

# Revolution in France: Who Benefited Most From The Collapse Of The Ancien Regime?

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The Ancien Regime (French for Old Order) was the way society was run, in a period in French history occurring before the French Revolution (1789 - 1799). France was ruled by an absolute monarchy (a system where the king was classed as divine - an infallible role) King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The French society was separated into classes or Estates.

The first Estate was the Clergy who were extremely rich. There were about 100,000 of these people. They had control over censorship of the press and of educational institutions. Their wealth came from the Roman Catholic Church, which was made up of the upper and lower Estates. The upper, Bishops and Abbots who had the authority and the lower, Priests and Monks who had a modest income and had no say in church affairs.

The Second Estate was the Aristocracy or Nobility, which was made up of about 400,000 people. They owned 20% of all the land in [France](#) and paid no taxes. They were very

wealthy and enjoyed a carefree life. Their only grievance was the power that the First Estate held. The Second Estate were the men who held positions in the government. They were also exempt from taxes. The special concern of the Second Estate was to see that the King did not introduce tax reform. They wanted more political power to make sure events like this did not happen. While they denounced the monarchy's absolutism they wanted to set up their own form of it.

The third and largest Estate was made up of the Bourgeoisie (educated and privileged middle class) and the Serfs (peasants). The King and the Aristocracy enjoyed parties, banquets and tax exemptions, while the Bourgeoisie and serfs had to pay heavy taxes. Many of the serfs died from starvation and the living suffered under enormous financial hardships. The Third Estate had no success in voting because of the differing opinions about the tax system between them and the Second Estate.

The Third Estate despised the privileges of the Second Estate and hated the tax system, which involved only themselves, the majority, paying the heavy taxes. There was a huge need amongst the Third Estate, who represented the 'people' of France for tax reform. The Second Estate worsened this situation because they were determined not to give up their tax concessions.

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