When we hear “French Revolution” we tend to think of two moments:

14 July 1789
Storming the Bastille

21 January 1793: Louis XVI guillotined
Charge: “Crimes against the state”

For now, just the first part.
(Napoleon etc. 2nd semester)
For now: investigate French idea of “unity” (without dissent).

How does the individual relate to the community?
Compare to American:
unity necessitates dissent.

Conflict or consensus?
Freedom for or freedom from?
Rest on underlying notions of “human nature.”
Short-term Crisis

- **1783:**
  - American Revolution ends: USA free; France broke!!

- **1787:**
  - Monarchy on verge of bankruptcy: needs support from moneyed classes
  - Calls “Assembly of Notables”
  - Backfires: monarchy in more debt than imagined; demand calling of “Estates General”

- **1788 July:**
  - Louis XVI agrees to convocate Estates General next year (1789)

Problem: Last meeting of Estates General had been 175 years earlier!!! (1614)

- Louis XIV
  - abolished it
  - Absolutist monarchy: eliminate possibility of being “checked” by nobility
  - L’état, c’est moi”

- Dunn:
  - this is why the French had no “experience” of governing
  - no “checks” or balance against monarch

Problem of Representation / representative government

- Dunn: “Social Compact”:
  - the foundation of society is not given “in nature” — rather, we create society by mutual agreement

  —NB: atomistic individuals come together to form society

Since the 2000 presidential election, voting has been a sticky subject. As the nation was reminded, the Electoral College — not the popular vote — decides who will be the next president of the United States. Meant as a system to indirectly gauge tab by the voting process, the Electoral College has left a confusing wake in its path and has turned many off completely to the idea of voting for the sake of voting. The first candidate since 1888 to win the presidency and lose the popular vote, George W. Bush received four more electoral votes than Democrat Al Gore in 2000. Don’t let that stop you. In fact, let it give you fired up.

Your vote is supposed to indicate how the Electoral College should vote; i.e., a voter’s vote is supposed to be reflective of his or her state’s popular vote. In all but two states — Maine and Nebraska — voters vote “electoral vote.” A number of states have laws on the books stating that electoral votes be indicative of the state’s popular vote.

And so your vote at the polls is at the very least a notice to the Electoral College that so-and-so is who you want the next president to be.
REVIEW: Rousseau: “General Will”

1. In the act of making the social contract, “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will.”
2. An individual’s “particular will” may be “contrary or dissimilar to the general will which he has as a citizen.”
3. So that “the social compact may not be an empty formula,” “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body.”

REVIEW: Abbé Sièyes: What is the Third Estate?

1. Mathematical view of society: atoms equidistant from center [“law”]
   — “I imagine the law as being at the center of a large globe; we the citizens, without exception, stand equidistant from it and occupy equal places.”
2. What should we do with “privileged orders” (nobility and clergy) who do not want to be stripped of privileges and become citizens like everyone else?
   — “This is the equivalent of asking what place one wishes to assign to a malignant tumor that torments and undermines the strength of the body of a sick person. It must be neutralized.”
   — NB analogy: EXCOMMUNICATION of dissenters

1789: “Sacralizing” the Revolutionary Moment

Why “sacralize”? 

• “Sacralize”:
  — “to make sacred”
  • same root: “sacrifice”
• Why sacralize???
  — We need to invest contingent events [e.g., luck or fortuna] with meaning / significance
  — We need to make them not so arbitrary.
“Sacred significance”, cosmic, world-historical, or even “religious” proportions

Alternative?
A sense of living in a random / arbitrary / chaotic universe

Culture:
“A system or positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered.”

Rousseau: The social order --- even though based on an agreement / handshake (contingent “conventions”) --- is a “sacred” right…

A NEED TO “SACRALIZE” [make necessary] what is contingent [and perhaps even arbitrary]

Compare rhetoric of marriage: a contract performed before a (secular) authority, some call it “sacred.”

Key in 19th-c. struggle to legalize divorce.

Sacred Moment I: 20 June 1789
“The Tennis Court Oath”

Note inherent problem in legitimating a “Revolution”: it admits that it is something new.

Not Eternal Divine Order [endless revolving like planets], but rather Provisional Human Agreement [evolved]: a social contract between subjective individuals

Contrast rhetoric of “revolution” with rhetoric of “reensensous” (19th c.) a “rebirth” of the ancient or “reformation” (16th c.) a “reform” that goes back to something ancient

They do not have same problem: they do not admit that they are something new. Revolution does.

