**Aim:** DO ABSOLUTE MONARCHS STRENGTHEN OR WEAKEN A NATION OR EMPIRE?

**Topic: Age of Absolutism (1600-1700’s) and Absolute Monarchs**

***Introduction: Absolutism in Europe***

The Age of Exploration made the Kings and Queens of Europe stronger. They were able to become richer and build national armies. As they made their nations more powerful, their own power grew. This led to a time period in history known as **Age of Absolutism** – when rulers had **absolute (total)** power and very centralized (power located in one place) governments. Rulers believed in the power of **Divine Right –** their power to rule came from god and not the people.

1. **How did the Age of Exploration contribute (lead to) to the Age of Absolutism?**

**Part I: Quotes on Absolutism**

**Quote #1:**

*“When men live without a common power to keep them all in order…it is every man against every man. In this state, there is fear and danger of violent death, and the life of men is lonely, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”* -- Thomas Hobbes, the Leviathan

**Q: What does the above quote mean? Is absolutism viewed as a good or bad concept?**

**Quote #2:**

*“The royal power is absolute…without this absolute authority the king could neither do good nor repress evil. It is necessary that his power be such that no one can escape him.”*

--Bishop Jacques Boussuet

**Q: What does the above quotation mean? How is this idea different from the first quote?**

**Quote #3:**

*“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”*

**Q: What does the above quote mean? Is absolutism viewed as a good or bad concept?**

**Part III: Absolute Rulers.**

**Instructions:**

1. *Read about each absolute ruler and complete the graphic organizer*
2. *Use the information to answer the T.E.A.L. question at the end.*

# Document #1: Louis XIV, France

# Louis became ruler in 1661, after a time of chaos and revolt. Louis believed in divine right. He took the sun as the symbol of his power. Like the sun that stands at the center of the solar system, the Sun King was the center of the French nation. Louis is often quoted as saying, *"L’etat, c'est moi!”-- "I am the state*."

Not once during his reign did Louis XIV call a meeting of the Estates General (The French Congress). In fact, the Estates General did not meet between 1614 and 1789.

To strengthen the state, he expanded the bureaucracy and appointed **attendants**, royal officials who collected taxes, recruited soldiers, and carried out his policies in the provinces. Under Louis XIV, the French army became the strongest in Europe – using taxes to build a 300,000 man army that to enforce his policies in France and to conquer colonies in North America.

Louis found an expert organizer in his chief finance minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert (kohl BEHR). Colbert followed mercantilist policies to bolster (strengthen) the economy and promote trade.

Colbert's policies helped make France the wealthiest state in Europe. Yet Louis XIV was often short of cash. Not even the financial genius of Colbert could produce enough income to support the huge costs of Louis's court or pay for his many foreign wars.

In the countryside near Paris, Louis XIV turned a royal hunting lodge into the immense **Palace of Versailles.** He spared no expense to make Versailles the most magnificent building in Europe. Versailles became the perfect symbol of the Sun King's wealth and power. As both the king's home and the seat of government, it housed at least 10,000 people, from nobles and officials to servants. Louis used the palace to lure his nobles to Versailles where he turned them into courtiers angling for privileges rather than warriors battling for power. Louis carefully protected their prestige and left them free from paying taxes.

Louis XIV poured vast resources into wars to expand French borders and dominate Europe. At first, he did gain some territory. His later wars were disastrous, though, because rival rulers joined forces to check French ambitions.

Perhaps Louis's most costly blunder was his treatment of the Huguenots. He saw the Protestant minority as a threat to religious and political unity. In 1685, he **revoked** (took back) the **Edict of Nantes**, which promoted religious toleration. Facing persecution, more than 100,000 Huguenots fled France. Huguenots, however, had been among the hardest working and prosperous of Louis’s subjects. Their loss was thus a serious blow to the French economy, just as the expulsion of Muslims and Jews had hurt Spain.

Although France was then the strongest state in Europe, years of warfare, taxes and bad harvests had drained the treasury.

### Document #2: Suleiman the Magnificent (Ottoman Empire)

The Ottoman Empire enjoyed its golden age under the sultan Suleiman (soo lay mahn), who ruled from 1520 to 1566. Called Suleiman the Magnificent by westerners, he was known to his people as the "Lawgiver."

