

Age of absolutism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Armond Henderson History 7B Kier T Th 8: 10-9: 30 Essay 1 1. The Age of Absolutism in Europe began with the rise of national legislation and civil bureaucracies that slowly eroded local power and self-government. The rise of absolute monarchies differed from country to country, but the general consensus is that the age began with the reign of Louis XIV and ended with the French Revolution. The Age of Absolutism, when Monarchies were at the height of their power, brought massive changes to the social, political, military and economic institutions in Europe.

The Age of Absolutism was based upon the theory of the Divine Right of Kings, which is a religious and political policy that states that a ruling monarch is not subject to earthly authority, and his right to rule is derived directly from the will of God. The King's power is absolute and he is not subject to the will of the people, the aristocracy, or the church, and any opposition or attempts to limit his power is contrary to the will of God and is considered to be treason.

The Divine Right of Kings justified a king's absolute authority in all matters spiritual and political and was embraced and supported by various Kings, such as King Louis XIV of France and King James I of England. King Louis XIV is credited with pronouncing that the King and the State were one and the same. In order to achieve this stability, absolutists asserted that the national government should be solely in the hands of the monarch. The administration of these functions required the formation of a national civil bureaucracy whose officials were answerable only to the king.

This bureaucracy had to stand against the most powerful institutional forces opposed to the king: the nobility, the church, representative and legislative bodies. So the absolutists faced a problem. In order to centralize the state, the government had to somehow take political authority out of the hands of the nobility and others who were not interested in giving that authority up. In Europe absolute monarchs could not completely break the power of the nobility, so they brought them into their new bureaucratic institutions.

The church, however, was a different matter. Most absolutist monarchs tried to get around the church by nationalizing it, that is, by imitating the actions of England's Henry VIII in the early sixteenth century. While Henry had himself named head of the Church of England, the absolute monarchs in Europe only managed to gain some administrative and judicial control over the clergy. The most difficult battles, however, would be with representative legislative bodies; it was just such a battle that brought about the French Revolution. 2.

The Age of Enlightenment was a cultural movement of intellectuals in 18th century Europe that sought to mobilize the power of reason, in order to reform society and advance knowledge. It promoted science and intellectual interchange and opposed superstition intolerance and abuses in church and state. Originating about 1650 to 1700, it was sparked by philosophers Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Pierre Bayle, mathematician Isaac Newton (1643-1727), and historian Voltaire. The wide distribution of the printing press, invented in Europe in 1440, made possible the rapid dispersion of knowledge and ideas which precipitated the Enlightenment.

Ruling princes often endorsed and fostered figures and even attempted to apply their ideas of government in what was known as Enlightened Despotism. The Enlightenment flourished until about 1790–1800, after which the emphasis on reason gave way to Romanticism's emphasis on emotion and a Counter-Enlightenment gained force. The center of the Enlightenment was France, where it was based in the salons and culminated in the great *Encyclopedie* (1751–72), with contributions by hundreds of leading philosophes such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. Some 25, 000 copies of the 35 volume set were sold, half of them outside France.

The new intellectual forces spread to urban centers across Europe, notably England, Scotland, the German states, the Netherlands, Russia, Italy, Austria, and Spain, then jumped the Atlantic into the European colonies, where it influenced Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, among many others, and played a major role in the American Revolution. The political ideals influenced the American Declaration of Independence, the United States Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the Polish-Lithuanian Constitution of May 3, 1791.

A key thinker of the early Enlightenment, the Englishman John Locke was educated at Oxford but read wider than his course, gaining both a BA and a degree in medicine before pursuing a varied career. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690 challenged Descartes' views and influenced later thinkers, and he helped pioneer views on toleration and produced views on government which would underpin later thinkers. Locke was forced to flee England for Holland in 1683 because of his links to plots against the king, before returning after William and Mary took the throne.

Charles Montesquieu was another critical thinker of the Enlightenment. Born into a prominent legal family, Montesquieu was a lawyer and president of the Bordeaux Parlement. He first came to the attention of the Parisian literary world with his satire *Persian Letters*, which tackled French institutions and the “Orient”, but is best known for *Esprit des Lois*, or *The Spirit of the Laws*. Published in 1748, this was an examination of different forms of government which became one of the most widely disseminated works of the Enlightenment, especially after the church added it to their banned list in 1751.

The English scholar and mathematician regarded as the father of physical science, Sir Issac Newton’s discoveries anchored the Scientific Revolution and set the stage for everything that followed in mathematics and physics. He shared credit for the creation of calculus, and his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* introduced the world to gravity and fundamental laws of motion. The methodology and ideas he set forth in key works like the *Principia* helped forge a new model for “natural philosophy” which the thinkers of the Enlightenment tried to apply to humanity and society.