

Question. how  
important was the  
part played by essay



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question. HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE PART PLAYED BY THE THIRD ESTATE IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION UP TO 1793? Definition-Third Estate consisted of the industrial, professional, commercial and intellectual classes generally known as the Bourgeoisie. Workers, peasants and everybody else who was not a noble or clergy also belonged to the Third estate. They made up 97% of the population. Part played-they revolted against Louis xvi in 1789 by breaking away from the Estates-General to form the National/Constituent Assembly. They vowed not to dissolve until after they had written a constitution for France.

The Revolt and formation of the National assembly was one of highly significant actions by which the previously excluded and oppressed Third Estate grabbed a share of the political power and participation. It was one of the actions by which Louis xvi was practically reduced from an absolute to a constitutional monarch. The march of women on Versailles and the forced relocation of Louis xvi and National Assembly to Paris to Versailles were also highly significant actions by the Third Estate which served to emphasize the Third Estate's emergence as the dominant political force in France.

Correspondingly Louis xvi was reduced in stature and he increasingly fell under the dominance and direction of the Third Estate. In 1789 the rise of the Third Estate and the corresponding decline of the monarchy, first and second estates was further confirmed by further actions of the Third Estate that included the storming of the Bastille, the abolition of the privileges of the clergy and nobles and seizure of the nobles and church lands.

Other highly significant actions confirming the new political, social and economic order included the Declaration of Rights and violence against nobles and their property which led to the emigration of the nobles and clergy from France into exile in countries such as Austria, Prussia and England. The declaration of rights following the abolition of the political, social and economic privileges of the nobles was also a highly significant and positive development in that for the first time political, social and economic rights were given to all French people regardless of class, gender and religion.

The Third Estate had thus inaugurated a new era of social equality, human dignity and hope for all in place of the political and social inequalities that had characterized the absolute monarchy of the ancient regime. These positive measures were later given formal and complete recognition in the 1791 constitution drawn up by the National/Constituent Assembly. France thus became a constitutional monarchy in theory as well as in practice. The Third Estate had thus fulfilled Rousseau and Montesquieu's dreams for general political participation and separation of powers.

This was achieved by creating a Legislative Assembly to assume Louis xvi's law-making powers and leaving him only executive functions. But the Third Estate also displayed a violent, highly oppressive and divisive aspect through some of their actions during the entire period. The vindictive peasants killed, destroyed and looted from the nobles exhibited. Through the 1790 civil constitution the Third Estate oppressed and undermined the church by forcing the clergy to take an oath of loyalty to the state which humiliated and brought them under state subjection.

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The Third Estate which controlled the National Assembly, then the Legislative Assembly and National Convention divided France instead of uniting the nation. The church itself was divided between those willing to take the oath (constitutional/juring priests) and those who refused (refractory/non-juring). The Third Estate itself split into radical, anti-clerical elements and passionately catholic peasants who rejected the civil constitution as an attempt to undermine to destroy Catholicism and Christianity. France also found itself in conflict with the pope and other countries of Europe.

In the end such oppressive and divisive acts of the Third Estate bred the internal rebellion and civil wars in places such as Vendee, Lyons, Toulon and Bordeaux. They also bred the international war between France and a coalition of European countries including Austria, Prussia, England, Holland and Spain beginning in 1792. This atmosphere of civil and international war created a situation in France where the Revolutionary Government found itself in a difficult position and it was forced to resort to far more violent and repressive measures to save itself and the revolution.

Some of these violent and repressive measures included the abolition of the monarchy, the arrest and death sentence of Louis xvi in 1792. This was prompted by fears that the king was conniving with the Revolutionary government's internal and external enemies to destroy the Revolution and restore the political, social and economic conditions of the Ancien Regime. The Third Estate introduced even more violence and repression in 1793 first through violent attempts to destroy Christianity by closing churches, murdering priests and introducing a new calendar which was supposed to be free of all the traces of Christianity associated with the old one. That same

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year there were mass slaughters of real and imagined enemies of the Revolutionary Government and that infamous period of domestic violence is referred to as the September Massacres. Even worse violence and suppression of civil rights followed in 1793 when the Third Estate through the National Convention introduced various laws including the Laws of Suspects and Maximum. The first destroyed freedoms of opinion and expression and the right to a fair trial by criminalizing any show of support for the monarchy and failure to show enough enthusiasm for the Revolution.

Suspects were hauled before the newly created Revolutionary Tribunal where they were denied legal representation . The Law of Maximum hindered free trade by fixing maximum prices for essential goods and prescribing death and imprisonment for offenders. Other measures included military conscription and requisitioning to beef up the army and feed it so it could deal with internal rebels and foreign armies. As many as 60000 people lost their life during this period; about 500000 were imprisoned only to suffer hunger, disease and even death in jails. This violent and oppressive phase of the Revolution was called the Reign of Terror.

The Third Estate therefore played a highly significant role in the Revolution to 1793. Positive aspects included achieving political power sharing and participation of all through the National then Legislative Assembly and National Convention. They also the granted civil rights and economic empowerment of the majority Third estate through the sale of land seized from the church and Nobles. Negative aspects included violence, suppression of civil rights, grabbing total political power by abolishing the monarchy and

dragging France into a war with other European countries that lasted until  
1815. U