

The French Revolution: Causes and Consequences

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ABSTRACT:

The social and political lives of individuals were greatly impacted by the French Revolution of 1789. The revolutionary ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were the cradle of the dynamic nationalism that first swept over France and brought an end to absolute monarchy and feudal lord privileges. Following it, new concepts and ideas were introduced, which fundamentally altered the nature of politics, law, and governance. Between 1787 until 1799, the French Revolution rocked the country, reaching its initial peak in 1789. Invasion brought about a number of profound institutional changes. The concept of equality before the law was developed as a result of the French invasion, which destroyed the political and financial barriers that had protected the nobility, clergy, guilds, and urban oligarchies. The ideas that emerged at and around the start of the revolution in 1788–1789, as well as its effects, are the main topics of this article.

Keywords: Revolution, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Oligarchies, Nobility, Clergy, Guilds

Introduction

The French Revolution, which began in 1789 and was essential to the creation of modern Europe, came to an end when Napoleon Bonaparte assumed power in the late 1790s. During this time, France's political environment underwent a complete rebuilding as a result of the centuries-old institutions like the absolute monarchy and the feudal system being dismantled. Like the American Revolution before it, the Enlightenment values had an impact on the French Revolution, especially the notions of inalienable rights and popular sovereignty. The movement was crucial in helping to shape contemporary countries because it demonstrated the strength that comes from the collective will of the people, despite the fact that it fell short of all of its objectives and sometimes descended into a bloody chaos.

In the 18th century, France was a powerful and robust nation. Large areas of North America, Caribbean islands, and Madagascar in Africa had been annexed by France. Even nevertheless, the French monarchy was going through a crisis that would eventually cause its demise. At the age of 20, Louis XVI of France assumed the throne in 1774. While he had good intentions, he was a dull-witted and ineffective ruler who was far more interested in his hobbies of lock-making and hunting than in the duties of absolute monarchy. He noted in his notebook, "Nothing," the day when crowds seized the Bastille on July 14, 1789.

Lucky to have Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727–1781) as his principal financial minister from the start, Louis forfeited that advantage two years after becoming king when he chose to fire Turgot

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rather than pursue the economic reforms that his minister had proposed when they faced fierce opposition from the nobility. After then, kingless and subject to the whims of self-serving courtiers, national policy took an erratic turn. The queen, Marie Antoinette, the daughter of Austria's Queen Maria Theresa, was as to blame for the king's erratic misgovernance as anybody else. She aroused the fervent animosity of reformers, intellectuals, and ordinary people because she was vain and strong-willed and enjoyed court entertaining and royal intrigue.

Causes of French Revolution

Following are the French Revolution's three primary causes:

1. Political Cause
2. Social Cause
3. Economic Cause

1. Political Cause:

In the seventeenth century, France served as the epicenter of authoritarian monarchy. The French rulers claimed to be "God's Representative" and exercised unrestrained authority. Louis XIV argued in favour of this notion. The French kings and queens delighted in luxury and excess in the royal court of Versailles. They have limitless strength. The Letter de Catchet gives them the authority to hold and jail anybody at any moment. They gave their topics very little consideration.

The great ruler Louis XIV of the Bourbon Dynasty. He was a capable, diligent, and self-assured leader. He took part in several conflicts. The infamous words "I am the State" by Louis XIV illustrate his idea of unrestricted royal authority.

In the 1700s, the Bourbon family controlled France. The Bourbon dynasty's rulers held the belief that they were God's earthly emissaries, and as such, they had only God to answer to (according to the Divine Right theory).

When the French Revolution occurred, King Louis VI was the absolute autocrat in power. He was an inept monarch who was only concerned with enjoying his luxury and showed the least interest in the business of the realm.

Louis' wife, Queen Marie Antoinette, intervened in administration and consistently favoured the aristocrats and the clergy because of her husband's inexperience in the business of state. The general populace, who was immensely underprivileged and was living in constant hunger as a consequence of the Bourbons' mismanagement, chose to express their discontent by participating in the revolution.

Therefore, the autocratic monarchy, bad governance, and wasteful spending made up the cause.

2. Social Cause:

The seventeenth century in France was marked by a dreadful social atmosphere. The three social groups that comprised ancient French society were the clergy, the nobles, and the commoners.

The First Estate owned the Clergy. The superior clergy and the lower clergy were two different categories of clergy. In the community, the highest ranked clergy had the most respect. All of France's

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monasteries, schools, and churches were under their control. They didn't pay any taxes to the king.

They used commoners in a variety of ways. Around the highest clergy, there was an inordinate amount of riches and luxury. The lower clergy were abhorred by the general populace. While enduring very wretched lives, the lesser clergy, on the other hand, served the people in the truest meaning of the word.

The Nobility was regarded as the Second Estate in French society. They also didn't pay any taxes to the monarch or queen. The nobles of the Court and the nobles of the provinces were divided into two further groups. The court nobles led lavish lives. They paid little attention to the problems that the locals in their villages were dealing with.

The local nobility, on the other hand, was worried about the problems that the people were suffering. They did not, however, have the same rights as the Court nobility. There were many different people that made up the Third Estate. Farmers, cobblers, sweepers, and other members of the lower classes made up this class. The predicament of the farmers was dire.

