

The painting depicts a chaotic battle scene during the French Revolution. In the center, a woman, likely Marianne, stands atop a pile of rubble, holding the French tricolor flag high in her right hand and a rifle in her left. She is surrounded by soldiers and revolutionaries. Some are standing, holding various weapons like bayonets, rifles, and pistols. Others are lying on the ground, some appearing to be dead or wounded. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a cloudy sky. The overall tone is dramatic and heroic.

*Peasantry and the
French Revolution*

"1st. What is the third estate? Everything.

2nd. What has it been heretofore in the political order? Nothing.

3rd. What does it demand? To become something therein."

-Abbe Sieyes 1789

Pre-Revolution

- Louis *XVI* came to the throne in the midst of a serious financial crisis
- France was nearing bankruptcy due to the outlays that were outpacing income
- A new tax code was implemented under the direction of Charles Alexandre de Calonne
- This proposal included a land tax
- Issues with the Three Estates and inequality within it

Peasant Life pre-Revolution

A painting of a rural landscape with haystacks and people working in a field. The scene is set in a vast, open field under a pale sky. In the foreground, several figures are engaged in agricultural work. One person is bent over, working with a tool in the soil, while another stands nearby. In the background, there are large, golden haystacks and a few more figures in the distance. The overall atmosphere is one of hard labor and rural life.

- French peasants lived better than most of their class, but were still extremely poor
- 40% worked land, but it was subdivided into several small plots which were shared and owned by someone else
- Unemployment was high due to the waning textile industry
- Rent and food prices continued to rise
- Worst harvest in 40 years took place during the winter of 1788-89

Peasant Life pre-Revolution



- The Third Estate, which was the lower classes in France, were forced by the nobility and the Church to pay large amounts in taxes and tithes
- Peasants had experienced a lot of unemployment during the 1780s because of the decline in the nation's textile industry
- There was a population explosion of about 25-30% in roughly 90 years that did not coincide with a rise in food production

Direct Causes of the Revolution



- *Famine and malnutrition were becoming more common as a result of shortened food supply*
- *Rising bread prices contributes to famine*
- *France's near bankruptcy due to their involvement in various wars and their assistance in the American Revolution*
- *Lack of social services for veterans*
- *High unemployment rate*
- *Peasants desired their own land rather than working on someone else's*

Direct Causes of the Revolution

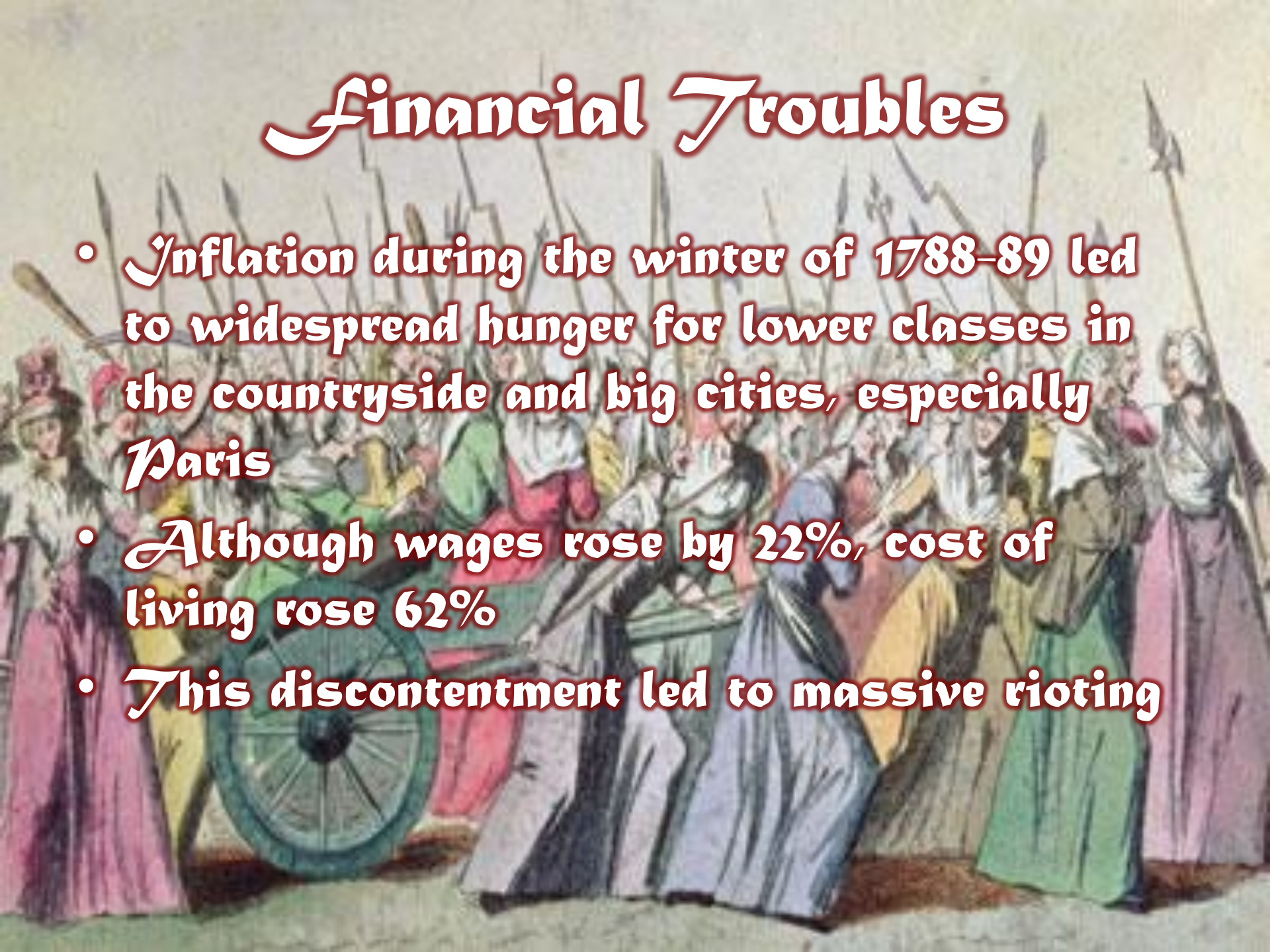
- Peasant's resentment of the concept of royal absolutism
- Resentment of those, such as nobles, who were allowed varied privileges
- General unhappiness and discontentment with their place and earnings in society
- The Feudal system had been dying in Europe for several centuries

