

# French revolution social groups assignment

[History](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Identify the major social groups in France on the eve of the 1789 Revolution. Assess the extent to which their aspirations were achieved in the period from the meeting of the Estates General (1789) to the Declaration of the Republic (1792). By the end of the 18th century, the social classes in France each had distinct characteristics and goals. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd Estate had different needs, heavily influenced by their individual subdivisions and place on the social scale. As progress was made in efforts of the Revolution, each social group achieved their aspirations to different extents.

The first and highest group on the social scale in France was the 1st Estate, or the clergy. Despite making up no more than 1% of the population, the clergy had possession of approximately 10% of the land. The clergy was exempt from taxes, rather paying a "voluntary gift" to the government every 5 years. With many decisions regarding the nation in their hands, the clergy did not have the same goals as the rest of the population, but their dissatisfaction with the absolute monarchy made them vital players later on for the other social classes. The next group on the social scale was the 2nd Estate, composed of the nobles.

Like the clergy, the nobles made up a small percentage of the population, adding up to approximately 400,000 people, or 2% of the people of France. The noble's position in the 2nd Estate provided them with more rights, including exemption from taxes, and ownership of 20% of the land in France. Throughout the noble class, more distinct subdivisions can be observed. The class was split into 2 major groups; the nobles of the robe, who purchased their place in the hierarchy, and the nobles of the sword, who had hereditary

power and some anorial rights from a feudal system that dated back to the Middle Ages.

In a ddition to these, many nobles held “ honorable” rights, giving them permission to do things such as have possession of a swor d. The clear subdivisions within the noble class left them with different degree of freedom, and thus, different goals. Nearly 1/3 0 f the nobles recognized the great need for change in the political, economic, and social systems of France. Their access to educatio n and wealth provided the nobles with the power to change these institutions as the Revolution progressed. The final and largest social group was the 3rd, or General Estate.

Composing a pproximately 97% of the French population, the 3rd Estate was made of a large mix of various groups ranging everywhere from lav. vyers to artisans, unskilled laborers, and peasants. These people all held one thing in common that joine d them together, being that they were simply not of the clergy or noblemen. The majority of the 3rd Estate was made of poor fam ers, many of whom were on the brink of starvation. It was these people who needed and desired the most change in the French i nstitutions, as they, despite being incredibly poor, ere forced to pay all of the nation’s taxes, while holding very few rights.

It wa s the General Estate, which had not been called since 1 614, that wished to be joined into 1 group with the nobles and clergym en so that progress could be made. All 3 of the groups shared one main goal: to eliminate the absolute rule of the king and r eplace it with a constitutional monarchy, with liberties guaranteed by law. Because the Estates General

had not been called for 175 years, not many people knew how these goals were to be executed. In an effort to eliminate the imbalance, those who wished for change asked that the Estates be joined into one house.

When the Parliament of Paris disagreed, the middle class, or bourgeoisie of the 3rd Estate, were angered. In protest, 1200 delegates from all 3 Estates paraded into Versailles in May of 1789. The events following would dramatically complicate the circumstances. On June 17th of 1789, priests from the 1st Estate joined the 3rd, giving the new group the title of National Assembly. 3 days later, the National Assembly was forced to move the location of their meeting. When the group settled in an indoor tennis court, they swore on the Oath of the Tennis Court that they would not leave, remaining united until a new Constitution was created.

By this time, the French peasants neared starvation as the price of bread rose dramatically. In fear of government advances regarding the matter, the people of Paris joined together and marched to Bastille on July 14th, in search of arms. The fort surrendered, and the casualties suffered at long last broke the monopoly held by the national army, thus protecting the National Assembly from its demise, meeting the goals held by the lower class. Following the surrender at Bastille, protests ensued nationally in rebellion of the national absolutist government that