1789:

THREE SACRED MOMENTS

How to make something radically new seem necessary / natural / given?

Left: 1872: Wives wait for their husbands to finish drinking on pay night. From S. C. Hall, The Trial of Sir Jasper; from The Victorian City, Images and Realities, Dyos and Wolff (1972)

Right: from The Vote, published by Women's Freedom League, February 1911

Sacred Moment II: 18 July 1789
“The Storming of the Bastille”

Sacred Moment III: 26 August 1789
“Address to the Nation”
Painter: Jacques-Louis David

Note: “Enlightenment” [secular] = “Nimbus” [sacred halo]

Cosmic Forces:
Light vs. Dark
Massive winds

Kneeling in prayer at this “Epiphany”
Social Contract as sacred revelation
Sacred Moment I:
The Tennis Court Oath [20 June 1789]

Sacred Moment II
14 July 1789:
Storming the Bastille

Demonizing the Bastille as “evil”

Reality

Rhetoric
**Facts:** they knew gunpowder in Bastille
- They go there for ammunition, not to release prisoners.
- They behead the prison’s governor, head paraded around on stick.
- Who was actually in the Bastille?
  - 7 prisoners:
    - 4 counterfeiters [quickly transferred to another prison!]
    - 2 “sexual deviants” committed by their families
    - 1 assassin

**Aux armes! [To arms!]: Sacralizing the Bastille**

**Why important?**
- **UNITY:** First time they act together, think of themselves as a unit
  - Forms identity: self-consciousness, cultural coherence as a group.
- **SACRED VIOLENCE:**
  - Wedding of freedom and violence in modern history
  - Sacred / sacrifice
    - BLOOD is price paid for “freedom”

**French National Anthem: La Marseillaise**

**The Marseillaise**

Arise you children of our patrie,
Oh now is here our glorious day!
Over us the bloodstained banner
Of tyranny holds sway!

Oh, do you hear there in our fields
The roar of those fierce fighting men?
Who came right here into our midst
To slaughter sons, wives and kin.

To arms, oh citizens!
Form up in serried ranks!
March on, march on!

And drench our fields
With their tainted blood!
KEY for rhetoric: Revolutionary Printing Press

L: Deliverance of the Count de L’Orges / R: Discovery of the Iron Mask

Enlightenment!
Liberation of the Count de Lorges after 32 years of imprisonment!!

- Dungeon as metaphor for tyranny /
  darkness of pre-Enlightenment
- Light = liberation from tyranny

“Discovery” of the Iron Mask!
**Lettre de cachet** = “sealed letter”  
*[cacher = “to hide”]*: a letter signed by the king  
- used to authorize someone’s imprisonment [e.g., in Bastille] indefinitely without due process  
- NB: against our principle of “writ of habeas corpus” [“you have the body”]  
- commands recipient to obey orders without delay and without explanation  
  - “Man with the Iron Mask” — fictional brother of Louis XIV (novel of Alexandre Dumas)  
  - imprisoned for the rest of his life without legal representation

As Bastille demolished, First and Second Estates [proportionately represented] dance to the tune of Third Estate

Sacred Moment III:  
“Night of the Fourth of August”

- “A holocaust of privilege”; “a delirium of sacrifice”  
- i.e.: a sacred sacrifice; a ‘burnt offering’  
  - Abolition of the feudal regime  
  - Self-sacrifice of all the privileges which come from the feudal regime of Three Estates  
  - a sacred moment of self-sacrifice

First Estate  
Clergy robes  
Second Estate  
*culottes* [breeches]  
Third Estate applauding

“A holocaust of privileges…” … “A delirium of sacrifice…”

Differences abolished: mathematical equality  
UNITY: one “nation”  
Dissent = “counter-revolutionary”

Three sacred moments:  
create a “social compact” and “General Will”

One nation: a “sacred unity”
Three years later . . .

The Terror

A desperate effort to stabilize subjective individualism into a community where they will be interconnected and care for one another.

American sense of "unity": factional

The Terror: 1792-1794

21 January 1793: Louis Guillotined
Crime: "Crimes against the state"

28 October 1793: Marie-Antoinette guillotined
Charge: "Promiscuity"
Inherent instability of “subjective individualism”

- On one hand:
  - see individual person as the ordering principal and source of all value

- On other hand:
  - not just one will but many!

- Thus:
  - individual is source of community’s collapse

Individual and Community: How to handle this problem?

How to get subjective individuals to think of themselves as interconnected and thus care for one another?