

Topic: The Age of Absolutism: Louis XIV

Grades: 10, 11

Courses: World History, European History

Context: Absolutism can be defined as government rule by a king or queen in which the monarch holds absolute, unlimited power. Absolutism prevailed for centuries beginning in the 15th century, mostly in Europe, and was often used as a unifying force in the consolidation of nation-states. Two influential figures validated absolutism in the 17th century. In France, Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet affirmed that absolute power could be justified through the divine right of kings to rule—an authority given to monarchs directly by God. This meant that because monarchs were God's representative on Earth, whoever challenged the monarch was challenging God. In Britain, political theorist Thomas Hobbes justified absolutism politically rather than religiously. In his political treatise *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes wrote that absolute monarchy was the only system of government capable of maintaining order among the unruly masses.

French absolutism became the prototype for all other European monarchs. Absolutism emerged in France partially in response to a rebellious aristocracy that had pitched the country into internal conflict, particularly the Fronde Revolts of the mid-17th century. Determined to suppress the nobles, King Louis XIV took personal control in 1661. Louis believed that he was God's lieutenant on Earth. He dutifully performed his monarchical and ceremonial tasks but was ruthless in his suppression of anyone who questioned his authority. He crushed the Huguenots (French Protestants) through enforced conversion or death and forced obedience to his decrees in the courts. He also diminished the power of autonomous towns by centralizing government power in France.

Focus: The collapse of Church authority and the rise of the centralized, bureaucratic, and monarchical state gave rise to the Absolute Monarch. The building of the state and its power, which was then placed in the hands of the king and his ministers, resulted in the breaking of medieval privileges and wars of conquest and succession.

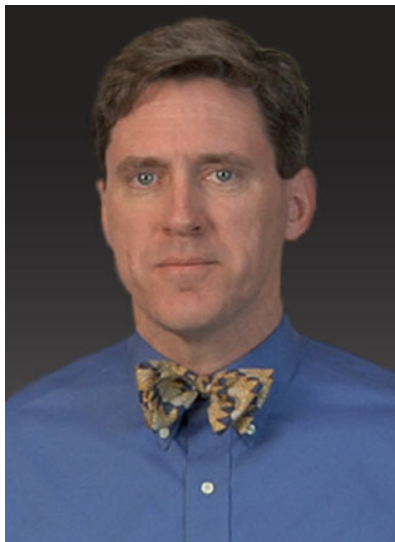
Outcomes: Students will be able to describe the concept and function of absolutism, specifically the French model under Louis XIV. They will also demonstrate an understanding of the prevailing economic system of mercantilism.

Factors:

- The work of Martin Luther
- The corrupt nature of the late Medieval Church
- The political goals of Henry VIII
- The efforts of the Counter-Reformation

Student Writing: The Reformation is arguably the greatest social and religious change in modern Western history. Why would this be true? What changes in Germany and England were so radical? Please give at least four examples and explain each.

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