Absolutism in Western Europe: c. 1589-1715

I. Absolutism
   A. Characteristics of Western European absolutism
      1. Continuation of the process of political centralization started by “new monarchs”
         a. The nobility was effectively brought under control.
            • Bureaucracies in the 17th century were composed of career officials appointed by and accountable to the king.
               o They often were rising members of the bourgeoisie or the new nobility (“nobles of the robe” who purchased their titles from the monarchy).
               o The nobility could sometimes prevent absolute monarchs from completely having their way.
            • This contrasts Eastern European absolutism where the nobility remained powerful.
         b. Absolute monarchs were not subordinate to nat’l assemblies.
            • The sovereignty of a country was embodied in the ruler.
         c. Control over religion
            • The French and Spanish monarchies gained effective control of the Roman Catholic Church in their countries.
         d. They maintained large standing armies during peacetime.
            • Monarchs no longer relied on mercenary or noble armies as had been the case in the 15th century and earlier.
      2. Domination over national culture
         a. Used censorship
         b. Patronage of the arts
         c. Propaganda thru manipulation of ceremonies and symbols
         d. Used secret police to weaken political opponents.
            • Absolutism foreshadowed totalitarianism in the 20th century BUT lacked financial, technological and military resources of 20th century dictators (like Stalin and Hitler).
            • Those who did not openly oppose the state were usually left alone by the government.
   B. Philosophical basis of absolutism
      1. Based on the belief in “divine right of kings.”
         a. Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704)
            • He was the principle advocate of "divine right of kings" in France during the reign of Louis XIV.
         b. "Divine right" meant that the king was placed on throne by God, and therefore owed his authority to no man or group.
      2. Jean Bodin (1530-96)
         a. first to provide a theoretical basis for absolutist states.
         b. He lived and wrote during the chaos of the French Wars of Religion during the late 16th century.
         c. He believed that only absolutism could provide order and force people to obey the government.
II. The development of French Absolutism (c. 1589-1648)

A. France in the 17th century

1. In the feudal tradition, French society was divided into three 
estates made up of various classes.
   a. First Estate: clergy; 1% of population
   b. Second Estate: nobility; 3-4% of population
   c. Third Estate: everyone else including middle class 
       (bourgeoisie), artisans, urban workers, and peasants

2. primarily agrarian: 90% of the pop. lived in the countryside.

3. Largest pop (17 million) in Europe (20% of Europe's population)
   a. This would make France the strongest nation in Europe.

B. Henry IV (r.1589-1610)

1. laid foundation for French power in Europe.
   a. He strengthened the social hierarchy by strengthening 
      government institutions: parlements (councils of noble 
      judges), the treasury, universities, and the Catholic Church.
   b. first king to actively encourage French colonization.

2. First king of the Bourbon dynasty
   a. came to power in 1589 at end of the French Wars of Religion.
   b. converted to Catholicism to take throne.
   c. issued Edict of Nantes (1598) providing religious toleration to 
      the Huguenots (Calvinists).

3. Henry was assassinated in 1610 by a fanatical monk who 
   sought revenge for Henry's granting religious protections for 
   the Huguenots.
   a. This led to a severe crisis in power.
   b. Henry's widow, Marie de' Medici, ruled as regent until 
      their son, Louis XIII, came of age.

C. Louis XIII (1610-43)

1. Chief minister was Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642)
   laid the foundation for absolutism in France.
   a. he was a politique (put political ahead of religious principles)
   b. Intendant System (used to weaken the old nobility)
      • Intendants were largely middle-class or minor nobles 
        ("nobles of the robe").
      • replaced local officials (usually "nobles of the sword") 
        w/civil servants—intendants—who report direct to king 
        o "nobility of the sword" not allowed to influence the 
        royal council.
      • Many of the "nobles of the robe", new nobles who 
        purchased their titles from the monarchy, became high 
        officials in the govt and remained loyal to the king, 
        o They had been commercially successful members of 
        the bourgeoisie and sought to raise their social status.
      • Each of the country's 32 districts had an intendant 
        responsible for justice, security and finance.
      • Thus, gov't became more efficient/centrally controlled.
   c. Furthered developed mercantilism (more on that later)
   d. Richelieu subdued the Huguenots politically
      • Peace of Alais (1629): Huguenots lost their fortified 
        cities and Protestant armies.
      • Calvinist aristocratic influence was thus reduced.
      • Huguenots were still allowed to practice Calvinism.
2. Thirty Years’ War: “French phase”
   a. Richelieu/Louis XIII sought to weaken the Habsburgs/HRE
   b. France supported Gustavus Adolphus with money during the “Swedish Phase” of the war.
   c. Later, France entered the “International Phase” of the war and ultimately forced the Treaty of Westphalia on the Habsburgs

III. Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715)
   A. Quintessential (best example of) absolute ruler in European history
      1. personified the idea that the sovereignty resides in the ruler.
         a. “L’état, c’est moi” (“I am the state”)
         b. He became known as the “Sun King” since he was at the center of French power (just as the sun is the center of our solar system).
   2. Strong believer in “divine right” of kings.
   3. longest reign in European history (72 years)
      a. inherited the throne when he was 5 years old.
   4. France became the undisputed major power in Europe during his reign through his modernized, state-controlled military.
      a. French culture dominated Europe
         • French became the international language in Europe for over two centuries and the language of the well-educated (as Latin had been during the Middle Ages).
         • France became the epicenter of literature and the arts until the 20th century.
   B. The Fronde (mid-late 1640s)
      1. Cardinal Mazarin controlled France while Louis XIV was a child.
      2. Some nobles revolted against Mazarin when Louis was between the ages of 5 and 11.
         a. A split amongst noble factions enabled Mazarin to win.
      3. Louis never forgot the threat he faced at the hands of the nobles early on and was determined to control the nobility.
   C. Government organization
      1. He continued the intendant system begun by Richelieu.
         • recruited his chief ministers from the middle class in order to keep the aristocracy out of government.
      2. checked the power of institutions that might resist him.
         • The parlements were fearful of resisting him after the failure of the Fronde.
         • Officials who criticized the government could be arrested.
   D. Control over the peasantry (about 95% of the population)
      1. Some peasants kept as little as 20% of their crops after paying their landlord, government taxes, and tithes to the Church.
      2. Corvée: forced labor that required peasants to work for a month out of the year on roads and other public projects.
      3. Idle peasants could be conscripted into the army.
      4. Rebellious peasants were executed or used as slaves on ships.
E. Versailles Palace

1. Under Louis XIV, the Palace at Versailles became the grandest and most impressive palace in all of Europe.
   a. The awe-inspiring scale of the palace reinforced his image as the most powerful absolute ruler in Europe.
   b. The Baroque architecture
c. The cost of maintaining Versailles cost about 60% of all royal revenues!
   d. The façade was about 1/3 of a mile long; 1,400 fountains adorned the grounds.
   e. The royal court grew from about 600 people (when the king had lived in Paris) to 10,000 people at Versailles.

2. Versailles Palace became, in effect, a pleasure prison for the French nobility.
   a. Louis gained absolute control over the nobility.
   b. Fearful of noble intrigue, Louis required nobles to live at the palace for several months each year in order to keep an eye on them.
   c. Nobles were entertained with numerous recreational activities such as tournaments, hunts and concerts.
   d. Nobles were made to attend daily ceremonies celebrating the king (rising "levée", dressing, eating, etc.)

F. Religious Policies

1. Louis considered himself the head of the French Catholic Church.
   a. While he was very religious, he did not allow the pope to exercise political power in the French Church.
2. Edict of Fountainbleau (1685)-revoked the Edict of Nantes
   a. Huguenots lost their right to practice Calvinism
   b. About 200,000 Huguenots fled France for England, the Netherlands and the English colonies in North America
      - Highly skilled Huguenots contribute to economies of French enemies
      - later gave major support of the Enlightenment and its ideas of religious toleration.

G. Mercantilism

1. State control over a country’s economy in order to achieve a favorable balance of trade with other countries
   1. Bullionism: policy of accumulating as much gold and silver as possible while preventing its outward flow to other countries.
2. reached height under finance minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert
   a. Colbert’s goal: economic self-sufficiency for France
   b. Oversaw the construction of roads and canals
   c. Granted gov’t-supported monopolies in certain industries
   d. Heavily regulated guilds to ensure quality of goods.
   e. Reduced local tolls (internal tariffs) that inhibited trade.
   f. Organized French trading companies for international trade (East India Co., West India Co.)
   g. Forbade export of foodstuffs
3. By 1683, France was Europe’s leading industrial country
   a. Excelled in such industries as textiles, mirrors, lace-making and foundries for steel manufacturing and firearms
   b. Louis’ military buildup stimulated the economy due to the production for uniforms, overcoats, weapons, and ammunition employed weavers, tailors, and gun makers.
4. Drawbacks of mercantilism and the French economy
   a. Poor peasant conditions (especially taxation) resulted in large emigration out of France.
   b. Louis opted for creating a massive army instead of a formidable navy.
      - Result: France later lost naval wars with England
   c. War in later years of Louis’ reign nullified Colbert’s gains
      - Louis was at war for 2/3 of his reign

