9 – The Enlightenment and Dynamic 18th Century

The great philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote of the 18th-century Enlightenment: "We live in an age of Enlightenment, but not an enlightened age." Kant considered the 18th century a time of significant reform and a questioning of established traditions, optimistically pointing toward progress. At the same time, Kant realized how far Europe still had to go toward the ideals of reason, equality, individualism, and secularism – all principles of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, its principles, and its adherents form the central focus on this chapter, but we also examine cultural and political manifestations of Enlightenment thought. As an intellectual movement, the Enlightenment ranks as one of the most important you will study this year and a frequent subject of AP questions.

Chapter 9 addresses the following Key Concepts from the Course Description:
- Key Concept 2.1 Enlightened absolutism in central and eastern Europe
- Key Concept 2.3 Enlightenment thought applied to religion, politics, and social reform
- Key Concept 2.3 Role of and debate over women in the Enlightenment
- Key Concept 2.3 Revival of religion and public sentiment

Elite and Popular Cultures

• SKILL SET
Through this section, you are advised to note the similarities and differences (COMP) between elite and popular culture, perhaps by making a Venn Diagram. In addition, you may wish to note the ways and degree to which the Enlightenment shaped the outlook and activities of the two strands of culture.

Despite differences in station and outlook, peasants and nobles partook of similar cultural experiences in early modem Europe. This changed during the 18th-century Enlightenment as elite and popular cultural diverged. Those in the upper classes inhabited a culture of print, reading the latest novels, periodicals, newspapers, and perhaps philosophical treatises. Congregating in salons, coffeehouses, reading clubs, and libraries, members of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie acquired an appreciation for scientific knowledge and secular learning. Peasants and poor townspeople, however, lived within an oral culture, with knowledge and stories transmitted through story-telling, legend, or perhaps the symbolic imagery of a religious service. Once again, we are faced with a paradox of the 18th century – the Enlightenment gaining a strong cultural foothold, while many if not most Europeans remained relatively untouched by and unaware of it.

The Reading Public

If your life had spanned across 18th-century Europe, you would have witnessed a huge increase in the amount of **printed materials** available – ***newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets***, and ***novels***. The phenomenon was both a cause and a result of an increase in the literacy rate, which in turn was supported by improved access to primary education. All classes and groups took part in this increase, though it was strongest among males and the middle classes.

By 1780 most European cities supported publication of at least one daily or weekly newspaper. The phenomenon fed interest and concern regarding public affairs, including government policies, and publishers often catered to specific segments of the population. One of the more notable if short-lived publications was Richard Steele's and Joseph Addison's *Spectator*, which featured articles of public interest and inspired the *Female Spectator*, focusing on domestic topics such as child-rearing and household management. Though books remained expensive, more members of the upper classes willingly invested resources in their purchase. Popularized scientific accounts, history, and philosophical works all competed for shelf space. These works often reflected a secular focus or took a more critical view of religion. For example, Edward Gibbon's (1737-1794) *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, an immense chronicle of its subject, argued that the adoption of Christianity had sapped the Stoic energy of Rome.

Novels proved to be the biggest sellers. England pioneered the development of these works which featured complex plots, character development, and ultimately, a strong moral message. For example, ***Samuel Richardson***'s (1689-1761) *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* recounts the tale of a serving girl who resists the sexual advances of her master, who then comes to understand her worth and eventually proposes marriage to her, thus her chastity is rewarded. Reflecting the 18th-century theme of child abandonment, ***Henry Fielding's*** *The History of Tom Jones, a*

Foundling traces the adventures and ultimate success of the title character, a wily orphan who in traveling around England allows the author to satirize the hypocrisy of the age. Such works illustrated the growth of public ***sentiment***, the belief that open emotional displays equated with sincerity, and that humanitarian impulses elevated society by sustaining reform movements.

Governments did attempt to censor works they deemed threatening to public order or blasphemous to organized religion. Efforts at ‘censorship rarely succeeded in the long run, due partly to the decentralized nature of intellectual life in Europe and because states lacked the enthusiasm or manpower to enforce them adequately. To illustrate, the French government at one time or another banned publication of the famous *Encyclopedie* as well as works by Voltaire, yet these publications eventually saw the light of day in other nations or the authors went into temporary hiding only to reappear when circumstances had shifted.

Other than the sheer increase in knowledge, why is this increase in reading material important? Two words: **public opinion**. It is hard to imagine the American and French Revolutions occurring without the political energy generated by a reading public which was both informed and concerned about politics.

