Charles Dickens
& A Tale of Two Cities
The book itself

- Wrote the book in 1859 (but the book centers around the French Revolution of the late 1700s)
- England was in a period of social & political stability… France, not so much
- Essentially a social commentary
  - Consider that he’s writing in Victorian England – considered straight-laced
  - Criticism of French corruption & excess?
  - Criticism of British class system, hypocrisies?
  - Possible concern/warning of what might happen if same oppression occurs in England?
  - Who might his audience be?
The French Revolution
What caused The French Revolution?
Long Term Causes
[multiple generations]

• The Enlightenment’s demand for change.
• Population increases due to the development of new agricultural techniques.
• The inability of the Old Regime to adapt or change.
Intermediate Causes
[one generation]

• Frustration with the lack of social mobility available…
  ◦ “Glass-ceiling”

• Debt caused by the French & Indian War/Seven Years War (war with Britain – 1756-1763)

• Frustration with policies of war
Short-Term Causes [within the decade]

• 1785; massive economic crisis
  ° [Government almost goes bankrupt]
• Food shortages due to bad harvests in 1787-88.

“Every country is three meals away from a Revolution” -- Leon Trotsky
BACKGROUND
(France’s Strict Social Structure)

• 1st Estate - Clergy (religious officials)
  • 0.5% of population
  • Owned 10% of the land
  • PAID NO TAXES
Social Structure cont.

- 2nd Estate – Nobility
  - 1.5 % of the population
  - Owned 25% of the land
  - Used to pay taxes; slowly gained exemption
Nobility:

- Status comes from **birth** (noble family names)
- Nobility doesn’t necessarily imply wealthy.
Social Structure cont.

• 3rd Estate - Everyone else
  ° 98% of the population
  ° Owned 65% of the land
  ° Were HEAVILY TAXED
Social Structure cont.

3rd Estate:

- HUGE differences in occupation, levels of education, and wealth.

- Peasantry:
  - Little *serfdom* remains, but certain *relics of feudalism* remained:
    - They were taxed to use communal property (like flour mills and winepresses)
    - Nobility were allowed to hunt on their land.
3rd Estate cont.

- **Shopkeepers/artisans:**
  - Hardest hit by economic crisis;
  - Prices rose faster than wages [esp. bread]

- **The Bourgeoisie; [top 8% of 3rd Estate]:**
  - Middle Class (merchants, bankers, lawyers)
  - Economically equal in power to some nobles
  - Very educated, had read many Enlightenment works.
By 1789, the political, social and economic atmosphere was primed for change...

- France = bankrupt / broke.
- The King must have permission to tax the nobility.
- So he summons the Estates-General (a representative body made from the three estates).
- This legislative body has not been called since 1614 ( = SOMETHING BIG IS GOING TO CHANGE).
King Louis XVI
Third estate arrives at **Versailles** (14 miles outside of Paris) in May wanting a **Constitutional Monarchy**.
Talks break down from the beginning;
(Third estate has been ignored from the beginning).
June 20, 1789

• Third estate shows up to their meeting room (at Versailles), but the King had locked the doors.

• They immediately march over to the King’s tennis court and sign the Tennis Court Oath…
TEXT OF THE OATH: “We swear never to separate ourselves from the National Assembly, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the realm is drawn up and fixed upon solid foundations.”
RESULT:

• … “solid foundations” = Enlightenment Ideals.

• Eventually the King concedes and the Third Estate becomes the National Assembly.
The National Assembly

1. Abolished feudal systems
2. Taxed nobles
3. Made all people eligible for church and governmental positions
4. Wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man (guaranteed freedom of thought, religion, and expression. Proclaimed that the source of all power was the will and consent of the people).
Meanwhile back in Paris…

- The **working class riots** (due to food shortages and oppression).
- They steal weapons from armories in Paris…
- The armed mob storms the **Bastille (prison)** on July 14, 1789---now a national holiday in France (=4th of July)
The Storming of the Bastille
14th of July 1789
PRIS DE LA BASTILLE

par les Gardes Françaises et les Bourgeois de Paris, le Mardi 14 Juillet 1789.

Le triomphe qu'en tant que gouverneur j'ai fait et heureux à la Place de Grève, en en courant et avec les bras brûlés, étant enlevé de troubans, je l'ai fait et mes mains brûlées pour le triomphe pour toute la ville.
The Revolution Begins

- These two groups of the Third Estate compete for power --- the educated Bourgeoisie (at Versailles) & the working class (in Paris).

- By mid-1792 (three years later) the economy has NOT recovered and order has NOT been restored.
The Revolution Goes Radical

- A mob of radicals from Paris march to and storm Versailles.
- The women of the Parisian lower classes forced many women from all social classes to march with the men and they capture the King.
- Olympe de Gouges publishes the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen in September 1791 as a wake-up call to women.
- It states that a "woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights."
- The radicals call for a NEW government, based on universal male suffrage.
- Gouges goes to the guillotine in 1793.
On January 21, 1793 the new government executes the King of France (Louis XVI).

There’s no going back…
EXECUTION OF LOUIS XVI
Things get out of hand… and

THE REIGN OF TERROR BEGINS:

• The “Committee of Public Safety” led by Maximelien Robespierre issues the “Law of Suspects” on September 17, 1793. (He ruled the country from 1793-1794).

• The Law of Suspects (“L.O.S.”) allows citizen arrests and trials for:
  ° “supporters of tyranny or enemies of Liberty”
  ° “Those who have not constantly supported the Revolution”

• WITHIN 8 months between 16,000 -- 25,000 people were beheaded.
“La Guillotine”
Wrap up

• Eventually Robespierre is also executed by La Guillotine (1794).
• Then Napoleon rises to power and restores order as a dictator.
• He keeps some ideas from the Revolution, like voting, rights, and education (but he’s still a dictator…which is bad).
Impact of the Revolution

- A. Old Regime destroyed
- B. More democratic society
- C. Separation of Church and State
- D. Metric system and free school
- E. Meritocracy