

1787-1789



*Salle de Jeu de Paume*  
(Indoor Tennis Court)  
Versailles

- August 1786      Controller-General Calonne suggests sweeping reforms to Louis XVI in attempt to avert bankruptcy; to avoid struggle with *parlements*, an Assembly of Notables is called
- Feb-May  
1787      Assembly of Notables meets, rejects all proposed reforms; Assembly dissolved and reforms sent to Paris *parlement*, which rejects them; *parlement* sent into exile but popular protest results in its recall; *parlement* demands that the King call the Estates-General
- August 1788      France suspends re-payment of loans; Estates-General called for May
- Jan. 1789      Sieyes publishes *What is the Third Estate?*
- spring 1789      assemblies elect representatives and write *cahiers*
- May 1789      King and Necker open the Estates-General; voting to be by order; representatives of the Third refuse to meet on that basis, eventually joined by some from First Estate in “the Commons”
- June 17, 1789      the Commons takes the name “National Assembly”
- June 20, 1789      Commons has to meet in Tennis Court; takes oath

- July 1-8, 1789 Many members of First and Second Estate join the Assembly; Louis XVI orders army to surround Paris and Versailles
- July 12, 1789 Louis XVI dismisses Necker; word of this reaches Paris and prompts variety of protests (speeches in public places, looting, etc.)
- July 14, 1789 A Paris crowd storms the Bastille Prison, looking for arms with which to defend itself against the army which is rumoredly about to attack; troops there largely refuse to fire on the crowd
- Paris electors call themselves the Paris Commune and elect a mayor (Bailly) and commander of the National Guard (Lafayette). Municipal government passes largely into hands of electoral districts; similar “municipal revolutions” happen in many French cities
- Great Fear* in the countryside
- August 4, 1789 meeting late into the night, the National Assembly votes to “abolish privilege”
- Oct. 5-6, 1789 crowd of Parisians marches to Versailles; in aftermath, Court and Assembly re-locate to Paris

## The Estates-General

why was it called to meet?  
with what consequences?

## The National Assembly and the storming of the Bastille

Versailles/Paris

elite/popular

political debate/crowd mobilization

## The “abolition” of privilege (night of August 4<sup>th</sup>)

why?

with what consequences?

## Court and Assembly move to Paris (Oct. 1789)

why?

with what consequences?

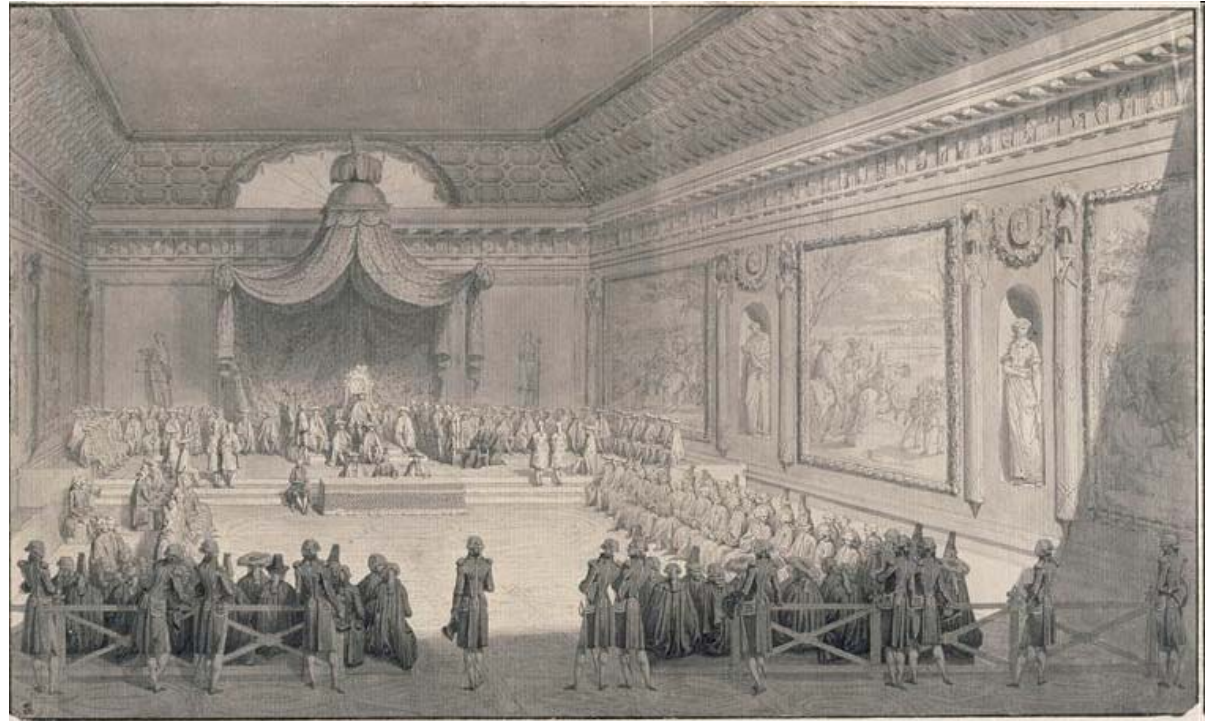


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Why was the Estates-General called?

