

Topic 5.2 - Nationalism and Revolutions in the Period from 1750 to 1900

Standards Alignment

AP Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept
Political (POLS): The organization of governments and the processes of political power, including nationalism, revolutions, and state formation.	Unit 5: Learning Objective C – Explain causes and effects of the various revolutions in the period from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.3.II.ii People around the world developed a new sense of commonality based on language, religion, social customs, and territory. This was sometimes harnessed by governments to foster a sense of unity.
		KC-5.3 The 18th century marked the beginning of an intense period of revolution and rebellion against existing governments, leading to the establishment of new nation-states around the world.
		KC-5.3.IV.A.i Discontent with monarchist and imperial rule encouraged the development of systems of government and various ideologies, including democracy and 19th-century liberalism.
		KC-5.3.III.B Colonial subjects in the Americas led a series of rebellions inspired by democratic ideals. The American Revolution, and its successful establishment of a republic, the United States of America, was a model and inspiration for a number of the revolutions that followed.
		KC-5.3.I.B Enlightenment ideas in documents such as the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and Bolívar’s Letter from Jamaica influenced resistance to existing political authority.
		KC-5.3.II.iii Newly imagined national communities often linked national identity with state borders; nationalists sometimes challenged boundaries or sought unification of fragmented regions.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students should be able to:

- Explain major causes of revolutionary movements between 1750 and 1900.
- Describe how Enlightenment ideas influenced revolutionary leaders.
- Identify how nationalism contributed to revolutions and independence movements.
- Evaluate the effects of revolutions on political systems and the creation of nation-states.

Lesson Overview

Between 1750 and 1900, many societies experienced revolutions that challenged traditional monarchies and colonial rule. These revolutions were influenced by Enlightenment ideas about natural rights, liberty, and the power of citizens to shape their governments.

At the same time, a powerful new political idea called **nationalism** emerged. Nationalism encouraged people to identify strongly with a shared culture, language, or territory. Revolutionary movements in the Americas and Europe often combined Enlightenment political ideals with nationalist goals.

Major revolutions—including the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and Latin American independence movements—reshaped global politics and led to the creation of new states.

Essential Vocabulary

- **Nationalism**
A belief that people who share culture, language, or history should form their own independent nation.
- **Revolution**
A rapid and significant change in a government or political system, often involving conflict.
- **Liberalism (19th century)**
A political ideology supporting individual rights, representative government, and limits on monarchy.
- **Republic**
A form of government in which leaders are elected and power comes from the people rather than a monarch.
- **Colonial Independence Movement**
A political struggle in which colonies seek freedom from imperial control.

Background Reading

During the late eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that governments existed to protect the rights of citizens. These ideas challenged traditional beliefs that monarchs ruled by divine authority. Many people began to believe that governments should represent the will of the people.

The **American Revolution (1775–1783)** demonstrated that colonial societies could successfully rebel against imperial rule and create a republic. The new United States became a powerful example for other revolutionary movements. Shortly afterward, the **French Revolution (1789)** spread similar ideas of equality, citizenship, and political participation throughout Europe.

In the Americas, revolutionary leaders such as **Simón Bolívar** sought independence from European empires. These movements were influenced by Enlightenment ideas but also shaped by local social conditions, including class divisions and colonial economic systems. Together, these revolutions helped create new nation-states and spread ideas about popular sovereignty and national identity.

Primary Sources

Primary Source 1

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (France, 1789)

Source: Fordham University Internet History Sourcebook

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1789rights.asp>

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, considering that ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man.

Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its formation.

Source Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE Enlightenment idea reflected in this document.
2. Explain how this document challenges traditional monarchies in Europe.
3. Describe ONE way this document could inspire revolutionary movements elsewhere.

Primary Source 2

Simón Bolívar, Letter from Jamaica (1815)

Source: Fordham University Internet History Sourcebook

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1815bolivar.asp>

The Americans, in the Spanish colonies, were neither Indians nor Europeans, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of the country and the Spanish usurpers. In short, being Americans by birth and our rights those of Europe, we have been placed in a situation that is both difficult and extraordinary.

It is impossible to foresee the future fate of the New World or the political principles which will govern it. But it is clear that our destiny is to break the chains of colonial oppression. The provinces of America have endured a system designed to benefit Spain while denying Americans equal rights.

We are a small human race, possessing a world of our own, separated by vast seas from Europe. Our people must form independent nations in order to govern themselves and pursue their own prosperity and happiness.

Source Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE grievance Bolívar expresses about Spanish colonial rule.
2. Explain how Bolívar uses ideas about identity or nationality to support independence.
3. Describe ONE historical development that influenced Bolívar’s thinking.

Major Atlantic Revolutions

Revolution	Time Period	Major Causes	Key Outcomes
American Revolution	1775–1783	Colonial taxation, Enlightenment ideas, colonial autonomy	Creation of the United States
French Revolution	1789–1799	Economic crisis, inequality, Enlightenment ideas	End of monarchy, rise of republican government
Haitian Revolution	1791–1804	Enslaved resistance, French revolutionary ideas	Independence of Haiti
Latin American Revolutions	1810–1825	Colonial inequality, Enlightenment influence	Independence from Spain and Portugal

Change, Continuity, and Comparison

Change

- Growth of nationalist identities linked to territory and culture
- Expansion of republican and constitutional governments

Continuity

- Social inequalities often remained after revolutions
- Political power often remained in the hands of elites

Comparison

American and French revolutions focused on political representation and rights, while the Haitian Revolution also involved a large-scale social revolution ending slavery.

Key Takeaways

- Enlightenment ideas helped inspire revolutions around the world.
- Nationalism encouraged people to identify with shared culture and territory.

- The American Revolution served as a model for later revolutionary movements.
- Revolutionary movements often challenged monarchies and colonial rule.
- New nation-states emerged across the Americas.

Practice Activity

Answer the following in **2–3 sentences each**.

A. Identify ONE cause of revolutionary movements between 1750 and 1900.

B. Explain ONE effect of nationalist ideas on political movements during this period.

C. Identify ONE way the American Revolution influenced later revolutions.

Primary Source Citations

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