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The Age of Revolution

In European and American History, the period from 1775 to 1848 is known as the **Age of Revolution**. During this time, multiple revolutions took place, in many different parts of the world. Each of these revolutions brought about a change in their country's type of government. In every case, the revolutions of the age moved away from the traditional model of **monarchy**. Each revolution sought to replace monarchy with some form of democracy.

Monarchy is the form of government with a king or queen at its head. The ruler (or "monarch") typically passes the crown to his or her son or daughter upon death. During the **Age of Enlightenment (1620-1780)**, many new philosophies and ideals flourished. Many people during this time felt that monarchies were an outdated, unfair system of rule. People hungered for democracy and representative government, wherein leaders would be elected by the people. Thus began the Age of Revolution, beginning with the American Revolution in 1775.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution began in 1775. The United States of America declared its independence from the British crown in 1776. The American Revolution would last until 1783.

The main combatants in the American Revolution were the British, and the American colonists who opposed them. There were many other factions involved, however. The British hired mercenaries from the German state of Hesse, known as **Hessians**, to help regain control of the colonies.

The newly independent United States also had allies. France became the permanent ally of the U.S. in 1778. It was the first country to do so. France was a crucial ally, and the U.S. likely would have lost the war without the French. The Spanish and the Dutch went on to ally with France in 1779 and 1780, which made them allies of the American cause.

Despite the fact that **King George III**, the British monarch, wanted to continue the fight, support for the war back in Britain dwindled with each defeat. The **Treaty of Paris** put an end to the conflict in 1783.

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The French Revolution

The French Revolution began in 1789. Much like their American counterparts, the French Revolutionaries sought to overthrow the monarchy in France and establish a government that better represented the people. France had allied with the United States during the American Revolution, and it had cost France a lot of money. The government raised taxes to replenish its funds; the decision was unpopular. In addition, crop failures had increased the suffering of the poor in the years leading to Revolution. The people resented the fact that church and government officials had plenty while the population starved.

After the revolutionaries removed many nobles and clergy from power (and killed them), they established the terrifying **Revolutionary Tribunal**. The Tribunal was a court that served the Committee of Public Safety in 1793 and 1794, and it passed death sentences on thousands of French citizens. At the head of this revolutionary bloodshed was a lawyer named **Maximilien Robespierre**. This era of French History is known as the **Reign of Terror**. Using the newly-invented guillotine (a device for decapitating people quickly), Robespierre and his men executed over 16,000 people during the Reign of Terror. Robespierre himself is quoted as saying, "Terror is nothing else than justice: prompt, severe, inflexible."

Robespierre was eventually arrested and executed by former allies who feared he would turn against them. The years that followed were filled with government corruption and political maneuvers. In 1799, a French general named Napoleon Bonaparte staged a coup (overthrow) of the government and became dictator. The French Revolution was over.

The Haitian Revolution

The Haitian Revolution began in 1791, shortly after the French Revolution. The revolt in Haiti was far different from those in the United States and France, however. The Haitian Revolution was a slave revolt.

Haiti was originally a French colony called **Saint-Domingue**. Since the 1730s, French colonists had run large plantations in the Caribbean colony. The plantations mainly grew sugar, though many grew coffee, cocoa, cotton, and other crops as well. The entire economy depended on African slave labor. At the time of the Haitian Revolution, the ratio of slave-owners to slaves was about 1:10. On August 21, 1791, the slaves launched a revolt they had been preparing in secret.

The revolution was as brutal as any. The slaves killed 4,000 white colonists in the first two months of the revolt, and the rebellion reached 100,000 members. Within months, former

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slaves controlled a third of the island of Hispaniola (which Haiti and the Dominican Republic share).

In March of 1792, France deployed 6,000 troops to the island in an attempt to regain control. France also declared that men of color who had been freed (freedmen) were allowed civil and political rights. This was very unusual for the time; France was hoping to bring peace by calming some of the revolutionaries.

French soldiers were not able to take control of the island. Moreover, France went to war with England in 1793. France was also involved in its own revolution at the time, and it couldn't afford to fight over its lost colony. In order to keep Saint-Domingue French (and not have it go to England, Spain, the former slaves, or the French rebels), France freed the colony's slaves in 1793.

Despite this, France took steps to reestablish slavery in 1801 (at Napoleon's command), and for two years afterward. A well-organized resistance held the French back until 1803, when Napoleon decided to give up on Saint-Domingue. France's enemies back in Europe (Spain and Great Britain) demanded all his attention.

On January 1st, 1804, resistance leaders declared the country free. They called it "Haiti," which was the island's name in a local language. After Haiti's independence was declared, the resistance massacred the remaining white people on the island, including women and children.

Latin American Wars of Independence

Just five years after the Haiti declared its independence, in 1809, a wave of revolutions spread across Latin America. France and Spain had been allies during the Napoleonic Wars, which found French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte conquering much of Europe. In 1807, France turned against Spain. Meanwhile, Spanish colonists in South America were unhappy with their status. Some wanted independence, while others just didn't want to live under French rule. Dissatisfaction and fear of French rule prompted a series of violent revolts throughout Latin America.

Over the next fifteen years, Venezuela, Chile, Paraguay, and other countries would declare their independence. Notably, Mexico also declared its independence in 1810; that declaration resulted in a war with Spain that lasted until 1821.

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Multiple Choice Questions:

1) Which nation originally owned the colony of Saint-Domingue, which would later become Haiti?

- a) Spain
- b) France
- c) England
- d) Portugal

2) What year did the American Revolution conclude?

- a) 1776
- b) 1812
- c) 1783
- d) 1865

3) When did the French Revolution begin?

- a) 1789
- b) 1791
- c) 1793
- d) 1794

4) What year did Haiti declare its independence?

- a) 1793
- b) 1776
- c) 1799
- d) 1804

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5) Who was the King of England during the American Revolution?

- a) King Louis VIX
- b) King George III
- c) King Albert V
- d) King Joffrey I

6) What do people call the time between 1793 and 1794, during the French Revolution, when thousands of French citizens were killed using the guillotine?

- a) The Long Dark Night
- b) The Two Years' War
- c) The Reign of Terror
- d) The Reckoning

7) During the American Revolution, the British employed German mercenaries to fight against the colonists. What were these mercenaries called?

- a) Berliners
- b) Einhandlers
- c) Alemanites
- d) Hessians

8) What European intellectual movement (which was against monarchies) was most likely responsible for beginning the Age of Revolution?

- a) The Age of Enlightenment
- b) The Age of Iron
- c) The Renaissance
- d) The Industrial Revolution

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Short Answer

1) Which French general eventually put an end to the French Revolution and became a dictator? _____

2) Who was the French lawyer we remember as responsible for the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution? _____

Essay Question

Revolutions are bloody and violent. They usually end up killing many civilians, as well as soldiers. It can also take a long time for a country to rebuild after a revolution.

Do you think revolutions are sometimes justified? Give an example of an issue you think justifies revolution, and support your answer with both facts and opinions.

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Answer Key

Multiple choice:

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. d
5. b
6. c
7. d
8. a

Short Answer

1. Napoleon Bonaparte
2. Maximilien Robespierre

Essay

Accept reasonable answers. Answers should include supporting arguments. If the student feels that no issue warrants revolution, argument supporting this claim should be provided.