L'ASSEMBLÉE DES NOTABLES.



*Citoyens assemblés par un Roy Citoyen, Vous ne trahirez point l'attente généreuse.*

“Citizens assembled by a Citizen King,  
You will not betray his generous expectations.”

old financial tricks no longer work

decades of overseas wars

appeal to “public” opinion  
--but who *is* “the public”?

Why was the Estates-General called?—What’s different about the 1787 crisis?

# First Meeting of the Estates-General in 175 Years

Estates-General: a meeting of representatives of the three French “estates”  
clergy, nobility, commoners

traditionally, voting was “by order”



Calling of the Estates-General: with what consequences?

## Abbé Sieyès and *What is the Third Estate?*



Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, 1748-1836

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.



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

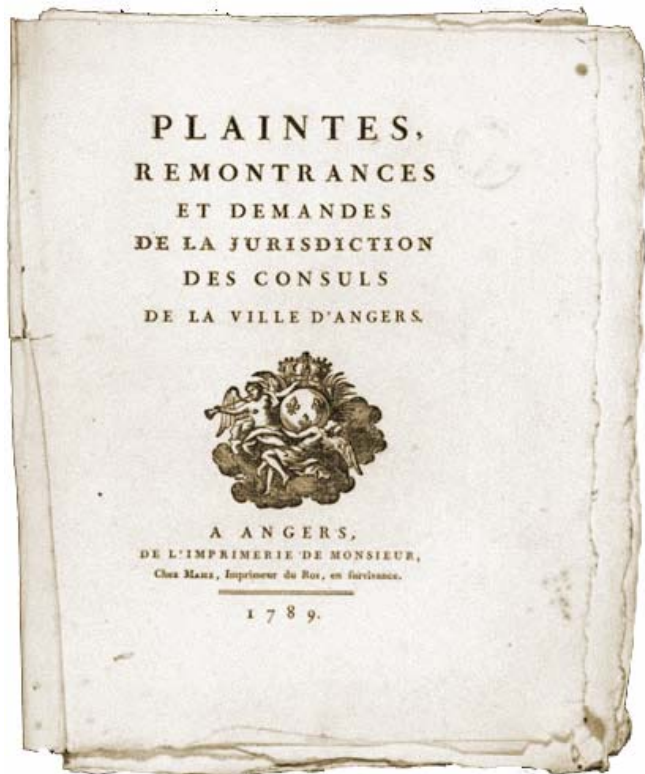
It is not possible in the nation to find a place for the caste of nobles. I know that there are countless individuals whose infirmities, incapacity, incurable laziness, or the weight of bad habits render strangers to the labors of society. ... But the worst possible arrangement would be where not just isolated individuals, but a whole class of citizens should take pride in remaining motionless in the midst of general movement, and should consume the largest part of the products without bearing any part in its production.

The noble order is not less estranged from the generality of us by its civil and political prerogatives.

*What is the Third Estate?*

abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès

January 1789



“Sire, King, if only you knew what was happening in France and what misery and poverty your humble people are suffering...”