• THEME MUSIC
Here we can see the connection between two course themes (OS and PP). as the increase in wealth during the 18th century allowed for the expansion of a reading public and venues in which to consume these new reading materials.

Education

Even in this age of Enlightenment, education (or lack thereof) reflected social inequality. Secondary schools reinforced the hierarchy of European society and focused on a curriculum of classical languages unlikely to provide practical advantages to an aspiring member of the lower classes. Educational reformers also criticized the stale education of the universities, slow to change in their adherence to Greek and Latin and often ignoring the scientific advances of the previous two centuries. Nonetheless, changes were evident. In Germany, *Realschule* were founded, which focused on practical skills to prepare young men for business. Furthermore, if a modern-minded scholar wished to learn the new science, he could attend one of the following universities: Leiden in the Netherlands, Halle in Germany, or Edinburgh in Scotland.

Art and Music

Though the Baroque style in the arts and music continued well into the 18th century, by the 1720s the Rococo style had taken hold, especially in France. Whereas the Baroque expressed power, illusion, and movement – the art of popes and kings – Rococo concentrated on light-hearted and pensive themes of romance and the transitory nature of life. Paintings employed rich creams and golds, subtle curves, and lush settings to portray the graceful material pleasures of the aristocracy.

Nearer the middle of the century, Rococo gave way to another renewal of classical subject matter and motifs. Reflecting the increased attention paid to civic culture in an enlightening age, artists, such as ***Jacques-Louis David*** (1748-1825), in their **neo-classical style** drew from stories of ancient Greece and Rome. The David masterpiece *Oath of the Horatii* (1785) recounts the story of three brothers pledging to their father the patriotic sacrifice of their lives. Male figures stand firm and starkly drawn with straight lines and bold colors beneath masculine Doric columns, while emotionally prostrate women await the action in muted colors and passive curves.

With the works of Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), we move into the great Age of Classical Music (1750-1830). Composers experimented with full orchestration, writing symphonies of several movements that developed simple themes into complex musical patterns. Operas, like Mozart's *Don Giovanni* or *The Magic Flute,* allowed composers to demonstrate mastery of several artistic forms – drama, music, and set design.

Crime and Punishment

Governments of the 18th century lacked modem police forces and prisons. When criminals were captured, they were punished harshly and publicly in order to set an example. An Italian jurist, **Cesare Beccaria** (1738-1794), condemned the traditional approach in his *On Crimes and Punishments* (1762). According to Beccaria, reason and the certainty of punishment (not its severity) should guide law and the penal system. Torture, breaking on the wheel, and drawing and quartering all served as

horrifying spectacles but tended to arouse people's bloodlust and fear of power rather than respect for the law. Beccaria's ideas promoted penal reform and the building of prisons, beginning in the United States, which aimed at rehabilitaion of its inmates through discipline and structure. Many enlightened monarchs further reflected humanitarianism by working toward the rational codification of laws to replace the patchwork of local customs and the elimination of torture and even capital punishment (see below).

Medicine

Despite slight improvements, the medical care available to most Europeans remained inadequate and based either on outmoded classical ideas or dubious folk remedies. Life expectancy remained low, even with gradual improvements in urban hygiene and the beginnings of ***inoculation***, first developed to address the scourge of smallpox in the 1770s. Most prospective physicians trained at universities that emphasized classical learning and paid little heed to a scientific or clinical approach, an exception being the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, famous as the setting for Rembrandt's paintings of human dissection. To improve standards and training, British physicians formed the first professional group, the Royal College of Physicians, and were followed by surgeons who broke away from barbers to create the Royal College of Surgeons. Professionalization aimed to exclude traditional practitioners, such as midwives and folk healers, as outside the circle of expertise and knowledge of medicine. Though such developments created an improved setting for medical study and practice, the general improvement in Europeans' standard of living in this period owed more to improved diet and nutrition than to medicine.

Religious Revival in a Secular Age

• THEME MUSIC AND SKILL SET

A natural human tendency is to prioritize change over stasis. The Enlightenment-also named the Age of Reason-is one such era. No doubt, secular thinking increased during the 18th century, especially among elites. At the same time, religious belief remained strong among the masses; in fact, several revivals of belief occurred in this century, forcing us to balance our understanding of the OS theme and return to sound advice regarding CCOT.

