

Western civilization



Western Civilization Background of the French Revolution Question: What was the long-term background of the French Revolution? Can you explain its immediate causes?

We can trace the origin of French Revolution to the rigid social structure of the French society based on custom and tradition during the old French regime. French law imposed by the regime-perpetrated inequalities between classes.

Clergymen, especially the bishops and the abbots enjoyed power and wealth and used their office to secure them. Noblemen, held all the power positions in Church, Court and the Army. The Bourgeoisie consisting of doctors, lawyers, traders and intelligentsia had talent and money but enjoyed little social status and privileges. Those who lived in abject poverty and burdened by innumerable taxes were the poor peasant class.

The poor peasants were overburdened with the taxes imposed by Louis XIV, a warmonger and extremely lavish in his lifestyle.

The peasants were made to pay land tax, war tax, and an extraordinary number of dues were imposed on them such as, cloth dues, salt dues, bread dues, while the clergy and the nobility were exempt from paying taxes.

Resentment and anger were fuming among the exploited poor peasants.

These form the long time social background, which caused French Revolution.

Immediate causes:

The administrative failure in France and her bankruptcy in the later part of the 18th century forced Louis XVI to call a general meeting of the Estates General. But differences ensued among the representatives regarding voting rights. On June 10, 1789 the Third Estate, consisting of the bourgeoisie, the

peasants, and the liberal minded representatives from the members of the nobility declared itself the National Assembly. Louis XVI failed to disband the group. On July 14th commoners in Paris stormed the Bastille.

Question: Outline the ways in which French Revolution broke with the past.

What was revolutionary about it?

French Revolution brought a tide of change both externally and internally in the history of mankind. What were they?

First of all, the age of aristocracy saw an end, as the privileges based on birth became a thing of the past.

Secondly, talent received recognition as the highest positions went to the bourgeoisie. The French state found an identity in upholding middle class consciousness and values.

Thirdly, the feudal system gave way to a more modern “ liberal, secular and rational state”. The idea was that common man owned the country. He was now a citizen of his state.

Finally, the ideas of philosophers (Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet and others) found shape and form such as equality in the eyes of law, trial by jury, freedom of press, religion and press.

French Revolution brought new hope and light to all other European states.

As the age-old feudal system was demolished the new age upheld the high ideals of Enlightenment. New institutions came up which were based on reason and justice. Man broke the shackles of superstition, prejudice, oppression and cruelty of a fellow human being. New terms such as freedom, liberty, equality and brotherhood filled the hearts of men.

For that generation, human rights came within sight; forces of oppression, tyranny and misery were identified. “ So 1789 stands as the pivotal year- a

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watershed- in which these forces came to their abrupt and necessary end”.

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