

American and French Revolution DBQ

Historical Context:

The year 1989 marked the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. To celebrate, the French government threw its biggest party in at least 100 years, to last all year. In the United States, an American Committee on the French Revolution was set up to coordinate programs on this side of the Atlantic, emphasizing the theme, "France and America: Partners in Liberty."

But were the French and American Revolutions really similar? On the surface, there were parallels. Yet over the past two centuries, many observers have compared the American Revolution to the bloodless Glorious Revolution of 1688, while the French Revolution has been considered the forefather of the many, modern violent revolutions that have ended in dictatorships.

The American Revolution sprang from a series of conflicts with the King of England, in which the colonists felt that their rights as citizens of Great Britain were being taken away. The Stamp Act, the Tea Act, and the Boston Massacre are but three examples of the problems encountered by the colonists in their struggles against the British Government.

The French Revolution came out of the Enlightenment. Philosophers such as Rousseau, Locke, and Hobbes pointed out that a monarchy was naturally against the way things were supposed to be and was not the way in which people were supposed to live. The Third Estate (i.e. the working and poorer classes) rose up against the First Estate (the wealthy class) and took down the monarchy.

The American Revolution, symbolized by the Declaration of Independence, the rise of Generals like George Washington and, to a lesser degree, Andrew Jackson, and the end of British rule in the colonies, was in many ways the basis for the French Revolution. The French Revolution, however, is symbolized by the guillotine, the Reign of Terror, and in the end, a dictatorship.

Task: Using information from the documents below and your knowledge of social studies, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B paragraph response, in which you will be asked to answer the following focus question:

Focus Question: Why was the American Revolution so much more successful than the French Revolution?

Part A: Primary Document Questions

Document 1: Arthur Young (1741-1820): Travels During the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789 (France)

... The abuses attending the levy of taxes were heavy and universal. The kingdom was parceled into generalities [administrative districts], with an intendant at the head of each, into whose hands the whole power of the crown was delegated for everything except the military authority; but particularly for all affairs of finance...It must be obvious that the friends, acquaintances, and dependents of the intendant, and of all his sub-delegates, and the friends of these friends, to a long chain of dependence, might be favoured in taxation at the expense of their miserable neighbours; and that noblemen in favour at court, to whose protection the intendant himself would naturally look up, could find little difficulty in throwing much of the weight of their taxes on others, without a similar support. Instances, and even gross ones, have been reported to me in many parts of the kingdom, that made me shudder at the oppression to which [people have been subjected] by the undue favours granted to such crooked influence.

List at least three examples of favoritism or corruption which was happening in regards to how they obtained taxes.

Document 2: From “The Declaration of the Rights of Man” (France)

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.
2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.
5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

According to this document, what are the right of the citizens of France?

Based on you knowledge of what happened in France, did these right happen for all citizens?

Document 3: Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth by Turgot (France)

1. The impossibility of the existence of Commerce upon the supposition of an equal division of lands, where every man should possess only what is necessary for his own support.

If the land was divided among all the inhabitants of a country, so that each of them possessed precisely the quantity necessary for his support, and nothing more; it is evident that all of them being equal, no one would work for another. Neither would any of them possess wherewith to pay another for his labour, for each person having only such a quantity of land as was necessary to produce a subsistence, would consume all he should gather, and would not have any thing to give in exchange for the labour of others.

What is the suggestion on how to deal with the problems in France given in this document?

Can you see a problem with this plan and getting the wealthy landowners to cooperate?

Document 4: Illustration: the execution of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France



How does this picture show the rebellion of the French for its Monarchy?

Document 5: Maximilien Robespierre: “Justification of the Use of Terror” (France)

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most urgent needs.

In Maximilien’s argument, why does he see a need to use terror to solve the issues in France?

How does Maximilien connect a need for terror to democracy?

Document 6: Soame Jenyns, The Objections to the Taxation of our American Colonies by the Legislature of Great Britain, briefly consider'd

It has been moreover alleged, that, though Parliament may have power to impose taxes on the Colonies, they have no right to use it, because it would be an unjust tax; and no supreme or legislative power can have a right to enact any law in its nature unjust: to this, I shall only make this short reply, that if Parliament can impose no taxes but what are equitable, and the persons taxed are to be the judges of that equity, they will in effect have no power to lay any tax at all. No tax can be imposed exactly equal on all, and if it is not equal, it cannot be just: and if it is not just, no power whatever can impose it; by which short syllogism, all taxation is at an end; but why it should not be used by Englishmen on this side the Atlantic, as well as by those on the other, I do not comprehend. . .

What is Jenyns argument for why taxes cannot be legally made into law?

Document 7: Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (American)

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

In the Declaration of Independence it explains when it is time to get rid of a government and develop a new form of government. Give at least three reasons this document gives for separating oneself from their government.

Document 8: Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775 (American)

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free--if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending--if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained--we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! ...There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace--but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

What is Patrick Henry comparing the colonist life as being? How is he using this imagery to encourage the men in the colonies to fight the British?

Document 9: "Pulling Down the Statue of King George III" (America)



PULLING DOWN THE STATUE OF GEORGE III.
BY THE LORDS OF FREEDOM.
At the Meeting-house, City of New York, July 27th.

What is the symbolism of the American colonist pulling down a statue of the King of England?

Document 10: United States Bill of Rights

1. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.
2. A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.
3. No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.
4. The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.
5. No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

6. In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.

7. In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

8. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

9. The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

10. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people

According to this document, what are the natural rights of men?

Choose one of the Bill of Rights and explain why it would have been important for the American Colonist to include this based on how they were treated by England before the Revolution.

Part B: Writing Response

Directions: Write a well-organized paragraph with a thesis statement. Use the documents above to help you with creating a paragraph answering the focus questions. Focus Question: Why was the American Revolution so much more successful than the French Revolution? You need to think about why, at the end of the American Revolution, a democratic system complete with a Constitution and a Bill of Rights was established, and why, at the end of the French Revolution, a dictator took control, only to be thrown out years later and a monarchy re-established. Was there something unique about the American Revolution? Was there something naturally wrong about the French Revolution? This is what you are to decide.

Thesis Statement: The American Revolution was more successful than the French Revolution because of _____, _____, and _____.

Body Sentence 1: (Use evidence to prove your first point)

Body Sentence 2: (Use evidence to prove your second point)

Body Sentence 3: (Use evidence to prove your third point)

Conclusion sentence: (Summarize your response)
