



Louis XIV and French Absolutism

1643-1715

Introduction

- Absolutism defined
 - A political theory that encouraged rulers to claim complete sovereignty within their territories
 - Sometimes defined by “divine right”
- Age of absolutism as an age of empire
 - Colonial rivalries



The Appeal and Justification of Absolutism

- Absolutism promised stability, prosperity, and order
- Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715)
 - Squabbles among the nobility meant he had to rule assertively

The Appeal and Justification of Absolutism

- Absolutist control
 - Command of the state's army
 - Control over the legal system
 - Right to collect and spend the state's financial resources
 - The need to create an efficient centralized bureaucracy

The Appeal and Justification of Absolutism

- Obstacles
 - Legally privileged estates of the nobility and clergy
 - The political authority of semiautonomous regions
 - Interference of parliaments, diets, and estates general

The Appeal and Justification of Absolutism

- The nobility
 - Important opponents of royal absolutism
 - Louis XIV: deprived the nobility of power but increased their social prestige (Versailles)

Early Life



- Cardinal Jules Mazarin, Chief Minister
- His mother, Anne of Austria, regent
- Civil War in France – The Fronde, 1648-53
- Starvation and political unrest
- Young Louis determined never to allow challenge to power again.

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- The façade that was Louis
- Performing royalty at Versailles
 - A stage on which Louis mesmerized the nobility into obedience
 - Daily rituals and demonstrations of royalty
 - Royal “choreography”



Louis XIV Arrives at the Palace of Versailles

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Performing royalty at Versailles
 - Nobles were required to live at Versailles for part of the year
 - Raised their prestige
 - Louis could keep an eye on them
 - Louis was hard-working and conscientious
 - Took personal responsibility for the well-being of all his subjects

Louis de Rouvroy, Duke of Saint Simon (1675-1755)

critic of Louis XIV's court life

The King's ministers, general, mistresses and courtiers learned soon after he became their master that glory, to him was a foible rather than an ambition. They therefore flattered him to the top of his bent, and in so doing, spoiled him. Praise, or better, adulation...were the only road to his favour and those whom he liked owed his friendship to choosing their moments well and never ceasing in their attentions. That is what gave his ministers their power, for they had endless opportunities of flattering his vanity, especially by suggesting that he was the source of all their ideas.

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Administration and centralization
 - For Louis, royal power meant domestic tranquility
 - Conciliated the upper bourgeoisie by making them royal administrators
 - Intendants: administered the thirty-six *generalités* into which France was divided
 - Unconnected with local elites
 - Held office at the king's pleasure (his men)

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Administration and centralization
 - Taxation
 - Collection of taxes necessary to maintain a large standing army (very expensive)
 - The *taille* (land tax), *capitation* (head tax), and the *gabelle* (salt tax)
 - Other indirect taxes on wine, tobacco, and other goods

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Administration and centralization
 - Regional opposition
 - Reduced but not curtailed
 - Members of any *parlement* (law court) who did not enforce his laws were exiled
 - Never called the Estates-General (last convoked in 1614)

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Louis XIV's religious policies
 - Louis was determined to impose religious unity on France (God would favor him)
 - Outside Roman Catholicism
 - Quietists—Catholics who preached personal mysticism
 - Dispensed with the Church as intermediary
 - Suspect in the eyes of Louis

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Louis XIV's religious policies
 - Jansenists—held to the Augustinian notion of predestination
 - Persecuted by Louis
 - Jesuits—earned the support of Louis
 - Huguenots—French Calvinists
 - Hated by Louis
 - Protestant churches were destroyed
 - Protestants banned from many professions (medicine and printing)

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Louis XIV's religious policies
 - 1685: Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes
 - Protestant clerics were exiled
 - Laymen were sent to the galleys as slaves
 - Children were forcibly baptized as Catholics
 - Two hundred thousand Protestants fled to England, Holland, Germany, and America

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) and royal finance
 - Colbert as finance minister, 1664–1683
 - Tightened the process of tax collection
 - Eliminated tax farming
 - 1664—25 percent of taxes collected ended up in the treasury; by 1683, 80 percent
 - Sold public offices



The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) and royal finance
 - Allowed guilds to purchase the right to enforce trade regulations
 - Controlled and regulated foreign trade
 - Imposed tariffs on foreign goods imported to France
 - Used state money to promote domestic manufactures

The Absolutism of Louis XIV

- Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) and royal finance
 - Improved France's roads, bridges, and waterways
 - His policies foundered because of Louis XIV's wars

Wars and Limits



1667 War with Spanish power on French borders – claimed Franche Conte and pieces of the borders on the Spanish Netherlands.

Treaty of Aix-la-chappelle

The Dutch War 1672

Peace of Nijmegen

King William's War

Peace of Ryswick

War of Spanish Succession

Peace of Utrecht