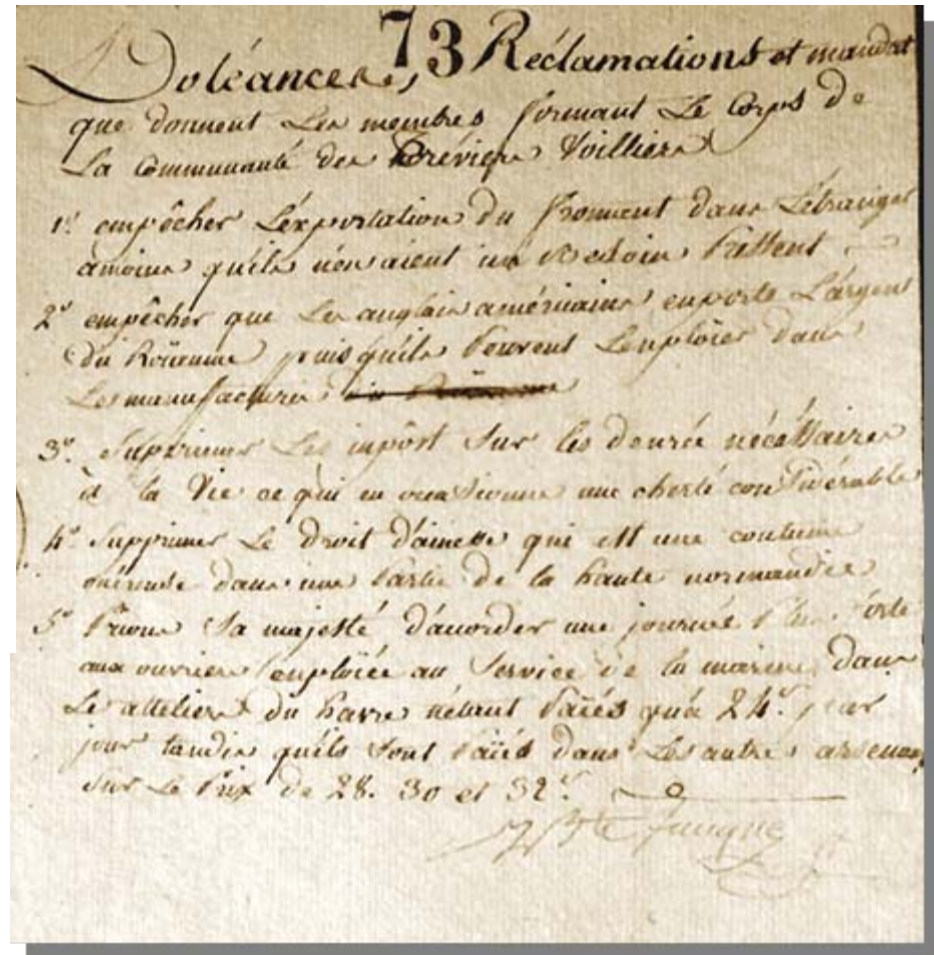
*cahier* of the Third Estate of Angoulême

*cahiers de doléances*—“grievance notebooks”  
written instructions to delegates  
“to do” lists

30,000-60,000 drafted across France

many final versions based on model  
circulated by the Society of Thirty  
(liberal noblemen including Lafayette,  
de la Rochefoucauld, members of the  
Paris *parlement*)

1. prohibit export of grain
2. prohibit the English and the Americans from taking money out of the country
3. "suppress taxes on necessary goods, because they cause notably high prices"
4. suppress the "rights of the eldest" (all family property inherited by oldest son)
5. increase the pay of naval workers in Le Havre, who only get 24 sous per day, whereas in other places they get 28 or 30 sous per day



cahier des doléances from the Master Sailmakers, Le Havre (winter 1789)

Calling of the Estates-General: with what consequences?





deputies from Brittany

Bailly

Sieyes

Robespierre

Mirabeau

Barère

SERMENT DU JEU DE PAUME.

Dom Gerle (not actually there)  
abbé Grégoire  
Rabaut Saint Etienne

nineteenth-century engraving  
based on Jacques Louis David's unfinished painting



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

June 20, 1789  
Versailles

political elite  
demands to write a constitution  
“no taxation without representation”



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

July 14, 1789  
Paris

ordinary Parisians  
looking for weapons  
create city-based militia  
(National Guard)

# The night of August fourth

55 or more proposals

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*

## Anxiety

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

Idealism and the “heat of the moment”



What is privilege? What is property?

# The Event: October 5-6, 1789

Flanders Regiment rumored to have torn up national colors

Women's demands:

"We need bread, not laws"

"The baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy" (Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, the Dauphin)

Skirmishes between King's Guard and Paris National Guard

Court and Assembly move to Paris  
King accepts Declaration of Rights  
20 deputies quit the Assembly



Power dispersed  
monarchy (King can veto Assembly's decrees)  
National Assembly  
city governments  
Paris electoral districts, or "sections"  
rural unrest

"Public opinion"—where to find it?  
National Assembly?  
the press?  
the sections?  
the streets?  
the countryside?

And what about the financial crisis?



"Louis XVI, King of the French and Restorer of Liberty"

## Credits

1. Indoor Tennis Court (*salle de jeu de paume*), Versailles; photo credit unknown.
4. Lady's fan depicting the Estates-General; 1789? [www.photo.rmn.fr](http://www.photo.rmn.fr)
5. "The Assembly of Notables at Versailles in 1787," pen and ink drawing; [www.photo.rmn.fr](http://www.photo.rmn.fr)
6. "The Assembly of Notables," anonymous engraving; [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)  
photo from the website of the Archives municipales of Le Havre
8. [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)
11. photo from the website of the Archives municipales of Le Havre; <http://archives.ville-lehavre.fr>
15. "Night of 4-5 August 1789, or Patriotic Delirium," [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)
17. "To Versailles, to Versailles!" engraving (Paris, 1789); [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)
18. "Louis XVI, King of the French," engraving (Paris, 1789); [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)