

The following “model answers” all received some sort of A grade (from a bare A- to a definite A+) on the midterm. If your commentaries on the final exam resemble these, you should do well. On the final exam, it could also prove useful to think about how the passage or image under consideration relates not just to its own context but to other developments in the Revolution as well. For instance, in the discussion of Fréron below, the author points out the unintended consequences of Fréron’s embrace of the idea and language of “the nation.”

1. “The prince need render account of his acts to no one. ‘I counsel thee to keep the king’s commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not on an evil thing for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?’ [Eccles. 8:3-4]” Without this absolute authority the king could neither do good nor repress evil. It is necessary that his power be such that no one can hope to escape him, and, finally, the only protection of individuals against the public authority should be their innocence.”

Bossuet, *Politics Derived from the Words of Holy Scripture* (1709).

The context in which Bossuet’s Politics Derived from the Words of Holy Scripture was published is the reign of Louis XIV, the model king of absolute monarchy. The text was published for public consumption, but was derived from materials Bossuet used to educate Louis XIV’s son. So, the original audience would have been the son of the model of absolute monarchy, and Bossuet’s aim in this passage would have been to teach the king’s son the importance of absolute authority and to show him that he must answer only to God (which happens to be the authority Bossuet would hold most dear). [Grader’s comment: Explain divine right more explicitly.] When this passage was published, Bossuet was dead and the target audience was probably more along the lines of an educated upper-middle and upper class, the members of the bourgeoisie and the nobility who would be interested in a text that contemplated politics. Here, the aim would be to keep these men subservient and God- and King-fearing, so as to enfeeble the questioning attitude that Enlightenment writers would encourage them to adopt. The necessity of absolute unquestionable authority is emphasized when Bossuet writes, “[w]ithout this absolute authority, the king could neither do good nor repress evil.” He further encourages the masses to be subservient in saying “[i]t is necessary that his power be such that no one can hope to escape him.” [Grader’s comment: Why is this necessary? What about the Great Chain of Being?] Also noteworthy is the bit where he writes that the “only protection” of individuals against the public authority should be their innocence [Spang comment: Doesn’t this sound like Robespierre on political morality?], blatantly denying the concept of rights. Considering the publication’s notability, it was probably successful in encouraging the masses to love and respect absolutist authority.

2. “There are wars in which the people only take an interest because of their submission to the King, but this war is of a different nature. It is the English nation which, by unanimous agreement, has attacked our nation to deprive us of something that belongs to all of us.”

Elie Fréron, *L'Année littéraire* [*The Literary Year*], (1756).

Elie Fréron, a member of the nobility [*Spang comment*: I don't think so] opposed strongly to French philosophes and the intellectual thrust of the Enlightenment, nonetheless employs the language of nationhood to incite popular French support for the fight against Britain in the Seven Years' War. In reality, of course, the spoils of war and the economic/colonial interests at stake in the war would not benefit the vast majority of French people. But by appealing to a collective sense of nationalism, Fréron tried to persuade the French people that this was a collaborative, rather than monarchical, struggle. [*Grader's comment*: good point.]

The very concept of nationhood draws on an emerging awareness of some “public” realm that is distinct from the “private” realm that constituted the social and political order of *ancien régime* France. The central organizing principle of this system was privilege, or private law. In the absolutist state's prime, there was no concept to describe any kind of mutual or communal interests of the French people as a whole. There were only private interests to defend and pursue.

The Parlements were largely responsible for helping to generate this sense of a public by claiming to represent the needs and interests of the “people” against the monarch, who was trying to reform the system of privilege in the interest of bolstering a central French state.

Fréron's appeal to nationhood can wash in two ways, however. If it is the duty of ordinary Frenchmen to defend the honor of their nation and King, then it follows that they should have some stake in the King's decision making and should be able to choose whether or not to fight. Fréron, by appealing to an emerging concept of public opinion and national interest, not only generated a national fervor against perceived British aggression but also contributed, albeit in an unintentional fashion, to the undoing of the old social-political order, constituted solely by privilege and private interest.

3. “It is not possible in the nation to find a place for the caste of nobles. I know that there are countless individuals whose infirmities, incapacity, incurable laziness, or the weight of bad habits render strangers to the labors of society. ... But the worst possible arrangement would be where not just isolated individuals, but a whole class of citizens should take pride in remaining motionless in the midst of general movement, and should consume the largest part of the products without bearing any part in its production. The noble order is not less estranged from the generality of us by its civil and political prerogatives.”

abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?* (1789).

This excerpt, from abbé Sieyès, was from a pamphlet distributed before the meeting of the Estates-General in May-June 1789. The writing is very idealistic and has some broad concepts that are easily remembered (What is the Third Estate? Everything!). Thus, this

pamphlet was targeted at not just the bourgeoisie but even the illiterate (who could easily grasp key concepts because of their simple format). This specific passage is condemning the aristocrats for their lack of contribution to society. [*Grader's comment: Any significance that Sieyes is part of the First Estate?*] Going directly against the mentality that it was ignoble to dirty one's hands with trade or actual labor, Sieyes insists that it is those who work who are the best and highest members, indeed, the only members of society.

