

French Society: Other Causes for Revolution
A Critical Review

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Directions: Analyze the following documents - highlighting relevant information, noting trends, annotating predictions, noting current knowledge, making historical connections, etc. - to determine the other underlying causes of the French Revolution beyond the inequalities of the three estates.

Historical Context: The French Revolution of 1789 had many long-range causes. Political, social, and economic conditions in France contributed to the discontent felt by many French people-especially those of the third estate. The ideas of the intellectuals of the Enlightenment brought new views of government and society. The American Revolution also influenced the coming of the French Revolution

Financial Strains of France:

Document 1: As evident by the graphs below the Third Estate bore the burden of paying most of the taxes in pre-revolutionary France.



Document 2: Arthur Young, *Plight of the French Peasants* (1787-1789)

The abuses attending the levy of taxes were heavy and universal...The rolls of the tailles, capitation, vingtiemes, and other taxes were distributed among districts...A cruel aggravation of their misery, to see those who could best afford to pay, exempted because able! The corvee (taxes paid in labor, often road building), or police of the roads, were annually the ruin of many hundreds of farmers; more than 300 were reduced to beggary in filling up one vale of Lorraine: all these oppressions fell on the tiers etat (Third Estate) only; the nobility and clergy having been equally exempted from tailles, militair and corvees.

Q: According to Documents 1 & 2, why is the taxation issue detrimental to the French economy?

American Revolution Influence on France:

Document 3: Lord Acton suggested another point of view.

The condition of France alone did not bring about the overthrow of the monarchy... for the suffering of the people was not greater than they had been before. The ideas of the philosophes were not directly responsible for the outbreak... [but] the spark that changed thought into action was supplied by the Declaration of American Independence... The American example caused the Revolution to break out...

Q: What did Lord Acton believe caused the French revolution?

Document 4: French and American soldiers during the American Revolution. France sent an estimated 12,000 soldiers and 32,000 sailors to the American war effort.



Q: How might France’s participation in the American Revolution have helped spread the ideas of the Enlightenment (use prior knowledge to help you critically analyze this connection)?

Enlightenment Inspiration:

Document 5: Comte D’Antraigues as quoted in an excerpt from *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*.

“The Third Estate is the People and the People is the foundation of the State; it is in fact the State itself; the other estates are merely political categories while by the immutable (unchangeable) laws of nature the People is everything. Everything should be subordinated (inferior) to it... It is in the People that all national power resides and for the People that all states exist.”

Q: What does Comte D’Antraigues see as the rightful role of the Third Estate in France (use prior knowledge to help you critically analyze this connection)?

Document 6: The People Should Have Power, Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1775 (A pamphlet, banned by the French government in 1775)

Man is born free. No man has any natural authority over others; force does not give anyone that right. The power to make laws belongs to the people and only to the people.

Q: How did the Enlightenment influence the 3rd estate to rebel (use prior knowledge about the membership of the 3rd Estate to help you critically analyze this connection)?

Political Demands and Changes of the People of France:

Document 7: These excerpts from *cahiers* (lists of grievances about the king, taxing, and voting in the Estates General) brought to the Estates General..

That the king be forced to reform the abuses and tyranny of letter de cachet.

That every tax.... Be granted [by the Estates General] only for a limited time.

That the taille [a tax on land] be borne equally by all classes....

The meetings of the Estates General.... Shall be scheduled for definite times....

In order to assure the third estate the influence it deserves because of its numbers... votes in the assembly should be taken by head...

Q: Identify three changes did the third estate demand be made in the French government?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

Document 8: Excerpt from the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)*. This document was written by the members of the 3rd Estate, who became the National Assembly of France, to make France a more fair society.

- 1. *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; social distinctions can be established only for the common be*
- 2. *The aim of every political association is the conservation of the imprescriptible rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression...*
- 10. *No one may be disturbed because of his opinions, even religious, provided that their public demonstration does not disturb the public order established by law.*
- 11. *The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: every citizen can therefore freely speak, write, print..*
- 16. *Any society in which guarantees of rights are not assured nor the separation of powers determined has no constitution.*

Q: According to this document, what are the natural rights of man?

Q: How might a belief in these ideas lead the French to start a Revolution against their king?