They paid taxes, much as Taille, Tithe, and Gable. Nevertheless, the nobles and clergy continued to employ them in their positions. The Bourgeoisie was the biggest class in the Third Estate. Professionals including doctors, lawyers, professors, business people, writers, and philosophers were present at this class. They were wealthy and affluent. The French monarch, however, identified them as members of the Third Estate, which was led by the clergy and nobility.

As a consequence, they stoked widespread rebellion. They made the general public aware of their rights. The common people began to rebel as a consequence. The lower clergy and local nobles joined forces with the ordinary people in addition to the bourgeoisie. The French Revolution is often referred to as the "Bourgeoisie Revolution" as a result.

3. Economic Cause:

The nation's economic state was another aspect that helped spark the French Revolution. France's economy declined due to Louis XIV's expensive overseas battles, Seven-year War by Louis XIV, and following expensive battles. Marie Antoinette's extravagant spending during Louis XVI's reign caused the royal coffers to run dry.

Louis XVI appointed Turgot finance minister in 1774 to solve this situation. Turgot worked hard to reduce the royal court's expenses to a minimum. He supported the king taxing all socioeconomic groups equally as well. However, Marie Antoinette's influence caused Louis XVI to dismiss Turgot.

Necker was later appointed Finance Minister in 1776. He published a report on the State's income and expenditures in an effort to inspire the people. But the monarch also gave the order to fire him.

The King chose Callone as his second choice to serve as France's finance minister in 1783. He changed the borrowing plan to pay for the royal court's expenses. This deal led to a three-year increase in France's national debt from 300,000,000 to 600,000,000 Franks.

Callone advanced the idea of taxing all classes equally. The monarch, however, dismissed him. The king then requested the States General in this situation. The unstable economy was a major cause of the revolution.

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Effect of French Revolution

This section summarizes a number of crucial aspects of the French Revolution as well as the pre-revolutionary conditions in numerous adjacent countries and locations that are significant to our investigation. We also talk about the effects that Napoleon's further conquests and the eventual growth of the French Revolutionary army had on these areas. A lengthy fiscal crisis that triggered the Revolution by forcing the Estates-General to convene in 1789 for the first time since 1614. After the first Estates General meeting, held on May 5, 1789, in Versailles, it was resolved to convene the National Parliament, a more powerful assembly. This sparked a radicalization process that culminated on July 14, 1789, with the storming of the Bastille. The National Constituent Assembly, which had just been formed, abolished feudalism and the First and Second Estate's rights and privileges on August 4, 1789. After that, the Church lost its authority to levy special taxes, and ultimately, the clergy were appointed to public office, starting the process of separating church and state. It then approved a constitution on September 29, 1791, making France a constitutional monarchy. The guilds' considerable authority in the cities was likewise diminished by this constitution.

The Terror was brought on by the radicalization of the Revolution, which ended in July 1794 with the deaths of Robespierre and Saint-Just. After that, there was a period of rather calm leadership, first in the form of a three-man Consulate under the direction of Napoleon Bonaparte, Ducos, and Sieyes between 1795 and 1799, and then with more centralised power under the Directory from 1795 and 1799. Already during the war, the young commander Bonaparte rose to prominence for his valor in battle and leadership qualities. His impact barely increased after 1799. Napoleon rapidly seized control of the Consulate and made it his own. He first arranged his election as First Consul in November 1799 via the 18th of Brumaire revolution, and then in 1804 he proclaimed himself Emperor. Continental Europe was brought to its knees between 1799 and 1815 as a result of a string of significant victories, notably those at Austerlitz, Jena-Auerstedt, and Wagram. They also made it possible for Napoleon to implement his laws across a broad area.

Conclusion

France and the countries that surrounded it were significantly impacted by the French Revolution in 1789. King Louis XVI's intention to raise taxes in order to pay off the national debt accumulated over the course of two wars set off the French Revolution (1789–1799), one of the most significant events in modern history. However, there needed to be a lot of ready-to-burn gasoline before a spark could start the fire of revolution. Either the underlying causes of this revolution or its fuel were the fundamental aspects of French society. It was founded on a political structure that granted the monarch unchecked authority, gave a tiny aristocratic elite control over politics and the economy, and condemned the vast majority of French people—the peasants—to a hard existence in misery. Political, social, and economic challenges were the three primary causes of the French Revolution.

The infamous French Terror and other radical institutional changes, such as the abolition of guilds and internal tariffs, the reduction of the power of the nobility and clergy, and the declaration of equality before the law for all citizens, were brought about by the violent overthrow of the previous government by the French Revolution. A significant portion of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands,

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Switzerland, and—most importantly for the purposes of this essay—Belgium were captured and governed by the French Revolutionary army and subsequently by Napoleon. The Revolution effectively brought about the same severe political, legal, and economic changes in all of these locations as it did in France. However, the forces of the French Revolution's invasion were also accompanied by disorder and the exploitation of the captured territory (and subsequently by Napoleon).

The long-term effects of the institutional changes that the French Revolution brought about have not received as much research as the origins and effects of the revolution. This essay makes an effort in that direction by looking at the effects of the major institutional changes that the French army forced upon their neighbors as a kind of natural experiment. The statistics show that after 1850, in places that suffered the institutional changes of the French Revolution, urbanisation moved more fast. It is significant that, at least in certain historical situations, our results indeed indicate that extreme institutional transformations may have long-term positive effects.

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