

Analysis of arthur young's travels in france

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DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT, HISTORY AND JUSTICE CAMPBELL

UNIVERSITY ANALYSIS OF ARTHUR YOUNG'S TRAVELS IN FRANCE BY

DANIELLE KING Submitted to Professor Ocana in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for Western Civilization 112 November 3, 2010 Arthur Young

was born on September 11, 1741 in Bradfield, a village in Suffolk, England.

After he dropped out of school and acquired a job in a mercantile house, for

which he was not suited for, Young began his writing career at the age of

seventeen. He was much more inclined to write than work in a more

commercial capacity as he later became a great English agriculture writer.

Although Young was such a fantastic agriculture writer he is most known for

his social and political writings. Young was not very successful with the land

from the start; however, after inheriting the land around his home after the

death of his mother and through a series of failed farming attempts

elsewhere in England, he began to learn quite a lot about agriculture. From

this point Young began to write several books and journals about agriculture

in and around England and his popularity grew tremendously. After having

made quite a name for himself in the world of agriculture, Young began to

travel outside of England.

Young first went to Ireland in 1776 and published his findings there four

years later with *Tour in Ireland*. Young's most popular excursion was to

France, which he first visited in 1787. Young explored the country in great

detail learning a good deal from the people and the land. Young meticulously

documented the condition of the soil and other agricultural data as well as

his opinions as to the political and social reasons for France's

agricultural failure. This information was published in 1792 split into two volumes titled *Travels in France*.

The reason this work was so important then and still important today is because Young gives a remarkable account of the social, economic, and political problems and struggles leading up to and just after the beginning of the French Revolution. During the section of *Travels in France* that discussed his thoughts on the French Revolution, Young was enraged by much of what he saw. The issues that seemed to frustrate Young the most were unequal taxes, harsh penal codes, and a lack of justice in the court system. The first major dilemma Young discusses is a system of unequal taxes.

He begins by giving the reader an understanding of how the kingdom was organized. Young says that the kingdom was broken into generalities with an intendant appointed to govern them. The generalities were broken down further into elections which were governed by "sub-de-legate"; this position was appointed by the intendant. Needless to say, the intendant held a vast amount of power particularly with regards to taxation. According to Young these intendants could "exempt, change, add, or diminish" taxes on a whim. (Young) With this type of control it is easy to see why befriending the intendant might be advantageous.

It was known that the friends and family, even very distant relatives could benefit financially from a connection to the intendant. Naturally people without this connection were very upset as, since taxes still had to be paid to the kingdom, they were the ones to shoulder this financial burden. There were exemptions allowed for the intendants, sub-de-legues, nobility, clergy, and the friends and family of these people. The poor of the kingdom felt as

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though the people with the most economic resources were exempted from paying taxes because they were fortunate enough to have those resources.

The second issue Young uncovers while traveling in Frances is the kingdoms' unequal and unfairly harsh penal code. Young uses, as an example, the laws for salt smugglers. Taken from his Travels in France were eight extremely strict regulations covering the offenders accused of smuggling salt. The first law mentioned says that if five or more armed salt smugglers are gathered together in Provence they will be fined and spend nine years in jail. If these same people were anywhere else in the kingdom they would be put to death.

The next law says that if less than five but more than one armed smugglers are gathered together they get a second chance. The first time they are caught meeting, they will be fined and sentenced to three years in jail. The second time they will be killed. The third rule discusses unarmed smugglers that have some sort of transportation to move the salt. This could be in the way of animals and or carts while traveling on land or a boat if the smuggler is on the water. At this point the punishments become slightly less severe with the first offence being only the fine of the previous law without the time in jail.

However, if that fine is not paid then the same three years time will be served. With this law as well, the smuggler would have a second chance although the second offence carried a much stiffer penalty. In most of the kingdom a heavier fine was required as well as nine years jail time. In Provence, a smuggler could expect to go to jail for five years without the fine. In Dauphine, however, the second offence would take away a

smuggler's freedom for the rest of his life. The next law covers unarmed smugglers without transportation.

This is the least severe of the punishments for males having only a small fine for the first offence. If the smuggler does not have the money to pay the fine they are flogged and branded. The second time they are caught is not much worse with a fine and six years jail time. The fifth law sets the punishments for women; it is very interesting that they are given three chances and not given jail time for either offence. The first time they are sentenced with a very small fine and the second time a slightly larger fine. The husband is responsible for the fine. The third time they are flogged and permanently put out of the kingdom.

The next law says that the child smugglers are treated the same as the women with both parents held liable for the fine. After the common people of the kingdom, the nobles are mentioned. If nobles are caught, their titles and estates are taken away from them. No fine or jail time is necessary for the same crime that common people could be put to death for. The last law in this excerpt discusses what Young thinks is the salt or revenue employee that smuggles on the side. This person would be sentenced to death. If this employee steals or transports the stolen salt they would be hung.

This is the only law listed that describes a particular kind of death showing how important they felt this crime was. The final major issue Arthur Young found with the French during his journey through the kingdom was with the lack of justice in the court system. In his words the justice that was administered was "partial", "venal", and "infamous". (Young) He goes on to say that after conversing with numerous men in several different areas

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around France all of them felt as if the legal system needed serious reform, as equal justice under the law was completely impossible due to widespread corruption.

Young found that as two parties stood before the judge the winner of the dispute would be whichever party could bribe the judge more. Shockingly, this bribe did not always have to be monetary; it could also be the “ beauty of a handsome wife” (Young) The only way justice would be served was if two conditions were both met; neither party could have any connection to the judge (or anyone else in power) and neither party could have something of value to offer the judge, be it money, land, or women.

If either of these conditions was not met, the party that knew the judge or had the available resources would be victorious. Furthermore, the judges had the authority to originate decrees. Not surprisingly, they did this without the permission of the King. As it turns out, these “ parliaments” had configured a judicial system where they made the laws and then turned around and punished people for breaking these laws. Young had uncovered what he described as “ a horrible system of tyranny”.

Young's main points of unbalanced taxes, unforgiving penal codes, and the deceitful legal system help to bring into focus his feelings of why the French were doomed for a revolution. He does a wonderful job of really capturing the feeling of the typical Frenchmen at the time. Although he arrived in the kingdom to evaluate the conditions of the soil and other aspects of the farming environment, he seemed to leave with a thorough understanding of French society in the late 1780's. The only bias shown in the piece might be

in that Young only makes note of the thoughts, fears, and complaints of the working class citizens.

From the reading, it is difficult to get a sense of how the people in power felt about day-to-day life. Because of this one-sided account, any reader would automatically find themselves cheering for the “ little people” and suppressing a growing detestation for persons of authority. The principle value of Arthur Young's Travels in France is that the people of this day and age studying the French Revolution have an excellent report of some of the events leading up to it. Young goes deeper into the major concerns of the day than the average textbook can.

The reader truly gets the opportunity to feel the pain of the local townspeople. Textbooks try to hit the highlights of history, which sticks mainly to important kings and key politicians, where in pieces like Young's, readers get to understand the plight of the average Joe. Bibliography Stead, David. Arthur Young. EH. Net Encyclopedia 2003. <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/stead.young> Young, Arthur. Arthur Young's Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788, 1789. London: George Bell and Sons, 1909.