H. Wars of Louis XIV
   1. Overview
      a. The wars were initially successful but eventually became economically ruinous to France.
   2. France developed the professional modern army.
      a. This is perhaps the first time in modern European history that one country was able to dominate politics.
      b. A balance of power system emerged in response to the threat posed by Louis.
         - No one country would be allowed to dominate the continent since a coalition of other countries would rally against a threatening power.
         - Coalitions of varying European powers opposed Louis
            - War of Devolution (First Dutch War), 1667-68
            - The Dutch War (1672-78)
            - Nine Years’ War (War of the League of Augsburg) (1688-97)
      c. initiated a period of Anglo-French military rivalry that lasted until Napoleon’s defeat in 1815.
   3. War of the Spanish Succession (1701-13)
      a. Cause: The will of Charles II (Spanish Habsburg king) gave all Spanish territories to the grandson of Louis XIV.
         - European powers feared that Louis would consolidate the thrones of France and Spain, thus creating a monster power that would upset the balance of power.
      b. The Grand Alliance emerged in opposition to France:
         - England, Dutch Republic, HRE, Brandenburg (Prussia), Portugal, Savoy
      c. Treaty of Utrecht (1713)
         - It maintained the balance of power in Europe.
         - It ended the expansionism of Louis XIV.
         - Britain was the biggest winner.
            - gained the asiento (slave trade monopoly) from Spain
   4. Costs of Louis XIV’s wars:
      a. destroyed the French econ. due to severe disruption of trade.
      b. 20% of French subjects died.
      c. cost would be placed on the shoulders of the Third Estate
         - The French gov’t was bankrupt.
C. The Baroque and Absolutism *(see also Unit 1.3)*

1. Baroque art reflected the age of absolutism.
   a. It began in Catholic Reformation countries to teach in concrete and emotional ways and to demonstrate the glory and power of the Catholic Church.
      - It was encouraged by the papacy and the Jesuits.
      - It was prominent in France, Flanders, Austria, southern Germany, and Poland.
   b. It spread later to Protestant countries such as the Netherlands and northern Germany and England.
   c. Characteristics
      - It sought to overwhelm the viewer: Emphasized grandeur, emotion, movement and unity surrounding a certain theme.
      - **Versailles Palace typifies Baroque art:** huge frescoes throughout the palace were unified around the emotional impact of a single theme.

2. Architecture and sculpture
   a. Baroque architecture reflected the image and power of absolute monarchs and the Catholic Church.
   b. Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1650) personified Baroque architecture and sculpture.
   c. **Versailles Palace** built during the reign of Louis XIV is the quintessential baroque structure.

D. Baroque painting

1. Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Flemish painter
   a. He worked much for the Habsburg court in Brussels (the capital of the Spanish Netherlands).
   b. He emphasized color and sensuality; animated figures and melodramatic contrasts; monumental size
   c. Nearly half of his works dealt with Christian subjects.

2. Diego Velázquez
   a. Perhaps the greatest court painter of the era
   b. He painted numerous portraits of the Spanish court of Philip IV and their surroundings.

Baroque Music

1. Characteristics
   a. Baroque composers developed the modern system of major-minor tonalities.
   b. Dissonance was used much more freely than during the Renaissance

2. Claudio Monteverdi (1547-1643) developed the opera and the modern orchestra

3. J. S. Bach
   a. Greatest of the Baroque composers
      - wrote dense and polyphonic structures (in contrast to the later balance and restraint of Classical Period—Mozart and Haydn)
   b. He wrote in a variety of genres, both choral and instrumental, for a variety of instruments (e.g., masses, organ works, concertos).

4. George Frideric Handel
   a. Like Bach, he wrote in a variety of genres.
   b. His masterpiece is the oratorio *The Messiah.*