A brilliant general and wise ruler, Suleiman modernized the army and conquered many new lands. He strengthened the government of the rapidly growing empire and improved its system of justice. As sultan, Suleiman had absolute power, but he ruled with the help of a grand vizier (royal advisor) and a divan, or council. A huge bureaucracy supervised the business of government, and the powerful military kept the peace. As in other Islamic states, Ottoman law was based on the Sharia – the law of the Koran and Muslim tradition. Government officials worked closely with religious scholars who interpreted the law.

The Ottomans ruled diverse peoples who had many religions. Non-Muslims were organized into millets, or religious communities. These included Greek Christians, Armenian Christians, and Jews. Each **millet** had its own religious leaders who were responsible for education and some legal matters.

The Ottomans recruited officers for the army and government from among the huge populations of conquered peoples in their empire. The Ottomans levied a "tax" on Christian families in the Balkans, requiring them to turn over young sons to the government. The boys were converted to Islam and put into rigorous military training at the palace school. The best soldiers won a prized place in **the janissaries**, the elite force of the Ottoman army. The brightest students received special education to become officials and might serve as judges, poets, or even grand vizier.

As boys were recruited into the janissaries, so non-Muslim girls were sought to act as slaves in the households of the wealthy. Most female slaves were from Eastern Europe. (The word slave is derived from Slav) Slaves were accepted as members of the household and often became free on the death of their masters.

The arts blossomed under Suleiman. Influenced by Persian artistic styles, Ottoman painters produced magnificently detailed miniatures and illuminated manuscripts. The royal architect Sinan, designed hundreds of mosques and palaces. "With God's help and the Sultan's mercy," Sinan wrote, "I have succeeded in building in building a mosque greater…then that of the Hagia Sophia.”

# Document #3: Peter the Great in Russia

In the early 1600’s, Russia was still a medieval state untouched by the Renaissance and because of the Mongol conquest, largely isolated from Western Europe. When Peter the Great became Czar of Russia in 1689, he found that most of his subjects were illiterate and knew little and cared little about the world beyond their farms and villages. Single-handedly, he tried to bring Russia out of the Middle Ages and make it into a European power. His rule was far more personal and direct than that of other absolute monarchs. He ordered Russian men to shorten their beards and wear European clothes. Peter imposed a tax on beards. One could purchase a beard Russian women were told to stop secluding (isolating) themselves.

One of Peter's passions was ships. He traveled around the shipyards of England and the Netherlands learning how to build them. He wanted Russia to have a port on the Baltic Sea- "a window to the west"- from which her ships could trade with Europe. Accordingly, he built the largest standing army in Europe and waged war on Sweden whose territory blocked Russia's access to the sea. In 1704 he won the land and built his new capital of St. Petersburg. Peter failed in his efforts to reach the Black Sea and build a warm-water port on its shores. However he was able to persuade China to accept Russian control of Siberia.

Peter reformed many Russian institutions, bringing them more closely under royal control. He eliminated the power of the Patriarch and put the Eastern Orthodox Church under a Holy Synod (council of bishops), which reported to the government. Like Louis XIV, Peter wanted to harness (control) the nobility to the service of the crown. In return for holding government office they were freed from all taxes and given full control over their serfs. These wretched peasants were no longer allowed to leave their lord's service but were bought and sold like cattle. Peter also placed the mining and metalworking industries under government control.

Peter used to terror to enforce his absolute power. He had no mercy for any who resisted the new order. When elite palace guards revolted, he had over 1,000 tortured and executed…as a reminder of his power; he left their rotting corpses hanging outside the palace walls for months.

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| **Ruler** | **Social Effects (effects on how people live/society)** | **Political Effects (effects on government/laws/power/war)** | **Economic Effects (effects on how people earn money/jobs/trade)** | **Did their actions have a more positive or negative impact on their nation? Explain.** |
| **Louis XIV, France** |  |  |  |  |
| **Suleiman the Magnificent** |  |  |  |  |
| **Peter the Great in Russia** |  |  |  |  |

**Question: Evaluate the impact the absolute rulers had on their nations.**

**Use evidence from at least two different rulers in your answer.**

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