Enlightenment *philosophes* aimed to improve European society through a secular and scientific approach. Many Europeans did not share this goal and clung to a religious worldview. Strong evidence to counter secularism is offered by several movements of religious revival. John Wesley's (1703-1791) Methodism represents the most famous of these movements. Wesley appealed directly to the English lower classes, many of whose lives had been negatively affected· by economic changes or alcoholism, with a warm spirituality that emphasized huge open-air meetings highlighted by dramatic stories of conversion. In Germany, Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) initiated the Pietist revival within a Lutheran religion that many perceived as stale and institutional. Revivalism crossed the Atlantic as Wesley's conversion tactics were employed liberally on the American frontier, and German Pietists immigrated to the American colonies to practice their religious faith.

Unlike previous centuries, many enlightened monarchs approached religious matters with skepticism and attempted to create a barrier between private religious belief and public expressions of religion, which were of concern to the state. At the insistence of several governments, the papacy in 1773 banned the Jesuit order, which was perceived as beholden to a foreign power, though it was later reinstated in 1814 following the French Revolution. Furthermore, monarchs began to extend ***religious toleration*** to minorities. Going furthest in this regard was Joseph II of Austria, whose Edict on Toleration (1781) even granted toleration to Jews, allowing them to practice their religion freely, own land, and hold titles of The process of emancipation for Jews continued into the French Revolution, allowing them to assimilate more fully into economic and intellectual life. However, it should be noted that Jews continued to be subjected to scorn by Enlightenment thinkers and prejudice by popular opinion.

Popular Culture and Leisure

Literacy increased among all classes in 18th-century Europe; however, literate lower class members generally shunned the novels, histories, and treatises of the elites. Many poor townspeople and peasants favored the 24-page cheaply printed chapbooks, as well as almanacs, both of which carried tales of chivalry and religion, folk wisdom, and information about weather. ***Oral culture*** remained strong among the illiterate, who often told folk and fairy tales to understand their condition and warn the young about the harsh world outside.

Carnival celebrations punctuated the cycle of seasonal work in early modern Europe. Despite government efforts to curtail them during the Protestant Reformation, many clung to the tradition of concentrated riotous behavior that the festival offered. The masses could turn to other amusements even if Carnival was restricted. Drink has always played a major social and dietary role in the lives of Europeans. During the 18th century, many of the lower class turned to stronger (and often cheaper) spirits like gin and whiskey for escape. ***Taverns*** in Great Britain advertised "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two." Alcoholism arose as a major social problem for the first time. For further escape, peasants and poor townspeople turned to the ***bloodsports*** of bare-knuckle fisticuffs, cockfighting, and bear-baiting (chaining a bear taken from the woods and siccing ferocious dogs upon it). These popular leisure activities serve to remind us of the growing divergence between popular and elite cultures and that the Enlightenment ethos clearly did not reach all members of society.

Enlightenment Thought

Enlightenment philosophy took its cue from the Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. Given this, remember the following brief and useful definition of the Enlightenment:

An application of the methods and principles of the Scientific Revolution to issues of political, economic, and social reform.

In other words, Enlightenment thinkers that just as laws guided the movements of the planets or workings of the human body, human reason observation could discover the same laws of human affairs-for example, in law, politics, or even religion. We have already seen how the skeptical mindset liberated by the Scientific Revolution laid the foundations for the 18th century. Now we look at the social setting in which this philosophy gained currency.

The Setting of the Enlightenment and the Role of Women

• THEME MUSIC AND SKILL SET

You may have noted throughout this guide the recurring theme (IS) of women's involvement in various movements of reform, only to be frustrated by lack of change in gender attitudes or practices (CCOT). Though the evidence of women's advance during the Enlightenment Is mixed, one proposition seems undeniable: women gained a language of natural rights that would later bear fruit with feminism.

To experience the full flavor of the Enlightenment, one needed to live in Paris. Many of the greatest *philosophes* hailed from France, and French served as the unifying language of intellectual discourse among elites. Scotland, Britain, Germany, and contributed to the Enlightenment, but the movement took its tone and spirit from the salons of Paris. The women who ran the **salons** – known as *salonnieres* – attracted philosophers, economists, and writers from allover Europe in an effort to stimulate an ongoing conversation regarding the key issues facing Europe. For 25 years, Madame de Geoffrin (1699-1777) hosted intellectuals, acted as mediator and financial patroness, and invited foreign thinkers and rulers to her famous Parisian salon. Many writers chose the salons of Julie Lespinasse or Suzanne Necker as the settings to introduce newly published works or discuss new theories.

