

## The French Start Out to Make a Small Revolution and End Up Making a Big One

### I. Brief Historiographical Survey (Four Major Interpretations)

- A. Senseless Violence and Destruction
  - Edmund Burke, *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, 1790
- B. Rise of Liberty: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*
  - Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 1837
- C. Marxist, Class Struggle
  - Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, 1939
- D. Revisionist
  - William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 1980

### II. Myths and Realities of Its Origins

#### A. Political

1. Despotic Rule of the Bourbon Dynasty?
2. Illogical Character of French Government?
3. Wars of the French Kings?
4. Lack of Effective Leadership at Crucial Times

#### B. Social and Economic

1. Rise of the Middle Class and Their Opposition of Mercantilism?
2. Survival of Privilege?
3. Inequitable System of Taxation?
4. Inability to Solve the Credit Crunch
5. Bad Harvests during 1780's

#### C. Intellectual

1. Contribution of Philosophes?
2. American Revolution?
3. Education
  - a. Grub Street Writers — Scandal and Slander
  - b. Lawyers and Civil Servants

### III. Significant Results

- A. Medical Reforms
- B. Relatively Efficient and Centralized Tax System
- C. Reform of Legal Code — Equality Before the Law
- D. Nationalism — Ideology That Integrated Society from Top to Bottom
- E. Metric System of Measurement

James Burke, *Social Impact of New Medical Knowledge*, part 1

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) — hospitals  
Madame Helvetius (1719–1800) — salons  
Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis (1757–1808)  
Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) — infinitesimal calculus  
Fredrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854) — *Naturphilosophie*  
Marie François Xavier Bichat (1771–1802) — *Treatise on Membranes* (1800)  
Pierre-Simon Marquis de Laplace (1749–1827) — probability theory  
Napoleon I Bonaparte (1769–1821)

### Population of France in 1789

|                |                                 |                  |       |
|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-------|
| First Estate:  | Clergy                          | 135,000          | 0.5%  |
| Second Estate: | Nobility                        | 400,000          | 1.6%  |
| Third Estate:  | Bourgeoisie                     | 1,000,000        | 3.9%  |
|                | Non-agricultural workers        | 2,000,000        | 7.8%  |
|                | Farmers (landowning and tenant) | 5,000,000        | 19.6% |
|                | Sharecroppers                   | 11,000,000       | 43.1% |
|                | Day Laborers                    | 5,000,000        | 19.6% |
|                | Serfs                           | <u>1,000,000</u> | 3.9%  |
|                |                                 | 25,500,000       |       |

### Those Executed in Paris During the Terror (1793–1794)

|                    |            |     |
|--------------------|------------|-----|
| Clergy             | 980        | 7%  |
| Nobility           | 1158       | 8%  |
| Upper Middle Class | 1964       | 14% |
| Lower Middle Class | 1488       | 11% |
| Working Class      | 4389       | 31% |
| Peasants           | 3961       | 28% |
| No class given     | <u>200</u> | 1%  |
|                    | 14,140     |     |

from: J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, New York, 1945, p. 93.