

# MAJOR THEMES: REVELATIONS & REVOLUTIONS

## ABSOLUTISM: 1559-1689 CE

**Absolutism** is the unlimited centralized authority and absolute sovereignty that is vested in a monarch or dictator. The ruling power is not subject to regularized challenge or check by any other branches of government. King Louis XIV (1643–1715) of France provided the most familiar example of absolutism when he said, “*L’état, c’est moi*” (“I am the state”). **Absolute monarchies** originated in early modern Europe; new nation-states centralized government power with the power of their rulers; to strengthen both, it was necessary to restrict powers that had been exercised by the church and feudal lords during the medieval period. Peter I of Russia (1682-1725), recognized that he needed to overcome the power of these medieval groups and institute political and legal reform in order to establish Russia as a competitive nation. Meanwhile, England experienced political upheaval due to a progressively weakening hold on their absolute authority. Clashes between the English throne and Parliament led Charles I to sign the Petition of the Right in 1628, limiting his authority as king. He was removed from power and executed by Oliver Cromwell in 1649; Cromwell, a Puritan, ruled as a **dictator**, using the military to enforce his political and religious mandates. After the Restoration, Parliament will eventually remove James II from power and install his Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William of Orange, on the throne. However, in exchange for ruling England as joint monarchs, Parliament issued the English Bill of Rights, which redefined the powers of the Crown and completed England’s transition to a **constitutional monarchy**.



### **Major Events:**

- 1643- Louis XIV crowned King of France
- 1649- Peter the Great (Peter I) named Czar/Tsar of Russia
- 1649- Puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell, execute Charles I
- 1740- Maria Theresa inherits throne of Holy Roman Empire
- 1756- Frederick I of Prussia provokes war with Holy Roman Empire

## ENLIGHTENMENT: 1550-1815 CE



During the Renaissance, intellectuals developed a culture of education and knowledge by encouraging others to challenge established conventions. Newly discovered concepts that challenged the status quo would continue into the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, culminating in the **Scientific Revolution** (1550-1700). Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and Johannes Kepler were just a few of the key figures to contribute new ideas during this time. Newton’s research methods and theories would go on to inspire the great thinkers of the **Enlightenment** (1685-1815). While the majority of Enlightenment thinkers emphasized the natural rights of man, feminist philosophies also began to emerge with the publication of works by Olympe de Gouge and Mary Wollstonecraft. Enlightenment ideals even found its influence spreading to the arts, with musicians like Mozart, Bach, and Handel moving away from composing religious pieces for the church (Handel’s *Zadok the Priest* has been used during British coronations since 1727) towards secular compositions, including operas and symphonies (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s compositions are considered to be the epitome of Enlightenment music).

### **Major Events:**

- 1687- Isaac Newton publishes Laws of Gravitation
- 1689- John Locke publishes Two Treatises of Government
- 1727- George Handel composes *Zadok the Priest* for the coronation of George II
- 1785- Mozart composes *Marriage of Figaro*
- 1792- Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

## REVOLUTION:

Challenging one man's power to rule over others, the basis of absolutism, was one of the main ideas behind the Enlightenment. The ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers would be used to legitimize the revolutionary ideals of the **American, French, and Latin American revolutions** in the late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As interest in democracy advocated by Enlightenment philosophes began to grow, so did discontent with absolute monarchs and calls for rebellion against their governments. Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers of the American Revolution, was heavily influenced by John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Inspired by the achievements of the Americans, and compounded by class warfare and poor agricultural harvests, France's Third Estate began their own revolution that brought down the French monarchy. However, unlike the Americans, the French government went through many transitions before it evolved into a working democracy. During Napoleon's domination of France, many European nations began to neglect their colonies in Latin America in response to fending off Napoleonic forces. Throughout the 1800s, colonies including Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, and Argentina rebelled against their European founders and secured their independence.



### **Major Events:**

- 1776- Thirteen Colonies declare independence from England
- 1789- French citizens storm the Bastille
- 1793- Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette are executed; Reign of Terror begins
- 1804- Haiti gains independence
- 1810- Father Miguel de Hidalgo delivers the "*Grito de Dolores*"

## NAPOLEON:



Napoleon Bonaparte was one of the greatest military geniuses in history. He quickly rose through the ranks of the French military, becoming one of the youngest generals in French history. He restored order to France after the chaos of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, but he was also extremely ambitious and power-hungry. After crowning himself Emperor of France, Napoleon invaded various European nations as part of the Napoleonic Wars in order to expand his empire. After a disastrous attempt to invade Russia, Napoleon abdicated his throne and spent a short time in exile. He briefly returned to power and attempted to continue expanding French territory, but he was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. He spent the remainder of his life in exile. France would briefly restore the Bourbons, the

French royal family, to the throne but they were once again removed from power during the July Revolution, after which France transitioned to a democracy. After eliminating Napoleon as a power player, France and other European nations signed the Balance of Power doctrine at the Congress of Vienna, where they pledged to prevent empires from being built on the European continent.

### **Major Events:**

- 1799- Napoleon comes to power in France after ending the Reign of Terror
- 1804- Napoleon crowns himself Emperor of France
- 1812- Napoleon's attempt to invade Russia fails
- 1815- Napoleon is defeated at the Battle of Waterloo
- 1815- European nations meet at the Congress of Vienna