Issues with the Feudal System

- French agriculture had not effectively kept pace with innovations and improvements made in places like the Netherlands and the British Isles
- Most revenue came from taxes
- When peasants could no longer afford to live or eat, riots ensued

Financial Troubles

- Inflation during the winter of 1788-89 led to widespread hunger for lower classes in the countryside and big cities, especially Paris
- Although wages rose by 22%, cost of living rose 62%
- This discontentment led to massive rioting



Riots during the Revolution

- *Rioting was a common problem during the Revolution*
- *Peasants really banded together for the greater good*
- *Brought little relief to the situation*
- *Contributed to a higher unemployment rate due to various damages they often caused*



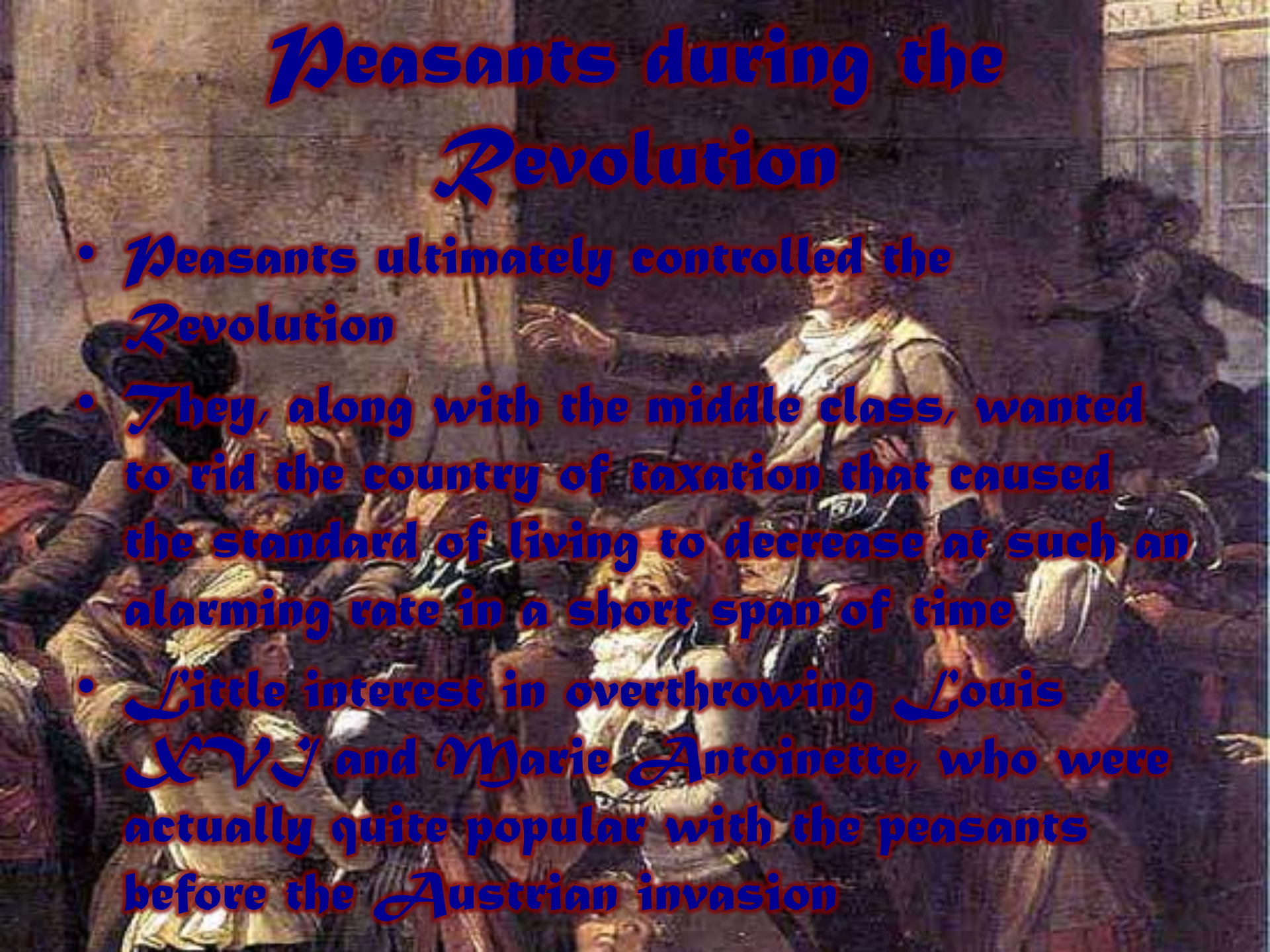
Method to Rebellion



- Taxes had become virtually impossible for the lower classes to pay
- The massive rebellion was mostly directed towards tax-and-tithe consumers, nobility, and the Church
- Peasants held a lot of animosity towards these groups because they held all of France's money and power

Peasants during the Revolution

- Peasants ultimately controlled the Revolution
- They, along with the middle class, wanted to rid the country of taxation that caused the standard of living to decrease at such an alarming rate in a short span of time
- Little interest in overthrowing Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who were actually quite popular with the peasants before the Austrian invasion



Immediate Action



- On July 14, 1789 a large group of peasants rushed and captured the Bastille, threatening to tear it down
- Peasant uprisings against nobles began happening all over France
- Many nobles fled the country, they were called "émigrés" because they emigrated
- These uprisings saved the National Assembly from being disbanded by the King

Steps Toward Recognition



- *The Decrees of August 4* abolished some feudal dues the peasants owed their landlords, the tax advantages of clergy and nobles, and regional privileges
- *Declaration of Rights* guaranteed some basic rights to all citizens, including "liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression" as well as a representative government

Steps Toward Recognition



- *Assembly seized lands of the Church, most of which was sold to wealthier peasants and members of the middle class*
- *Money from these sales was used to help clear the massive national debt*
- *This mollified peasants want to be recognized as well as their valid concern about the country's monetary issues*

Turning Point in the Revolution

