The French Revolution

I. France Becomes a Focus
   A. European leaders all imitated the French fashion, manners, economics, and government
   B. France seemed stable until the revolution broke out

II. Background to the Revolution
   A. Conditions actually were not worse than the rest of Europe (better than some
      1. Government (absolute monarchy - somewhat feudal provinces)
         a. king appoints all ambassadors, judges, ministers, & generals
         b. could have anyone imprisoned without trial
      2. Three Estates (rigid class system)
         a. First Estate - clergy
            1. upper clergy often were nobles appointed by the king
            2. lower clergy often were commoners
         b. Second Estate - nobility
            1. hereditary nobles spent time at court idle and in luxury
            2. wealthy middle class who bought their titles
         c. Third Estate
            1. professionals - merchants, financiers, etc. - best educated
            2. tradespeople & artisans
            3. factory workers & laborers
               a. constant hunger
               b. constant threats of unemployment
            4. peasants
               a. small, primitive farms
               b. small yields with common famines
   B. Widespread discontent because of serious financial problems
      1. Unequal tax burdens
         a. 1st & 2nd Estates exempt from most taxes
         b. Church takes 10% of incomes as a tithe
         c. nobles take rent from peasants
         d. direct taxes, like an income tax, taken from individuals
            (half a peasant’s income)
         e. indirect taxes, like sales tax
      2. Legal inequality
         a. nobles only tried by special courts
         b. peasants tried by lords and leading nobles
         c. kings appointed judges
         d. lettre de cachet - letter to arrest without trial or explanation
   C. Incompetent rulers after Louis XIV in the Old Regime
      1. Louis XIV died in 1715 and left huge debts
      2. Louis XV was intelligent but unstable
         a. enjoyed strangling birds, went days without speaking, haunted
            by fears of death and hell
         b. cared little for state affairs & let others rule for him
         c. Madame de Pampadour influenced King to have lavish parties &
            to build massive structures
      3. Louis XVI comes to power in 1774
         a. no initiative, courage, or self-confidence & often bewildered and
            indecisive
         b. Marie Antoinette was arrogant, thoughtless, & extravagant
III. Eve of Revolution
   A. Peasants’ discontent
      1. hated their tax burden (1st & 2nd Estates exempt)
      2. poor harvests in 1788 and 1789
   B. Bourgeois members of 3rd Estate frustrated
      1. well-to-do and well-educated
      2. no way to move up social ladder
      3. stimulated by enlightened philosophies
   C. Economic problems
      1. France, though richest in Europe, had huge debts
      2. huge sums spent on armies and courts
      3. government borrowed from rich bankers
   D. 1st and 2nd Estates refused to share tax burden
      1. 1786 - bankers refuse to lend more money
      2. France goes bankrupt
      3. Top Estates call a General Estates Meeting to dominate it, keep their
         privileges, and appear to abide by popular rule

IV. Meeting of Estates General (Meeting)
   A. May of 1789 in Versailles
      1. 3rd Estate demanded a constitution, representative assembly, freedom
         of speech and press, and trial by jury
      2. 3rd Estate asks for equal taxation
   B. Stalemate
      1. Nobles wanted each Estate to have one vote (2 to 1 margin for nobles)
      2. 3rd Estate wanted each person to have a vote (overwhelming majority)
   C. June 17
      1. parish priests move to 3rd Estate and declared themselves
         National Assembly
      2. first act of the revolution

V. Fall of the Bastille (symbol of Old Regime’s political abuses)
   A. Louis XVI assembles troops in Versailles and Paris
      1. citizens riot
      2. troops mutiny
   B. July 14, 1789
      1. only seven prisoners in Bastille at time (thought to be more)
      2. Bastille leveled
      3. becomes an Independence Day of sorts
   C. Louis XVI gives in and removes troops
      1. Nobles begin leaving France (including King’s brothers)
      2. thousands leave France

VI. Great Fear in late July and August
   A. Peasants and townspeople feared the nobles would destroy gains of
      revolution
      1. armed themselves
      2. wanted to destroy records of feudal dues
      3. burned many manor homes
   B. August 4 - Nobles gave up having serfs, manorial courts, & other feudal rights
   C. August 26 - Declaration of the Rights of Man
      1. Freedom of speech, press, religion
      2. Rights to liberty, property, security “Liberty, Equality & Fraternity”
      3. Laws must be followed in arrests and trials
VII. Moving to Paris
   A. Thousands out of work & Food was scarce and high priced
      1. October 5 - crowd of women assemble in Paris
      2. 7,000, mostly women, march to Versailles
      3. Royal family forced to go to Paris with the mob
         a. “We have the baker, and the baker’s wife, and the baker’s little boy!”
         b. Royal family never sees Versailles again
   B. Constitution accepted by Louis XVI in September of 1791
      1. King regretted the signing and Marie Antoinette influenced him
         a. convinces him to flee France
         b. Louis XVI recognized and they were arrested and sent to Paris
     2. Commoners viewed the royals as disloyal and traitorous

VIII. End of the Monarchy
   A. September Massacres (Sept. 2 - 8, 1792)
      1. Foreign troops threaten invasion
      2. Rumors spread of imprisoned aristocrats and some priests that could kill families of the patriots
         a. Journalist Jean Paul Marat aroused people’s fear and rage
         b. Sept. 2 - murder of priests being taken to prison
         c. Mobs held courts immediately at prisons
         d. Guilty people immediately put to death
         e. 1,000 people executed
   B. Sept. 21, 1792 - French monarchy abolished
      1. King accused of treason
      2. Trial of Louis XVI put on trial in Dec. 1792 (spectacle)
      4. Louis XVI bravely dies on Jan. 21

IX. The Reign of Terror (July 1793 - July 1794)
   A. France at war with Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, Britain, Spain, Prussia, and Italy
   B. Committee of Public Safety formed
      1. Led by men including Georges Jacques Danton (orator) & Maximilien Robespierre (ruthless idealist)
      2. Military setbacks, unemployment, high prices, food shortages
      3. The “single will”
         “Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice. It is less than a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to the most urgent needs of the fatherland.” - Robespierre
   C. Arrests begin
      1. Arrests made on those favoring a monarchy or those who do not constantly show their allegiance to the revolution
      2. 500,000 arrested during this year
      3. 17,000 received a death sentence (up to 40,000 overall died)
      4. Another 10,000 executed without trial
         a. guillotine
         b. boats with prisoners sunk
         c. shootings
         d. prison deaths (conditions)
      5. Charlotte Corday (killed Marat), Marie Antoinette, Louis XV’s mistress, 21 leaders expelled from the Convention, mayor of Paris, Antoine Lavoisier (father of modern chemistry)
      6. Danton thinks things go too far & is killed by the guillotine with 15 others
D. July 26, 1793 - Robespierre demands a “final purification”
   1. Accused of setting up a dictatorship
   2. Tried and executed on July 27

E. Terror’s Successes
   1. Ends riots and rebellions
   2. Titles of nobility abolished (“Citizen” & “Citizeness”)
   3. Trousers worn instead of breeches
   4. Women wore clothing of ancient Greece and Roman
   5. Patriotic spirit & a draft began
   6. King’s army executed or fled

F. Year I was September 22, 1792