American Revolution Vs. French Revolution Essay, Research Paper

A revolution is to overthrow a government and replace with another. That is what both colonial America, and France did. The American Revolution started in the year of 1775, and was set out to break away from Britain. Most of the colonist wanted to break away from British rule because of taxes, trade regulations, and power. The French revolution began in the year 1789. The French nobles, Bourgeoisie, and peasants wanted to break away because the people wanted more power, to overthrow the monarchy, or to change the tax system. The American and French Revolution both have similarities and differences. The similarities and differences come in economy, leaders, ideology, and provocation.

The American Revolution was started basically because of problems with the British economy. The major concept of the time was ?taxation without representation?. After the French and Indian war, the British government was burdened with a huge debt. They wanted to tax more to the colonist because they were the ones helped the most from the war. Ordinary people had always been taxed lightly in America, but they did not want their money to be used to support the British. The first major tax imposed on the colonist was the Sugar Act of 1764. This act increases the duties on imported sugar and other items such as textiles, coffee, wines, and indigo. One of the other taxes levied was the Stamp Act. The act required that revenue stamps be put on all legal documents, deeds, newspapers, pamphlets, dice, and playing cards. Most of the colonist disapproved the act. They showed their disapproval by destroying the stamps, and basically resorting to violence. The other tax imposed was the Townshend Act. The Townshend Act was put in affect to collect duties on colonial imports of glass, red and white lead, paints, paper, and tea. Both the Stamp and Townshend Acts were imposed to help pay for the costs of British soldiers living in America, and to protect the American colonies. Also, trading restrictions enforced by Britain angered the colonist. The British basically wanted, and tried to have a mercantilistic economy in America. This policy discouraged any trading between the colonist, and any other country other than Britain. The colonist did not really care about most of the British rules, and they again were able to overturn the rules once again.

In France, the bourgeoisie and the peasants totally disliked the tax system. Both revolutions were started mainly because of taxation. Due to the Seven Year War and American Revolution, the government of the French was in a huge debt. The French rebels looked on to the American Revolution, and copied the idea of ?taxation without representation?. At the time, the peasants and bourgeoisie had to pay taxes. The nobles refused to cooperate and pay taxes like the rest of the people of France. Also, in both countries trade was getting very prosperous. In American trade was getting regulated by Britain. In France, the bourgeoisie was getting rich off the booming trade. But like the British, the government discouraged free trade. Both France and British governments love the idea of mercantilism so there debt would start to get smaller. But it hurt them the most, because the people were getting more and more angry because of it. Mercantilism caused more and more poverty in both France, and America.

During the American Revolution, many leaders emerged to help the colonist get their freedom. Of the many leaders, the two most influential were Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington. Thomas Jefferson?s political ideas helped draft the Declaration of Independence. His ideas were influenced by the Enlightenment era. He also drew ideas from an earlier politician, John Locke. The job was given to Jefferson to write up the Declaration of Independence. The document not only declared America independent from Britain, but also defined the government and society America would rest upon. The Declaration fueled most of the colonist to a revolution. Washington turned out to be one of the most influential leaders ever in America. He was appointed commanding general in 1775. The biggest strength of America was that it had Washington as its leader. George?s concept of persistently attacking, and never backing down to the British, was the reason America won. After the war, and aside from the battlefield, Washington showed once again he cared deeply about America. He was asked to be the king, but knew that America shouldn?t have one. Washington knew America needed to be a country that everyone in the world looked up to. He believed America needed a government for the people, and by the people. He later went on to become the first President of the United States unanimously.

The French Revolution also had many influential leaders. Unlike the leaders of America, these leaders did not turn out to help the country drastically. In other words, I would say that these leaders caused more harm, than good. Also, they taught the French people more about which government would be better off for them. One of the most deadliest, and cruelest leader was Maximilien Robespierre. The time of his dictatorship was known as ?Reign of Terror.? He demanded a republic and soon after his demands; the monarchy was overthrown. Also, he felt that a constitutional government would have to wait until all the enemies of the revolution have been killed. To do this, he killed almost 40,000 people most by guillotine, and sometimes just by life in jail. The Reign of Terror was one of the most controversial, and most outrageous phases of the Revolution. Some French colonist thought it was a way to democracy; others thought it was just a way for Robespierre to be a dictator. The other great leader was Napoleon Bonaparte. He believed that the only way to have control in France was to put a limit on democracy. Over a period of time Napoleon?s party overthrew Robespierre?s party. Soon enough Napoleon was dictator of France.

