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## Describe the three estates into which french society was divided in 18th century

1774, King Louis XVI ascended the throne of France at the age of 20. He was married to Marie Antoinette and led an extravagant life. He decided to support the American War of Independence and hence increased France's debt to over 3 billion Livres. The 18th century French society was divided into three estates. The first estate consisted of the clergy. The 18th century French society was divided into three estates. The first estate consisted of the clergy. The second estate comprised the nobility while the third estate, which formed about 97% of the population, consisted of the merchants, officials, peasants, artisans and servants. The clergy and nobility did not have to pay any taxes. It was only the third estate that paid taxes. A part of third class called the middle class was part of the third estate. This group consisted of educated people such as teachers, lawyers, artisans and merchants. They started to question the privileges being enjoyed by the nobility. French Society in the late 18th Century was divided between distinct classes or groups in society. At the top of society was Louis XVI, the absolute monarch of France. He believed that his authority to rule came from God and that any decision that Louis XVI made had to be obeyed by everyone within France.In the 1780's the population of France numbered about 24,700,000, and it was divided into three estates or orders. The estate to which a person belonged was very important because it determined that person's rights, obligations and status. Usually a person remained in one estate for his or her lifetime, and any movement from upwards in the estate system could take many generations. This is the period before the French Revolution and is a time known as the Ancien Regime.The First Estate was made up of the Roman Catholic clergy who numbered about 100,000 in the 1780's. The clergy included people such as: monks, nuns, parish priests and bishops. The clergy was divided in that the higher church positions, like bishops, were held by members of the nobility, while positions in lower clergy were often held by members of the peasant class. The Church had many privileges, including the collection of tithes. Tithes are one-tenth of a person's income which is formally taken in support of the church and clergy. Also, the Church did not pay land taxes, even though it owned about 6% of the land and was very wealthy. The Second Estate consisted of the French nobility, which numbered about 400,000 people. The nobles owned about 20% of the land and had many feudal privileges. For example, they were exempt from paying many taxes and were allowed to collect dues from the peasants. The nobility occupied most of the powerful positions in the army, Church and government.All other people in France, about 98% of the population belonged to the Third Estate. This group included: merchants, lawyers, poor laborers, and ordinary peasants. They paid most of the taxes collected by the government but were generally looked down upon by the nobility. They resented the power of the Church and the nobility. Something went wrong. Wait a moment and try again. Q. The 18th century French society was divided into which of the following? Answer: [C] Three states Notes: The 18th century French society was divided into three groups. These groups were referred to as estates. The three types of groups were - First estate, Second estate and Third estate. Something went wrong. Wait a moment and try again. A common depiction of the Third Estate shouldering the heavy burden of the other two Estates Before the revolution, French society was divided into three orders or Estates of the Realm – the First Estate (clergy), Second Estate (nobility) and Third Estate (commoners). With around 27 million people or 98 per cent of the population, the Third Estate was by far the largest of the three – but it was politically invisible and wielded little or no influence on the government. Diversity As might be expected in such a sizeable group, the Third Estate boasted considerable diversity. There were many different classes and levels of wealth; different professions and ideas; rural, provincial and urban residents alike. Members of the Third Estate ranged from lowly beggars and struggling peasants to urban artisans and labourers; from the shopkeepers and commercial middle classes to the nation's wealthiest merchants and capitalists. Despite the Third Estate's enormous size and economic importance, it played almost no role in the government or decision-making of the Ancien Regime. The frustrations, grievances and sufferings of the Third Estate became pivotal causes of the French Revolution. The peasantry Peasants inhabited the bottom tier of the Third Estate's social hierarchy. Comprising between 82 and 88 per cent of the population, peasant-farmers were the nation's poorest social class. While levels of wealth and income varied, it is reasonable to suggest that most French peasants were poor. A very small percentage of peasants owned land in their own right and were able to live independently as yeoman farmers. The vast majority, however, were either feudal tenants, métayers (tenant sharecroppers who worked someone else's land) or journaliers (day labourers who sought work where they could find it). Whatever their personal situation, all peasants were heavily taxed by the state. If they were feudal tenants, peasants were also required to pay dues to their local seigneur or lord. If they belonged to a parish, as most did, they were expected to pay an annual tithe to the church. These obligations were seldom relaxed, even during difficult periods such as poor harvests, when many peasants were pushed to the brink of starvation. Urban commoners Other members of the Third Estate lived and worked in France's towns and cities. While the 18th century was a period of industrial and urban