Women clearly participated in the culture of the Enlightenment. Some women and even a few male *philosophes* like Condorcet advocated the equality of women. A writer and collaborator in radical political movements, **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759-1797), penned the first modern statements of the feminist movement. Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* took issue with Rousseau's gender-based educational philosophy, arguing that only if women were trained for intelligence and self-reliance could they raise children who exhibited these same characteristics necessary for republican government. Later, during the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft defended the movement for equality with *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which held that no legitimate basis, other than physical strength, could be devised to discriminate between men and women. Though these works set the feminist agenda for the next century, women gained few tangible benefits from their participation in a movement that targeted religious superstition and intellectual suppression rather than gender inequality.

For those who could not participate in the salons, other venues provided opportunities for the exchange of new ideas. The middle classes congregated in ***coffeehouses*** and reading clubs to discuss the New Science or the latest novel. Though most *philosophes* boasted aristocratic status, the bourgeoisie often imitated noble fashions and intellectual interests, including Enlightenment

philosophy. An additional if more secretive setting for the spread of the Enlightenment were the ***Freemason lodges***, founded in the early 1700s. Freemasonry attracted many famous intellectuals, including Mozart and many early U.S. presidents, with its tight-knit camaraderie; select membership, and betterment through education and technology.

The *Philosophes* and Their Ideals

Who were the *philosophes*? The majority were not, in fact, professional philosophers, though several, like Hume and Kant~ were. Most worked as writers, social critics, and publicists for new ideas. Just as an engineer or political leader uses a plan to guide his actions, the *philosophes* articulated an intellectual project: to subject all of human custom and tradition to a systematic criticism using reason and the methods of science. Revolution was far from their thinking; progress should occur through gradual acceptance of the Enlightenment message of reform. As you review the important *philosophes* below, consider how their works reflect the following principles:

Reason – Perhaps the concept most associated with the Enlightenment, belief in reason's ability to discover the relevant laws of nature and humanity expresses the assumption that the world itself is inherently knowable to the human mind and an optimism in the advance of human understanding.

Secularism – Not all *philosophes* demonstrated hostility to organized religion or advocated **atheism**. Most Enlightenment thinkers attacked the perceived dogmatism of organized religion and sought to quarantine it from public life. Science and rational inquiry should replace theology as the authorities in public affairs. In place of organized religion, many intellectuals adhered to belief in God based on reason, not revelation. This **deism** portrayed God as a kind of Newtonian clockmaker who designed the world with scientific natural laws and then simply allowed it to function. With this natural religion, the prophets, holy books, dogma, clergy, and rituals of organized religion were considered unnecessary.

Equality – Though many *philosophes* noted the crushing inequality present in European institutions, few trusted the masses to rule. Belief in the betterment of the lower classes did not necessarily translate into support for democracy.

Progress – A natural byproduct of belief in human reason, the notion of progress lay at the heart of the Enlightenment project. According to the foremost American advocate of the Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin, the pursuit of knowledge should ultimately yield practical benefits for humankind.

• EXAMPLE BASE

As you study the figures in this section, focus on connecting each to the principles articulated above and the project of the Enlightenment – to better human affairs through a scientific approach. Also, these thinkers engaged in a debate regarding a new epistemology (method of knowledge) and cosmology (model of the universe). Make sure that you can explain it.

Brief biographical and intellectual sketches of the most important figures of the Enlightenment follow:

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) – Diderot, one of the first outspoken atheists, achieved fame for his editing of the *Encyclopedie,* a 17-volume reference work that ambitiously set out to arrange the sum total of human knowledge alphabetically, without deference to ecclesiastical (religious). or political authority. Many of the articles generated controversy by taking a critical perspective on organized religion or by revealing the trade secrets of the guilds. In addition to print articles, the *Encyclopedie* provided illustrations designed to convey practical knowledge of engineering, the military arts, and manufacturing. Diderot possessed an expansive mind, which led him to write in a variety of genres, including drama and education for the deaf, making him a favorite in the salons and at courts like Catherine the Great's of Russia.

