

# DBQ: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Using the documents below and your understanding of the French Revolution please answer the following question:

To what extent did the French Revolution live up to its ideals of Libert , Egalit , et Fraternit ? Please answer with reference to politics, economics, and society

A.



French Society  
late 1700's

B. **Poverty Observed: Journal of a Country Priest**

Finally, after three weeks of this cold, which increased continually, the thaw came. Its sad effects were not yet known. Work was begun on the vines in the usual manner, but this soon became impossible because the cold began again at the start of Lent toward the middle of February and lasted fifteen days in the same violent manner. The sun, however, was stronger and made the cold more bearable to men during the day, but much more damaging to what remained of the

produce of the earth, which could not resist the terrible nights that caused almost everything to die, so that it was scarcely possible to gather enough to provide for next year's seed.

Wheat was soon at 28 livres the septier, and wine at 100 francs the pipe. It was hardly possible even for those who knew how, to find money, when there wasn't any. The number of poor people increased incredibly because the continuing rains of the previous year, 1708, had been very bad and had damaged the grain crops. . . . The poor of the countryside were destitute of any aid, no longer possessing a cabbage or a leek in their gardens, so they crowded into the cities to take part in the liberalities of the inhabitants, which were very considerable, at least in Nantes—for I cannot speak of other cities.

But they were soon begrudged the only help they had. They were forced, by the threat of great penalties, to return to their homes, and there soon appeared the most beautiful edicts in the world to help them, which, however, served only to increase their misfortune. Each parish was supposed to feed its own poor; but for this it would have been necessary for the poor to feed the poor. So these lovely edicts were without effect, and the only way to help the poor, by decreasing the taxes with which they were burdened, was never put into practice. On the contrary, they were increased.

*Source: Jeffrey Kaplow, ed., France on the Eve of Revolution: A Book of Readings (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 9–12. This material is used by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

## **C.** Voltaire's Understanding of Inequality

This passage from François-Marie Arouet, pen-named Voltaire, who was perhaps the best-known writer of the eighteenth century, illustrates the spirit of investigation of the Enlightenment. The philosophes wanted to understand the rationale behind inequality, were particularly interested if there were natural reasons for it, or if inequality came wholly from social conventions. From a well-to-do middle-class background, Voltaire condemned arbitrary inequality and the social conditions that spawned it.

All men are born with a rather violent penchant for domination, wealth, and pleasure, and with a strong taste for idleness. Consequently, all men covet the money, wives, or daughters of other men, want to be their master, subjecting them to all their caprices and doing nothing, or at least only doing enjoyable things. It is easy to see that with these honorable tendencies it is as impossible for men to be equal as it is impossible for two preachers or two professors of theology not to be jealous of one another.

The human race, such as it is, cannot subsist unless there is an endless number of useful men who possess nothing at all. For it is certain that a man who is well off will not leave his own land to come and plow yours, and if you have need of a pair of shoes, it is not the Appellate Judge who will make them for you. Equality is therefore both the most natural of things, as well as the most unreal.

As men go to extremes in everything when they can, this inequality has been exaggerated. It has been claimed in many countries that it was not permissible for a citizen to leave the country where fate has placed him. The idea behind this law is obvious: "This land is so bad and so badly governed that we forbid anyone to leave for fear that everyone will leave." Do better: make all your subjects want to live in your country, and make foreigners want to come.

Deep in their hearts, all men have the right to think themselves entirely equal to other men, but it does not follow from this that the cardinal's cook can order his master to prepare him dinner. But the cook can say: "I am a man like my master, born in tears, as was he. When he dies, it will be with the same fear and the same rituals as I. Both of us perform the same natural functions. If the world was turned upside down, and I became cardinal and my master became the cook, I would take him into my service." This discourse is reasonable and just, but while waiting for the world to turn over, the cook must do his duty or else all human society becomes corrupted.

*Source: François-Marie Arouet, Dictionnaire philosophique (London [Nancy], 1765), 157–60.*

## **D. French Poverty in the Countryside**

To Combourg: The country has a savage aspect; husbandry not much further advanced, at least in skill, than among the Hurons (American Indians) . . . The people almost as wild as their country, and their town of Combourg one of the most brutal, filthy places that can be seen; mud houses, no windows, and a pavement so broken as to impede all passengers . . .

To Montauban: The poor people seem poor indeed; the children terribly ragged, if possible, worse clad than if with no clothes at all; as to shoes and stockings, they are luxuries . . . They did not beg, and when I gave them anything seemed more surprised than obliged. One third of what I have seen of this province seems uncultivated, and nearly all of it in misery . . .

