Causes of the French Revolution

The Enlightenment
- Government views different with new ideas
- Criticism with old regime
  - Against Absolutism
  - Against privileges for nobles
  - Against clergy
- Ancien Régime
  - “Old Regime”
  - Before French Revolution

Social Structure
- System of classes
  - Called ‘Estates’
    - 1st Estate – The Clergy
      - Control religion
      - Control schools
      - Control charity
      - Censorship
      - Highly privileged
        - 1% of population but controls 20% of best arable land
        - No taxes
          - “free gift” to the king
          - Gift of money
            - Not much but paid instead of taxes
        - Collect tithe
          - Everybody paid 10% of their income to the church
      - Upper clergy
        - Archbishop
        - Bishops
        - Cardinals
        - Closely connected to king
      - Lower Clergy
        - Priests
        - Took care of the daily lives of the people
        - Fairly poor
      - Primogeniture
        - Law that dates back to middle ages
        - First son inherits everything
        - Second son gets nothing
          - Becomes clergy or joins military
        - Girls get dowry
    - 2nd Estate – The Nobles
      - Aristocrats
        - Two kinds of nobles
          - “Noble of the Sword”
            - Born into the nobility
“Noble of the robe”
- Made into nobles by promotion or buying titles

- Equally privileged
  - 1.5% of population but controls 20% of arable land
  - Paid to taxes
    - Collected fees
      - Feudal dues
    - Did not pay ‘taille’
      - Tax on land

- Influenced government
  - Controlled army
  - Controlled courts
    - Parlement

- Influenced church

3rd Estate – The Bourgeoisie and Commoners
- Everybody else
  - 98% of the population
  - Included bourgeoisie, peasants, urban workers, sailors, beggars, merchants, artisans, bankers
- Could buy a title of nobility if you are lucky
- All paid taxes
  - Tithe (church)
  - Taille (land)
  - Feudal dues (nobles)
- Did all the work
- Better off than most of the rest of the peasants in Europe

Incompetent and Unpopular Monarchy
- Louis XVI
- Socially awkward
  - Personality
    - Clumsy
    - Awkward
      - Difficult for him to make friends
  - Shy
    - Avoided people
  - Oblivious
    - Indecisive
      - Did not want to hurt feelings people
    - Unaware of new ideas
      - Did not pay attention to Enlightenment
      - Well intentioned by not very smart
    - Did not know what was going on
      - Oblivious to needs and fears of the people
- Absolutist
  - Divine Right
- Narrow-minded
  - Incapable of compromising
  - Did not listen to advisors
- **Marie Antoinette**
  - Hapsburg
    - Foreigner
  - Equally clueless
    - “Let them eat cake” (?)
  - Louis spent more time attending to her and children
    - Bored with government and state affairs
- **Advisors**
  - Charles Alexandre de Calonne
    - Attempted reform
      - Wanted to do away tax exemptions for upper classes
      - Forced to leave the country
      - Returned in 1802
  - Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne
    - Elected president of Assembly of notables
    - Served as finance minister
      - Fought with nobility and monarchy
  - **Jacques Necker**
    - Finance minister
    - *Compte rendu au roi*
      - “Report to the King”
      - Summary of government income and expenditures
      - Originally meant to show finances were not that bad
    - Cooked the books
      - Trying to hide £520 million debt
        - Over $7 Billion in today’s money
      - Mostly owed to pay off American Revolution
    - Advocated doubling representation of 3rd Estate
      - Did not matter for voting system

**Earlier Revolutions**
- **Glorious Revolution**
  - 1688 England
  - Successful rebellion of Parliament over monarchy
    - Gave French hope of similar revolt
      - Increased power of nobility
- **American Revolution**
  - 1776 North America
  - Successful rejection of monarchy
    - Complete removal of power of king
  - French soldiers
    - Served in America throwing off one king in support of another
    - Brought revolutionary ideas back with them to France
  - Very Expensive

**Growth of the Bourgeoisie**
- 3rd Estate
Growing very fast
· ‘Nouveau Riche’
· Educated
  ▪ Well-read ideas of Philosophes
· Wanted reforms
  ▪ Resented privileges of 1st and 2nd estates

Bad Harvests
- 1787, 1788, 1789
- Food shortages
  o Causes unrest in the population
  o Brought the poor into the discussion

Government Bankrupt
- Expenses exceeded revenues
  o Necker attempted to spin into good light
  o Deficit spending
- Revenue
  o Only 3rd estate paid taxes
    ▪ Least able to pay
- High costs of war
  o Louis XIV and American Revolution
- Lead to meeting of Estates General

Meeting of the Estates General
- Opening of Pandora’s Box
- Old legislative government
  o Had not been called in 175 years
- Louis XVI
  o Forced to call it because he needed money
- Traditional voting by house
  o Each housed had one vote
    ▪ 1st Estate - Clergy
    ▪ 2nd Estate – Nobility
    ▪ 3rd Estate – Commoners
    ▪ Always 2 to 1