- *With all the changes that had taken place in a social sense during the first part of the Revolution, the second half was more about political change*
- *While this obviously affected the peasants, it also lessened their involvement because they had virtually no power in the government*



New Politics



- After showing less support for his people than Austrian invaders, Louis XVI was dethroned and taken into custody by the people of Paris
- His removal ended the constitutional monarchy
- People in Paris took a lot of control with the Revolution; during the September Massacre, over 1,000 prisoners were executed for fear of an uprising



Recognition in Government

- *When the Jacobin government reigned in France, the lower classes finally got a taste of real involvement*
- *Provided with free primary education and public assistance to the poor, peasants felt empowered*
- *Price controls to protect consumers from rapid inflation were implemented, saving countless wallets in the peasant community*
- *Taxes now based on income*

Peasant Life post-Revolution

- Thanks to the Revolution, the landowning and bourgeoisie classes emerged as the most important classes in France
- Although this did not include peasants significantly, it did show an improvement in their every day life
- The discontentment of the peasants would eventually lead to the class conflicts of the 19th century





End Results

- Overall, the French Revolution led to the unification of the country and a better government system
- Peasants managed to get a foot in the door with the government system in France
- Although they did not yet hold power within the system, they became more recognized as an important part of the country

Artistic Representation

- Violence was often depicted in a mostly accurate manner
- Riots were very common in art during the Revolution and usually very specific in presentation
- "The people", or the lower classes of France, defined most art about the Revolution because it was usually centered around their actions

Artistic Representation

- The art itself tended to represent the views of the artist themselves; if they were of a lower class, the peasants were depicted as self-righteous rather than entirely psychotic
- Romantic vs. villainous images of the lower and higher classes was a common battle in the art world at this time
- Even the most graphic violence in a painting could be decoded by looking at the crowd

Artistic Representation

- Most paintings depicted the masses as having direct rationale with their intentions, however violent they may be
- Historians and art critics still debate whether or not all rationale was consistently intended by the artist

Sources

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