*Arthur Young- Travels in France, Brittany, September 1788*

## **E. Petition of Women of the Third Estate to the King (1 January 1789)**

Sire,

The women of the Third Estate are almost all born without wealth; their education is very neglected or very defective: it consists in their being sent to school with a teacher who himself does not know the first word of the language [Latin] he teaches. They continue to go there until they can read the service of the Mass in French and Vespers in Latin. Having fulfilled the first duties of religion, they are taught to work; having reached the age of fifteen or sixteen, they can earn five or six sous a day. If nature has refused them beauty they get married, without a dowry, to unfortunate artisans; lead aimless, difficult lives stuck in the provinces; and give birth to

children they are incapable of raising. If, on the contrary, they are born pretty, without breeding, without principles, with no idea of morals, they become the prey of the first seducer, commit a first sin, come to Paris to bury their shame, end by losing it altogether, and die victims of dissolute ways.

Today, when the difficulty of subsisting forces thousands of them to put themselves up for auction [prostitution], when men find it easier to buy them for a short time than to win them over forever, those whom a fortunate penchant inclines to virtue, who are consumed by the desire to learn, who feel themselves carried along by a natural taste, who have overcome the deficiencies of their education and know a little of everything without having learned anything, those, finally, whom a lofty soul, a noble heart, and a pride of sentiment cause to be called prudes, are obliged to throw themselves into cloisters where only a modest dowry is required, or forced to become servants if they do not have enough courage, enough heroism, to share the generous devotion of the girls of Vincent de Paul.

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We ask to be enlightened, to have work, not in order to usurp men's authority, but in order to be better esteemed by them, so that we might have the means of living safe from misfortune and so that poverty does not force the weakest among us, who are blinded by luxury and swept along by example, to join the crowd of unfortunate women who overpopulate the streets and whose debauched audacity disgraces our sex and the men who keep them company.

We would wish this class of women might wear a mark of identification. Today, when they adopt even the modesty of our dress, when they mingle everywhere in all kinds of clothing, we often find ourselves confused with them; some men make mistakes and make us blush because of their scorn. They should never be able to take off the identification under pain of working in public workshops for the benefit of the poor (it is known that work is the greatest punishment that can be inflicted on them). . . . [in text] However, it occurs to us that the empire of fashion would be destroyed and one would run the risk of seeing many too many women dressed in the same color.

We implore you, Sire, to set up free schools where we might learn our language on the basis of principles, religion and ethics. May one and the other be offered to us in all their grandeur, entirely stripped of the petty applications which attenuate their majesty; may our hearts be formed there; may we be taught above all to practice the virtues of our sex: gentleness, modesty, patience, charity. As for the arts that please, women learn them without teachers. Sciences? . . . [in text] they serve only to inspire us with a stupid pride, lead us to pedantry, go against the wishes of nature, make of us mixed beings who are rarely faithful wives and still more rarely good mothers of families.

We ask to take leave of ignorance, to give our children a sound and reasonable education so as to make of them subjects worthy of serving you. We will teach them to cherish the beautiful name of Frenchmen; we will transmit to them the love we have for Your Majesty. For we are certainly willing to leave valor and genius to men, but we will always challenge them over the dangerous and precious gift of sensibility; we defy them to love you better than we do. They run to

Versailles, most of them for their interests, while we, Sire, go to see you there, and when with difficulty and with pounding hearts, we can gaze for an instance upon your August Person, tears flow from our eyes. The idea of Majesty, of the Sovereign, vanishes, and we see in you only a tender Father, for whom we would give our lives a thousand times.

*Source: The materials listed below appeared originally in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 60–63.*

## **F.** Tax Grievances

1. That his subjects of the third estate, equal by such status to all other citizens, present themselves before the common father without other distinction which might degrade them.

7. That venality {sale} of offices be suppressed. . . .

13. That military ordinances establishing a degrading distinction between officers born into the order of nobility and those born in to that of the third estate be revoked, as thoroughly injurious to an order of citizens and destructive of the competition so necessary to the glory and prosperity of the State.

15. That every personal tax be abolished; that thus the capitation and the taille and its accessories be merged with the vingtiemes in a tax on land and real or nominal property.

16. That such tax be borne equally, without distinction, by all classes of citizens and by all kinds of property, even feudal and contingent rights. . . . JUSTICE.

