

# *Official Background Guide*

## **Ad-Hoc: The French Revolution**



Model United Nations at Chapel Hill XVIII

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## Table of Contents

Letter from the Chair .....	3
Background Information .....	4
Financial Struggles .....	6
Riots .....	8
Government Styles .....	10
Important Terms .....	12
Position List .....	13

## Letter from the Chair

Greetings Delegates,

Welcome to MUNCH XVIII and to this crisis committee! My name is Aurora Fulp, and it is my honor and delight to be your Crisis Director. I am a senior from Winston-Salem, NC double-majoring in Hispanic Literature and Cultures and Linguistics, with a History minor. Though this is only my second year of involvement with Model UN, I can only hope to impress upon you all how much it has come to mean to me and how much of an effect it has had upon my personal development. I'm looking forward to working with you all to make this conference an interesting and unforgettable experience.

Your Chair, Sofie Senecal, and your Co-Chair for this conference, Taylor Marks, and I have spent quite a bit of time these last months researching and brainstorming ideas for this committee to make it both fun and challenging for everyone. While you have not had the opportunity to research this like you ordinarily would for a regular committee, we can't wait to see what kinds of crisis arcs and debates you manage to create this weekend.

With all of that said: I encourage you to read this guide thoroughly to determine what kinds of valuable information you can find to craft your own solutions (and problems!) in the coming days. Welcome to Chapel Hill!

Sincerely,

Aurora Fulp, Crisis Director

aurora9@live.unc.edu

## Background Information

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1789

France, a regional and global power for centuries, is currently at a pivotal turning point, one that may change the course of world history and come to be known as one of the most important events in human history. How did this nation come to arrive at this point? Perhaps it is best described as an apex predator that has currently bitten off more than it can chew, on the verge of choking on its own hubris. Between warring with their longtime rivals in England on and off for centuries, stretching their colonial empire beyond maintainable boundaries, and a lack of fiscal responsibility, King Louis XVI of France and his predecessors have fed into a vicious cycle of decadent spending (both personal and military) and failed reform that has left the nation with no clear way forward. This moment has grown so unexpectedly salient that the events about to occur can be controlled by no single man or woman, not even a king claiming divine right, not even the most enterprising noble or enthusiastic soldier can hope to be the sole influence in this whirlwind of circumstance.

The French government, in a time of intense financial despair and perceiving the possibility of a truly difficult recovery, has convened the Estates-General for the first time since 1626. The Estates-General consists of three estates: The First Estate made up of representatives of the clergy, the Second Estate made up of representatives of the nobility, and the Third Estate made up of representatives of the commoners and anyone else not included in the other estates. At this time, members of the First and Second Estates enjoy significant power and influence of their own outside the structure of the Estates-General, which serves mainly as an advisory council with no tangible power unlike British Parliament, which has a similar structure but is not constrained by an absolute monarchy as the Estates-General is. Following elections during the spring of 1789, members of the three estates have gathered to discuss not only the resolution of the financial distress of the state but

also the possibility of improving life for the French people through increased representation in the government. However, discussions quickly stalled over squabbling about the internal structure of the Estates-General, and the doubled number of representatives for the Third Estate has come to mean nothing with the voting being by order instead of by head. Over the course of the last week, the estates have been meeting separately, and the Third Estate has begun to call itself the National Assembly, attracting members of the higher estates to join their meetings. With this meeting of the Estates-General not going to plan, it is now a question of how long the status quo will be maintained with so many issues going undiscussed and the country on the precipice of much needed change. Louis XVI is already displeased by the actions of the self-proclaimed National Assembly, and has decided to prevent access to the room where they have been meeting.



## Financial Struggles

Economic issues have plagued France since before the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), though this war would serve as a point of severe distress for the French economy, with their economic woes lasting far beyond the reach of the historical end date of the war itself. Tensions on the continent led to an all-out battle between the various colonial powers of the mid-1700s, with battle extending across continents and territories and costing those involved significant financial strain. France in the end suffered human losses in the hundreds of thousands, as well as the loss of New France (Canada) to Great Britain and the temporary loss of the Louisiana Territory Spain in the Treaty of Paris.

