SOFTWARE & TECH

Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers

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Introduction: Understanding the Collapse of the Old Regime

The French Revolution remains one of the most pivotal events in modern Western history, a seismic upheaval that dismantled centuries of monarchy, feudal privilege, and aristocratic dominance. For students tackling a Document-Based Question (DBQ) on this topic, the challenge is not merely to list events but to synthesize complex, interconnected factors using primary sources as evidence. Finding comprehensive **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers**requires a deep dive into the social, economic, political, and intellectual forces that converged in the late 1780s. This article provides a thorough analysis of those causes, structured to help you understand not only what happened but why, and how to articulate that understanding effectively in a DBQ essay. By examining the structural weaknesses of the Ancien Régime alongside the immediate triggers, we can see how a perfect storm of grievances made revolution inevitable. This exploration will equip you with the analytical framework needed to interpret documents and craft a persuasive, evidence-based argument.

The Social Foundations of Discontent: The Three Estates System

At the heart of any discussion of the **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers** lies the deeply unequal social structure known as the Three Estates. This system legally divided French society into orders, with the First Estate (clergy) and Second Estate (nobility) holding a monopoly on power, wealth, and privilege, while the vast majority belonged to the Third Estate. This institutionalized inequality was a primary source of resentment and a key theme in many DBQ documents.

The First and Second Estates: Privilege and Exemption

The First Estate, comprising the Catholic clergy, owned roughly 10% of French land and collected the tithe, yet paid virtually no direct taxes. Similarly, the Second Estate, the nobility, controlled vast estates and held the highest offices in government, the military, and the church. They enjoyed exemptions from the primary direct tax, the *taille*, and lived lives of luxury funded by feudal dues extracted from peasants. While internal divisions existed—the *haute clergy* (high-ranking bishops) often lived as aristocrats alongside the nobles, while the *curés* (parish priests) were often poor—the estates as a whole were perceived as parasitic and resistant to reform. DBQ documents often include cartoons, tax rolls, or memoirs that vividly illustrate this privilege, such as the famous image of the Third Estate carrying the clergy and nobility on its back.

The Third Estate: The Weight of the Nation

The Third Estate was anything but a monolithic group. It included the bourgeoisie (merchants, lawyers, doctors, bankers), the urban workers (sans-culottes, artisans, laborers), and the peasantry—the vast majority of the population. What united them was their lack of privilege and their heavy tax burden. The bourgeoisie, though often wealthy and educated, were barred from high office and social advancement because of their birth. They

resented being locked out of power and frustrated by outdated laws that hindered commerce. The urban workers faced rising bread prices, stagnant wages, and harsh working conditions. The peasants, who comprised about 80% of the population, were crushed by feudal dues, tithes to the church, and a crushing tax burden owed to the state, their lord, and the clergy. A poor harvest in 1788–89 sent food

Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers to the social grievances of the Third Estate—particularly the bourgeoisie's desire for political representation and the commoners' need for economic relief—form the backbone of any strong essay.

Economic Crises: The Financial Wreck of the Monarchy

While social inequality created the underlying tension, economic crisis was the immediate catalyst. No analysis of the **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers** would be complete without examining the Crown's staggering debt and its inability to reform the tax system. The French monarchy, after decades of expensive wars (including the Seven Years' War and crucial support for the American Revolution), was effectively bankrupt by the 1780s.

The Cost of War and Royal Extravagance

France's intervention in the American Revolution is a classic irony of history: the French Crown spent a fortune to help establish a republic based on Enlightenment principles, only to bankrupt itself in the process. The cost of the war, combined with the lavish spending of the court at Versailles under King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, created a massive deficit. The royal treasury was so depleted that it could no longer borrow money without raising interest rates to unsustainable levels. Key financial ministers, like Turgot, Necker, and Calonne, all attempted reforms, but each was thwarted by the privileged classes who refused to surrender their tax exemptions. This led directly to the summoning of the Estates-General in 1789, a desperate move that set the revolution in motion.

The Tax Burden and Bread Crisis

The tax system was not only regressive but also inefficient. The Third Estate bore the entire burden of direct taxes like the *taille*, the *capitation* (poll tax), and the *vingtième* (income tax of 5%). Indirect taxes on salt (*gabelle*) and other goods were also deeply hated. Furthermore, the system of tax farming—where private individuals collected taxes for the crown—meant that a large portion of revenue was lost to corruption. Compounding this was the devastating famine in 1788–89. Hailstorms and a drought destroyed crops, sending the price of bread (the staple food for most people) soaring. In August 1788, a four-pound loaf of bread cost eight sous; by February 1789, it had risen to fourteen sous, consuming most of a worker's daily wage. This economic desperation made the population receptive to revolutionary ideas and willing to riot. DBQ documents from this period often include bread prices, petitions from guilds, and financial reports that demonstrate this link between empty stomachs and political upheaval.