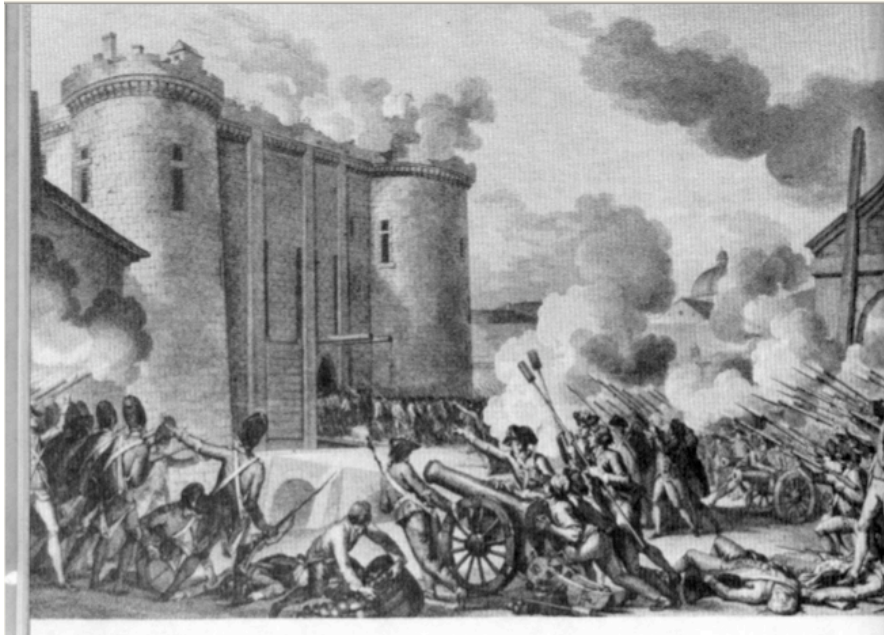
*Cahiers de doléances-lists of grievances Presented to the Estates General March 29, 1789*

## **G.** What is the Third Estate?

Who is bold enough to maintain that the Third Estate does not contain within itself everything needful to constitute a complete nation? It is like a strong and robust man with one arm still in chains. If the privileged order were removed, the nation would not be something less but something more. What then is the Third Estate? All; but an "all" that is fettered and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged order? It would be all; but free and flourishing. Nothing will go well without the Third Estate; everything would go considerably better without the two others. . . . What is a nation? A body of associated living under common laws and represented by the same legislative assembly, etc. . . . Because of these special rights, the nobility does not belong to the common order. . . Thus its private rights make it a people apart in the great nation.

*What is the Third Estate? Emmanuel Sieyès (1789)*

# H.



Storming of the Bastille  
July 14, 1789

# I.

## A Royalist's Observation

His majesty...appeared...before the States General which for the first time he called the National Assembly. He confirmed the dismissal of the army camped around Paris, approved the establishment of the bourgeois militia, handed a letter for the recall of Necker to the president of the Assembly, authorized eighty deputies to be sent to Paris... The capital...barricaded its streets and was covered with armed men who seemed to have sprung from the earth.... The cockade was hoisted everywhere; it was white, blue, and red. These colors decorated everything, sanctioned everything, justified everything.... Versailles will never forget that day and that departure: the king's former servants could not, without shedding tears, watch the French ...proceed...toward a capital...

*Journal politique national, No.8; A Royalist Journalist Comments on the King's Acceptance of the July 14 Revolution*

# J.

## Feudalism Abolished

Article I: The National Assembly completely abolishes the feudal regime. It decrees that among the rights and dues that are feudal, as well as rental, those which derive from...personal servitude...shall be abolished without compensation...

Article III: The exclusive right of hunting and of maintaining open warrens is likewise abolished...

Article IV: All manorial courts are suppressed without compensation...

Article V: Tithes of all kinds...are abolished...

Article X: As a national constitution and public liberty are of greater advantage to the provinces than the privileges which some of them enjoy, and as the sacrifice of these is necessary

for the intimate union of the realm, it is declared that all the peculiar privileges of provinces...are forever abolished and shall be incorporated into the law common to all Frenchmen.

Article XI: All citizens, without distinction of birth, can be admitted to all offices and dignities, be they ecclesiastical, civil or military...

*Decrees Abolishing Feudalism August 11, 1789*

## **K.** Declaration of the Rights of Man

I. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.

II. The aim of all political association is to preserve the natural and unalienable rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, and security and resistance to oppression.

III. The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially in the nation. No body and no individual may exercise authority which does not emanate from the nation expressly...

VI. Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens being equal in its eyes are equally admissible to all public dignities, offices, and employment's, according to their capacity, and with no other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.

X. No one may be disturbed for his opinions, even in religion...

XI...Every citizen may therefore speak, write, and print freely...