His language undermines the structure of the three estates. He places the third over the second and claims this distinction on the basis of personal merit rather than bloodlines. It is little wonder that this pamphlet, which addressed the third estate itself and challenged the old regime's structure, inspired the third estate to separate themselves from the Estates General and become the National Assembly later that year.

5. "The section, gathered in the number of more than 600 citizens, considering the dangers that face the fatherland... Considering that Louis XVI has lost the confidence of the nation, that the constituted powers have no force other than public opinion, and that the expression of this opinion is a strict and sacred duty of all citizens; Consequently declares to all its brothers [the other sections] that it no longer recognizes Louis XVI as King of the French..."

Registers of the Mauconseil Section, July 31, 1792.

Written immediately before August tenth 1792 when the monarchy was abolished [*Spang comment: And what was going on internationally? Brunswick Manifesto?*], the declaration made by the Paris section was the first statement that Louis was no longer king. Here, the power of the French public is demonstrated. Because Louis XVI lost the confidence of the nation [*Grader's comment: How did he lose this?*], the people no longer believe him worthy to be king. Rather than the king being the absolute power and authority, now the people have the right to judge him. [*Grader's comment: good!*]

The section realizes that they have all the power, including power over the Legislative Assembly. Because public opinion can also become public violence, the will of the French nation is the most important. In line with the Declaration of the Rights of Man, it is now the duty of citizens to express their opinions. The Flight to Varenne completed the desacralization of the king and made public opinion of him deteriorate. With the potential danger found in public violence and the interaction of French citizens in political life, the nation now has the power to remove the king if they wish. Having already demonstrated how violent they could be (storming of the Tuileries), the Paris section now puts its power to use. The will of the people has become sovereign power.

One other point to note is the call to other sections to join theirs. They are nationalizing [*Spang comment: Paris is not the nation!*] the decision to remove Louis. What follows was the wish of the French nation being granted, and the monarchy came to an end. The people of Paris (sans-culottes) told the Legislative Assembly that they were the new governing body. This too demonstrated the power of the public, as they granted ruling right to the Assembly.

7. “Many years before the French Revolution, men who called themselves Philosophers conspired against the God of the Gospel, against Christianity... The grand object of this conspiracy was to overturn every altar where Christ is adored... This school soon combined with a conspiracy against kings ... [and joined that ancient sect known as the Freemasons] who only initiate the chosen of the elect into the secret of their unrelenting hatred for Christ and kings.”

abbé Barruel, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797).

This passage from a work by the abbé Barruel is an example of a reactionary history. It was written soon after many of the events of the French Revolution by a person who experienced them. A member of the clergy, Barruel believes the Revolution has the Enlightenment entirely to blame. On top of that, he sees the events not as innocent or as a natural culmination, but as an intentional conspiracy. [*Spang comment: Was Barruel the first to attribute events to a plot or conspiracy?*] This conspiracy was formed by the free-thinking philosophes in the salons, who “intended” to overthrow the Church and Christianity. He continues that they were augmented by those who opposed the monarchy and by the Freemasons. The abolition of the monarchy and Church power and the establishment of a Republic was all in their plan, as they had an “unrelenting hatred for Christ and Kings.” This opinionated history was representative of many within the Church, as the Revolution had drastically transformed their role in society. At the time of Barruel’s writing, they had lost their privileges, all of their lands, and much of their power as an institution.

8. “In this lay her glorious error, her touching and sublime weakness: the Revolution, it must be confessed, commenced by loving everything. She loved even her enemy, England. She loved, and long she strove to save, royalty, the keystone of the abuses which she had just demolished. ... This universal sympathy which, at first, made her adopt and indiscreetly mingle so many contradictory elements, led her to inconsistency,—to wish and not to wish, to do and undo, at the same time.”

Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution* (1847).

Here is an interesting passage about the French Revolution largely because of its poetic rhetoric, but also the retrospection with which it was written, decades after the Revolution (in 1847). Michelet treats the Revolution tenderly and personifies it as a faulty woman that embraced the ideals of the people and tried to accomplish too much at once (universal sympathy) without considering the problematic ambiguities and contradictions that eventually undid her.

These ambiguities and contradictions refer most directly to the inconsistencies of the French people themselves; they wanted to be treated as sovereign, but were not even close to the necessary unification of ideas and ambitions. She, the Revolution, embraced a dismembered, disgruntled “nation” and succumbed with the internal struggles fueled by passion, violence and the increasingly polarized politics that destroyed themselves within her grasp. [*Grader’s comment: Okay, but how does this justify or explain the Revolution and its contradictions?*]