

system; others seek to retain its basic structure but add many new rooms; and still others seek to burn down the entire edifice, pulverize the foundation, and build something entirely new.

The Americans are relevant to your current labors for yet another reason. The cost of supporting the American Revolution—over one billion livres—bankrupted the treasury of King Louis XVI. Four years' ago, even before the horrible winter of 1788, he called on the noblemen of France (Assembly of Notables) to accept higher taxes; they refused, citing the fact that their obligations and relations to the monarch had long been fixed. Desperate for the revenue that could only be generated by new taxes, Louis in 1789 summoned the Estates-General, an ancient three-tiered institution that embodied the major constituent elements of the ancien régime: the First "estate" consisted of representatives of the Catholic Church (cardinals, bishops, monks, and priests); the Second "estate," of the nobility; and the Third "estate," the remainder of the French people. The Estates-General had not met since 1614, and its legal function and procedures were unclear.

THE ANCIEN RÉGIME: PRIVILEGES AND RECIPROCITY

To the King and his advisers, the principle was simple: France was a prosperous country but its government was insolvent. New taxes had to be raised from people who preferred not to pay. The King could not simply impose new taxes and demand that they be paid. For all of the descriptions of the French monarchy as absolutist, the reality was much more complicated. The King reposed at the center of a web of interdependent relations, each party being bound by oaths of obligation and mutual responsibilities. Each group won from the king special privileges (literally the word privilege means private law); in turn, the privileged groups acknowledged the king as the source of all legitimate privileges. For example:

King and Church

Louis XVI received his crown during a coronation at the cathedral in Rheims. He then took a vow to protect the Catholic Church. He even agreed to "extirpate heretics" (i.e., Protestants). The Catholic Church, for its part, anointed him with sacred oil, which had been supplied to King Clovis by a dove sent from heaven. The Catholic Church thus acquired special privileges: Though it owned about a tenth of the arable land of France, it was exempt from the two main land taxes—the *taille* and the *vingtième*. The Catholic Church was also the only legal church in the realm. The King received from the Church the moral legitimacy for his powers; and the Church, whose credit sources were superb, often loaned money to the king's treasury. The Church had acquired from the King its own legitimacy as a public agency: Insofar as the children of France were educated, it was at schools run by the Catholic Church; the Church also operated the nation's poor-relief system and its hospitals;

King and Nobility

The monarchy existed in a similarly mutual relationship with the nobility. In ancient times, the king made permanent grants of land to those soldiers and

Ancien Regime
original govt of
France

insolvent = out of
money

extirpate heretics =
get rid of Protestants
and enemies of the
catholic Church

arable = good for farming

corporal punishment = physical beatings or torture

magnates who had served him best. They promised the monarch their continued military protection and loyalty, and he extended them special privileges: freedom from corporal punishment and also from land taxes; the right to be tried by special courts; and the right to impose certain taxes on the peoples who worked the noblemen's lands. Over time, the genealogies of the hereditary nobility became confused and sometimes lost. During the past century, thousands of commoners (those lacking noble birth) who had acquired wealth in finance or trading, attained noble rank through military service in the officer corps, or they acquired noble title and rights by paying for positions in various local *parlements* (Nobility of the Robe). Some of these "new" nobility merely desired the distinction of noble rank, while others bought noble positions to make money from the customary fees paid by peasants and others. In any case, nobility was a legal privilege whose rights could not be terminated by monarchical fiat. The nobility were entitled to rights they held by tradition or for which they had paid good money, or so they believed;

genealogies = family history

hereditary nobility = titles, power, & privileges are passed from parents to children

Monarchical fiat = just because the King wants to

King and Guilds and Universities

The monarchy had, for hundreds of years, extended special privileges to guilds which organized and supervised various crafts, ranging from the huge silk workers' guild of Lyons (which had 60,000 members) to the smaller guilds, such as stone-masons, furniture-makers, bakers, and the like. The monarch conferred on the guilds the authority to supervise their trades, and in return the monarch imposed certain licensing fees and taxes. A similar arrangement governed the monarch's relations with the universities. Many activities, and nearly all involving skilled labor, were subject to royal regulations and fees, and the guilds received in return the right to exclude non-guild members from practicing such tasks and trades.

guilds = organizations that supported skilled workers.

monopolies = only one company controls all the business.

