

## The Estates System

### The First and Second Estates

**The First Estate (The Church):** They prayed for the King, so they were let off taxes. Their other responsibilities included the registration of births, marriages and deaths; they collected the tithe tax (10% of every peasants' produce); they censored books; operated schools and hospitals; and distributed charity to the poor.

**The Second Estate (The Nobility):** They fought for the King, so they were let off taxes. They also collected rent and taxes from the peasant population.

### Sources

- A. *"The young Duke of Sonfranc has just got out of bed. He is already rich and is heir to a fortune that would make a hundred families wealthy. His servant is putting his stockings on him; his butler is bringing a cup of chocolate, and his secretary is writing tender little notes to the many young women the bored duke is courting"* - **By an eighteenth century writer**
- B. *"60% of the nobility lived in conditions where they found it hard to make ends meet. At the very bottom there were those who were too poor to possess a sword, a dog or a horse"*  
- **Historian Simon Schama**

1. How do these two sources differ in their description of what life was like for the First and Second Estates?
2. Is it possible that both of them are telling the truth? Explain your answer.

### **The Third Estate (the Peasantry)**

The First and Second Estate paid no taxes. All of the taxes were paid by the peasantry!

The peasants had to pay all of the taxes. There were taxes on salt, cloth, bread and wine as well as on mills, granaries, presses and ovens.

#### **Sources - Arthur Young, a British observer**

- A.** *"They live on bread made of barley and oats...the bread can sometimes be lifted by the straw sticking out of it. They also eat poor fruits and a few vegetables. They eat meat less than three times a year. Three quarters of them are dressed in half-rotting tattered linen. This hardship has its usual effects. It makes people weak and unhealthy, especially the children. The men become listless [idle] knowing that they would get nothing for their efforts"*
- B.** *"[In the Bearn district of Southern France] I could hardly believe my eyes...a succession of well-built, comfortable farming cottages, each with a little garden. To every house belongs a farm...with grass borders mown and neatly kept. They are all in the hands of small owners...an air of neatness, warmth and comfort breathes over the whole"*

- 3.** How do these last two sources differ in their description of what life was like for the First and Second Estates?

- 4.** Is it possible that both of them are telling the truth? Explain your answer.

**The Middle Class (*Bourgeoisie*)**

*"The Middle Classes were a many sided group, ranging from bankers, shipowners, manufacturers, merchants and tradesmen down to shopkeepers and workshop masters. They were the professionals and officials too...but they had no power over how the country was run"*

- Historian, C. Labrousse

5. Complete the following table.

	Ways their lives were good	Ways their lives were bad
Nobility & Clergy		
Peasantry		
Middle Classes		

6. Outline 3 ways in which you think that the situation of the country could be improved.  
I.

II.

III.

7. What is the message of this cartoon?



8. Imagine that you are a cartoonist who disagrees with the view expressed in the cartoon showed here. As a group, design and produce a cartoon that highlights all of the **good** things about France.