XIII...common taxation is necessary. It should be apportioned equally among all citizens according to their capacity to pay.

XVII. Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no one may be deprived of it except for an obvious requirement of public necessity, certified by law, and then on condition of a just compensation in advance.

*Declarations of the Rights of Man and Citizen, August 26, 1789*

## **L.** Abolition of Nobility

Decree Abolishing Hereditary Nobility and Titles

19 June 1790

1. The National Assembly decrees that hereditary nobility is forever abolished. Consequently, the titles of Prince, Duke, Count, Marquis, Viscount, Vidame, Baron, Knight, Lord, Squire, Noble, and all other similar titles shall neither be accepted by, nor bestowed upon, anyone whomsoever.

2. A citizen may assume only the real name of his family. No one may wear livery or have them worn, nor may anyone have a coat of arms. Incense shall be burned in churches only to honor the Divinity, and shall not be offered to any person.

3. The titles of Your Royal Highness and Your Royal Highnesses shall not be bestowed upon any group or individual, nor shall the titles of Excellency, Highness, Eminence, Grace, etc. Under

pretext of the present decree, however, no citizen can take the liberty of attacking either the monuments in churches or the charters, titles, and other documents concerning families or properties, or the decorations in any public or private place. Also, the implementation of the provisions related to liveries and coats of arms placed upon carriages may not be effected or required by anyone at all until 14 July for citizens living in Paris, and for three months for those living in the provinces.

4. The present decree does not apply to foreigners; they may preserve their liveries and coats of arms in France.

*Source: John Hall Stewart, A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 142–43. (Slightly retranslated)..*

## **M.**      **Populace Awake**

Good people of France! You can become the premier country in the world. You have started the most beautiful revolution in the history of mankind, and it is up to you to take it to its end. Continue to go to public places, assemble often, unburden yourselves of your boring and monotonous drudgery, and consecrate your leisure time and your days of rest to the discussion of the nation's interests and the examination of your leaders' conduct. Let none of the political currents that take place around you go unnoticed. Be strangers to nothing. Let your dignity enfold you, know the extent of your power, and multiply the light of your wisdom by stringing together the sparks of genius of each and every individual that makes up your imposing mass. Of all your weapons, there is not one with a caliber equal to that of education. Education is the refuge of your independence.

Good people of France! Cultivate your own reasoning. Set up patriotic lectures at the heart of every town and in the countryside. If the local priest refuses to turn over the pulpit, or if he mixes the wheat and the chaff, let the most able father assemble his children and his neighbors under the church porch or on the threshold of his cottage and read the decrees from the National Assembly so that they may be discussed by those present. Let each person improvise in his own way, without any other aim but that of the public good. And soon the simplest of men, guided by that moral instinct with which nature has blessed all thinking beings, will be in a position to appreciate things and people for their true worth.

*Source: Révolutions de Paris, no. 68 (23 October 1790), 116.*

## **N.**      **Beware the Wealthy Bourgeoisie**

This is how the Paris bourgeois were before the Revolution, and how they are still, or very nearly.

The bourgeois is not a democrat, or barely. He is a royalist by instinct. Sheep also look to a single leader. Nothing can make them stop following their shepherd, even though he shaves them



so closely they bleed, sells them to the butcher when they're fattened up, or slits their throats for his own dinner. But sheep all alone, without a sheepdog or shepherd, would be confused and wouldn't know what to do with their freedom. The bourgeois is the same way. In the order of species he would be situated halfway between man and mule, and serve as the link between the two. He often has the straightforwardness of the latter and sometimes tries to think like the former . . . but at this he often doesn't succeed.

Before the Revolution, several different types of bourgeois could be identified in Paris: the low, the high, and the moral [bonne.] Sometimes these last two are confused, and it might seem that they were one and the same. But that would be a big mistake.

The high bourgeois is an aristocrat in the full sense of the word, but he does not have the energy or loyalty of the nobles. He is, however, proud to walk immediately behind them. This was the class from which municipal magistrates and other city officials were normally chosen.

The petite bourgeoisie are in the middle, between the two previous kinds and the People. There were many of them, among whom were the lower clergy and retail merchants, bosses of small workshops, well-off artisans, clerks, and, especially lately, many writers. The Revolution has the biggest obligations to the small bourgeoisie, who were constantly and everywhere in evidence. It was they who contributed most effectively to containing the hordes of brigands that the Minister had let loose on us in the capital to try to make us abort the upcoming birth of French Freedom. One-third of the guard regiment was made up of small bourgeois.