David Hume (1711-1776) – A down-to-earth, jovial leader of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hume conveyed a radically empirical approach to human knowledge. According to Hume (see *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748]), it was a fallacy of reasoning to say that we *experience* the "laws of nature" or even that personal identity persists through time. Stable knowledge arises from our immediate observations (what Hume called perceptions); the further removed from these we become by forming abstract ideas, the less reliable is our knowledge. Further, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), Hume articulated a skeptical and an agnostic attitude toward miracles and the intelligent design argument for God's existence. Finally, Hume argued that the "oughts" of morality cannot arise from the "is'es" of nature; ethics, then, could only be based on our moral sense, or sentiments (feelings), not our reasoning.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) – Kant stands as one of the most brilliant and incomprehensible philosophers of the modern age. Rarely traveling outside his home town of Konigsberg, Prussia, Kant never married and dedicated his life to developing a complete system of philosophy. Kant's "Copernican revolution" in philosophy combined the empirical and rationalist traditions into one coherent system of knowledge. Our rational intuitions about time, space, and causation (rationalism) do provide us with knowledge about what we experience (empiricism), Kant held, but they can never tell us about the "things in themselves," for these lay beyond our experience. Kant's system is called constructivism, because the perceptual "lenses" of our intuitions construct the world out of our experiences. When it came to ethics, Kant rejected Hume's moral-sense ideas in favor of a purely rationalist approach- the ethical act is objectively determined by testing whether it could be applied universally without contradiction.

Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) – Montesquieu's experiences as a French Protestant and member of the Bordeaux *parlement* influenced his writings. Keeping with the new travel literature, Montesquieu in 1721 penned the *Persian Letters,* a satirical account of two foreign visitors' adventures through France as they encounter what seem like strange and often ridiculous beliefs and customs. By far, Montesquieu's most important work was *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). Based on his investigation of history and contemporary states, Montesquieu concluded that geography, climate, and history determined the forms of government and laws of each nation. Large nations tended toward despotism (like Russia), medium-sized nations toward monarchy (like France), and smaller nations toward republics (like Switzerland). Montesquieu favored a government like Britain's, which incorporated checks and balances to restrain the vices associated with each major political interest: monarchy-tyranny, oligarchy-factionalism, democracy-anarchy.

The Physiocrats and **Adam Smith** (1723-1790) – Scottish thinker Adam Smith built off the ideas of the French Physiocrats, both of whom criticized mercantilism for violating the natural laws regarding economics. Whereas mercantilists believed specie (hard money) to be the true source of wealth, the Physiocrats held it to be land, as that resource provided society with its agricultural sustenance and mineral resources. To produce a higher standard of living, Physiocrats argued, one must free land from the inefficient feudal restrictions placed upon it and promote the development of commercial agriculture. It was the Physiocrats who coined the term *laissez faire* ("let it be") to argue against the kind of continuous government supervision of the economy associated with mercantilism. Adam Smith agreed with Physiocracy's analysis of mercantilism, but provided a somewhat different analysis of the natural laws of economics in his "bible of capitalism," *Inquiry into Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Many of his ideas still guide economic thinking today and can be summarized as follows:

1. Labor is the ultimate source of value, as it is labor that mixes with raw materials to make useful products.
2. Economic activity is too complex to be guided by the blunt instrument of government. The "invisible hand of the marketplace" or the laws of supply and demand (i.e., the **free market**) should determine what is produced, how much is produced, and at what price.
3. Nations should allow the free flow of goods across borders and concentrate on producing those goods for which they possess a comparative advantage (e.g., Guatemala produces coffee more efficiently than computers). Mercantilism's assumption of scarcity will be rendered false, as all nations will benefit from this practice of **free trade**, without artificial tariffs that protect inefficient producers and harm consumers.
4. Opposing the traditional guild system, Smith argued for a higher division of labor to produce larger quantities of goods and lower costs. When the production process is broken into its component steps, worker specialization yields greater efficiency:

Voltaire (1694-1778) – The middle-class François-Marie Arouet later took his famous pen name and came to represent the ideals of the Enlightenment. Voltaire's sarcasm, witty style, and commitment to intellectual freedom won him both admiration and resentment. Wide ranging in his interests, Voltaire took aim at religious fanaticism and hypocrisy. During the Calas Affair – when a Protestant father was falsely accused of killing his son to prevent his conversion to Catholicism – Voltaire argued

for religious toleration and claimed that revealed religion made people stupid and cruel. His famous battle cry "crush the infamous thing!," indicated his distaste for organized religion. Like many *philosophes*, Voltaire argued for rational belief in God, or deism. In *Philosophical Letters on the English,* Voltaire expressed his admiration for England's balanced government and relative religious tolerance. Voltaire spent two years at the court of Frederick II of Prussia, with whom he shared a belief in enlightened top-down reform and a distrust of the ignorant masses. In response to the narrow-mindedness and shallow optimism Voltaire believed to be a part of human nature, he wrote the novelette *Candide,* which recounts the misadventures of a young man who ultimately learns the best we can hope for is "to tend our own garden," or develop our intellectual capacities without interference.