King and the Cities

The monarchy had also long exempted urban dwellers from the usual land tax, the *taille*. City dwellers were obliged to pay some special taxes and fees, but in the main they were commonly exempted from many of the older feudal obligations derived from a mostly agricultural economy;

For example: if Microsoft was the only company allowed to make software that would be a monopoly.

King and the Royal Chartered Companies

The King also granted trading monopolies to certain companies, usually in return for payments made to the treasury.

revenues = to make money or the money made from doing business

Thus in the late 1780s, when confronted by a need to seek broad new sources of revenues, Louis XVI was obliged to call together "all" of France, as embodied in the traditional assemblage of its constituent elements: the three "estates." He preferred to conceive of France as a constellation of discrete bodies, each of whose orbit was regulated by the monarchy.

3

provincial = local

clergy = priests, bishops, etc... of the Catholic religion

vestments = fancy clothes worn for special occasions

deliberation = deciding of important issues

prominent = important

CONVENING THE ESTATES-GENERAL (MAY 1789)

After a complicated electoral process, conducted for each estate at the provincial level (see, for example, the section on "Lafayette"), the delegates convened at Versailles in May 1789. It was a memorable spectacle: the clergy processing in their vestments, the nobility in silk breeches, with gilt swords, gold waistcoats, and white-plumed hats; and the Third Estate following in sober plain black. But trouble surfaced over how the Estates-General would conduct their deliberations. The King had assumed that the estates would meet separately, and that each estate's collective voice would count as one; this ensured that on any matter on which a majority of the First and Second Estate were in agreement, the Third Estate would be outvoted, two to one. King Louis XVI's real task, he imagined, was to find a common ground between the first two estates.

But some prominent figures in the Third Estate, and even some in the First and Second as well, disputed this arrangement. In *What is the Third Estate?* the Abbé Sieyès [see-YEHZ] answered his own question with an extraordinary declaration: the Third Estate was "everything." The First and Second Estates represented small privileged interests at odds with the French people; only the Third Estate, Sieyès declared, represented the will of the nation. [See Censer and Hunt, <http://www.chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/>.]

The members of the Third Estate agreed from the outset not to conduct any votes or deliberations unless they met with the other estates and voted collectively, by head. Insofar as the delegates of the Third Estate more than equaled the combined First and Second Estates, and insofar as some members of the clergy and nobility sided with the Third Estate, this ensured that the Third Estate would control the proceedings. The First Estate voted, 188 to 46, to continue to meet separately, as did the nobility, the latter by a surprisingly close vote of 133 to 114. Subsequent negotiations among the estates for a collective meeting dragged on, with no resolution in sight. On June 10 the Third Estate voted, 493 to 41, to constitute itself as the sole collective deliberative body of France. Several days later, a handful of parish priests, delegates of the First Estate presented themselves for admission to the Third, amidst jubilant cries of approval. Two days later sixteen more clerical delegates slipped over to the Third. Then, by a scant majority, the First Estate voted to join with the Third.

No longer merely the Third Estate, that group declared itself to be the National Assembly, much as Sieyès had proposed earlier. Some members of the Assembly declared a moratorium on tax collection until the Assembly had authorized such payments.

The claims of the National Assembly unsettled the monarchy. You well recall the rumors back then that the King had deployed tens of thousands of troops in and about Paris and Versailles: even then the King's firebrand younger brother, the Comte d'Artois [cohn-dahr-twa], and the King's Austrian wife, Marie Antoinette, made no secret of their disdain for the changes that were sweeping France. Rumors of a royalist crackdown were seemingly confirmed when a royal edict ordered that the chambers of the National Assembly be locked.

