THE FRENCH REVOLUTION – Notes

I. Revolution – a sudden, radical change

i. Examples:
   - Intellectual Revolution
   - Scientific Revolution
   - Political and Social Revolution

ii. Difference between revolutionary and evolutionary.
   - Evolutionary is a process of gradual change

II. Old Regime was the traditional political and social system of France throughout the 1600’s

i. Characteristics:
   - **king is the absolute authority**
   - Power is centralized in the royal bureaucracy (gov’t departments administer Louis XIV’s policies).
   - Royal authority and rigid social structure

ii. **First Estate: (100,000 clergy)**
   - higher clergy who were nobles (live in luxury)
   - parish priests – commoners (simple hardworking life)
     - administered church, ran schools, kept birth/death records, cared for poor
     - clergy collected *tithes*: taxes levied on landowners
     - church owned vast amounts of property (1/5 the land) on which they paid no taxes
     - Services provided: Maintain religion, education, relief from poverty

iii. **Second Estate: (400,000 nobles)**
   - nobility (less than 2% of the population)
   - enjoyed great wealth and privilege
     - some were poor, but in defense of their traditional privileges would raise feudal taxes on the peasantry to compensate for rising prices.
   - special courts
   - many well paid offices reserved for nobles
iii. **Third Estate: (26, 000, 000)**
   a. The vast majority of French people were commoners belonging to the Third Estate.
   b. Included bourgeoisie (middle class), peasants and city workers.
   c. Bourgeoisie were a small group, but the most outspoken
      - Included merchants, manufacturers, lawyers, doctors, and shop keepers.
      - Resented privileges of the nobles
      - Criticized Old Regime because they believed the ideas of the Enlightenment – ideas of equality and social justice.
      - Peasants made up the largest group within the Third Estate

III. **France’s Financial Crisis - Three factors**
   i. poor harvests hurt the economy
   ii. regulations (surviving from the middle ages) hampered expansion of trade and manufacturing
   iii. most serious economic problem – huge debt the gov’t owed bankers.
       - Large amounts of debt from the wars of Louis XIV and XV
       - Louis XVI continued to borrow money to maintain Versailles and to continue to fight wars in Europe
       - Also borrowed to finance French support of the Amer. Rev.
   iv. Robert Turgot: first finance minister of Louis XVI
       - Eased financial crisis by controlling gov’t spending and reducing expenses at Versailles
       - Recommended major tax reform – taxing the nobles
       - Parliament were required to approve new tax laws, and since it was made up of nobles, they rejected Turgot’s suggestion
         - “All public financial burdens should be borne by the lower classes.”
       - Turgot dismissed by the king- In 1776 he leaves office warning the king, “Remember Sire, that it was weakness which brought the head of Charles I to the block.”
   v. 1786 the Banks refuse to lend more money to the French treasury.
   vi. 1787 and 1788 poor harvests cause lack of food and worsening economic crisis.
III. **Stages of Revolution**

**Stage One (Old Regime):** People of Third Estate dissatisfied with the heavy tax burden that was becoming worse because of growing economic that was developing through the 1770s and 1780s.

i. *Due to economic crisis, Louis XVI calls the Estates General to meet in May of 1789.*
   - *Estates General:* law making body before 1789 created in 1302.

ii. Louis hoped to win support for his economic reforms.

iii. Estates General had not met since 1614 and was unpredictable
   a. Reasons: Enlightenment and Philosophes

iv. **Structure of Estates General**
   a. *Deputies:* members of the Estates General who represent local assemblies.
   b. Local Assemblies drew up list of likes and dislikes called cahiers based on ideas of philosophes and democratic ideas
   c. Prior to 1789, each Estate met separately and had one vote. Often led to Third Estate being outvoted 2:1. Maintained establishment
   d. In 1789, Third Estate wants Estates General to meet together and each deputy to have an equal vote.
   d. First and Second Estate had 300 members each. Third Estate had 600 of it's own.