The Later Enlightenment

Some historians believe that after 1760, the Enlightenment entered a new phase. According to this interpretation, some *philosophes* grew more insistent and radical in their criticisms of existing society and called for the adoption of an explicitly mechanistic and materialist view of the world. Though he is difficult to categorize, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is often associated with this more radical view of the Enlightenment.

• THEME MUSIC

Many of the Enlightenment figures, especially Rousseau, later exercised significant influence on the French revolutionaries, as their critique of the Old Regime and prescription for reform provided an ostensible blueprint for a nation based on reason and equality (SP).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) – Unique among the *philosophes*, Rousseau came from the lower middle class. His life represents a tale of misfortune. as he was a neglected child. lived from job to job, found patronage among older women, and eventually married a local barmaid, with whom he had five children, which he later abandoned. In his many writings, Rousseau developed several themes. Early on, in *Discourses on the Arts and Sciences* and *Discourses on the Origin of Inequality among Men,* Rousseau portrayed civilization as corrupting to humans' natural inclination for mutual association, leading to exploitation and artificial divisions. Rousseau glorified the life of the Noble Savage, exemplified by American Indians, for whom there was no need for reason, as instinct and emotion more reliably produced happiness. Concerned with the moral dimension of human experience, Rousseau wrote in ***The Social Contract*** (1762) that the fundamental dilemma of any political system was to find a form of political association in which the General Will of the entire society could be realized through pursuit of the common good. Rousseau left the institutional structure of this republican state ambiguous, for the General Will could not be expressed through representative bodies or legal formalities. With *Émile* (1762) and *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1762), Rousseau completed his presentation of a culture of public sentiment. In the former, Rousseau laid out a new approach to child-rearing and education, with a focus on children's positive experiences rather than rote memorization or a premature focus on reason. Within this system, Rousseau viewed women as naturally fitted for the domestic sphere, where their duties lie with breast-feeding and nurturing their children. For the latter work, a sentimental novel, Rousseau showed how artificial boundaries between two lovers lead to tragedy. In imitation of Rousseau, many began to weep openly, speak emotionally, and glorify nature. Overall, Rousseau stands as one of the most creative and controversial of the *philosophes*, but also the first figure of the later Romantic movement .

Though many *philosophes* wished to retain a veneer of spirituality with deism, others were content to push a scientific view of the world to its further limits. **Baron d'Holbach** (1723-1789) of Germany contributed to the *Encyclopedie* articles attacking Christianity as preventing humanity from reaching its full moral development. In *The System of Nature* (1770), he boldly asserted that all of existence consisted of no more than particles in motion, guided by built-in natural laws. God, souls, angels, and spirits could not exist since they did not possess a material nature. From this, d'Holbach concluded that human behavior itself was subject to the same material forces and was therefore determined, even if actions *seemed* the result of free choice. Not only churches, but even thinkers such as Voltaire found d'Holbach's ideas repugnant to the spirit of human progress and improvement characteristic of the Enlightenment.

Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), an aristocratic mathematician and political scientist, wrote passionately for equality (including women), justice, constitutional

government, and individual liberty. His most famous work, *Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), portrays human civilization as an advance toward scientific thinking and freedom and happiness. Condorcet's idealism could not save him from the radicalism of the French Revolution, as he was arrested because of his aristocratic lineage and later died in prison, an example of how the forces unleashed by the Enlightenment could not always be controlled by its creators.

Enlightened Absolutism

Monarchs recognized the potential of Enlightenment methods for the rational ordering of the state. While rulers patronized the Enlightenment and attracted *philosophes* to their courts, their focus remained on the realities of power. Several rulers in the 18th century fit the label enlightened absolutism, but three stand out.

• THEME MUSIC

In Chapter 7, We examined the theory and practice of absolutism (e.g., Louis XIV). As you study this section, please note the way in which enlightened thought both changed and left unchanged the practice of absolute monarchy (SP). These monarchs embraced the Enlightenment, but as a means to strengthen the state and often sacrificed ideals when it clashed with the realities of power.

