

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Modern European History

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Unit 5 – Revolutions

#### The Revolution Begins

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the following handout, identifying any important vocabulary, terms, names, and/or events that you think might be historically important. Write content notes in the margins next to the important text that will help you remember the information. You may wish to highlight or underline the important text.

#### ***Why was the Estates General unable to make progress solving France's problems?***

The opening meeting of the Estates General took place on May 5, 1789. Each of the three Estates paraded in separately, wearing the clothing required by tradition. The First Estate (clergy) wore the robes of the clergy, the Second Estate (nobility) wore silk clothes, with gold cloth belts, swords, and white-plumed hats. The Third Estate (everyone else) were all in black.

The Estates General made little to no progress on the issues facing France. Much of its time was spent wrangling over whether each Estate would get one vote or whether each elected member of the Estates would get one vote, known as voting by head. A majority of the First and Second Estates opposed one vote per head, for though they represented a minority of delegates and of the French population, they hoped to preserve their ability to outvote the Third Estate, 2-1. The Third Estate, with six hundred delegates, saw an advantage to voting by head.

The Estates met separately and debated what steps to take. While the nobility met in private, the Third Estate opened their sessions to the public. The debates were often chaotic. For example, the moderator of the Third Estate was once knocked to the floor by a group of deputies rushing to request a chance to speak.

The Third Estate tried to get the other Estates to meet with them, but the other Estates resisted at first. A member of the Third Estate proposed that they call themselves the National Assembly and act on their own if the other two Estates would not join them. On June 19, the clergy voted to join the National Assembly.

#### ***What was the Tennis Court oath?***

King Louis XVI decided to call a meeting of all the Estates General for June 23, 1789 where he would chart a course forward and assert his authority as king. He planned to use the hall where the Third Estate met for the meeting; it was large enough to hold all the delegates of all of the Estates. The king ordered the hall locked and prepared for the joint session of the Estates.

When the delegates of the Third Estate arrived at their hall on the morning of June 20 and found it locked they reacted with anger. The king had not told the Estates what he was doing. The delegates feared the king planned to dissolve the assembly. They moved their meeting to a nearby indoor tennis court where they took an oath not to disband until a new constitution could be written.

### ***How did the king respond to the Tennis Court Oath?***

The king spoke to the full Estates General on June 23, surrounded by large numbers of soldiers. He proposed some reforms including trying to make the tax system fairer and ending arbitrary imprisonment. But he insisted that the three Estates continue to meet separately and that each have only one vote. He also said that the nobility and clergy had the right to veto any proposed changes to their privileges. He reminded the Estates that nothing they did was valid without his approval. He told the Estates to leave and resume meeting separately the next day and left the hall.

While the First and Second Estates filed out, the Third Estate remained as did some members of the clergy. When they were reminded that the king had ordered them to leave, they refused.

### ***The Fall of the Bastille***

The king chose not to order the army<sup>[SEP]</sup> to expel the delegates. But in the days that followed, he faced increasing turmoil and protests. Tens of thousands were on the streets in Paris intimidating and threatening those they saw as supporters of the Old Regime. Soldiers who had fired on rioters two months earlier now refused to help control the crowds.

On June 25, forty-eight nobles decided to sit with the National Assembly. Four days later the king changed course and decided to order the First and Second Estates to join the National Assembly. At Versailles, the king and the queen wept on their balcony as they were cheered<sup>[SEP]</sup> by adoring crowds, who<sup>[SEP]</sup> believed that the king truly<sup>[SEP]</sup> supported reform.

The revolution was not complete. In fact, it had just begun. While members of the National Assembly hoped finally to begin writing a constitution, popular unrest continued. Some members of the army in Paris mutinied. As a consequence, the government ordered a military force of about twenty thousand from the border regions to Paris. Some of these soldiers were mercenaries (soldiers from other countries who had been hired by the king). Most believed that the mercenaries would be less reluctant to use force against French people than French soldiers. Members of the assembly worried that they would be arrested or even killed. Many people believed that the troops would forcibly disband the assembly.

### ***What was the response to the king's decision to replace his ministers?***

In Paris, nerves were stretched taut by the presence of so many troops. The king's decision to replace four of his ministers with more conservative ones proved to be a breaking point that prompted a powerful reaction from the people. One of the fired ministers was Jacques Necker, who was popular with many because he supported keeping the cost of bread low.

The king fired his ministers on July 11, 1789. The public discovered this the next day, a Sunday, when most were not at work. Crowds gathered and were attacked by foreign cavalry (soldiers on horses). In

response, the crowds burned the toll stations around the city, which they associated with the high price of bread. Worried that the mercenaries would move against them, the people of Paris tried to get their hands on weapons wherever they could find them.

### ***Why did crowds attack the Bastille?***

The search for weapons led the crowds, who<sup>[SEP]</sup> had been joined by mutinous members of the army<sup>[SEP]</sup> to the gates of the Bastille.<sup>[SEP]</sup> The Bastille was a prison, but also Paris's largest arsenal of gunpowder. An initial attempt to break in was unsuccessful. When the crowds dragged a captured cannon to the gates of the prison, the governor of the Bastille decided to surrender. About one hundred Parisians died attacking the Bastille; only one defender died. Crowds killed the governor of the Bastille, put his head on a pike, and paraded it through the streets. The king's ministers told him he could no longer rely on the loyalty of his soldiers.

On July 15, the king told the National Assembly that he was ordering all troops withdrawn from Paris and agreed to work with the assembly. He also agreed to reappoint Jacques Necker as finance minister. His announcement was greeted with applause, cheers, and shouts of "long live the king."

The members of the Estates General were swept up in a tide of emotions. The fear of violence against them was temporarily replaced with patriotic fervor and hope. Nobles and clergy were now attending sessions of the assembly with members of the Third Estate. Newly renamed the National Constituent Assembly, it was now an integrated representative body of the three Estates.

When the king visited Paris on July 17, he accepted a red, white, and blue cockade<sup>[SEP]</sup> (a decorative knot of ribbons), which was the symbol of the revolution. There were 150,000 citizens carrying weapons on the streets of Paris. When they saw the king wearing the revolutionary cockade, they cheered him.

### ***What was the "Great Fear"?***

During the second half of July 1789, the insurrection that had torn through Paris spread to about two-thirds of France. This period, which would last into August, has become known as the "Great Fear."

Hunger and grain shortages drove many to desperation and violence. Rumors spread throughout the countryside among peasants that they would be attacked or their crops stolen by bandits. Peasants lashed out against the tax system, refusing to pay tithes and even burning the records that showed how much they owed the nobility. Many peasants suspected the nobility of hoarding grain and of hiring criminals to steal their crops. Others thought that the British government was paying to incite riots throughout France. Unrest spread to small towns and cities. In the city of Rouen, textile workers destroyed machines that they thought might replace them in the factories. Rumors flew. Fear spread.

In its first weeks of existence, the National Constituent Assembly faced severe challenges. For the time being, the delegates were united by hope and the desire for change. Nevertheless, the economic and political problems that had led to insurrection throughout France remained. The assembly had integrated the three estates into a single representative body. Now would come the challenge of fixing the problems facing France.

Members of the Constituent Assembly were proud they had integrated all the three Estates. Many shared a sense of optimism and hope for the future. But the task of constructing a new France would prove formidable.

Adapted and revised from "The French Revolution." *The Choices Program*. Accessed January 12, 2015.  
<http://choices.edu/resources/detail.php?id=196>