Comparative Analysis Essay – Sample

The American Revolution and the French Revolution

Outline

1. Introduction
   1. **Establishes context for essay-** By the end of the 18th century, the Enlightenment ideals of “life, liberty and property” had spread across the European continent, inspiring disenfranchised peoples to seek out more political representation.
   2. **Introduces Subject #1** - In the mid-1770s, colonies from the eastern coast of the American continent considered freeing themselves from British rule.
   3. **Introduces Subject #2** - A decade later, across the Atlantic Ocean in France, members of the Third Estate pushed to reconfigure the power structure to pull power away from the King.
   4. **Analysis** – Statement of impact of Subject #1 and #2 - These American and French revolutions radically altered how societies view their governments, and within a century, countries across the globe pursued freeing themselves from royal rule.
   5. **Thesis Statement** - Although both revolutions started due to mounting debt, the manner in which the conflicts evolved and the systems of government each nation eventually adopted created two entirely different “democratic” nations.
2. Comparative Analysis Topic #1
   1. **Topic Sentence** - Both the American Revolution and French Revolution started because the governments in power had amassed a huge debt, requiring them to increase taxes on their population.
   2. **Summary of Topic #1 as it refers to Subject #1** - In America, the ruling French had mounting debt due to the cost of waging the French and Indian War (1756-1763) and the cost of maintaining a standing British army in the western frontier, protecting American settlers from rival Native Americans.
   3. **Summary of Topic #1 as it refers to Subject #1** - Over in France, the government had likewise accumulated a great deal of debt due to a foreign conflict (but in this case, ironically, it was from funding America’s war against Britain).
   4. **Recognition of Nuances/Differences** - However, in France a great deal of the debt was not only due to funding foreign conflicts, but in satisfying the gluttonous desires of the royal family – specifically King Louis XVI, his wife Marie Antoinette and their royal entourage at Versailles. Whereas King George of England likewise spent a great deal of the royal coffers on maintaining the pomp and circumstance of royal life, nothing compared to the grandeur of Versailles (a palace that cost over $2 billion to construct) which accounted for over 25% of the annual budget.
   5. **Summary of Topic #1 with Analysis of Impact** - In both cases, this mounting debt forced the government to create new taxes (or in the case of Britain, enforce previous taxes), and it was these taxes that created the tension that eventually led to revolution.
3. Comparative Analysis Topic #2
   1. **Topic Sentence -** Once the revolutions were underway, it became clear that the French Revolution was going to proceed far differently than it did in the United States.
   2. **Summary of Topic #2 as it Refers to Subject #1** - In the United States, there was a war between a new nation (the US) and a colonial power (the British), after which the new thirteen colonies created a governing document – the Articles of Confederation. Initially, this document tried to right the wrongs of royal rule, limiting the power of the Executive Branch, allowing each colony (state) to rule relatively independently.
   3. **Analysis of Impact -** These idealistic aims failed, as colonies competed with each other for foreign business, laws were almost impossible to pass, and revolts started to pop up around the colonies (most notably Shay’s Rebellion). Once the Founding Fathers recognized the errors of the Articles of Confederation, they reconvened in Philadelphia and wrote the Constitution, the document that would become the model for democratic nations for the next two centuries.
   4. **Summary of Topic #2 as it Refers to Subject #2** - In France, the transfer of power was not nearly as peaceful (if you consider 45,000 Revolutionary War deaths peaceful), as by the time the French Revolution ended, 40,000 Frenchmen died due to the Revolution, and another 6.5 million died due to the ensuing Napoleonic Wars.
   5. **Recognition of Differences** - In the early years of the French Revolution, King Louis and his family were imprisoned (never happened to King George) and eventually guillotined (also never happened). Thousands of wealthy members of the Second Estate were killed or forced off their land (some American loyalists were persecuted or pushed off their property). Also, there was a point in the middle of the French Revolution where Catholicism was actually outlawed. In America, religious persecution did not ever occur at a large scale.
   6. **Summary of Topic #2 -** Although the French Revolution was far more violent than the American Revolution, they both did struggle to create a document that worked from the beginning. In America, the Articles of Confederation was replaced by the Constitution, and in France, there was Constitution of 1791, then a new Constitution of 1793, and then a new Napoleonic Code in 1804.
   7. **Analysis of Topic #2 -** These alterations showed that the governments were willing to continually improve upon the initial documents should they find initial legislation was inferior to deal with the realities of society (and Amendments are continually added to the American Constitution).
4. Comparative Analysis Topic #3
   1. **Topic Sentence -** Once the violent phases of the revolution passed and the written constitutions went into effect, the choices made by the new leaders dramatically altered each nation’s ability to successfully embrace a democratic government.
   2. **Summary of Topic #3 as it Refers to Subject #1 -** In America, George Washington stepped down after two terms (8 years) and refused to run for election again.
   3. **Analysis and Connection for Subject #1 -** Because Washington followed in the footsteps of Roman general Cincinnatus who returned to his farm after saving Rome, he set the precedent for all future presidents to likewise not seek a second term (until Franklin Roosevelt broke this precedent 150 years later, not wanting to leave during World War II).
   4. **Summary of Topic #3 as it Refers to Subject #1 -** In France, this was not the case. Napoleon Bonaparte remained in power for 11 years until foreign powers eventually removed him from office and exiled him on the island of St. Helena. And along the way, he had himself coronated Emperor of France in the presence of the Pope. Because of his unwillingness to voluntarily step down from power, France would vacillate over the next 150 years between monarchs and democratically-elected leaders.
   5. **Summary of Topic #3**
5. Conclusion
   1. **Summary of Essay and Impact -** The American Revolution and French Revolution radically transformed the Western world, setting in motion a revolutionary spirit that would transform the nature of governments both in the West, but eventually around the world.
   2. **Review of Major Points -** Caused by horrible debt, both revolutions eventually turned violent and then experimented with a variety of documents before settling on constitutions that would work for their nation’s constituents.
   3. **Final Statement of Comparative Analysis – Impact on Future -** However, because the French Revolution turned far more violent and because their eventual executive leader (Napoleon Bonaparte) never relinquished power, France was far less able than the United States to successfully transfer power away from a monarch.