

What Important Political and/or Social Transformations were Brought about by the French Revolution, and What was the Cultural Impact of these Transformation?

In order to look at the cultural impact from the French Revolution, the social and political transformation during and after the period needs to be evaluated and discussed. Subject that need to be considered in the cultural changes would have to include art, literature, ideologies, gender roles, citizenship and many others, as they could and would have been affected as well as aspects, politically and socially. This would have to be examined before, during and after the French Revolution to see the real change to France and to the French people.

France in the eighteenth century was in a feudal society under the authorization of the absolute monarchy. The Bourbon monarchs whom lived in luxury in the royal palace of Versailles, while the finances of France were in an appalling condition. The French treasury had been virtually emptied after the copious wars that France was engaged in (Mamta Aggarwal). The King of France, Louis XVI was incompetent of guiding France through the political and financial crises that they were facing at the time. His wife, Queen Marie Antoinette who was an Austrian princess was accused for lavishing in the and wasting away public money. Both the autocratic and administration was immoral and corrupt (Mamta Aggarwal).

There was constant social unrest due to political and economic distress. French society was divided due to the social classes or "estates" (Mamta Aggarwal). The first and second estate made of the clergy and the aristocracy enjoyed many privileges under the government including the exclusion of the burden of taxation. Due to the fact the nobility dominated all important positions in the French administration and lived a life of luxury, it affected the third estate, which was made up of 98% of the French population (Mamta Aggarwal). The third estate had the burden of the entire taxation however, the taxpayers had no political rights. The members of the third estate were miserable and had to work long hours with little pay as well as had to pay separate taxes to the Crown, to the clergy and to the nobility (Mamta Aggarwal). This helped motivate and push the French Revolution as the people suffered under the social and economic system wanted to change it (Mamta Aggarwal).

The political, social as well as the economic factors during the French Revolution affected the culture of France and the French people. Therefore, the "cultural legacy" (Emmet Kennedy, 1989) of the French Revolution has changed western culture and has affects the culture to present day. the French culture creates a "colourful backdrop" (Emmet Kennedy, 1989) in contrast to the effects of the Revolution on France. It can be said that attitudes changed and progressed and/ or radicalised during this period with the anti-Christian views and the Enlightenment era to the point where there was a cult-like sensibility about the Revolution as it slid into horror and terror at the end of the century (Emmet Kennedy, 1989). The French Revolution mainly affected the Culture of the people through dechristianization on France and giving men rights as well as helping enlightening women to their ability to be equal to that of men.

Everything was affected by the French Revolution, including art. There were hundreds of paintings and sketches influenced by the French Revolution as well as Napoleon Bonaparte

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(Brian Gardner, 2009). Many painters were influenced and decided to paint figures or landscapes that represented the revolutionary ideas and events that occurred at the time or after the Revolution. Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) was a neoclassical artist. He was born in Paris, France (Brian Gardner, 2009). He was an active supporter of the revolution and supported his friend, Robespierre, on his regime. Napoleon even asked him to paint a portrait of him (Brian Gardner, 2009). Paintings before the revolution would never depict the rising of the red flag of revolution or anyone not considered of importance. The revolution brought the freedom of communication of thoughts and ideas and therefore the freedom to paint whatever the painter wanted or was paid to paint.

Many people do not consider or tend not to think about the substantial effects that the revolution had on music (How the French Revolution affected Classical Music, 2016). There were several ways to earn money and a living through music. The most common one was through the Church which was a primary supporter of musicians. For example, Bach, made his money mainly from working for the Church which pushed him to be listened by the likes of the aristocracy. The Church would ensure financial security and success (How the French Revolution affected Classical Music, 2016). After the Revolution there was a rise of public concert halls. This was both a positive and negative thing. More people had access to music, but this caused a problem for “serious” musicians as the people were not interested in “heavy” music (How the French Revolution affected Classical Music, 2016). Many musicians no longer fit into the popular trend of the music style and struggled to find a platform for their music. This then caused the loss of many jobs (How the French Revolution affected Classical Music, 2016).

Literature was also affected by the Revolution not just in France but in Britain as well. There were many responses to Thomas Paine's *The Right of Man* (Ruth Mather, 2014). Newspapers such as *The London Chronicle* which warned ‘before they have accomplished their end, France will be deluged with blood.’ Many believed and predicted the Revolution would turn violent including Edmund Burke (Ruth Mather, 2014). Most moderate Britons belated the attempts by the French to mimic the formation of a constitutional monarchy in their own version of the English ‘Glorious Revolution.’ (Ruth Mather, 2014). Events in France influenced a major frenzy on both the advocacy of Republics and a system of social welfare as well as advocated to improve education for women and provoked the reflection of the way society was organised through class and gender (Ruth Mather, 2014).

At the time of the Revolution, as ideas and theories as well as ways of thinking developed and changed, so did the influences of philosophers. They started to inspire people with revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality (Mamta Aggarwal). They rejected the theory of the Divine Rights of Kings and in the book “Social Contract” by Rousseau explains how the sovereign's power lays in popular will rather than by a birth right or by the will of a higher power (Mamta Aggarwal).

The Reign of Terror was very important to the beliefs and ideologies of the French people. Radical beliefs of the French republican politicians and citizens impacted to the Terror. It provided interpretations of the Reign of Terror as a manifestation of the ideology of the

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French Revolution (Zachariah Gehlert, 2019). Aspects of the power during the Terror can be found in the roots of the enlightenment philosophy as well as absolutist practices in the later days of the Ancien Regime (Zachariah Gehlert, 2019).

Nationalism theories have supposedly created a gender-neutral approach which has resulted in a pattern of minimizing women and their contribution to their nations. (Tiffany R Thompson, 2015). Culturally, notions of gender differences have informed nationalisms and produced by a nation as seen in the political exclusion of French women during the French Revolution. The ideology inspired by the enlightenment has created the idea of rights for the French people however it also limited universal rights and women were systematically and automatically excluded from any political participation. (Tiffany R Thompson, 2015). Women were not given access to full citizenship rights and therefore defined by the conception of gender and values the French nation held about the enlightenment (Tiffany R Thompson, 2015).

The French Revolution opened the debate and conception of citizenship and nationhood for not only men of any class but for women, children, foreigners and even slaves. The Revolution was supposed to create a flourishing and progressive new era to be hailed and be a place of international fraternity (Dr Michael Rapport, 2000). Foreigners were promised acceptance and were to be enriched in the “regenerated nation and to become citizens” (Dr Michael Rapport, 2000). However, this was a false promise and it fell through with foreigners being executed by guillotine during the Terror and hundreds jailed, expelled from France and closely watched. (Dr Michael Rapport, 2000). Foreigners were eventually almost completely squeezed out from political and social French life, creating a dramatic transformation which would affect France to the present day (Dr Michael Rapport, 2000). Therefore, the origins of the modern concept of nationhood and citizenship came and developed from the national identities during the Terror and French Revolution (Dr Michael Rapport, 2000).

In conclusion, the political and social transformations brought about by the French Revolution highly impacted the culture of France. The Revolution was a decade of “disruption” (Emmet Kennedy, A Cultural History of the French Revolution, 1989) and it created and influenced the rest of Western Europe culture along with it. It can be said that the most important impact on the culture in France was the social radical change of dechristianization across the country. The most important political impact on the culture at the time was the dethroning of the monarchy, beheading of King Louis XVI and his Queen, Marie Antoinette as well as the establishment of the republic and the Rights of Man. Furthermore, the political and social transformations brought about by the French Revolution, culturally impacted and transformed the way of thinking and the way of life throughout the decade and after the Revolution.

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