In the mid-1770s, the domestic economy had more or less arrived at a point of stagnation, though other areas of the economy, such as the trade in luxury goods, flourished. However, these areas of success will prove to be not enough to push past structural issues in the French taxation system or the issues in French agriculture that persist through the 1770s and into the 1780s. Long-time tensions with the British led the French to throw their support behind the fledgling American forces in their fight for independence, an action which would only further empty French coffers and drive the nation further into debt. France contributed both manpower as well as financial support to the American cause, inspired in no small part by the still-smarting wounds inflicted during the Seven Years' War, though it can also be said that France would stand to benefit from having new trading partners on the North American continent as well as the benefits reaped via their support of the Enlightenment in the face of traditional tyranny in the form of Great Britain. The situation in France in the 1780s was not believed to be as dire as it truly was due to the deliberate misstatement of the financial state of affairs by the director of finances of the time. Between the costly wars of the previous decades, the intense borrowing of money by the monarchy in an attempt to pay their debt amassed as a result of these conflicts, and the deficit between the

French government's revenue and its expenditures, the government saw only one possible way out: the summoning of the Estates-General, in an effort to restructure the French system of taxation and bring about a solution with longer-lasting effects than a loan default (as had been used in the past when the government found itself in dire straits). It is under this pressure that the monarch and the Estates-General are working to prevent popular uprisings and loss of faith in their governing abilities.