Rumor had it that thousands of peasants, starving and armed with pikes, were moving into the outskirts, clamoring for food and preparing to attack. Within Paris, too, some

Concession = compromise

Abrogating = to limit or get rid of

(4)

sections were ready to explode, as high food prices and bread lines maddened thousands. In the evenings, throngs of poor gathered in the parks of Paris and listened to the speeches of radicals: Georges-Jacques Danton [dahn-tohn], a king's court lawyer with a voice that bellowed fury; Camille Desmoulins [day-moo-lawn], who stuttered in conversation but spoke flawlessly while addressing a multitude; and, more recently, Dr. Jean-Paul Marat, radical editor of *The People's Friend*.

Many expected the king's army to move into Paris at any moment, perhaps to protect the city from ruffians or perhaps to crush the National Assembly.

THE TENNIS COURT OATH (JUNE 20, 1789)

You were perhaps among those delegates of the National Assembly who proceeded to a nearby tennis court where you vowed not to disperse until "the constitution of the Realm and public regeneration are established and assured." Then, some 47 nobility joined. The "National" Assembly could now fairly claim to embody a substantial proportion of the traditional "Estates." Finally, the King appeared before the Assembly and proposed concessions on taxation. But what the King gave, he also seemed to withhold: if the "National Assembly" passed any legislation abrogating existing rights of the clergy or the nobility, either body could veto it; moreover, the King asserted a right to veto any action of the Assembly, a threat punctuated by the presence of thousands of soldiers outside. When the King subsequently dismissed Necker, a popular reformist minister of finance, rumors swept Paris: that the Comte d'Artois was organizing an army to march on the Assembly; that royalists were withholding bread so as to provoke riots that would bring about the downfall of the National Assembly; and that the Queen was fornicating with beasts and king's ministers alike. Concerned about anarchical violence breaking out in the city, the King ordered several thousand troops to surround Paris, included his feared Swiss and German mercenaries.

Then, on July 12 Desmoulins, standing on a table outside the Café de Foy, gave a speech that started the revolution. He concluded, "Tonight all the Swiss and German battalions will move from the Champ-de-Mars [a field in Paris] to cut our throats. We have only one recourse left—to take up arms!"

Riots erupted in one district after another and turned bloody. Sometimes mobs rampaged through the streets, threatening the houses of the rich and slaughtering aristocrats, clergy, and others. More than a few rowdy groups broke into gunsmiths' or sword-cutlers' shops. The royal officials of the city proved powerless to deal with the unrest, and another group increasingly filled the void and asserted the right to do so. These were the Electors for Paris, the lawyers, doctors, merchants and a few others who had been elected to choose delegates for the Third Estate. The Electors met at the Hôtel de Ville and formed an unofficial Permanent Committee to manage the affairs of the city. Similar groups were popping up in cities, towns, and villages throughout France. One of the first acts of the Permanent Committee of Paris was to call on the people to serve in a citizens' militia to restore order (and to protect the National Assembly and Paris from the king's troops). Most of the Electors, themselves prominent citizens, further decided that only those who had paid property taxes equal to three days' work would be eligible for this new military body. The Permanent Committee did not want to give the rabble more weapons.

5

THE FIRST JOURNÉE: THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE (JULY 14, 1789)

Fears of the expected, and long rumored, royal onslaught provoked several vividly memorable *journées* ("days" [JHOOR-NAY]). No one can forget the first. The sky was overcast, with a cold morning rain. Six royalist regiments from the eastern frontier had arrived on the outskirts of Paris, and then came another ten mercenary divisions. Here, it seemed, was the long-awaited royalist attack on the Hôtel de Ville, aimed to oust the Permanent Committee and doubtless proceed to Versailles to arrest the delegates of the National Assembly. Paris was swept by panic.

