

Mastering the Essay

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AP European History Modified DBQ #2

2. THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Exercise Question: Analyze the extent to which the middle class was responsible for the European revolutions of 1848.

Document A

SOURCE: Matthew Arnold, private secretary, in a letter to his sister, March 10, 1848

What agitates me is this, if the new state of things succeeds in France, social changes are inevitable here and elsewhere, for no one looks on seeing his neighbour mending without asking himself if he cannot mend in the same way; but, without waiting for the result, the spectacle of France is likely to breed great agitation here, and such is the state of our masses that their movements now can only be brutal plundering and destroying. ... You must by this time begin to see what people mean by placing France politically in the van of Europe; it is the intelligence of their idea-moved masses which makes them, politically, as far superior to the insensible masses of England as to the Russian serfs...

Document B

SOURCE: Alphonse de Lamartine, French writer and politician, speech to Provisional Government of France, 1848

At great crises society stands in need of great powers. ... The undefined reform which is at this day achieving its victory in the streets will not be able to assume a definite form without instantly throwing into an aggressive attitude all those classes of the people who will be excluded from the possession of power.

Document C

SOURCE: Nassau William Senior, Professor of Political Economy, from a journal entry about a conversation with an Italian author, December 22, 1850

‘Do you think,’ I asked, ‘that the present state of things can continue?’ ‘No,’ he answered; ‘it is too violent: no one in any class of society is safe. A mere denunciation to the police may occasion his arrest, and when once imprisoned he may be forgotten. ... ‘But who,’ I said, ‘are to supply the explosive force? Not the army, for they seem devoted to the King; not the populace, for they are too degraded to care about politics; not the aristocracy, for they have not the vigour which leads men to incur great risks; and as to the middling classes, they do not seem to be sufficiently numerous.’ ‘What you say,’ he answered, ‘about the army, the mob, and the aristocracy is true; but the middle class are increasing in number, they possess almost all the intellect and education of the country, and they are unanimous. Unhappily they attempted, in 1848, to carry on together two incompatible operations—to recast all our institutions, and to make war with Austria.’

Document D

SOURCE: Samuel Laing, author and traveler, from Observations on the Social and Political State of the European People in 1848 and 1849, published 1850

It is a very shortsighted view of this great social movement of 1848, among the 40,000,000 of people, to attribute it to secret associations of students, or revolutionary enthusiasts, republicans, and propagandists of extravagant theories. What funds, what influence, what following, could such a class, with all their clubs and newspaper paragraphs, have in the vast, peacefully inclined, and patient German population, if the material, the enormous mass of real grievance, had not existed as a combustible prepared by the misgovernment of their rulers, and ready to catch fire from the most insignificant sparks? The Germans are a speculative people, who vindicate their intellectual freedom, and resent every attempt, open or concealed, on the right to think freely, as zealously as we would an attack upon our freedom to act in our material interests. The reason is, that their middle class is composed almost entirely of men who have no other path to distinction, social weight, and individual well-being, than through mind—through the free action of intellectual power.

Document E

SOURCE: Nassau William Senior, Professor of Political Economy, from a journal entry, March 21, 1851

In the provinces on the other side of the Apennines, which contain three-fourths of the population and four-fifths of the wealth of the country, the feudal system was destroyed by the French before the end of the last century or in the beginning of this. The great families were ruined, their properties and those of the rich corporations were divided, and an intelligent and numerous middle class sprang up, tolerant in religion and liberal in politics. ... It was unfortunate, therefore, that the seat of Pio Nono’s reforming government was placed in Rome, where, from the want of a middle class and of political knowledge, there was, in fact, no Constitutional party. ... The real seat of constitutional liberalism is in the provinces of the Adriatic.