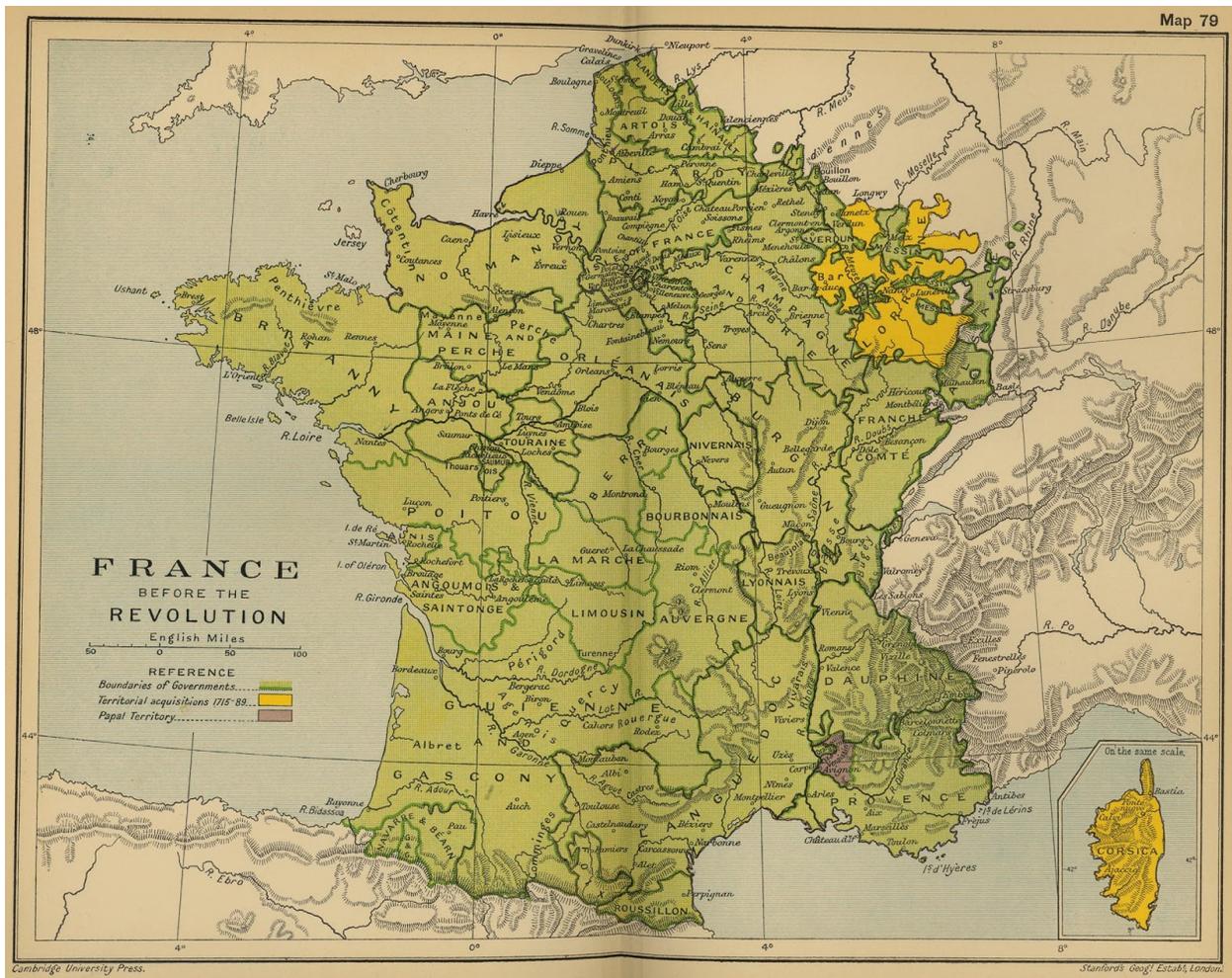
## Riots

With civil unrest comes civil disobedience, especially when the majority feels their voices and concerns are being ignored. France has no constitution and is currently governed by an absolute monarchy, which provides minimal protections for the rights of the everyday citizen and largely relies on the decisions of the King and his advisors from the nobility. While there have been no major riots or rebellions as of now, it seems like it's only a matter of time before the country's laborers and peasants come together to organize resistance to policies that leave them with less and less to survive.

After much pushing from the people, it was decided that the Third Estate would receive double representation in an effort to give the majority of the population a greater say in resolving the issues France is facing. However, at the time of meeting for the Estates-General, this compromise was revealed to be a sham compromise, as the voting on any issue would be done by order as opposed to by head, making the entire point behind giving the Third Estate double representatives moot. Representatives to the Third Estate are displeased, and it is unlikely that the people they represent will be receptive to the continued suppression of their opinions.

With the economic crisis ongoing, it is often the poorest members of society who feel the worst of the effects thereof. From food shortages caused in part by drought and the filtering down of taxation on upper classes, the commoners will undoubtedly be taking the brunt of financial losses, and may come to act on their displeasure if nothing is done to help them put bread on their tables. The average French individual has already suffered a rough winter, with widespread famine causing suffering among the lower classes of French society. While Louis XVI currently has control over the French Royal Army, after bowing to pressure from the nobility and barring the possibility of achieving officer status to soldiers of less auspicious origins he has already begun to breed intense resentment among the majority of his soldiers. As can be seen elsewhere in world history, in such

miserable and dire conditions wherein the lower classes have limited freedoms, not enough to eat, and no real opportunities for rising above their low station in life, it becomes more and more likely by the day that the soldiers making up the bulk of France's military forces will not be willing to turn their weapons on their friends and families in the event of conflict or rebellions. In fact, with the situation as it is now, it is increasingly probable that the non-noble members of the military will defect or desert and join the commoners in their struggle against the seemingly uncaring monarchy.



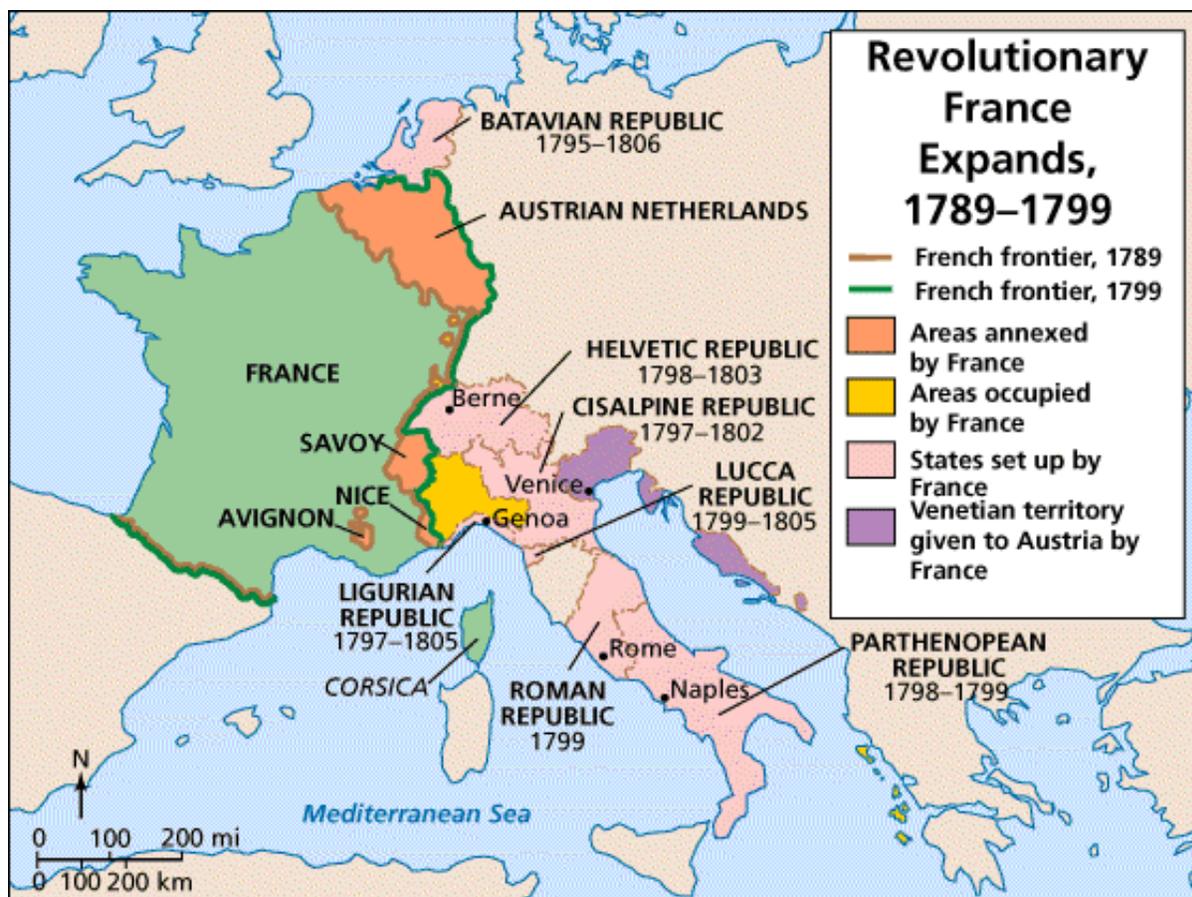
## Government Styles: Enlightened Ideals vs. Absolute Monarchy

