph I of Austria (letter, Feb. 26, 1790).

divisive issue: from “divine right” to “constitutional” monarch
Who emigrated?

the King’s brothers and aunts

over half the men elected in 1789 as representatives of the nobility

60% of the officer corps

150,000 total (approx.) of which
25% clergy and 17% noble
less than 20% of émigrés were women

“The Prince de Condé gives the spurs to his ostrich/Austrian mount”
gallica.bnf.fr

Divisive issues: Emigration and the Status of the Monarchy
The Event: the “Flight to Varennes” (June 20, 1791)

“The King has abandoned not just the nobility, the clergy, and the whole right side of the Assembly to the fury of the mobs, but he has also abandoned his friends, his servants, and his ministers. Such conduct is atrocious.”

[former Marquis de] Ferrieres, letter to his wife, June 1791.

June 20  royal family flees Paris; caught near the border
June 25  royal family returns to Paris; king’s power provisionally suspended
July 16  after days of debate, Assembly decides:
           the person of the king is inviolable
           the royal family had been victims of a plot (they were “abducted”)
           Louis to regain full power when he ratifies the new Constitution
[The King and Emperor intend in marching against France]… To put an end to the anarchy that reigns and stop the attacks on the French throne… To restore to the King the security and liberty of which he has been deprived and put him in a position to exercise his legitimate authority… [the German Armies will protect those who do not resist] But those who dare to defend themselves will be punished immediately and their houses destroyed… if the least violence or force be used against the French King or Queen, the Allied monarchs will …deliver the city of Paris over to military rule and to complete ruin…

The Brunswick Manifesto, 25 July 1792.

Divisive issues: war and the King becomes an enemy