

Essay on French Revolution

◆ Economic Crisis and Burden on the Third Estate

France faced a severe financial crisis in the late 18th century due to its involvement in costly wars and royal extravagance. The **Third Estate**, made up of peasants, artisans, and the middle class, bore the weight of high taxes, while the First and Second Estates—the clergy and nobility—enjoyed privileges. This economic imbalance ignited social unrest.

◆ Influence of Enlightenment Thinkers

The ideas of Enlightenment philosophers deeply influenced public opinion. Thinkers such as **Rousseau**, **Voltaire**, and **Montesquieu** questioned absolute monarchy and promoted equality, liberty, and democratic values. These ideas encouraged the people to challenge oppressive systems and imagine a fairer society.

◆ Role of the Estates-General

In 1789, King Louis XVI summoned the **Estates-General**, a body representing all three social classes, to solve the financial crisis. However, disagreements over voting rights led the **Third Estate** to break away and form the **National Assembly**, asserting their right to represent the people and initiate reforms.

◆ Origins of Discontent and Rising Tensions

Economic hardship, unequal taxation, and lack of political representation led to widespread **dissatisfaction**. Food shortages and unemployment increased anger. The people were no longer willing to suffer under the weight of injustice, and revolutionary sentiments began to grow rapidly.

◆ The Declaration of the Rights of Man

In August 1789, the **National Assembly** adopted the Declaration of

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the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. It proclaimed freedom of speech, equality before the law, and protection of property. This landmark document became a symbol of modern democracy and human rights.

◆ Collapse of the Monarchy

King Louis XVI's refusal to implement meaningful reforms and his failed attempt to flee France in 1791 destroyed public trust. He was arrested, tried, and executed by guillotine in 1793. The monarchy was abolished, and France was declared a republic.

◆ Reign of Terror and Radical Measures

Following the king's execution, the revolution entered its most violent phase—the **Reign of Terror**. Led by **Robespierre** and the Jacobins, thousands were executed for allegedly opposing the revolution. While intended to protect the republic, these actions caused widespread fear and instability.

◆ Women's Participation in the Revolution

Women were active participants in revolutionary events. In the **Women's March to Versailles**, they demanded bread and accountability from the king. Though often overlooked, their role in protests, political clubs, and revolutionary change was significant.

◆ Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte

Political instability created a power vacuum that **Napoleon Bonaparte** exploited. In 1799, he seized control through a coup d'état. Though he brought order and reforms, his rise to power marked the end of the revolution and a shift toward authoritarian rule.

◆ Lasting Impact on France and the World

The French Revolution had far-reaching effects. It ended feudalism in

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France, promoted civil rights, and influenced democratic movements around the world. Ideas born during the revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—continue to shape modern political thought.

◆ **Conclusion**

The French Revolution was a turning point in both French and global history. It marked the collapse of absolute monarchy and the rise of democratic ideals. Rooted in inequality, economic hardship, and the influence of Enlightenment ideas, the revolution reshaped France's political and social structure. Although it passed through phases of violence and instability, its core principles—liberty, equality, and fraternity—remain central to modern democratic societies. The revolution not only changed France but inspired movements for justice and rights around the world.