

American Revolution versus French Revolution

Name

Institution

In the recent years, a lot of research has been made where American revolution (also referred as ‘the War of Independence’) is compared to other revolutions that took place in the end of the 18th century. The most significant academic effort has been made when comparing it with French revolution, the nearest one in time. Before discussing and comparing particular causes and events of both revolutions, it is worth mentioning that they were carried in different historical, economical and social contexts. On the one hand, we have European France with its profound historical tradition and centuries-old culture. On the other hand, there is a young America, or rather a group of English colonies, relatively recently populated, with no settled down traditions and, still, in the process of creating their own culture. British colonies in America occupied the territory nearly equal to that of France; however, the population of those territories was 10 times smaller than in France. Thus, the current paper, not claiming the comprehensive coverage of all aspects of each revolution, aims to discuss the most relevant issues of the comparison of two revolutions of the end of 18th century.

Causes of the French Revolution

The French Revolution took place in 1789-1799 years. It was a significant period of political and social upheavals in France. Some factors comprising of economic and social factors contributed to the uprisal of the Revolution. One of the direct reasons of the French revolution in 1789 was the regressive and mismanaging system of taxation carried out by Louise XVI (Murray, 2002). The wealthiest in the country did not pay taxes while the peasantry had to pay approximately 80% of their lesser income to the royal treasury.

During King Louis XVI’s reign, the element of debt also fueled up the revolution in the same perspective. The military spending and the lavish spending undertaken at Versailles Palace contributed to the debt crisis in France during the period. For instance, the statistics indicated

that the French participation in American Revolution rose to a very high debt in 1789 (Carlyle & Scurr, 2010). The increase created an economic crisis that led to a rejection of equal taxation among the Estates General.

Second, the deregulation of the grain market also resulted in the French revolution. The crisis affected the price of food in a negative manner. A significant part of French population was rural, and the basic food was either grain or potatoes. During that period, there was a decline in potato and grain yield in France. The lower class population suffered the most, as they had to spend two third to three quarters of their income on food. In accord, the French Revolution also caused by harvest failure leading the prices to soar. Such discontent resulted in radical upheavals of the masses (Egendorf, 2004). As the period held a significant economic hardship, the tight integration of the local market in France led to Revolution.

Third, the combined effect of economic problems made people express their resentment with their political and social situations. It, therefore, resulted in the element of disillusionment on the political system of the country. For instance, there was a broad social distrust in the 1789. The discontent mainly developed in the Third Estate known as the Social Strata of the Commoners. The distrust was primarily due to the political structure that did not consider an equal distribution of power among the First Estate, comprised of the Clergy. The same problem in the division of authority was between the Second Estate, made up of the Nobility and the Third Estate made up of the peasants, under the reign of King Louis XVI (Egendorf, 2004). Therefore, social problems and inequality were among the reasons that led to the French Revolution.

Causes of the American Revolution

America of the 18th century was merely a group of European colonies and mostly populated by people of commercial mind. The latter contributed to the specific world view. Americans were strongly independent people and never wanted people dictating things that they had to do. They wanted to have things for themselves. Therefore, this idea was different with that of Great Britain. The Americans significantly challenged the obligation by the colonial power demanding on how the Americans were to live and do business (Morton, 2003). They never wanted people an ocean away telling them on how to live their lives to do business, thereby leading to the American Revolution.

The American Revolution had its roots in the financial pressure created by Britain in the New World. As Britain was economically dependent on its colonies, taxation was also an influential factor in the American Revolution. The British Imperial Policy caused tax strain due to the economic burden on Britain from the French-Indian War of 1754 to 1763 (Coonts, 2003). Taxation in British colonies in America began by series of laws like the Currency Act of the year 1764. Such laws prevented the colonists from printing paper money thereby putting a dependency on Britain for capital. The Sugar Act of the year 1764 also contributed to the Revolution by enforcing laws on the molasses importation. The final straw was the 1765 Act that imposed fees for stamps on every type of documents available. These taxes created discontent for colonists that did not want taxation without representation (Morton, 2003). Therefore, tax created an economic distress in America leading to revolution.

The American colonialists were not represented in the government of Great Britain, as such, they lacked a voice in mother country. They wanted to set up a republic, to provide justice and liberty to all the classes of citizens. By so, their reign in the region was not a smooth one. They treated the colony as a private property sanctioning laws that were inappropriate. Such

actions made the Americans rebel against the government on having too much power controlling them. More precisely, the misuse of authority by England to acquire wealth in its colonies and making laws that favored them (MacAtasney, 2012). Hence, the American Revolution started with an aim of making things better for every citizen, in terms of availability of food and satisfactory life.

Comparison of the two Revolutions

The two revolutions are similar in some ways. The people who rebelled in the two countries were ordinary citizens involved in taking arms and attacking their governments. Both revolutions had these connections. Similarly, the artillery and the muskets were used in both the American Revolution and the French Revolution. The two revolutions were also similar in that they both wanted to escape the reign of kings. In accord, they started by an uprising of the people against the unfair taxation of the monarch. Hence, the two revolutions were similar in some ways (Carlyle & Scurr, 2010).

The American Revolution distinguished from the rest of the revolutions as the Americans were striving for independence, liberty, from the parent nation (Drummond, 2002). Differently, the America's nature of upheavals was against imperialism. On the other hand, the French Revolution was striving for structural political and the socio-economic reforms.

Other differences between the two revolutions are that the American rebels had warships, unlike the French rebels. The French rebels had no navy. The Americans were also a colony that rebelled against their government (Werner, 2000). It was significantly important to the revolution as the American colonialists had more time to prepare for the invasion, as the country of Britain was distant away from America.

Conclusion

The revolutions achieved their aims to some levels and had lasting consequences. For example, the Americans finally got independence. The causes of the two revolutions were much interwoven. It is significant to identify that the revolutions started in France, as the country was an important regional player. Economic factors that led to the revolution were almost similar, mainly based on taxation. Therefore, the French and the American Revolutions positively affected social understanding of the need of political reform to avoid economic crisis. Thereby, all those factors resulted in the new forms of ideas that united people who were the driving force of both revolutions.

References

MacAtasney, G. (2012). *Tom Clarke: Life, liberty, revolution*. Kildare, Ireland: Merrion.

Drummond, A. (2002). *Liberty*. New York: Frances Foster Books.

Coonts, S. (2003). *Liberty*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Egendorf, L. K. (2004). *The French Revolution*. San Diego, Calif: Greenhaven Press.

Carlyle, T., & Scurr, R. (2010). *The French Revolution*. London: Continuum.

Murray, S. (2002). *American Revolution*. New York: DK Pub.

Morton, J. C. (2003). *The American Revolution*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Werner, K. D. (2000). *The American Revolution*. San Diego, Calif: Greenhaven Press.