



AP European History 2000 Student Samples

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DBQ (#1)

Rituals and festivals played a ~~major~~ crucial role in traditional European life. Rituals, such as charivari ("riding the stang") allowed for the community to join together and have fun, teach lessons, and even make political statements. Festivals such as Carnival, and that on midsummer night's eve allowed for the community to relax, release their burdens, join together, learn from one another, and, to the dismay of some, also served as a medium of propagating vices.

Rituals were very important to the traditional European life, in some cases rituals linked people to ancient Greece and Rome — rituals were long standing. One of the earlier rituals, described by Brother Giovanni di Carlo delineates sons going through the streets acting as their fathers, who were the leaders of the city. Brother Giovanni describes the magnificence in which the sons performed and the enjoyment shared by the citizens, and, obviously, by himself. The Brother may have enjoyed these caricatures because of the animosity between the political leaders and the clergy in the fifteenth century. Another ritual, more frequent in the nineteenth century was charivari, or "riding the stang". This ritual was apparently popular because of the uses in England

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and in France. In charivari, a "hen-pecking" woman is made to "ride stang." The community assembles as the woman is made to ride the horse backwards and cheers, sings, and bang pots in mockery. This event is clearly described as so by Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell. Her point-of-view is quite interesting as she is a married woman and supports this event that requires the humiliation of other married women. Mrs. Gaskell is also quick to point out that the celebrations are never too disorderly and no one seeks redress. Women such as Mrs. Gaskell may see this event as one of putting women in control. In the "stang song" from Lincolnshire describes a man beating his wife and the wife in turn throwing him out of the house and taking "his skin to the tanners." Other purposes were also forwarded at these events. For example, in France a police report notes the beginning of the Easter Rebellion and cites the charivari as the cause of the excitement. His perspective is logical because he works for the government and would not wish

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to place the blame on them. Another example of ritual is the humiliation of criminals. In Russia, for example, when a woman picked berries from the communal berry patch too early, she was sentenced to walk through the streets with her basket on her neck. There were also reportedly no complaints from the woman concerning her humiliation. However, this is from a government report and complaints may have likely been omitted.

Festivals, also, had many purposes. The celebration of midsummer night was a festival of fun, honesty, and openness. In it, servants and masters conversed and everyone is told their faults; however, no offense was taken — the celebration brought the community of Scilly Island together, as Henry Bourne, an outsider, perceived it. Baltasar Rusow, a Lutheran pastor commented on the drinking, "disorder, whoring, killing and dreadful idolatry" that took place on a saint's feast day. Rusow may have taken the holiday more seriously than others because he obviously was a religious man, and may have exaggerated; however, vices tend to be displayed on holidays. This idea is clearly depicted in Bruegel's "Battle Between Carnival and Lent" in which a man

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on a keg faces off against a nun. Bruzelius comments on the irreverence and disregard for the meaning of Lent. The "unmannerly manners" of carnival are also discussed by John Taylor, an English writer in the early 1100's ~~he~~ points out the destruction caused by these events.

R. Lassels, a Frenchman, justifies Italian carnival celebrations as a way to vent. Lassels, however, is French and also celebrates carnival and may be inclined to justify the Italians to, in a way, justify his own actions.

Rituals and festivals, both in general, had their purposes in creating a community. Some rituals were intended to dignify, while others to humiliate; some were used for political purposes while others were just for fun. Festivals were ~~seen as~~ ^{seen as} a way to celebrate and vent the sorrows of everyday life through vices while others drew the community together through honesty and openness.

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Rituals and festivals played an important part in the lives of Europeans. There were many festivals. Such gatherings were usually rather large and often attended by a wide variety of people. However, the purpose of these festivals was not so much to express religious devotion or for another very noble cause. Most festivals were celebrated to have good times and let loose; often times, unique rituals were incorporated into these festivals as a way to punish wrong-doers in a jovial manner. Life was rough for many Europeans. They had to work extremely hard. For peasants, life was even worse because there was little chance for an improvement in social standing. According to R. Lassels, Italians broke their backs for a year and used Carnival to soothe their sores and repair their broken spirits (Doc. 5). A simple traveler, R. Lassels could see that it was painfully obvious that people used festivals to relax and put their problems behind them. Pieter Brueghel paints a fabulous scene from a Carnival wherein the people celebrate fully and the whole town appears to be alive and partying (Doc. 3). Indeed, even the domestic servants and other low-social-class peoples relished the days of jollity. Henry Bourne says that servant and master seemed to be equals on days of festivals and turned a deaf ear to their differences (Doc. 6). Surely festivals were used for recreational purposes; Baltasar Ruscw reports

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that despite the drunken disorder, a seemingly endless joy spread like fire through the entire country (Doc. 2)!

The rituals of Europeans appear to be used to light-heartedly punish minor criminals in a way that could be mixed with the frivolity of the festivals. According to a Russian official, once when a woman picked berries from a forbidden patch, she was paraded through town to be laughed and giped at with those same berry baskets bound around her neck (Doc. 10)! A variant of a stang song seems to encourage the happy-go-lucky attitude of a festival by encouraging women to teach an abusive husband a lesson (Doc. 9). Surely these songs were born in an atmosphere where as Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell tells us, a woman who was believed to have acted inappropriately would be bound to a horse with her face towards its rump to be mocked by screaming masses (Doc. 8)!

Even the ensuing damage and wrecklessness was socially acceptable in the name of good times. John Taylor praises the damaging behavior with the defense that destruction leads to employment for those that can make repairs (Doc. 4). A report from the police inspector reveals that as prosecutions of people involved

in large amounts of loud drinking increased, the number and types of people participating increased. It was the obvious will of the masses that they wanted to party. What more did some people really have to look forward to? Even if festivals served more of a purpose than wreckless drunkenness at one time, surely the trend shifted by the time these documents were published. Perhaps Brother Giovanni di Carlo's statement about how the focus of one procession seemed to be the imitation and celebration of city officials, is of the last remnants of the more "purposeful" use of festivals (Doc. 1).

All in all, people used festivals as a means of escaping reality to let loose and be gay. Crude forms of relatively harmless punishment seeped their way into festivals and these rituals seemed to affirm the festive no-troubles mindset of celebrations. Europeans worked hard, and they partied hard. Damage was overlooked in the name of fun because honestly, with the lifestyles some people led with wives such that could corrode spirits quickly, relief in the form of ritual and celebrated festivity was a necessity.