They have always sided with the people, who have not always treated them fairly. The high bourgeois never missed a chance to back the nobles, and every day they whisper how sorry they are that they are now extinct.

*Source: Révolutions de Paris, no. 87 (12 March 1791), 453–60.*

## **O. Press Reports of the King's Flight: Révolutions de Paris (25 June 1791) and Père Duchesne (1791)**

Citizens! We warned you! Remember that we didn't wait until the dénouement of 21 June to tell you what kings are capable of. He left, this vile king, but he is no doubt the last to fool you. Let him go, never to return. To have kept him any longer at our head would have been far too much of an encumbrance.

But citizens, look at how all the circumstances which have preceded, accompanied, and followed this flight are criminal. Has the enforcer of righteousness, with his lethal weapons ever struck more accomplished villains than those who have just fled the Tuileries Palace by night? Julius Caesar, stabbed to death by the Romans, Charles I, decapitated by the English, were innocent compared to Louis XVI.

You my King. You are no longer my King, no longer my King! You are nothing but a cowardly deserter; a king should be the father of the people, not its executioner. Now that the nation has resumed its rights it will not be so bloody stupid as to take back a coward like you. You, King? You are not even a citizen. You will be lucky to avoid leaving your head on a scaffold for having sought the slaughter of so many men. Ah, I don't doubt that once again you are going to pretend to be honest and that, supported by those scoundrels on the constitutional committee, you are going to promise miracles.

*Source: Les Révolutions de Paris, no. 102 (18–25 June 1791), 525–26; and Le Père Duchêsne, no. 61 (June 1791), 1–8.*

## **P.** Enemies of Liberty

The French nation declares that it will treat as enemies the people who, refusing liberty and equality, or renouncing them, may wish to preserve, recall, or treat with the prince and the privileged castes; it promises and engages not to subscribe to any treaty, and not to lay down its arms until after the establishment of the sovereignty and independence of the people whose territory the troops of the Republic have entered upon and who shall have adopted the principles of equality, and established a free and popular government.

*Source: Decree for Proclaiming the Liberty And Sovereignty of all Peoples (December 15, 1792)*

## **Q.** The Tyrant is No More

Citizens, the tyrant is no more.... The National Convention and the French people are now to have only one mind, only one sentiment, that of liberty and civic fraternity....Never did circumstances more urgently require of all citizens the sacrifice of their passions and their personal opinions concerning the act of national justice which has just been effected. Today the French people can have no other passion than that for liberty....Let us, through our patriotism,avert those horrible shocks, those anarchical and disorderly movements which would soon overwhelm, France with disturbances and grief, if our outside enemies, who are fomenting them, could profit therefrom...

*Proclamation of the Convention To the French People, January 23, 1793*

## **R.** The Terror Grows

The Law of 22 Prairial Year II (10 June 1794)

The Revolutionary Tribunal is instituted to punish the enemies of the people.

The enemies of the people are those who seek to destroy public liberty, either by force or by cunning.

Those who have supported the designs of the enemies of France, either by countenancing the sheltering and the impunity of conspirators and aristocracy, by persecuting and calumniating patriotism, by corrupting the mandataries of the people, or by abusing the principles of the Revolution or the laws or measures of the government by false and perfidious applications;

Those who have deceived the people or the representatives of the people, in order to lead them into undertakings contrary to the interests of liberty;

Those who have sought to inspire discouragement, in order to favor the enterprises of the tyrants leagued against the Republic;

Those who have disseminated false news in order to divide or disturb the people;

Those who have sought to mislead opinion and to prevent the instruction of the people, to deprave morals and to corrupt the public conscience, to impair the energy and the purity of revolutionary and republican principles, or to impede the progress thereof, either by counterrevolutionary or insidious writings, or by any other machination...

The penalty provided for all offenses under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Tribunal is death.

Every citizen has the right to seize conspirators and counterrevolutionaries, and to arraign them before the magistrates. He is required to denounce them as soon as he knows of them.

The accused shall be examined publicly in the courtroom: the formality of the preceding secret examination is suppressed as superfluous; it shall take place only under special circumstances in which it is deemed useful for a knowledge of the truth.

If either material or moral proofs exist, apart from the attested proof, there shall be no further hearing of witnesses, unless such formality appears necessary, either to discover accomplices or for other important considerations of public interest.

All proceedings shall be conducted in public, and no written deposition shall be received, unless witnesses are so situated that they cannot come before the Tribunal; and in such case an express authorization of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security shall be necessary.

*Source: John Hall Stewart, A Documentary History of the French Revolution (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 528–31.*