With France throwing their support behind the ideals espoused by the American colonies in the American Revolutionary War, this leaves an opening for concepts of government running counter to the absolute monarchy France has experienced in decades prior. As evidenced by the Third Estate's desire for greater involvement in their own government, much like the protests made by the Americans against British taxation, royals and traditionalists alike may need to adapt or face the very real possibility of rebellion from within.

France has enjoyed success under an absolute monarch in the past, with Louis XIV working hard to fully concentrate power in his own grasp. Many absolute monarchs received popular support, as Louis XV "the Beloved" did, but given the financial circumstances the desire of the French to remain under such government is becoming strained. Under an absolute monarch, the legislative, judicial, and executive authorities are centered in the monarch, and in France the king is the ultimate judicial authority. Unlike the system in Britain, where the king's powers are held in check by Parliament in a constitutional monarch, the French monarch has advisors but is under less obligation to obey outside influence.

Many of the members of the educated classes have paid close attention to the events of the American Revolutionary War, and in fact many leading figures in writing and ideology of the Age of Enlightenment are French in origin. Influential works by Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot and others have been disseminated throughout the French nobility and worldwide, causing other absolute monarchs to make changes to incorporate these ideals into their styles of government. While not going so far as to permit democracy, a move towards greater secularism and a belief in science and fact over religion and superstition has called into question the "divine right" to rule of many monarchs, Louis XVI being chief among them.

The question now is will France attempt to strike a delicate balance between the Ancien Regime's control and these new ideas about representation, or will the monarch attempt to retain total control in the face of desired change? This question is one that will surely be aggravated by the infighting and squabbling amongst the nobles, who have recently benefited from Louis XVI's lack of control over them and at this time almost certainly have their own individual agendas separate from that of the "greater good" of France.



## Important Terms

**Sans-culottes:** literally “without breeches”, common people of the working class who are primed for radical militant behavior out of displeasure with the Ancien Regime’s treatment of them. They seek social and economic equality and have been known to call for popular democracy.

**Bastille Saint-Antoine:** a medieval fortress, armory, and political prison, a symbolic representation of the monarch’s authority in Paris. Recently it has served as a method of enforcing political censorship in Paris. A likely flashpoint in the coming conflicts.

**The Palace of Versailles:** originally constructed by Louis XIV, this palace has been inhabited by French monarchs and various noble members of the court as a means for the monarch to keep an eye on the activities of the nobility. Being at court is a provides a means of currying favor with the monarch, but this concept has in recent years drawn criticism for its frivolity and gross expenditures.

## **Position List:**

### **Gilbert du Motier – The Marquis de Lafayette**

The Marquis de Lafayette made a name for himself in the American Revolution, and upon his return to France soon found himself involved in attempts to deal with France's fiscal crisis as part of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 and later the Estates-General in 1789. He, in consultation with Thomas Jefferson, presented the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to the Estates General on July 11.

### **Louis XVI of France – King of France**

Louis XVI is the King of France at the outset of the French Revolution, and has been since the death of his grandfather in 1774. He has the misfortune to have inherited a rather precarious financial situation, and with the political atmosphere in France being what it is in 1789, he has a lot to do insofar as reorganizing and attempting to assuage his country's debts and the concerns of his people.