growth in France, most cities remained comparatively small. There were only nine French cities with a population exceeding 50,000 people. Paris, with around 650,000, was by far the largest. Most commoners in the towns and cities made their living as merchants, skilled artisans or unskilled workers. Artisans worked in industries like textiles and clothing manufacture, upholstery and furniture, clock making, locksmithing, leather goods, carriage making and repair, carpentry and masonry. A few artisans operated their own business but most worked for large firms or employers. Before doing business or gaining employment, an artisan had to belong to the guild that managed and regulated his particular industry. Unskilled labourers worked as servants, cleaners, hauliers, water carriers, washerwomen, hawkers – in short, anything that did not require training or membership of a guild. Many Parisians, perhaps as many as 80,000 people, had no job at all: they survived by begging, scavenging, petty crime or prostitution. Parisian prostitutes being rounded up and taken to prison in the 1740s The difficult 1780s The lives of urban workers became increasingly difficult in the 1780s. Parisian workers toiled for meagre wages: between 30 and 60 sous a day for skilled labourers and 15-20 sous a day for the unskilled. Wages rose by around 20 per cent in the 25 years before 1789, however prices and rents increased by 60 per cent in the same period. The poor harvests of 1788-89 pushed Parisian workers to the brink by driving up bread prices. In early 1789, the price of a four-pound loaf of bread in Paris increased from nine sous to 14.5 sous, almost a full day's pay for most unskilled labourers. Low pay and high food prices were compounded by the miserable living conditions in Paris. Accommodation in the capital was so scarce that workers and their families crammed into shared attics and dirty tenements, most rented from unscrupulous landlords. With rents running at several sous a day, most workers economised by sharing accommodation. Many rooms housed between six and ten people, though 12 to 15 per room was not unknown. Conditions in these tenements were cramped, unhygienic and uncomfortable. There was no heating, plumbing or common ablutions. The toilet facilities were usually an outside cesspit or open sewer while water was fetched by hand from communal wells. The affluent bourgeoisie An affluent member of the bourgeoisie, with his cane, breeches and tricorn hat Not all members of the Third Estate were impoverished. At the apex of the Third Estate's social hierarchy was the bourgeoisie or capitalist middle classes. The bourgeoisie were business owners and professionals with enough wealth to live comfortably. As with the peasantry, there was also diversity within their ranks. The so-called petit bourgeoisie ('petty' or 'small bourgeoisie') were small-scale traders, landlords, shopkeepers and managers. The haute bourgeoisie ('high bourgeoisie') were wealthy merchants and traders, colonial landholders, industrialists, bankers and financiers, tax farmers and trained professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. The bourgeoisie flourished during the 1700s, due in part to France's economic growth, modernisation, increased production, imperial expansion and foreign trade. The haute bourgeoisie rose from the middle classes to become independently wealthy, well-educated and ambitious. Political aspirations As their wealth increased so did their desire for social status and political representation. Many bourgeoisie craved entry into the Second Estate. They had money to acquire the costumes and grand residences of the noble classes but lacked their titles, privileges and prestige. A system of venality evolved that allowed the wealthiest of the bourgeoisie to buy their way into the nobility, though by the 1780s this was becoming more difficult and frightfully expensive. The thwarted social and political ambitions of the bourgeoisie led to considerable frustration. The haute bourgeoisie had become the economic masters of the nation, yet government and policy remained the domain of the royalty and their noble favourites. The revolutionary bourgeoisie Many educated bourgeoisie found solace in Enlightenment tracts, which challenged the foundation of monarchical power and argued that government should be representative, accountable and based on popular sovereignty. When Emmanuel Sieyès published What is the Third Estate? in January 1789, it struck a chord with the self-important bourgeoisie, many of whom believed themselves entitled to a hand in government. What is the Third Estate? was not the only expression of this idea; there was a flood of similar pamphlets and essays around the nation in early 1789. When these documents spoke of the Third Estate, however, they referred chiefly to the bourgeoisie – not to France's 22 million rural peasants, landless labourers or urban workers. When the bourgeoisie dreamed of representative government, it was a government that represented the propertied classes only. The peasants and urban workers were politically invisible to the bourgeoisie – just as the bourgeoisie was itself politically invisible to the Ancien Régime. A historian's view: "The social structure on the European continent still bore an aristocratic imprint, the legacy of an era when, because land was virtually the sole source of wealth, those who owned it assumed all rights over those who worked it... Almost the whole population was lumped into a 'third order', called in France the Third Estate. Aristocratic prerogatives condemned this order to remain eternally in its original state of inferiority. [But] throughout ... France, this ordering of society was challenged by a long-term change which increased the importance of mobile wealth and the bourgeoisie, and highlighted the leading role of productive labour, inventive intelligence and scientific knowledge." Georges Lefebvre

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