

Student Essay on Causes of French Revolution

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Essay

Right before the French Revolution, society consisted of three major groups, or Estates. These three estates were kept separate: It was practically impossible to move from one to another.

The first estate consisted of clergymen of the Roman Catholic Church. They owned much of the land of France and were not taxed at all. In fact, they actually received tax income from the crown. The second estate consisted of those who had been born into nobility. They were taxed very little and owned more land than the clergymen. The third estate was further divided into three groups: the bourgeoisie (wealthy merchants), the artisans, and craftsmen. All were taxed absurdly highly with regards to their income and compared to the first and second estate. The bourgeoisie felt like they were unfairly treated because several of them were more affluent than many noblemen, they were well educated, they had worked for their money and appreciated its value, and still they were taxed very highly while noblemen were hardly taxed at all. The remaining portion of the third estate really did not rally for independence until after the bourgeoisie started it. They were uneducated and had always worked. They did not think that another life was possible.

Together, the clergymen and nobles made up about 2% of the entire population of France, and yet they owned approximately 40% of the land. The system in use was rather similar to a feudal system, but was not recognized as such. It benefited the rich and taxed the poor to a point where they were starving while nobles down the street were feasting.

The third estate felt like they had nothing to lose. The bourgeoisie had read and agreed with Enlightenment ideas, the Americans had just recently successfully pulled off a revolution, and French society was at a breaking point. As is evident, society contributed a great deal to the start of the French revolution.