

Louis XIV and French Absolutism

- I. Absolutism defined
 - a. A political theory that encouraged rulers to claim complete sovereignty within their territories
 - b. Sometimes defined by “divine right”
- II. The Appeal and Justification of Absolutism
 - a. Absolutism promised stability, prosperity, and order
 - b. Absolutist control
 - i. Command of the state’s army
 - ii. Control over the legal system
 - iii. Right to collect and spend the state’s financial resources
 - iv. The need to create an efficient centralized bureaucracy
 - c. Obstacles
 - i. Legally privileged estates of the nobility and clergy
 - ii. The political authority of semiautonomous regions
 - iii. Interference of parliaments, diets, and estates general
 - d. The nobility
 - i. Important opponents of royal absolutism
 - ii. Louis XIV: deprived the nobility of power but increased their social prestige (Versailles)
- III. The Absolutism of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715)
 - a. The façade that was Louis
 - i. Performing royalty at Versailles
 - ii. A stage on which Louis mesmerized the nobility into obedience
 - iii. Daily rituals and demonstrations of royalty
 - iv. Royal “choreography”
 - b. Nobles were required to live at Versailles for part of the year
 - i. Raised their prestige
 - ii. Louis could keep an eye on them
 - c. Administration and centralization
 - i. For Louis, royal power meant domestic tranquility
 - ii. Conciliated the upper bourgeoisie by making them royal administrators
 1. Intendants: administered the thirty-six *generalités* into which France was divided
 - a. Unconnected with local elites
 - b. Held office at the king’s pleasure (his men)
 - iii. Taxation
 1. Collection of taxes necessary to maintain a large standing army (very expensive)
 2. The *taille* (land tax), *capitation* (head tax), and the *gabelle* (salt tax)
 3. Other indirect taxes on wine, tobacco, and other goods
 - iv. Regional opposition

Louis XIV and French Absolutism

1. Reduced but not curtailed
 2. Members of any *parlement* (law court) who did not enforce his laws were exiled
 3. Never called the Estates-General (last convoked in 1614)
- d. Louis XIV's religious policies
- i. Louis was determined to impose religious unity on France
 - ii. Outside Roman Catholicism
 1. Quietists—Catholics who preached personal mysticism
 - a. Dispensed with the Church as intermediary
 - b. Suspect in the eyes of Louis
 - iii. Jansenists—held to the Augustinian notion of predestination
 1. Persecuted by Louis
 - iv. Jesuits—earned the support of Louis
 - v. Huguenots—French Calvinists
 1. Hated by Louis
 2. Protestant churches were destroyed
 3. Protestants banned from many professions (medicine and printing)
 - vi. 1685: Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes
 1. Protestant clerics were exiled
 2. Laymen were sent to the galleys as slaves
 3. Children were forcibly baptized as Catholics
 4. Two hundred thousand Protestants fled to England, Holland, Germany, and America
- e. Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) and royal finance
- i. Colbert as finance minister, 1664–1683
 - ii. Tightened the process of tax collection
 1. Eliminated tax farming
 2. 1664—25 percent of taxes collected ended up in the treasury; by 1683, 80 percent
 - iii. Sold public offices
 - iv. Allowed guilds to purchase the right to enforce trade regulations
 - v. Controlled and regulated foreign trade
 1. Imposed tariffs on foreign goods imported to France
 2. Used state money to promote domestic manufactures
 - vi. Improved France's roads, bridges, and waterways
 - vii. His policies foundered because of Louis XIV's wars
- f. The Wars of Louis XIV
- i. 1667 War with Spanish power on French borders
 - ii. The Dutch War 1672
 - iii. King William's War
 - iv. War of Spanish Succession