World History · GS - I

Explain how the foundations of the modern world were laid by the American and French Revolutions.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2019	GS - I	World History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Popular sovereignty; liberty and equality; republicanism; constitutional government; human rights; citizenship; nationalism; abolitionist ideas; democratic institutions; limitations and contradictions

Model Answer

Introduction

The American Revolution (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789 onwards) challenged established systems of monarchy, hereditary privilege and imperial authority. Their political and ideological consequences helped shape modern democracy, constitutionalism and nationalism.

Body

1. Popular Sovereignty and Representative Government

The American Revolution rejected British imperial authority and established a republic based on representative institutions. The Declaration of Independence articulated the principle that legitimate government derives its authority from the consent of the governed.

The French Revolution challenged absolute monarchy and asserted popular sovereignty, helping establish the idea that political authority ultimately rests with the nation.

2. Liberty, Equality and Rights

The American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen popularised ideas of natural rights, liberty and equality before the law. These principles influenced subsequent constitutional movements across the world.

3. Constitutionalism and Republicanism

The American Constitution established a written constitutional framework, separation of powers and checks and balances. The French Revolution weakened hereditary privilege and promoted citizenship and legal equality.

These developments helped establish constitutional government as an alternative to arbitrary authority.

4. Nationalism and Popular Mobilisation

The revolutions inspired nationalist and liberal movements in Europe and beyond. Revolutionary France spread ideas of citizenship and national identity, while the American example encouraged anti-colonial struggles.

5. Social and Political Transformation

The French Revolution abolished feudal privileges and promoted administrative and legal reforms. Revolutionary ideals also strengthened later campaigns for abolition, women's rights and broader democratic participation.

Limitations

Both revolutions had contradictions. Slavery persisted in the United States after independence, while women were denied equal political rights. The French Revolution also experienced political violence and authoritarianism under Napoleon.

Conclusion

The American and French Revolutions laid important foundations for the modern world by promoting constitutional government, citizenship, popular sovereignty and individual rights. Although their ideals were initially applied unevenly, they provided enduring principles for subsequent democratic and social reform movements.

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