### **Marie Antoinette – Queen of France**

Marie Antoinette (German name: Maria Antonia) is the wife of Louis XVI of France, and has long been the subject of dislike and ridicule by the people at court due to her familial ties to the Holy Roman Empire. She, as wife to the King, has some power to influence affairs in France, and has many social duties.

### **Maximilien Robespierre – Lawyer & Representative of Artois in the Third Estate**

Maximilien de Robespierre is a lawyer to the poor, known for his frugality and altruism, and has been chosen to represent Artois in the Third Estate. He has already caused members of the elite

classes some alarm with his protests against royal absolutism, and his speeches have the power to command the attention of his comrades and opposition alike.

### **Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes – Chancellor of the Diocese of Chartres & Representative of the Third Estate**

Abbe Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes is an educated man of non-noble birth, limiting his upward mobility in the church and causing a sense of dislike for the upper classes. Sieyes is the author of the pamphlet “What is the Third Estate?”, and has encouraged his fellow members of the Third Estate to hold strong in their conviction in forming the National Assembly in the face of the King’s disapproval.

### **Jean Paul Marat – Physician & Scientist**

Jean Paul Marat is the former physician to the personal guards of the Comte d’Artois, a post he held after making a name for himself in England after years of relative obscurity in France and abroad. After attempts to pursue a career as a scientist (and being denied entrance to the Academy of Science) went sour for him, he began his more political efforts with the belief that monarchy may still be able to save France.

### **Jean Sylvain Bailly – Scientist & Representative of the Third Estate**

Jean Sylvain Bailly began his career in astronomy but with the state of affairs in France leading up to the Revolution found himself elected as one of the deputies from Paris to the Estates-General. He led the proceedings of June 20 and has recently been proclaimed as the first mayor of Paris.

### **Jacques Necker – Finance Minister**

Jacques Necker was the Director-General of Finance from 1777 until 1781 when the extent of France's debt and the pushback against his reforms got him removed from office. He misrepresented the state of France's finances and loans following the American Revolution, leading people to believe that France had a surplus of 10,000,000 livres when in reality they were deeply in deficit. He has been brought back to his position as France stands on the brink of disaster.

### **Marie Thérèse Louise of Savoy – Princesse de Lamballe**

The Princesse de Lamballe is a wealthy young woman in her own right and in service to the Queen, acting as confidant and lady-in-waiting. Originally from Savoy, she married a wealthy unfaithful Frenchman and upon his early death stayed in France due to her close relationship with her father-in-law. She is one of the most powerful courtiers at the outset of the Revolution.

### **Jacques Roux – Vicar**

Roux is a vicar to a Paris parish, and around the time of the beginning of the Revolution he holds democratic ideals and preaches from his position to the sans-culottes in his church. His religious influence allows him increased control over the surround areas; however, in recent times, faith in the church has been waning and if it continues, Roux may find himself in a position without any influence.

### **Louis Philippe II – Duc d'Orleans**

Louis Philippe is one of a small group of nobles supporting the Third Estate and a more liberal ideology. He had been temporarily exiled after disagreements surrounding France's debt in 1787, but

was selected to represent the First Estate at the convening of the Estates-General. He mostly has stayed away from court due to tensions regarding his intense dislike of Marie Antoinette.

### **Honoré Gabriel Riqueti – Comte de Mirabeau**

The Comte de Mirabeau is a politician and orator representing the Third Estate in the Estates-General, avidly opposing despotism and holding a moderate position in the turbulent political climate of the times. He had previously been a member of the nobility, but after years of scandal and misuse of funds he spent time in jail and then as a paid pamphleteer and occasionally as a secret agent.

### **Jacques-Pierre Brissot – Politician and Newspaper Owner**

Brissot spent time in the Bastille in 1784 for his writings against the Queen, but since the start of the Revolution he holds office representing the first municipality of Paris and has started a newspaper, *Le Patriote Français*.

### **Charles Augereau – Military Officer & Past Deserter**

Born into a lower class, Augereau joined the military and swiftly became known for his skills as a swordsman and dueler. However, having found himself in a spot of trouble, Augereau fled France and has spent much of the last several years floating around the continent and fighting for various other countries. Currently Augereau is in Portugal, where he is being detained on suspicion of being a dangerous foreigner.

## **Napoleon Bonaparte – Soldier**

Originally belonging to a minor noble family in Italy, Napoleon Bonaparte currently serves as an artillery officer in the French army. However, possessing ambitions and connections beyond those of your average soldier, it is almost certain that Bonaparte will become something more than anyone could have ever predicted.