Political Failures: The Weakness of Absolute Monarchy

The political structure of France was an absolute monarchy, but its effectiveness was fatally undermined by resistance to reform. Finding accurate **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers** requires analyzing not just the actions of the king, but the structural limitations of the entire system of governance.

The Indecisive King and Unpopular Queen

Louis XVI, though personally kind and well-intentioned, was indecisive, shy, and lacked the charisma or political acumen needed to navigate a crisis. He preferred hunting and locksmithing to the business of state. His Austrian-born wife, Marie Antoinette, was widely reviled as "Madame Deficit" due to her lavish spending and rumored affairs. The public blamed the monarchy for the economic crisis, and the monarchy's inability to respond effectively eroded its legitimacy. Document sources such as political pamphlets (*libelles*)—often slanderous, pornographic attacks on the queen—show how deeply respect for the royal family had declined.

The Parlements and the Blockage of Reform

The monarchy was further hamstrung by the *parlements*, powerful courts controlled by the nobility (the "robe nobility"). These courts had the power to register royal decrees, and they could block legislation they disliked. When Louis XVI's ministers proposed taxing the nobility, the *parlements* refused to register the decrees, claiming they were a violation of tradition. This legal obstructionism forced the king into calling the Estates-General, the first time it had met since 1614. The decision to summon this medieval assembly, with its outdated voting procedures (one vote per estate), was a catastrophic miscalculation. It gave the Third Estate a platform to voice centuries of accumulated grievances, creating a crisis of representation that could no longer be contained.

Intellectual Ferment: The Enlightenment as a Revolutionary Blueprint

While material conditions were dire, ideas gave the revolution its direction. The intellectual movement of the Enlightenment provided a powerful critique of the Old Regime and a set of alternative principles for organizing society. Any complete set of **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers** must account for the role of revolutionary ideas, which often appear directly in DBQ documents through excerpts from philosophers.

Key Thinkers and Their Ideas

John Locke's concept of natural rights (life, liberty, and property) challenged the divine right of kings. Montesquieu argued for the separation of powers (executive, legislative, judicial) as a safeguard against tyranny—a model later adopted in the U.S. Constitution. Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed the idea of the "general will" and popular sovereignty, arguing that legitimate government rests on the consent of the governed. Voltaire famously defended freedom of speech, religion, and thought, railing against the Catholic Church's censorship and authority. The American Revolution provided a living example of these principles in action, demonstrating that a republic could overthrow a monarchy. These ideas did not cause the revolution in a vacuum, but they gave the Third Estate a language to articulate its demands for liberty, equality, and fraternity. When the Estates-General met, the Third Estate deputies were heavily influenced by Enlightenment thought and drew on it to write the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in August 1789.

The Spread of Ideas Through Print Culture

The spread of these ideas was accelerated by a growing print culture. Pamphlets, newspapers, and books reached an increasingly literate public (especially among the bourgeoisie). Coffeehouses, salons, and Masonic lodges became centers for political debate. This "public sphere" meant that the king could no longer control the narrative. Political cartoons and cheap pamphlets spread revolutionary ideas quickly, creating a shared language of discontent. A well-read DBQ student will often find a document—an excerpt from an essay by Rousseau or a passage from Sieyès' "What is the Third Estate?"—that shows the direct application of philosophy to the political crisis.

Immediate Triggers: The Estates-General and the Storming of the Bastille

The long-term structural causes—social inequality, economic crisis, political dysfunction, and intellectual change—created the conditions for revolution. The immediate triggers were the events of 1789. A careful look at these events provides essential context for any **Causes Of The French Revolution Dbq Answers** essay.

From the Estates-General to the National Assembly

When the Estates-General met at Versailles in May 1789, the Third Estate demanded that the three estates meet together and vote by head, giving them a numerical advantage due to their 600 deputies (compared to 300 each for the clergy and nobility). The king and the nobility insisted on voting by order, which would ensure the two privileged estates could always outvote the Third Estate. After weeks of deadlock, the Third Estate

National Assembly on June 17, 1789, claiming to represent the entire French nation. When they found their meeting hall locked, they moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and swore the famous **Tennis Court Oath** on June 20: they would not disband until they had written a new constitution for France. This was a direct act of rebellion against royal authority.

The Storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789)

Fearing that the king was about to use military force to dissolve the National Assembly, the people of Paris took matters into

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