

Political Cartoon  
*The People under the Old Regime*  
 1815

This cartoon depicts a man carrying three figures on his back. Chained and bloodied, the man struggles beneath the weight not only of the riders' rotund physiques but also of the numerous privileges they enjoy, as recorded on the papers each holds in his hand. In the front sits an aristocrat, or perhaps Louis XVI himself, brandishing a whip and his claim to feudal rights. A bishop clings to his shoulder, wielding his own set of powers, the Inquisition and the annual church tax (dîme). Behind him sits a



*judge, resplendent in his robe, who trumpets the nobility's domination of the regional courts (parlements). Their beast of burden is none other than the French people, symbolically depicted here as the naked and emaciated man whom the riders control with reins, chains, and a blindfold. Although this cartoon was first published in 1815, it captures the mood of thousands of French men and women on the eve of the Revolution just as powerfully as Sieyès and other pamphleteers had done in words.*

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary message of this cartoon?
2. What images in particular do you think convey this message most effectively, and why?
3. In what ways do these images reflect the mixture of social and political conflicts that ultimately helped to fuel the French Revolution?