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Date _____

The French Revolution

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b''

Before the revolution, France's society was divided into three social classes. The First Estate was made up of members of the clergy, or church leaders. Nobility and royalty comprised the Second Estate, and the Third Estate included the bourgeoisie, or middle class, and peasants. But here was the problem: Despite their wealth and privilege, the First and Second Estate were exempted from paying taxes, and the majority of taxes were levied upon the Third Estate, which made up 98% of the population.

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During the Estates General, each estate only got one vote, meaning 98% of France's population could be outvoted by the other 2%. That's exactly what happened: the First and Second Estates voted to keep their privileges, putting the financial burden on the Third Estate. This unfair representation outraged the Third Estate, and they decided to break away from the Estates General to create their own National Assembly, marking the beginning of the French Revolution.

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Notes

2. b''

Notes

Social unrest continued to grow, and rumors that Louis XVI was preparing a military coup to suppress the National Assembly spread. On July 14, 1789, a crowd of Parisians stormed the Bastille, a prison in Paris often viewed as a symbol of tyranny. They seized weapons and freed prisoners as a protest against the king. Leaders of the National Assembly wrote a document called The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This document, like the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence, used many ideas from the Enlightenment. The Assembly aimed to guarantee liberty, property security, and resistance to oppression. The document set up a representative government. The bourgeoisie and peasants of the Third Estate would have more power in this new government. The nobles of the Second Estate didn't like the idea of a representative government. It meant that they would lose power. Many noble people fled France because they feared that those who had threatened the king would threaten them next. They were right: After the storming of the Bastille, the French countryside became a dangerous place. Some revolutionaries attacked the estates and manors of the rich. July through August of 1789 was known as the Great Fear.

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During this violent time, one political group rose to power—the Jacobins. The Jacobins were a radical group of revolutionaries led by Maximilien Robespierre. Robespierre was influenced by Enlightenment thinker, Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he believed that people should be governed by the general will. Robespierre and the Jacobins were committed to keeping the French Revolution alive and opposed the French monarchy. They took drastic measures against people they viewed as a threat to the revolution. Louis XVI attempted to flee France with his family in 1791 but the Jacobins captured and brought them back to Paris. The king's unsuccessful flight further solidified the perception that he was untrustworthy and plotting against the revolution. This eventually led to Louis XVI being charged with treason and publicly executed on January 21, 1793, officially marking the end of the French monarchy and the beginning of the French Republic. During the 10-month period known as the Reign of Terror, thousands more were killed. But on July 27, 1794, Robespierre himself was arrested and executed.

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The death of Robespierre gave Napoleon Bonaparte, a respected military general, an opportunity to rise to power. In 1799, he launched a coup d'état, replacing the government with a consulate, which was supposed to reflect the will of the people. But in reality, Napoleon had absolute power. He appointed himself as France's First Consul, officially ending the French Revolution and starting the Napoleonic era.

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