WHAT IS ABSOLUTISM???

Read the following paragraphs and answer the questions.

The decline of feudalism, the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the Commercial Revolution all served to enrich European society and to greatly increase the power of European monarchs (hereditary rulers).

In the Middle Ages, the power of kings had been limited by nobles, parliaments, and the Catholic Church. In the 16th and 17th centuries, this began to change. Kings were now able to increase their power for a variety of reasons.

WAR OF RELIGION
During the Reformation, most kings took control of religion in their countries. The religious wars that followed the Reformation provided kings with an opportunity to build large standing armies, to introduce new government officials, and to increase taxes. The army was used to put down any resistance to higher taxes.

CHANGING ROLES OF NOBILITY
In the Middle Ages, nobles had been an independent source of power. Many even had their own castles and armies. In the 1600s, rulers began to “tame” the nobility. Nobles kept their wealth and privileges but were expected to obey the king's commands.

NEW JUSTIFICATIONS FOR ROYAL POWER
New theories arose to justify royal authority. An Englishman, Thomas Hobbes, wrote that man was not naturally good. Without a strong central authority to keep order, life would be “nasty, brutish and short.” Hobbes said kings were justified in seizing absolute power because only they could act impartially to maintain order in society.

Other monarchs justified their power on the basis of divine right. According to this theory, a king was God’s deputy on Earth, and royal commands expressed God’s wishes.

Absolutism refers to a monarch’s total control over his subjects.

Answer the following questions on your handout:

1. What conditions allowed many rulers in Europe to establish absolute power?
2. What three opportunities were provided to kings by the religious wars of the Reformation?
3. How do you think the nobles feel about the increasing power of the monarchy? Why?
4. Explain Thomas Hobbes' theory on how to justify the power of the king.
5. What is the theory of divine right?
**CASE STUDIES IN ABSOLUTISM**

**Louis XIV (France)**

Louis XIV of France provided a model for other absolute monarchs. His will was law. Any critic who challenged the king was punished. Louis interfered in the economic and religious lives of his subjects. His regulations established standards for all French industries. He demanded that Protestants convert to Catholicism or leave France. Leading nobles were forced to spend most of the year residing with the king at Versailles, so they had no opportunity to disobey or rebel. Louis developed a large army with standardized uniforms, training and housing. He involved his nation in a series of wars to expand France’s frontiers and bring glory to his rule. Although he probably never said “I am the state,” this expression accurately summarized his view of royal power. In the end, Louis’ aggressive actions served to unite Europe against France, leaving his country bankrupt and exhausted at his death.

**Philip II (Spain)**

One of the most powerful rulers in Europe during this time, Philip also tried to control every aspect of his vast kingdom. He inherited Spain, the Netherlands, and the American colonies from his father when he became king. He went on to control the Portuguese kingdom which included parts of Africa, India, and the East Indies. Philip’s empire was providing him with incredible wealth, with which he built a large army of 50,000. Besides navies and palaces, Spain’s wealth also supported a golden age of arts. Philip II was a devout Catholic and believed it was his duty to defend Catholicism against the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and the Protestants of Europe. He tried and executed thousands of non-Catholics during his reign. Philip’s vast empire was eventually weakened by high taxes, inflation, bankruptcy, and revolts. Philip II was married three times, all marriages arranged for the sake of Spain. He had one son, the infamous Don Carlos, who is known to have been insane, wild, and aggressive. After plotting to kill his father, Don Carlos was imprisoned and died, most likely suicide. Philip II did not leave much of a legacy for the future of Spain.

**Answer the following question on your handout:**
1. Name five ways Louis XIV exerted absolute (total) control over his subjects.

**Answer the following questions on your handout:**
1. What did Philip do with the vast amounts of wealth Spain was getting from the colonies?
2. What were the problems that weakened the Spanish Empire?
CASE STUDIES IN ABSOLUTISM

Peter the Great (Russia)
Peter turned Russia from a backward nation into a modern power by introducing Western ideas, culture, and technology. He executed his mutinous palace guard and developed a new army trained by European officers. He used force to make the old Russian nobles shave their beards and wear Western-style clothing instead of traditional Russian clothing. He defeated neighboring Sweden and Turkey, greatly extending Russia’s boundaries. He took control of the Church, imported foreign workers, and opened new schools. Peter moved the capital of Russia from Moscow to St. Petersburg, a modern city he ordered to be built on the Baltic coast so that Russia would have a “window on the West.” Peter had the mind of a genius, the body of a giant, and the ferocious temper of a bear. Peter stood about 6 feet 8 inches tall. He was so strong that he was known to take a heavy silver plate and roll it up as if it were a piece of paper. He loved to joke and laugh, but if someone annoyed him, he would take his massive fist and knock the offender unconscious. If he were angrier, he would have the person’s nostrils torn out with iron pincers. He even had his own son imprisoned and killed when he opposed him. By the time Peter died, Russia was a power to be reckoned with in Europe.

Answer the following questions on your handout:
1. Name three ways Peter the Great transformed Russia into a modern power?

Catherine the Great (Russia)
Catherine was not born to be a Russian czar, just the daughter of a German prince. At age 15, she was summoned to St. Petersburg to marry the heir to Russian throne. The marriage was a disaster, her husband was mentally unstable. Catherine saw her husband’s weakness as an opportunity to seize power in Russia. Only months after her husband became the czar, Catherine had him arrested and confined. Soon afterward, Peter conveniently died, probably by murder. As the czar of Russia, Catherine continued Peter the Great’s policies of expansion and Westernization. She also promoted limited reform, corresponded with leading French thinkers, and even granted nobles their own charter of rights. However, she refused to part with any of her absolute power. During her reign, the conditions of the serfs actually worsened. She defeated the Ottoman Empire, expanded Russia’s border to the Black Sea, and carved up Poland with her neighbors. Throughout her reign, Catherine took many lovers and married again, leaving behind several children.

Answer the following questions on your handout:
1. How was Catherine’s tactics as ruler different from previous absolute rulers?
Constitutionalism Comparison

Read the following paragraphs and answer the questions on your handout.

In England, monarchs were never able to establish absolute rule as their fellow monarchs did in France and Russia. Already in the Middle Ages, strong checks had been established on the English king’s power.

Magna Carta
In 1215, English nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta, which guaranteed that Englishmen could not be fined or imprisoned except according to the laws of the land. John also agreed not to raise new taxes without the consent of his barons. The Magna Carta demonstrated that the king’s power could be limited.

Rise of Parliament
Parliament was established as a legislative body made up of nobles in the House of Lords and elected representatives in the House of Commons. New taxes needed the approval of Parliament.

Later events turned England into a limited monarchy, in which subjects enjoyed basic rights and power was shared between the king and Parliament.

France eventually became a constitutional monarchy during the French Revolution. A constitutional monarchy is a form of government in which the monarch’s power is shared with a popular assembly and is limited by law and tradition.

Answer the following questions on your handout:
1. What were the results of the Magna Carta being signed in England?
2. What was the Parliament? What was their main power?
3. Define a limited monarchy.
4. Define a constitutional monarchy.