Prussia and Frederick II the Great (1740-1786)

We have already seen how **Frederick II** established the greatness of Prussia through his military exploits and conquest of Silesia (see Chapter 8). A skeptic by nature, Frederick practiced religious toleration, as did his Hohenzollern. ancestors, but did not offend, the religious sensibilities of his people by ridiculing their faith. Whereas Louis XIV proclaimed "I am the state," Frederick believed himself to be "the first servant of the state." In *Forms of Government* (1781), Frederick specified for each social group its necessary function for the smooth operation of the state machinery. His ideal· of efficiency and reason did not produce equality, however. Prussian social classes remained legally defined with little or no social mobility between them. Frederick also reversed many of his father's policies related to merit, once again favoring the Junker nobility above others. In addition, outside of Frederick's own crown lands, serfdom grew worse during his reign. Nonetheless, Frederick achieved a higher degree of centralization, codifying the laws of his diverse lands .and enforcing them with Prussia's renowned bureaucracy. Frederick invited Voltaire to his court, but their egos were too large for close company. Despite such displays of enlightenment and Frederick's early interest in music and philosophy, the aging monarch often cynically put the interests of state above principles, as with his calculated invasion of Silesia in 1740 and the Polish Partition of 1772.

Austria and Joseph II (1780-1790)

Of all rulers, **Joseph II** most thoroughly believed in and upheld Enlightenment principles during his brief 10-year reign. Building on the reforms of his mother, Maria Theresa, Joseph pursued reform systematically and often recklessly. Genuinely concerned with the plight of the lower classes, Joseph abolished serfdom, granted religious toleration to minorities (Edict on Toleration, 1781), granted liberty of the press, and introduced legal equality. Though nominally Catholic, Joseph clashed with the pope and insisted on greater control over the church in Austria. His Edict on Idle Institutions disbanded unproductive monasteries and diverted the funds for the establishment of secular hospitals. Joseph also attempted to promote economic development in his empire by advocating Physiocracy. Despite issuing over 10,000 edicts in his life for the betterment of the people, when Joseph died at 49, many of his reforms were reversed. In his effort to centralize his diverse lands and improve the lives of his people, Joseph offended local traditions and alienated important segments of society, such as clergy and nobility. No one can doubt Joseph's commitment to the Enlightenment principles, but his fast-paced reform and disregard for opposition ultimately proved too much for many in the empire.

Russia and Catherine II the Great (1762-1796)

Catherine I may have been the most famous and admired woman of her era. Between Peter the Great's death in 1725 and Catherine's accession in 1762, Russia had been led by a series of weak and unstable rulers, which allowed the nobility to resurrect their power. In addition, Catherine hailed from Germany and gained power via a palace coup against her weak husband. Despite these obstacles, Catherine proved a strong ruler, though one who continuously compromised her adherence to Enlightenment principles in favor of practical political

realities. The "philosopher on the throne," Catherine attracted Voltaire and Diderot to her court, wrote a famous Instruction to the Legislative Commission (1767) expressing her belief in reason and equality, established schools for girls, and even abolished torture and capital. punishment. On the other hand, she gained a reputation for leaving grandiose projects unfinished and acting ruthlessly when it suited her interests. She allowed serfdom to worsen by selling off crown lands and brutally crushed the subsequent Pugachev Revolt in the 1770s. At the same time, Catherine liberated the nobles from state service with a Charter of the Nobility (1785), while never following up with the proposed constitution for all Russia's people. In her greatest accomplishment, Catherine added more territory to Russia than any ruler in its history, both by defeating the weakening Ottoman Empire and by partitioning neighboring Poland out of existence. Reflecting a double standard toward women, Catherine earned a reputation for sexual promiscuity by taking lovers of her advisers and political allies. One of these, Grigori Potemkin, lends his name to the fake villages set up to impress foreign dignitaries with Russia's greatness. Like the Potemkin Villages, Russia appeared immense and powerful to the outside world, but in Catherine's Russia much suffering and unfinished reform hid behind this

The Realities of Enlightened Despotism and the Partitions of Poland

Enlightened despotism allows us to gauge and assess the ideals and realities of the larger movement. With the problematic exception of Joseph II, enlightened monarchs viewed enlightened ideals primarily as a *tool* to exercise power. When push came to shove, most rulers chose the path of power and compromised on ideals. Even so, enlightened absolutism laid the groundwork for the revolutionary movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By promoting centralization and calling into question traditional authorities, enlightened monarchs provided an agenda and a method for future changes, even if in the future by way of revolution. Since the Middle Ages, monarchy had generally acted as a progressive force for change; by 1780, the enlightened despots had taken their reforms about as far as they could without undermining their hereditary dynasties. Not surprisingly, after the French Revolution, monarchies looked backward instead of forward, attempting to avoid change while supporting tradition.

