

Absolutism and the "*Ancien Régime*"

-Key Concepts-

I. The Emergence of the Modern State

How Feudalism Works

KING

Provides money, army on demand
Bestows land on his many Nobles

NOBILITY

Provides military service
and protection on demand

Bestows land on
his many Knights

KNIGHTS

Provides military service
and food on demand

Bestows land on
his many Vassals

VASSALS

- Old Feudal Notion of the State
- The Modern Conception of the State
 - “governed” and “those who govern”

II. A Definition of Absolutism



- The ruler as the embodiment of the state -- "L'état c'est moi" = "I am the state!"
- The Divine Right of Kings

III. The Tasks of the Absolutist State



- To Secure Obedience
- To Exert Control over Economic Life
- To Protect its Territory and the Expansion of its Claims
 - Louis XIV as military hero
- To Create a State Bureaucracy

III. The Tasks of the Absolutist State (con't)



- To Enlist the Service of the Church
 - "One King, One Law, One Faith"
- To Employ Culture to Exalt the State
 - French Classicism

III. The Tasks of the Absolutist State (con't)



- To Gain the Loyalty of the Nobility
 - The Old Aristocracy with landed wealth
 - The New Aristocracy with commercial ties
- Structured social inequality

IV. Creating a “Spectacle”



- To be seen was the supreme social duty of the nobility
- To shine at court was to keep the rest of the world at a distance
- The monarch created the spectacle, or theater, for this social drama

Louis XIV: The Sun King



- Reign from 1643 to 1715 remains longest by any monarch in European history
- Became king at the age of 4 (born in 1638)
- Louis XIV did not actually take control until 1661



- Yes, he's wearing heels!



VII. Versailles: A Model Palace of Baroque Absolutism

“You gaze, you stare, you try to
understand that it is real, that it is on
earth, that it is not the Garden of
Eden”

--Mark Twain

Versailles Palace features . . .

- Baroque planning
- Conformity to the King's will
- Geometry reigned supreme



The Grounds and Gardens



- The triumph of man over nature
- Acres and acres of formal gardens
- Massive canal and 1400 formal fountains

The King's Chamber



The Hall of Mirrors



- 357 total mirrors
- Marble and bronze art

The Chapel



- Mass held at 12:30 p.m. each day
- The people worshipped the King while the King worshipped God

The Chapel (again)



“Versailles was more than a royal residence; it was a statement: its scale was meant to dwarf, stupefy, and intimidate Louis’s friends and enemies.”



Life at Versailles



- Tedious and extremely expensive
- Only those at Court had any influence with Louis XIV

An Imaginary World



- Versailles was the great theater upon which the drama of absolute power was staged.
- Ideas were treated as realities—the “make believe world” of the powerful and rich.
- Real people, real cities, and real problems were treated as if they were imaginary.