Also, ideology was a major source of ideas for the American Revolution. Ideology includes ideas, concepts, philosophies, and beliefs. Ideology is key in revolutions because it showed how ideas influenced people at that time. Ideas determine how people act, and tells us what they feel, and what they want. The American Revolution was essentially was a war for economic freedom. The main issue was taxation. Just like stated above, the phase, ?taxation without representation? was a key idea in many revolutions, including the American Revolution. This was the colonists? main cause to rebel; they went as far as to tar and feather tax collectors. Many of them followed 17th-century English philosopher John Locke in believing that all individuals possessed certain ?natural rights??such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of property?and that it was the responsibility of government to protect those rights.

In the French Revolution, there were many ideas that fueled the citizens to rebel as well. In the 18th century, there was a lot of criticism of the French monarchy, even from the Old Regime. The king?s ministers questioned his past decisions, and current ideas. The parliaments were 13 regional royal courts led by the Parliament of Paris. They decided if a law should be passed or not. They believed that the king?s initiatives with the laws that he wanted to pass threatened rights and liberties of the people. There was also another group called the philosophies; they did not want a violent revolution. They argued that the people had certain natural rights, and that the government was there to guarantee these rights to them. The philosophies pointed out the Old Regimes flaws and how they abused their power. Yet another group called the Bourgeoisie influenced people with their ideas. They were respected very much because of their high education levels. It included such thinkers as Voltaire and Rousseau. They presented an idea of liberal society that benefited from commerce. The Bourgeoisie went against the absolute right to rule, they presented ideas of equal rights, and wanted to abolish the class system. Also, they said men should develop through opportunity and education, not because of they birth. The French soldiers who fought in the American Revolution came back from the war with new ideas and reason for revolution. They included: the right to take up arms against tyranny, no taxation without representation, all men should have liberal freedoms, and a republic is superior to a monarchy. The war with Napoleon was seen as a way to spread the revolutionary cause throughout Europe. It was to spread the idea of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Another area to look at when comparing revolutions is provocation. This area includes such things as tyranny, class war, land war, and grievances. The American Revolution had many altercations with social classes, and land. One reason the revolution started was because the British made the Proclamation of 1763, which stated that Americans couldn?t move east of the Appalachian Mountains. Land was abundant in America, but the British were sick of wars with the Indians. In contrast though, the Americans were big time farmers and wanted more land. They didn?t understand why they couldn?t have the land if it was right in front of their eyes. Another altercation had to due with social class. People don?t ever think of the American Revolution to be a civil war, but it turned out to be. All the classes in America were united against the British except the loyalists. This is mainly because they were all fighting for the same cause: freedom, equality, and no taxation without representation. The British were trying to control Americans completely, with their monopoly on trade, and also thought that the Americans would do everything they demanded. The colonists on the other hand were figuring out the British. They didn?t understand why they had to pay taxes to the British, when they had no say in Britain?s actions. Their question was ?Why are we paying for Britain?s wars?? The British were using the colonists, and naturally the colonists did not like it, and viewed themselves independent.

During the French Revolution, the peasants had many grievances. One of these was the seigniorial system. This system allowed for greater income differences in France and a distinct separation of classes. This left peasants isolated compared to the rest of society. The peasants were given huge amounts of taxes, which was impossible for them to pay. This led to an angry peasantry in France. Peasants were attracted to the ideas of the Bourgeoisie for two reasons. One, they related with them on peasant grievances. Also, they were the only class that the peasants could come close to associating with. Due to financial problems and conflict between classes, 1788 was a big year. All the classes were mad at the regime and wanted chance. Finally, there was the storming of the Bastille. The peasants stormed the Bastille; this gave peasants loot and land.

In conclusion, the American and French Revolution have similarities and differences. Those similarities and differences come in the categories of economy, leaders, ideology, and provocation. All revolutions from the past and now seem to take something from the past and they use it to benefit themselves.