v. *Louis XVI locks out Third Estate*

vi. **Tennis Court Oath (June 20, 1789)**
   a. National Assembly
   b. deputies of Third Estate, reform minded nobles, lower clergy
   c. swore an oath not to disband until they had written a constitution
   d. Louis XVI reluctantly orders First and Second Estates to join them
   e. Peaceful first step
   f. Demonstrated three Estates could meet peacefully

vii. **National Assembly surrounded by troops of Louise XVI**
   a. Third Estate fears for lives
b. Peasants see there may not be relief from inflation, unemployment, and food shortages if King crushes National Assembly

viii. *Storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789)*
The king refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the National Assembly. He assembles his royal troops near Paris. Rumors of an attack by the king, an angry national assembly and a disgruntled and hungry mob spurred the crowds to storm the royal prison. The royal troops would eventually side with the mob.

a. Prison fortress in Paris that became a symbol of royal tyranny.
b. Bastille was used primarily for housing political prisoners.
c. Citizens of every class and profession, if for any reason deemed obnoxious to the royal court, were arrested by secret warrants.
d. Attack on Bastille seen as an attack on the injustice and inequality of Old Regime.

ix. “Great Fear” - The "Great Fear" occurred from July 20 to August 5, 1789 in Fr. at the start of the Revolution. Rural unrest had been present in France since the worsening grain shortage of the spring, and the grain supplies were now guarded by local militias as bands of vagrants roamed the countryside. Rumors spread among the peasantry that nobles had hired these vagrants to prey on villages and protect the new harvest from the peasants.

In response, fearful peasants armed themselves in self-defense against the imaginary marauders and attacked their landlords. Landlord property was ransacked, and documentation recording peasant obligations were destroyed. There were isolated incidents of violence against the aristocrats, but the peasants mostly wanted to destroy the records in which the feudal dues were recorded. Grain supplies were attacked and merchants suffered serious losses as peasants helped themselves to much needed supplies. The revolt spread across the country but gradually burned itself out as militias imposed law and order.
IV. **Stage Two: Reforms of the National Assembly- a shift in power from the Monarch to the aristocratic members of the Third Estate.**

i. August 4, 1789. Reaction to “Great Fear” leads National Assembly to take action.

ii. NA abolishes feudal customs, made all male citizens eligible for government and church positions

**iii. Declaration of the Rights of Man March 1789- basic democratic principles that would be the basis for the French Government.**

iv. **March on Versailles 1789 (October)**
   b. Crowd led by women march on Paris to protest food prices
   c. They discovered plans of the royal family to flee France and forced them to return.
   d. nationalistic symbols: tri-colour

v. **Religious Reforms**
   a. freedom of worship abolish privileges of Catholic Church
   b. 1790, Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Gives French Gov’t control of the church and allows citizens to elect bishops and priests
   c. To raise money, sells church lands which causes many Catholics to condemn Revolution

V. **Stage Three: Constitution of 1790 (Read Text pg 50) - Shift in power from the Aristocrats to the Bourgeoisie. Limits distinctions b/w clergy, nobles, and commoners.**

   a. France’s first constitution
   b. Limited monarchy with King being head of executive branch
   c. Legislative can veto King’s veto of laws
   e. Abolish feudal distinctions of clergy, nobles, and commoners
   f. France divided into 83 departments

VI. **Responses to First Three Stages of the French Revolution**

i. Few people happy with constitutional Monarchy

ii. Division between groups of revolutionaries.
   a. Radical revolutionaries wanted a republic
   b. Monarchists thought constitution went to far.
   - *Emigres*: Nobles who fled France and urged European rulers to stop revolutionaries in France
iii. Louis XVI flees in June 1791.
   a. arrested and brought back to Paris
   b. King reluctantly accepts constitution as he’s a prisoner of the Assembly
   c. October 1791, Assembly meets for the first time
   - Left (radical, far reaching changes. Center, those with views in b/w. Right, preserve tradition)

iv. Radicals split. Jacobins want rights for all male citizens to vote
   a. Led by Maximilien Robespierre
   b. Jacobins become dominant in the Legislative Assembly

