The Enlightenment

Pre-Enlightenment Society to Enlightenment
What was the Enlightenment?

Period during 18th century (1700s) when thinkers (philosophes) began to use reason to try and understand how the world worked and how to make it better. Many social and social advances were made.

Also known as the Age of Reason
But, it was NOT always that way...  

Historically...  
(16th & 17th Centuries)

- People turned to church teachings (*RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE*) as only truth
- Religious teachings & traditional beliefs explained the universe & how the world worked
- And absolute rulers had all power
Absolutism (Absolute Monarchy)

Dominate in the 16th & 17th Centuries:

- People willingly accepted authority in exchange for peace & safety
- Nobility was incorporated into power to avoid opposition

Absolutism is When...

- Power rests in hands of king/queen
- Monarchs of Western Europe had complete control over national government & society
- Selected through DIVINE RIGHT RULE (more later...
Divine Right Rule Theory

Basics:

- King ruled by will of God
  - Rule absolutely
  - Opposition to king = rebellion against God
- Theory gained support due to power of religion
  - Monarchs nationalized church (gain power)

Why would this assure the king gained power and support?

The Back Story:

- Belief people should be excluded from power
  - God’s purpose is to institute absolute monarchy
  - Monarch’s rule is to protect and guide society
    - Rule with best interest of society
    - King Louis XIV of France...
Background Information on Enlightenment

Time For...

Historically – people turned to church teachings (RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES – bible) as TRUTH...

...but people started to challenge the church & society controlled by dominant leaders

Challenged authority with scientific reason to solve SOCIAL problems (Scientific Method—Which is...)

Old superstitions rejected; religious beliefs challenged
A Change in Thinking...THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

Man can now reason to explain the world around him

Systematic observation & careful experimentation leads to correct principles

No need for God in science = natural law

Francis Bacon
Rene Descartes
Isaac Newton
Social Scientists Apply the Thinking from the Scientific Revolution to Society to solve social problems: 1700-1800s

- Start questioning God and God’s role in society
- Apply “reason” to human nature
- Criticize government & the church
- Weaken church and absolute powers
QUESTION:

How does this new era or reason challenge DIVINE RULE and ABSOLUTISM?
Philosophes (thinkers) apply the Scientific Revolution to society to solve social problems, ignorance, and build a better world. Main issues discussed revolved around the role of government.
Denis Diderot

Salons

Teach to think critically & question

Put together a collection of the writings of the major philosophes
Question:

Why would an Encyclopedia be revolutionary during the Enlightenment?
Philosophe, Thomas Hobbes

- Humans are naturally selfish & fearless
- Life in nature is poor, nasty, brutish, & short
- Need a powerful leader to impose order & manage corrupt behavior
  - Which Government?
- Social contract = exchange of freedom for protection & security from the government
Philosophe, John Locke

People are born with “unalienable rights”

- Life
- Liberty
- Property
John Locke's Views Of:

Rulers are not ABSOLUTE:
- Bound by laws of **Reason & Nature**
- Create order
- Protect people’s natural rights
- Gain consent of the people

Rights of People:
- Right to **OVERTHROW** the ruler if:
  1. Does not represent the people
  2. Fails to protect natural rights

**REVOLT**
It's **NATURAL** for rulers with ABSOLUTE POWER to use power in corrupt manner… therefore… we must…

Philosophe, Baron de Montesquieu
Philosophe, Baron de Montesquieu

...spread power evenly over three branches of government – prevent the abuse of power by dividing political power

CHECKS & BALANCES:

a. Legislative – Made laws (Congress)

b. Executive – Enforce the laws (Pres.)

c. Judicial – Interpret and apply laws (Supreme & Federal Courts.)
Philosophe, Jean Jacques Rousseau believed that people are born good. However, society and its institutions can corrupt individuals. Corruption by bad laws and bad government can lead to further corruption. The environment in which people grow up also plays a role in shaping their character. So, while individuals start off as good, society and its corrupting forces can change them.
Philosophe, Jean Jacques Rousseau

A Social Contract is necessary

• Government should be contract between people
  • Best government used POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY (vote by all of the people – MAJORITY RULES)

• “General Will” OR Common Good
  • People should give up freedom for the majority’s decision
Philosophe, Voltaire

- Used public opinion to fight injustice

“I do not agree with a word you say, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it.”

Believed the perfect government needed FREEDOM OF THOUGHTS freedom of speech and of religion.