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Sabrina HoProfessor DraperHistory 11028 November 2017TheEnlightenment and The French RevolutionWhileit might be a robust statement, The Enlightenment was the first groundbreakingintellectual movement in European history.

Unlike its other predecessors, thisintellectual movement inspired change for the sake of the social welfare tobenefit the common person. For the first time, the ideals of Enlightenmentcaused everyone to apply rational thoughts to justify human existence in life. This caused many people  in France,  to realize their social welfareand political environment.  Thus, it lead the French toquestioning the power of the French state, and eventually inspiring arevolution.  So in simple terms, The reason why The Enlightenment wasgroundbreaking was because it the first intellectual movement to transform intoa revolution known as the French Revolution. Beforethe Revolution, the people of France lived in a restricted social and politicalsystem known as the Ancien Regime. There was legislative assembly partof government called “ The Estates General”. 1 With the purpose ofrepresenting everyone in France, The Estates General were divided into thethree Estates: The First, the Second and Third.

The First and Second Estateswere composed of wealthy nobles and the clergy. On the other hand, theThird Estate was comprised of commoners, (which was 98 percent of thepopulation during the time). Now keep in mind that France was still an absolutemonarchy with King Louis XVI ruling over everything in France. Thus the monarchhad overruling control over “ The Estates General” despite being a legislativeassembly2.  King Louis XVIwould favor The First and Second Estates because the monarchy deep dependencefrom these two class groups for  economical, political, and social support.

Thus, The Third Estate had none power at the assembly and instead becamevictims of cruel laws enacted by The First and Second Estates3. By the1780s, France had a huge economic crisis by supporting the American Revolution, hence the nation was racking up a lot of national debt. Because of this, KingLouis XVI and his royal government raised taxes to pay off the nationaldebt. However, one of the social privileges of being part of the wealthy Firstand Second Estates was the fact they never had to pay taxes. As a result, the burdenof paying taxed was left to the common people from The Third Estate4. Moreover, in 1788, alarge famine plagued the entire nation that caused a food shortage5. By then the commoners ofThe Third Estate had enough, and the Revolution began with the goal of creatinga new government based on the enlightenment ideals. Thus how the French Revolutionbegun.

Afterthe takeover of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, the “ Declaration and Rightsof Man and Citizen” was written by the newly formed National Assembly6. The authors were inspiredby John Locke idea of human rights and Rousseau idea of a social contract. Locke believed people were born with natural rights of life, liberty, andproperty. Hence the role of the government was to protect one three basicnatural human rights7.

Rousseau believed government was anagreement between the nation and its people8. Furthermore, Rousseau thought that if the standards of the agreement was notupheld by the nation, the people had every right to create a newgovernment for themselves, thus why it was considered it a social contract9. By incorporating thesetwo Enlightenment ideals, the Declaration and Rights of Man and Citizen” would end up  making social welfare of people a governmental responsibly. Thus being so significant because it changed the culture of the way citizenslived as they were ensured hope for once in their life. Unfortunately, The Declaration and Rights of Man and Citizen did not appeal towards themajority of people.

Thus the Constitution of 1791 was written in replaceand established a constitutional monarchy. Under this new constitution, Francekept its Monarchy but the ruling power of government was given to the people. More importantly, it declared that the national government would be dividedamong individual branches10. This enlightenment ideal came from the greatPhilosophes Montesquieu’s who established the idea of limiting ruling within leadinggovernment positions. Montesquieu’s  truly believed that everyauthoritarian role had limits on power . Hence he established thesystem checks and balances to uphold the separation of powers and ensure astable government 11. Remarkable as it was, this was a time in history where the government did not abused power.

Infact it was the first time the power of government was limited. Hence why thisdocument was so momentous. Despiteall these changes from the Revolution, there was still one left one group thatwas unsatisfied: the Jacobins, led by Robespierre. The Group wanted aRepublic because they hoped it lead to greater equality and fair representationto the people and used violence to achived it12.  Nevertheless, there was one important aspect of  that the Jacobins tackled: therole of of religion in government.  TheJacobins also supported  Voltaire’s enlightenment rational of scrutinizingthe authority and power of the church. Because of the influence of these twoideals, many started to questioned the church authority over people13. This is very importantto note because it was the first time in history the Catholic Church lostpolitical influence and power after centuries of overpowering Europe.

Thuseventutally transforming into religious institute it is known today instead ofthe poltlical powerhouse it once use be. Certainly, the enlightenment ideals transformation into the French Revolution was thefirst of its kind. Nevertheless as many know it was a very unsuccessfulrevolution that ended up with Napoleon. This was because there no game plan topreserve the revolution. In the case of the French Revolution, too many ideascame out at once that ended up colliding each other.

Thus, ending up in purechaos. Sure one could have all these bright ideals that can spark theemotions and revelations, but is it worth anything if cannot last forentirety?        BibliographyBurke, Edmund. Reflections on the Revolution inFrance. N. p.

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