In nearly every neighborhood of Paris, crowds had seized the most prominent places—the churches. Now bells throughout the city tolled, attracting tens of thousands. At the Church of the Couvent des Cordeliers, Danton climbed upon a table and shouted above the din:

Citizens! Let us arm ourselves! Let us arm ourselves to repel the 15,000 brigands assembled in Montmartre, and the 30,000 military who are ready to descend on Paris, to loot the city and slaughter its inhabitants! . . . The sovereign people is rising against despotism!

A crowd of volunteers surged forward and soon the Battalion des Cordeliers had nearly 600 men. This group, joined by others from many other districts, moved toward the Hôtel de Ville. There the Permanent Committee called on the assembled groups to barricade the streets of Paris with carriages, carts, and furniture. It also instructed soldiers of the king's troops—especially the French Guard—to desert and report for service with the citizens' militia, which was taking defensive positions behind the barricades at the Hôtel de Ville. Within an hour, tens of thousands of Parisians had gathered there and began digging ditches in front of the barricades and fashioning weapons from iron grates and wooden posts. Few imagined that such weapons would repel the trained and well-armed soldiers of the King.

Some realized that firearms were kept at the soldiers' hospital, the *Invalides*, and within several hours some 40,000 people had surged onto its parade grounds. The Governor of the *Invalides* ordered his men to dismantle its cache of weapons—they refused—while he tried to buy time by negotiating with representatives of the mob. Finally, the mob pushed through the gates and clambered across the moat. The guards walked away from their cannon. (Royal officers commanding the troops refused to march their men from the barracks, because they feared that their men would more likely join the rioters than fire on them.) The crowd surged through the *Invalides*, gathering up some 28,000 muskets. But they found few cartridges and little gunpowder.

"There's gunpowder at the Bastille," someone shouted, and the crowd moved. Within minutes the huge assemblage, by now perhaps 60,000, brandishing muskets and pikes and clubs, was streaming toward the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. As the crowd passed through Saint-Antoine, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Paris, more people joined in. Then the torrent spilled toward the Bastille. Once a formidable fortress, with eight round towers and stone walls eight feet thick and eighty feet high, the Bastille had become an unimportant prison that held a handful of prisoners. Yet it had once imprisoned Voltaire and many regarded it as a symbol of the worst excesses of the *ancien régime*. And, as had been rumored, the Bastille held hundreds of barrels of gunpowder.

The Governor of the Bastille, the Marquis de Launay, had feared an attack such as this, for in recent weeks many of his soldiers had deserted. As the mob approached the Bastille, de Launay raised the drawbridges, ordered the cannon loaded, and prepared to drop tons of paving stones upon the besiegers. A delegation from the Permanent Committee arranged to meet with de Launay, who obligingly served them a meal. He also instructed his men to withdraw the cannon from the walls, lest they provoke the crowd. But he refused to surrender the king's fortress. When the cannon were pulled back from the walls, however, the crowd outside assumed that this was preparatory to their being fired. Tens of thousand of people surged over the moat and into the courtyard. Then the shooting began, and paving stones were hurled from the battlements. The citizens' militia fired back and some regular soldiers, defectors from the king's army, managed to bring cannon from the Invalides right up to the drawbridge doors. At this point, de Launay surrendered. When the doors opened, the mob went on a frenzy, slaughtering the defenders. Within minutes the heads of de Launay and his second-in-command had been stuck upon pikes, and were brandished on the celebratory procession back to the Hôtel de Ville.

Later that evening, the Permanent Committee voted to demolish the Bastille, stone by stone. The King, who had been hunting and retired early, was awakened with news of the fall of the Bastille. "Is this a rebellion?" he asked. "No," responded the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt. "It is a revolution." The King then sent word to the Third Estate: he would withdraw all of his troops from Paris. The National Assembly was saved.

THE FOURTH OF AUGUST DECREES (1789)

The National Assembly, still in Versailles, applauded the King's decision, as did the Permanent Committee in Paris, which decided to constitute itself more formally as the Commune of Paris. Bailly, head of the Permanent Committee, was elected Mayor of Paris and Lafayette was elected commander general of the citizens' militia, which he renamed the National Guard of Paris. Its uniforms were originally to include a cockade, to be attached to their hats, in red and blue, the colors of Paris; but Lafayette added white, the color of Louis XVI, forming the revolutionary tricolor: red, white, and blue.