VII. The Revolution Deepens

i. France at War
   a. The monarchs of Europe felt uneasy because the revolutionary ideas were spreading from France to other parts of Europe.
   b. Felt they needed to turn back revolution
   c. Revolutionary leaders want a war to unite people of France.
   d. Declare war on Austria, April 1792.

ii. Brunswick Manifesto
   a. Prussian Commander, Duke of Brunswick, sends warning to Paris to surrender peacefully or Austrian and Prussian troops will burn city.
   b. Revolutionary leaders will be “put to the tortures they deserve.”

iii. People of Paris unafraid.
   a. Angrily declare that no emigres or foreign troops would crush the revolution.
   b. All over France they rallied to defend the revolution

iv. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

v. Second French Revolution
   a. War causes high prices and food shortages.
   b. Angry Parisians and sympathetic troops from the provinces join in an uprising
   c. Aug 10, 1792 revolutionaries took over Paris City Government and establish new administration called the Commune.
   d. Revolutionary troops attack Tuileries where King and Family live
   e. Royal family escapes to the Legislative Assembly for protection
VIII. Stage Four: The National Convention and the Committee of Public Safety

i. Newly elected National Convention votes to abolish the monarchy and make France a Republic. The Reign of Terror – power shifting from the bourgeoisie to the working class.
   a. Radical Jacobins demand Louis be tried for treason.
   b. The Convention discovers letters that showed Louis was plotting with emigres to crush the revolution
   c. Louis XVI is executed.
   d. Later Marie-Antoinette is tried and executed for treason.

ii. Because of Domestic and Foreign threats the National Convention sets aside the Constitution, approved in 1793.
   a. Create the Committee for Public Safety
   b. Committee has nearly dictatorial power and wage a brutal campaign against the “enemies of France.”
   c. Known as the Reign of Terror (July 1793 – July 1794)

iii. Robespierre’s Republic of Virtue
   a. “our country assures the welfare of each individual and where each individual enjoys with pride and prosperity and the glory of our country.”
   b. He believed that the state must be ruthless against its enemies.

iv. Law of Suspects
   a. Declared that people suspected of being counter revolutionaries could be arrested for their conduct, their relations, their remarks or their writings.
   b. Law was vague which allowed revolutionary courts to imprison and condemn citizens on very little evidence.

v. Levee en masse meant that every French Man regardless of age or occupation was eligible to be drafted into the army.
   a. raise new French armies to fight in wars against neighbours

vi. The Law of Maximum imposed strict limits on prices and wages.
   a. rationed food and outlawed use of scarce white bread
   b. restrictions used to bolster the economy of the country

vii. The Reign of Terror was brought to an end when the citizens started questioning the need for constant execution at home.
   a. National convention orders Robespierre’s arrest, he was tried, convicted and executed.
   b. With his death the Reign of Terror ended.
IX. **Results of the Fourth Stage of the Revolution**

i. National Convention had abolished all remaining feudal dues and customs.
ii. It ended slavery in the French colonies
iii. It had confiscated the land of the emigres
iv. In 1795, the National Convention wrote another constitution that reflected the more conservative mood of the country.
v. B/w 1789 and 1794 French life had been transformed
   a. monarchy was gone, king was dead
   b. French society was more democratic
   c. Equality of all people
   d. All remaining feudal dues and customs were abolished
   e. Styles in fashion changed
   f. Playwrites and painters produced patriotic works
   g. Metric system established

X. **Stage Five: The Directory** – Strong military leaders (Napoleon) were helping the government control the revolutionaries. The power was shifting back to the bourgeoisie from the working class.

i. Directory included an elected legislature and an executive branch of 5 directors.
   a. Failed because 5 man executive could not function efficiently and corrupt deputies in the legislature bargained for political favours.
   b. Gov’t removed the controls on prices, so they rose sharply which caused poor workers to riot in Paris.

ii. Napoleon found many people were dissatisfied with the Directory.
   a. Because of his popularity he, two directors, and his troops overthrew the gov’t in 1799.
   b. He drew up a new constitution and named himself First Consul.