



Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution

Germaine de Stael

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Few individuals have left as deep an influence on their time as did Germaine de Staël, one of the greatest intellectuals of her age, whose works have influenced entire cultures, eras, and disciplines. Soon after its publication, posthumously in 1818, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* became a classic of liberal thinking, making a deeply original contribution to an ongoing political and historical debate in early nineteenth-century France and Europe. **As a representative of classical liberal opinion, de Staël's voice, which Napoleon Bonaparte tried to silence by censorship and banishment, is a unique and important contribution to revolutionary historiography.** *Considerations* is considered de Staël's magnum opus and sheds renewed light on the familiar figures and events of the Revolution, among them, the financier and statesman Jacques Necker, her father. Editor Aurelian Craiutu states that *Considerations* explores "the prerequisites of liberty, constitutionalism and rule of law, the necessary limits on power, the relation between social order and political order, the dependence of liberty on morality and religion, and the question of the institutional foundations of a free regime." **Madame de Staël's unique perspective combined a sharp intellect with an elegant style that illustrates the French tradition at its best.** *Considerations* was rightly hailed as a genuine hymn to freedom based on a perceptive understanding of what makes freedom possible and on a subtle analysis of the social, historical, and cultural context within which political rights and political obligation exist. **Madame de Staël conceived of this volume in six parts: parts 1 through 4 reflect on the history of France, the state of public opinion in France at the Accession of Louis XVI, and Necker's plans of finance and administration. Other topics discussed in this section of the book include the conduct of the Third Estate in 1788 and 1789, the fall of the Bastille, the decrees of the Legislative Assembly, the overthrow of the monarchy, the war between France and England, the Terror of 1793–94, the Directory, and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. Parts 5 and 6 contain a vigorous defense of representative government in France, with a detailed examination of the English political system. Part 6, in particular, offers memorable political insights on liberty and public spirit among the English and discusses the relation between economic prosperity and political freedom and the seminal influence of religion and morals on liberty.** Germaine de Staël (1766–1817) rose to fame as a novelist, critic, political thinker, sociologist of literature, and autobiographer. She experienced firsthand many important events of the French Revolution, which she followed closely from Paris and, later, from exile in Switzerland, where she lived between 1792 and 1795. Her salon was famous for hosting Benjamin Constant, August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Lord Byron, and other luminaries, before and after her exile by Napoleon. **Aurelian Craiutu** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington.

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