The good will did not last. Louis refused to bring back the popular Necker. On July 16, the King met with his Ministers, the Queen, and his brothers; what transpired there is still debated in Paris. Rumor had it that the Comte d'Artois, a firebrand, wanted to order the royalist armies against the Commune and then against the National Assembly. The Queen evidently suggested that the royal family withdraw from Versailles to Metz, a military fortress in the northeastern frontier. When the War Minister doubted that the King's soldiers would protect him during a departure to Metz, Louis decided to ride out the storm in Versailles. What is beyond doubt is the fact that the National Assembly, working several blocks away in Versailles, began to write a constitution (the work that you seek to finish within the next few months).

The situation back in July 1789 was monumentally confused (as it remains today). The King was monarch. Sometimes government officials did as he commanded and sometimes not. Sometimes, and in some places, the King's intendants and his army

as citizens from birth. Perhaps most important for current events, the Declaration enshrined in law what had become since 1788 an unusually free freedom of the press. Almost overnight, scores of news sheets appeared in Paris, more than 400 in 1789 alone. Desmoulins now found his calling: as editor of a revolutionary broadsheet, first called the *Courrier of Brabant*, whose title was an obscure reference to the insurrection of a Belgian province. Then came the violent and even scatological rhetoric of Marat's journal, *L'Ami du Peuple* [The People's Friend].

THE JOURNÉE OF THE MARKET-WOMEN (OCTOBER 5, 1789)

Meanwhile, the King refused to accept either the Fourth of August Decrees or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. He maintained that such measures violated long-standing rights and obligations among the First and Second Estates. His obduracy was seemingly punctuated by an intensification of the bread crisis, which resulted in long lines and riots. On October 5, huge crowds of women at the central markets in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine began shouting for bread. Then bells were rung at the nearby Sainte-Marguerite church, and some 6,000 women—fishwives, market stall-keepers, prostitutes, and even well-dressed *bourgeois*—marched toward the Hôtel de Ville, where the Mayor and the leaders of the Paris Commune were attempting to administer the city. The women crowded around the National Guards, taunting, teasing, cajoling, and eventually disarming them. The women swarmed up the stairs and charged into the municipal offices, flinging papers and demanding bread. At the desperate insistence of the officials of the Commune, they agreed to leave. "On to Versailles," one woman cried and the others took up the chant.

Then ensued one of the most remarkable spectacles of the entire Revolution: Thousands of women pouring through the crowded streets of Paris, heading for Versailles, twelve miles away, to the palace of the King and the halls of the National Assembly. Along the way, they gathered up more women, and plenty of men, too. The throng bristled with muskets, swords, pikes, crowbars, bludgeons. The march took all day. When they arrived at Versailles, the palace shone brilliantly in the setting sun.

Mounted officials—of the Commune and of the monarch—had raced ahead to warn the King, who hastily conferred with his ministers. Many counseled him to flee Versailles; but Necker, returned to office, urged him to stay. Again, the King's officers were not sure that their military escort could be trusted to take him to safety.

As the mob of market-women approached the courtyard, the Bishop of Langres shouted, "Order! Order!"

"We don't give a fuck for order," one woman declared. "We want bread!"

The King reluctantly agreed to meet with a delegation and it was ushered into the palace. He told them that he would gather up all the bread at Versailles and distribute it to the group outside. Mollified, these delegates reported the King's proposal to the assemblage outside, but some denounced it. Probably they were agents of the Duc d'Orléans, a cousin of the King whom many thought to be exploiting the revolution to enhance his own monarchical claims. The women remained in the courtyard, shouting and chanting, while the troops who constituted the King's bodyguards, many of them Swiss mercenaries, watched with alarm as the shadows of the palace lengthened into evening.