Poland represented an outlier among European monarchies. Its elective monarchy and powerful nobility never allowed the kingdom to achieve centralized institutions like a tax system, bureaucracy, or standing army. As a result, the three great eastern powers-Austria, Prussia, and Russia- took advantage of Poland's internal instability to eliminate its independent While each of the three partitions (in 1772, 1793, and 1795) was prompted by differing circumstances, each stemmed from the collusion and cynicism of Poland's great power rivals. The ***Partitions of Poland*** maintained the balance of power in eastern Europe, but at the expense of the old international order, which had often upheld the existence of weaker states like Poland. The enlightened monarchs who helped carve up Poland once again demonstrated how power politics under the guise of enlightened reform held the potential of upsetting the basis for traditional government.

Realizing the Enlightenment in Politics

Reform in Britain

Prior to the great revolution in France (1789), clouds of change wafted across the Atlantic World. We look first at Britain, before traveling to its colonies in America. As part of the humanitarian impulse borne out of the Enlightenment, reformers targeted slavery as one of greatest violations of the principles of equality and freedom. In 1783, the Quakers, who believed all humans possessed an inner light, founded the first abolitionist society in Europe. The **British Abolitionist movement** targeted the slave trade itself for elimination, which achieved success with both Britain's and America's elimination of the practice in 1807.

Within Britain, the system of "rotten boroughs" and patronage came under increasing criticism. Many cities lacked representation, and only the wealthy exercised the vote. Voices for democratic reform rallied around the case of John Wilkes, a radical journalist and member of Parliament who criticized the king's policies. Though the "king's men" excluded Wilkes from Parliament until 1774, his cause animated the crowds of London with cries

of "Wilkes and Liberty!" Calls for reform echoed throughout Britain's empire; however, attempts at change in Ireland resulted only in an Act of Union in 1801, which bound it more tightly to Britain. As for India, the rule of the British East India Company grew more centralized under parliamentary supervision. Of these trends toward democratization and centralization, the American colonists took up the first and defied the second.

The Promise of the Enlightenment – The American Revolution

THEME MUSIC

Historians often speak of a transatlantic revolutionary impulse, fed by the winds of the Enlightenment blowing back and forth across the ocean. The American rebellion against Britain inspired the French Revolution, which itself stirred a slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti)—all of which drew upon the principles and rhetoric of natural rights and social contract theory from the Enlightenment (INT).

The United States appears on the AP exam only in its relation to European history, which means only sporadically until the First World War. It is not necessary to recount the American Revolution here, but a word is in order to place the Enlightenment in proper context.

First, the American colonists followed events closely in Britain, particularly the Wilkes affair. Such events, as well as the reading of British critics of the king-in-parliament system, inspired America in its own rebellion against British efforts at centralizing the empire. These protests resulted in American independence and later, the first written constitution in the modem age expressing Enlightenment principles. Enlightenment thinking stretched across the Atlantic Ocean, and indeed, several Americans contributed to the movement:

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) – Franklin lived an exceptionally fruitful life, which included the discovery of electricity, several inventions, projects of civic betterment like the postal service, as well as diplomatic contributions as Minister to France. During his term, Franklin wowed Parisians with his humor and intellect, acting as a conduit for the notion that enlightened principles could be realized in a government and an individual.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) – Jefferson gained fame for crafting the Declaration of Independence, one of the great expressions of Enlightenment thought, justifying natural law, inalienable rights, and the right of revolution. One of the only presidents openly to espouse deism, Jefferson promoted religious toleration and sponsored numerous scientific endeavors. Of course, Jefferson's ownership of slaves demonstrates the limitations to his enlightened philosophy.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) – Born in Britain, Paine set sail for America in 1774 just in time for the revolution. Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), which criticized monarchy as unnatural, sparked the movement for independence. Later involved in the French Revolution, Paine defended the radical movement for equality and liberty with *The Rights of Man* (1791) as well as deism with *The Age of Reason* (1794).

As we see in the next chapter, the American Revolution inspired belief that Enlightenment principles could be realized politically, and also, indirectly led to revolution in France by bankrupting that nation's treasury through its support for American independence.